



# Objection 356

Reconciliation Victoria - 2

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**From:** info@reconciliationvic.org.au  
**To:** [FedRedistribution - VIC](#)  
**Subject:** [VIC REDISTRIBUTION OBJECTIONS] Damian O'keefe \*WWW\* [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]  
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Victorian Redistribution objections uploaded from the AEC website.

Name: Damian O'keefe

Organisation: Reconciliation Victoria

Address: Level 1, 112 Langridge Street,

Phone number: [REDACTED]

Additional information: Reconciliation Victoria is the statewide body promoting reconciliation across Victoria. This means that we promote deeper understanding, respect and justice for and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We wish to submit an objection against the decision to maintain the name Batman for the Victorian Federal Electorate.



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

### Objection to the recommendation to not rename the Federal Electorate of Batman to the Federal Electorate of Simon Wonga

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#### **Introduction**

Reconciliation Victoria is disappointed in the Redistribution Committee's interim recommendation that fails to capture how renaming the electorate of Batman is part of the long journey 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.

## **Substantiated doubts around John Batman's record of "outstanding service" to Australia.**

This is particularly the case regarding Batman's involvement in the massacres of Aboriginal people in Tasmania and participation in the "Black Line", a documented attempt at genocide.

We believe that there is an inconsistency in the Committee's decision to remove the name of McMillan from the Gippsland Federal Electorate on the basis of his involvement in massacres, and not that of Batman, when in fact Batman's involvement was on a far more serious level.

## **A legacy of hurt and grief for contemporary Aboriginal people**

Continuing to honour John Batman through the name of an electoral division perpetuates the trauma of the past; a trauma that still has ripple effects today in the current disadvantages faced by many Aboriginal people.

We should not continue imposing the name of Batman on the descendants of his victims, especially as Aboriginal people (both Traditional Owners and contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in the electorate) repeatedly express how this name is hurtful and damaging to them. This impact continues and is felt on a daily basis.

## **Community appetite for change**

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

- Wurundjeri Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council Aboriginal Corporation
- the Darebin Aboriginal Advisory Committee and Yarra Aboriginal Advisory Group;
- the 18 Aboriginal-controlled organisations based in Darebin;
- the current and former Members for Batman – Hon Ged Kearney and David Feeney, as well as the candidate for the Greens, Alex Bhathal;
- both Darebin and Yarra City Councils.

The name Simon Wonga has been put forth and endorsed by the Wurundjeri Council's Board of Directors as the proposed new name for 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.

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.

At the time Darebin Council took this opportunity to also gauge community attitudes to changing the name of the Federal Electorate 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.

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.

There is now broad community understanding in the electorate that changing the name would be one way of recognising past dispossession and symbolically righting past wrongs. That there was an original joint submission asking for a name change provided by the Traditional Owner body, along with the two local government jurisdictions included in the electoral division (City of Darebin and City of Yarra) is in itself an indicator of the very significant weight that this should be given. The united views of these parties and their constituents highlight the gravity this issue holds at the local level.

### **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.

## **Conclusion**

Traditional Owners have put forth the name 'Simon Wonga' in the spirit of reconciliation and out of respect for his leadership and legacy. A strong advocate for his community's land rights, 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 provided outstanding service to his community at a critical time in our history. While documentation of his deeds may be limited, this by no means diminishes his significance and standing for the Victorian community, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike.

Simon Wonga had and still has standing in both cultures. His name should be recognised in this way to ensure his legacy is remembered and made visible to all.

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, in line with the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, particularly in regard to its commitment to respect and promote the rights of Aboriginal people.

It is noted that the AEC is making recommendations to renaming the electorate Division of Murray to 'Nicholls' in honour of Sir Douglas Ralph Nicholls and Lady Gladys Nicholls for their significant contribution in advocating for Aboriginal rights and welfare. The renaming of the Division of Batman to Simon Wonga provides a significant opportunity to similarly recognise the major contribution to the Victorian community by this respected Aboriginal leader.

Changing the name of the Division of Batman to Simon Wonga is but one small way to recognise the past and allow us all to move forward on a journey towards reconciliation. Such a change would recognise the distinct place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia's history and in its future as a cohesive, inclusive and respectful society.

It would promote healing by paying rightful respect to a significant community leader, clarifying history to truly reflect the past and enable all people, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to stand together with shared understanding and hope.

It is in this spirit that Reconciliation Victoria will be asking the augmented Electoral Commission to review the Redistribution Committee's recommendation to retain the name of Batman for this Federal Electorate and to agree to change it to Simon Wonga.

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.

Ends

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