



Objection 37

Gregory Marks

2 pages

Australian Electoral Commission

Introduction

I wish to make a submission proposing an alternative name for the proposed new electorate of Bean in the ACT.

The AEC naming guidelines suggest that Aboriginal names should be used where possible and appropriate: **“Aboriginal names should be used where appropriate and as far as possible existing Aboriginal divisional names should be retained.”**

There is a very appropriate Aboriginal name for this electorate. That is the name “Onyong”.

Submission

Onyong was a prominent Aboriginal and a leader of his people the Ngambri during the time of early European settlement of the Canberra region in the 1830's. His country included the east side of Lake George and through the general area of what is now the ACT. He and his family group travelled and hunted through the area. He was particularly associated with the southern part of the region, the country now to be included in the new electorate. Onyong's home-base appears to have been located on the Tuggeranong Plain south/west of Mount Taylor although he was known to travel extensively.

He was very well known and respected by the early settlers and authorities. Whilst living a traditional lifestyle independently, he knew many of the early settlers on friendly terms. Particularly relevant to the naming of the new electorate, he was a close friend and associate of James Cotter, after whom the Cotter River is named. Indeed he and Cotter spent considerable time together in the country south of the Murrumbidgee. I believe Onyong died at Cuppacumbalong and is buried near Tharwa, which are in the new electorate. Consequently his association with the area of the new electorate is infinitely closer than that of Charles Bean who temporarily resided there whilst writing.

Onyong's association with the area of the ACT is quite extensively documented. In particular, it has recently been dealt with in the novel “Cotter” by Richard Begbie (2016). Although this is a fictionalised account, Begbie has drawn closely on the historical material available. The descendants of both Onyong and Cotter still live in the Canberra district. See: <https://www.smh.com.au/national/act/onyong-the-warrior-led-garrett-cotter-into-canberras-water-catchment-20160808-gqnasf.html>. See also ‘Ngambri Ancestral Names’ by Anne Jackson-Nakano 2005. Further information will be held by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Canberra. There is a walking trail named after him (with the spelling ‘Honyong’) in the ACT Cotter Avenue nature reserve. See <http://www.environment.act.gov.au/parks-conservation/parks-and-reserves/find-a-park/murrumbidgee-river-corridor/Cotter-Avenue>

Summary

The current suggestion for the electorate name is Bean, after the renowned correspondent and historian. I note that 2 out of the 4 members of the Redistribution Committee did not vote for this suggestion. That is, it did not have overwhelming support.

Charles Bean was a very important figure in the development of Australian history, and in understanding and commemorating Australia's involvement in World War 1, amongst other things. He was in his life, and still is, to a degree a controversial figure.

Regardless, the name of a celebrated Aboriginal leader of this region, Onyong, is in all respects a more appropriate name for the new electorate. This would be the ACT equivalent of the naming of the Sydney electorate of Bennelong.

This name would bring honour on the original Aboriginal inhabitants of the region, would bring credit to their descendants today.

it would be a fitting gesture of recognition of the Aboriginal foundation and inheritance of this nation for such an electorate to be named in this regard in the national capital.

Yours faithfully

Greg Marks
Canberra
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