

# THE INTERNATIONAL HYDROGRAPHIC ORGANIZATION AND ITS INVOLVEMENT WITH GEOGRAPHICAL PLACE NAMES

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## INTRODUCTION

It may be useful to first of all explain what the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) is and what it does. It is an intergovernmental body, at present having 64 Member States. It is not a member of the United Nations group of organizations. It was formed in 1921 and has its Headquarters, which is termed the International Hydrographic Bureau (IHB), located in Monaco, due to the generosity of the Government of that country, which provides it with office space. There are 21 people, including the three person Directing Committee, working at the IHB.

Since 1978 the IHO has had a formal Convention that defines its objectives and constitution. Its two main objectives are to bring about:

- (a) The co-ordination of the activities of national hydrographic offices.
- (b) The greatest possible uniformity in nautical charts and documents.

Within these basic objectives there is an array of specific activities, which includes such matters as developing a worldwide set of uniform charts and the development of standards for digital data exchange.

Within the context of this paper it is important to note another statement in the IHO Convention and this is that the Organization shall have a consultative and purely technical nature [1]. This is elaborated further in the General Regulations [2] which add that its activities shall not include matters involving questions of international policy.

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## INTEREST IN GEOGRAPHICAL PLACE NAMES

The IHO has had an interest in geographical place names from the very beginning of its existence in 1921. This was due to its quest for uniformity in nautical charts and publications, in which different countries used different languages and the charts and publications had to be understandable to international mariners.

Even before the Organization was formed we may note that a Resolution was passed by the International Hydrographic Conference in 1919, in which it was agreed desirable that the limits of enclosed seas should be laid down and it might be stated to what sea or ocean a strait connecting two of them should be reckoned [3]. This matter was subsequently taken up by correspondence in the above reference and oceans and seas with their limits were defined. These included the naming of the body of water between Asia and the islands of Japan as the Japan Sea. In 1929 a Special Publication No. 23 "The Limits of Oceans and Seas" was published by the IHB.

There was considerable concern that names on some charts and hydrographic publications were not in the Latin alphabet and how names not in this script, such as Greek, Chinese and Japanese, could be uniformly transcribed. We therefore find, in 1932, the Organization publishing official lists of place names and information derived from official sources concerning various national systems of transcription into the Latin alphabet [4, 5].

The third area of interest in nomenclature resulted in the need to use consistent terminology for submarine relief. This matter was first raised in 1924 in another internal Circular Letter of the Organization [6]. The Bureau had received a suggestion from the Director of the Italian Hydrographic Institute proposing the adoption of standard terminology in the various languages for such submarine and topographical features that would be useful in the compilation of Sailing Directions and Charts. It was noted that the 7th International Geographical Congress, held in Berlin in 1899 had appointed a committee on the "Nomenclature of Sub-oceanic Features". A list of definitions and terms was subsequently adopted at the 8th International Geographical Congress in 1904. The Bureau drew up its own lists in English and French and submitted these to the Member States for comments.

Over the years these interests in geographical place names have developed, as the need for more detailed maps, charts and written publications describing the oceans grew. The pursuit of these interests have not been without contention or it may be said, without politics, in spite of the Organization's mandate to avoid political issues. Contention lies both in the naming of the oceans and seas but also in their limits. Typical of this contention has been whether or not to name the large ocean area north of Antarctica the Southern Ocean, the Antarctic Ocean or to consider it simply as an extension of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans. This matter was first brought up by the USA at the Third International Hydrographic Conference in 1932, which raised the proposal that it should be Southern Ocean in preference to Antarctic Ocean [7]. It also claimed that the limits as defined are generally too far north. In fact, at present there are more questions on the limits of bodies of water than on the names themselves.

The third and last edition of SP-23 "Limits of Oceans and Seas" was published as long ago as 1953 [8]. Since then, various valiant efforts have been made to produce further editions, including a draft in 1986 [9], which nearly reached approval by the Member States. Since then, perhaps aggravated by the feelings of sovereignty aroused by the Law of the Sea Conference, it has been difficult to reach agreement even though the non-political need for the publication has been stressed.

Paralleling the developments of Limits of Oceans and Seas has been the interest in developing a uniform policy for the handling of geographical names and the international standardization of geographic names. Both these matters have now been resolved and are published as the IHO Technical Resolutions [10]:

A 4.1 Uniform policy for handling geographic names.

A 4.2 International standardization of geographic names.

These are attached as Annex 1 of this paper. The second of these resolutions recommends that the IHB co-operate with the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names with the object of achieving international standardization of names of maritime and undersea features. This association can be traced back to 1967 when the first UN Conference on the International Standardization of Geographical Names was held [11]. The IHB was represented at that conference by one of its Directors, Captain V.A. MOITORET. A resolution made by that conference has some bearing on matters being discussed in this paper. This was:

#### **RESOLUTION 8**

##### **"Treatment of Names of Features beyond a Single Sovereignty"**

It included the consideration that it is preferable that a common name or application be established, wherever practical, in the interest of international standardization and recommended that the geographical names authorities of the nations concerned attempt to reach agreement on these conflicting names or applications.

Further on, Resolution 8 recommended that the UN Permanent Commission on Geographical Names should obtain from the IOC (Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission), the IHB, and the International Association for Physical Oceanography (IAPSO) full particulars of the work already accomplished by those organizations.

In a series of internal Circular Letters, starting in 1972 [12], the IHB took up the matters which later became its Technical Resolutions 4.1 and 4.2, noted previously. This dialogue extended through until 1974 and during this period many refinements were made. It is clear, that inspite of the urging of Resolution 8 of the first UN Conference on Geographical names that attempts be made to reach agreement on conflicting names, the Member States felt that it was necessary to have an "opt out" clause, should agreement not be possible. Thus we find in paragraph 6 of IHO Technical Resolution A 4.2 the statement: "It is recommended that where two or more countries share a given geographical feature (such as, for example, a bay, a strait, channel or archipelago) under a different name form, *they should endeavour to reach agreement* on fixing a single name for the feature concerned. If they have different official languages and *cannot agree on a common name form, it is recommended that*

*the name forms of the two languages in question should be accepted for charts and publications unless technical reasons prevent this practice on small scale charts. e.g. English Channel/La Manche".*

## UNDERSEA FEATURE NAMES AND THE GAZETTEER

The development of the General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans (GEBCO) has given rise to a need for a consistent practice in the naming of undersea features. As information on the bathymetry of the world's oceans improves, more and more features are discovered and defined and it is important that they be named in a consistent and unique manner. There are two elements to this. One is a consistency in the generic naming of undersea features and the other is to ensure that the proper names used are designated to a single international policy.

During the Ninth Session of the "Joint IOC/IHO Guiding Committee for the General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans (GEBCO)", in 1983, the IHB was requested to prepare a Gazetteer of the geographical names of undersea features shown on the GEBCO 5th Edition and on the IHO Small-scale International Chart Series (1:2 250 000 and smaller). The IHB has developed this Gazetteer [13]. It is in two parts. Part I is the Gazetteer of Geographical Names of Undersea Features shown on the GEBCO and on the International Chart Series. Part II is Standardization of Undersea Feature Names. The Gazetteer provides an alphabetical list of Geographical names with their geographical coordinates. Part II includes Guidelines for the Standardization of the names (see Annex 2) and includes definitions of the terminology for generic features. The latter part is also published separately [14].

The IHO Technical Resolution A 4.3 (see Annex 3) "Naming of Undersea Features" asks Member States to encourage marine scientists and other persons in their country wishing to name undersea features to take account of the gazetteer and the guidelines on naming undersea features.

The guidelines include some interesting points. For instance it is stated that international concern for naming undersea features is limited to those features entirely or mainly outside waters under the jurisdiction of states. Is this to be taken as the Economic Zone or the Continental Shelf and in either case this must infer that the responsibility for naming within the jurisdiction rests only with the coastal state. In paragraph E of the Guidelines it states: 'In the event of conflict, the persons and agencies most directly involved should resolve the matter. When two names have been applied to the same feature, the older name generally should be accepted. When a single name has been applied to two different features, the feature named first generally should retain the name.' It would seem that the guidelines are just that and do not provide an authority.

The generic terminology, that we can trace back to the concerns of the Italian Hydrographer in 1924, has assumed considerable political importance in recent years, not only because of the need to be consistent but in the interpretation of the Law of the Sea Convention in such articles where this terminology is used. Article 76 on the Continental Shelf is particularly noted in this respect.

## CONCLUSIONS

The above discussion will have shown the importance to the International Hydrographic Organization of having consistent policies for the assignment of place names. In spite of this and its mandate to avoid involvement in questions of international policy, the Organization frequently finds itself drawn to political issues when discussing place names. Undoubtedly the greater level of exploitation of the oceans in recent years has aggravated this situation but the IHO must strive to consider only the technical issues. However even such a seemingly innocent task as trying to agree on unique and consistent nomenclature in the interest of maritime safety inevitably leads to contention between states concerned about the sovereignty of their adjacent offshore waters.

## References

- [1] International Hydrographic Organization (1996). Basic Documents of the International Hydrographic Organization, M-1, 60 pages.
- [2] International Hydrographic Organization (1996). Ibid, p 15-25.
- [3] International Hydrographic Bureau (1923). Circular Letter No. 1-H, 15 February 1923.
- [4] International Hydrographic Bureau (1932). Proceedings of the Third International Hydrographic Conference, p. 28.
- [5] Ibid, p. 105.
- [6] International Hydrographic Bureau (1924). Circular Letter No. 21-H, 5 July 1924.
- [7] International Hydrographic Bureau (1932). Proceedings of the Third International Hydrographic Conference.
- [8] International Hydrographic Organization (1953), Third Edition SP-23, Limits of Oceans and Seas, 38 pages.
- [9] International Hydrographic Organization (1986), Draft Fourth Edition SP-23, Limits of Oceans and Seas, 215 pages.
- [10] International Hydrographic Organization. Resolutions of the International Hydrographic Organization M-3. Loose leaf with to date amendments.
- [11] International Hydrographic Bureau (1967) "United Nations First Conference on the International Standardization of Geographical Names". Report in the International Hydrographic Bulletin.
- [12] International Hydrographic Bureau. Circular Letters 28/1972, 10/1973, 28/1973, 8/1974.
- [13] International Hydrographic Organization - Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (1988), Publication B-8, Gazetteer of Geographic Names of Undersea Features (Part I) and Standardization of Undersea Feature Names (Part II), 150 pages.
- [14] International Hydrographic Organization - Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (1989), Publication B-6, Standardization of Undersea Feature Names, 34 pages.

**Annex 1****A 4.1 Uniform policy for handling Geographical Names**

1.- With the purpose of obtaining approximate uniformity in the geographical names appearing on the nautical documents of maritime countries, it is recommended that each national Hydrographic Office:

- (a) On its charts and other nautical documents of its own coasts, show names that are in exact agreement with the forms prescribed by the most authoritative source. Each country will thus provide complete and authoritative name coverage in its own official script, whether Roman or non-Roman, for the use of all other national hydrographic offices that issue charts on various scales, and other nautical documents, for the same area.
  - (b) On its charts and other nautical documents of foreign coasts where the Roman alphabet is officially used by the sovereign country, show names that are in exact agreement with the most authoritative usage of the country having sovereignty. These names should be obtained directly from new and revised editions of the nautical charts and other documents of the country having sovereignty or confirmed by correspondence with that country. Where such names as officially written use accents or diacritical signs, these should be retained, even, and indeed particularly, when names are printed in capital letters.
  - (c) On its charts and other nautical documents of foreign coasts where the script of the sovereign country is other than the Roman alphabet, show names that are obtained by applying the various international systems for romanization approved by the United Nations to the names appearing on the most authoritative sources of the country having sovereignty or confirmed by correspondence with that country.
- Note: Among countries where the Roman alphabet is official, international uniformity in transcription systems would be advantageous to the various national governments. It is accordingly recommended that national Hydrographic Offices place before their governments the desirability of obtaining uniformity and urge the continuation of efforts for effective agreements through the United Nations. (See also C1.2).
- (d) On its charts and other nautical documents of all foreign coasts, use for the generic part of complex geographical names the word (in its Roman-alphabet form) used by the country having sovereignty. e.g. Falsterborev. By following this practice, the geographical generic term will not be translated but will appear, in its Roman-alphabet form, on the charts of all nations.
  - (e) On all its charts and other nautical documents, apply its conventional national usage to names of countries, major territorial divisions and boundary features, and to the oceans and international subdivisions thereof. The names used internationally may also be shown but in a subordinate manner. This system will be applied until an international convention by the United Nations on standardization of internationally recognized names has been adopted.

#### **A 4.2 International standardization of Geographical Names**

1.- It is resolved that the IHB should maintain continuous contact with the United Nations Organization, and specifically with the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, for all studies or actions relating to geographical names involving or affecting hydrographic publications. The Bureau should insure that actions previously taken on hydrographic matters, with respect to names, within the IHO are brought to the attention of appropriate United Nations Conferences or working groups. The Bureau also promulgate to Member States information on all significant developments on this subject as they occur.

2.- It is recommended that, since national standardization of geographical names is an essential preliminary to international standardization, Hydrographic Offices encourage and support the establishment of national names authorities, following the principles and procedures recommended by the resolutions on this subject adopted by the United Nations Conferences on Geographical Names.

3.- It is recommended that the IHB Co-operate with the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names with the object of achieving international standardization of names of maritime and undersea features.

4.- It is further recommended that co-operation should, in particular, be extended in the under-mentioned activities of the United Nations Group of Experts:

- (a) Study of existing national and international practices concerning the delineation and naming of oceans and seas, including their integral sub-divisions, beyond the limits of national jurisdiction, with a view to recommending improvements in current nomenclatural practices and procedures.
- (b) Drawing up a system for naming undersea features beyond a single sovereignty and proposing it as a basis for preparing an international convention on the subject.
- (c) Standardizing the definitions of undersea feature "terms and definitions" in order to promote their acceptance and use by names authorities.
- (d) Developing procedures for international standardization of naming new undersea features as they are discovered, defined and identified in the future.

5.- It is recommended that when Hydrographic Offices produce gazetteers or geographical dictionaries, these publications be standardized as far as possible in accordance with resolutions on the subject adopted by the United Nations.

6.- It is recommended that where two or more countries share a given geographical feature (such as, for example, a bay, a strait, channel or archipelago) under a different name form, they should endeavour to reach agreement on fixing a single name for the feature concerned. If they have different official languages and cannot agree on a common name form, it is recommended that the name forms of each of the languages in question should be accepted for charts and publications unless technical reasons prevent this practice on small scale charts. e.g. English Channel/La Manche.

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**Annex 2****GUIDELINES FOR THE STANDARDIZATION  
OF UNDERSEA FEATURE NAMES**

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**I. GENERAL**

- A. International concern for naming undersea features is limited to those features entirely or mainly (more than 50%) outside waters under the jurisdiction of States.
- B. "Undersea feature" is a part of the ocean floor or seabed that has measurable relief or is delimited by relief.
- C. Names used for many years may be accepted even though they do not conform to normal principles of nomenclature.
- D. Names approved by national names authorities in waters beyond national limits (i.e. international waters) should be accepted by other States if the names have been applied in conformance with internationally accepted principles. Names applied within the territorial limits of a State should be recognized by other States.
- E. In the event of a conflict, the persons and agencies involved should resolve the matter. Where two names have been applied to the same feature, the older name generally should be accepted. Where a single name has been applied to two different features, the feature named first generally should retain the name.
- F. Names not in the writing system of the country applying the names on maps or other documents should be transliterated according to the system adopted by the national authority applying the names.
- G. In international programme, it should be the policy to use forms of names applied by national authorities having responsibility for the pertinent area.
- H. States may utilize their preferred versions of exonyms.

**II. PRINCIPLES FOR NAMING FEATURES****A. Specific terms**

- 1. Short and simple terms (or names) are preferable.
- 2. The principal concern in naming is to provide effective, conveniently usable, and appropriate reference; commemoration of persons or ships is a secondary consideration.
- 3. The first choice of a specific term, where feasible, should be one associated with a geographical features; e.g.: Aleutian Ridge, Aleutian Trench, Peru-Chile Trench, Barrow Canyon.



4. Specific terms for other features can be used to commemorate ships or other vehicles, expeditions or scientific institutes involved in the discovery of the feature, or to honour the memory of famous persons. Where a ship name is used, it should be that of the discovering ship, or if that has been previously used for a similar feature, it should be the name of the ship verifying the feature, e.g.: San Pablo Seamount, Atlantis II Seamounts.
5. If names of living persons are used (surnames are preferable), they should be limited to those who have made an outstanding or fundamental contribution to ocean sciences.
6. Groups of like features may be named collectively for specific categories of historical persons, mythical features, stars, constellations, fish, birds, animals, etc. Examples are as follows:

Musicians Seamounts	Bach Seamount Brahms Seamount Schubert Seamount
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Electricians Seamounts	Volta Seamount Ampere Seamount Galvani Seamount
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Ursa Minor Ridge and Trough Province	Suhail Ridge Kochab Ridge Polaris Trough
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7. Descriptive names are acceptable, particularly when they refer to distinguishing characteristics (i.e. Hook Ridge, Horseshoe Seamount).
8. Names of well-known or large features that are applied to other features should have the same spelling.
9. Specific elements of names should not be translated from the language of the nation providing the accepted name.

#### **B. Generic terms**

1. Generic terms should be selected from the following list of definitions to reflect physiographic descriptions of features.
  2. Generic terms applied to features appearing on charts or other products should be in the language of the nation issuing the products. In those cases where terms have achieved international accuracy in a national form, that form should be retained.
  3. It should be recognized that as ocean mapping continues, features will be discovered for which existing terminology is not adequate. New terms required to describe those features should conform to these Guidelines.
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**Annex 3****A 4.3 Naming of Undersea Features**

1.- It is agreed that Member States should strongly encourage marine scientists and other persons in their country wishing to name undersea feature to:

- a) check their proposals with published Gazetteers of Undersea Feature Names, including the IHO/IOC Publication B-8, "Gazetteer of Geographical Names of Undersea Features" shown (or which might be added) on the GEBCO and on the IHO small scale International Chart Series and its supplements of Geographical Names included on larger scale Regional International Bathymetric Chart Series;
- b) take into account the guidelines in the IHO/IOC Publication B-6 "Standardization of Undersea Feature Names", including the use of the Undersea Feature Name Proposal Form contained therein;
- c) submit all proposed new names for clearance either to their appropriate national authority or, where no such national authority exists, to the IHB or IOC for consideration by the GEBCO Sub-Committee on Undersea Feature Names, which may advise on any potential confusing duplication of names.

2.- It is agreed that Member States invite publishers of ocean maps and editors of scientific journals in their country to require compilers and authors to provide written evidence of such clearance before accepting for publication any maps or scientific articles containing new names for undersea features.

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