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**Item 7 (a) of the provisional agenda**

**National and international standardization of geographical names: Names collection, office treatment, national authorities, features beyond a single sovereignty and international cooperation**

## **Canada, a bilingual country, as reflected in its toponymy**

Submitted by Canada\*\*

Summary:

In Canada, the Official Languages Act confers on French and English the status of official languages of the country. The Act provides for guarantees relating to the right of any member of the public to communicate with, and to receive available services from, any institution of the Parliament or Government of Canada in either official language. In response to the requirements of this Act, guidelines have been established on the linguistic treatment of Canadian toponyms in the documents, topographic maps and nautical charts of the Federal Government. These guidelines apply only to the Federal Government, not to the provincial and territorial governments, nor to the general Canadian population.

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\*\* Prepared by Diane Lacasse, Geographical Names Board of Canada Secretariat, Natural Resources Canada

## ***Official Languages Act in Canada***

2019 marks the 50th anniversary of the first *Official Languages Act*, which confers on French and English the status of official languages of Canada. Canadian linguistic duality is based on the notion of two founding peoples of Canada, those of British and French origins. The purpose of this Act was to arrive at equality between the two communities within the country.

In 1982, an important step in language reform was taken. The Government of Canada repatriated its Constitution from Great Britain and attached to it the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, which confirms the equality of English and French in Canada and provides guarantees as to the right of the public to use either language to communicate with, or receive services from institutions of Parliament and the Government of Canada.

The following year, the Treasury Board of Canada issued Circular No. 1983-58 containing guidelines regarding the linguistic treatment of Canadian geographical names on federal maps and in federal documents. These guidelines are based on the provisions of the *Official Languages Act* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Canadian government policy must ensure that members of both official language communities are consistently served when using federal government maps and in federal documents. The toponymy used on these maps and documents is also one of the elements that contributes to creating the image of a Canada where both official language communities share a common heritage.

The Treasury Board Circular also implemented a policy to require the use of the official form of geographical names. Federal departments responsible for naming entities such as military bases, Indian reserves, national parks and national historic sites under federal jurisdiction must formalize the names of these entities in both languages. In addition, many underwater features located in Canadian waters, as well as in international waters bordering Canada, have an approved name in both English and French.

The Circular also includes a list of names of 75 features of pan-Canadian significance approved in English and French for use on federal maps and in federal documents. The entities on this list have names that are well known in both languages. This list includes both the major geographical features within Canada (for example the St. Lawrence River/Fleuve Saint-Laurent and Georgian Bay/Baie Georgienne) and those of national historical interest (for example Rainy River/Rivière à la Pluie and Lake Nipigon/Lac Nipigon). These names are considered part of Canada's national heritage.

Since 2005, the Geographical Names Board of Canada has been responsible for updating the list of names of pan-Canadian significance. However, the purpose and scope of the policy have remained, in that these names continue to be consistently displayed on Canadian federal government documents and maps.

### **Translation rules for geographical names on Canadian federal government maps and texts**

In Canada, in general, geographical names are official only in one language. The official form of geographical names is that adopted by the federal, provincial or territorial authorities having jurisdiction over the territory in question. The names of cities, towns, villages and

municipalities that have been incorporated by the provinces or territories have a legal status that must be recognized. For natural entities, other than names of pan-Canadian significance, the official form of their name is required. Names of pan-Canadian significance must appear in both official languages on bilingual maps and in the appropriate language on the English and French versions of a map.

In text documents, unlike maps, it is permitted to translate the generic portion of geographical feature names, i.e. the element that indicates the nature of the feature (e.g., the word *Lac* in Lac Castor, or the word *Mount* in Mount White). However, we cannot translate the specific of a name, i.e. the element specific to the entity (the words *Castor* and *White* in the previous examples). The names of inhabited places keep their official form, whatever the language of the text.

These rules apply to the translation of toponyms from English or French only and not to toponyms from another language, such as Indigenous languages. Indeed, the toponyms of Indigenous languages are not translated, regardless of the language of the documents in which they appear.

The need to translate certain geographical names applies only to the federal government and not to provincial and territorial governments or to the general population.

### **The case of certain Canadian provinces and territories**

In some circumstances, provincial and territorial authorities allow the use of unofficial geographical names. Where there is a French variant for an official English name, this variant is preferred to any other unofficial French form of the toponym.

For example, in Ontario, ‘alternate’ names can be used. Geographical names in French, confirmed as firmly established and in common local use, have received approval from the Ontario Geographic Names Board as official alternate names. The Ontario Geographic Names Board provides and publishes a French translated name for each non-French toponym in the province.

Manitoba also recognizes the use of certain geographical names in both of Canada's official languages within designated areas that serve Francophone communities. These names are authorized for use on bilingual maps, signage, and other documents related to designated areas serving French-speaking communities.

New Brunswick, the only officially bilingual province in Canada, recognizes a French equivalent to all English-language geographic feature names in its territory.

In the Northwest Territories, the names of parks under territorial jurisdiction have an unofficial French variant in territorial government documents.

In the Yukon, the translation of the generic terms in French texts is accepted.

### **Conclusion**

The rules of toponym translation were put in place so that the Government of Canada can serve its citizens in the official language of their choice. They do not dictate to Canadians how to write place names in their publications.

These rules are not taught in schools and are not well known by the general population. They are therefore not applied. For example, in an English-language newspaper, we may read: "*The provincial ministers of finance met in Quebec City yesterday*" when the official name of the city is Québec, and not Quebec City. A French-language newspaper could read "*Une tempête a soufflé sur Saint-Jean (Terre-Neuve)*" while the official name of the capital of Newfoundland and Labrador is St. John's.

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