



Suggestion 38

Reconciliation Victoria

8 pages

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Cc: [Aileen Traynor](#)
Subject: Federal Electorate (Batman) Renaming Submission
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[Batman Federal Electorate Renaming Submission.pdf](#)

Please find attached a Submission from Reconciliation Victoria supporting the renaming of the Federal Electorate of Batman.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any queries.

Regards,

Damian O'Keefe | Project Officer
(Monday – Thursday)

Reconciliation Victoria

Working towards just and respectful relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians



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The Maggolee website supports engagement and partnerships between local governments and Aboriginal communities.



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A submission from Reconciliation Victoria to The Australian Electoral Commission Redistribution Committee Requesting

The renaming of the Federal Electorate of Batman to the Federal Electorate of Simon Wonga

1. Introduction

This submission supports the formal request to change the name of the Federal Electorate of **Batman** to **Simon Wonga**. The name Simon Wonga has been chosen by and formally endorsed by the Wurundjeri Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council Aboriginal Corporation (Wurundjeri Council).

The name change has formal endorsement from the following local government authorities:

1. Yarra City Council
2. Darebin City Council

Reconciliation Victoria believes that the timing for the Australian Electoral Commission's 2017 redistribution process provides an outstanding opportunity to promote a community discussion about the importance of expanding Aboriginal cultural heritage as a means towards reconciliation.

To achieve reconciliation in Victoria, Reconciliation Victoria champions the recognition of Aboriginal Victorians as the first peoples of the region and the special place they have in our community. We believe that respect for culture, land and heritage is something all Victorians must develop further.

We believe that governments and government institutions at all levels have a vital role to play in promoting and celebrating local histories. Victoria has a rich and diverse Aboriginal history going back thousands of years, and which continues today.

It is important that Aboriginal people see the long history of their connection to the land and particular places is reflected appropriately in place naming.

Many Aboriginal people have played a significant role in the development of local areas post-settlement. Recognition of the active involvement of Aboriginal people in the community is a positive step and supports a culture of respect in the broader community.

We believe it is paramount that governments work with Traditional Owners to provide appropriate naming and interpretation for the general community to recognise the connection of Aboriginal people to places prior to European settlement.

2. Division of Batman

The Division of Batman is an Australian Electoral Division in the state of Victoria. The division was created in 1906, replacing the Division of Northern Melbourne. It is named after John Batman, one of the founders of the city of Melbourne.

The division is located in Melbourne's northern suburbs of Alphington, Clifton Hill, Fairfield, Kingsbury, Northcote, Preston, Reservoir and Thornbury, and parts of Bundoora, Coburg North, Macleod and Thomastown.

The division incorporates three local government authorities: Darebin City Council, Whittlesea City Council and Yarra City Council.

3. Name proposed by the Wurundjeri Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council Aboriginal Corporation

The name Simon Wonga has been put forth and endorsed by the Wurundjeri Council's Board of Directors as the proposed new name for the Division of Batman. The Wurundjeri Council believe that this important Wurundjeri leader deserves greater public recognition and acknowledgement.

Simon Wonga's significant contribution and legacy was recognised by his induction onto the Victorian Aboriginal Honour Roll in 2014.

Simon Wonga (1821-1874) was an important Aboriginal leader who became *ngurungaeta*, or 'head man', of the Wurundjeri people in the mid-19th century, at a time when their future was uncertain. He helped his people negotiate the disruption to their traditional way of life and, despite much adversity, achieved his vision for an Aboriginal settlement at Coranderrk.

Simon Wonga has a long list of far-reaching achievements, including the establishment of Mohican Station in recognition that Aboriginal people had no future without an economic base, organisation of the final corroboree involving the people of the Kulin and other nations at Pound Bend in 1852, the securing of a portion of land for the Taungurong people and, most

famously, the establishment (with William Barak) of Coranderrk Station, the most economically successful Aboriginal mission station in Australia.

Coranderrk's importance and attachment as a permanent home and refuge for its residents cannot be overestimated. It became a symbol of hope for Victoria's Aboriginal people and their non-Indigenous supporters.

Simon Wonga was also recognised for his capacity to unite the different Aboriginal clans and new settlers in a spirit of goodwill, cooperation, common purpose and shared humanity.

“Simon Wonga had amazing leadership and diplomacy skills. He was a tenacious and determined man, the sort of fella people looked to when things were tough, a person people could count on and someone they would listen to and follow. He also knew the power of knowledge, of listening and learning. It was these skills that allowed him to adapt. He knew that if he and his people were to survive in this new world, they needed to adapt, learn to live in the white man's world. His charisma and diplomacy skills were outstanding, as was his ability to bring people together.” – Uncle Colin Hunter, Senior Wurundjeri Elder, September 2017.

Simon Wonga fought to improve conditions for the Wurundjeri people. Without him, his people may never have regained a place for themselves in the Country that was taken from them.

His story is a story of leadership, vision and courage in the face of adversity.

4. Cultural Rights and Human Rights

This submission is underpinned by the principles and objects of the Victorian **Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006**, particularly regarding its commitment to respect and promote the rights of Aboriginal people.

In seeking a change of name for the Federal Electoral Division of Batman to Simon Wonga, we are seeking to incrementally and respectfully restore Aboriginal culture and heritage.

One of the four founding principles of the Charter is:

“Human rights have a special importance for Aboriginal people of Victoria, as descendants of Australia's first people with diverse social, cultural, and economic relationship with their traditional lands and waters.”

One of the substantive rights listed in the Charter, under cultural rights, is that Aboriginal people of Victoria must not be denied the right, with other members of their community, to:

- (a) enjoy their identity and culture
- (b) maintain and use their language
- (c) maintain their kinship ties; and
- (d) maintain their distinctive spiritual, material and economic relationship with the land and water and other resources with which they have a connection under traditional lores and customs.

It is our strong view that the role played by past Federal and State Government policies in the social, cultural and territorial dispossession of Aboriginal people has caused the current disadvantages faced by many Aboriginal people. Having an awareness of this disadvantage and taking steps towards mending it is the shared responsibility of all residents in the Batman electorate and a significant step towards recognition and reconciliation.

5. Support from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community

The name change to Simon Wonga has received universal support from:

- the Darebin Aboriginal Advisory Committee and Yarra Aboriginal Advisory Group;
- the 18 Aboriginal-controlled organisations based in Darebin;
- the Member for Batman, the Hon. David Feeney, who has given support to the Wurundjeri Council for the name change.

6. Support of local government

The two local government authorities of Darebin and Yarra have formally endorsed the name change to Simon Wonga. Support has also been provided at the local government level by the Council representative bodies: the Darebin Aboriginal Advisory Committee and the Yarra Aboriginal Advisory Group.

7. Community appetite for change

The community conversations undertaken in 2016 by Darebin Council about the proposed change to the name of Batman Park in Northcote indicated a widespread and consistent appetite for change among its residents and visitors.

Darebin Council took this opportunity to also gauge community attitudes to changing the name of the Federal Seat of Batman.

Following the consultation, a group of residents formed an independent community coalition

with the purpose of building on the strength of community resolve to change the name of the Division of Batman in anticipation of the AEC redistribution process. (A copy of the report can be viewed on the Darebin Council website www.darebin.vic.gov.au/batmanconversations).

This community mandate reflected a strong desire to see greater recognition and respect for Traditional Owners, as well as acknowledgment of history, relationship, standing and contribution as First Nations.

8. Elevating the cultural and historical legacy of Traditional Owners

Renaming a Victorian electorate after an Aboriginal Elder would be seen to acknowledge and elevate the cultural and historical significance of the Traditional Owners beyond the current use of generic Aboriginal language.

Of the 37 electoral divisions in Victoria, only nine have any connection to the Traditional Owners.

Eight divisions are named in an Aboriginal language. These are mainly geographical or generic words: Ballarat, Corangamite, Corio, Indi, Kooyong, Mallee, Maribyrnong, and Wannon.

Only one makes any reference to Aboriginal people. The division of Jagajaga is named after the collective of three principle Aboriginal Elders who signed the 'Treaty' with John Batman in 1835.

Reconciliation Victoria supports the view of the Aboriginal community consulted by the Darebin and Yarra Councils that, the adoption of the name of Simon Wonga for the Batman electorate, will help generate a greater meaning behind the name and create a positive effect over time as the name becomes part of the mainstream.

The renaming could contribute to a new chapter in Australian society that acknowledges the diversity and complexity of building a shared Australian identity shaped by respect and recognition of Traditional Owners.

9. The legacy of John Batman

It is Reconciliation Victoria's view that the renaming of Batman Park gives visibility to the history and damaging legacy that Batman's actions had on Aboriginal people, which continues to be felt today. There is well-documented evidence of his involvement in the massacres ordered and committed on Aboriginal people in Tasmania.

In Batman's own words, the Aborigines:

"Were in the act of running away into the thick scrub, when I ordered the men to fire upon them, which was done, and a rush by the party immediately followed, we only captured that Night one woman and a male child about two years old, the party was in search of them the remainder of the Night, but without success, the next morning we found one man very badly wounded in his ankle and knee, shortly after we found another 10 buckshot had entered his Body, he was alive but very bad, there was a great number of traces of blood in various directions and learned from those we took that 10 men were wounded in the Body which they gave us to understand were dead or would die, and two women in the same state had crawled away, besides a number that was shot in the legs... on Friday morning we left the place for my Farm with the two men, woman and child, but found it quite impossible that the two former could walk, and after trying them by every means in my power, for some time, found I could not get them on. I was obliged therefore to shoot them." (Source: Nicholas Clements, Honorary Research Associate, the University of Tasmania 13/5/2011 *The Conversation* <https://theconversation.com/the-truth-about-john-batman-melbournes-founder-and-murderer-of-the-blacks-1025>)

George Augustus Robinson, (Chief Protector of Aborigines in Port Phillip District from 1839 to 1849), thought Batman "*a bad and dangerous character*", while the prominent artist John Glover referred to him as "*a rouge, cheat, thief, liar, a murderer of blacks and the vilest man I have ever known*". (Source: Nicholas Clements, Honorary Research Associate, the University of Tasmania 13/5/2011 *The Conversation* <https://theconversation.com/the-truth-about-john-batman-melbournes-founder-and-murderer-of-the-blacks-1025>)

Batman led roving parties in Tasmania which systematically hunted Aboriginal groups with the intent to execute, such as the documented killing of 15 Aboriginal people at Benlomond (Ben Lomond) in 1829 and reported in the Colonial Times (Source: Campbell, Alastair H. (1987 p.32), *John Batman and the Aborigines* Malmesbury, Australia).

Historians Henry Reynolds and Lyndall Ryan have published extensively on this period of colonial/Aboriginal relations including the Black Line - an act of martial law ordered by Governor George Arthur. This was a 'human chain' that moved systematically across the southern and eastern settled districts of Tasmania with the goal of trapping Aboriginal people on the Tasman Peninsula and relocating them to the Aboriginal reserve on Flinders Island. This period also saw widespread rape and sexual assault of Aboriginal women. It is commonly understood that Batman was involved in the "Black lines."

Given the legacy of John Batman and the clear injustices meted out on Aboriginal people, there is a very strong a case to argue that Batman's name should in fact not be so honoured

publically in contemporary Australian culture.

10. Conclusion

Changing the name of the Division of Batman to Simon Wonga is an important contribution and logical next step on a journey towards reconciliation. It recognises the distinct place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia's history and its future as a cohesive, inclusive and respectful society.

Significantly, the name change advances the journey of healing by paying rightful respect to a significant community leader, clarifying history to truly reflect the past and enable all people, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, to stand together with shared understanding and hope.

We urge the Australian Electoral Commission to support this name change for the benefit of all the community and future generations.

End

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