

Ninth Session of the  
United Nations Group of Experts on  
Geographical Names

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New York, 17-27 February 1981  
Agenda item 8

Report of Activity by the Working Groups Since the Eighth Session

(a) Undersea and Maritime Features

Submitted by the Convenor of the Working Group  
Richard R. Randall, United States of America

The major accomplishment to report is that agreement was reached between me and representatives of the GEBCO Subcommittee on Geographic Names and Nomenclature of Ocean Bottom Features regarding terms and definitions of undersea features. This agreement was reached at a subcommittee meeting in Monaco in October of 1980 which I attended.

The details of the meeting, and the reasons for attaining agreement, are provided in Attachment 1, which is a circular letter on the subject mailed to members of the working group. It is important to note that while the letter says that IHO agreed to the terms and definition, the agreement involved only the mentioned subcommittee. Full IHO agreement will depend on a subsequent vote of the IHO membership. Any references to agreement in the attachment should be interpreted accordingly.

Perhaps the major reason for the agreement was the realization that the interests of the UN Law of the Sea Conference in terms and definitions were related to legal and political considerations, and not to naming functions. During the eighth UNEGN, this situation had not been fully clarified, for which reason action on the terms and definitions was deferred.

With respect to maritime features, no further work was carried out. In the report of the Eighth UNEGN Session, it was agreed that the working group would wait for the IHO to develop additional information on the subject. At the appropriate time, both sides will collaborate in preparing necessary procedures. This is covered by paragraph 36 of the report. That paragraph also asks individual nations to work together to reach agreement on names of shared bodies of water. Nations active in this area are invited to provide me with information so their work can be documented and coordinated as part of the working group's mission.

I respectfully ask that this Ninth UNEGN Session approve the list of terms and definitions contained in the attachment. In addition, I ask approval of the "Proposed Guidelines for the Standardization of Undersea Feature Names for National Use," which are part of the attachment and which have been slightly revised as a result of the Monaco meeting. To complete the action, the "Undersea Feature Name Proposal" form also a part of the attachment, should be accepted.

UNITED NATIONS  
Group of Experts on Geographical Names

Working Group on Undersea and  
Maritime Feature Names  
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CIRCULAR LETTER  
November 5, 1980

TO: Members of Working Group on Undersea and Maritime Feature Names

FROM: Richard R. Randall, Convenor

It is for me a pleasure to inform you that agreement has been reached with the International Hydrographic Organization on all matters regarding undersea terminology. This agreement was worked out at a meeting of the GEBCO Subcommittee on Geographic Names and Nomenclature of Ocean Bottom Features in Monaco on October 3 which I attended as Convenor of our Working Group. At the Ninth Session of the UN Group of Experts on Geographic Names, scheduled for New York February 17-27 of 1981, I will present a report covering this agreement and calling for UNCEGN acceptance.

The principal factor leading to agreement was the knowledge that in the area of undersea terms and definitions, there was no "conflict" between the UN Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and our Working Group. In a document issued by the Third UNCLOS on September 2, 1980, it was clear that terms and definition for continental shelf, ridge, and other features have only legal and political application. Mr. De Renseler, Chief of the UN Cartography Section, in the latter part of September verified that UNCLOS terms and definitions were for such application and not for naming purposes. With this clarification, there was no reason at Monaco not to accept the list of terms and definitions developed earlier by the Working Group.

It was further agreed that the acceptance of the terms and definitions did not mean that individual nations already active in naming undersea features had to abandon any terms and definitions they were using. It was agreed, however, that nations should follow the terms and definitions to maximum extent possible.

The group also decided that certain changes would be beneficial to the "Proposed Guidelines for the Standardization of Undersea Features Names for International Use," developed at the 1979 UNCEGN session. In the title, the word "International" was changed to "National," since the level of active naming would be national. Under B. Generic Terms of the guidelines, the sentence of paragraph 1 was expanded to include a reference to Annex 1, the list of

ATTACHMENT 1 to Working Paper submitted  
to the Ninth Session of the UN Group of  
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terms and definitions which must be included with the guidelines. The sentence in paragraph 3 of the same section was changed so that the last two words are: "...these guidelines." Finally, while not discussed at Monaco, the sentence under paragraph III. B. should be amended to include reference to Annex 2, which is the Proposal Form. This is needed for clarity.

Also, the guidelines should have an additional statement to indicate that the terms and definitions and the entire process of naming undersea features have no legal or political connotations. This statement will clarify the difference between the use of terms and definitions for naming purposes and their use for legal or political purposes. In addition, the statement should refer to the UN resolutions calling for collaboration with IHO in the development of terms, definitions, and related items. Finally, a statement should be included to the effect that the terms and definitions do not necessarily conform to those in the Hydrographic Dictionary published by IHO.

Attached to this circular letter are the guidelines as revised (Attachment 1). The list of approved terms and definitions and the proposal form (already approved in 1979) are included as annexes to the guidelines.

If you have any comments concerning this general development, please inform me as soon as possible. Unless there are further comments calling for alteration, my report to the UNCEGN will call for acceptance of the items discussed above.

As for the Working Group's interests in maritime feature names, we should wait for the latest edition of the IHO Special Publication #23, "Limits of Oceans and Seas," before we take further action. I am informed that publication is expected before 1981. In the meantime, as stated in the report of the 1979 UNCEGN session, countries sharing water bodies should attempt to resolve any differences in names. We will discuss this topic at the next UNCEGN session.

PROPOSED GUIDELINES FOR THE STANDARDIZATION OF  
UNDERSEA FEATURE NAMES FOR NATIONAL USE\*

I. General

A. International concern for naming undersea features is limited to those features entirely or mainly (more than 50%) outside waters under the jurisdiction of states.

B. "Undersea feature" is a part of the ocean floor or seabed that has measurable relief or is delimited by relief.

C. Names used for many years may be accepted even though they do not conform to normal principles of nomenclature.

D. Names approved by national names authorities in waters beyond national limits (i.e., international waters) should be accepted by other states if the names have been applied in conformance with internationally accepted principles. Names applied within the territorial limits of a state should be recognized by other states.

E. In the event of a conflict, the persons and agencies most directly involved should resolve the matter. Where two names have been applied to the same feature, the older name generally should be accepted. Where a single name has been applied to two different features, the feature named first generally should retain the name.

F. Names not in the writing system of the country applying the names on maps or other documents should be transliterated according to the system adopted by the national authority applying the names.

G. In international programs, it should be the policy to use forms of names applied by national authorities having responsibility for the pertinent area.

H. States may utilize their preferred versions of exonyms.

II. Principles for Naming Features

A. Specific Terms

1. Short and simple terms (or names) are preferable.

2. The principal concern in naming is to provide effective, conveniently usable, and appropriate reference; commemoration of persons or ships is a secondary consideration.

\* These guidelines and the list of terms and definitions attached to them have been worked out through collaboration between the International Hydrographic Organization and the Working Group on Maritime and Undersea Features of the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names in accordance with provisions of appropriate resolutions of UN Conferences on Geographical Names. It is understood that the guidelines, terms, and definitions are intended for the naming of undersea features. The definitions are based almost exclusively on physiographic descriptions of the features themselves and must not be construed as having any legal or political connotations whatsoever. Nor do they necessarily conform to their hydrographic/navigational usage as appearing in the Hydrographic Dictionary issued by IHO as Special Publication No. 32.

3. The first choice of a specific term, where feasible, should be one associated with a geographical feature; e.g., Aleutian Ridge, Aleutian Trench, Peru-Chile Trench, Barrow Canyon.

4. Specific terms for other features can be used to commemorate ships or other vehicles, expeditions, or scientific institutes involved in the discovery of the feature, or to honor the memory of famous persons. Where a ship name is used, it should be that of the discovering ship, or if that has been previously used for a similar feature, it should be the name of the ship verifying the feature, e.g., San Pablo Seamount, Atlantis II Seamounts.

5. If names of living persons are used (surnames are preferable) they should be limited to those who have made an outstanding or fundamental contribution to ocean sciences.

6. Groups of like features may be named collectively for specific categories of historical persons, mythical features, stars, constellations, fish, birds, animals, etc. Examples are as follows:

Musicians Seamounts

Bach Seamount, Brahms Seamount,  
Schubert Seamount

Electricians Seamounts

Volta Seamount, Ampere Seamount,  
Galvani Seamount

Ursa Minor Ridge and  
Trough Province

Suhail Ridge, Kochab Ridge, Polaris  
Trough

7. Descriptive names are acceptable, particularly when they refer to distinguishing characteristics (e.g., Hook Ridge, Horseshoe Seamounts).

8. Names of well-known or large features that are applied to other features should have the same spelling.

9. Specific elements of names should not be translated from the language of the nation providing the accepted name.

**B. Generic Terms**

1. Generic terms should be selected from the attached list of definitions (Annex 1) to reflect physiographic descriptions of features.
2. Generic terms applied to features appearing on charts or other products should be in the language of the nation issuing the products. In those cases where terms have achieved international currency in a national form, that form should be retained.
3. It should be recognized that as ocean mapping continues, features will be discovered for which existing terminology is not adequate. New terms required to describe these features should conform to these guidelines.

**III. Procedures for Naming Features**

A. Individuals and agencies applying names to unnamed features in international waters should adhere to internationally accepted principles and procedures.

B. The attached form (Annex 2) is recommended as a model for new proposals.

C. Prior to the naming of a feature, identification of its character, extent, and position shall have been established sufficiently for identification. Positions should be given in terms of geographic coordinates. If it is necessary to refer to a feature before such full identifiability has been established, it is suggested that the reference be by coordinates and generic term with the addition of (PA)--Position Approximate--after the coordinates if the position is not adequately established and (?) after the generic term if the nature of the feature is in some doubt.

D. New names should be approved by the appropriate national authorities before being published.

E. If a national authority has reason to change the name of a feature it named originally, information explaining the change should be circulated to other concerned authorities. If there is opposition to a name change, the involved authorities should communicate with each other to resolve the question.

F. National authorities approving names of features should regularly publicize their names decisions.

G. National authorities naming features within their territorial jurisdiction should conform to the principles and procedures stated above.

ANNEX 1 to "Proposed Guidelines for the Standardization  
of Undersea Feature Names for National Use"

LIST OF UNDERSEA TERMS AND DEFINITIONS APPROVED PROVISIONALLY  
BY THE UNCEGN WORKING GROUP ON UNDERSEA AND MARITIME FEATURE NAMES

(Terms in parentheses may also be found in the literature.  
The terms Guyot (see Tablemount) and Scarp (see Escarpment)  
may also be used for naming.

<u>Term</u>	<u>Definition</u>
ABYSSAL HILLS	A tract of small elevations on the seafloor.
ABYSSAL PLAIN	(Plain) A flat, gently sloping or nearly level region at abyssal depths.
APRON	(Archipelagic Apron) A gentle slope with a generally smooth surface of the sea floor, particularly found around groups of islands and seamounts.
BANK	An elevation over which the depth of water is relatively shallow, but normally sufficient for safe surface navigation.
BASIN	A depression more or less equidimensional in plan and of variable extent.
BORDERLAND	(Continental Borderland) A region adjacent to a continent, normally occupied by or bordering a shelf, that is highly irregular with depths well in excess of those typical of a shelf.
CANYON	(Submarine Canyon) A relatively narrow, deep depression with steep sides, the bottom of which generally has a continuous slope.
CONTINENTAL MARGIN	The zone, generally consisting of the shelf, slope and rise, separating the continent from the abyssal plain or deep sea bottom.
CONTINENTAL RISE	A gentle slope rising from the oceanic depths towards the foot of a continental slope.
ESCARPMENT	(Scarp) An elongated and comparatively steep slope separating flat or gently sloping areas.
FAN	(Cone; Deep Sea Fan; Deep Sea Cone; Submarine Fan; Submarine Cone) A relatively smooth feature normally sloping away from the lower termination of a canyon or canyon system.

FRACTURE ZONE	An extensive linear zone of irregular topography of the sea floor, characterized by steep-sided or asymmetrical ridges, troughs or escarpments.
GAP	(Abyssal Gap) A narrow break in a ridge or a rise.
HILL	A small isolated elevation, not as high as a knoll (see Abyssal Hills).
HOLE	A small depression of the sea floor.
KNOLL	A relatively small isolated elevation of a rounded shape.
LEVEE	An embankment bordering a canyon, valley or deep-sea channel.
MEDIAN VALLEY	(Rift, Rift Valley) The axial depression of the mid-oceanic ridge system.
MOAT	(Sea Moat) An annular depression that may not be continuous, located at the base of many seamounts, islands and other isolated elevations.
MOUNTAIN	A large and complex grouping of ridges and seamounts.
PEAK	A prominent elevation either pointed or of a very limited extent across the summit.
PINNACLE	Any high tower or spire-shaped pillar of rock, or coral, alone or cresting a summit.
PLATEAU	A flat or nearly flat area of considerable extent, dropping off abruptly on one or more sides.
PROVINCE	A region identifiable by a group of similar physiographic features whose characteristics are markedly in contrast with surrounding areas.
REEF	Rocks lying at or near the sea surface that may constitute a hazard to surface navigation.
RIDGE	(The word RIDGE has several meanings: (a) A long, narrow elevation with steep sides. (b) A long, narrow elevation often separating ocean basins. (c) The major oceanic mountain system of global extent.
RISE	A broad elevation that rises gently and generally smoothly from the sea floor.
SADDLE	A low part resembling in shape a saddle in a ridge or between contiguous seamounts.



SEACHANNEL	(Channel) A continuously sloping, elongated depression commonly found in fans or abyssal plains and customarily bordered by levees on one or both sides.
SEAMOUNT	A large isolated elevation characteristically of conical form.
SEAMOUNT CHAIN	Several seamounts in a line.
SHELF	(Continental Shelf) A zone adjacent to a continent (or around an island) that extends from the low water line to a depth at which there is usually a marked increase of slope towards oceanic depths.
SHELF-EDGE	(Shelf Break) A narrow zone at the outer margin of a shelf along which there is a marked increase of slope.
SHOAL	An offshore hazard to surface navigation composed of unconsolidated material.
SILL	The low part of a gap or saddle separating basins.
SLOPE	(Continental Slope; Island Slope) The slope seaward from the shelf edge to the beginning of a continental rise or the point where there is a general reduction in slope.
SPUR	A subordinate elevation, ridge, or rise projecting outward from a larger feature.
TABLEMOUNT	(Guyot) A seamount having a comparatively smooth, flat top.
TERRACE	(Bench; Deep Sea Terrace) A relatively flat horizontal or gently inclined surface, sometimes long and narrow, which is bounded by a steeper ascending slope on one side and by a steeper descending slope on the opposite side.
TRENCH	A long, narrow, characteristically very deep and asymmetrical depression of the sea floor, with relatively steep sides.
TROUGH	A long depression of the sea floor characteristically flat bottomed and steep sided and normally shallower than a trench.
VALLEY	(Submarine Valley) A relatively shallow, wide depression, the bottom of which usually has a continuous gradient. This term is generally not used for features that have canyon-like characteristics for a significant portion of their extent.

UNDERSEA FEATURE NAME PROPOSAL

Ocean or Sea \_\_\_\_\_ Name proposed \_\_\_\_\_  
Location of midpoint: Lat. \_\_\_\_\_ (N) (S), Long. \_\_\_\_\_ (E) (W);  
\_\_\_\_\_ kilometers in \_\_\_\_\_ direction from \_\_\_\_\_

Description: Kind of feature: \_\_\_\_\_  
Identifying or categorizing characteristics (size, shape, dimensions, least depth, steepness, etc.—use additional coordinates for extremities of lineal features): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Associated features: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Chart reference:  
Shown and named on chart (map) \_\_\_\_\_  
Shown but not named on chart (map) \_\_\_\_\_  
Not shown but within area covered by \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for choice of name:  
If for a person, state how associated with the feature to be named \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Discovery facts: Date \_\_\_\_\_; by (individuals or ship) \_\_\_\_\_  
By means of (equipment): \_\_\_\_\_  
Navigation used: \_\_\_\_\_  
Estimated positional accuracy in nautical miles: \_\_\_\_\_  
Description of survey (track spacing, line crossings, grid network, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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Annex II to "Proposed Guidelines for the Standardization of Undersea Feature Names for National Use."

Nature and repository of other survey activities (dredge samples, cores, magnetics, gravity, photographs, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Supporting material: Enclose, if possible, a sketch map of the survey area, profiles of the feature, etc. Reference to prior publication, if any: \_\_\_\_\_  
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SUBMITTED BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
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