

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL**

**23 July 2012**

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**Tenth United Nations Conference on the  
Standardization of Geographical Names**

New York, 31 July – 9 August 2012

Item 4 of the provisional agenda\*

**Reports by Governments on the situation in their countries and on the progress  
made in the standardization of geographical names since the Ninth Conference  
(for distribution only).**

**Report of Ireland 2007-2012**

Submitted by Ireland\*\*

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## **Summary**

This report outlines activities relating to the standardization of geographical names in Ireland since the Ninth United Nations Conference in 2007, with particular reference to the legal status of placenames following the enactment of the Official Languages Act 2003. The report also includes information on a new edition of the Gazetteer of Ireland, a new online national database of geographical names, web sites, and on a workshop on the online management and dissemination of toponymic data.

## **National standardization.**

Geographical names may have two official forms in Ireland, one in the English language and one in Irish. The English-language forms of names were standardized by the Ordnance Survey of Ireland, the national mapping agency, in the mid-nineteenth century. Official Irish language forms of names are established on the advice of the Placenames Commission by the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht under the provisions of Part 5 of the Official Languages Act 2003. The research necessary to establish correct, standardized, Irish forms is undertaken by the Placenames Branch of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

## **Legal status of placenames before 2003.**

The definitive legal placenames of Ireland are contained in the maps of Ordnance Survey Ireland which date back to the time of the original mapping and valuation of the country between 1824 and 1874 and the publication of a townlands index with the 1851 census. These were deemed to be the legal placenames of the country. The maps and the placenames were exclusively in the English language. English-language placenames may be changed under procedures set out in the Local Government Act 2001, consisting of local consultation/plebiscite, decision by local authority, confirmation by the Minister for Local Government in statutory order.

## **Place-Names (Irish Forms) Act 1973.**

The Placenames Commission was established by warrant of the Minister for Finance in 1946 to advise on establishing authoritative Irish language name-forms for official use. The Placenames Branch was established as a division of the Ordnance Survey of Ireland to undertake the research necessary for the standardization of the Irish forms. Legislation to give legal status to the Irish-language forms of names was enacted in the Place-Names (Irish Forms) Act 1973. The Act allowed the Minister for Finance to declare by Order, having received and considered the advice of the Placenames Commission, that the equivalent in the Irish language of a placename specified in the Order is such word or words as might be specified in the Order. The Irish words then would have the same meaning and same force and effect as the placename. Two Orders were made under this Act, one in 1975 to declare Irish language versions of the names of postal districts, and one in 2001 to amend the original 1975 Order.

The Place-Names (Irish Forms) Act 1973 was seen as unsatisfactory which explains its lack of use. The problem was that while the Act allowed definitive Irish language versions of placenames to be made available for official use, it also meant in legal terms that the placename remained in the English language only. This situation was regarded as unacceptable and in order to rectify it the provisions of 1973 Act, with fundamental amendments, were incorporated in the Official Languages Act 2003.

### **The legal position of placenames under the Official Languages Act 2003.**

Under Part 5 of the Official Languages Act 2003, the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, on advice from the Placenames Commission, may make an order, known as a placenames order, to declare the Irish language version of a placename specified in the order. Once such a statutory placenames order is made in respect of any particular placename in any area outside the Gaeltacht, the designated traditional Irish-language speaking areas, the effect is that the Irish and the English versions of the placename have the same status and the same legal force and effect.

Where the Minister makes an Order in respect of a placename in a Gaeltacht area, the English version of that placename ceases to have any legal force and effect. While this is without prejudice to any private use and most public use of the English version, the Act provides that the English version may not be used in Acts of Parliament or Statutory Instruments, on road and street signs, or on certain maps published by Ordnance Survey Ireland.

### **Placenames orders.**

The Minister, on the advice of the Placenames Commission, has made thirteen placenames orders under the provisions of the Official Languages Act 2003 to date. These orders declare the Irish version of placenames for County Kilkenny, County Louth, County Limerick, County Monaghan, County Waterford, County Offaly, County Tipperary and County Dublin. Orders were made to declare the official Irish versions of names of centres of population in other counties, and of the names of the administrative counties and provinces. A placenames order to declare the official Irish names of administrative units in Gaeltacht areas was made in 2004 and a second order was made in 2011 in respect of all the other, non-administrative, placenames in Gaeltacht areas shown on the large-scale maps of the Ordnance Survey. Four placenames orders will be made in 2012 covering the placenames of County Cork, County Galway, County Leitrim and County Longford and it is expected that placenames orders will be made for the remaining counties over the next seven years. All placenames orders are published as statutory instruments by the the Stationary Office and are available for purchase from the Government Publications Sales Office. Copies are available for download in PDF format from the website of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, <http://www.ahg.gov.ie/en/Irish/ThePlacenamesBranch/PlacenamesOrders/> or from the Placenames Database of Ireland web site, <http://www.logainm.ie/Orduithe.aspx>.

### **National gazetteer.**

A new edition of the bilingual national gazetteer, *Gasaitéar na hÉireann / Gazetteer of Ireland*, (Dublin,1989), has been prepared by the Placenames Branch of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and was due to be published at the end of 2007. However, issues relating to the Irish-language version of a number of names led to a delay in publication. These issues have been resolved and publication is expected in early 2013. In the meantime, the Gazetteer is available for download in PDF format from the Placenames Database of Ireland web site at <http://www.logainm.ie/eolas/Details.aspx?ID=25>. The new edition contains 4,000 geographical names in their Irish- and English-language forms, including names of cities, towns, and smaller centres population, as well as the names of major physical features, and of places of historical or other interest. Other information on the names includes the county of location, and a national grid reference to the accuracy of one kilometre. The first edition of the gazetteer included a standardized pronunciation guide to the Irish-language forms of the names in International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) transcription. This feature has not been included in the electronic version of the new edition for technical reasons but will be available in the published edition.

### **The Placenames Database of Ireland.**

The Placenames Database of Ireland is a public website, the purpose of which is to provide the standardized Irish and English versions of the geographical names of the country, along with additional information on those names. It is being developed by Fiontar, a school within Dublin City University that specialises in digital humanities projects for the Irish language, in collaboration with the Placenames Branch. The project is funded by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

The Database is accessible through two interfaces. The editorial website is a comprehensive management system for data, archival records and placenames research conducted by the Placenames Branch. The public website, [www.logainm.ie](http://www.logainm.ie), is primarily aimed at journalists and translators, students and teachers, historians and researchers in genealogy. It is a public resource for all those who appreciate the rich heritage of Irish placenames.

Work commenced on Phase I of the project in April 2007 and the Placenames Database was launched at the beginning of October 2008. With the completion of Phase III (2011-2012) of the project the following resources will have been added to the site:

- pronunciation sound files of the major placenames in sixteen counties;
- mapping tools using Google Maps and the maps of Ordnance Survey Ireland;
- educational resources for primary, second level and third level students;
- a system to enable simultaneous Irish-English and English-Irish translation of lists of placenames;
- supplementary aids for the public including explanatory notes on certain features of the placenames;
- scanned images of some historical source material (under ‘Archival records’);
- export and import facilities;
- a tool to translate/explain common elements of placenames.

Further resources will be added in Phase IV (2013-2014) including sound files for placenames in the remaining eight counties and a facility to generate distribution maps of placename elements.

The Placenames Database of Ireland won the European Language Label in 2010 and was category winner at Irish eGovernment Awards in 2011.

### **Websites**

Information on matters relating to the geographical names of the country, including national standardization, is available on the Placenames Database of Ireland web site at <http://www.logainm.ie/Info.aspx?uiLang=en>.

### **Placenames Workshop 2012**

Placenames Workshop 2012, with the theme “Management and dissemination of toponymic data online” will be held in Dublin on 24-25 August 2012. Contributors include geographical names experts from UNGEGN, Canada, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom (Scotland and Wales), and Google Maps. The event is organised by Fiontar in collaboration with the Placenames Branch. Information about the event is available at <http://www.logainm.ie/placenames2012/>.