

AEC to rename Ged Kearney's Melbourne seat from Batman to Cooper



Ged Kearney's seat of Batman has been renamed. Early settler John Batman (top right) has been dropped for indigenous activist William Cooper (bottom right).

By **Greg Brown**, Canberra, and **Richard Ferguson**, Melbourne

The Australian, 12:18PM June 20, 2018

The Australian Electoral Commission has bowed to pressure over two electorate names in Victoria, a move labelled a victory for “common sense” by indigenous leader Warren Mundine.

The name of the Melbourne electorate of Batman has been changed to Cooper in commemoration of indigenous rights activist William Cooper.

The decision by the AEC means the name of John Batman, one of the founding settlers of Melbourne, has been dumped as representing the inner Melbourne electorate, which is held by new Labor MP Ged Kearney.

The seat of Corangamite will not be renamed after former swimming teacher May Cox following an outcry from both sitting Liberal MP Sarah Henderson and Aboriginal leaders due to the original name's indigenous significance.

The AEC had initially decided to retain the name Batman for the electorate, despite pressure to adopt an indigenous name.

Mr Mundine had previously spoken out against a change to Corangamite's name due to the fact Aboriginal-linked seats have fallen from 19 to 10 since federation.

“It was brilliant to see Corangamite is staying. It's just common sense to keep the name and I think the AEC have realised that,” he said.

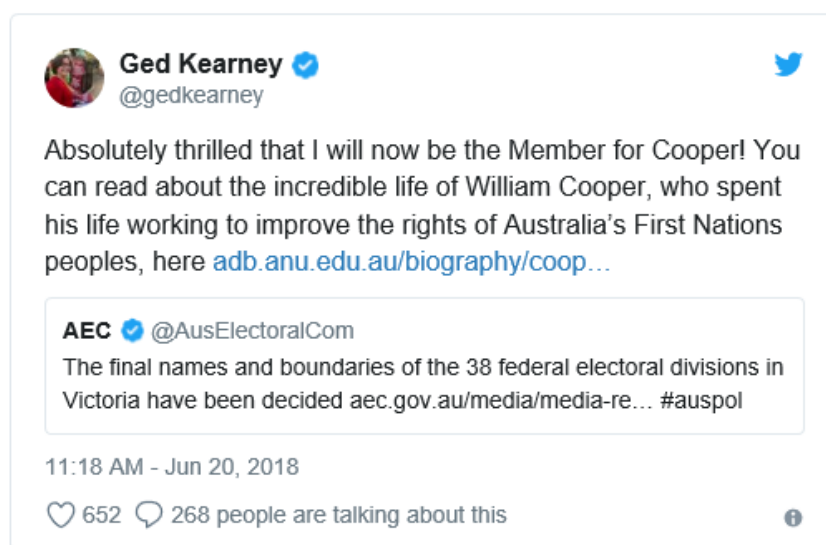
“I have no problems with Ms Cox but we need to maintain the Aboriginality of these seat names.”

Mr Mundine also said the Cooper decision was “common sense” due to its namesake’s record as a civil rights champion.

“I was so pleased to hear William Cooper was finally being honoured. He’s an internationally renowned hero. It was the right decision and again, it’s just common sense.”

There has been a long campaign to rename the seat of Batman due to the pioneer’s chequered past as a bounty hunter in Tasmania. There are accusations that Batman specialised in hunting Aboriginal people.

Batman’s Labor MP Ged Kearney supported a name change. “Absolutely thrilled that I will now be the Member for Cooper! You can read about the incredible life of William Cooper, who spent his life working to improve the rights of Australia’s First Nations peoples,” Ms Kearney tweeted.



Ms Henderson has previously said she would challenge the attempt to change her electorate to Cox due to both the Aboriginal significance of the current name and the possible connotations around Cox.

“I attended a dinner with parliamentary colleagues, stakeholders and journalists — and the main topic of conversation was my proposed new name, the Member for Cox,” she told *The Geelong Advertiser* earlier this month. “There was much laughter and many inappropriate connotations which flowed at my expense.”

Announcing the decision this morning, the AEC said Mr Cooper was a spokesman for Aboriginal people who, as secretary of the Australian Aborigines League presented a petition and led deputations to authorities, calling for direct representation in parliament, enfranchisement, land rights and federal control of Aboriginal affairs. In 1938 Mr Cooper lodged a personal protest against the treatment of European Jews in Nazi Germany following Kristallnacht.

John Batman (1801-1839) settled in the northeast of the Van Diemen’s Land Colony in the 1820s and played a key role in the founding of a settlement on the Yarra River which became the city of Melbourne.