

UNITED STATES BOARD ON GEOGRAPHIC NAMES.

A resolution passed at the Fifth International Hydrographic Conference recommended the development of a uniform policy for handling geographic names on nautical charts and in hydrographic documents. The Bureau's Circular Letter No. 6-H, dated September 18, 1947, presented a draft proposal on this subject for consideration and comment. In connection with this proposal, member Offices may find interest in the new status in the United States of America of the work of setting up geographic name standards for official use. The United States has had a centralized authority, a "Board on Geographic Names", to deal with this subject since the year 1890. Its activities, however, have at times been largely limited to the voluntary work of its Members, and it was realized that such an establishment was inadequate to carry the full load required by present conditions. The Congress of the United States has accordingly recognised the situation by the passage of Public Law No. 242, effective July 25, 1947. The text of the law is brief, and as some of its features may be of interest to Member-States confronted with a similar problem, it is given in full below :—

PUBLIC LAW 242 - 80th Congress
Chapter 330 - 1st Session
S. 1262.

AN ACT

To provide a central authority for centralising geographic names for the purpose of eliminating duplication in standardizing such names among the Federal Departments, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

That the Secretary of the Interior, hereinafter called the Secretary, conjointly with the Board on Geographic Names, as hereinafter provided, shall provide for uniformity in geographic nomenclature and orthography throughout the Federal Government. The Secretary may exercise his functions through such officials as he may designate, except that such authority as relates to the final approval or review of actions of the Board on Geographic Names shall be exercised by him, or his Under or Assistant Secretaries.

SECTION 2. — There is hereby established a Board on Geographic Names, hereinafter called the Board. The Membership of the Board shall include one representative from each of the Departments of State, War, Navy, Post Office, Interior, Agriculture, and Commerce, and from the Government Printing Office, and the Library of Congress. The Board may also include representatives from such Federal agencies as the Secretary, upon recommendation of the Board, shall from time to time find desirable, even though these agencies are in the departments otherwise represented on the Board. The members of the Board shall be appointed by the respective heads of the departments or independent agencies that they represent. Each member shall be appointed for a two-year term but may be reappointed to successive terms. The members of the Board shall serve without additional compensation. The Board shall nominate a Chairman to be appointed by the Secretary, and shall establish such working committees as are found desirable.

SECTION 3. — The Board, subject to the approval of the Secretary, shall formulate principles, policies, and procedures to be followed with reference to both domestic and foreign geographic names; and shall decide the standard names and their orthography for official use. The principles, policies and procedures formulated here-under shall be designed to serve the interests of the Federal Government and the general public, to enlist the effective cooperation of the Federal Departments and agencies most concerned, and to give full consideration to the specific interests of particular Federal and State agencies. Action may be taken by the Secretary in any matter wherein the Board does not act within a reasonable time. The Board may make such recommendations to the Secretary as it finds appropriate in connection with this Act.

SECTION 4. — The Secretary shall cause such studies and investigations to be made and such records to be kept as may be necessary or desirable in carrying out the purposes of this Act, and he shall provide a place of meeting and staff assistance to the Board. The staff shall be responsible to the Secretary, who shall prescribe its relations to the Board and the committees of the Board. The Secretary may establish from time to time, upon recommendation of the Board, advisory committees of United States citizens who are recognized experts in their respective fields to assist in the solution of special problems arising under this Act.

SECTION 5. — For the guidance of the Federal Government, the Secretary shall promulgate in the name of the Board, from time to time and in such form as will carry out the purposes of this Act, decisions with respect to geographic names and principles of geographic nomenclature and orthography. The Secretary shall also furnish such additional information with respect to geographic names as will assist in carrying out the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 6. — With respect to geographic names the pertinent decisions and principles

issued by the Secretary shall be standard for all material published by the Federal Government. The United States Board on Geographic Names in the Department of the Interior created by Executive order, is hereby abolished, and the duties of said Board are transferred to the Board herein created, and all departments, bureaus, and agencies of the Federal Government shall refer all geographic names and problems to the said Board for the purpose of eliminating duplication of work, personnel, and authority.

SECTION 7. — Nothing in this Act shall be construed as applying to the naming of the offices or establishments of any Federal agency.

SECTION 8. — There are hereby authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be necessary to carry out the purposes of this Act.

Approved July 25, 1947.

