



## **Guidelines for the Consistent Use of Place Names**

Version 1.0 (April 2001)

Prepared by the Committee for Geographical Names in Australia (CGNA)

### **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

#### [1.INTRODUCTION](#)

#### [2.GEOGRAPHICAL/PLACE NAMES AUTHORITIES](#)

#### [3.COMMITTEE FOR GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES IN AUSTRALIA](#)

#### [4.GUIDELINES](#)

##### [4.1.OFFICIAL LANGUAGE](#)

##### [4.2.NAMES GOVERNED BY STATUTORY or ADMINISTRATIVE AUTHORITY](#)

##### [4.3.OFFICIAL OR APPROVED NAMES](#)

##### [4.4 FEATURE DESCRIPTION AND IDENTIFICATION](#)

##### [4.5.FEATURES WHICH CROSS STATE/TERRITORY BOUNDARIES](#)

##### [4.6.PERSONAL NAMES](#)

##### [4.7.FORMS AND CHARACTER OF NAMES](#)

##### [4.8.OFFSHORE HYDROGRAPHIC FEATURES](#)

##### [4.9.OFFSHORE UNDERSEA FEATURES](#)

##### [4.10.ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT PLACE NAMES](#)

##### [4.11.DUAL NAMING](#)

##### [4.12.GENITIVE APOSTROPHE](#)

##### [4.13.DIACRITICAL MARKS](#)

##### [4.14.UNIFORMITY OF SPELLING](#)

##### [4.15.GENERIC TERMINOLOGY](#)

##### [4.16.QUALIFYING TERMINOLOGY](#)

##### [4.17.DUPLICATION](#)

##### [4.18.ABBREVIATIONS](#)

##### [4.19.NATIONAL GAZETTEER](#)

##### [4.20.EXCONYMS](#)

## **INTRODUCTION**

**These guidelines cover the choice, form and application of place names in Australia. Consistent use of accurate place names is an essential element of effective communication worldwide, and supports socio-economic development, conservation and national infrastructure. The United Nations Conference on the Standardisation of Geographical Names, meeting in Montreal in 1987, drew attention to the need for each member nation to formulate a set of Toponymic Guidelines. This document, which**

**replaces the 'Toponymic Guidelines for Australia' of November 1995, is a response to that requirement. It has been prepared by the Committee for Geographical Names in Australasia, under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Committee for Surveying and Mapping, as a contribution to the Australian Spatial Data Structure Initiative.**

Prior to the time of European settlement Australian geographical features, except for those in the external territories, have largely been named in one or more of the approximately 260 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages then spoken.

In the period of European exploration of the Australian coasts which extended from the 17th century through to the 19th century, names of coastal and near coastal features were applied in the European language of the discoverer or cartographer. Since European settlement in 1788 place names have generally been applied in English or translated into English from the indigenous languages or from other European languages. It should be noted that in the early part of the European settlement a policy of adopting indigenous place names was in place.

Although Australian English is acknowledged as the national language, the study of Australian indigenous languages is again gaining impetus. These Guidelines recognise the importance of these original sources of place names, both from the presently spoken languages and also from those languages no longer spoken. The spoken language in the External Territories is not necessarily Australian English. The respective lingua franca of a territory is used for nomenclature purposes.

On Federation, the States retained responsibility for naming features lying within their respective borders. The Commonwealth assumed responsibility for naming features lying within boundaries of the Internal and External Territories of the Commonwealth. These various responsibilities were generally exercised within a mapping or surveying agency of the respective government.

## **2. GEOGRAPHICAL/PLACE NAMES AUTHORITIES**

**Each State and Territory of the Commonwealth has developed legislative or regulatory procedures for the systematic approval and recording of place names. A number of other government agencies also have nomenclature responsibilities.**

The principal nomenclature authorities are listed in Appendix A.

## **3. COMMITTEE FOR GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES IN AUSTRALASIA**

**This Committee was established in 1984, for the coordination of place naming in Australia and New Zealand. Its membership comprises the authorities listed in Appendix A, plus the other bodies listed in Appendix B.**

The activities of the Committee are directed towards:- \* developing a national standard for nomenclature matters; \* maintaining the Australian National Gazetteer; \* co-ordinating the methodology of researching, recording and applying place names, including those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin; and \* co-ordinating Australasian input into international nomenclature activities, including liaison with the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, particularly the Regional Grouping.

## **4. GUIDELINES**

#### **4.1 OFFICIAL LANGUAGE**

The Australian national language is Australian English. In general, place naming practice must use the form, spelling and style of contemporary Australian English. In particular cases, place naming practice should take account of contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spoken languages and the various languages used in Australian External Territories.

#### **4.2. NAMES GOVERNED BY STATUTORY OR ADMINISTRATIVE AUTHORITY**

Authorities or agencies of Commonwealth, State, Territory or Local Governments other than those listed in Appendix A which, by legislation, regulation or administrative arrangement, have responsibility for naming particular or selected classes of geographical features, such as electoral districts or national parks, should liaise with the relevant State/Territory geographical/place names authority on the adoption of a name. The broad principles of these Guidelines should be considered by such authorities in the adoption of a name.

Authorities and agencies with naming rights should give due recognition to:- \* principles developed under international treaties and agreements; \* policies and principles developed and recorded by the Committee for Geographical Names in Australasia; and \* policies and principles developed in their own area of responsibility to accord with local needs.

#### **4.3 OFFICIAL OR APPROVED NAMES**

The written form of a place name approved by a State or Territory nomenclature body is deemed to be an "official" or "approved" name. Full documentation of the approval process should include alternative names, covering Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, External Territory, historic English, French or Dutch names and other variant forms. The final decision needs to be documented for future references and reviews. Including "recorded names" or unapproved names within a gazetteer database will remain the responsibility of each naming authority.

#### **4.4 FEATURE DESCRIPTION AND IDENTIFICATION**

A decision on a geographical name proposal for a physical feature should specify the extent of the feature to which the name applies. If the feature lies entirely within one State or Territory area, that State or Territory will decide how the feature is to be described.

#### **4.5. FEATURES WHICH CROSS STATE/TERRITORY BOUNDARIES**

The name for any feature which crosses a State/Territory boundary should be the same on both sides of that boundary. The basis for the selection of a name for such a feature should be consensus between the relevant authorities and primary responsibility for obtaining consensus should rest with the authority in which the feature was first named.

#### **4.6. PERSONAL NAMES**

If personal names are to be used for geographical features the person commemorated should have contributed significantly to the area or state where the feature is located. Ownership of the land should not in itself be grounds for the application of the owner's name to a geographical feature.

When a personal name is used, it should be applied only posthumously. Names of living persons are by their nature subject to partisan perception and change in community judgement and acceptance; for this reason they are not efficient or effective choices for official place names. Alternatives are to use commemorative plaques or naming a particular community facility such as a building or oval after the person to be commemorated. The adoption of a

personal name during the lifetime of a person concerned should only be made in exceptional circumstances.

#### **4.7 FORM AND CHARACTER OF NAMES**

Place names should be easy to pronounce, spell and write; simple, concise and preferably of 50 or fewer characters; recognisable words or combinations of words; and in all respects in accordance with community standards. Consideration should be given to the use of place names in diverse cultural situations, and derogatory or discriminatory terms or terms in poor taste or likely to cause offence should be avoided. Terms that may be construed as advertising a commercial or industrial enterprise should also be avoided.

#### **4.8 OFFSHORE HYDROGRAPHIC FEATURES**

The naming of high water features (features permanently above sea-level), low water features (features exposed at low tide) and seabed features which occur within the Coastal Waters of a State or Territory is the responsibility of that State or Territory. The respective Commonwealth Agency is responsible for naming low water features which lie in Commonwealth Internal Waters and in that part of the Territorial Sea seaward of the Coastal Waters. Australian States and Territories involved in the naming of features in Coastal Waters should liaise with the Australian Hydrographic Office.

#### **4.9 OFFSHORE UNDERSEA FEATURES**

Low water or seabed features which lie within the Australian Exclusive Economic Zone or within the Exclusive Economic Zones of the External Territories and the Australian Antarctic Territory or within the area of the Australian continental shelf are to be named in accordance with the guidelines for the Standardisation of Undersea Feature Names issued by the International Hydrographic Organisation and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission. Submissions on offshore undersea feature names should be forwarded to the Australian Hydrographic Office for coordination and submission to the Scientific Committee on Undersea Feature Names.

#### **4.10 ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PLACE NAMES**

The use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names will be governed by the Guidelines of the Committee for Geographical Names in Australasia which include:-

- \* the need for consultation with groups within the community for input into the place naming process;
- \* the acceptance of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples' right to have input into the process of adopting approved place names;
- \* the recognition that traditional names exist;
- \* the recognition that multiple names of Aboriginal and Torres Strait origin, together with a European name, may exist for the one feature;
- \* the recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names may predate the arrival of Europeans in Australia;
- \* the equal status of oral recording of place names with that of documentation;
- \* the recognition that the use of some names will be subject to restrictions;

\* consideration to be given to using Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander names for those features with an unrecorded name, in accordance with Resolution 22 'Aboriginal/native geographical names' of the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, 1987;

\* the need to comply with the written form of the indigenous language, where one exists, from which a name is drawn;

\* the need for full consultation with bodies affected by place naming proposals.

#### **4.11 DUAL NAMING**

Dual or multiple naming of features, recognised in some States and Territories, is a legitimate means of recording feature names drawn from Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, European and other cultures.

#### **4.12. GENITIVE APOSTROPHE**

In all cases of place names containing an element that has historically been written with a final -'s or -s', the apostrophe is to be deleted, e.g. Howes Valley, Rushcutters Bay, Ladys Pass. This is to facilitate the consistent matching and retrieval of placenames in database systems such as those used by the emergency services.

#### **4.13. DIACRITICAL MARKS**

English language placenames do not have diacritical marks. In the case of place names derived from languages other than English, any diacritical marks are not to be carried over to the English form.

#### **4.14. UNIFORMITY OF SPELLING**

Associated names (such as Balgowlah and Balgowlah Heights), or names deriving from the same source (such as McLaren Flat and McLaren Vale), should generally have the same spelling (rather than for example Balgowlah and Balgowla Heights or McLaren Flat and Maclaren Vale).

#### **4.15. GENERIC TERMINOLOGY**

The generic term is the part of a place name that indicates the type of feature designated, e.g. "Creek" in Sandy Creek, "Bay" in Botany Bay. The appropriate generic term should usually form part of the name of a geographical feature as published, although not all names have a generic, e.g. 'The Grampians'. The prime references are the Glossary of Toponymic Terminology produced by the United Nations and the Australian Glossary of Generic Terms (in course of production). Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and External Territory names of geographical features are generally to have a generic term in the English form as published. The Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or External Territory generic term should however be recorded if one exists.

#### **4.16. QUALIFYING TERMINOLOGY**

Qualifying terms such as "upper", "new" or their opposites, in addition to cardinal indicators, may be used in Australian place naming; however, more distinctive names are preferred.

#### **4.17. DUPLICATION**

The purpose of place names is primarily to provide unambiguous direction and reference to

identify geographical entities. Duplication of place names is to be avoided because of the confusion this will cause, particularly in the dispatch of emergency services, which is now often coordinated from national call centres. Before a new name is assigned, a check should be made that it is not already in use in another State or Territory. Where duplication does occur within a (intra) State or Territory, the respective authority should attempt to find an acceptable replacement for one or both names. Where duplication occurs inter State or Territory, the respective authorities should liaise in order to attempt to arrive at an acceptable solution.

#### **4.18. ABBREVIATIONS**

The international and national accepted abbreviations (to be promulgated) are used in mapping and charting products. Abbreviations are not to be included in the recording of place name generics.

#### **4.19. NATIONAL GAZETTEER**

The Australian National Gazetteer is a digital file containing a subset of the place name data bases maintained by Australian place name authorities. The Australian National Gazetteer is updated periodically. Additional information will be available from the respective place name authority.

#### **4.20. EXONYMS**

An exonym is a name used in a specific language for a place situated outside the area where the name has official status, and differing in its form from the name used in the official language or languages of the area where the place is situated, e.g. Prague is an English exonym for Praha, Londres is a French exonym for London. There is no list of exonyms approved for use in Australia. In mapping overseas areas the United Nations List of Country Names is the authority for country names.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **APPENDIX A: Principal Nomenclature Authorities for Australia**

### **Geographical Names Board of New South Wales**

Registrar of Geographic Names, Victoria

Nomenclature Board of Tasmania

Geographical Names Advisory Committee, South Australia

Geographic Names Committee of Western Australia

Department of Natural Resources, Queensland

Place Names Committee, Australian Capital Territory

Place Names Committee of the Northern Territory

Antarctic Names and Medal Committee

The Hydrographer - Royal Australian Navy

Australian Surveying and Land Information Group

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

## **APPENDIX B: Other Members of the Committee for Geographical Names in Australasia**

**Defence Topographic Agency**

New Zealand Geographic Board

Australian National Placenames Survey

[\[ TOP \]](#)

