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English

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

**2023 session**

New York, 1 – 5 May 2023

**Item 4(a) of the provisional agenda \***

**Reports: Governments on the situation in their countries  
and on the progress made in the standardization of  
geographical names**

**Report of New Zealand**

Submitted by New Zealand \*\*

Summary:

The 2023 report of New Zealand summarizes the geographic names standardization work of the national naming authority, the New Zealand Geographic Board Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa,<sup>1</sup> since the second session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, held in 2021. The report covers the implementation of outreach and engagement initiatives, upgrades to the gazetteer system, the creation of online proposal forms, the launch of a new brand, upgrades to the website and content, new map versions of original Māori geographic names, statistics on geographic name decisions, controversial decisions, responses to the Government's expectations and initiatives to revitalize the Māori language including the consideration of alternative Māori names for cities and towns, new policies, making geographic names official through a streamlined process, international contributions, and meeting Treaty of Waitangi commitments.

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\* GEGN.2/2023/1

\*\* Prepared by Wendy Shaw, Secretary, New Zealand Geographic Board Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa

## Background

New Zealand's geographic naming authority was established nearly a century ago, starting as an Honorary Geographic Board of New Zealand in 1924, then moving to have a stronger legislative mandate under a 1946 Act, which was reviewed in 2008. A minor amendment followed in 2012 and further minor consistency updates will be made later in 2023. See:

- legislation [here](#)<sup>2</sup>.
- an overview of the Board's work [here](#)<sup>3</sup>
- the Board's Strategic Plan 2020-2025 [here](#)<sup>4</sup> (see goals in image below)
- the Board's Annual Report 2021/2022 [here](#)<sup>5</sup>
- standards for each of the Board's five main naming responsibilities [here](#) along with other policies, requirements and protocols.

The Board's current strategic priorities are to:

- officially name all relevant and appropriate places, including cities, towns, suburbs and localities in New Zealand
- officially name places in New Zealand's area of interest in Antarctica and undersea regions
- contribute to, influence and apply international good practice for standardised and consistent geographic naming
- engage with Māori communities and restore original Māori geographic names
- provide advice to support the cultural redress of Treaty of Waitangi settlement geographic names
- increasingly engage with the public through an online presence
- partner with organisations and media (including Māori media) to promote the use and understanding of geographic names
- publish documents in Māori and English to reach a broader audience
- work closely with Toitū Te Whenua Land Information New Zealand to achieve all four strategic goals.

### Our outcomes

To secure and celebrate New Zealand's unique identity through place names.

We enable meaningful connections between people, places and language through these goals:



#### Naming places

We officially name features and places so that people can effectively communicate information about location and preserve New Zealand's heritage and culture



#### Outreach

We make information including stories about place names readily available



#### Using official names

Organisations use official names so that people use them in everyday life



#### Improving capability and processes

We continuously improve our capability and processes to achieve our goals and objectives

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2008/0030/30.0/DLM1065412.html>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.lin.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2022-12/a3\\_nzgb\\_20220217-v2.pdf](https://www.lin.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2022-12/a3_nzgb_20220217-v2.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.lin.govt.nz/resources/strategy/new-zealand-geographic-board-strategy-2020-2025>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.lin.govt.nz/resources/annual-report/new-zealand-geographic-board-annual-report-202122>

## Outreach

The Board has made good progress with its strategic goals for outreach and engagement. Two secondments in 2021 from within Toitū Te Whenua LINZ helped to determine priorities, and in late January 2022 a Customer Relationship Manager was appointed for six months. The main focus has been to:

- develop an engagement plan using a dashboard to highlight key deliverables and progress
- develop a stakeholder plan to acknowledge and recognise who the Board engages with
- refresh the Board's pages on the Toitū Te Whenua LINZ website, which went live in September 2022. This included navigation and content which was re-designed in at the end of 2021 to make it easier for users to find what they want
- update the Board's existing collateral with the new logo and branding (such as email signatures and PowerPoint templates), launched in September 2022 when the new Toitū Te Whenua LINZ website went live
- engage with media spotlights, such as Radio New Zealand's geographic names podcasts. Geographic name discussions continue to be reported widely in the media, primarily relating to Māori names.

The Board has developed an implementation plan for its centenary in 2024, which will cover a range of connected celebratory and commemorative activities. The activities are designed to:

- celebrate New Zealand's unique cultural and national identity through geographic names
- celebrate the importance of geographic names, including their history, origin and meaning with everyday New Zealanders
- raise awareness of and profile the Board's work and resources
- commemorate 100 years of official geographic naming
- recognise the Board's partners, stakeholders and former Board members.

The key goals of the Board's outreach programme are to increase understanding of the geographic naming process and share information about geographic names. The centenary and planned activities are an opportunity to reach more New Zealanders and broaden understanding. By the end of the centenary period, it is hoped that more New Zealanders will:

- participate in the official geographic naming process
- understand the Board's role in making geographic names official
- use the Board's resources and tools.

Activities in 2024 may include (depending on effort, cost and reward): a podcast series, *Gazetteer* upgrade (refresh), repackaging virtual school field trips<sup>6</sup>, an essay competition, Parliamentary breakfast, centenary brand and webpage, media releases/opinion editorials, centenary social media campaign, centenary conference/stakeholder presentation, commemorative collateral, refreshed/new online publications: an *Oral History Atlas* and *Toponymic Guidelines*, and a question in Parliament.

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<sup>6</sup> [Our place names: The Maniapoto story](#) will be available from 15 May 2023.

## Gazetteer system

The Board's legislation requires it to maintain a publicly available record known as the *New Zealand Gazetteer of Official Geographic Names*. The Board recognises the importance of managing an authoritative list of geographic names and making them freely available, accessible and reusable to everyone.

The main *Gazetteer* activities have been data cleansing, increasing people's use and re-use, upgrading the platform (new servers for backup, production, disaster recovery and testing, and a new service and hosting support agreement with an external provider to ensure security, stability and future proofing), penetration testing (revealing four low and non-urgent risks in infrastructure and applications to be addressed later this year subject to funding) and adding a pronunciation audio for Māori geographic names.

Data cleansing has included:

- changing dual name formats from brackets to the forward slash (solidus) format
- adding macrons to official Māori geographic names
- adding entries from Reed's *Place Names of New Zealand* to the History/Origin/Meaning field (more than 7,000 names)
- putting in place a contract to research and publish the history/origin/meaning for 1,000 entries.

Use of the online *Gazetteer* has been around 8% lower than in past years. However, access to the web feature service increased by over 200% last year compared with the previous year. This suggests more users are realising the benefits of using real time *Gazetteer* data within their systems.

One of the Board's strategic objectives is to provide pronunciation of Māori geographic names in the *Gazetteer*. The Board engaged an expert translator and linguist to make audio files for official Māori geographic names that have had their orthography confirmed. Recording began in August 2022 and continued in February/March 2023. The *Gazetteer* backend database was updated to provide an audio function for pronunciation. This capability will mark the delivery of another important aspect of Māori geographic names – that they contribute to the Government's goals for Māori language revitalisation. There are now currently over 2,000 Māori names with audio in the *Gazetteer*. The Board expects to complete another 6,000 by mid-2024. See examples:

- Aoraki/Mount Cook <https://gazetteer.linz.govt.nz/place/7297>
- Kaikōura <https://gazetteer.linz.govt.nz/place/24119>
- Te Oneroa-a-Tōhē / Ninety Mile Beach <https://gazetteer.linz.govt.nz/place/55202>
- Cape Reinga / Te Rerenga Wairua <https://gazetteer.linz.govt.nz/place/54933>
- Rotorua <https://gazetteer.linz.govt.nz/place/38867>

## Online proposal forms

In early 2022 the Board made an [online form](#)<sup>7</sup> available for proposing geographic names in New Zealand, undersea and Antarctica. This makes it easier for people to submit their proposals. Hardcopy proposals can still be submitted. Proposers started using the online forms in early 2022. Online proposals forms are yet to be developed for reserves, districts/regions and Treaty names.

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<sup>7</sup> [https://landinformationnz.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_cNKctPDqiCNuTpY](https://landinformationnz.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cNKctPDqiCNuTpY)

## New brand

As noted in the Outreach heading above, the Board launched a new logo and branding in 2022.



The icon was created to capture the essence of what Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa New Zealand Geographic Board does as the independent statutory body and legal authority on New Zealand geographic names.

The icon combines a location marker and the notion of speech marks with the koru, a symbol of new beginnings, growth and harmony, a double koru or spiral, a symbol of growing together and the Hei Matau – the fishhook of Māui, a symbol of abundance, strength and determination. Together they merge to form a stylised map of New Zealand.



## Website upgrade and content refresh

The refreshed Toitū Te Whenua Land Information New Zealand [website](https://www.linz.govt.nz/)<sup>8</sup> was launched in September 2022. The Board's Secretariat undertook significant content rewrites to simplify the information. The refreshed website should make it easier for people to find information about New Zealand's whenua (land), moana (sea) and arawai (waterways).

A business case for the Board to have its own website is currently on hold due to budget constraints. Options are being explored for other communication channels to deliver the Board's outreach strategy in a consistent way.

## New maps of original Māori geographic names

In 1995 the Board published the very popular poster style maps *Te Ika a Māui, The Land and its People circa 1840* and *Te Wai Pounamu, The Land and its People circa 1840*. With a considerable volume of additional restored and corrected Māori geographic names resulting from Tiriti o Waitangi<sup>9</sup> claim settlements over the past three decades, the Board, through its Komiti Taunahatanga Māori (Māori Names Committee), decided it was time for new versions. The two new maps, which were printed in April 2023, are renamed *Tangata Whenua Place Names – Te Ika-a-Māui* and *Tangata Whenua Place Names – Te Waipounamu*.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.linz.govt.nz/>

<sup>9</sup> Founding document of New Zealand from 1840 agreeing on principles, governance and sovereignty between Māori and the British Crown

The process to successfully deliver these maps was lengthy – over two years. An important part of the process was to engage directly with appropriate Māori groups on the correct geographic names and their meanings. The Board will distribute the maps to all schools and marae (communal meeting house) by mid-2023. They will offer a significant resource for New Zealand’s new history curriculum launched in 2023.

For full details of the new editions of the maps see the report from New Zealand under Agenda Item 12 GEGN.2/2023/34/CRP.34.

## Statistics on geographic names

Statistics on official and unofficial geographic names:

	2019/20		2020/21		2021/22	
<b>Total place names in the Gazetteer</b>	<b>52,850</b>		<b>53,550</b>		<b>53,700</b>	
Official geographic names	18,800	36%	21,000	39%	22,050	41%
Unofficial recorded geographic names	30,850	58%	29,300	55%	28,300	53%
Unofficial (replaced, discontinued, collected, original Māori names)	3,200	6%	3,250	6%	3,350	6%

In the 2021/22 financial year the Board made 3,153 geographic name decisions, noting that not all were gazetted as official:

Update <i>Gazetteer</i>	186
Decline	7
Note	54
Defer	1,634
Propose	15
Approve as official	1,012
Decline to approve as official	85
Board final decision	6
Report to Minister for Land Information	14
Undersea	18
Advise Undersea	4
Antarctica	1
Crown protected area	2
Corrigenda, amendments	102
Treaty	7
Discontinue	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,153</b>

## Controversial decisions

**The locality of Maxwell changed to Pākaraka** – this change in 2022 addressed a long-standing Treaty grievance for Ngāti Maika. In 1868 a government militia led by George Maxwell fired on a group of unarmed Māori children, attacked them with sabres and killed two boys. It was an unprovoked attack. The area was named ‘Maxwelltown’ in 1870 shortly after his death, and officially changed to Maxwell in 1927. The original Māori name, Pākaraka relates to the abundance of karaka trees in the area.

**Russell to Kororāreka** (the Board will consider submissions in June 2023) – a small township in the Bay of Islands which has a special place in New Zealand’s history. It was one of the first places where Europeans settled and was well known as Kororāreka until the early 1840s. To this day the township is still known as Kororāreka by many in the community.

**New names for Auckland railway stations** were made official in March 2023. Six of the seven railway stations, two in south Auckland and four in central Auckland, were gifted by mana whenua iwi<sup>10</sup> forums. The seventh, Drury Railway Station in south Auckland, recognises the name of the place being serviced by the new station. The new names will help connect the railway stations to the local history of the areas they serve and re-establish the cultural connection and identity when used by the public.

## Compliance

The requirement to use official geographic names in all official documents including road signs, official maps and charts, in scientific publications and information for tourists is set out in [section 32 of the Act](#).

While aiming to be proactive so that people are aware of their obligations to use official geographic names, the Board is mindful of cost. Therefore, updating road signs, promotional material, maps, databases, etc can be done over time and in the course of usual maintenance.

The Board finds these strategies to be effective for communicating the need to use New Zealand’s official geographic names:

- building relationships so that the information gets to the right people
- communicating the relevance of using official geographic names
- speaking to groups and participating in media interviews, podcasts and webinars
- ensuring people are aware that place name data is easily accessible and freely available for reuse
- offering assistance
- seeking feedback on ways to improve communication.

The Board has been engaging with several organisations who are not using official geographic names properly, and often not including macrons.

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<sup>10</sup> Mana whenua – people with authority over land/territory. Iwi – tribal group

## Revitalising the Māori language

### Māori names for cities and towns

Māori names for many towns and cities that have English names are becoming commonly used, recognised, understood and expected by New Zealanders. However, most of these Māori names are not official and the Board has not considered them. Most visible examples are those that the media use in weather forecasts, such as:

Auckland	Tāmaki Makaurau
Wellington	Te Whanganui-a-Tara
Christchurch	Ōtautahi
Dunedin	Ōtepoti
Napier	Ahuriri

In addition, many councils have adopted Māori names to reflect their civic jurisdictions and are using Māori names in their branding and marketing.

The Board has concerns that many popularised Māori names may not necessarily be correct or have the right orthography. Therefore, the Board has adopted the approach of:

- collecting original Māori names that are being commonly used for cities and towns and ensuring they are orthographically correct and supported by iwi and councils
- adding these names to the *Gazetteer* to make them discoverable as alternative names, even though not official
- encouraging the use of these names on official maps and charts and in the media
- working with councils, hapū<sup>11</sup>, iwi and Treaty claimants to progress any formal proposals from them for alternative Māori names for cities and towns.

Approving official alternative names means that either name can be used, and not necessarily together. It also means that both geographic names would be correct, official and could be used interchangeably.

### Other geographic names

Decisions to replace long-standing non-Māori geographic names are not taken lightly, and there has to be good reason. New Zealand's heritage is shared, and it is important to reflect on and commemorate the geographic names given to the landscape from an equitable standpoint. Sometimes the Board may opt for dual names to recognise equal significance, and sometimes alternative names may be appropriate. Each case is considered with different weighting on the criteria applied, depending on the information, connection and whether modern considerations apply. Whenever a geographic name is changed or replaced, it remains discoverable in the *Gazetteer* as a layer of history.

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<sup>11</sup> kinship group, clan, tribe, subtribe



## **Māori Language Plan**

The Board has a [Māori Language Plan](#)<sup>12</sup>, published in April 2021. Initiatives implemented in recent years include:

- opening and closing meetings with the Board’s own karakia (prayer) gifted by Board member Shane Te Ruki, which the Board is actively learning
- publishing the *New Zealand Geographic Features* website with Māori terms
- publishing material in Māori, especially media releases
- initiating the Māori pronunciation audio files project for the *Gazetteer* (mentioned above).

## **New policies**

One of the Board’s strategic goals is to have robust policies and guidelines that are fit for purpose. See the report from New Zealand under Agenda Item 8 GEGN.2/2023/33/CRP.33 for full details on recent new policies.

### **Contemporary Māori geographic names**

At the Board’s October 2021 meeting it considered a discussion paper on assigning contemporary Māori geographic names and agreed to a guideline or reference document that would help it when considering new contemporary Māori place names. The Board also agreed to encourage contemporary Māori place name proposals. The Board intends to review its five published naming standards, and how they might incorporate guidance on contemporary Māori geographic names.

### **Gender balance in geographic names**

At the Board’s April 2022 meeting it discussed the level of activity in and support for pursuing gender balance in geographic naming. The Board intends to review its five published naming standards with a focus on how they might incorporate generally worded criteria for geographic names to recognise the contribution women/wāhine have made to society and history.

### **Diversity and inclusion in geographic names**

In discussing gender balance in place names, the Board also wanted to consider the relevant aspects of diversity and inclusion to give identity, recognition and a voice to historically marginalised groups, people and cultures (including minority languages) in place naming. The Board considered a discussion paper on this topic at its July 2022 meeting and agreed to add a generally worded criterion to its five published naming standards that contributes to an equitable, diverse and inclusive society.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.linz.govt.nz/resources/strategy/maori-language-plan-nga-pou-taunaha-o-aotearoa-new-zealand-geographic-board>

## **Making geographic names official through a streamlined process**

Approximately 28,300 (53%) of the geographic names in the *Gazetteer* are not official. A programme to approve them as official began in October 2020. This is being done region by region, with completion expected by the end of 2026.

An unofficial recorded geographic name can be made official through a streamlined process set out in the Board's legislation which dispenses with public consultation if:

- there is no other recorded name for the feature or place
- public objection is unlikely
- the Board is satisfied that at least two publicly available documents that record the geographic name are authoritative.

Despite not being required to publicly consult, the Board still engages directly with councils and mana whenua. Where possible the Board takes the opportunity to confirm the recorded geographic names are correct and gather any stories/meaning behind them. Importantly, Māori geographic names can be standardised with macrons if required through this process. Positions are also investigated, and sometimes extents are added to the *Gazetteer* for features and places, such as rivers and suburbs.

For consistency the Board is also taking the opportunity to amend associated official Māori geographic names that require macrons. This includes protected reserves after confirmation from the Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai. If the Board finds that there are recorded geographic names that do not meet the test for the streamlined process, then they remain as unofficial recorded geographic names.

The Board considers that the benefits of having a large number of recorded geographic names made official through the streamlined approval process significantly outweighs the small risk of errors being made. For the most part the decisions have been well received by communities and the addition of macrons is welcomed.

## **International contributions**

The Board actively works with naming authorities from other countries to ensure consistency with international standards and good place naming practice. The Board engages with:

- Australian geographic naming counterparts through the Australia New Zealand Working Group on Place Names, which is under the Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping
- the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names
- the Sub-Committee on Undersea Feature Names
- the United States Board on Geographic Names for name proposals and matters in the Ross Sea region of Antarctica
- the Standing Committee on Antarctic Geographic Information.

## Treaty of Waitangi commitments

Original Māori geographic names are often reinstated or restored as part of Treaty settlement redress. Many tangata whenua<sup>13</sup> geographic names were replaced or lost through colonisation. Those geographic names are taonga (precious) to Māori, often recalling important ancestors or historical events. The Board's Secretariat works closely with Te Arawhiti and other government agencies to ensure that the geographic names reinstated/restored through Treaty settlements meet good naming practice.

The Minister for Treaty of Waitangi Negotiations and Cabinet make the final decisions on all Treaty settlement redress. The Board gazettes those geographic names that are accepted as official, enters them in the *Gazetteer* so they are publicly discoverable along with their stories and meanings, and encourages their use on official maps and charts, websites and in other publications.

An online portal, *Te Haeata*, managed by Te Arawhiti, is used by Crown agencies to track their obligations to meet their Treaty commitments. This allows for monitoring, reporting and enforcement. Agencies delivery of commitments are expected to be reported in their annual reports.

## Contact

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<sup>13</sup> People of the place/land