

Naming of Berwick Springs Lake – A Sikh Perspective

Argument	Elaboration
Sikh community was not actually consulted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19 people/orgs were contacted; 6 responded, all in Officer/Pakenham • No one local to Berwick Springs was consulted • Only two people (Suropada and Kandra) had foreknowledge • No one in my social circle had foreknowledge • No organisers, politicians or attendees posted before the event
Silence doesn't mean approval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privately, Sikhs I've spoken with are either critical or indifferent • Publicly, Sikhs are silent; no response to both direct and indirect inquiries • History of communal silence due to fear of intimidation or violent retaliation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 1985: Air India bombing; terrorists protected by communal silence; Sikh journalists in Britain and Canada were murdered – 1987: Sikh extremists imposed an unofficial 'ban' on meat and alcohol across Punjab; businesses quietly complied but suffered financially – 1990s and 2000s: Fights in Australian gurudwaras because committee members resorted to violence and intimidation during disagreements – 2022: Sikh parade swamped by pro-Khalistan literature; no significant resistance from moderates • Gurudwaras that celebrate or tolerate militancy face little criticism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 2023: Pro-Khalistanis promoted fake 'referendum' at gurudwaras – 2024: Keysborough mounted portrait of militant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale in langar hall; it may still be there – Militants are called <i>Sant</i> (saint) and <i>Shaheed</i> (martyr); their death anniversaries are commemorated – Even I haven't spoken up, because I don't want my legs broken or my child put at risk if my home is broken into
Sikhs are being blamed for a political favour they didn't ask for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upswing in anti-Sikh and anti-Indian sentiment on social media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – even VicPol had to turn off comments on a post featuring a Sikh PSO • Right-wing 'journalists' and public figures use this as evidence that immigrants are 'taking over' Australia • Similar to when orgs tried to be inclusive by avoiding greetings like 'Merry Christmas'; Muslims were accused of 'trying to ban Christmas'
Didn't consider Hindu and Muslim communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appears to 'confirm' political favouritism of Sikhs • Risk of alienating Hindus and Muslims, some of whom oppose lake name • Insensitive to live, unresolved issues between faith groups • Recent re-ignition of Hindu-Sikh tensions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 40th anniversary of Air India flight 182 bombing – Hindu MP in Canada removed due to intel on his relationship with Modi – Khalistan 'referendum' caused skirmishes and vandalism here in Aus – Modi govt accused of executing Khalistani activist on Canadian soil – Indian spies sent into Australian Sikh community • India-Pakistan dispute causes mutual ill will in parts of the Sikh, Muslim and Hindu communities
May affect India-Australia relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India is frustrated at perceived Western tolerance of Khalistan movement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Expelled Canadian diplomats (Canada also expelled Indian diplomats) – Suspended visas of Canadian visitors • Modi has already pressed Australia on treatment of Hindus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lake name risks exacerbating perceptions of bias towards Sikhs – May be seen as a 'win' for Sikhs trying to garner Western sympathy as an oppressed group in Modi's India