



Submission FOB181

Peter G. Rowe

Submission to the Australian Electoral Commission

Proposed Renaming of the Electoral Division of Franklin to Tongerlongeter

I write in my capacity as a Tasmanian Aboriginal man, an Australian legal practitioner and researcher of Tasmanian Aboriginal history, to express my strong support for the Australian Electoral Commission's proposal to rename the Electoral Division of Franklin as Tongerlongeter.

In my view, the proposed name represents an important opportunity to recognise one of the most significant Aboriginal leaders in Tasmania's history. Tongerlongeter demonstrated extraordinary leadership during one of the most difficult periods experienced by Tasmania's Aboriginal people. As Nicholas Clements records in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, he became the principal leader of the Oyster Bay resistance during the Black War and later continued to advocate for his people after their removal to Wybalenna on Flinders Island. His courage, leadership and commitment to his people deserve lasting public recognition.

The proposal is particularly appropriate because the Country of the Oyster Bay Nation extends across much of the newly configured electorate. The proposed name therefore has a genuine historical and geographical connection with the electorate itself. It is far more than simply commemorating an historical figure; it recognises a leader whose life was intrinsically connected with the landscape and communities represented by the electorate.

I also support the Commission's adoption of the spelling Tongerlongeter. Historical records contain numerous spellings of Tasmanian Aboriginal names, reflecting nineteenth-century attempts by Europeans to record Aboriginal languages for which no standard written form then existed. Such variations are common throughout Tasmanian Aboriginal history and should not be regarded as evidence that one spelling is necessarily correct and all others incorrect.

The spelling adopted by the Commission accords with the usage of respected contemporary historians including Professor Henry Reynolds and Dr Nicholas Clements in their publication *Tongerlongeter First Nations Leader & Tasmanian War Hero* (2021). Significantly, Professor Cassandra Pybus, who has previously published a different spelling, has also recently adopted Tongerlongeter in a published opinion article in the *Mercury* newspaper (18 Jul 26). In my opinion, this demonstrates that the Commission's preferred spelling is well supported by contemporary scholarship.

The Commission is not required to determine the only historically correct spelling, because no such certainty exists. Rather, it must adopt a single, defensible spelling for official purposes. In my opinion, Tongerlongeter satisfies that requirement.

As someone who has spent many years researching Tasmanian Aboriginal history and identity, I welcome initiatives that recognise Aboriginal leaders through careful historical scholarship and respectful public commemoration. Renaming the electorate from that of Sir John Franklin - a colonial governor whose legacy remains controversial - to that of Tongerlongeter, more appropriately reflects both the history of the region and the growing recognition of the contribution made by Aboriginal Tasmanians to our shared history.

For these reasons, I respectfully support the Australian Electoral Commission's proposal to rename the Electoral Division of Franklin as Tongerlongeter, and I encourage the Commission to confirm its proposal.

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