



# Objection 361

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2 pages

## **Objection to the Victorian Redistribution Committee Proposal to rename the electorate of McMillan to Monash**

**May 2018**

**By Chris Grummet**

I wish to advise my appreciation that the Committee has decided to abolish McMillan as the name of a federal electorate in Gippsland, but also to convey my dismay that the preferred choice of name is Monash. While there can be no doubting Sir John Monash's considerable contribution to Australia, he has been honoured already in numerous ways via a municipality, a university, a hospital, a freeway and more. His legacy is substantial and his memory will live on.

But what of the Gunaikurnai and Bunurong people of the Gippsland region? What is their legacy? How will they be remembered? Murdered, decimated by diseases brought from the Northern Hemisphere and forced off the land they nurtured for thousands of years, they were hunted to near extinction. Those few that survived were impounded in missions where their language and cultural practices were often forbidden, families separated and their deep connection to and knowledge of specific areas of land was broken irreparably. This chain of understanding linked them with their ancestors and their natural environment in ways that non-Aboriginal people are only just beginning to appreciate.

And so to 1949 and the knife was thrust more deeply with their exterminator-in-chief, Angus McMillan, as the choice of name for the Gippsland electorate.

Yes, this name has been consigned to the dustbin of history and not before time. But now is the time to be bold. Now is the time to reach out and really reconcile with our past; to ask, how can we do better? How can we learn from our mistakes? Firstly, we need to listen. We need to hear from those whose voices were silenced for so many years, who come not with any sense of retribution, but in the spirit of true reconciliation and pride in their peoples' capacity not just to survive, but to thrive...to say "we're still here!"

Part of rebuilding a people and a culture involves renewing language. So much was lost forever during colonisation. We should always be mindful of ways in which all Australians can learn about and share the languages spoken for millennia on this land. Languages which described the seasons, the wildlife, the people, the stories, the land. By this we all benefit and a new conversation can begin about the past, the good, the bad and the ordinary.

Representatives of the original landholders, the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation and Bunurong Land Council, in coalition with reconciliation groups and interested individuals have proposed support (*more so than for any other proposed name to replace McMillan according to the appendix on p.105 of the April 2018 Report of the Redistribution Committee for Victoria*) for renaming the electorate 'Bunjileene-Purrine' after two significant

historical figures of the Gunaikurnai and Bunurong peoples. While these men may not have impressive curriculum vitae listing a lifetime of achievement like a Sir John Monash, they should not be judged by this standard. They represent proud people whose marginalisation, subjugation and murder by men such as McMillan should be made known to the broader public. They and their descendants should be celebrated in their own right. Their legacy is the survival of their people, despite the odds, laws and past attitudes stacked against them.

I urge the Committee to reconsider their position, to look deep into their hearts and minds and to reflect for a moment “what if it had been my forebears who had been treated in this way?” In doing so, I hope you conclude that renaming the electorate ‘Bunjileene-Purrine’ is not only the best choice, but the right choice and that in so doing, you lay down a moral and just marker for future generations to follow. You will be part of writing a new chapter in our shared history by recognising the First Australians of Gippsland in a meaningful way, something of which all Australians can be proud. That will be your legacy.