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Report by the International Hydrographic Organization

Submitted by the International Hydrographic Organization **

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**11th United Nations Conference
on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN-11)**
UN Headquarters, New York, USA, 8 to 17 August 2017
30th Session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN-30)
UN Headquarters, New York, USA, 7 and 18 August 2017

Report by the International Hydrographic Organization¹ (**Item 6 of UNCSGN-11**)

This is a brief report on the activities of the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) in relation to the naming of maritime features. As far as geographical naming is concerned, the IHO is involved in the following two activities, for which status reports are provided:

I. Undersea Feature Naming

The IHO participates, jointly with the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO, as co-owner organizations, in guiding the work of the Sub-Committee on Undersea Feature Names (SCUFN) of GEBCO². Reports of SCUFN meetings, as well as any new editions of the outcome products issued under SCUFN responsibility, are provided to the UNGEGN Chair/Secretary on a regular basis, in accordance with the relevant provision of the SCUFN Terms of Reference (ToRs): “*Maintain close liaison with the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names, the focal point of which shall be invitations to attend meetings of the Sub-Committee, and with international or national authorities concerned with the naming of undersea features*”. The IHO-IOC Publication B-6, Edition 4.1.0, September 2013, English/French version³, provides the international standards (Guidelines, Proposal Form and Terminology) for the naming of undersea feature names.

SCUFN is tasked with selecting the names to be used in the products of the IHO-IOC General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans (GEBCO) project and on international nautical charts. These names, widely used in scientific publications also, are made available in the on-line GEBCO Gazetteer of Undersea Features Names (www.gebco.net → Data and products → Undersea feature names → view and download). SCUFN-related documents are available from the dedicated GEBCO website (www.gebco.net) and the IHO website (www.ihoint.org). The SCUFN is chaired by Dr Hans Werner SCHENKE, Alfred Wegener Institute for Polar and Marine Research (AWI), Germany, and comprises 12 members nominated by the IHO (6) and the IOC (6). The Sub-Committee has its secretariat at the Secretariat of the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) in Monaco. The Sub-Committee meets once a year. Since the 29th session of UNGEGN in April 2016 in Bangkok, Thailand, SCUFN has undertaken the following activities.

1. The 29th meeting of SCUFN was hosted at the National Center for Environmental Information (NCEI) of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), in Boulder, Colorado, USA, from 19 to 23 September 2016. It was attended by 25 participants, including 10 of the 12 SCUFN members, together with 14 observers and the SCUFN Secretary.

The Sub Committee considered a significant number of proposals in five days - 133 undersea feature names, submitted by various bodies and supporting organizations from the following countries: Brazil (7), China (50), Denmark (1), Dominican Republic (2), France (1), Japan (23), Malaysia (4), New Zealand (31), Republic of Korea (2), Russian Federation (1), United Kingdom (3) and United States of America (8).

Due to the workload, SCUFN decided not to consider in a systematic manner the additional 139 names that had been proposed by Canada for international recognition by SCUFN, because they

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² General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans, a joint IHO-IOC project.

³ B-6 is also available in English/Spanish, English/Russian, English/Japanese, English/Korean, English/Chinese (www.ihoint.org/ihoint_pubs/IHO_Download.htm then B-6).

related to features located in its territorial sea. This outstanding task may be addressed later by a project team, however, the priority being for SCUFN to name features located beyond the territorial sea.

In addition to the consideration of the naming proposals, the Sub Committee considered several administrative issues, including:

- The maintenance and improvement of the GEBCO Gazetteer interface (<https://www.ngdc.noaa.gov/gazetteer/>)
- The ways and means to improve the efficiency and quality of SCUFN activities (inter connexion of the web services that already exist: the IHO SCUFN webpage, the internal SCUFN submission and review web services developed by the Republic of Korea, and the GEBCO Gazetteer itself maintained by NOAA),
- The future of SCUFN (membership, scope, new Edition of B-6 – *Standardization of Undersea Feature Names (Guidelines, Proposal Form Terminology)* – including the integration of a fast-track procedure for existing names which are already charted, the capitalization of best practices, the relations between naming authorities in areas of common interest, etc.).



The Sub Committee recommended the establishment of a project team for the development of a future product specification for undersea feature names based on the IHO S-100 geospatial information standard (see [S-100 brochure](#)). This would address several harmonization issues related to the procedures and definitions used by SCUFN and other national/international organizations. The objective is also to avoid duplication, and improve efficiency and interoperability between GIS⁴ and geospatial portals in the future. This recommendation was endorsed and then approved by the IHO Member States.

2. The SCUFN Undersea Feature Names Project Team (UFNPT) was established in April 2017 under the chairmanship of Ms Rowena OROK, Canadian Hydrographic Service. The scope of work of the UFNPT is:

- to harmonize definitions of generic terms that exist in various publications and standards and in the Feature Concept Dictionary of the S-100 Geospatial Information Registry (see <http://registry.iho.int/>);
- to consider a possible new/updated model that would describe undersea feature names better;
- to consider standardized symbology for the portrayal of undersea features.

⁴ Geographic information system.

3. The 30th meeting of SCUFN is scheduled to be held from 2 to 6 October 2017 in Genoa, Italy. An inaugural meeting of the UFNPT is planned in tandem in order to facilitate the subsequent networking between subject matter experts.

II. Limits of Oceans and Seas

The IHO adopted Publication S-23 “*Limits of Oceans and Seas*”, for the purpose of consistent nautical cartography and in the interest of safety of navigation at sea. The edition in force is the 3rd edition, dated 1953, which is available from the IHO website (www.iho.int). Despite the need for revision, several attempts to prepare a 4th edition of the publication have been unsuccessful over the past decades.

An IHO Working Group on S-23 (S-23 WG) was established in 2009 with a view to updating the current edition. It failed to achieve its goal, mainly due to political and diplomatic lobbying by some members of the Working Group. The 18th International Hydrographic Conference held in Monaco in April 2012 decided not to take any further action on this matter and as a consequence, the S-23 WG was disbanded.

At the 5th Extraordinary International Hydrographic Conference (EIHC-5) held in Monaco, in October 2014, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea submitted a proposal with a view to seeking a new way forward for the S-23 issue. EIHC-5 Decision No 5 was as follows: “*The Conference took note of the options, ideas and comments made by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Republic of Korea and Japan regarding the revision of S-23, but also recognized the resource constraints of the current Work Programme 2013-2017. The Conference agreed that the matter could be discussed again at the next Ordinary Conference/Assembly in 2017 if a proposal on the matter is made by any Member State.*”

At the 1st Session of the IHO Assembly (A-1) held in Monaco in April 2017, proposals submitted by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea were considered. A-1 Decision No 4 ... *tasked the Secretary-General [of the IHO] to facilitate an informal consultation process regarding the future of S-23 among interested Member States, including determining mutually agreed modalities of work and to report the result of the consultations to the Assembly at the next ordinary session (A-2) [in 2020].*

This consultation is now starting.

III. The IHO will continue cooperating with the UNGEGN and the UNCSGN and support any actions that may be required to further enhance safety at sea and the protection of the marine environment.