

**Twenty-seventh session  
30 July and 10 August 2012, New York**

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**Item 3 of the Provisional Agenda**

**Reports of the working groups**

**Working Group on the Promotion of Recording and Use of  
Indigenous, Minority and Regional Language Group  
Geographical Names \***

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\* Prepared by: Bill Watt (Australia), Convenor Working Group on the Promotion of Recording and Use of Indigenous, Minority and Regional Language Group Geographical Names.

## **Summary**

The information contained in this report will summarise the activities undertaken in association with the points identified in the work plan.

The current work plan covers the following points

- Continue to maintain and update version 1 of the promotion report.
- Compile a set of guidelines for field collection of indigenous, minority and regional language group geographical names.
- Initiate dialogue between UNGEGN and other national and international groups and academic bodies involved with indigenous, minority and regional language group geographical names, to further the work on geographical names standardization.

Also discuss is the outstanding issue of the name of the Working Group.

## **Introduction**

The Current Work Plan for this working group is as follows:

- Continue to maintain and update version 1 of the promotion report.
- Compile a set of guidelines for field collection of indigenous, minority and regional language group geographical names.
- Initiate dialogue between UNGEGN and other national and international groups and academic bodies involved with indigenous, minority and regional language group geographical names, to further the work on geographical names standardization.

The information contained in this report will summarise the activities undertaken in association with the points identified in the work plan. Also discussed is the outstanding issue of the name of the Working Group.

## **Work Plan Progress**

### **1. Continue to maintain and update version 1 of the promotion report.**

Version 3 of this report is completed, with both additional information and updates of existing projects included in this report.

### **2. Compile a set of guidelines for field collection of indigenous, minority and regional language group geographical names.**

The task of compiling a set of guidelines for field collection is an interesting task, given the wide range of situations found around the world. Some of the conditions that influence the field collection are:

- Political considerations
- Legislative considerations
- Strategic and procedural considerations
- Status of the language – official or unofficial
- Relationships with the indigenous, minority or regional community.

As such, there is at this time insufficient information available to enable the compilation of a set of guidelines. As more countries undertake this work and produce their own policies and guidelines, then further work can be undertaken on a best practice model.

In the interim, a document has been prepared from the available information and experience outlining the issues that may be encountered as this work is undertaken. Also included is a short bibliography of the available documentation from various countries, providing information on how these issues have been resolved within the specific jurisdiction. The two sections of this document are included as Appendix 1 to this report, and are subject to additions and alterations as deemed appropriate following input from other countries.

### **3. Initiate dialogue between UNGEGN and other national and international groups and academic bodies involved with indigenous, minority and regional language**

**group geographical names, to further the work on geographical names standardization.**

Dialogue has been initiated with the following organisations:

- International Conference on Indigenous Place Names.
- Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity
- Australia Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
- Trends in Toponymy.
- Public Participation GIS

This dialogue is at various stages, but in general is at the early stages of communication. Further results should be available at the next UNGEGN Session.

There has also been a contact made from a group associated with the Basque language in Spain, seeking membership in the Working Group. I suggest that it would be appropriate to discuss this with the Spanish delegation before provide any further advice to this enquiry.

Name of the Working Group.

An outstanding issue is still the name of the working group, which all agree is very lengthy.

An alternative name has been suggested using the same work plan but abbreviating the name as follows:

- Working Group on Indigenous, Minority and Regional Geographical Names

Other Alternatives have been proposed that involve the expansion of the working group terms of reference to cover the heritage related issued of place names as listed below:

- Working Group on Recording of Cultural Heritage Space and Place Names
- Working Group on Standardization of Indigenous, Minority and Regional Group Names of Cultural Heritage
- Working Group on Onomastics and Standardization of Names of Cultural Heritage
- Working Group on Recording of Indigenous, Minority and Regional Group Names of Cultural Heritage
- Working Group on Place Names as Heritage
- Working Group on Aboriginal Place Names [or Place Naming] and Heritage
- Working Group on Aboriginal Place Names [or Place Naming] and Heritage in Toponymy

These proposal will be discussed at the working group meeting to be held as side meeting to the Conference, an and appropriate resolution put forward for consideration.

## Appendix 1

### **Recording of Indigenous, Minority and Regional Language Group Place Names.**

#### **Introduction**

This document is aimed at providing some outlines of possible steps, pitfalls and outcomes in relation to the methodology that can be use for the outlined activities. A bibliography (attached as Appendix 1), covering some of the available documentation from jurisdictions that have undertaken such activities, is also included.

This document is intended to be dynamic in scope, and inclusions from other jurisdictions are both invited and welcomed.

#### **Background**

As well as being a source of spatial intelligence, every place name has an association with the heritage of the community it rises from. This is as relevant for the new names that are put in place today as it is for the established toponyms.

Links to historical events, people and circumstances are all reflected in the place names of a community. The use of a name engenders a picture in the mind of those who use or hear the name of the feature itself, and what atmosphere and environment that can be expected to be found there.

Indigenous, minority and regional language group place names are under increasing threat in a global environment in which instant answers are expected and where data retrieval can often be from competing and, at times, unofficial or unsanctioned sources.

All these facts we already know and recognise to a certain degree, but further emphasis on office procedures and policies that protect and enhance the cultural associations may be required in many jurisdictions.

The loss of heritage is not only a problem for the community it is derived from, but ultimately it is a loss for us all. We obviously cannot protect all aspects of cultural richness and diversity, but we can aid in the protection the part we have an influence over.

#### **Points for Consideration**

The undertaking of a recording project can appear to be a daunting and complicated process. Often, the communities we are trying to work with are struggling to survive on a number of levels so that they do not see this work as a priority.

Some of the issues that need to be considered and possible solutions are summarised as follows:

##### ***Political Considerations***

Political considerations can be beneficial or can present barriers.

Jurisdictional politics will need to be adhered to in relation to the policies and procedures developed regarding indigenous, minority and regional language groups. However, decisions made at a political level can provide a solid strategic direction and an established framework in which this work can be undertaken.

Consideration needs to be given to presenting appropriate position papers to relevant political leaders to assist in the development and adoption of an appropriate political position.

Another area of political concern is the internal politics within the client communities. These often present potential difficulties if not recognised and understood as they usually result in divisions within the community. Advice from other individuals or agencies working with the relevant community is usually the best source to identify any such situation and provide advice on how to work within the existing situation.

Communities may be sensitive to or hesitant to accept 'outside' or political policies (depending on their experience of political involvement historically, this may be seen as unwanted interference), so any such contact should be sensitively introduced.

### ***Jurisdictional Policies and Procedures***

The creation of jurisdictional policies and procedures has benefits in three specific areas as summarised as follows:

- Assist in the development and adoption of a political strategy / framework. This was the case in Australia as it was the formulation of the policies and procedures in the early 1980's that led to a political adoption of them by all States and Territories.
- Establish a public document that can be referred to in negotiations with client communities. This can assist in the development of a relationship of trust that is very important to the effectiveness of any recording project. The document should be comprehensive so that there are no surprises for the community in relation to any aspect of the recording process, office treatment and eventual public use.
- Assist in the education of the wider community as to the intent and benefits of the recording process.

### ***Education of the General Community***

Experience has shown that any official place naming action that is effected without acceptance by the general community tends not to be used by the community.

There is therefore a need to educate the community in relation to any indigenous, minority or regional language programs

The methods used to educate the general community will alter somewhat with each situation encountered, but there needs to be in place a means by which the general

community can be advised of the aims and purposes of the use of indigenous, minority or regional language group place names. This might include conveying that promotion of such place names can be a way (even if perhaps symbolic) of reinforcing cultural heritage and confidence and promoting endangered language use.

Jurisdictions are invited to supply summaries of any educational program they have used to be added to the reference documents.

### ***Communication protocols***

Each culture possesses its own set of rules for effective communication. An understanding of these rules is therefore necessary to establish and maintain effective communication.

To this end, documentation outlining the communication protocols for each of the language groups classified as indigenous, minority or regional language groups is needed. This will assist to minimise communication errors and pass on valuable knowledge to new staff involved in projects.

Expert advice from those who have already established working relationships with the communities can be of great assistance in establishing appropriate communication protocols.

### ***Intellectual Property / Copyright***

Among communities not well versed in modern law, there is a concern that the recording of their place names, and the issue of copyright over published results, can diminish or remove their intellectual property rights over this aspect of their culture.

To a small degree, the release of place names by a language group into the public domain does sacrifice some measure of control of the subsequent use of the name for other purposes, such as associated features and the use of the name for community and business purposes.

However, it must be stressed that the ownership of the name as applied to the source feature remains with the language group from which it originated.

This point should be stressed in the policy and procedure document and also in an educative program for the general community.

### ***Language / Orthography***

This is an important aspect for any indigenous, minority or regional language group, even for those who have existing written language.

The primary aim for the recording of place names is to use the written form of the language that is acceptable to the community. For those languages with an accepted written form, this is not a problem. However, for those languages that either have multiple written forms, or no written form, this can be a major issue.

The aim of recording oral information is to get the most accurate transcription of the oral sound into a written form. There are linguistic rules and process available for this, with the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) being a significant tool that can be used during the recording process. However, the IPA is not suitable for general use and an acceptable orthography will need to be determined.

The development of an orthography may require linguistic expertise, but the decision as to its form should be either with the community itself and / or in harmony with any government strategy.

### ***Who do we talk to?***

This issue needs to be considered on two levels.

The first level is in relation to the identification of any organisation that represents the community. Such organisations can cover a wide range of structures and forms, including:

- Heritage Organisations
- Tribal Elders
- Formal governance/representative bodies
- Land Rights Organisations

Obviously, such organisations need to be engaged, but generally are easily identified.

The second level is not an issue for all communities, but for those that it is relevant, it can be more problematical. This is relation to who has the traditional knowledge and right to speak for specific areas of the country. This is particularly relevant to indigenous communities. Obtaining information from the correct source is important for the project. This will be a measure of the reliability of the information recorded

The approaches to identify who has the right to speak for country will show a higher level of respect for the culture and traditional of the community and will add to and support the relationship of trust.

It should be noted that establishing ‘who is the community’ is important and not always evident: factional / inter-community issues may play a part, and, on a linguistic level, dialectal issues may be relevant.

### ***Sacred / Secret Nature of Information***

Many indigenous communities have a secret / sacred aspect associated with their place names. They can restrict the information that can be revealed, and also may have a bearing on the gender of both informants and recorders. Such traditions need to be understood and respected.

If desired by the community, this information may be recorded but should only be released when appropriately authorised by the relevant custodians from the community.



### ***Collection Methodology***

The principles and procedures outlined in the Canadian "***Guide to the Field Collection of Native Geographical Names***", published in 1992 are still valid.

This publication provides a comprehensive step by step process for the collection of place names.

There may be some minor amendments to the processes as a result of varying cultural values and rules and due to the advances in portable computing and GPS technology since the initial publication.

## Appendix 1

### Available Documentation

<i>Name of document</i>	<b>Guide to the Field Collection of Native Geographical Names</b>
<i>County of origin</i>	Canada
<i>Date of production</i>	1992
<i>Summary</i>	A step by step guide to the practical aspects of field collection of indigenous names, covering the following broad headings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authorisation for the survey</li> <li>• Survey organisation</li> <li>• Undertaking the survey</li> <li>• Processing survey information</li> <li>• Templates for data forms</li> </ul>
<i>Name of document</i>	<b>Guidelines for Dialogue by the New Zealand Geographic Board Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa with Tangata Whenua</b>
<i>County of origin</i>	New Zealand
<i>Date of production</i>	2009
<i>Summary</i>	Provides a set of guidelines that will assist the user to understand the protocols involved in consultation with indigenous people of New Zealand.
<i>Name of document</i>	<b>Guidelines for Dialogue by the Place Naming Jurisdictions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities</b>
<i>County of origin</i>	Australia
<i>Date of production</i>	2010
<i>Summary</i>	Based on the guidelines established by New Zealand in the document above and adapted to suit the cultural parameters associated with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people in Australia.
<i>Name of document</i>	<b>Guidelines for the Use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Place Names</b>
<i>County of origin</i>	Australia
<i>Date of production</i>	Last revision – September 2010
<i>Summary</i>	This is an appendix to the document “ <i>Guidelines for the Consistent Use of Place Names</i> ” and outlined the objectives and guidelines used in Australia for the recording and use of indigenous place names.  First released in 1987??? at the Committee for Geographical names In Australasia meeting held in Wellington, New Zealand, the guidelines have been revised on occasion as the need has been identified.
<i>Name of document</i>	<b>Dual Naming Depiction Guidelines</b>
<i>County of origin</i>	Australia
<i>Date of production</i>	Last revision – September 2010

*Summary* This is an appendix to the document “*Guidelines for the Consistent Use of Place Names*” and provides an outline of acceptable practice for the depiction of dual names on maps, signs and in publications.

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<i>Name of document</i>	<b>Report to the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographic Names (UNGEGN) BGN Special Committee on Native American Names and Tribal Consultation</b>
<i>County of origin</i>	United States of America
<i>Date of production</i>	March 21, 2012
<i>Summary</i>	An interim draft policy that recognizes the government to government relationship that exists between the federal United States and Federally recognized Tribes.