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Report by the International Hydrographic Organization

Submitted by the International Hydrographic Organization **

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10th UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN)
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This is a brief report on the activities of the IHO in naming sea features provided to the UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. 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 (of UNESCO), in the work of the Sub-Committee on Undersea Feature Names (SCUFN) of GEBCO¹. Reports of SCUFN meetings, as well as any new editions of products issued under SCUFN responsibility, are provided to UNGEGN Chairperson/Secretary on a regular basis, in accordance with SCUFN terms of reference, which include “*Maintain close liaison with the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names, the focal point of which shall be invited to attend meetings of the Sub-Committee, and with international or national authorities concerned with the naming of undersea features*”. SCUFN-related documents are available from the GEBCO website (www.gebco.net) and the IHO website (www.iho.int). SCUFN is chaired by Dr. Hans Werner SCHENKE, Alfred Wegener Institute for Polar and Marine Research (AWI), Germany, and comprises 12 members representing IHO and IOC. The Sub-Committee has its secretariat at the International Hydrographic Bureau (IHB) in Monaco. It meets once a year. Since the 26th UNGEGN session in May 2011, SCUFN held the following meeting:

1. The 24th meeting of SCUFN took place in Beijing, China, on 12-16 September 2011 and was hosted and organized by the National Marine Data and Information Service (NMDIS) of China. The meeting was chaired by Dr SCHENKE and attended by 30 participants, including 10 of the 12 SCUFN members (from Argentina, Brazil, China, Germany, Japan, Rep of Korea, New Zealand, Pakistan, Russia, and USA). The meeting welcomed Prof. LIN Shaohua (China – IOC side) as new member.

The Sub-Committee considered some 140 undersea feature names, including name proposals from institutions in Belgium, Brazil, China, Ecuador, Germany, Japan, Rep of Korea, New Zealand, Russia and United States. It eventually accepted 97 new names for inclusion in the GEBCO Gazetteer of Undersea Feature Names, IHO-IOC publication B-8, which is maintained at the IHB.

The meeting noted with satisfaction the significant progress made in the development of a web-based map interface and on-line database for the GEBCO Gazetteer, thanks to the efforts and support of the US National Geophysical Data Center (NGDC) and the co-located IHO Data Centre for Digital Bathymetry (DCDB).

¹ General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans, a joint IHO-IOC project

The meeting agreed a final list of undersea feature terms and definitions for inclusion in IHO-IOC publication B-6 *Standardization of Undersea Feature Names*.

In order to facilitate the drafting of name proposals for SCUFN consideration, a SCUFN working group was formed to develop guidelines on how to prepare such proposals.

2. The 25th meeting of SCUFN has been planned on 23-27 October 2012 in Wellington, New Zealand, at the kind invitation of Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) and GNS Sciences.

II. Limits of Oceans and Seas

The IHO has produced 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 still the 3rd edition, dated 1953, which is available from the IHO website (www.iho.int). A 4th edition of the publication has been under preparation for several years.

Noting that the update of this important publication was long overdue and that a new edition was needed as soon as possible, the IHO Member States agreed, in 2009, to set up a *Working Group on the Revision of IHO Publication S-23 “Limits of Oceans and Seas”* (S-23 WG), with Vice Admiral Alexandros MARATOS, IHB President, as Chair. The WG agreed to address the following areas of concern, on the basic principle that decisions should “generally be made by consensus”:

- The naming of the sea area between the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese Archipelago;
- Whether the Malacca and Singapore Straits should be located in the Indian Ocean or the South China Sea and Eastern Archipelagic Seas; and
- Proposals by China for changes in names and limits in the South China Sea, East China Sea and Yellow Sea.

The outcomes of the WG, working by correspondence and through two face-to-face meetings, were as follows:

- There was no consensus on the issue of naming the sea area between the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago;
- There was consensus that Malacca and Singapore Straits should be accepted as a single, continuous waterway, forming a separate administrative division in S-23;
- Proposals by China:
 - There was consensus on the following:
 - Title of S-23 Chapter 6 to be revised to read “South China Sea and Eastern Archipelagic Seas”;
 - Bo Hai to be considered a separate body from Yellow Sea;
 - Line of demarcation between Bo Hai and Yellow Sea to be amended according to China’s proposal.
 - Agreement was not reached – or no progress was made on the following:

- To subsume Natuna Sea into South China Sea;
- To rename Beibu Gulf the existing Gulf of Tonkin;
- To amend to Taiwan Dao the name of this island;
- To amend the southeastern limit of the Yellow Sea.

These outcomes were reflected in an S-23 WG report and as proposals to IHO Member States. However, none of the proposals reached a majority support from MS. It should be noted that the work of the S-23 WG was undoubtedly affected by political and diplomatic lobbying by some members of the Working Group.

Work on S-23 was further discussed at the XVIIIth International Hydrographic Conference (Monaco, 23-27 April 2012). For similar reasons, i.e. the highly political nature of some of the issues that overwhelmed the technical purpose of the publication and of the Organization, no progress could be made towards a new edition of S-23. Eventually, the Conference agreed not to take any further action on the revision of S-23.

III. The IHO will continue cooperating with the UNGEGN and support actions needed that will enhance safety at sea and protection of the marine environment.