

Open Letter to the Premier of Victoria

9 December 2024

Hon. Jacinta Allan,

We write regarding your recent [media conference](#) and [parliamentary](#) remarks about the Berwick Springs Lake renaming, which have deeply offended our diverse, multicultural community.

You claimed "the source of this division is political", suggesting our community's legitimate concerns about proper democratic process are politically motivated. This mischaracterizes the fundamental issue: the failure of Government to follow mandatory statutory consultation requirements for Naming Places in Victoria. The community waits for your answer as to why the local community was not consulted on such an important matter? And why did the Government bypass the mandatory statutory regulations for Naming Places in Victoria?

You stated you "stand very, very strongly with the local Sikh community", implying those seeking proper consultation stand in opposition. This creates a false division. Our community includes residents of all backgrounds, including Sikh residents, united in seeking adherence to democratic principles. Our community acknowledges and values the contributions of the Sikh community. Furthermore, as noted in our Change.org [Stop Berwick Springs Name Change - A Worrying Precedent for All Victoria!](#) Petition:

"The objection to this change is a matter of principle. It would remain the same regardless of which religious figure's name had been chosen. This is not about any particular faith or community (...)"

Most concerning is your characterization of our peaceful community as "extremist" and "neo-Nazi". These allegations are particularly offensive and hurtful to residents, including people whose family members suffered the indescribable horrors at the hand of the Nazi during WWII. The [600 plus people](#) in the local community who attended in opposition to the Berwick Springs Lake name change - representing diverse backgrounds, faiths, and cultures - were simply exercising their democratic right to peaceful protest. Such baseless accusations from you, the Premier of Victoria, have a chilling effect on democratic expression and community participation.

You also referenced a Labor party election commitment, stating "at the last State election the Labor party said we think that lake [Berwick Springs Lake] should be renamed". However, the actual commitment, made by former premier Daniel Andrews in 2018, as [reported by SBS](#), was:

"We'll bring the Sikh community together and have a discussion on what kind of permanent landmark in the name of Guru Nanak should be created."

The discrepancy requires explanation, particularly the fact that the promise was to create a landmark, not to rename an existing one. Moreover, it raises the question of why the community was not consulted during the six intervening years?

Premier, our diverse community deserves better than unfounded accusations, offensive language and divisive rhetoric; you have stated yourself "People have a right to demonstrate, no one has a right to divide." We demand you:

1. Unreservedly apologise for the 'neo-Nazi' name calling, for the racist assertions against community, and for creating division where none existed.
2. Reinstate the name Berwick Springs Lake and initiate proper consultation in accordance with the mandatory statutory consultation requirements.

Sincerely,

The Berwick Springs community