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REPORTS OF THE WORKING GROUPS

Report of the UNGEGN Liaison with the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research
(SCAR)

(Submitted by Germany)**

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Report of the UNGEGN Liaison with the
Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR)

At present there are more than 40 signatory countries to the Antarctic Treaty, and place-names appear in 15 or more languages and five scripts. Gazetteers or lists of geographical names and guidelines for naming features in the Antarctic have been issued by some 22 countries in various grades of completeness. However, internationally agreed guidelines for proposing new names and for using existing place-names have not as yet been set up. In many cases unintentional multiple naming of features, and either translation or mistranslation of place-names have caused ambiguity and confusion in their current usage in the Antarctic.

The Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research is the scientific advisory body to the Antarctic Treaty System. SCAR initiates, promotes and co-ordinates a wide range of scientific research programmes in Antarctica, most of which involve significant international collaboration. At present more than 20 SCAR member countries are actively conducting mapping programmes in the Antarctic and as such are being involved in problems of geographical naming in a practical way. These countries are collaborating in the SCAR Working Group on Geodesy and Geographic Information (WG-GGI). The Working Group co-ordinates the provision of a geographic framework for scientific activities in Antarctica and the dissemination of Antarctic geographic information.

In 1992 the need for a composite gazetteer of Antarctica was recognized, with the aim of bringing some order to the complex toponymy of Antarctica. Work began by collating existing gazetteers or lists of geographical names issued by countries adhering to SCAR as Full Members or Associate Members. A first draft of the Composite Gazetteer (CGA) was presented in 1994. WG-GGI members were requested to revise and to authorize the integrated data of their countries.

A printed version of the CGA was published in 1998. The gazetteer consists of two volumes. Volume I contains some 21 500 alphabetically ordered different geographical names, which correspond to about 33 000 names found in all national gazetteers. To each name the geographical co-ordinates and the providing country are indicated, and a reference number is assigned. The reference number is equivalent to one of the approximately 16 500 named Antarctic features as listed in Volume II. For each feature, all existing variant names, as approved by the countries, are represented synoptically, without indicating a preference for any name. National gazetteers or geographical names lists have been considered for 21 countries, and the gazetteer of the International Hydrographic Organization / International Oceanographic Commission.

Since 1998 the CGA was updated continuously. Today the number of name entries is 34,166 assigned to 17,098 different geographical features in the Antarctic. The collaborating countries in the project "Composite Gazetteer of Antarctica" are (listed as ISO three-letter code): ARG, AUS, BEL, BGR, CAN, CHL, CHN, DEU, ECU, ESP, FRA, GBR, IND, ITA, JPN, NOR, NZL, POL, RUS, URY, USA, ZAF, and the International Hydrographic Organization / International Oceanographic Commission.

Further discussion made it clear that the following additional information should be incorporated in a future edition of the CGA:

- a short description of the feature, because in most cases a name without a description would not identify the feature unambiguously;

- the elevation above sea level;
- the date of approval of a name.

Particularly the latter attribute was considered to be necessary to allow the future work of comparison and, possibly, choice of names, following a historic principle of the first given name.

The present CGA is slowly evolving towards what would be called the "Dictionary of Antarctic Names". The dictionary will contain descriptions and dates of approval for all geographical names and, apart from being a document for consultation, it may turn into the basic piece of information for comparing and choosing among alternative names.

Since August 1998 the CGA is accessible at the web site www.pnra.it/SCAR_GAZE. It is updated quarterly. The site contains the database of geographical names plus some searching facilities. The database may be downloaded free of charge as a .txt file. Starting from January 2002 the CGA is available as an ARCINFO export file visiting the site of Geoscience Australia's National Mapping Division www.auslig.gov.au/download/#Antarctic. Users are required to register their interest first and to obtain an electronic 'key' to access the files. There is no payment required for either registration or the data.