



Comment on suggestion 11

The Australian Workers' Union

2 pages

27 November 2017

The Victorian Federal Redistribution Secretariat,
The Australian Electoral Commission,
2 Lonsdale St,
MELBOURNE, VIC, 3000

via – online submission

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: Victorian Federal Redistribution - Renaming the Federal Division of Gellibrand to Cooper

The Australian Workers' Union ("AWU") hereby writes to formally support the proposal to recognise the outstanding contribution of Mr William Cooper in renaming the Federal Division of Gellibrand in his honour.

As has already been submitted William Cooper made an outstanding contribution to our country through his dedicated service at both a local, state and national level. Whether it be his pioneering work in the establishment of the Australian Aborigines League, or his leadership of the only protest against Nazi Germany following Kristallnacht, Cooper's fierce devotion to equality, inclusiveness and justice are values that deserve recognition.

However, what is little known of Cooper is his commitment and work throughout the labour movement. William Cooper blazed a trail for indigenous activists in our movement and more specifically in the AWU. As a shearer and general labourer like so many Australians of his era, he joined the AWU, along with his sons, and acted as an organiser for its NSW and Victorian Branches. His activism within the AWU in the early part of the 20th Century would lay the foundations for the industrial recognition of Aboriginal workers throughout the pastoral industry as the Union fought for equal pay for its indigenous members. The skills Cooper acquired in organising workers no doubt contributed to the skills he would hone as a superb organiser of his own people.

Cooper embodied the egalitarian, humanitarian and internationalist ethos that lies at the heart of the labour movement, even if his non-Aboriginal comrades observed that ethos more in the breach. It was the work of activists such as Cooper that forced the AWU and other unions to change their ways and eventually champion the cause of Aboriginal rights, notably NSW official Charlie Oliver.

At a time of much debate about the recognition of Australia's indigenous people our Union can think of no better person, and indeed no better time, than to recognise the outstanding work of William Cooper. As such we urge the Commission to consider this application and pay due recognition to the work of William Cooper

Kind regards,



BEN DAVIS
Secretary
AWU Victorian Branch