

Moreland residents demand consultation on council name change



By [Rachael Dexter](#)

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KEY POINTS

- More than 1400 people have called to halt the name change of Moreland Council.
- The decision currently sits with the state Minister for Local Government Melissa Horne.
- Moreland City Council last month voted to officially change the name of the municipality and end its 28-year association with a Jamaican sugar plantation that used slave labour.
- Residents who have since pushed back on the decision claim the name change was presented as a fait accompli.

A group of Moreland residents is fighting the move to change the municipality's name to remove a connection to slavery, arguing the decision was presented as a fait accompli and the community was not consulted.

A petition signed by more than 1400 people will be tabled at Moreland Council's meeting on Wednesday night, demanding it revisit the consultation process for renaming the municipality. Residents will also meet with Minister for Local Government Melissa Horne to lobby for a reversal of the decision based on what they say was a lack of consultation.



Moreland residents Peta Slattery with son Levi, and fellow resident Ray Pastoors are among more than 1400 people unhappy with the council renaming process. LUIS ENRIQUE ASCUI

Moreland City Council last month [voted to officially change the name of the municipality](#) to end its 28-year association with a Jamaican sugar plantation that used slave labour.

The Greens-led council, which takes in suburbs including Brunswick, Coburg, Fawkner, Glenroy and Pascoe Vale, committed to change its name last year.

Postal surveys were circulated to residents of Moreland in May and June with three name options.

The council landed on Merri-bek – the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung word for ‘rocky country’ – after 59 per cent (3739) of all survey responses (6315) supported the name. According to the council, there was 22 per cent support for ‘Jerrang’, 13 per cent support for ‘Wa-dam-buk’, while only six per cent preferred no name change.

But some residents have since pushed back on the decision, claiming the move to change the name was presented as a *fait accompli*, with surveys only offering options to choose from three pre-determined names.

Those who had voted against a new name had done so by writing dissenting comments on their survey paper.

Resident Ray Pastoors said that option had not been publicised by the council.

“I’m conflicted because I’m progressive. I don’t want it to be seen as me being against First Nations,” he said. “But at the end of the day ... if you don’t involve the community ... in such a big change, you’ll have a community that’s divided.”

Peta Slattery, a ratepayer and resident of Brunswick for eight years, said most of the

signatories to the petition were concerned about a lack of transparency or ability to air concerns.

“It’s interesting, even on social media if you up speak out about this you are instantly shut down as a racist,” she said.

Share your feedback

Which name do you support the most as a new name for the City Council? (tick 1)

1 Wa-dam-buk

2 Merri-bek

3 Jerrang

Please tell us more about why you like this name

Name _____

Address _____

Email _____

Other comments _____

Fill out and return this form by **Monday 20 June**

Which best describes your connection to the area? (tick response)

Resident Ratepayer Business Owner Other

Mail Place in reply-paid envelope. Drop in any Australia Post red street posting box. No stamp needed.

In person Return this slip to any Council library or customer service centre.

Online conversations. moreland.vic.gov.au/renaming

cut out and post back

The postal survey received by Moreland residents during consultation of the council’s name change.

A letter on November 24 last year from Mayor Mark Riley to the then minister for local government, Shaun Leane, shows both Riley and Moreland council CEO Cathy Henderson intended to bypass any debate on whether the name should change.

“At this stage, we are not proposing to carry out community consultation on whether the name Moreland should be removed, as such a consultation is likely to be divisive and cause further hurt to our community,” said the letter, which was obtained under Freedom of Information.

In the letter, the mayor said the request for the name change came from Aboriginal elders from the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung community and other unnamed community representatives on November 19.

“The Elders who met with us have told us that the name is racist and offensive, and associated with the terrible dispossession of the traditional owners.”

The council has estimated the cost of the name change at \$500,000 over two financial years, but Independent Councillor Oscar Yildiz said he believed that would blow out.

“It will cost in the millions,” said Yildiz, one of three of 11 councillors who opposed the renaming.

“All the street signs, all the rubbish bins, stationery, cars, community facilities, all the leisure

centres, all the sporting clubs, social media. You name it, we need to change it.”

British colonisers dispossessed Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people from the area in the 1800s. In 1839, Scotsman Farquhar McCrae bought land between Moonee Ponds Creek and Sydney Road and named it Moreland after his family’s Jamaican sugar plantation, which had up to 700 slaves.

Moreland was chosen as the name for the council when the cities of Brunswick, Coburg and parts of Broadmeadows merged in 1994.

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

Riley said in a statement that the renaming initiative was part of “a real commitment to reconciliation with the [Traditional Owners] Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people”.

He said every ratepayer, resident and business owner had already had the opportunity to provide feedback on the options for names in May and June.

Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation declined to comment.

A spokesperson for Horne said the process, which involves making a recommendation to the Governor, would be completed in the next two months.

The minister did not respond to questions about whether she would consider the concerns of the residents in her decision, but said in a statement that “strong collaboration with Traditional Owner Groups is vital as we progress our nation-leading path to treaty, truth and justice.”

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