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Item 6 of the provisional agenda

Reports of the liaison officers and international organizations

Report by the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO)*

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United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN)
25th Session, Nairobi, Kenya, 5-12 May 2009

Report by the International Hydrographic Organization

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 invitations to attend meetings of the Sub-Committee, and with international or national authorities concerned with the naming of undersea features*”. SCUFN-related documents are also available from the GEBCO website (www.gebco.net) and the IHO website (www.iho.int). SCUFN is currently 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 in Monaco. It meets once a year.

Since the 24th UNGEGN session in 2007, the 21st meeting of SCUFN was held on 19-22 May 2008 in Jeju Island, Rep of Korea and hosted by the National Oceanographic Research Institute (NORI). The meeting was chaired by Dr Hans Werner Schenke (Germany) and attended by 23 participants from Argentina, Brazil, Germany, Hungary, India, Japan, Rep of Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, Russia, USA and IHB. The meeting welcomed Ms. Ksenia Dobrolyubova (Geological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences) as new member appointed by IOC.

In total, the meeting considered 48 names, of which 29 were the subject of new name proposals from Argentina, Brazil, Japan, Rep of Korea and Russia. After careful examination of each proposal, including the supporting survey data / bathymetry and the reason for the choice of name, the meeting eventually accepted 33 new names for inclusion in the GEBCO Gazetteer of Undersea Feature Names, which is maintained at the IHB. Additionally, 9 names/features would be placed in a “reserved” section of the Gazetteer, pending further clarification / supporting documentation or the submission of an alternative name. As a result, a new GEBCO Gazetteer has been issued for use in GEBCO products and by IHO Member States for charting purposes.

The meeting reviewed and agreed the English part of a new 4th edition of IHO-IOC publication B-6 *Standardization of Undersea Feature Names*, taking into account the revised Terms of Reference and new Rules of Procedures for SCUFN, which had been approved by IHO and IOC. An English/French version of B-6, 4th Edition was subsequently published in November 2008. The following language versions will follow: E/Spanish, E/Russian, E/Japanese and E/Korean.

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

Other topics addressed by the meeting included:

- A review of the IHO-IOC Undersea Feature Name Proposal form, in view of its improvement and modernization, and its harmonization with the form used by ACUF (Advisory Committee on Undersea Features, of the US Board of Geographic Names). As a result, a new form was agreed.
- Consideration of reports on the GEBCO Gazetteer from the British Oceanographic Data Centre (BODC) and the German Alfred Wegener Institute (AWI), and of proposals for improving the GEBCO Gazetteer. This resulted in corrections to the Gazetteer and additional positions to a number of features, in order to better define their shape and areal extension.
- Consideration of a report on the examination of 73 “unnamed” seamounts in the central Pacific Ocean, which had been identified from the GEBCO Digital Atlas. The study was conducted by the SCUFN member from Argentina, based on the best available bathymetry, and revealed that 5 seamounts had already been named and that 9 seamounts did not exist.
- Reformatting of the GEBCO Gazetteer into a geospatially enabled, web-accessible data base, through collaboration of the US National Geophysical Data Center (NGDC) and BODC. A prototype of the database and interface has now been completed and is being evaluated at the IHB (April 2009).

The 22nd meeting of SCUFN will take place in Brest, France, on 22-26 September 2009, following invitation by the French Hydrographic Office (SHOM).

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.

The International Hydrographic Bureau has asked its Member States to consider establishing a Working Group in order to prepare a draft new edition of the publication S-23 for approval by the Member States, noting that this is an important publication, its update is long overdue and there is a need for a new edition as soon as possible. This has now been agreed by Member States and the inaugural meeting of this new WG has been planned on 1 June 2009 in Monaco, immediately before the 4th IHO Extraordinary International Hydrographic Conference.

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.