Department of
Premier and Cabinet

Approval of proposed name for Guru Nanak landmark commitment

BMIN-240202370

Ministerial Briefing (BMIN)

Security classification: Official

Response prepared by: Premier & Cabinet, Social Policy and Intergovernmental Relations, Multicultural Affairs, Policy.

Topic

Proposed naming of a lake as 'Guru Nanak Lake' to honour the founder of Sikhism, to implement a 2018 election commitment.

Analysis

The proposed naming of a lake in the City of Casey has undergone community consultation and aligns with the Geographic Names Victoria's naming rules.

Recommendations

1.	APPROVE the proposed name 'Guru Nanak Lake' for consideration by the Minister for Planning.	☑	Approved	☐ Not Approved
2.	SIGN the letter to the Minister for Planning (Attachment A) confirming your approval of the name.	☑	Signed	☐ Not Signed

Electronic endorsement of this brief will be by , Minister for Multicultural Affairs

Act by date (optional):

12:00 AM Wed, 10 Apr 2024 26.5.24

Minister for Multicultural Affairs's Comments:

No comments provided

1 Key reasons

1.1 Your approval is sought for the proposed name for the Guru Nanak landmark commitment

In November 2018, the former Premier of Victoria made a public commitment to name a permanent landmark in honour of the founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak. Following extensive community consultation and engagement with Geographic Names Victoria (GNV) from 2021 to 2023, your approval is now sought for the proposed name, 'Guru Nanak Lake', for a lake at Berwick Springs.

1.2 You are required to write to the Minister for Planning to seek registration of the name

Under section 11(5) of the *Geographic Place Names Act 1998,* the Minister for Planning may direct the Registrar of GNV to register geographic names upon request. Subject to your approval of the proposed name, the letter at Attachment A will be provided to the Minister for Planning for their review and assessment. DPC will continue to work with your Office, the Office of the Minister for Planning, and GNV to support registration of the name.

1.3 DPC has exhausted all other options to name the landmark without Ministerial intervention

Pursuant to section 15 of the 'Naming rules for places in Victoria' (naming rules), geographic naming requests should be led by the landowner and relevant naming authority, or by an appropriate entity nominated by GNV. In this case, both the naming authority as Melbourne Water and the nominated alternative entity as City of Casey have declined to lead this process for capacity reasons.

In line with advice from GNV, seeking naming of the landmark via Ministerial direction is the only remaining pathway to progress and acquit this commitment.

1.4 The proposed name aligns with the principles outlined within GNV's naming rules

Under section 2 of the naming rules, all naming principles are equally important and should all be considered in a determination regarding the registration of a place name. The proposed name of 'Guru Nanak Lake' for the proposed site at Berwick Springs aligns with the following naming principles:

- Principle B – the name is enduring and has been used in Sikhism since 1539, and there is public interest in recognising the founder of a faith group that has contributed significantly to Victoria.
- Principle C – the name is accurately linked to the site, as the local area is home to one of the highest Sikh populations and the lake reflects Sikh environmental values.
- Principle D – there are no other sites in Victoria registered with the name 'Guru Nanak'.
- Principle I – the proposed name commemorates a significant person, who is held in strong regard by the Sikh community and broader Victorian community.
- Principle K – the name reflects Victoria's diverse multicultural society.

1.5 DPC will work with your Office on opportunities to open and announce the landmark

Subject to registration of the proposed name, DPC will work with your Office and key project stakeholders on monument design and signage, including Traditional Land Owners through the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Council (BLCAC). Your Office will be consulted on opportunities to launch the landmark, which could occur on or around 15 November 2024, which marks the date Guru Nanak's birthday will be widely celebrated this year.

2 Further reasons

2.1 DFFH identified the proposed landmark name and site through targeted consultation

In 2022, Multicultural Affairs through DFFH led consultation on the landmark name with Victoria's Sikh communities, including representatives from the Victorian Sikh Gurduaras Council, Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria, Siri Guru Nanak Darbar and Dream Harmony Seniors club. Sikh communities have chosen the name as it appropriately respects the founder of the Sikh faith. Sikh leaders have also endorsed the landmark lake at Berwick Springs due to the high population of Sikhs in the City of Casey, and the natural setting reflecting Sikh values of conservation.

2.2 Key stakeholders have provided their endorsement of the proposed name and site

The City of Casey, Melbourne Water, BLCAC and the Victorian Multicultural Commission also participated in targeted engagement for the landmark naming project. All consulted groups have indicated their support for the proposed name and site, and GNV has reviewed and is supportive of the draft letter to the Minister for Planning at Attachment A.

2.3 Public safety risks on use of the proposed name have been effectively addressed

In July 2023, DFFH consulted with relevant public safety authorities including Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA), Triple Zero Victoria, and Ambulance Victoria, following initial concerns from the GNV Registrar regarding use of the honorific 'Guru' in a place name, due to risks in emergency services not being able to easily locate the site. Representatives from these entities confirmed their support for the proposed name and site in a collaborative meeting with DFFH and the GNV Registrar, following shortening of the originally requested name of 'Guru Nanak Sahib Ji Lake' to 'Guru Nanak Lake', and confirmation that there are no other landmarks containing the honorific 'Guru'.

3 Context

3.1 The 2018 commitment seeks to celebrate and recognise Victoria's Sikh communities

According to the 2021 ABS Census, Sikhism is one of the nation's fastest growing religions, with Victoria home to the largest Sikh population in Australia. The commitment to name a landmark in honour of Guru Nanak seeks to recognise the contributions Sikh communities have made to Victoria, which has included notable support for Victorians during the pandemic and 2022 flooding crisis. The landmark naming commitment was made alongside several other commitments for Victoria's Sikh communities, including $1 million for a Sikh Community Centre, each of which have been acquitted.

3.2 Delivery of this commitment has stalled due to reprioritisation of work within the portfolio

The Guru Nanak landmark naming commitment has faced extensive delays due to reprioritisation of resourcing to enable the government's COVID-19 response and impacts of DFFH restructure and Machinery of Government changes to the portfolio in late 2023 and early 2024. Despite these delays, Victoria's Sikh communities continue to remain engaged in the progress of this commitment.

Ingrid Stitt MP

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Dear Minister

In line with section 11(5) of the *Geographic Place Names Act 1998,* I am writing to seek your Ministerial direction to formally register the name 'Guru Nanak Lake' for a site at Berwick Springs, as indicated at figure 1 below.

Background

This request arises from a 2018 public commitment by the former Premier of Victoria to name a permanent Victorian landmark in honour of the founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak. Victoria is home to Australia's largest Sikh community, and the commitment aims to recognise the significant contributions of Sikh communities to our state.

The proposed name and site have been identified through community consultation led by the Multicultural Affairs portfolio since 2021, including with Sikh community leaders and groups, the City of Casey, Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Council, Melbourne Water, the Victorian Multicultural Commission and Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA, now Triple Zero Victoria).

Preliminary decision by the Registrar of Geographic Names Victoria (GNV)

In April 2023, Multicultural Affairs through the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) wrote to the Registrar of GNV to seek in-principle support for the name.

The Registrar rejected the proposed name, assessing that the word 'Guru' is an honorific, like 'Doctor' or 'Aunty', and cannot be used due to potential public safety risks in emergency services not being able to locate the site, should the honorific be used in other places.

These concerns were addressed at a collaborative meeting held by the Registrar and DFFH, through which Triple Zero Victoria and Ambulance Victoria provided support for the proposed name and site, for the following reasons:

- 'Guru' is not like other honorifics, as it is a title only used by 10 historical Gurus worldwide. The title cannot be gained through accreditation, like 'Doctor', or through lineage, like 'Aunty', therefore minimising the risk of duplicative place names.
- While the term 'guru' is used across other faiths, only in Sikhism is 'Guru' used as a formal title. The title will only ever be used for the 10 Sikh Gurus, who have all died.
- 'Guru', meaning 'teacher' in Sanskrit, is an extremely important term for the Sikh community. Removing 'Guru' would be culturally inappropriate and disrespectful.
- The name directly aligns with the Victorian Government's public commitment and key principles under the 'Naming rules for places in Victoria.'

Landmark name

The proposed name appropriately reflects and respects the founder of the Sikh faith, with Sikh communities expressing that it would be disrespectful and culturally inappropriate to name the landmark anything other than 'Guru Nanak Lake'.

All consulted groups have provided their support for the proposed name, and will continue to be involved in this project, including monument design and signage, as it progresses.

Landmark site

The proposed landmark to be named is the largest lake in Berwick Springs, Narre Warren South. The landholder for the site is Melbourne Water, which is supportive of this project and has advised that there are no gazetted names for the lakes in the complex.

The landmark is in the City of Casey, which is home to a large Sikh population. The City of Casey has also provided support for the proposed landmark location.

Figure 1: Berwick Springs – proposed landmark location of Guru Nanak Lake

Alignment to the 'Naming rules for places in Victoria' (naming rules)

In line with section 2 of the naming rules, all naming principles are equally important. The proposed name and site strongly align with the following principles under the naming rules:

- Principle B – the name is enduring and has been used in Sikhism since 1539, and there is a clear public interest, as highlighted by the former Premier, in recognising Sikh communities and their contributions to Victoria, and promoting Victoria's rich diversity.
- Principle C – the name is accurately linked to the site, as the local area is home to one of the highest Sikh populations and the lake reflects Sikh environmental values.
- Principle D – there are no other sites in Victoria registered with the same name.
- Principle I – the proposed name commemorates a significant person, who is held in strong regard by the Sikh community and broader Victorian community.
- Principle K – the name reflects Victoria's diverse multicultural society.

I therefore seek your support to direct the Registrar of GNV to add the proposed name 'Guru Nanak Lake' to the Register of Geographic Names (VICNAMES) following gazettal of the name in the Victoria Government Gazette.

Should your Office have any queries, please contact Lakshmi Holmes, A/Director, Multicultural Affairs Policy at s33(1) [redacted] @dpc.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Ingrid Stitt MP
Minister for Multicultural Affairs

26/5/24