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MEASURES TAKEN AND PROPOSED TO IMPLEMENT UNITED NATIONS
RESOLUTIONS ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

The naming of regions

Paper submitted by Australia**

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Summary

The following paper is concerned with regional classification and the associated application of a name to each individual region as a means of identification. Some of the nomenclature-related considerations and uncertainties which have arisen as a result of this practice are noted, with particular reference to South Australia. The questions asked are to what extent, and in what manner, should the names of these geographical units (some physically evident and others arbitrarily or otherwise perceived) be treated within the framework of the standardization of nomenclature. Resoution 7, adopted at the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, specifically refers to physiogeographic regions and could be extended to other regional classifications, as a step towards answering these questions.

THE NAMING OF REGIONS

INTRODUCTION

In Australia, thus far, consideration of general policies pertaining to regional nomenclature appears to have been minimal. This does not reflect the number of regional classifications which have been constructed for various purposes. There have, in fact, been many examples of the regional classification of Australia and each State which have been devised by various bodies. Significant from a nomenclature point of view, is that with each classification, the "regional unit" is, in the majority of cases, identified by a name.

The bodies which have been responsible for establishing regional classifications have, more often than not, worked independently of one another, their definition of a region being based on different criteria dependent upon the specific purpose and intention of the regional classification. This situation has contributed to confusion and uncertainty in the area of nomenclature because, briefly, the outcome has often been the appearance, in text books, documents, brochures etc. of differing names for a similar region as well as, at times, an inappropriate name for a region.¹ The situation has

¹ vide Appendix I

arisen where various academic disciplines, in particular, have created their own regional nomenclature for the purpose of specific studies with the result that the inclusion of this information in text books and/or other literature has often led to these names being accepted as being official. Although the names are generally appropriate ones, they have in fact, in the majority of cases, no official status. The question arises as to whether these names should be given official status, or become the concern of State and/or National nomenclature authorities and, if so, to what extent and in what way. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to provide a framework of information, on the basis of which, these questions might be addressed and in so doing promote a subsequent move towards the formulation and/or development of an appropriate policy for the specific consideration of "region" or "regional" nomenclature, if, in fact, it was considered necessary and/or feasible.

DISCUSSION

One of the most probable reasons for the apparent lack of policy development in the area of regional nomenclature, so far, is the characteristically uncertain and vague nature or perceived value of the regional unit.

The "region" is generally considered to be "a portion of the earth's surface that possesses some characteristic or properties that distinguish it from other....areas² or "a portion of territory that possesse[s] a physical and cultural unity".³ There is, however, a second broad type of region which has been utilized by certain bodies as a framework for description and analysis - one for which boundaries are defined on an arbitrary basis, rather than physically and/or culturally determined, an example being electoral divisions. The difficulty experienced when referring to regions in any way can probably best be illustrated and concluded by the following statements and arguments:

- "...regions do not exist as objective realities independent of the observer but are mental constructs that vary both with the person concerned and the purpose for which they want to identify regions."⁴

² Gold, J.R., "An Introduction to Behavioural Geography", (1980), p.131

³ Gold, p.115

⁴ Chisholm, M., "Human Geography - Evolution or Revolution", (1975), p.159

- "...there is no single criteria or set of criteria that will yield regions appropriate for all circumstances. Regions are rarely valid other than for the specific purposes for which they are designed." ⁵

- "...it would be more useful if geographers used public images of regions as the appropriate framework for analysis rather than designing and imposing their own regional taxonomies." ⁶

- With reference again to regional geographers, there is the view that they "may perhaps be trying to put boundaries that do not exist around areas that do not matter." ⁷

As far as South Australia is concerned, there have been individual instances where either the former Nomenclature Committee or Geographical Names Board has been involved in the naming of regions eg. "The South East", the change of name from "The Ninety Mile Desert" to "Coonalpyn Downs" (Incidentally, despite this name change, this region is now widely referred to as being the northern portion of "The South East" or alternatively the "Upper South East") and the change of name from the "Upper Murray Planning Area" to the "Riverland Planning Area". There have, however, been relatively few of these instances.

Probably the earliest and most concrete acknowledgement, however, that there was a need to consider region names in a formal manner was the resolution made at the 1921 Meeting of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science as follows: "That a Committee be appointed to initiate a suitable distinctive nomenclature for the natural regions of

⁵ Gold, p.131

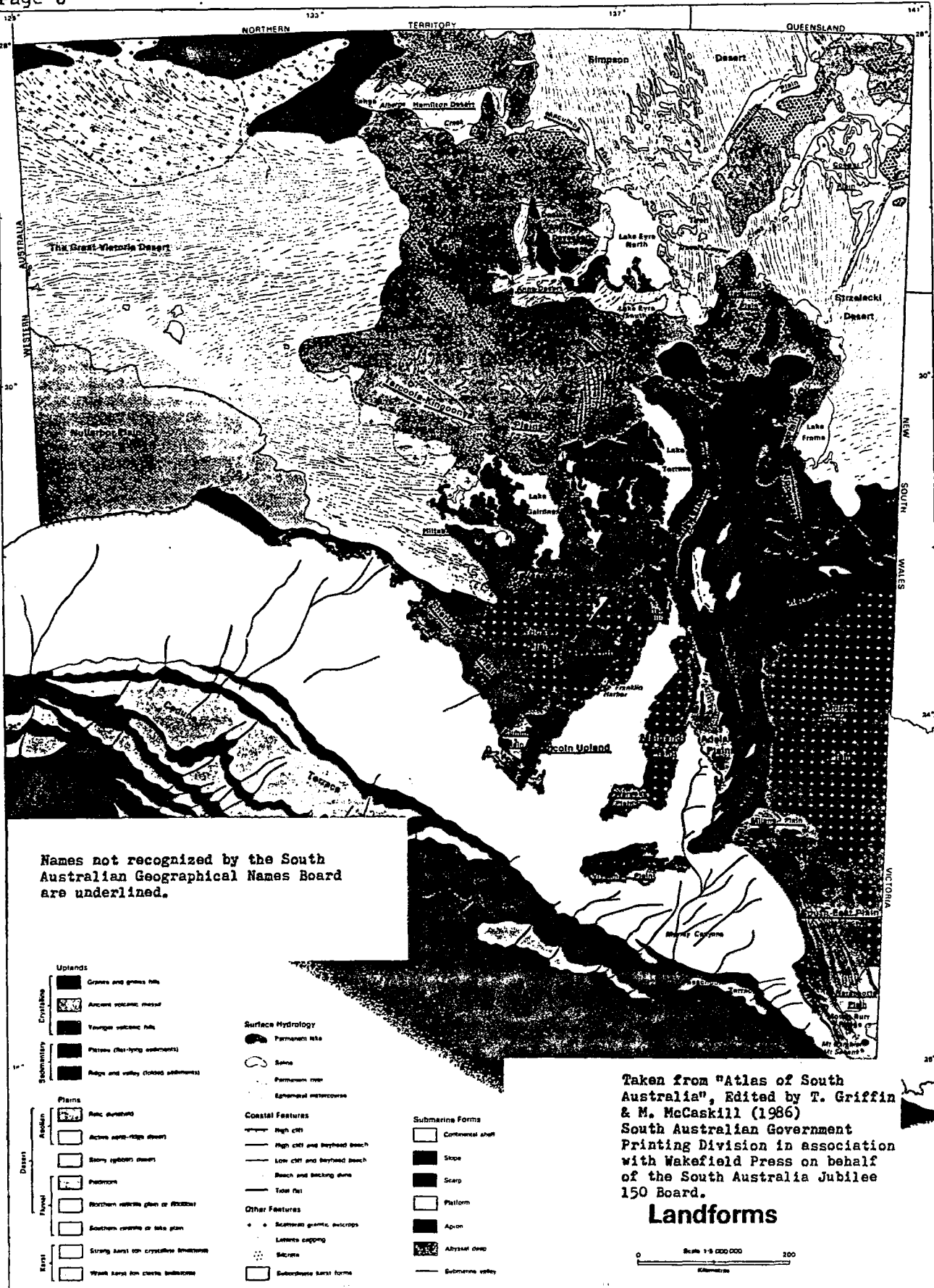
⁶ Gold, p.131

⁷ Chisholm, p.74

Australia eg. Gippsland." This committee was initially referred to as the "Committee on Regional Names of Australia" but was later re-appointed as the "Committee on Natural Regions of Australia and New Zealand" and was established as an extension of the move to define and delimit "natural regions" for Australia.⁸

For similar reasons to those which have previously been mentioned, the defining and naming of what were termed natural regions did not prove to be a straightforward task. This is reflected in the conclusion made by the Chairman of the Committee at the 16th Meeting of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, held in Wellington, New Zealand in 1923, that: "It seemed necessary, first, to AGREE upon a definition of the term "natural region"; secondly, to AGREE upon the boundaries of such regions; and thirdly, to name them." The Committee was not re-appointed after 1926, being five years after its initial appointment.

⁸ vide Appendix II



The impetus for the writing of this paper came about following the examination of the landforms section of an atlas being prepared for the South Australian Sesquicentennial Year. The text and accompanying map referred to various physiogeographic areas using nomenclature which, although probably appropriate, had no official basis. The concern which arose was that the names would (especially through a publication of this nature) be considered and adopted as official geographical names without undergoing the normal process of determining the most suitable name for a "place" under the Geographical Names Act, 1969-1982 (which was established to regulate geographical nomenclature). Another concern which followed was the confusion which would result if, for example, one or more other persons developed a similar landforms classification but assigned different names to the areas concerned.

At a special meeting held to consider the abovementioned "Landforms" text and map, it was decided that, in this particular instance, the nomenclature used would remain essentially unaltered (except for some obvious necessary nomenclature changes), but that a qualifying note be added in this section of the atlas stating that the physiogeographic region names used were not necessarily names officially recognized by the Geographical Names Board. The lack of formulated policy concerning this type of nomenclature as well as the restriction in time available (from a printing point of view) to consider the alteration of the nomenclature used in this particular text did not allow any further action to be taken at the time. There was, however, the identification of the need to consider region names more closely and develop an appropriate policy henceforth.

In South Australia, the statutory tools already exist for region names to become "geographical names" in terms of the Geographical Names Act, 1969-1982 (where a "geographical

name" means a name assigned to a "place"⁹ under this Act). There was, however, a reluctance to make use of these for the abovementioned case because it was argued that it was not possible to define precise, objective and "unchanging" boundaries.

⁹ In terms of the Geographical Names Act, 1969-1982 a "place" includes any geographical or topographical feature and any region, area, locality, city, suburb, town, township, settlement, railway station, hospital, school and any other place or building that is, or is likely to be of public or historical interest.

CONCLUSION

The following resolution made at the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names supports the move towards the standardization of region names:

CONSIDERING that it is necessary to intensify activities within the framework of national standardization of geographical names, in accordance with resolution 16 of the Third United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, 31/

RECOGNIZING that the standardization of named physiogeographic regions contributes to the solution of various problems.

1. RECOMMENDS that named physiogeographic regions should be registered and characterized unambiguously.

2. FURTHER RECOMMENDS that the named physiogeographic regions should be listed in surveys and other documents along with locations and dimensions of the features, and that the same procedures should be followed also with respect to regional features divided among two or more countries.

In the practical application of this resolution it is felt that the following should take place:

(i) That an attempt be made to record all existing and past regional nomenclature, to identify the extent of the regions and to note the purpose of the classification from which the name arose.

(ii) Through the correlation of this collated information and consultation with each authority, academic discipline etc. involved with regional classification and the naming of /...

regions thereof, to identify areas which could possibly be officially named and established.

(iii) To ensure that all new regional nomenclature to appear in text books and/or other literature is chosen in consultation with the State nomenclature authority.

It is felt that the development of a national policy for the treatment of region names is necessary and it has been the aim of this paper to promote discussion and an exchange of ideas towards this end.

APPENDIX I

From Fenner, Charles, "South Australia: A Geographical Study - Structural, Regional and Human", (1931) p.296 as follows:

GRIFFITH TAYLOR - In "The Australian Environment" (Melbourne, 1918, Govt. Printer) Taylor provides major divisions for the whole of Australia. He divides South Australia approximately along the line the northern boundary of "The Counties" [vide Fig. 2(a)], into two such divisions:

1. A northern arid region, which he calls the "Eyre Region".
2. A southern agricultural region, which he calls the "Adelaide Region".

These divisions and their descriptions are most valuable, but the nomenclature provides some difficulty. The name "Eyre", for instance, to the South Australian, calls up the western portion of the southern division (Eyre Peninsula) and not the arid north.

APPENDIX II

Definition of NATURAL REGIONS from Fenner, Charles, "South Australia: A Geographical Study - Structural, Regional and Human", (1931) pp.294-295 as follows:

At the Adelaide (1924) meeting of the A.A.A.S. the following definition was submitted by Griffith Taylor: "A natural region is one which has a fairly uniform environment as determined by the general amount and season of rain, temperature, topography, and to a lesser degree, soil. It therefore leads to a homogeneous type of settlement within the region."

At the same meeting M. Aourousseau suggested the following definition: "A natural region is a tract of country stamped with an aspect of unity (not of uniformity), and within it a uniform mode of life is gradually developed."

....[Charles Fenner adopted the definition] that a Natural Region is "An area where the topography, climate, productions, and potentialities may be described with the maximum number of general statements, and the minimum number of exceptions, and within which the people have greater community of interest with one another than they have with the people of adjoining regions."

APPENDIX III

Extract from South Australian Government Gazette, Thursday
October 31, 1839:

Under the consideration that it is due to enterprising men who first explore countries or large districts, as much as possible to preserve the memory of their conduct in the names of the regions they discover, the Governor has been pleased to direct that the great coast divisions of the Colony shall be hereafter distinguished as follows:

1st. The territory included between the southern part of the eastern boundary of the Province, the Murray, Lake Alexandrina, and the sea, to be called - BONNEIA.

2nd. The territory included between the Murray, Lake Alexandrina, Encounter Bay, and St. Vincent's and Spencer's Gulfs, excepting Yorke's Peninsula, to be called - STURTIA.

3rd. Yorke's Peninsula of course to retain the name originally given to it by its first discoverer.

4th. The Peninsula included between Spencer's Gulf in its whole length, and the Southern Ocean from Cape Catastrophe to the western point of Denial Bay, to be called - EYRIA.

In regard to the minor features of the country to which the natives may have given names, the Governor would take the present opportunity of requesting the assistance of the colonists in discovering, and carefully and precisely retaining, these in all possible cases, as most consistent with propriety and beauty of appellation.

All information on this subject should be communicated in precise terms to the Surveyor-General, who will cause memorandums to be made of it, and native names, when clearly proved to be correct, to be inserted in the public maps.

By His Excellency's command,
ROBERT GOUGER, Colonial Secretary

/...

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