



Objection 25

Joe Thwaites

2 pages

Renaming the electorate of Corangamite – Lillardia, not Tucker.

This submission is not so much an objection as a proposal for amendment.

I strongly support the Redistribution Committee's intention to name an electorate in honour of Margaret Tucker – whose indigenous name was Lillardia.

I do not know what consultation the Committee has had with Marge's family, and clearly their views on the renaming should carry the greatest weight. But from my perspective, the honour being proposed for Marge should acknowledge her indigenous name – Lillardia – if that is acceptable in terms of indigenous custom. That name is unique: there can be no question as to who is being honored. It is also a beautiful and memorable word in itself.

Tucker is a fine name, but the Australian National Dictionary of Biography contains at least nine people by the name of Tucker, several with Victorian connections. Naming an electorate Tucker will have little impact, whereas the name Lillardia immediately prompts enquiry. And it would be perverse, to say the least, if the result of the Committee's efforts to honor an indigenous leader was to replace an indigenous electorate name (Corangamite) with a comparatively anonymous English one. So I feel strongly that the purposes the Committee seeks would be far more effectively met if the electorate is named Lillardia, if that is preferred by the family.

As a child in Melbourne I knew Marge Tucker, who was a friend of my parents, Michael and Honor Thwaites. A tree jointly planted by Marge and my mother in the garden of a home in Melbourne was celebrated earlier this month in an act of reconciliation by descendants of both families, at an event in support of the Uluru Statement from the Heart organized by Initiatives of Change (IofC). As long ago as 1959 my father Michael Thwaites, the first Australian poet to win the King's Medal, wrote a powerful poem of shame and reconciliation after attending the funeral of Marge's mother Yarmuk at Cummeragunja. It is not long – Committee members might care to read the text, which is attached.

As noted above, all of this is subject to any views Marge's family may express on the question of the electorate's name.

Here is my father's poem:

For Yarmuk, Elder of the Ulupna Tribe

buried at Cummeragunja on the Murray, 14th August 1959

A worn-out body laid in quiet earth,
Attendant trees, a wattle's throb of gold,
The unhurried river hollowing its path,
Wind in the grass – what more is to be told?

You, last of all that knew your tribal tongue,
Rest now with them in this ancestral ground.
Above your grave the towering ancient wrong
Speaks in a silence pregnant and profound.

For named and nameless ills your people bore
From us, who killed by bullet, axe, and pride,
For our stone blindness; for the day we tore
In kindness' name your children from your side,

What could we answer if your ghost should rise
To curse our children's children from the grave?
You rise, but with compassion in your eyes.
Before we knew to ask it, you forgave.

A fire of truth and love was lit in you
Who unembittered fought with bitter fate.
We took the land and life your fathers knew,
You never claimed your heritage of hate,

But poured your life unstinted for the sake
Of those you loved, caught in the world's dark mesh.
Sleep well: but let your burning spirit wake
Till hearts of stone are melted into flesh.

Michael Thwaites