National agencies and functioning of a names board

Helen Kerfoot
(Canada)

UNEGGN

Brazil, 2017
Aims today

- National programmes – premises and justifications
- Some different types of geographical names authorities
- Variations in mandate, composition, etc. of names boards
- Principles of naming – some thoughts
Basic premises

- Geographical names should be clear and unambiguous.
- Each country has control over the geographical names in its own territory.
- Each country needs a process for standardizing and approving names.
- Nationally recognized names are the basis for international use.
Justifying a national programme?

- Not always easy to justify the benefits in financial terms
- Considerable money and time are spent on different programmes; overlapping efforts
  - little coordination and conflicting results
- Consolidated, small nucleus of dedicated people
  - at less cost
  - more consistent information in government documents
  - names more readily available to general public
Support from the United Nations

- UN resolution I/4a 1967 underlines need to establish national agencies … again V/15 1987
- Importance of toponyms in spatial data infrastructure … UN Regional Cartographic Conferences, 2000, 2001 and UN res. VIII/6, 2002
- Preservation of toponyms as elements of identity and cultural heritage … VIII/9 and IX/4 + link with UNESCO
Names authorities come in different shapes and sizes

- The choice depends on the nature of the country
- (1) Default if no names board?
- (2) Centralized national names board
  - all decisions under one roof
  - by sub-committees: feature types, language ..
- (3) Decentralized to regional names boards
  - with central umbrella coordinating authority
  - with regional committees
  - *Is it a board, a commission, a council ......?*
(1) Standardization – central agency / agencies

- National Mapping Agency
- Municipalities
- National Hydrographic Office
- Military Mapping
Is this good or bad?

- Expertise in mapping
- Collect names while doing field survey
- Continuing user of names
- Have available finances

- Perhaps responsibility of one individual
- Lack of range of expertise
- Have own agenda
- No shield from political pressure
(2) Standardization – names authority (centralized)
Hungarian Committee on Geographical Names

Responsibility - Under Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

Legal basis - Decree 1989 and 1992

Decisions – physical and transport features

Advice – administrative names; treatment of names outside Hungary

Members – national mapping, departments of both domestic and foreign affairs; transport; geographical science, education and higher learning; experts in linguistics; local authorities, minorities; major map publishers; national press

Meetings – 3 to 5 times a year
(3) Standardization – names authority (decentralized)

National Names Authority (decentralized)

Regional committee

Regional committee

Regional committee

Office

Office

Office
Geographical names - Canada

Administrative structure

- Geographical Names Board of Canada (national authority) ... since 1897 ...
- Chair
- Sec.
- 10 provinces
- 3 territories
- 11 federal depart.
- adv. com. chairs
GNBC …

- √ Forum for discussion
- √ Development of policies
- √ International, United Nations activities
- √ Receive advice on toponymic problems
- √ Work on common projects
- X .. Name decisions

(except undersea; Antarctica)
Provincial and territorial names authorities

- Some have administrative structures
- Some have names boards

Public appointees
- academia
- First Nations
- Northern Ontario
- francophone rep.

Ex officio
Ministry of Natural Resources

Advisory to Minister

Chair

OGNB
In general ...
Board meeting results ...
Decisions of a Board

GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES BOARD OF CANADA

BRITISH COLUMBIA DECISIONS

The decision noted hereunder was approved:

DATE: 19 NOVEMBER 2012

BY: [signature]
Provincial Toponymist
Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations

RESCINDED
CGNDB Status: B4 (Gazetteer Cross-Reference)

JANGI Mayne
Feature type: Community
92B/14 - Mayne Island, British Columbia
NW side of Mayne Island, facing Active Pass, Cowichan Land District
Geographical Coordinates: 485104 1231759

ADOPTED
CGNDB Status: A4 (Change in the Form of a Name)

JDLLC Mayne Island
Feature type: Community
92B/14 - Mayne Island, British Columbia
NW side of Mayne Island, facing Active Pass, Cowichan Land District
Geographical Coordinates: 485104 1231759

Mayne (Post Office) adopted 12 December 1939, as labelled on BC Lands' map 2A, 1913 et seq. Form of name changed to Mayne (community) 29 November 1984 on Ottawa file 203-2. Form of name changed to Mayne Island (community) 19 November 2012, as requested by Islands Trust and endorsed by residents' groups and area representatives, including Ratepayers Association, regional government, and elected provincial & federal representatives.
The decisions noted hereunder were approved:

Date: Dec 6, 2010

As confirmed by:

Nancy Saunders, Nova Scotia Member of the GNBC

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<th>Altered Application</th>
<th>Generic Code</th>
<th>Feature Name</th>
<th>County</th>
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</table>
Process ........

- Gathering names
  - field collection from local use
  - other sources

- Processing in office
  - to database, etc.

- Official recognition

- Dissemination
Aim - clarity and avoiding ambiguity

- Correctly recorded names data
  - based on local usage
  - “standardized” - through an authority
- Available and easily accessible
Responsibilities and scope of decisions?

Developing policies and guidelines to support names approval or rejection

Making decisions/recommendations on names

Assuring minutes, names decisions … are made generally available

Other tasks?

- displays, talks, workshops
- promotion in media, conferences
Board looked to for independent unbiased judgement
Decisions may affect highway signs, laws, maps, etc.
Decisions are important to future generations
Integrity and effectiveness of board at stake
  • Slow and sure!
..... avoid political interference
Variations – composition, mandate

- **Number of members:**
  - usually 6-18 ..... 44 in Madagascar (1973)

- **Types of members:**
  - national / regional / municipal governments
  - cultural and language groups
  - non-government experts (e.g. universities, scientific academies, publishers, historical societies)

- **Mandate:**
  - natural features; populated places; municipal units – towns, etc.; streets; buildings; ephemeral features
  - features in parks, on indigenous lands; marine features
  - exonyms

- **Meetings:**
Legislation: names, language

- Many national authorities established through legislation
  - Board Act: New Zealand (NZGB, 1946, 2008)
  - Decree: Israel (1951); Madagascar (KPMA, 1973)
  - Cabinet document: Malaysia (NCGN, 2002)

- Some countries have legislation regarding names
  - Ireland: Official Languages Act, 2003
  - New Zealand: since 1998 Māori place names for maps
  - Norway: since 1990 Norwegian, Saami & Finnish names
  - Estonia: since 1996 .. include language & spelling rules
More about a board …

- Secretariat support / tasks
  - really essential
- Policies and principles
- Who makes the final decision
  - Board or Minister of Department?
- Public consultations?
- … other questions …
Policies and principles - 1

- Develop according to country’s needs
  - current and long-standing local usage
  - univocity / multilingual areas
  - duplication in small area?
  - variations in spelling in associated features?
  - derogatory and pejorative names
  - generic terminology
Policies and principles - 2

- generic terms for part of the whole
- statutory names
- commercial names
- personal names and commemoration
- preferred types of names where no local use
- use of council resolutions
- areas of restricted naming
- changing names
... one name, or more?
Early names authorities

- Historically many lists of place names accompanying maps (e.g. explorers)
- Mainly lack of names authorities until late 1800s
  - USA .. USBGN 1890 ... Executive Order of Benjamin Harrison ... decisions binding for Federal Government
    - Now domestic and foreign names under the USBGN
  - Canada .. Board 1897 ... Order of Privy Council ...
    - Originally federal, by 1960s all provinces had responsibility
- Denmark 1910; NZ and Ireland 1946
Geographical Names Authorities (July 2016)

- **With National Names Authority**
- **No National Names Authority**
- **Status Unknown**

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

*Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by Pakistan.*

**Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined.**

Map No 4554 United Nations
April 2016

Department of Field Support
Geospatial Information Section (formerly Cartographic Section)
Why are some boards ineffective?

- No one reason! Some suggestions:
  - Do not have
    - commitment of management, particularly in the lead department (resources)
    - Secretariat as focal point
    - interest/commitment of board members
    - good advisors on subjects of concern
    - clear direction/mandate
    - consultation with local community and provision of feedback
    - decisions available and used by government
Conclusions

- To have a suite of standardized names a country needs a geographical names authority
- A Secretariat plays a significant role
- Boards vary in types, size, etc. – each country must adapt to their own needs
- Management must be aware of the advantages of an appropriate authority

**References**: UNGEGN website

- National Names Authorities – documents
- UNGEGN Bulletin # 51
Political pressure to change a name

- Mount Logan, Yukon (Canada)
  - The highest mountain in Canada
- Prime Minister wished to change the name
  - Commemorate a former Prime Minister, Pierre Elliott Trudeau (deceased)
- Yukon/National Parks
- Population strongly opposed

the proposition was withdrawn resistance of population, forthcoming election
Political pressures to change a name

- Castle Mountain, Alberta (Canada)
  - 1858, appears like a rocky castle
  - 1946, the Prime Minister gave instructions to rename it after General Eisenhower
  - 1979, after constant pressure from the public: Castle Mountain with Eisenhower Peak
Some sample documents and forms

- Act for a names board (e.g. Ontario, Canada)
  - Terms of Reference
- Naming principles
  - Procedural Guidelines
- Forms for public submissions
  - New Zealand, South Africa
  - Canada - undersea features
- Detailed naming process
  - New Zealand
Requester: The Township

Proposal: Newly amalgamated municipality requests that the name of the lake which has been in common use for the last 40 or 50 years be reinstated as part of the 911 addressing project (see application - Appendix 104.5.1.1).

Background: Current official name Farrell Lake replaced former official name Farren Lake on October 25, 1971. Farrell Lake was approved by the Ontario Geographic Names Board on the recommendation of, and from information supplied by the former Township. (see 1971 decision background - Appendix 104.5.1.2). Newly formed municipality passes motion to re-instate the name Farren Lake - wondering why name was changed in the first place??


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<th>CONTACT/SOURCE</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>ADDRESS</th>
<th>1ST CHOICE</th>
<th>USAGE</th>
<th>COMMENTS/ADDITIONAL INFORMATION</th>
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<td>50+ years</td>
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*Contact/Source provided by requester

**DECISION:** Proposal Approved as is ______ Proposal Approved with changes ______ Proposal Deferred ______ Proposal Denied ______ Alternate Recommendation ______

COMMENTS/CHANGES: ______
Geographical Names

Core Activities

Outreach to international community

Dissemination

Policies, procedures, guidelines, standards

National Toponymic Services Board ... Database

Field recording & investigation delineation

Tools, Training