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Submission OB40

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Wright, Andrew - Redistribution TAS - Submission on the proposed Tasmanian redistribution

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Submission on the proposed Tasmanian redistribution details

Category: Names
Details: Proposal: Rename the Electorate of Franklin to Mathinna

I propose that consideration be given to rename the electorate of Franklin to Mathinna to reflect contemporary Australian understanding of history, and to acknowledge First Nations people and the ongoing impacts of the Stolen Generations.

Mathinna: A Life Between Cultures

Mathinnas life serves as a poignant narrative of an Aboriginal child navigating the complexities of two cultures, ultimately unable to find acceptance within either. As the daughter of Port Davey chieftain Towtrer and Wongerneep, Mathinnas family was among the last to resist George Augustus Robinsons 'Black Line'a government policy designed to relocate all Tasmanian Aboriginal people to Flinders Island. Mathinna was born on Flinders Island in 1835. As an infant, she was removed from her parents and placed with a school teacher, reflecting the prevailing policy of educating Aboriginal children in the customs of white society at an early age. This separation led to Mathinnas alienation from her community from the outset of her life. Her original name, Mary, was subsequently changed to Mathinna by colonial authorities, further distancing her from her cultural heritage.

In the 1840s, Mathinna was brought into the household of Governor Sir John Franklin and Lady Jane Franklin at Government House, exposing her to the norms and expectations of European society.

Following the completion of Sir John Franklins gubernatorial term in 1843, the Franklins departed

for England, leaving Mathinna in Tasmania. At eight years of age, she was placed in St Johns Orphan School in Hobart the same institution where her sister, whom she never met, had passed away. Despite her efforts to assimilate among the other students, Mathinna was rejected due to her Aboriginal identity. After being unable to adapt to life at the Orphan School, Mathinna was returned to Flinders Island in 1844 and taken in by Robert Clark, the minister and school master. In Clarks household, Mathinna resided alongside Fanny Cochrane Smith, Tasmanias oldest surviving full-blood Aboriginal, who later recalled instances of mistreatment inflicted upon Mathinna by the preacher of Wybaleena.

She was shipped back to the Orphan School which was overcrowded and plagued by disease, with many children succumbing to scarlet fever. Hunger and unjust punishment were frequent. By the time Mathinna departed the institution at sixteen, she was its sole remaining Aboriginal student. Due to her Aboriginal heritage, she was subsequently sent to the settlement at Oyster Cove, where a diminishing group of survivors from Flinders Island were subjected to isolation, disease, and emotional distress. Confronted by exclusion and hardship, Mathinna resorted to alcohol abuse as a means of coping. She was compelled to exchange her body for alcohol and sustenance in order to survive. Tragically, her circumstances culminated in her drowning in 1856 at the age of twenty-one.

Her story is often cited as part of the broader history of the Stolen Generations in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were removed from their families, communities, and culture.

Renaming the electorate from Franklin to Mathinna would recognise: (1) the shift in Australian public recognition of First Nations people in particular Tasmanian first nations people; (2) the legacy and continuing impact of the Stolen Generations; and (3) Mathinnas direct historical connection to the Sir John Franklin.

Her story illustrates the experiences of Tasmanian Aboriginal people after European settlement, including events such as the Black Line, Black War, exile and imprisonment at Wybaleena on Flinders Island, premature deaths, alcoholism, and forced cultural assimilation. These events exemplify the broader context of protection versus extinction policies of the 1830s to the 1840s.

Remembering Mathinna and the Significance of Electoral Reform

Mathinnas story deserves to be remembered as an important part of our shared history. When we participate in the democratic process and cast our votes, it provides a significant opportunity to reflect on past injustices committed against First Nations people. These moments remind us of our evolving attitudes and values, especially in the period following Federation, towards recognising and respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Our electoral system embodies the principle that every individual has the right to an equal vote. Upholding this right is crucial as we continue to acknowledge historical wrongs and strive towards a more inclusive and just society for all Australians.
