



Objection 70

John Goss and Diane Gibson

2 pages

Objection to proposed name of new electorate in the ACT

As of April 2018, 93 of the 150 House of Representatives electorates (62%) are named after men, and only 15 of 150 electorates (10%) are named after women. Another 6 electorates are named after married couples or families, and 36 electorates take their names from geographic areas.

This is a major gender imbalance which we should do more to correct.

When the House of Representatives was expanded from 125 electorates to 148 in 1984 we made a major step towards rectifying this historic imbalance by naming 10 of the new electorates after women and only 12 after men.

But since then progress has been limited, with two electorates named for women and 16 for men.

Since the turn of the millennium, only one woman and 12 men.

The point we wish to make is not as much about the statistics as it is about what those statistics represent. And what they say to women and girls about their place in our political system. (And to men and boys for that matter). It is true that the naming of electorates is only one small way in which we as Australians memorialise what is important to us. But electorates are an integral part of our political process. Accepting an historical predisposition to naming conventions that favour men is one thing – perpetuating that particular historical perspective is quite another.

The redistributions that are currently occurring in Victoria, SA and the ACT give us an opportunity to progress this important issue. In SA it is proposed that Wakefield will be renamed as Spence - after Catherine Spence. And in Victoria, it is proposed 2 more seats will be named after women – May Cox and Jean Macnamara, with the new seat to be named after Malcolm Fraser and another seat to be jointly named - after Doug Nicholls and Gladys Nichols.

Yet in the ACT redistribution, the proposed new seat is to be named after a man - Bean, so the two seats in the ACT named after people will both be for males.

Surely the new seat in the ACT should be named after a woman.

The Redistribution Committee for the ACT considered many possible names for the new electorate. They considered the 13 names suggested in Redistribution submissions, but they also considered 57 other names – 31 women and 26 men (Appendix J of the Redistribution Committee for the ACT Report).

They whittled this list down to a shortlist of 3. They were divided as to which name on the shortlist they would recommend for the new seat, so they voted. 2 members of the committee voted for Charles Edwin Woodrow Bean, 1 member of the committee voted for Lewis Windermere Nott and 1 member of the committee voted for Ngingali Cullen.

The name that got the most votes – Bean – was the one recommended.

It is important that our political processes value and recognise the contribution of women as well as men. If we are interested in changing the gender imbalance in the naming of electorates we should use the name Cullen for the new electorate, or one of the 30 women listed in Appendix J.

John Goss and Diane Gibson