

Politics Victoria [Local council](#)

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City of Merri? Push for Moreland Council to take Indigenous name



By [Michael Fowler](#)

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One of the key figures who convinced Moreland City Council to change its name due to links to slavery has voiced his hope that an Indigenous name is selected next year.

Andrew Gardiner, deputy chair of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, said his team would prepare several options for the council and public to consider, with a focus on names that have a connection with the inner-northern Melbourne area.



Andrew Gardiner (right) said a group including Indigenous leaders such as himself would prepare suggestions for Moreland.

Another senior Indigenous figure, Gary Murray, suggested “City of Merri” in a nod to Merri Creek, which runs through the local government area.

A motion to change the council’s name before the end of 2022 [was passed six votes to three](#) at a special meeting on Monday night.

A report on how best to approach community consultation and engagement will be presented to council in February as the next step in a process expected to cost at least \$500,000, including updating Moreland’s signage, bins and online platforms.

Mr Gardiner was part of a delegation that met Moreland’s Greens mayor Mark Riley and chief executive Cathy Henderson and informed them of the name’s links to slave labour.



The City of Moreland takes in suburbs such as Brunswick (pictured) and Coburg. PAUL JEFFERS

Moreland was the name of a Jamaican sugar plantation owned by the family of Scotsman Farquhar McCrae, which had as many as 700 slaves at any one time in the decades after it was founded in the 1780s.

McCrae arrived in Melbourne in 1839 and, after dispossessing the Indigenous owners of a parcel of land he bought stretching from Moonee Ponds Creek to Sydney Road, he gave it the name of Moreland after his family's estate. Britain had made slavery illegal in 1833.

Mr Gardiner said he expected community members to offer a raft of suggestions for new names, in addition to ones his group prepared.

“We’re researching some names in the local government area that have some specific meaning. We’ll provide those names – the Woi Wurrung word and the English meaning – to council and they can consider them as they wish,” he said.

“It’s fair to say we’d very much appreciate them choosing a Woi Wurrung title.”

Woi Wurrung is the language traditionally spoken by Aboriginal communities in part of central Victoria, including the Moreland area.

Other Victorian councils have already adopted Indigenous titles, including Maribyrnong, Boroondara, Dandenong and Yarra.

Moreland was selected as the name of the amalgamated Coburg and Brunswick councils in 1994.

Mr Murray, a local resident and member of the City of Moreland Reconciliation Action Group, said the City of Merri was the ideal name.

“Obviously, it refers to the significant creek but what I like is that it has a double meaning: a white, English meaning as well as a black one,” said Mr Murray, whose family was probably the first Indigenous one to settle in the Moreland area, according to council records.

“It’s a creative title with a nice ring to it.”

Wurundjeri woman Mandy Nicholson, [a Woi Wurrung language expert](#), said Merri Creek was a significant waterway because it follows trade routes into what is now referred to as Melbourne. Merri Merri means rocky or stony.

Ms Nicholson said large gatherings were once hosted at the creek near Coburg’s Pentridge Prison, and nearby a white ochre mine – a key trading item for Indigenous communities – can still be found at the river’s edge.

Professor Clare Wright, a historian at La Trobe University, said if Moreland Council did not privilege the local Indigenous community’s suggestion for the name, it would be undermining the very rationale for changing the name.

“It’s not my place to even suggest who should be worthy and should be recognised,” she said.

“That has to be a hands-on, grassroots process.”

What should Moreland City Council’s new name be? Readers have their say

- “A short Indigenous name meaning either north or west. There is a welcome trend to acknowledge our First Nations people and this would be a good opportunity.”
- “It should be named after a prominent First Nations woman from the area, but only after consultation with local First Nations people.”

State MP for Brunswick Tim Read, whose electorate covers half the Moreland local government area, echoed Professor Wright’s sentiment.

“First Nations justice means listening and responding to First Nations people, and I hope their voices are front and centre in any discussions around new names,” the Greens MP said.

Local Government Minister Shaun Leane, who must give the final tick of approval, has already written to Moreland Council pledging his support for the name change.

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