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**Geographical names as culture, heritage and identity (including indigenous,
minority and regional language names).**

Australian Indigenous Names Projects

Submitted by Australia **

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Summary

Given the potential for Australia to develop a rich multi cultural environment through interaction with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and culture, it is very important to ensure that progress is evident in relation to the recognition and use of place names from the languages of Indigenous peoples.

This paper provides a brief summary of the progress made in relation to the recording and use of Indigenous names in Australia since the last United Nations Conference on the Standardisation of Geographical Names. Included in the summary are the national initiatives and information relating to legislative changes, policy creation or alteration and specific recording projects undertaken by the seven State and Territory place naming jurisdictions.

Within Australian naming policies it is stressed that the recognition and use of names from Indigenous languages will:

- Emphasise the existence of the languages, even those that are considered extinct.
- Support the use of Indigenous languages in the general community.
- Retain aspects of Indigenous heritage.
- Provide windows into Indigenous heritage for the rest of the Australian community.

It is recognised that by far the greater majority of Indigenous place names are not recorded in official government gazetteers nor available for general use. However, given the available resources it is pleasing to see that progress is still being made to ensure that indigenous place names are becoming progressively better represented in the general geographic nomenclature of Australia.

Introduction

Australians have the potential to share a very rich indigenous heritage, with over 350 Aboriginal and Torres Strait languages existing at the time of colonisation plus a number of dialects. However, the reality of the situation is that many of these languages are either extinct or moribund, with only 20 being seen as strong enough to last well into the future.

It is recognised that the recognition and use of Indigenous place names will not solve the multitude of language-loss associated issues, but the increased use of these names, either as stand-alone names or dual named with non-Indigenous names, will assist in:

- Emphasising the existence of the languages, even those that are seen as extinct.
- Supporting the use of aspects of language in the general community.
- Retaining aspects of the Indigenous heritage.
- Providing windows into Indigenous heritage for the rest of the Australian community.

This paper outlines the current situation in Australia in relation to the legislation, policy, documentation and projects related to Indigenous names- reporting on both Australia-wide initiatives and on directions and projects within the seven States and Territories.

Australia Wide Initiatives

The four major national initiatives are summarised as follows:

Guidelines

- The sections of the national guidelines titled “*Guidelines for the Use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Place Names*” and “*Dual Naming Depiction Guidelines*”. These documents are under constant review at each CGNA meeting, with the most recent change being to clarify the use of English generic terms with Indigenous specific names.
- Draft “*Guidelines for Dialogue by the Place Naming Jurisdictions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities*”. This draft document was discussed at the last CGNA meeting, with some enhancements suggested to be put in place for the next meeting prior to ratification as national policy.

Initiatives

- “*What’s in A Name – Australian Place Names*” video.
- Dual Naming emphasis.

State/Territory Initiatives

Given that each State and Territory has its own naming process, based on different legislative frameworks, resources and areas of focus, it is not surprising that each jurisdiction is in its own position in relation to the recording and use of Indigenous names.

Summarised below are some of the initiatives currently being undertaken by the jurisdictional authorities.

Australian Capital Territory

- Use of indigenous place names and names of prominent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the suburbs and street naming within Canberra, the national capital of Australia.

New South Wales

- Legislated preference for traditional Aboriginal place names to be used.
- Use of dual naming initiated for features across the State.

Northern Territory

- Northern Territory is recognised as the first jurisdiction in Australia to introduce composite names, being Uluru/Ayres Rock and Kata Tjuta/Mount Olga. The collection and use of other place names has also been undertaken when resources were available.
- Significant focus on the names of Aboriginal communities, particularly standardising the names within government agencies to ensure that there is constancy in referring to a specific community.
- Naming of roads and some parks in the Aboriginal communities and town camps for addressing purposes, using Aboriginal names and words suggested by the community.

Queensland

- Recording and assigning of a number of traditional Aboriginal names for features on Fraser Island, including two names for the island itself.

South Australia

- Legislated ability to institute dual names for a feature with the traditional Aboriginal name and the name for any other source.

- Continuing with the recording program within the available staff resource environment. South Australia has 51 Aboriginal languages (as defined by Norman Tindale), and to date communication has been commenced with 19 language groups, with place names from 9 now in general use following authorisation from the relevant communities.
- Institution of a standard process of consulting with the relevant indigenous community prior to the assigning of a name proposed over a natural feature. If available for general use, the indigenous name takes precedent over any other proposal.

Tasmania

- Development of an Aboriginal Naming Policy.

Victoria

- Development of a communications protocol based on the *Dialogue Guidelines* and the specific situation found within this jurisdiction.
- The removal of feature names perceived to be offensive within Victoria is an ongoing project with the creation of the Indigenous Names Advisory Committee. Local Indigenous groups had been requesting the removal of the offensive name 'Niggerheads' for four features in North-East Victoria, an ongoing issue for some 30 years. The eventual name change in February 2009 recognised the traditional clan of the area - the Jaithmathangs.
- Indigenous name histories in VICNAMES (www.dse.vic.gov.au/vicnames) - over 3000 indigenous toponym etymologies have been incorporated into the online gazetteer VICNAMES. With the help from colleagues in the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages and with the completion of the *Dictionary of Aboriginal Place Names of Victoria* written by Ian D Clark and Toby Heydon.
- New status type in Gazetteer- 'Traditional'. With the creation of the Guidelines for Geographic Names 2010 (www.dse.vic.gov.au/namingguidelines) Victoria has seen the inclusion of many new indigenous naming principles- one of which has been the inclusion of 'Traditional' names. This enables communities to be able to propose that a traditional Indigenous name be recorded in the official gazetteer. The feature may already have a registered name, which means any traditional name will become recorded, alternatively Principle 1(L) could apply and the name could be registered as a Dual name. If the feature does not have a registered name, then the feature may then be officially registered with the traditional name.

Western Australia

- Use of dual naming for various features throughout the State.
- Standardisation of Aboriginal Community names to ensure recognition of these name in the same manner as bounded suburbs and localities..

Conclusion

It is recognised that there is by far the greater majority of indigenous place names that are not recorded or available for general use. However, given the available resources it is pleasing to see that progress is still being made to ensure that Indigenous place names are becoming progressively better represented in the general geographic nomenclature of Australia.