

United Nations Group of Experts on
Geographical Names

6 November 1991

15th Session

Geneva, Switzerland, 11-19 November 1991

Agenda Item No. 5, Reports of divisions, liaison officers and experts

REPORT OF THE UNGEGN LIAISON
TO THE INTERNATIONAL HYDROGRAPHIC BUREAU (IHB) OF THE
INTERNATIONAL HYDROGRAPHIC ORGANIZATION (IHO)

Submitted by Dr. Richard R. Randall, USA, UNGEGN Liaison to IHB

1. Since the 1989 session of the UNGEGN, the UNGEGN Liaison Officer to the IHB carried out various tasks, most of which were routine. One item, however, has raised important questions of procedure and authority. The background is as follows:

a. From 5-7 June 1991, the Liaison Officer participated in the 9th Session of the Subcommittee on Geographical Names and Nomenclature of Ocean Bottom Features (SGN) in Leningrad. The meeting was part of a two-week convention of about 30 persons associated with the Joint Guiding Committee on the Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans at 1:10 million (GEBCO), a program of the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC, a UN body). The USSR Head Department of Navigation and Oceanography was host for all the GEBCO meetings.

b. Meetings of SGN included the chairman, Dr. Robert Fisher of USA (Scripps Institution of Oceanography in California), Rear Admiral Alfredo Civetta (Director of IHB), Michel Huet (of IHB and Senior Cartographic Advisor for GEBCO), Dr. Galina Agapova (USSR Academy of Oceanography), Desmond Scott (of the UK and Permanent Secretary for GEBCO), and the IHB Liaison Officer (also named a member of SGN). A major task was to review and accept (or reject) some 120 names of features in the Caribbean Sea submitted for a chart being published by IHO/IOC. The Advisory Committee on Undersea Features (ACUF) of the US Board on Geographic Names also worked on the same names. A review of the GEBCO and ACUF results showed a number of different decisions by the two bodies. This situation generated other questions, as defined in paragraph 5 below.

c. As background, it is appropriate to note recommendations made by a UNGEGN Working Group on Undersea Features and Maritime Names several years ago.

(1). UNEGN should not become involved with approving names of undersea features; instead, nations working with undersea feature names should follow guidelines promoted by the Working Group as described in a paper prepared for the 11th UNEGN.

(2). Nations should approve such names through their national bodies; by collaborating with the UNEGN Liaison, a mechanism would exist to help assure coordination with other nations.

(3). Nations could also collaborate with IHB inasmuch as it had a responsibility through SGN for naming features on the IHO/IOC GEBCO series. (In the past few years, IOC has initiated another charting program at 1:1 million for such areas as the Mediterranean Sea and the Caribbean Sea and the SGN has assumed responsibility for approving names for this series.)

d. Upon approving the recommendations, UNEGN dissolved the Working Group and recommended the establishment of the IHB Liaison to accommodate further UN/IHB programs. IHB approved of this action.

2. A major question highlighted at the GEBCO Leningrad meeting is whether the SGN has responsibility for approving all names for features in international waters. The SGN believes it has or should have such responsibility. In the view of the IHB Liaison Officer, there is no documentation that defines such authority. Whether there should be is another matter. Another question is how to formulate feature terms and definitions to meet national and international requirements. Still another issue is how maritime nations should play a role to approve names in their waters proposed by other organizations. The Liaison Officer is now working with GEBCO authorities to develop principles concerning undersea naming to satisfy all valid requirements.