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**Implementation of resolutions and activities relating to the Working Group
on Evaluation and Implementation**

The Norwegian Place-Name Act – Changes in Process^{*}

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The Norwegian Place-Name Act – changes in process

Summary

The Norwegian Place-Name Act was passed by the National Assembly for the first time on 18 May 1990 and became law on 1 July 1991. A revised text of the Act was put into effect 1 August 2006. In January this year a parliamentary proposal to once again change aspects of the Act was forwarded. The proposal suggests that the farm owner shall have the right of veto on the spelling of the name of his or her farm. Accordingly the general rule that the spelling shall follow current orthographic principles of Norwegian will be removed as far as property names are concerned. This is in direct conflict with the intentions of the Act as well as the standardization principles set up by the Norwegian Language Council (Språkrådet) and recommended by United Nations. The Norwegian Mapping and Cadastre Authority (Statens kartverk) as well as the name consultants have objected to the proposal. In spite of the protests the proposal was adopted by the National Assembly, and the Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs will have to draft an amendment to the Act. However, the proposal may still be modified during the drafting process which probably will start after the general elections in September 2009.

1. Introduction

The Norwegian Place-Name Act was passed by the National Assembly (Stortinget) for the first time on 18 May 1990 and became law on 1 July 1991. A revised text of the Act was put into effect 1 August 2006. The original Act was presented at The Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, New York, 25 August–3 September 1992 as document E/CONF.85/L.85 (also published in Vol. II Technical Papers, pp. 218–219 of that Conference). A Consultation on the Act was presented as WP 55 at the Twenty-Second Session of UNGEGN, New York, 20–29 April 2004. The revised Act was presented as WP at the Twenty-Third Session of UNGEGN, Vienna 28 March – 4 April 2006. In January 2009 a parliamentary proposal to once again change aspects of the Act was forwarded.

2. Main aspects of the Act

The Place-Name Act applies to the choice of and use of the standardized forms of the place-names in official contexts and provides rules for laying down the spelling of Norwegian, Saami and Kvenish (Finnish) place-names in Norway. Under the provisions of the Act six regional Name Consultancy Services were established, with a secretariat and consultants for Norwegian, Saami and Kvenish (Finnish) place-names, and a central register of place-names under the Norwegian Mapping and Cadastre Authority. The Name Consultancy Services should provide advice and guidance in place-name matters. An appeal board was also established.

The main aspects of the Act are:

- Place-names are historical texts that transmit a multifaceted picture of older generations' experiences and insight into the interplay between man and Nature, and they are a

valuable source of local history. At the same time they represent an important factor for the well-being of the people in the local communities. The names of places also belong to our linguistic heritage, they are part of the dialects, and usually follow the same phonological development as other words. Therefore the spelling shall be based on the local inherited pronunciation.

- The place-names are addresses that help us to find our way in the surroundings and in the world as whole. Just as personal names are necessary to distinguish persons from one another, place-names are necessary to identify particular places in a certain and unambiguous way.

3. Evaluation process

After the Act had been in force for almost 10 years, an evaluation was conducted to determine how the legislation had functioned during this period, and a revised text of the Act was put into effect 1 August 2006. Inter alia there were amendments on the following points:

- The procedure in place-name cases was simplified.
- A purpose section and provisions concerning the protection of names were included.
- Provisions that had turned out to entail an unreasonable amount of local strife and appeal cases were mitigated or removed.
- A number of editorial amendments and clarifications were made.

4. Authorization process

When a name case has been taken up with the decision-making body, the matter shall be made known to those who have a right to make statements. An owner or lessee has the right to make a statement in cases applying to the name of his or her farm or single-holding. Municipal authorities have the right to express their views when the decision shall be made by a body other than the municipal authority itself. County authorities have the right to express their views in cases that include more than one municipal authority area. Local organisations have the right to express their views in cases concerning place-names to which the organisation has a particular tie. Before any decision on spelling is made, the name consultants shall give advice on the spelling. The proposed spelling may be rejected if the name consultants find it to be against the Act, or the spelling can be enforced against the advice of the name consultants. In cases where there is an appeal against the enforced spelling the losing part can present the case to the appeal board that has the final decision. The appeal board has handled about 1000 name cases since 1992.

5. 2009: A new situation

In Norway 70 % of the family names are originally farm names, but the spelling is in many cases a misrepresented form of the original name based on sources from the 18th century. The revised Act says that in cases applying to farm names and single-holding names the views of the owner shall be ascribed particular weight when the preferred spelling is according to the general rules. However, many farm owners prefer to have the name of the farm written in the same way as their family name, without regard to the local pronunciation or spelling rules.

In January 2009 a parliamentary proposal to change aspects of the Norwegian Place-Name Act was forwarded. The proposal suggests that the farm owner shall have the right of veto on the spelling of the name of his or her farm. Accordingly the general rule that the spelling shall follow current orthographic principles of Norwegian will be removed when it is question of property names. This is in direct conflict with the intentions of the Norwegian Place-Name Act as well as the standardization principles set up by the Norwegian Language Council (Språkrådet) and recommended by UNGEGN, and the Norwegian Mapping and Cadastre Authority (Statens kartverk) as well as the name consultants have objected to the proposal. The chair of the Norden Division has also submitted a letter of objection.

In spite of the protests the proposal was adopted by the National Assembly, and the Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs will have to draft an amendment to the Act. However, the proposal may still be modified during the drafting process which probably will start after the general elections in September 2009.