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Electorate of McMillan to be renamed due to associations with Indigenous slaughter

REPORTER: Robert French
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ELEANOR HALL: To Victoria now, where a Federal Liberal MP is proposing to change the name of his electorate because of its links to the massacres of Australia's Indigenous people.

The Eastern Victorian seat of McMillan is named for the notorious explorer, Angus McMillan.

There is little resistance to changing the name, but there is debate about what the seat should be called now, as Robert French reports.

ROBERT FRENCH: Angus McMillan was a Scottish pioneer who played a leading role in the extermination of Aboriginal people in Eastern Victoria more than 150 years ago.

Jeannie Haughton is a local playwright who studied McMillan's life.

JEANNIE HAUGHTON: He was a murderer. He was one of the people involved in several of the massacres in Gippsland.

ROBERT FRENCH: The Federal Member for McMillan, Russell Broadbent, believes it's time to remove that association.

RUSSELL BROADBENT: We're doing something about practical reconciliation. It's offering a hand out to those in our community, those Indigenous people that are offended by the name.

ROBERT FRENCH: He's written to the Electoral Commission, requesting the name be changed during a boundary redistribution after this year's federal election.

RUSSELL BROADBENT: It would send a message that we actually care about these issues and if we are not responsible to our past, we don't understand our past, we can't get on with our future.

ROBERT FRENCH: But Mr Broadbent wants it named after another famous white man.

RUSSELL BROADBENT: I just think that Sir John Monash is such an icon. He actually provided the electricity that provided the wealth for manufacturing right across Victoria. He made Victoria great and he should be recognised.

ROBERT FRENCH: That's being questioned by local historian Linda Barraclough, who says the local Indigenous community should be consulted.

She says there are plenty of candidates within the Gunai Kurnai history.

LINDA BARRACLOUGH: One of the names that should be considered is Bungaleena who is an Aboriginal tribal leader in Gippsland and he was captured as part of the hunt for the mythical white woman and died in custody.

ROBERT FRENCH: Reconciliation Australia's chief executive Justin Mohamed says changing the name is a small but important step.

JUSTIN MOHAMED: It's a great tribute that people from that region have identified this and they want change and to have a name that everyone can be proud of.

ROBERT FRENCH: But he says it needs to be done in partnership with the traditional owners.

JUSTIN MOHAMED: Many Aboriginal people from that region would have known this history and it would have been passed down through many generations. So for them even to kind of even to have into walk into an electoral booth and vote for that seat would cause some distress and pain.

I think will be a sense of victory but also a sense that people feel yeah right, finally people have heard and understand and the truth is being told and the appropriate action has taken place.

ROBERT FRENCH: Mr Mohamed says it's the first time he's heard of it happening in Australia and hopes it will lead to further change across the country.

JUSTIN MOHAMED: Hopefully this can also be, you know, show some leadership across other parts of Australia where similar sorts of names or places have been headed up by people or named by people which have caused a lot of hurt and destruction to Aboriginal people.

ELEANOR HALL: That's Reconciliation Australia's chief executive, Justin Mohamed, ending that report from Robert French.