

30 March 2023

English

**United Nations Group of Experts on
Geographical Names**

2023 session

New York, 1 – 5 May 2023

Item 5 (a) of the provisional agenda*

Cooperation and liaison with other organizations: International Organizations

Report of the International Hydrographic Organization

Submitted by the Liaison Officer, IHO**

* GEGN.2/2023/1

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Note: The views expressed in this report are the author's and not necessarily those of the U.S. Government.

Report of the International Hydrographic Organization

This is a brief report on the activities of the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) in relation to geographical names and related topics.

I. Undersea feature names

The IHO and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO jointly oversee the work of the Sub-Committee on Undersea Feature Names (SCUFN) of GEBCO¹. Reports of SCUFN meetings, as well as any new editions of the outcome products issued under SCUFN responsibility, are provided to the UNGEGN Chair/Secretary on a regular basis, in accordance with the relevant provision of the SCUFN Terms of Reference (ToRs): “*Maintain close liaison with the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names, the focal point of which shall be invitations to attend meetings of the Sub-Committee, and with international or national authorities concerned with the naming of undersea features.*” The [IHO-IOC Publication B-6, Edition 4.2.0, October 2019](#), English/French version, provides the international standards (Guidelines, Proposal Form and Terminology) for the naming of undersea feature names.

SCUFN is tasked with selecting the names to be used in the products of the IHO-IOC General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans (GEBCO) project and on international nautical charts. These names, widely used in scientific publications also, are made available in the on-line GEBCO Gazetteer of Undersea Features Names (www.gebco.net → Data and products → Undersea feature names → view and download). SCUFN-related documents are available from the dedicated GEBCO website (www.gebco.net) and the IHO website (www.iho.int). The SCUFN is chaired (Acting) by Dr Yasuhiko OHARA, Hydrographic and Oceanographic Department of Japan (JHOD), and comprises 12 members nominated by the IHO (six) and the IOC (six). The Sub-Committee’s secretariat is provided by the Secretariat of the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) in Monaco. The Sub-Committee typically meets once a year, but the COVID pandemic impacted its operations. No IHO report was submitted to the second session (2021) of UNGEGN. Since the first session of UNGEGN in May 2019, SCUFN has undertaken the following activities:

- 1 In 2020, the 33rd meeting of SCUFN was held virtually on 9-10 November. In addition to the full SCUFN-33 Summary Report, the IHO Secretariat’s Bulletin Report may be obtained at: <https://iho.int/en/scufn33-2020> (Post Meeting Documents)
- 2 In 2021, the 34th meeting of SCUFN comprised three virtual sessions held 7 January, 7 June, and 16-17 November. In addition to the full SCUFN-34 Summary Report, the IHO Secretariat’s Bulletin Report may be obtained at: <https://iho.int/en/scufn34-2021> (Post Meeting Documents)
- 3 In 2022, the 35th meeting of SCUFN comprised one hybrid meeting and one in-person meeting. In addition to the full SCUFN-35 Summary Report, the IHO Secretariat’s Bulletin Report may be obtained at: <https://iho.int/en/scufn35-2022> (Post Meeting Documents). This last Bulletin Report is provided in Annex for ease of convenience.
- 4 The 36th meeting of SCUFN is scheduled to be held from 6-10 November 2023 in Wollongong, Australia.

¹ General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans, a joint IHO-IOC project.

II. S-130 Project Team

The Second IHO Assembly (A-2) (2020) approved the set of proposals from the Secretary-General in his report on the informal consultation process for the future of IHO S-23 *Limits of Oceans and Seas*, a well-known publication frozen in its 3rd Edition since 1953. As part of the proposal approved at A-2, it was agreed to develop a new product specification and dataset to meet modern GIS needs: the S-130 *Polygonal Demarcations of Global Sea Areas*. An S-130 Project Team (PT) has been established under the authority of the IHO Hydrographic Services and Standards Committee (HSSC). The product specification will be S-100 *Universal Hydrographic Data Model* conformant and the dataset will use a system of unique numerical identifiers only. The scope of the work of the PT is strictly limited to technical issues only. More information on the work of the S-130 PT is available here: <https://iho.int/en/s-130-pt>.

III. Southern Ocean

The Third IHO Assembly (A-3) (2023) is currently being held in Monaco (2-5 May 2023). As part of the proposals to be considered by the IHO Member States, there is a proposal for a new IHO Resolution on the *Recognition of the Southern Ocean* since this global sea area is not listed in S-23 while this name is largely used by geographers and the scientific community. This proposal is available here: [link](#). The outcome of the discussions and decisions will be reported at the next Session of UNGEGN.

IV. The IHO will continue cooperating with the UNGEGN and the UNGGIM in order to support any actions that may be required to further enhance safety at sea and the protection of the marine environment with geospatial maritime information.

Points for discussion

The Group of Experts is invited to:

- (a) Take note of the report of the IHO;
- (b) Encourage proposals of undersea feature names to IHO/IOC SCUFN; and
- (c) Promote the work of undersea feature standardization within the programme of work of national names authorities.

**35th Meeting of the IHO-IOC GEBCO Sub-Committee on Undersea Feature Names (SCUFN),
Part 1 - IOC, UNESCO, Paris (hybrid), 14 – 18 March 2022;
Part 2 – IHO Secretariat, Monaco (in-person), 28 November – 2 December 2022**

Contribution to the IHO Work Programme 2022

Task 3.6.1 Organize, prepare and report annual meetings of ... associated bodies including...SCUFN

1. At the end of their previous virtual meeting in November 2021 (SCUFN34 VTC03) SCUFN agreed to arrange the 35th meeting of the IHO-IOC GEBCO Sub-Committee on Undersea Feature Names (SCUFN) in 2022, due to the backlog of proposals and the uncertainties with regard to the possibility of having the next meeting early 2022 in St. Petersburg, Russian Federation, exceptionally into two parts:
 - Part 1 – hosted by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (IOC), at their headquarters in Paris (hybrid format), from 14 to 18 March 2022;
 - Part 2 – hosted by the IHO Secretariat in Monaco (in-person format), from 28 November to 2 December 2022.
2. The meetings were chaired by Dr Hyun-Chul Han (IOC Representative) from the Korean Institute of Geoscience and Mineral Resources (KIGAM – Republic of Korea). Assistant Director Yves Guillam (SCUFN Secretary) represented the IHO Secretariat. Technical support for running the meetings was provided by the IHO staff (Mr Rémy Roquefort)¹, and the Project Officer (Mr Insung Park) seconded to the IHO by the Republic of Korea.
3. - Part 1 was attended by about 51 registered participants (18 in-person), with 10 SCUFN Members out of 12 (5 in-person). Observers, and subject matter experts from, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Republic of Korea, United States of America, Viet Nam, Marine Regions (also Chair of the S-130 Project Team) and Mr Toshihiko Chiba from the Marine Policy and Regional Coordination Section of the IOC also participated in this Part 1.
4. - Part 2 was attended by about 24 registered participants, with 8 SCUFN Members out of 12 and observers or subject matter experts from China, Türkiye, Japan, Philippines, United States of America, and Viet Nam, the US Advisory Committee on Undersea Feature Names (ACUF) and Marine Region.
5. SCUFN had a significant number of naming proposals to consider in 2022. Most of them were pending proposals from previous meetings, which were re-submitted after correction or the provision of complementary data and information. Reaching a total number of 334, and in chronological order of reception by the Secretariat, the breakdown of these proposals was: Indonesia (10), USA (88)², Philippines (12+9), Germany (15), Republic of Korea (1), China (11+23+60), New Zealand (9), Viet Nam (67), Malaysia (11), Japan (14), and Brazil (4).
6. With a majority of naming proposals of features located in the South China Sea (SCS), both meetings were affected by strong statements from the representatives of the Coastal States, claiming priority for naming features within the limits of their EEZ, and ECS... most of these limits being disputed by others. The participants were reminded by the Secretary that in

¹ For one day in Paris.

² From Caladan Oceanic.

accordance with clause I.A of B-6, the international recognition of naming proposals by SCUFN was legitimate as long as the features were located outside the external limits of the territorial sea.

7. Since 2014, many naming proposals, although technically reviewed and accepted by SCUFN in general, have therefore been kept as “pending” in application of the clause D.III in Publication B-63 by which proposers are invited to engage in mutual consultation for features located in mutual areas of interest. It turned out that there was at least an implicit consensus by the interested parties not to apply this clause since it is not applicable when limits are precisely disputed. These pending proposals are stored for two years only in the SCUFN archive and the GEBCO Gazetteer database, then deleted if the issue is not solved. In other words, all efforts for improving marine knowledge and GEBCO products are wiped out again if now consensus between the regional parties affected cant be reached!
8. As a consequence, some participants suggested to apply the SCUFN Rule of Procedure 2.10 (ROP 2.10) for the SCS (undersea feature name proposals that are politically sensitive are not considered). SCUFN agreed that it was a radical option that would simplify SCUFN work for sure, but would certainly flag the full SCS as a “no-go” area for feature naming, creating a precedence in the future for some other disputed areas in the world.
9. In order to avoid this side effect, and after considerable discussions during Part 1, a vote (secret ballot) on the applicability of ROP 2.10 was arranged⁴ and SCUFN Members voted almost unanimously for going ahead with the technical review of the naming proposals located in the SCS.
10. Most of the proposals were accepted from a technical point of view, but also challenged by a coastal State requesting the application of clause I.D of B-6, since they had already named them (principle of anteriority). Since it was unclear whether these names were already recognized by the scientific community, a sub-group was set up at Part 1 to clarify the criteria by which this principle of anteriority should be used (peer-review international scientific publications for instance). The setting up of this sub-group, supported by approved TORs, was not completed at the start of Part 2, since the members did not reach a consensus in the drafting process of the TORs.
11. To avoid a second postponement of final decisions affecting all the pre-technically-accepted names made at Part 1, SCUFN agreed at the beginning of Part 2:
 - on the main objective of the meeting, being the resumption of the entire backlog, otherwise it would not be possible to accept new proposals in 2023 and onwards;
 - on the decision-making process, which was in good spirit, to only use the Rules of Procedure and Guidelines in force at the beginning of the meeting, providing the acceptance of their intrinsic uncertainties.
12. Despite numerous statements again, a consensus based on the principle of equal treatment of the proposals wherever the feature is located was reached to move forward.

³ Standardization of Undersea Feature Names – Guidelines.

⁴ In application of SCUFN ROP 2.9.

13. Out of 334 proposals, 263 names were finally ACCEPTED⁵, thanks also to the work achieved by correspondence by SCUFN Members and the Secretariat, between Part 1 and Part 2. Some were rejected for technical reasons and very few still require some mutual consultation due to conflicting naming proposals affecting the same feature: for these cases, in a good will spirit, SCUFN suggested to the proposers to submit a joint proposal at the next meeting.
14. Despite this substantial progress this does not mean that the road is clear for future proposals. One participant argued that the implicit principle “first come-first served basis” provided a privilege to the nations and organizations who support the activities of their SCUFN Members as they know before all, what and where is submitted for being reviewed. The Secretary reported on the procedure to inform the coastal States who are listed with a “*” in the SCUFN List of Naming Authorities maintained by the Secretariat on the SCUFN webpage. He also invited SCUFN Members not to encourage implicitly and unconsciously some sort of surveying-undersea feature naming race, as the consequences for SCUFN would become totally unmanageable.
15. SCUFN also made significant progress on some internal corporate matters and dilemma (future of the Cookbook on Generic Terms, Repository of Typical Cases for decision-making, horizontal strategy for naming features and bathymetric grid resolution, open initial discussion on the possible wave(s) of naming proposals and their impact on SCUFN when automated feature detection tools become robust, naming strategies and minor features, spelling or generic term identified errors in already-named features and their propagation in scientific publications in the future if not modified by SCUFN,...). The work by correspondence was also regulated (no silence procedure, ROP 2.9 applies).
16. At the end, the Chair thanked Dr Marie-Françoise Lalancette (IHO branch) for her contribution and welcomed the incoming Members (Dr Oke Dwiyananda and Dr Hyun Suk Lee). The Vice-Chair and Secretary thanked Dr Han, stepping down from his Chair position, for his long commitment and expertise in SCUFN since 2009 and his outstanding achievements as Chair since 2018. The Chair thanked the IHO staff for their excellent support and hospitality during the week, including for the antigenic self-tests. Dr Ohara, Vice-Chair, will be Acting Chair until the SCUFN-36 meeting included in 2023. The Acting Chair thanked Australia for their offer to host the next meeting in November 2023.

⁵ And/or APPROVED for those names already pre-ACCEPTED in March 2022 at Part 1.