



The Federal Redistribution 2003
QUEENSLAND



Public Suggestion Number 25

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The Redistribution Committee for
Queensland
Australian Electoral Commission
Level 7 Collection House
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By Hand



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Dear Committee Members

**Submission that the new Queensland House of
Representatives Seat be named after Neville Bonner AO**

I refer to the calling for submissions in relation to the redistribution of House of Representatives Seats in Queensland, including the creation of a new seat.

I submit that the new House of Representatives seat be named after Neville Bonner AO – Australia's first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander member of the Commonwealth Parliament.

1. Guidelines

I thank Anne Bright, the Australian Electoral Officer for Queensland, for forwarding to me the relevant guidelines for the naming of House of Representative seats. There are 2 guidelines which appear to be particularly relevant:

- (a) "That in the main, divisions be named after former citizens who have rendered outstanding service to their country..."
- (b) "That, when new divisions are created the names of former Prime Ministers be considered."

In making this submission, I will address, firstly, why I passionately believe that Neville Bonner has such a special place in Queensland and Australian history that it is right and proper that a Federal seat should be named after him and, secondly, I will address why I think Neville Bonner should be given priority over former Prime Ministers who may not as at this time have been so honoured.

2. Neville Bonner AO

The story of Neville Bonner is well known. He was an elder of the Jagera Tribe upon whose land the State Parliament of Queensland is built. He was born on Ukerebagh Island in the mouth of the Tweed River. His childhood was poor, impoverished and the subject of discrimination. Because there were no State schools in his local area which were allocated to Aboriginal children (these were the days of segregation), he was denied the education that was other children's right. It was not until he was 14 that he obtained the benefit of 1 year's formal education in Beaudesert.

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After a period working out West, Neville and his family settled on Palm Island for a number of years prior to moving to Ipswich where he lived the second half of his life.

It is difficult for me to imagine what his childhood would have been like. The fact that he rose to the position he attained as a Senator of Queensland for 12 years with the legacy of such a tough childhood is hard for me to contemplate. Just think about it, 1 year's formal education and an impoverished upbringing where he was treated like a second class citizen – to have the courage, tenacity and determination to become or even to seek to become a Senator was a monumental achievement.

Prior to entering into the Senate, Neville had a long history of promoting community causes. This included as a director of OPAL – an organisation promoting the advancement of Aboriginal people, a member of organising committees on Palm Island and through his involvement in the Liberal Party (including working to successfully see the passage of the referendum on the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for the purposes of census and for the making of Federal laws).

Neville then served 12 years as a Senator. This included periods serving on a number of Senate Committees including as Chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. He was the first government backbencher to successfully sponsor a bill through to enactment (the Aboriginal Development Commission Bill).

Consider the significance of first his election and then the period during which he was a Senator. He gave hope to his people. He was an example to his people and to all Australians that notwithstanding past prejudice and impoverishment a person in this country can still seek to change our nation through engaging in the political process. Isn't this what our Parliamentary system is all about? Notwithstanding past prejudice, notwithstanding past injustices, one can still engage in the democratic process and bring about change.

Neville had every right to be bitter, angry and disillusioned with his country, but instead of being eaten up by such justified emotions, he rose above it and sought and attained elected office whilst maintaining his grace and dignity at all times. Has any Australian who has obtained a seat in the Senate since Federation achieved as much simply by being elected? This in itself calls for recognition.

In 1979, Neville was named Australian of the Year.

After his failure to secure re-election in 1983, he continued to work for the community as a director of the ABC, as a patron/member of World Vision, the Ipswich Women's Shelter, the Coloured Youth Soul Centre, Amnesty International, the governing council of Griffith University, the Senior Official Visitor for all Queensland Prisons, the chairman of the Indigenous Advisory Council and as an elected delegate to the 1998 Constitutional Convention. His passionate speech at the constitutional convention where he focussed delegates to consider the lack of indigenous representatives and ended with his traditional tribal sorry chant should become part of Australian folklore.

His is a remarkable track record of community involvement – in many cases representing those people and causes which most needed advancing.

I have personally heard Neville Bonner speak 2 times. Both times I was filled with admiration at his eloquence, sincerity, quiet dignity and modesty. Sitting here writing this submission, I cannot think

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of any member of our Federal Parliament who I have heard speak (and I have heard a number of past and present parliamentarians from our current Prime Minister to previous Treasurers and Senators of all political persuasions) who came anywhere near moving me or inspiring me to the extent that Neville did. Why is that? I think that some part of Neville might have appreciated the historical importance and significance of his role in the Senate as Australia's first Aboriginal Senator and MP. I have no doubt that Neville moved and inspired many Australians in this country as much as he inspired and moved me. It is fit and proper that he should be honoured with a seat named after him.

Again, let us not underestimate the achievement; especially for someone who was bereft of a formal education. The fact that he even attempted the journey against the prejudice, against the odds fills me with so much admiration. Once he made it to the Senate he had to tolerate death threats, discrimination and indignity in a pub that refused to serve him on the basis of his colour, criticism from both white and black Australia. Through it all he was his own person. He maintained his grace and dignity. He did not hesitate to cross the floor of the Senate on matters he felt strongly about. This is to be admired. He lived up to his words in his maiden speech:

I wasn't a senator for whites. I wasn't a senator for blacks. I was a senator for all Queenslanders.

Our children and grandchildren for generations to come should learn about and hear the Neville Bonner story. If the committee decides to name the seat after Neville, then maybe there will be this opportunity for parents to say to their kids – do you know who Neville Bonner was? Do you know why this seat is called Bonner? Do you understand the significance of what Neville Bonner achieved?

I attach an essay I found on the internet written by a high school student which was the winning entrant from South Australia in the Simpson History Essay. The author attends the Wilderness School in South Australia. The essay talks about Neville Bonner and his personification of the ANZAC spirit. To me it encapsulates what a great role model Neville Bonner is to the children of Australia today and in the future. The Redistribution Committee has the opportunity to put the Neville Bonner story in stark relief by naming the next Queensland seat after him.

Should the Redistribution Committee perhaps recognise a previous Prime Minister ahead of Neville Bonner? First, Neville was a great Queensland and I do not believe that any Prime Minister from Queensland has yet to be recognised. Second, I ask the Committee to ask themselves what some of the past Prime Ministers who are yet to be recognised would say? I am sure that men like Gorton, Whitlam, Fraser, Hawke and Keating would all recognise that, in many respects, the journey that Neville Bonner went through was in some ways, when we look at the milestones of this country's development and advancement, more historically significant. The fact that Neville Bonner achieved what he did notwithstanding his background makes it even more significant.

I thank the Redistribution Committee for considering this submission. Further I thank the AEC for their courteous and prompt assistance at all times.

Yours faithfully



Paul Scarr

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**Sunita de Sousa
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The ANZAC spirit was born at Gallipoli in 1916. Since then it has been demonstrated not only by Australians in war but also by those whose contributions have been in other fields.

The ANZAC spirit is one of the chief elements of our national identity which we, as Australians, commemorate every ANZAC Day at Dawn Services across the country. Originally established by the Australian and New Zealand troops in World War One, it has stamped an enduring impression on Australians. Subsequently, it has been exhibited not only by Australians in World War Two but also by those whose contributions have been in other fields.

The ANZAC spirit was born at Gallipoli in 1915 when Australian and New Zealand troops first set foot on Turkish soil during World War One. The ANZAC spirit can signify many different qualities for Australians. It represents mateship, courage, equality, resourcefulness and creativity. However, the most prominent attribute that was born at Gallipoli was the soldiers' determination. The Australian men were aware that they had little, if any, hope of victory during the Gallipoli campaign and yet they persisted. Testimony of this is derived from Private Donkin's diary, 25 April 1915, "*I know its fight and proper that a man should go back and fight again but Sunday's battle and the horrors of the trenches Sunday night ... had unnerved me completely.*" (Donkin in Gammage, 1975:59) Donkin noticeably appreciated the perils of battle yet the fact that he was reported to have been killed in action on 15 August 1915 shows that he continued to serve and engage in battle even after his harrowing ordeal on Turkish shores. This primary source may be unreliable in that the situation could be overstated due to his emotional state. Still, it is an exceptionally beneficial insight into the minds of the soldiers and his opinion is consistent with those of other soldiers indicating that, while not unquestionably free of exaggeration, their accounts maintain significant legitimacy. Private McAnulty recounted a similar view of the dangerous Gallipoli landing, "*The fumes are suffocating, the shrapnel is pouring all round us getting chaps everywhere.*" (McAnulty in Gammage, 1975:69) As was the case with Donkin, he too was later killed in action a few days later. While providing evidence of his determination, this source more importantly confirms that these feats of courage were not isolated occurrences but were common during the Gallipoli campaign. Donkin and McAnulty were only two of the countless men who had seen the treacherous nature of the war, but continued to fight, exemplifying the determination and persistence that became the ANZAC spirit.

The persistence that comprises the ANZAC spirit again emerged during following wars and particularly World War Two in the years 1939 to 1945. Here, numerous Australians, including women, sacrificed the security of their homes to join the Allied forces in order to resist the German and Japanese onslaught. These people had heard stories of Australian prisoners of war in Japan and their harsh living conditions. However the stories did not deter them; they unrelentingly volunteered their services. One such Australian was Sister Vivian Bullwinkle who is spoken of in Appendix 1. She was suffering from her own injury and had been tormented by the slaughter of her companions. Yet, she did not overlook the Englishman who lay helplessly wounded on the beach. Rather, she persisted, in the true ANZAC spirit, to nurse and service others by tending to the man for fourteen days. This source was printed in an Australian newspaper and consequently may be biased towards the citizens of its country. Conversely, this is a secondary source which indicates that the information has most likely been cross-referenced. Hence, the source is somewhat reliable and undoubtedly useful in understanding the sister's determined attitude. Like numerous Australians in war, Sister Vivian Bullwinkle possessed the determination and persistence initiated by the first ANZACs.

The ANZACs' persistence has not only been demonstrated on the battlefield, but also, it has been additionally exhibited by Australians in other lines of work.

Whether it is the Royal Australian Flying Doctor Service braving the harsh elements to attend remote patients or social workers, Diana Thomas and Peter Bunch, assisting the victims of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan while at risk themselves, Australians constantly express a sense of determination in their missions. One particular Australian who revealed such determination was Neville Bonner. From his childhood, Bonner had to struggle against the odds. Apart from being challenged by the forces of poverty and a poor education, he additionally experienced tremendous racial prejudice. Despite this, in 1971, he demonstrated the ANZAC spirit by overcoming his hardships to be the first Aboriginal elected to the Australian Parliament. In Parliament, he continued to persist by earnestly representing those of his own race as well as all other Australians. On the issue of his difficulties, Bonner once said, "*it was a hard life,*

but good training ... we had to work hard for anything we wanted." (Bonner in Burger, 1979:8) This quote clearly shows that despite the negative aspects in his life, Bonner was able to, and did, persevere. He accepted that there would be setbacks in reaching his goals, yet he continued to confidently persist as the ANZACs did in Gallipoli. There is a chance that Bonner viewed his life as more challenging than it truly was possibly making his words slightly inaccurate. Nevertheless, this primary source gives a unique view into the mindset of Bonner. Hence, while containing a small likelihood of unreliability, the source is still extremely valuable in appreciating the determination and persistence that Bonner possessed. Neville Bonner clearly proves that since April 1915, Australians whose contributions have been in fields other than war have similarly demonstrated the ANZAC spirit.

As can be seen, from the materialisation of the ANZAC spirit at Gallipoli in 1915, displays of persistence have been accomplished time and time again both in war and in other fields. This not only makes me proud to be Australian but also confident that, when I am faced with discouraging situations, I will not yield. I hope that I will endeavour with determination in all that I do as the ANZACs once endeavoured. I hope that I will always remember the willingness of the soldiers to fight in Gallipoli even though they confronted such overwhelming difficulties.

But above all, I hope that the flame ignited by the ANZACs in their darkest hour will not be extinguished but instead, will continue to burn in myself and all Australians no matter what field in which we choose to persist.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

"The Japanese separated the nurses from the remainder, drove them into the sea and opened fire with machine guns.

Out of this blood bath Sister Bullwinkle alone emerged. At the water's edge she was struck down by a bullet, but not fatally. Gradually recovering her senses she realised that silence had followed the firing. The Japanese, satisfied with their work had gone.

Struggling into the jungle she collapsed, and on coming to found her way back to the beach. There lay an Englishman, twice bayoneted by the victors. He was able to remember the day, and then it transpired that she had lain two days in the jungle.

For a fortnight the Australian sister nursed this man, and then they dragged themselves across the island to surrender again."

(Albury Mail in Simmelhaig and Spenceley, 1984:117)

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