

31 March 2023

English

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

**2023 session**

New York, 1 – 5 May 2023

**Item 8 of the provisional agenda \***

**Monitoring and evaluation of the strategic plan and programme of work, 2021–2029,  
and of the work of the Group of Experts**

**Report of New Zealand on activities aligned with the  
strategic plan and programme of work, 2021–2029, of the  
United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names**

Submitted by New Zealand \*\*

Summary:

The New Zealand Geographic Board Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa<sup>1</sup> has a strategic priority to “contribute to, influence and apply international good practice for standardized and consistent place naming”.<sup>2</sup> In the past two years, the Board has made progress on some of its own strategic goals that directly relate to specific aims and actions found in the strategic plan and programme of work, 2021–2029, of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.<sup>3</sup> The full report shares some of the activities of New Zealand that align with Group of Experts’ strategic intentions, for example:

- Contributing to the *International Principles and Procedures for Antarctic Place Names*<sup>4</sup> (aim II)
- Creating a “cookbook”<sup>5</sup> for generic terms for undersea feature names (actions 1-i-2 and 1-ii-7-c, and, under strategy 2, “International Hydrographic Organization: formal liaison, with particular cooperation on undersea and maritime feature names, for example the General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans Subcommittee on Undersea Feature Names and its documentation”)

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\* GEGN.2/2023/1

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

<sup>1</sup> “Memorial markers of the landscape”.

<sup>2</sup> See [www.linz.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2022-09/nzgb\\_strategic-plan-2020-2025\\_20201014.pdf](http://www.linz.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2022-09/nzgb_strategic-plan-2020-2025_20201014.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> See [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/documents/UNGEKN\\_Strategic\\_Plan\\_2021\\_V4.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/documents/UNGEKN_Strategic_Plan_2021_V4.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> See [www.scar.org/scar-library/reports-and-bulletins/scar-reports/5729-scar-report-41/](http://www.scar.org/scar-library/reports-and-bulletins/scar-reports/5729-scar-report-41/).

<sup>5</sup> See [https://iho.int/uploads/user/Inter-Regional%20Coordination/GEBSCO/SCUFN/MISC/Cookbook\\_for\\_Generic\\_Feature\\_terms\\_v1.1\\_May%202021.pdf](https://iho.int/uploads/user/Inter-Regional%20Coordination/GEBSCO/SCUFN/MISC/Cookbook_for_Generic_Feature_terms_v1.1_May%202021.pdf).

- Co-presenting at a webinar<sup>6</sup> hosted by the Group of Experts on the theme “Developing digital gazetteers using free and open-source software” (action 1-i-3)
- Agreeing to new policies on gender balance, inclusion and diversity, and the use of Māori generic terms (action 4-ii-6)
- Actively contributing to the Group of Experts’ bulletins to communicate the role of New Zealand in relation to themes (action 5-ii-4)

## Naming guidelines

**Aim II:** ‘Facilitate the creation or improvement of national geographical names standardization principles, policies and procedures.’

**Action 1-i-2:** ‘Evaluate and assess exchange standards for geographical names information and for web services (gazetteer, feature and mapping) for the provision of geographical names information.’

**Action 1-ii-7-c:** ‘Promote the use of the online discussion forum (Wiki) on general issues in the context of data maintenance (like feature classifications).’

### International Principles and Procedures for Antarctic Place Names



These guidelines were published in October 2021: <https://www.scar.org/scar-library/reports-and-bulletins/scar-reports/5729-scar-report-41>. The Liaison Officer for SCAR<sup>7</sup> has reported in more detail about this document under Agenda Item 5(a) GEGN.2/2023/124/CRP.124.

New Zealand’s contribution was under the SCAGI<sup>8</sup> Place Names Working Group, along with Belgium, Australia and the USA as the other main contributors. The guideline has two fundamental aims: to offer best practice geographic naming principles for all Antarctic Treaty signatory countries to follow, and to reset a past naming practice so that in the future, multiple naming of one feature by numerous countries is avoided. SCAGI members do not monitor or enforce the guideline. Treaty countries are encouraged to follow them.

New Zealand’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade recently published the [Antarctic Research Directions and Priorities 2021-2030](#). The geographic naming that New Zealand does in Antarctica was established to support scientific and operational activities on the ice and to

<sup>6</sup> See [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/working\\_groups/webinars/10May2022.csh.tml](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/working_groups/webinars/10May2022.csh.tml).

<sup>7</sup> Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research

<sup>8</sup> Standing Committee on Antarctic Geographic Information

honour and commemorate events and notable people in the history of discovery and achievement on the continent.

### **Cookbook for undersea feature name generic descriptions**

**IHO<sup>9</sup>**: formal liaison, with particular cooperation on undersea and maritime feature names, for example [SCUFN<sup>10</sup> and its documentation – page 18](#)

This [Cookbook](#) was first published in 2021 and is currently under review by a member of SCUFN, Kevin Mackay, from New Zealand, who is also a member of the Board’s Undersea Feature Naming Committee. The complex science behind determining feature types on the ocean floor relies on bathymetric data with very prescriptive descriptions and calculations to decide whether a feature is a ridge, seamount, valley, basin, etc. Version 2, expected soon, will offer even more certainty for undersea feature type classifications.

### **New Zealand Gazetteer**

**Action 1-i-3:** ‘Present geographical names data management topics at national and international conferences organized in the fields of geospatial information management.’

#### **Co-presenting at an UNGEGN webinar on Developing Digital Gazetteers Using Free and Open-Source Software**

In May 2022, New Zealand co-presented at an online UNGEGN [webinar](#) with Germany and Brazil. New Zealand shared the open source software it uses to deliver up-to-date, authoritative and accurate geographic name information. A short history of New Zealand’s Gazetteer set the past scene using the former paper-based system. This led to developing and maintaining the current iteration of the online, searchable, downloadable and linked Gazetteer, <https://gazetteer.linz.govt.nz/>. Sharing lessons learned in this process provided an opportunity for all countries to improve on their work. Presentations from Brazil and Germany helped New Zealand understand how we are placed relative to other international Gazetteers.

The UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work 2021-2029 includes strategies relating to technical expertise, promotion and capacity building. In sharing New Zealand’s journey to develop a digital Gazetteer, we are helping to implement these strategies along with strengthening the capacity of our international colleagues to understand how to use open source software to develop their own Gazetteers.

Presenting at sessions such as these are an excellent opportunity to connect, learn and promote the work of the Board and New Zealand’s geographic naming practices. About 120 people joined the webinar, and feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

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<sup>9</sup> International Hydrographic Organisation

<sup>10</sup> Sub Committee on Undersea Features Names



## Policies, practices, procedures

**Action 4-ii-6:** ‘Share effective practices and applications on culturally oriented resolutions, such as commemorative naming and commercialization of naming.’

### Gender balance

In 2022, the Board considered a discussion paper exploring the level of activity in and support for, pursuing gender balance in geographic naming. The Board recommended this general approach with some principles suggested for future consideration:

- replacing geographic names that are derogatory, discriminatory, frivolous, offensive, or in poor taste with those of women/wāhine (unless an original Māori name exists which would have priority)
- using the Board’s Standards and good naming practices, to ensure Māori women/wāhine are equitably commemorated
- pursuing gender balance in geographic naming as a contemporary practice by naming unnamed places and features, and not necessarily retrospectively changing existing geographic names unless there is good reason
- consider themes of like groupings, such as education, science, discovery, social conscience, etc., to help overcome potential restrictions around women/wāhine not having a direct connection to a place or feature.

The Board took account of UNGEGN’s paper published in May 2021 ‘[Creating an Equal Society through Geographical Names](#)’ and undertook its own intervention analysis. The Board agreed to include generally worded criteria regarding gender balance in its various Standards for geographic names. It also recommended an approach that is proportionate to the risks the issue might pose. This could be incorporated into business as usual by:

- including gender equality/balance as a principle in its framework and guidance documents for deciding name proposals
- as a consideration when no known and supported original Māori name or alternative Māori name exists, a gender equal name could be appropriate as part of the overall strategy
- starting to compile a reserve list of women/wāhine who could be commemorated in the future, eg. referring to websites and publications to inform of potential women/wāhine to commemorate in geographic names such as:
  - the [Dictionary for New Zealand Biography](#)
  - <https://www.ourwahine.nz/>, and
  - Ngāi Tahu Archive – [Tāngata Ngāi Tahu, Volume Two](#).

Under this approach ‘gender equality/balance in geographic names’ would not necessarily be proactively pursued. Rather, the Board would mostly be responsive to proposals made by the public. This approach would provide an understated way forward that could still have a positive impact on unconscious bias.

The Board has since identified a list of women associated with the back country and war time. These will be researched for possible commemorative naming as appropriate.

### **Inclusion and diversity**

In 2022 the Board considered a discussion paper on pursuing diversity and inclusion in geographic naming. The Board acknowledged that diversity and inclusion give identity, recognition and a ‘voice’ to historically marginalised groups, peoples and cultures (including minority languages) in geographic naming. The Board considered reasonable acceptance, global expectations, accessibility and giving practical effect where appropriate. This approach was recommended for future geographic name suggestions:

- altering existing geographic names that are derogatory, discriminatory, frivolous, offensive or in poor taste, by replacing them with appropriate geographic names that represent minority or marginalised groups (unless an original Māori name exists which would have priority)
- through its published naming Standards and good naming practices, to ensure minority and marginalised groups are equitably commemorated
- pursuing diversity and inclusion in geographic naming when considering proposals to name previously unnamed places and features
- considering themes of like groupings to overcome potential restrictions around minority or marginalised groups not having a direct connection to a place or feature.

The Board took account of UNGEGN’s [call to action of May 2021](#):

- ‘An invitation to the Bureau of the Group of Experts and the Working Group on Geographical Names as Cultural Heritage to consider developing guidelines aimed at equality and inclusion in geographical names in harmony with the principles on restoring, protecting and preserving cultural heritage, noting the contribution to relevant Sustainable Development Goals.
- Expressing hope that national names authorities would consider developing processes and mechanisms for geographical names standardization to achieve greater equality in naming, and respect the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities to their own geographical names.
- Urging the Bureau of the Group of Experts and its relevant working groups to pursue the topic in future events and sessions through dedicated meeting arrangements, with a view to a possible recommendation to the Economic and Social Council.’

The Board proposed that diversity and inclusion could be incorporated into business as usual in the same way as its commitment to gender balance, by:

- adding diversity and inclusion in geographic names as a principle in its standards and guidance documents and when deciding on name proposals
- as a consideration when no known and supported original Māori name or alternative Māori name exists, a diversity or inclusion related geographic name might be appropriate as part of the overall strategy

- starting to compile a reserve list of diverse and inclusive geographic names that could be commemorated in the future, eg. referring to websites and publications to inform of potential minority or marginalised groups to commemorate in geographic names.

Under this approach ‘diversity and inclusion in geographic names’ would not necessarily be proactively pursued. Rather, the Board would be responsive to proposals made by the public. Adding this as a point of consideration for decision making will encourage ongoing awareness of bias.

The Board’s various naming Standards are yet to be updated but will be processed along with a brand refresh of the Board’s printed and electronic collateral.

### **Māori generic terms**

This [policy](#) from 2019 provides guidance when considering and applying Māori generic terms to geographic names. The primary purpose of a generic term is to describe the feature itself, eg. River (English) or Maunga (Māori for mountain). Therefore, the generic term is valuable for general use by the public, and especially for safe navigation and emergency response. A name without a generic term can make it difficult to identify a feature or its location. The Board supports Māori generics with Māori specific terms, eg. Taranaki Maunga, Te Awa Kairangi. The New Zealand Geographic Features website helps identify appropriate Māori generics: <https://geographicfeatures.linz.govt.nz/>.

### **Contemporary Māori geographic names**

In October 2021 the Board considered a discussion paper with a set of guiding/reference principles to help its decision making when considering contemporary Māori geographic name proposals. Considerations included:

- What is a contemporary Māori geographic name? Are they different to contemporary non-Māori place names? Is there an equity issue?
- Does the feature or place need to be named?
- What is the threshold for deciding that a feature or place should be named?
- What is the feature or place being named for (event, descriptive, commemorative)?
- Is the feature or place being given a name after a prominent event or person?
- Should the criteria be applied differently to New Zealand, Antarctica and undersea?
- Undersea features are a special category, there are typically no original Māori names for them.
- How should contemporary Māori names be selected for unnamed features and places?
- Should proposals be considered case by case without prescriptive and possibly prohibitive guidance?
- Should contemporary Māori geographic names take precedence?
- What about ‘where New Zealand goes, Māori geographic names go’?
- Should an equal share of Māori geographic names throughout New Zealand be pursued?
- The Board’s reputation and accusations of unbalanced naming.
- The importance of acknowledging matauranga and kōrero.
- New traditions being created.
- Mana, sense of place/belonging.
- The increased opportunity for storytelling, especially by Māori media.
- Interest from tourists wanting to learn about Māori culture.



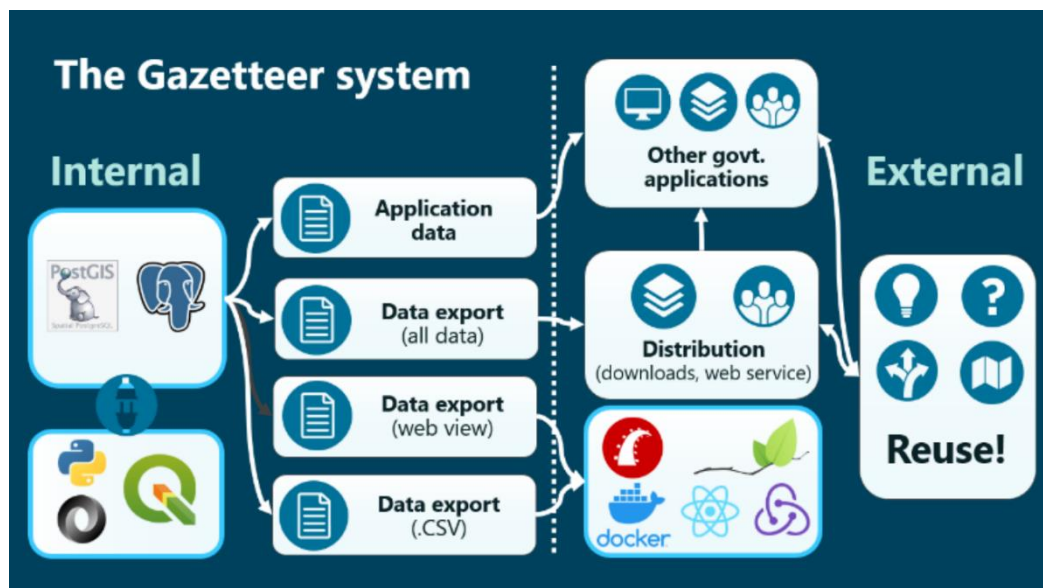
The Board's responsibility is to provide the means for appropriate recognition to be accorded to cultural and heritage values associated with geographic features. This includes upholding the principles of Treaty partnership, protection and participation. The Board agreed to compile a formal guideline/reference document to become part of its suite of policies, standards, etc.

## UNGEGN Bulletin articles

**Action 5-ii-4:** 'Ensuring relevance, development and dissemination of UNGEGN Bulletin.'

Since UNGEGN Session #2, New Zealand has contributed articles in four Bulletins with these themes:

- [Minority Names and Geographical Names in a Multilingual Setting](#)
- [Geographical Names in an Urban Environment](#)
- [Geographical Names as Indicators of the Environment](#)
- [Making Geographical Names Data Accessible](#)



New Zealand supports the intention of the UNGEGN Secretariat to align themes in each Bulletin with Strategic initiatives.

## Points for discussion

The Group of Experts is invited to:

- (1) Take note of some of the actions New Zealand is pursuing to align with and meet the intentions of UNGEGN's strategic plan and programme of work 2021-2029.
- (2) Acknowledge that UNGEGN does not require Member States to conform with its strategic initiatives, rather it is up to each Member State to decide what is applicable and a priority under each of the five strategies, and if willing, to share with other Member States the experiences, challenges, implementation, success or otherwise. This could be done through UNGEGN Bulletin articles, through Working Groups, through Divisions, through training and webinars, or at Sessions.

- (3) Consider reviewing national naming activities that align with UNGEGN's strategic intentions. Analyse and report on their compatability, effectiveness and whether improvements are needed.

## Contact

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