

Dr Marisa Paterson MLA

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBIDGEE

MEDIA RELEASE

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Legislative Debate on Public Place Names Amendment Bill 2022 - giving greater recognition to persons important in reconciliation

The ACT Legislative Assembly is set to debate the potential for more ACT public places to be named in honour of people important in Australia's path to reconciliation.

Dr Marisa Paterson MLA, Member for Murrumbidgee and Labor backbencher, introduced the Public Place Names Amendment Bill to the Assembly in November last year. The Justice and Community Safety Scrutiny Committee have reviewed the Bill with nil comment.

"This is a simple but important change to our legislation" Dr Paterson said. "It will remove the word 'colonisation' from the list of persons after whom the Minister may name public places to, instead, include 'reconciliation'".

"Under the Public Place Names Act 1989 the Minister may determine the name of a public place that is Territory land. Public places include an avenue, road, street, geographical feature or place that the public is entitled to use, and any unleased land. In making such determination the Minister must have regard to certain matters, among which include the names of persons famous in Australian exploration, navigation, pioneering, colonisation, administration, politics, education, science or letters".

"The term 'colonisation' is offensive to many people in our community and represents negative actions and connotations. It's time we place greater attention on those who have made, and those who continue to make, positive contributions towards reconciliation in the ACT".

Dr Paterson has worked in remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory for much of her academic career and is keen to use her role as an MLA to help influence positive change for reconciliation.

"As well as the need for all of us to make changes that will contribute to achieving reconciliation, there are already many great people whose contributions deserve recognition" Dr Paterson said.

Dr Paterson notes that: "already in the ACT, the suburb theme of Bonner is 'Indigenous leaders and their supporters'. Senator Neville Bonner AO was the first Indigenous person to enter Federal parliament as a Liberal Senator for Queensland in 1971. 'Mabo Boulevard' in Bonner pays tribute to Eddie Mabo's role in campaigning for Indigenous land rights in Australia. And there are others already named. But there are also many more conciliators we can recognise and honour; as well as ceasing to reference colonisation".

Dr Paterson said the effects of the Bill aren't retrospective – any existing place names associated with persons important in colonisation won't be sought to be re-named as a result of this Bill.

Paula McGrady, Deputy Chairperson of the Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Elected Body has expressed the importance of the amendment, "This is a significant moment for us as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in the ACT. My children were the first in my family to complete their year 12 certificates in NSW and ACT, this is still quite profound for me, as they have opportunities now that weren't historically destined for us.

Their ability to achieve this, I believe is largely due to the tireless advocacy and work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our community. To be able to celebrate and acknowledge the people who have made sure that the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are recognised, and enabled us to live the lives we do, is a

moment of great importance. There are countless people who deserve to be honoured for their work and this amendment will mean that they can finally get the recognition they deserve”.

The ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body (ATSIEB) provided support for the amendment.

Statement ends

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