



**UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC
AND
SOCIAL COUNCIL**



Distr.
LIMITED

E/CONF.61/L.36
17 March 1972

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

SECOND UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
London, 10-31 May 1972
Item 10 (a) of the provisional agenda

THE CLASSIFICATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL ENTITIES AND GEOGRAPHICAL
NAMES IN THE PROVINCE OF ONTARIO, CANADA

Paper submitted by the Government of Canada*

I. THE PROBLEM

While respecting the opinions and priorities of other statutory, legal and academic authorities in matters of geographical terminology, this paper examines (1) the difficulties involved in making a geographical nomenclature board of Ontario operational, (2) the problems associated with accommodating a definitive classification of geographical features and names to older and unformulated principles and procedures, and, (3) the implementation of a local usage rationale in defining the jurisdictional boundaries of the new board.

II. OBJECTIVES

As the recently appointed statutory authority for the provision and maintenance of a systematic geographical nomenclature for the Province of Ontario, the Ontario Geographic Names Board (OGNB) has as its aim the establishment and maintenance of principles and procedures which will provide:

(a) A classification of geographical features within the Province as a necessary step in defining the jurisdictional boundaries of the new provincial nomenclature board;

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(b) Definitions of operating principles and procedures which would clarify the Ontario names board's position vis à vis other statutory authorities regarding the status of legal and political territorial divisions as geographical entities and geographical names;

(c) A classificatory scheme of geographical names and categories currently employed by the Ontario names board for the use of cartographers, geographers and other government departments;

(d) A satisfactory definition of the terms "geographical feature" and "place", key words in the Act which currently defines the Ontario names board's jurisdictional area with regard to name approval or rescission;

(e) An argument supporting the Ontario names board's claim to full jurisdictional powers over all geographical names generated by local usage.

III. FACTORS

The provincial nomenclature authority

The Ontario Geographic Names Board established by statute in 1968, brought into force by royal proclamation in April of 1969, and operational in 1971 with the appointment of its full complement of seven members in July of that year, is, in matters determining what names shall or shall not be applied to unincorporated places and natural geographical features, the decisive statutory authority. In decisions involving orthography, language, scale and degree of duplication or uniformity, the Board's recommendations to the Ontario Minister of Natural Resources (formerly Lands and Forests) are, once approved, final.

Such recommendations usually take the form of submissions for approval or rescission of names in current use - in the verbal sense - or those recorded in documented form. These names appear, when approved, as official nomenclature on topographical and planimetric maps of the province.

IV. PLACES

"Places" (in established departmental usage over the years) refer to physical features in the landscape containing populated built-up areas such as unincorporated villages and such small loosely organized communities as farmsteads. Legal divisions, on the other hand, such as geographical and municipal townships, parks or reserves, and municipal subdivisions such as residential suburbs have names which are properly governed by statutory authorities other than The Ontario Geographic Names Board.