



Objection 179

Cr Geoff Ellis

5 pages

In respect of the nascent division of Monash, I appreciate the weighty deliberation that preceded the Australian Electoral Commission Secretariat's proposed redistribution.

In 2002, Anne Jones, Convenor of the West Gippsland Reconciliation Group, submitted that the AEC should consult with the Indigenous community to replace the name. In the intervening 16 years many groups and countless individuals have contributed to a grass roots effort to pull back the shrouds from the early history of Victoria.

Having submitted a suggestion and a comment supporting despatch of the previous name, I thank the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) for partially acceding to community sentiment.

Monash so befits the current guidelines that the question becomes 'why wasn't he previously commemorated?'

A Victorian with many great achievements, he is now justly honoured though there is potential confusion in the proliferation of Monashes - a Highway, a Municipality, a multi campus University and an environmental lobby group.

As well as honouring Sir John Monash's achievements we can commend his foresight. His strategy and tactics on the Western Front were based on fresh thinking.

After the war Monash brought affordable, reliable power to Victoria, through creation of a single entity for generation, distribution and billing that was at the cutting edge of technology. Where is such vision to be found today?

My objections to the proposed redistribution do not directly apply to 'Monash' but to the process.

The naming of anything sends a message about the society that honours that name. I respectfully petition the AEC to review the guidelines for naming divisions, to enable a broader reflection of our community. In the current redistribution, many suggestions and comments requested consultation with the community

regarding name changes. I believe that Aboriginal names were seriously considered.

The names of our Federation seats have endured for well over a hundred years. I appreciate that the intent of the guideline prioritising deceased Prime Ministers has merit, though in respect of current and future redistributions, I submit that the guidelines need to be strongly scrutinised and redrafted.

The current guidelines were drawn up in an era when Prime Ministers held relatively lengthy tenure and were statesperson-like in their demeanour. I contend that the high turnover rate this century foreshadows a mid-century rush of names that would preclude anyone, other than a Prime Minister, being recognised through new divisions in NSW or Victoria.

The nature of politics has changed and, although everyone in that space operates with the best of intentions, the application of those intentions is, evidentially, becoming more and more divisive and self-serving. I hesitate to say that any of the recent incumbents are undeserving – I would simply contend that people such as Rosie Batty, Gillian Trigg or Julian Burnside will also merit equal consideration in the, hopefully, very distant future.

The name of a deceased Prime Minister would have superseded Monash, no matter how fleeting or clumsy the Prime Minister's strut on the national stage had been.

I fully support guidelines that enshrine Federation names that have stood the test of time and retention of names that are of Aboriginal significance but suggest that a flaw in the current guidelines is the unintended consequence of perpetuation of patriarchy.

To be successful suggested names need to have significant local or national historical significance. People who have been written into the margins of history are very unlikely to be so honoured, as evidenced by the AEC's investigation of alternative names for several divisions in Victoria.

In support of this I cite the results of the recent AEC redistribution of Tasmania when Clark was honoured with a divisional name and any consideration of an Aboriginal name, in regard of the guidelines, was difficult, perhaps impossible, due to lack of documented background information. At the risk of cliché, I posit that history is written by the victors and is also too often 'his' story.

I respectfully petition the AEC to review the naming guidelines to enable a broader reflection of our community by, at least, removing the prioritisation of Prime Ministers past and setting other criteria to judge and compare individual achievements.

In respect of the proposed division of Fraser, I believe that this is a good example of the AEC in action. However, I suggest that future naming of new seats presents a great opportunity to take further steps along the road to reconciliation. This should be considered as an imperative in future redistributions.

In some ways I consider that the concept of divisional electoral boundaries reflects pre-European concepts of the custodianship of the land. Electoral boundaries are notional and based on geographic features such as roads or rivers. Indigenous names are therefore well suited to many divisions.

In respect of the Division of Batman I object to the continuation of that name.

There are at least two current guidelines that warrant discontinuation - Batman is not a federation seat. The name is not Aboriginal.

Further, Batman was not a Victorian, left his hometown of Parramatta under a cloud and was operating under a veil of secrecy when he sailed into Nerm. His treaty was swiftly struck down by the Governor of NSW whose legal jurisdiction had been contemptuously disregarded by Batman.

To highlight the fundamental lack of merit in the case for retention of Batman:

When John Batman arrived in 1835, he approached local Indigenous leaders with a contract, to 'buy' their land. His negotiations were successful, and he skulked away with 240,000 hectares of prime farming terrain – almost all of the Kulin nation's ancestral land.

This tragic deal was not straightforward. Batman's claim was based on his idea of ownership and legal contracts – a concept that was completely foreign to the Indigenous people. For them land was not about possession. Land was not bought or sold.

Batman claimed to have negotiated with Aboriginal 'chiefs' who were in charge of this land. He was actually negotiating with tribal Elders who weren't in a position to sell their people's land.

As William Buckley, who lived with the Wathaurung Aboriginal community for 32 years, and therefore had a unique understanding, observed:

“...they had seen several of the native chiefs, with whom, as they said, they had exchanged all sorts of things for land; but that I knew could not have been, because.....they have no chiefs claiming or possessing any superior right over the soil: theirs only being as the heads of families.I therefore looked upon the land dealing spoken of as another hoax of the white man, to possess the inheritance of the natives.”

Source: Morgan, J 1852, The life and adventures of William Buckley, Archibald MacDougall, Hobart, Tas.

When Batman arrived in the Port Phillip region, he had with him Aboriginal translators from New South Wales, who would have spoken a completely different language to the Wurundjeri people. It is now believed that the Wurundjeri may have thought Batman was offering them gifts in exchange for tandarrum (safe passage).

Batman's treaty was almost immediately declared invalid by the Proclamation of Governor Bourke of New South Wales. On 6 August 1835, the Governor declared that the British Crown

owned the entire land of Australia, and that only the Crown could sell or distribute land.

It might be exaggerating Batman's influence but it could be argued that he triggered the Governor's giant leap of terra nullius.

Anne Jones closed her group's submission thus "In the past, Aboriginal history was completely ignored. Recent history texts reflect a more honest view of how this country was settled. We believe that we should update our understanding. Catch up with our history and acknowledge what did occur."

In closing this submission I ask why we need to wait any longer. I also point out that the next opportunity to rename Batman will be presented by the AEC in 2025.

*Cr Geoff Ellis
(Bass Coast Shire Council)*

