



Submission FOB271

Aiden Brennan

Dear Australian Electoral Commission,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposal to rename the Division of Franklin to Tongerlongeter. I also wish to express my extreme concern at the AEC's recent decision to proceed with the renaming of the Division of Grey in South Australia despite the overwhelming majority of public submissions supporting the retention of its current name.

Before outlining my reasons, I want to acknowledge my confidence in, and appreciation for, the AEC's vital role in administering Australia's democratic system with professionalism and impartiality. At a time when trust in public institutions is under increasing pressure around the world, the AEC's reputation for independence is one of the great strengths of Australian democracy. It is because I value that reputation so highly that I make this submission.

The AEC's own naming guidelines state that electoral divisions should not be renamed without *very strong reasons*. That principle is sound. In a compulsory voting system with three levels of government, avoiding unnecessary complexity and change should remain an important objective. In my view, the reasons advanced for renaming Franklin do not satisfy the AEC's own threshold of "very strong reasons", and the existing name should therefore be retained.

There are also compelling historical reasons for retaining the name. Sir John Franklin was one of the most significant figures in Tasmania's history, serving as Lieutenant-Governor during the formative years of Van Diemen's Land. His administration contributed to the development of many of the institutions that underpin Tasmania's system of government today, including representative democracy. It is therefore entirely appropriate that a federal electorate bears his name.

The Division of Franklin has existed continuously since 1903. While it was created shortly after Federation, it has been part of Australia's electoral map for virtually the entire history of the Commonwealth. That longevity gives the name substantial historical significance and, in my view, it should be afforded the same respect that the AEC's guidelines encourage for Federation electorates.

By contrast, Tongerlongeter is widely associated with resistance that resulted in the deaths and injuries of numerous British settlers during the Black War. Many Tasmanians are direct descendants of those settlers. Renaming the electorate after a figure associated with those events would understandably cause genuine distress and division within the community. Considering the name of the electorate of Batman was recently changed due to alleged misconduct by John Batman against indigenous people, it seems a double standard to now propose renaming an electorate after a person who committed atrocities against British settlers.

My final concern relates to the AEC itself. The Commission's legitimacy depends not only on its impartiality, but also on the public's confidence that it acts impartially. Electoral boundary redistributions inevitably involve difficult decisions, but naming decisions are different.

By proposing to replace multiple longstanding British-derived electorate names with Indigenous names, and proceeding with these changes despite strong public opposition (Over 75% of public submissions to the AEC opposed the renaming of the seat of Grey), the AEC risks creating a perception that it is favouring one historical or political perspective over another. Whether or not that perception is justified is almost beside the point. Public confidence in an independent electoral authority is founded on both actual impartiality and the appearance of impartiality.

That perception is already emerging in public debate. Former Prime Minister Tony Abbott has publicly opposed the proposed renaming of Franklin. At the same time, the South Australian Liberal Party, the Member for Grey, Tom Venning, and his predecessor, Rowan Ramsey, have all lodged formal objections to the renaming of Grey. These are prominent, mainstream political figures who speak for a substantial number of Australians on this topic. If the AEC proceeds while appearing to dismiss and ignore public opinion, it risks undermining confidence in one of Australia's most trusted democratic institutions; the potential consequences of this could be catastrophic.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the AEC to retain the name Franklin and to reconsider its decision to proceed with the renaming of Grey. Preserving confidence in Australia's electoral system is too important to risk over changes that have not been demonstrated to meet the AEC's own standard of requiring very strong justification.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Yours sincerely,

Aiden Brennan