

# Place Names Board of Estonia

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Discussion about geographical names  
authorities, 2011-09-06

# Basic facts

- Established 1997 by the Government on the basis of the *Place Names Act* (adopted 1996)
  - (there was a Place Names Board also in 1938-40)
  - present, 3rd Board was named in 2004 according to the revised Place Names Act (2003)
- Functions at the Ministry of the Interior (Min. of Regional Affairs)
- 15 members

# Type of authority

- The Board is mainly of a consultative nature; its opinions are sought:
  - if naming is to be decided by ministers or the Government
  - if advice is required by municipalities
  - in the case of naming disputes
- The Board may also approve official names to features that have not yet been named, if there is a request:
  - lists of lakes (2005) and islands (2008)
- Other functions:
  - legal aspects of naming
  - international cooperation on standardization

# Legal foundation

- The Place Names Board functions according to the *Place Names Act* (1996, 2nd version 2003)
- Main naming authorities in Estonia:
  - the 226 municipalities for naming all features within their area, incl. streets and natural features (but excluding populated places)
  - populated places are named by the Minister of Regional Affairs based on the municipalities' initiative
  - if a feature is situated within several municipalities or in the territorial waters, the authority to approve names rests with the Government or the appropriate minister

# Composition of the Board

- Mixed type, consisting of both the officials and the various experts:
  - 1) Ministry of the Interior
  - Ministry of Economy and Communications
  - Ministry of the Environment
  - Land Board
  - Heritage Board
  - Language Inspectorate
  - Tallinn City Administration (names committee)
  - 2) Institute of the Estonian Language
  - University of Tartu
  - Võru Institute
  - AS Regio (cartography)

# Work cycle

- Meetings usually twice a year + e-mail meetings for more urgent decision-making + working seminars
- Board members are not paid, except sometimes for specific tasks (compiling lists, etc.)
- Main work concerning standardization is done by participating institutions, esp.:
  - Ministry of the Interior (official documentation)
  - Land Board (register of addresses and geographical names, use of names in maps)
  - Institute of the Estonian Language (office for onomastic expertise)
  - etc.

# Authoritativeness

- Board's decisions are usually respected and applied, esp. if the opinion is sought by higher naming authorities (Government, ministers)
- There have been few naming disputes involving the Board:
  - a name of merging municipalities (Government followed the Board's recommendation, not the municipalities' application)
  - different opinions in the names of populated places (e.g. *Turbuneeme*)
- Sometimes official decisions are not reflected on road signs or are wrongly applied

# Problems

- Scarcity of resources available for standardization activities
- Normalization of addresses, incl. cadastral units
  - irregular spellings in the names of cadastral units (esp. the old orthography /before 1870's/)
  - conformity of cadastral names to address requirements (descriptive phrases, etc.)
- Use of non-official names in public documents, on signs, etc.



## More information

- Website of the Place Names Board (in English, also available in Estonian and Russian):
  - <http://www.eki.ee/knn/index2.htm>
  - includes also the English translation of the *Place Names Act*

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# PLACE NAMES BOARD OF ESTONIA

The Place Names Board of Estonia was formed by the Government of the Republic on the 17th of June 1997, members were newly appointed on July 1, 2004. It is a consultative body working at the Ministry of the Interior under the supervision of the Minister of Regional Affairs. The Board is guided by the [Place Names Act](#), adopted on 5 December, 2003 (succeeding an earlier Act of 1996) and entering into force on 1 July, 2004.

The Board, as prescribed by its statute:

- gives advice to authorities and officials approving place names
- forwards naming proposals to names authorities
- observes the use of official place names
- suggests corrections and supplements to legal acts dealing with place names
- gives statements on name matters to be decided by the Government
- approves the use of non-official place names on the Basic Map of Estonia
- advises authorities in the case of name disputes
- participates in the compilation and publication of gazetteers
- disseminates information on Estonia's place names and the principles of standardization both in Estonia and abroad

The Board has 15 members, named by the Government. They represent various government institutions (Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Economy and Communications, Language Board, Inspection for Antiquities Preservation), mapping institutions (Estonian Map Centre, Regio Map Publishers) as well as scientific and cultural institutions (Institute of Estonian Language, University of Tartu) and local government associations.