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Labor MP for Batman Ged Kearney is delighted her electorate will be renamed Cooper after an Indigenous activist. Photograph: Ellen Smith/AAP

Melbourne electorate of Batman renamed after Indigenous activist

Electoral Commission responds to campaign about John Batman's alleged massacre of Aboriginal people

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The Melbourne electorate of Batman has been renamed after an Indigenous activist, following a public campaign to rid it of its ties to a man accused of involvement in the massacre of Aboriginal people.

Batman will now be called Cooper, after Yorta Yorta activist and leader William Cooper, the Australian Electoral Commission said, as part of an update on Victorian electorate boundaries on Wednesday.

Labor sources have welcomed the final Victorian distribution. They believe it preserves swings towards the opposition in Liberal-held marginal seats Dunkley and Corangamite revealed when changes were first proposed in April.

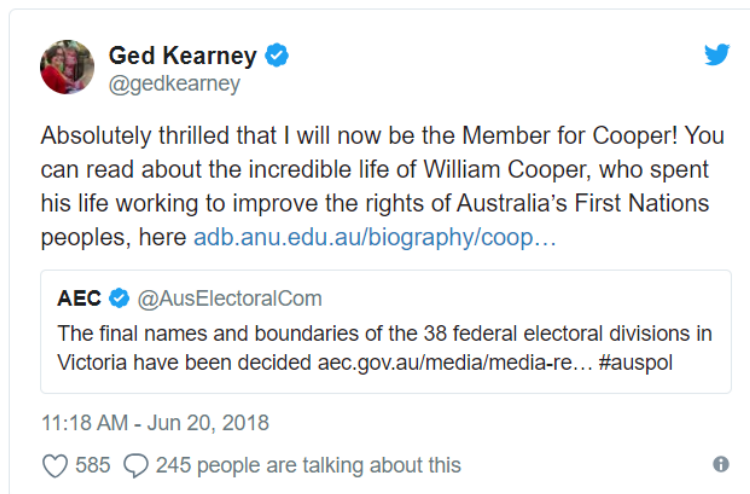
At the time the ABC election analyst, Antony Green, summarised the changes by suggesting that a new notionally Labor-held seat in both Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory and swings in those two Victorian marginals were so beneficial to Labor they “effectively wipe out the government’s majority”.

The electoral commissioner, Tom Rogers, said the decision to rename Batman was unanimous.

After the change, 11 of Victoria’s 38 electoral divisions would be named after an Aboriginal person or word, the AEC said.

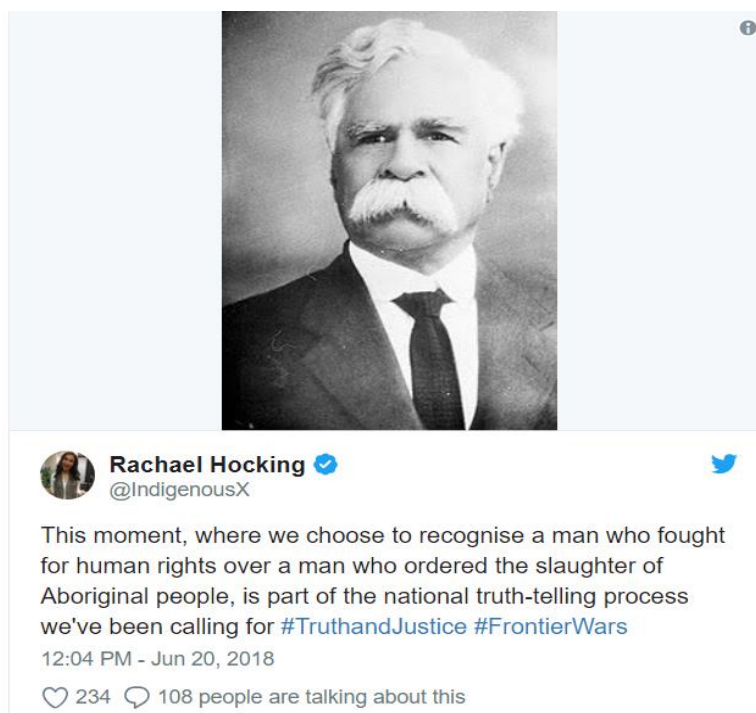
The electorate had been named after Melbourne founder John Batman, who was allegedly involved in massacring Aboriginal people in Tasmania before journeying to Victoria and attempting to purchase land around Port Phillip Bay from the Wurundjeri people.

The newly renamed electorate's MP, Ged Kearney, was among those who lobbied for the name to be changed and said she was "absolutely thrilled" at the AEC's decision.



The decision has also been welcomed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Greens MP Lidia Thorpe, whose state seat of Northcote sits within Cooper's boundaries, also said she was "extremely pleased".



The former head of the prime minister's Indigenous advisory council Warren Mundine also welcomed the decision.

Cooper helped establish the Australian Aborigines League in 1935, serving as its secretary, and petitioned King George V to give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples direct representation in parliament and land rights.

It was, the petition said, "not only a moral duty, but also a strict injunction included in the commission issued to those who came to people Australia that the original occupants and we, their heirs and successors, should be adequately cared for."

Cooper was also instrumental in the 1938 Day of Mourning protest. That same year he led a march on the German consulate in Melbourne protesting against the German government's treatment of Jewish people after Kristallnacht, the only private protest in the world to criticise Hitler for that act.



In addition to picking up the new seat of Fraser in Melbourne's west at the next election, Labor sources believe new boundaries strengthen its hand in Liberal marginal seats Dunkley, which is notionally Labor under the redistribution, and Corangamite, which improves to a 50-50 two-party preferred vote.

The Labor leader, Bill Shorten, has not publicly declared whether he will recontest the seat of Maribyrnong or move to Fraser, carved from his electorate and other Labor-held districts in Melbourne's growing west.

The AEC also voted to retain the name of the electorate of Corangamite, which had been proposed to be renamed Cox after swimming teacher Mary Cox.