

19th June 2025

The Hon. Sonya Kilkenny
GPO Box 4356
Melbourne VIC 3000

Berwick Springs Lake Renaming

Dear Minister Kilkenny,

The Berwick Springs Community Association (BSCA), representing the multicultural and multifaith community in Narre Warren South, around Berwick Springs Wetlands, wishes to draw your attention to issues relating to the renaming of Berwick Springs Lake.

When, on 26th September 2024, **against the recommendation of Geographic Names Victoria**, you signed away the need for broader community consultation for the renaming of Berwick Springs Lake you introduced religious division and sectarianism to Berwick Springs. A formerly cohesive community is now divided; residents are angry and disappointed.

The Correspondence Coversheet you signed was riddled with inaccuracies and half-truths. It stated that Melbourne Water agreed to the lake being named but omits the criteria laid out by Melbourne Water. This included broader community consultation to be led by DFFH with support from GNV, as stated in an email to GNV on the 14th Nov 2023.

The Coversheet also stated that neither Melbourne Water nor The City of Casey wanted to undertake consultation, yet The City of Casey offered to support the process “by promoting any engagement through our communication channels and directing any queries accordingly.” in a letter to GNV on the 11th Dec 2023. The City of Casey was also clear that broader consultation was required.

GNV notes that the proposal to name the lake meets principal C of the naming rules because “the local area is home to one of the highest Sikh populations and the lake reflects Sikh environmental values”, yet the 2021 Census reports only 1.9% of the population of Narre Warren South as identifying as Sikh.

We have heard from MP’s and Ministers that “the lake” did not have a name, yet the process was referred to as renaming in the government’s press release, signage and by the Sikh’s attending the ceremony. (As an aside did you not find it odd that nobody from the local community was at the ceremony?)

Since the renaming the Mayor of Casey and Federal Labor MP, Julian Hill, have both stated, on the record, that consultation should have taken place. Hill went on to say:

“It is obvious that residents and the broader community have known the place as Berwick Springs Lake.

It is not a new place, and it was simply wrong not to consult locals about any naming or renaming of the lake.”

BSCA has worked tirelessly to ensure that the Sikh Community is not the focus of attention in this affair, we do not want further tension in our community. There are Sikhs within our community who are horrified by what has happened, they too had no idea about the renaming until after the event on the 9th Nov 2024.

We have engaged with local MP Gary Maas, Minister Stitt and Sikh leaders, but we need action if we are to end the division and maintain social cohesion. Democratic due process, engaging with our elected representatives, is our *preferred* modus operandi and one that is respectful to all parties, but we are met with delays, dithering and indecision.

The one thing that has surprised me is that it is the more recent migrants to Australia who have been most vociferous, I have lost count of the number of times I have been told that people thought they had left sectarian politics and religious division behind for a better life in Australia only to find a government delivering the very thing they were trying to escape.

Finally, the residents of Berwick Springs are appalled that the Premier and Gary Maas believe that those opposing the renaming are, in effect, Neo-Nazis. You can, perhaps, imagine how Jewish members of our community have reacted to this. We still await an apology from the guilty parties. I realise that there is little you are able to do about this, but you do need to be aware of the utter disgust these disgraceful comments have caused.

We ask you to reverse the gazetting with immediate effect, apologise to the Sikh community, and to the residents of Berwick Springs. I believe we can accept that errors were made, we cannot and will not accept the ongoing division and sectarianism created by the State Government’s renaming of Berwick Springs Lake.

Yours Sincerely,



Malcolm Sharp
Berwick Springs Community Association

Copied to:

Julian Hill, Federal MP for Bruce
Jacinta Allan, Premier of Victoria
Ingrid Stitt, Minister for Multicultural Affairs of Victoria
Gary Maas, Member of the Victorian Legislative Assembly, Narre Warren South
Emma Vulin, Member of the Victorian Legislative Assembly, Pakenham
Pauline Richards, Member of the Victorian Legislative Assembly, Cranbourne
Paul Mercurio, Member of the Victorian Legislative Assembly, Hastings
Lee Tarlamis, Member of the Victorian Legislative Council, South Eastern Metropolitan
Stefan Koomen, Mayor of The City of Casey
Shane Taylor, Councillor - Kowan Ward – The City of Casey
Michael Ball, President – Berwick Springs Community Association
Berwick Springs Community Association Website