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FIFTH UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE  
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES  
Montreal, 18-31 August 1987  
Item 10 (c) and (d) of the  
provisional agenda\*

FEATURES BEYOND A SINGLE SOVEREIGNTY

MARITIME FEATURES

UNDERSEA FEATURES

Report by the UNGEGN Liaison to the  
International Hydrographic Bureau

Paper submitted by the United Nations Group  
of Experts on Geographical Names\*\*

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\*\* Prepared by Richard R. Randall, United States Board on Geographic Names,  
UNEGN Liaison to the International Hydrographic Bureau.

At the Fourth UN Conference on Geographical Names, the convenor of the Working Group on Maritime and Undersea Features reported that a major goal had been achieved: the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names approved statements of principles, policies, and procedures for dealing with undersea feature names. This meant that nations involved in naming undersea features could work independently and yet could collaborate to achieve international goals to standardize names of undersea features. Resolution 12 of the Fourth Conference recognized this accomplishment and recommended that the activities of the Working Group be limited to maritime features. Subsequent meetings of the UN Group of Experts resulted in the author of this report being designated as the "Liaison" to the International Hydrographic Bureau (IHB) with respect to undersea feature names. This liaison would be based on the fact that IHB also had a program for standardizing names for its cartographic publications and at the same time would help assure continuing communications between both organizations.

(It is perhaps useful to point out that IHB is not involved with naming all undersea features. Instead, its concern is for names of features which can be depicted on relatively small-scale items, including the sheets of the General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans (GEBCO) series at 1:6 million and 1:10 million. Nations desiring to name features at larger scales should continue to follow the UN guidelines and voluntarily collaborate with other nations to prevent duplications.)

At each following session of the Group of Experts, I reported on the work of the IHB and its parent organization, the International Hydrographic Organization. Also, between sessions I circulated summaries of my activities to the members of the former Working Group. Since the time between the 12th and 13th sessions has been brief, no report was prepared for that interval.

One item deserving of mention was my participation in a 1985 meeting of the Subcommittee on Geographic Names and Ocean Bottom Features of the IHO/IOC Guiding Committee on the GEBCO in Monaco. At that meeting I worked with a group of international marine geologists, bathymetrists, and other scientists to approve names for the next (6th) edition of the GEBCO. I also recommended that consideration be given to combining two publications: the 1981 IHB Standardization of Undersea Feature Names (which contains guidelines, proposal forms, and terminology concerning the naming of features) and the 1985 List of Geographical Names of Undersea Features Shown on the GEBCO 5th Edition and on the Small Scale IHO International Chart Series. After that meeting, I continued to correspond with officials of IHB and with the subcommittee on related matters.

In a letter to Rear Admiral A. A. Affonso, IHB Director, in December 1986 I asked whether his organization could work to standardize maritime feature names. This activity would seem closely associated with the IHO Special Publication No. 23, Limits of Oceans and Seas. He answered that while this activity could be possible, it would be necessary to assess technical aspects of the effort. This publication, which is now in final editing, will provide names and locations of a great number of water bodies. While designed to serve navigators, the publication also will be of considerable use for others.

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The Subcommittee had another meeting in Monaco in May of 1987 which I could not attend. Instead I sent a message concerning various items on the agenda. I repeated the recommendation to combine the two publications on undersea feature names and I provided additional comments on the content of the List.... These included a suggestion to add generic terms with specific terms for each name, to include alternate or variant names where historically justified, and to add to the proposed combined publication a brief description of the field of geographical names.

Another part of the message to IHB reported on a database of the entire file of names maintained by the US Board on Geographic Names Advisory Committee on Undersea Features (ACUF). The database was prepared by a member of ACUF from the National Ocean Service of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and will be used in connection with bathymetric charting of the Exclusive Economic Zone of the United States. While the database is not now in a form suitable for general use, its existence and potential development for general purposes may be of interest to IHB.

Following the May meeting, the Tenth Session of the Joint IHO/IOC Guiding Committee for GEBCO took place. Among items on the agenda was the following proposal:

1. That Member States encourage marine scientists and persons in their country wishing to name undersea features, having checked their proposal with published Gazetteers of Undersea Feature Names, and taking into appropriate account the guidelines contained in the IHO/IOC publication "Standardization of Undersea Features names" (including the use of the Undersea Feature Name Proposal Form contained therein), to submit all proposed new names for clearance, either to their appropriate national authority or, where no such national authority exists, to the IHB for consideration by the GEBCO Subcommittee on Geographical Names and Nomenclature of Ocean Bottom Features.

2. that Member States invite publishers of ocean maps, and editors of scientific journals, in their country, to require compilers and authors to provide written evidence of such clearance before accepting for publication any maps or scientific articles containing new names for undersea features.

At the time of writing this report, results of the proposal are not known. A fuller report will be given at the 5th UN Conference. In any case, the recommendation is a commendable step to further undersea names standardization.

In summary, I believe the liaison with the IHB has been useful both to IHB and to the UN. Further discussions with IHB are needed to determine whether that organization can play a role in standardizing maritime names. Should IHB agree to include maritime features in its program, I would recommend that the Working Group on Maritime Features be dissolved. As a matter of interest, no one from the group has expressed any need for its continuation. In any case, I recommend that the UN Group of Experts continue to rely on IHB to play the leading international role in programs to standardize undersea feature names. The undersigned will continue to carry out liaison between both organizations if such a function is desired.