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Item 4 of the provisional agenda*

REPORTS BY GOVERNMENTS ON THE SITUATION IN THEIR COUNTRIES
AND ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE STANDARDIZATION OF
GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES SINCE THE SEVENTH CONFERENCE

Report of Zealand

(Submitted by New Zealand)**

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Report of New Zealand

Responsibility for determining geographic and hydrographic names within New Zealand and its territorial waters lies with the New Zealand Geographic Board. The Board, which is an independent body, was established in 1946, under the New Zealand Geographic Board Act 1946. This Act has generally withstood the test of time. However social and cultural perceptions and political circumstances have changed during the intervening years and the Act is about to be reviewed.

The purpose of the review will be to clarify the jurisdiction of the Board, to revise procedures for public participation and consultation in the naming process, to make better provision for encouraging the collection and use of Maori place names and to modernise the composition and operations of the Board.

The Board is currently responsible for naming, or amending the name, of any place or any geographic feature in New Zealand other than in administrative districts governed by territorial authorities. The Board's powers are backed by statutory authority. However the names it prescribes are not legislated, except in the recent cases of some Maori names.

The most striking development over the last few years in New Zealand relating to geographic naming has been the emergence of a strong interest in indigenous or Maori place names. This interest in Maori names has been catalyzed by the elevation of Maori to 'official language status' in New Zealand. This has already resulted in some changes to the Act, and the way the Board carries out its functions. The Board now has a clear mandate to collect original Maori place names and to encourage the use of original Maori place names on official maps, The Board has had to modify its research processes and its consultation processes to accommodate these changes. And this has been reflected in the composition of the Board itself, and in the resourcing of the Board.

The replacement of European names by Maori names has not proceeded without considerable controversy. In some instances there has been strong resistance to change. In other cases disputes have arisen within Maoridom reflecting territorial disputes, and disputes over associated naming rights. In some cases dual names have been introduced, either on a temporary or transitional basis, or in some cases on a more permanent basis. A further issue that has arisen is whether Maori names should be given legislative recognition – not currently given to other names.

These new pressures reflect significant changes in New Zealand society, and its attitudes. The new Act will reflect these changes, but will also ensure that the introduction of Maori names, and the replacement of European names by Maori names, proceeds in a rational manner. The success or otherwise of this initiative will be the subject of a future report.