

Committee for Geographical Names in Australasia

Policy guidelines for the recording and use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Place Names

Prepared by the Committee for Geographical Names In Australia, October 1992

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1. BACKGROUND

The Dreaming is an Aboriginal philosophy that is the basis of Aboriginal culture and the core of

both the spiritual and physical life of Aboriginal people.

It is a philosophy about the origins of the universe, including people, animals, landscape and social life. The fundamental theme of this philosophy is that people and the world in which they live, are all part of a continuing spiritual-physical relationship where both aspects of the philosophy co-exist and one cannot survive without the other.

The land is seen by Aboriginal people as the sacred centre piece of Aboriginal religion and its features are seen as icons within a vast natural cathedral continually occupied by Aboriginal people whose fundamental existence is the bond between the land, people and spirituality. An important aspect of this link are the names given to features on the land that relate to the ancestors, stories, song and dance.

The relationship between Aboriginal people and the land is still as prevalent today as it was more than 400 centuries ago - it is fitting then, to acknowledge Aboriginal footprints in the sands of time by preparing these guidelines which are designed to encourage Naming Authorities throughout Australia to recognise the validity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names and to assist in the more frequent and official use of these names particularly for unnamed features.

The only previous attempts to standardise the approach for the collection and use of Aboriginal names occurred following instructions by Sir Thomas Mitchell, Surveyor-General of New South Wales between 1828 and 1852, and during the same period, a proclamation by Governor Gawler, Governor of South Australia, aimed at promoting the recording of Aboriginal names for topographic features.

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2. INTRODUCTION

The National Policy Guidelines for the Use and Recording of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Place Names has been developed in recognition of the continuing close relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the land, and how these relationships form the basis of an oral indigenous place names system.

The Policy is also cognisant of the concept of "self-determination" and as such, it recognises the fundamental right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to be involved in the decision-making processes of government particularly those related to official naming processes.

Notwithstanding the advice of anthropologists, linguists or those associated with nomenclature authorities, it must be recognised that the right to decide the use of names rests always with the indigenous people whose language or place names are being used for official naming purposes.

The Guidelines further provide a unique opportunity to adopt a set of national standards for the collection and use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander names. Further to this, it will create uniformity in the way that information is collected and used by State and Territory nomenclature authorities, and at the same time, enhance the maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage in areas throughout Australia.

It is recognised that each State and Territory has a differing set of environmental and administrative circumstances in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names. Differences in legislation, community structures and physical circumstances require guidelines to be broad enough to cater for the differences in circumstances in each State and Territory.

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3. OBJECTIVES AND GUIDELINES

The text in brackets forms a brief explanatory statement.

3.1 Main Objective

To ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names are recognised by all Australia as being part of Australian heritage and need to be preserved.

3.2 Secondary Objectives

3.2.1 The names of places as given by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people be recognised initially by place names authorities and ultimately by all Australians.

3.2.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names be preferred as the name to be used for any feature that does not have a name recognised by the relevant place name authority.

3.2.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to be consulted on all dealings concerning Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander place names in their areas of current occupation and traditional association, in line with self-determination policies.

(This includes any proposals to assign new names, alter spellings, institute a dual naming system etc).

3.2.4 The Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies be used as a resource to assist in the development of a writing system for any specific language which does not have an existing system.

(AIATSIS can assist with advice regarding linguist/anthropologists who have worked with the language group, previous surveys etc).

3.2.5 Nomenclature authorities to undertake when possible to educate the general community in the use and pronunciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names.

(This can be started by the use of authorised names on maps, wide distribution of policies, taking opportunities to speak to appropriate and interested groups, various media releases etc., all of which can be very beneficial without the need to be involved in costly programs).

3.2.6 Nomenclature authorities be committed to the continuing development of appropriate procedures to facilitate the recording and use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names and State and Federal governments recognise the need to provide funding.

3.2.7 Nomenclature authorities to seek the involvement of other interested/concerned groups (eg land councils, local government authorities, language centres).

3.3 Guidelines

3.3.1 Recognition

a. Any use of names of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin should be made following consultation and with appropriate recognition.

b. A recognition of the self-determination concept and its importance in contributing to placenames issues.

- c. A recognition to be given to the use of traditional names for places and localities bearing an officially or recorded name from another source.
- d. A recognition that more than one Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander place name may exist for any particular feature, both within a specific language group and from two or more language groups.
- e. A recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names were in use prior to European occupation.
- f. A recognition that the oral recording of placenames in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture has equal standing with written recording.
- g. A recognition that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names may be subject to restrictions that must be respected.

(This may apply to some names in common usage which are of a very sensitive nature - either sacred or offensive. Names in this category will be revealed following the establishment of good relations between the communities and the nomenclature authorities, and should be negotiated on an individual basis).

- h. A recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural expectation.

(This particularly applies to methods of contact, community structures, respect for community wishes etc).

3.3.2 Preferences

- a. That Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names be preferred for those features that do not have a name recognised by the nomenclature authorities or the local community.
- b. That a preference be stated for the spelling and accenting of place names to agree with the rules of the written form of the language (if one exists) from which the place names originate.
- c. That there should be no interference with established Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander place names without the consent of the relevant community.

(This applies to names in any location).

- d. That during the development and after the adoption of the guidelines, there be an assurance of the involvement of participants representing a diversity of interests, including government, non-government and voluntary organisations.

e. Adjustments may be made to the spelling of place names in consultation with the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community and their linguist if the current form is under threat of mispronunciation by the wider community or has been previously incorrectly represented.

f. Appropriate follow up be made with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to show the results of any specific field work or project.

g. Linguists should be consulted to maintain standards of excellence in written form.

h. Local government bodies, National Parks and Wildlife agencies, heritage bodies etc should be consulted as required.

i. Authorisation is to be obtained from the relevant community for the use of any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander name or word taken from any source in official naming.

(This refers to the use of names or words for new naming proposals - eg suburbs, conservation parks etc. The proposed use of the name or word may not be appropriate).

j. Questions of copyright/ownership of information collected during any fieldwork or investigation must be resolved prior to the survey being conducted or prior to the names being used in a public domain.

k. The wishes of the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community must be respected in relation to names and related information associated with areas of land currently occupied or areas of traditional association.

l. Consultation must try to meet the expectations of all involved parties, however, failing complete agreement, a consensus of opinion is to be aimed for. Various methods of consultation must be tried.

3.3.3 Writing Systems

a. Where a writing system already exists and is in use by the community, that system should be used (eg Pitjantjatjara).

b. Where no writing system exists, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies should be contacted as a reference source for the development of a writing system.

c. Ease of pronunciation be a criteria for the writing of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander place names.

d. English generic terms may be used if considered necessary to specify the type of feature involved.

e. Those researching languages that are no longer spoken will need to seek the assistance of a linguist to enable accurate renditions of the names to be determined.

f. The language source of each place name is to be noted if it is known or can be determined.

3.3.4 Education

a. A commitment by nomenclature authorities to undertake where possible an educative role in popularising correct spelling and pronunciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names.

b. Nomenclature authorities and the Committee of Geographical Names in Australasia to undertake an educative role to develop positive international perspectives of the use of indigenous names in Australia.

c. Assist in the education of the wider community about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and the importance of place names to that culture.

d. Impart a realization that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names represent a gift from another culture, the sharing of which imposes ethical obligations on the users.

(This covers such areas as respect for restrictions, acknowledgment of sources, authorisation for use etc).

e. To create an awareness among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of the importance of being able to preserve culture through place names and minimise the encroachment of new European names on the landscape, particularly for features of high cultural significance.

f. Foster a knowledge among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that their wishes will be respected.

g. Educate nomenclature authority support staff inappropriate consultative mechanisms.

h. Create an increased awareness among nomenclature authority staff of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language and culture.

3.3.5 Procedural

- A dual naming system may be used as a management and educative tool for the naming of physical and environmental features of significance to the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community when an official name already exists and when a name change is not possible or acceptable.

Whichever of the two names that is most likely to be used by the local community is to be the primary name.

b. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander names or terms from one area not to be applied to other areas for official naming purposes.

c. Local historical and cultural information relating to the meaning and origin of the place names should be collected whenever possible.

d. Previous relevant surveys by anthropologists, linguists, land councils, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditional owners and others be used as a resource prior to any field work.

e. Names and spellings may be changed to avoid duplication of names, present a better vehicle for correct pronunciation and provide for better cultural retention.

f. Roman characters should be used in preference to other syllabic forms.

g. Where alternative spellings of a specific Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander name exist, only one official spelling should be used following consultation with the relevant community.

h. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander placenames are to be actively sought with the assistance of the State/Territory and Federal Governments.

- State/Territory authorities agree to cooperate in undertaking joint field projects where common State/Territory boundaries have no meaning to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and language.

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4. POLICY GUIDELINES

The Guidelines should be seen as a tool to assist State and Territory naming authorities to

record and use the place names of Australia's indigenous people. A range of factors for consideration as part of recording and use of indigenous names, include:

- Recognition
- Preferences
- Writing System
- Education
- Procedure

4.1 Recognition

It is accepted that as part of any process to record and use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names a number of rules need to be recognised and used as part of this process, these include:

- i. Any use of names of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin should be made following consultation and with appropriate recognition.
- ii. As part of any process for the use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names, the concept of self-determination and its importance in contributing to place names issues must be recognised.
- iii. A recognition be given to the use of traditional names for places and localities bearing an officially recorded name from another source.
- iv. A recognition that more than one Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander place name may exist for any particular feature, both within a specific language group and from two or more language groups.
- v. A recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names were in use prior to European occupation.
- vi. A recognition that the oral recording of place names in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture has equal standing with written recording.
- vii. A recognition that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names may be subject to restrictions that must be respected. (This may apply to some names in common usage which are of a very sensitive nature - either sacred or offensive. Names in this category will be revealed following the establishment of good relations between the communities and the nomenclature authorities, and should be negotiated on an individual basis)
- viii. A recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural expectation particularly in respect of methods of community contact, community structures, respect for community wishes.

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4.2 Preferences

Preferential provisions in these Guidelines are designed to ensure that certain basic rules are incorporated into nomenclature authority procedures especially those relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names. As a guide the following rules concerning preferences have been developed:

- i. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names be preferred for those features which

do not have a name officially recognised by the nomenclature authority.

- ii. A preference be stated for the spelling and accenting of place names to agree with the rules of the written form of the language (if one exists) from which the place name originates.
- iii. There be no interference with established Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander place names without the consent of the relevant community. (This applies to names in any location).
- iv. That during the development and after the adoption of policy and guidelines, there be an involvement of participants representing a diversity of interests, including local government bodies, national parks and wildlife services, heritage bodies, etc.
- v. Adjustments may be made to the spelling of place names in consultation with the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community if the current form is under threat of mispronunciation by the wider community or has been previously incorrectly represented.
- vi. Appropriate follow up be made with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to show the results of any specific fieldwork or project.
- vii. Linguists should be consulted to maintain standards of excellence in written form.
- viii. Authorisation is to be obtained from the relevant community for the use of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander name or word taken from any source in official naming. (This refers to the use of names or words for new naming proposals, e.g. suburbs, conservation parks etc. where the proposed use of the name or word may not be appropriate).
- ix. Questions of copyright/ownership of information collected during any fieldwork or investigation must be resolved prior to the survey or other activity being conducted.
- x. The wishes of the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community must be respected in relation to names and related information associated with areas of land currently occupied or areas of traditional association.
- xi. Consultation must try to meet the expectations of all involved parties, however, failing complete agreement, a consensus of opinion should be sought.

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4.3 Writing System

There is obviously a clear difference between the official form of a place name for cartographic mapping and information science purposes, and the culturally/linguistic correct form of a word for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Nevertheless, the following rules have been developed to assist nomenclature authorities in clarifying these issues.

- i. Where a writing system already exists and is in use by the community, that system should be used as the basis for the correct spelling of place names by nomenclature authorities.
- ii. Where no writing system exists, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies should be contacted as a reference source for the development of a writing system.

- iii. Ease of pronunciation be a criteria for the writing of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander place names.
- iv. English generic terms may be used if considered necessary to specify the type of feature involved.
- v. Those researching languages that are no longer spoken will need to seek the assistance of a linguist to enable accurate renditions of the names to be determined.
- vi. The language source of each place name is to be noted if known or can be determined.

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4.4 Education

Education is seen as a crucial factor for increasing the awareness, knowledge, and correct pronunciation of names of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin, and in educating the wider community about the importance of place names to these cultures. As such, the following rules have been developed to assist nomenclature authorities in dealing with issues of education, raising awareness, and in improving correct spelling and pronunciation of indigenous place names,

- i. A commitment by nomenclature authorities to undertake, where possible, an educative role in popularising correct spelling and pronunciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names.
- ii. Nomenclature authorities and the Committee for Geographical Names in Australia (CGNA) should undertake an educative role to develop positive international perspectives of the use of indigenous names in Australia.
- iii. Import a realisation that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names represent gifts from those cultures, the sharing of which imposes ethical obligations on the users. (This covers such areas as respect for restrictions, acknowledgement of sources, authorisation for use of names, etc).
- iv. To create an awareness among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of the importance of being able to preserve culture through place names and minimise the encroachment of new European names on the landscape, particularly for features of high cultural significance.
- v. Foster a knowledge among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that these wishes will be respected.
- vi. Educate nomenclature authority support staff in appropriate consultative mechanisms.
- vii. Create an increased awareness among nomenclature authority staff of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language and culture.

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4.5 Procedural

The use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names particularly for cartographic purposes will obviously require rules that would not overly conflict with established practices for mapping. As such, the following rules have been developed to assist nomenclature authorities

in dealing with issues that may arise upon the consideration of use of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander place names for official purposes.

- i. A dual naming system or use of alternative names, may be used as a management and educative tool for the naming of physical and environmental features of significance to the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community when an official name already exists and when a name change is not possible or acceptable.
- ii. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander names or terms from one particular area are not to be applied to other areas for official naming purposes.
- iii. Local historical and cultural information relating to the meaning and origin of the place names should be collected whenever possible.
- iv. Previous relevant surveys by anthropologists, linguists, land councils, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditional owners and others be used as a resource prior to any field work.
- v. Names and spellings may be changed to avoid duplication of names, to present a better vehicle for correct pronunciation and to provide for better local and regional culture retention.
- vi. Roman characters should be used in preference to other syllabic forms.
- vii. Where alternative spellings of a specific Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander name exists, only one official spelling should be used following consultation with the relevant community.
- viii. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names are to be actively sought with the assistance of the State/Territory and Federal Governments.
- ix. State/Territory authorities agree to co-operate in undertaking joint projects where Common State/Territory boundaries have no meaning to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and language.

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5. REVIEW

It is not proposed that the National Policy Guidelines will constitute a fixed set of procedures and standards. It is, however, designed to establish rules to facilitate the collection, and correct use of place names of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin.

Meaningful reviews of the Policy Guidelines are recognised as being an integral part of ensuring that the aim and objectives of the Guidelines are being met and will continue to meet the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and nomenclature authorities.

It is expected that as nomenclature authorities commence programs to actively record and use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander place names, there will be an on-going process of review and revision of these guidelines.

Experiences in South Australia and Western Australia relating to recording projects have raised issues which, at first glance, appear to be complex problems. However, these matters have been readily resolved through processes of consultation with specific Aboriginal communities and individuals. A very important point is to ensure that the momentum is maintained,

particularly now that interest has been generated among a significant number of concerned agencies and individuals.

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6. IMPLEMENTATION

Each nomenclature authority will need to further examine these Guidelines to determine how they fit with current policy and practices within their respective States/Territories. Some of the Guidelines will already form part of the general policy in use by State/Territory nomenclature organisations. The Guidelines should be organised by nomenclature authorities in a procedural sense to suit the methodologies currently in place in each State/Territory.

As refinements and additions to these Guidelines occur, new changes will be dealt with by the National Secretariat of the Committee for Geographical Names in Australia and formal notification of changes to the Guidelines will be distributed to State and Territory nomenclature authorities for discussion and adoption.

7. FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information about the National Policy Guidelines for the Recording and Use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Place Names, please contact:

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