



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMY AND GENDER AND ECONOMIC EQUALITY
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Submission Cover sheet

Inquiry into memorialisation through
public commemoration

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AIATSIS

**Inquiry into memorialisation
through public commemoration**

**Places, monuments, streets, and
suburbs**

AIATSIS, 2022

AIATSIS welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the ACT Legislative Assembly Inquiry into memorialisation through public commemoration.

AIATSIS occupies an incredibly important place in this nation as the only national institution dedicated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples histories and cultures.

The privileging of colonial and post-colonial iconography and the erasure of significant sites of memory and being can be very painful to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. The legacy of this iconography is felt in the present.

The inquiry provides an opportunity to rethink our identity as a territory and work towards a future fuelled by the vibrancy of diverse cultures and people, underpinned by an at least 23-thousand years of living culture, resilience and strength of First Nations people.

AIATSIS commends the ACT Legislative Assembly for its role in exploring the need to diversify who we see reflected in public commemorations.

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Recommendations

1. Increase the number of public commemorations devoted to First Nations Australians, women, non-binary people, people of diverse linguistic backgrounds and people with disabilities who make or have made a significant contribution to the ACT.
2. Increase the number of First Nation leaders memorialised via places, monuments, public art, streets and suburbs.
3. Sites for re-storying the ACT cultural landscape with the stories and places of significance to the traditional owners should be identified in co-design with traditional owners of the ACT.
4. Widen the current scope of commemorating only those that are deceased in ACT Place Names with the living.

5. Widen the concept of personhood to go beyond people to be inclusive of First Nation perspectives that ascribe personhood to elements of nature.
6. Use dual naming for places and sites, giving priority to the original traditional owner name for the place or site.
7. Examine controversial people currently commemorated via monuments, suburbs and place names in the ACT, to include a more nuanced view of their legacy.

Promotion of equality and diversity through public commemoration

Widening the scope of the people recognised through public commemoration (places, monuments, streets, and suburbs) in the ACT is an important aim for promoting equality and diversity more broadly.

The layered histories of place and important contributors as reflected in public commemorations, aid in the formation of proud local identities that are inclusive of the diversity of the community we live in.

Exclusion of certain events, sites, groups and people from the ACT's historical narrative facilitates a forgetting. In his 1968 Boyer Lecture address, 'After the Dreaming', anthropologist W. H. Stanner described the exclusion of First Nations peoples from the Australian historical record as: 'a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. What may have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale'.¹

We are who we see.

Opportunities to increase the representation of First Nations leaders

AIATSIS supports an increase of First Nations peoples memorialised in public places. This should occur, not only via monuments but public art, signage, street names, suburbs, sports and recreation facilities, bridges, historical sites and stories linked to places of significance connected to First Nation leaders.

In selecting First Nations leaders for commemoration, wide consultation should occur with traditional owners, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in the ACT and AIATSIS. Recognition should be given to the complexity and diversity of the Indigenous community in Canberra.

Co-design of the appropriate form of commemoration should occur with the families and communities from the place of origin of First Nations leaders.

At all times, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' protocols should be respected. This may involve not using the name nor image of the person being commemorated for a certain period, using

a different name to that which they were known as whilst alive and finding alternatives to visual representations to commemorate the person.

Suggestions of suitable nominations for public commemoration and suitable sites

Historical conventions have deemed that only deceased people are worthy of commemoration. This convention is followed by ACT Place Names, where only deceased people can be nominated for commemoration. This view is changing, with the Australian National Centre of Biography reviewing whether it also includes entries on the living in their Australian Dictionary of Biography.

AIATSIS believes that people that have passed and are living should be considered for commemoration. In the case of First Nations Australians this should always be guided by the contemporary views of communities and families.

Suitable nominations for public commemoration could be category based and include:

- Traditional owners that have strong connections to the ACT as Country,
- First Nations people that have made a significant contribution to the ACT, either through public service, volunteering, community organisation involvement, Caring for country activities, contributions to the artistic, economic, political, sporting and cultural life of the ACT, and
- First Nations people who are deemed to be important by their communities, for example elders

The AIATSIS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Biographical Index (ABI)² and the Indigenous Australian Dictionary of Biography³ are useful search tools for identifying First Nations people that have contributed to the ACT.

Suitable sites for commemoration could include:

- Parks, stadiums, bridges, streets, suburbs, public art sites, buildings, sites of battles, and important sites linked to the person being commemorated

There are too many First Nations people worthy of commemoration and AIATSIS is always ready to provide suggestions. Some current omissions that are worthy of consideration include:

Jimmy Clements ([Jimmy Clements - Wikipedia](#)), John Noble ([Portrait of Wiradjuri elder John Noble with his dog | naa.gov.au](#)), Kerry Reid-Gilbert ([Kerry Reed-Gilbert - Wikipedia](#)),

Any other related matters

Broadening concept of personhood:

The current inquiry has too narrow a focus in only considering people for memorialisation through public commemoration. Cultural concepts of the person and personhood vary and should be considered as a means of incorporating different perspectives on personhood for commemoration purposes.

For example, many First Nation people ascribe the status of personhood to elements of the natural world and the location of feelings in the body have a relation to place.

Recently, the Griffith Law Review journal recognised the authorship of Martuwarra River of Life as the first author in a peer reviewed article.

Several jurisdictions globally have given legal personhood status to nature. For example, Pachamama Law (or law of nature) is enshrined in the Ecuadorian constitution, Bolivia has given legal rights to nature and New Zealand has recognised the personhood of Whanganui River.

AIATSIS believes that the Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality could explore cultural concepts of the person to widen commemoration beyond people.

Re-storying Country:

A cohesive ACT may rest in part in a shared identity that is diverse and inclusive. An element of which is re-storying the cultural landscape with a traditional owner presence. This may include the incorporation of traditional owner stories related to historical places that currently exclude their connection to place for inclusion of more comprehensive histories. Examples where the ACT Government could ensure that a more comprehensive history of place is experienced and includes the traditional owner story of place includes: Calthorpe's House, Lanyon Homestead, Mugga Mugga Cottage, Cuppacumbalong Homestead, etc.

Re-storying could extend to important sites identified by traditional owners, for example places of ceremony, song sites, campsites and places associated with significant events, amongst others.

Dual Place Naming

Traditional owner elders have been calling for the dual naming of place names for a long time to reflect traditional owner's history of place.

The *Public Place Names (Naming of public places) Guidelines 2021* provide that where a geographical feature has an existing introduced name, consideration shall be given to restoring traditional Aboriginal language to the feature by giving it dual names that recognise the traditional Aboriginal place name alongside the long-standing introduced name⁴.

A dedicated project, working alongside traditional owners should be put in place to make the dual naming of places a reality as opposed to waiting for a proposal to be put to the ACT Place Names Advisory Committee. Priority should be given to the traditional owner name if known.

The AIATSIS Collection holds several items that record pre-colonial names and meanings for place names in the ACT. These items could be consulted, alongside the wishes of traditional owners in a concerted effort to include more dual naming in the ACT.

Removal or descriptions on commemorative statues and place names:

Another related matter is the long overdue and bigger discussion on whether older statues, monuments, place and suburb names should be removed, or amended to include broader and more nuanced descriptions about their subjects. For First Nations Australians, the honouring of people who caused suffering to their people is very distressing and for non-Indigenous people it leaves a void of understanding on events in our shared history.

For example, Lachlan Street, Macquarie Place, Macquarie Street and the suburb of Macquarie commemorate Governor Lachlan Macquarie (1810-1821). In the ACT Place Names entry on Governor Macquarie, it states that: 'in his term in office, he encouraged exploration and constructed 276 miles of public roads.' There is no mention that Governor Macquarie ordered his troops to steal children from the site of massacres he also ordered his troops to conduct and promoted the use of 'terror' tactics (like hanging Aboriginal men from trees and pushing families off cliffs) against the Dharawal people his men massacred at Appin in 1816.⁵

The renaming of place names occurs from time to time, following controversies associated with subjects associated with that place name. In March 2021, commenting on the renaming of William Slim Drive to Gundaroo Drive, following allegations of sexual abuse of children in the 1950s by former Governor-General, Minister Chris Steel was quoted as saying that: "The government is committed to making sure that the naming of our roads, parks, and public places is consistent with a modern, inclusive and progressive Canberra".⁶

AIATSIS would like to encourage the Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality to consider engaging in broad-ranging discussions with ACT citizens on whether historical commemorations should be removed or amended to be more inclusive of different perspectives on the subject. This may include the renaming of place names that cause hurt to First Nations people.

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¹ W. E. H. Stanner, *After the Dreaming*, Crows Nest, ABC 1968

² Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (2021), *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Biographical Index*, accessed 13 December 2021, <https://aiatsis.gov.au/research/guides-and-resources/people-and-languages>

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⁵ NSW Archives and Records (2021), *Massacre at Appin, 17 April 1816*, accessed 13 December 2021, <https://www.records.nsw.gov.au/archives/collections-and-research/guides-and-indexes/stories/massacre-appin-17-april-1816>

⁶ Canberra Weekly (2021), *Making a Name for Canberra: Join the ACT Place Names Advisory Committee*, accessed 14 December 2021, <https://canberraweekly.com.au/making-a-name-for-canberra-join-the-act-place-names-advisory-committee/>