Geographical names authorities

Introduction

Helen Kerfoot
UNEGGN Chair
(Natural Resources Canada)

ICOS, Barcelona
Why do we need authorities for names?

- Standardized names - benefits
- Can avoid –
  - Duplication of names
  - Poorly recorded names
  - Confused applications
  - Lack of quick and easy access to data
What sort of authority is appropriate?

The choice depends on the nature of the country:
- size; diversity; type of government; languages;
- population density and distribution; layers of history

Many arrangements are possible, including:
(1) Default if no names board
(2) Centralized national names board
(3) Decentralized to regional names boards
(4) A combination of (2) and (3)

• *Is it a board, a council, a commission, a committee* ...?
(1) Standardization – central agency/agencies

- National Mapping Agency
- Municipalities
- National Hydrographic Office
- Military Mapping
(2) Standardization – names authority (centralized)

National Names Authority (centralized)

Office

branch offices
sub-committees
advisors
(3) Standardization – names authority (decentralized)

National Names Authority (umbrella)

Regional committee

Regional committee

Regional committee

Office
(4) Standardization – names authority both centralized and decentralized

- Two levels of government make decisions
  - (a) province/regional
  - (b) national/federal
Some considerations to discuss

• Mandate
  ▪ For what types of names is the authority responsible?
    • Municipalities, less formal settlements, land features, hydrographic features, offshore features, streets, buildings, farms, parks, airports, docks, features outside the country, etc.
  ▪ Final decisions or advisory?

• Legislation in effect
• Membership, meetings; policies and principles
• Problems faced? Who must use decisions?
The people are the key!

Names discussions:
A. Mongolia
B. Canada – advisory committee
C. Australia – NSW board
Resources

• Fortunate to have UNGEGN experts
  ▪ will indicate the variety in authorities
  ▪ provide some best practices

• Also have UNGEGN website:
  ▪ unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/
    ▪ Manual for establishing authorities
    ▪ Links to national authorities and databases
    ▪ Documents from UN Conferences and UNGEGN
    ▪ UNGEGN Information Bulletin