



Submission FOB226

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PYBUS, CASSANDRA - Redistribution TAS - Submission on the proposed Tasmanian redistribution (feedback)

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Submission on the proposed Tasmanian redistribution details

Category: Names
Details:

Submission to the augmented Electoral Commission for Tasmania

Round 3: In support of the proposal to rename the Division of Franklin as Tongerlongeter

Professor Cassandra Pybus

 Tasmania

20 July 2026

I write in strong support of the augmented Electoral Commission's proposal to rename the reconfigured Division of Franklin to Tongerlongeter.

I do not believe that electorates should be named for people who were colonial governors who served the British government not the Tasmanian people. This is especially the case for John Franklin who was one of the most reviled colonial governors, and was unceremoniously recalled in 1843 after years of controversy about his incompetence, corruption and favouritism.

While some popular opinion has cast the Franklins and his wife as high-minded humanitarians who cared about the original people, nothing could be further from the truth. Lady Franklin openly expressed her disdain for the original people of the island writing an entry in her diary recorded a dinner conversation in which she firmly expressed her disdain for 'people who think it so very shocking that these inferior races of men should be gradually disappearing from the earth to make room for a higher race—I thought it was more as specimens of natural history that they were regretted than for anything else'. I have written at length on the Franklin's involvement in the trade in Aboriginal Human remains in my most recent book *A Very Secret Trade* (Allen and Unwin 2025) but for the purpose of this submission I will highlight just one instance.

During the Franklin's fleeting visit to Wybelanna on Flinders Island the Commandant George Augustus Robinson noted how the couple had 'solicited curiosities, also the skull of an aboriginal', adding that their private secretary wanted an Aboriginal skull as well. In subsequent weeks Robinson recorded three autopsies of named people where he instructed their bodies be decapitated and each head sent to an orderly to have the flesh removed to preserve the skull. It is commonly accepted by historians of colonial Tasmania that that Robinson took those skulls to Hobart and gave them to Franklin in August 1838.

These skulls were the beginning of the Franklin's collection of Aboriginal skulls, the evidence of which can be found in the catalogue of the Royal College of Surgeons in London naming Lady Franklin as the source of thirteen skulls and crania, with one skull certainly

Tasmanian, and probably another two, all received in 1854. The British Museum also catalogued a Tasmanian skull also sourced to Lady Franklin.

Franklin gained fame, and his widow the naming rights, as the commander of expedition to find the North West Passage in the Arctic. He was dead even before the ships were abandoned to the ice in June 1847, but for over a decade Lady Franklin ensured that the colonial media were kept abreast of her futile efforts to find him somehow still alive. In 1859, once it was established that he had died ignominiously twelve years before, she wrote to the Premier of Tasmania to propose erecting his statue. The state government did that and more to ensure the name of Franklin, not the disgraced governor, but the heroic arctic explorer, was memorialised all around the state.

He never was a heroic figure and Tasmanians should not be asked to identify with an electorate that was named for him. By contrast Tongerlongeter was a heroic figure who fought for his people who had been Tasmanians for 40,000 years.

If the electorate continues to be named for this egregious couple I intend to be very public in ensuring that the electorate understand the terrible things they did to the original people of this place.