

The Place Names Act of NORWAY of 1990 with Amendments of 2005

I. Summary¹

In 1990 the Norwegian national assembly (Stortinget) passed an act on the standardization of place names (geographical names) in official use. Amendments to the Act were passed in 2005, taking effect from 1 August 2006 (<http://www.lovdato.no/all/hl-19900518-011.html>). The main provisions of the Place Name Act are:

- the written standardized form should be based on the traditional, local pronunciation, while at the same time keeping to current spelling rules;
- the public body which uses a place name should authorize the spelling (in most cases the Norwegian Mapping and Cadastre Authority);
- geographical names which have been determined by law should be used by other public bodies.

The law states that geographical names should be standardized according to the official form of Norwegian (Bokmål or Nynorsk) which corresponds best with the traditional local pronunciation. However, some dialectal traits as well as widely used old spellings may be retained. More detailed spelling rules are issued in the regulations of the law. Sámi and Kven (Finnish) geographical names should be standardized according to the spelling rules of those languages. During the standardization process local parties must be heard and their views shall be taken into consideration before the determination of a spelling. The Mapping and Cadastre Authority is responsible for standardizing most names on governmental level. The purpose of the Act is to safeguard geographical names as cultural monuments, to determine a spelling which is practical and useable and to promote knowledge and active use of the names. The Act shall secure the consideration of Sámi and Kven geographical names in accordance with national law and international treaties and conventions. The Act applies where any state, county or municipal body shall determine geographical names or the spelling thereof, or use them in the performance of its duties.

The Act also applies to the use of geographical names in companies that are fully publicly owned and in textbooks that are to be used in the schools. This Act does not apply to Svalbard, Jan Mayen and the Norwegian dependent territories, the Norwegian Continental Shelf and Norway's Economic Zone.

Positions have been created for two place name consultants and one secretary for each of the four university regions in the country, in addition to consultants and secretaries for Sámi and Kven (Finnish) geographical names in Norway (see Map 2). All names recognized under the Law must be reported to a central computerized register administrated by the Norwegian Mapping and Cadastre Authority. There is an appeal body to deal with complaints about the standardized forms of geographical names.

Different spellings of a name may be in official use at the same time, and the goal of establishing a single standardized form for each name is still a long way away.

II. The Place Names Act (as adopted 18 March 2005)²

¹ Cfr. <http://www.statkart.no/Toponymic+Guidelines.9UFRrM5Y.ips>,

(Wording in italics refers to changes from of the original Act)

§ 1. Purpose and extent

The purpose of this Act is to safeguard place-names as cultural monuments, to determine a spelling which is practical and useable and to promote knowledge and active use of the names.

The Act shall secure the consideration of Saami and Kvenish place-names in accordance with national law and international treaties and conventions.

The Act applies where any state, county or municipal body shall determine place-names or the spelling thereof, or use them in the performance of its duties. The Act also applies to the use of place-names in companies that are fully publicly owned and in textbooks that are to be used in the schools. The Ministry may in particular cases give provisions that the Act applies when companies that are not fully publicly owned are using place-names.

This Act does not apply to Svalbard, Jan Mayen and the Norwegian dependent territories, the Norwegian Continental Shelf and Norway's Economic Zone.

§ 2. Definitions

In this Act the following terms shall have the following meanings:

- a. *place-name [Norw. stadnamn], name of geographical points, lines and areas that may occur on maps*
- b. *farm name [Norw. gardsnamn], the name of the whole area to which one or more cadastral numbers are linked.*
- c. *single-holding name [Norw. bruksnamn], name of a property with its own single-holding number or leasehold number under a cadastral number.*
- d. *inherited place-name [Norw. nedervd stadnamn], place-name that has been handed down orally or in writing from earlier generations.*
- e. *local spoken form [Norw. lokal talemålsform], the form as it is pronounced in general use by people who have traditional ties to the place, either as residents or through annual industry.*
- f. *current orthographic principles [Norw. rettskrivingsprinsipp], general rules for the way in which sounds and combinations of sounds shall be reproduced in writing.*

§ 3. Protection of names and naming

As a general rule a place-name may not be adopted for use in a place where it does not traditionally belong when it

- a. *is in use as a family name and is protected, or*
- b. *is in any other manner a distinctive name,*
- c. *ought to be protected on other grounds*

² For the full text of this document see <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/ungegnlistdoc.htm>
(23 2006 WP 86 Revision of the Norwegian Place-Names Act Norway, submitted. by B. Helleland & T. Larsen)

An inherited place-name may not be replaced by a name without tradition in the place unless particular grounds so indicate.

§ 4. Spelling rules

Unless otherwise provided by this Act, for the determination of the spelling the point of departure shall be *the inherited local spoken form of the name*. The spelling shall follow current orthographic principles for Norwegian and Saami. For *Kvenish* place-names the spelling shall follow current orthographic principles in Finnish. *Finnish place-names in Eastern Norway may be adjusted to orthographic principles of Norwegian.*

Where the same name has been used of different name-bearers in the same place, the spelling in its primary function shall be indicative of its spelling in its other functions. Two or more written forms of the same name for the same name-bearer may be laid down as equally valid if one or more of the following conditions are satisfied:

- a. there are several pronunciation variants of the name because the locality has great geographical extent, or lies in a dialectical or administrative boundary area*
- b. two or several written forms of the name are well established by tradition*
- c. there is strong local interest in two or more of the forms*

§ 5. Determination of the spelling

Cases relating to the spelling of place-names may be taken up by:

- a. A public body and any other such persons as are mentioned in *the third paragraph of § 1*.
- b. An owner or lessee when the single-holding name comes under *the second paragraph of § 8*.
- c. A local organisation with a particular tie to a place-name.
- d. The name consultants where place-names in their area are concerned.

The municipal authority passes resolutions on the spelling of official addresses and of names of centres of population, farm groups, municipal streets, roads, marketplaces, urban districts, residential areas, plants etc. The county council passes resolutions on the spelling of names of county plants etc.

The Norwegian Mapping and Cadastre Authority passes resolutions on the spelling of other place-names *unless otherwise provided by statute or regulations. It may be passed collective resolutions on the spelling of parts of a name within a single administrative area.*

Where there is any doubt about who shall lay down the spelling of a place-name in pursuance of these rules, the matter may be submitted to the Ministry for decision.

§ 6. Further provisions on procedure

When a name case has been taken up with the decision-making body, the matter shall be made known to those who have a right to make statements. An owner or lessee has the right to make a statement in cases applying to single-holding names. An owner or lessee has also the right to make a statement in cases applying to farm names, when the spelling of the

farm name shall serve as a pattern for the spelling of the single-holding name. The views of the owner shall be ascribed particular weight. Municipal authorities have a right to express their views when the decision shall be made by a body other than the municipal authority itself. County authorities have a right to express their views in cases that include more than one municipal authority area. Local organisations have a right to express their views in cases concerning any place-name in respect of which the organisation has a particular tie. Before any decision on spelling is made, the name consultants shall give advice on the spelling.

The case documents relating to farm names and names of single holdings shall be sent direct to an owner or lessee. Cases relating to Saami or Kvenish place-names shall also be sent to local organizations that have special interest in the case. In addition the case shall be announced in no fewer than 2 newspapers that are generally read locally, or be made known in any other appropriate manner.

A name case shall be taken up simultaneously for parallel names in Norwegian, Saami or Kvenish. Unless otherwise provided by statute or in pursuance thereof, the provisions of Chapters IV, V and VIII of the Public Administration Act do not apply to cases under the Place-Names Act.

§ 7. Reconsideration

A case may be taken up again by any such persons as are mentioned in § 5 a-d if new information is being provided. A new decision shall be made pursuant to the provisions of this Act.

§ 8. Particular provisions as to the farm names and names of single holdings

An owner or lessee may determine the name of his or her own holding. Nevertheless an owner or lessee is not entitled to change or replace the name of any single holding that comes under the second paragraph of this section, unless special grounds so indicate.

The spelling of farm names and single-holding name which linguistically and geographically coincides with inherited place-names, or with other place-names which in pursuance of the provisions of this Act or of other Acts and regulations shall be used by the public authorities, shall be determined in accordance with the provisions of §§ 4 and 6.

Decisions on the spelling of farm names shall as a main rule be guiding for the spelling of names of single holdings which are coinciding with the farm name, or when the farm name is a part of the name of the single holding.

For other names of single holdings the owner or lessee determines the spelling.

§ 9. Use of place-names

When the spelling of a place-name has been determined under this Act and entered in the register of place-names, the spelling shall be used by those who are mentioned in the third paragraph of § 1.

Saami and Kvenish place-names that are used among people who are permanently resident in the place or have trading ties to the place shall normally be used by the public authorities on maps and signboards and in registers etc. together with any Norwegian name.

Public bodies and such other persons as mentioned in the third paragraph of § 1 shall continue to use the written forms that are in public use when the Act comes into force until such time as any decision to amend is made.

§ 10. Appeal

There is a right of appeal against a decision on spelling for any person who pursuant to the first paragraph, a–c, of § 5 is entitled to take up cases concerning the spelling of place-names. Official bodies have the right of appeal only in cases relating to names which they are using in service. This right of appeal also applies to decisions made by municipal and county authorities. *Grounds for an appeal shall be given.* There is no appeal against decisions made by the King and the Stortinget. *Incorrect application or lacking use of place-names may in accordance with § 9 be appealed to a superior ministry. Appeals against lacking decisions may be directed to the appeal board.*

Appeals against decisions other than those that are made by a ministry shall be dealt with by an appeal board appointed by the King. In appeal cases that involve matters of principle, the appeal board may give the Language Council, *the Saami Assembly* and the Ministry leave to express their views.

Any ministry that makes decisions on spelling has a duty to review the case on appeal. In such cases the Ministry shall seek advice from the appeal board.

For the preparation of an appeal case the provisions of § 6 apply. Otherwise the provisions of Chapter VI of the Public Administration Act apply.

§ 11. Place-name consultants (now § 9)

The Ministry appoints place-name consultants for Norwegian and *Kvenish* place-names. *The Saami Assembly appoints place-name consultants for Saami place-names.*

The name consultants shall provide guidance and advice on the spelling of place-names.

§ 12. Register of place-names

A central register of place-names shall be kept. Notice of all written forms that have been finally determined shall be given to the register of place-names by the body that has made the decision.

The information in the register is public.

§ 13. Regulations and exceptions

The Ministry may issue regulations for the supplementation and implementation of this Act.

§ 14. Implementation

This Act is will be implemented when the King so decides.