AUSTRALIAN PLACE NAMING PRINCIPLES

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We Acknowledge the diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders communities across Australia and their continued connection to the land. Place names reflect culture at various points throughout history. There are many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander naming systems across Australia. These systems continue today and were in place before official systems were adopted.

Many names from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages have become official names, used by all Australians. There are also many that have not.

AUSTRALIAN PLACE NAMING PRINCIPLES

Published by the Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping (ICSM) Place Names Working Group (PNWG)

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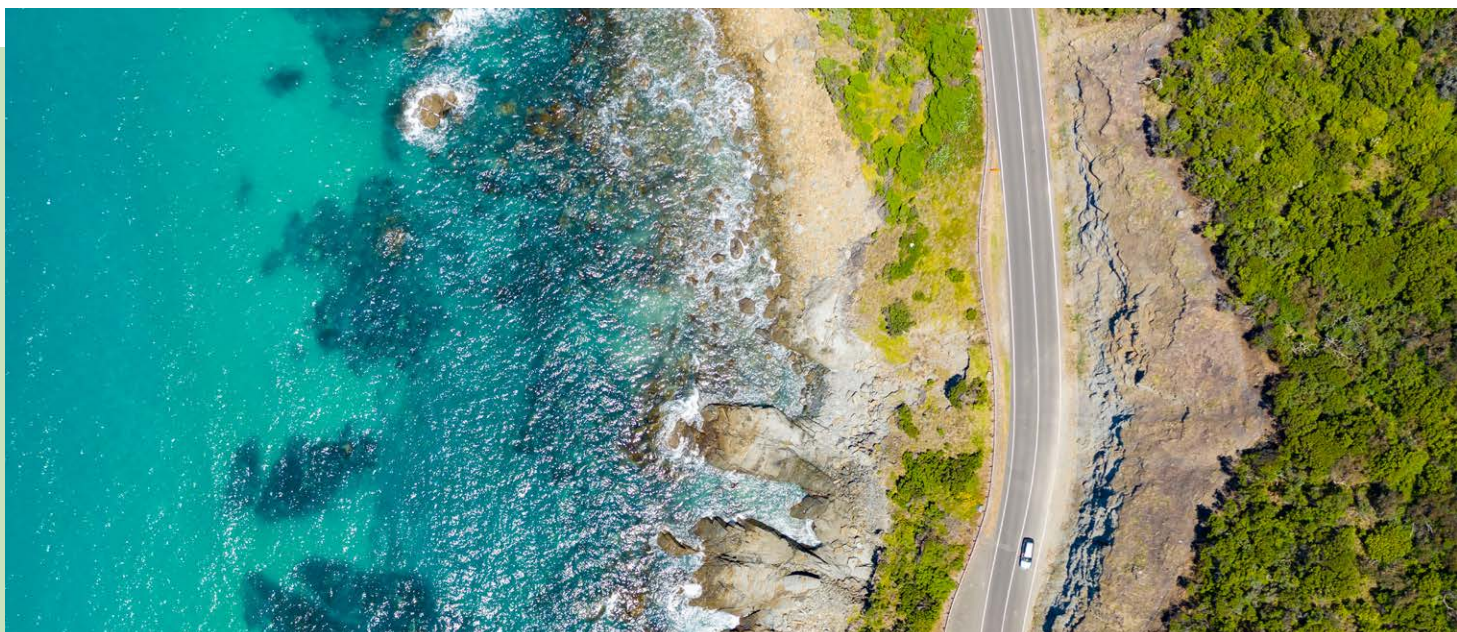
ACCESSIBILITY

We are committed to accessibility so that the Australian Place Naming Principles are available to everyone. This includes people with disability who may use assistive technology to read or listen to content.

If you are having trouble accessing the principles or have suggestions on how we can improve the accessibility of the principles, please contact the ICSM secretariat via icsm@ga.gov.au

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FOREWORD

The Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping (ICSM) Place Names Working Group (PNWG) brings together place name authorities from both Australia and New Zealand, working collaboratively to establish modern, inclusive, and consistent practices that reflect the evolving needs and values of our diverse communities. As there is no official national naming authority within Australia the PNWG has developed the Australian Place Naming Principles to provide a consistent and unified approach to place naming across the country.

The principles replace the previous Principles for the Consistent Use of Place Names and are designed to address contemporary community expectations, with a particular focus on safety, cultural sensitivity and inclusivity. It recognises the critical role place naming plays in supporting a range of functions, including economic development, research, conservation, service delivery, and in reflecting the cultural identity and values of Australia.

Aligned with the resolutions set out by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), the principles adhere to international best practices while supporting Australian government authorities in updating and aligning local place naming policies. This ensures greater effectiveness and consistency in place naming policy and process and better represents the diverse communities across the nation.

The PNWG advocates for place naming that is inclusive and reflective of the diversity within our communities. In particular, the group acknowledges the significance of place names in promoting the wider use and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and cultures.
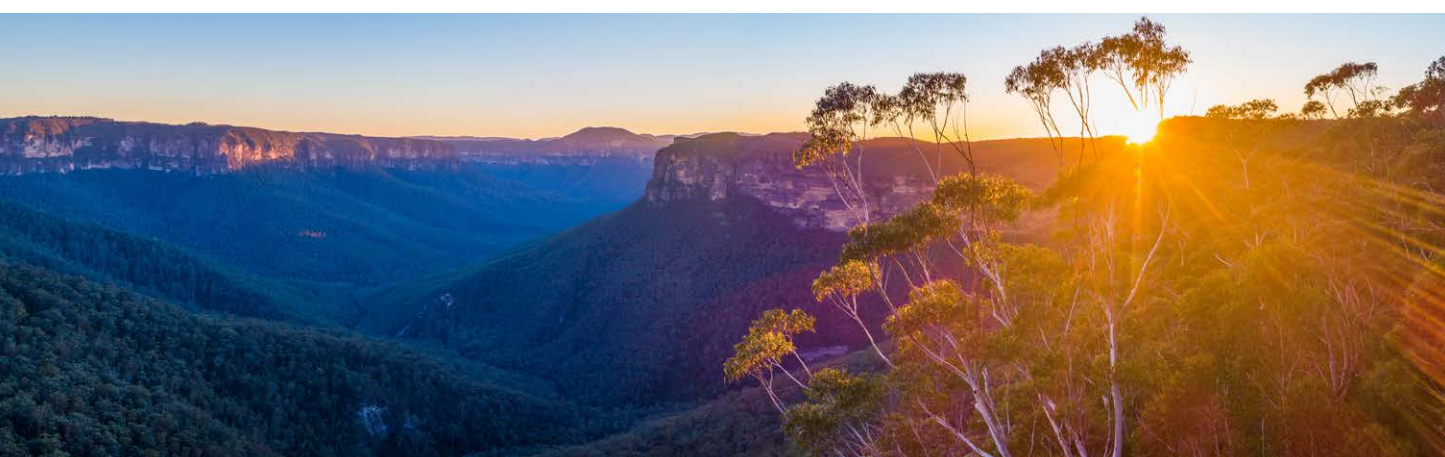
TBC

Incoming Chair
Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping

GLOSSARY

Term	Definition
Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP)	Indigenous cultural and intellectual property is a broad term which is used to refer to the rights Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to their heritage and culture. ICIP includes knowledge, songlines, language, dance, symbols and art as well as medicines, language, bush foods, sacred sites and ecological knowledge[1].
Feature	A place with identifiable physical characteristics (both geographical and administrative) that distinguish it from its surroundings.
Generic term	A part of a place name that indicates the type of geographical or topographical feature of a place. For example, 'Park' is a generic term used in the place name, 'Karakai Park', and 'Bay' is a generic term used in the place name 'Botany Bay'.
Locality	A locality, commonly referred to as a 'suburb' in urban areas, is an administrative area over a defined geographical area, for the creation of valid addresses that can be uniquely and clearly identified.
Official name	The State, Territory or other naming authority may approve a name to be the official name for a place. These may be referred to as assigned, approved, gazetted or registered.
Place name	An official or unofficial name given by a naming authority.
Road	Any public or private land-based thoroughfare or course navigable by vehicle or foot.
Unofficial name	The State, Territory or other naming authority may recognise alternative names within a gazetteer or related databases at their discretion. This may include recorded names, spelling variants, historic names or unapproved names. Collectively, these are referred to as unofficial names.
Vocabulary	A list, glossary, dictionary of the words used to define a place – its features, type and associations.

1   https://www.arts.gov.au/what-we-do/indigenous-arts-and-languages/protecting-indigenous-cultural-and-intellectual-property-rights

PRINCIPLES

Place names play a vital role in Australian society, serving as key geographical identifiers that support communication, navigation, emergency services, and cultural heritage. To ensure clarity, consistency, and inclusivity, Australia follows a structured approach to place naming, guided by principles that promote standardisation, accessibility, and cultural recognition.

These principles ensure that place names are applied consistently across the country, support cultural recognition and reflect community expectations.

Each state and territory in Australia has its own policies and practices, further information is available here: **icsm.gov.au/ what-we-do/place-names/australian-place- names**.

This document does not address the determination of state or territory names and boundaries, or Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Country or, language group names and boundaries.

The principles outlined in this document are not intended to be applied retrospectively.

PRINCIPLE 1: PLACE NAMING ACROSS AUSTRALIA IS CONSISTENT

All features and areas (places) in Australia are named in a consistent way to support the effective delivery of services, enhance community cohesion, and recognise the cultural heritage of that place.

1.1   LANGUAGE

Place names should:

- Be written in standard Australian English or, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander languages as determined by the appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

- Use the standard Australian English alphabet.

Place names should not:

- Contain numbers, roman numerals, punctuation, abbreviations, acronyms or similar. All words and numbers must be written in full.

- Start with the word 'The'.

- Be changed unless there is a compelling reason to do so.

- Contain cardinal indicators or qualifying terms, as listed in the 'Geographical Name Affix' vocabulary, available here: **vocabs.gsq.digital/v/vocab/defn:gn-affix**

PRINCIPLE 2: PLACE NAMING INFORMATION IS ACCURATE AND ACCESSIBLE

Place names are a key descriptor in databases supporting a broad range of services, including emergency services so they should be accurate and readily available.

2.1 ACCESSIBLE

- Place names must be approved by a relevant naming authority to be an official name.

- Place names should be published in the Australian gazetteer, which can be located here: **placenames.fsdf.org.au**

2.2 UNIQUE

- Place names of the same feature type should be unique and avoid duplicating existing names (in spelling or pronunciation) where it may cause confusion.

- Uniqueness is particularly important for names forming a component of a street address, such as road or locality name. A new road name, regardless of road type, should not be duplicated in the same or an adjoining locality, or in the same local government area.

- A new locality name should be unique in Australia.

2.3 CLEARLY DESCRIBED

A place name record should include:

- a clear description of the feature where the place name will be applied, including the extent of the feature.

- the type of feature being named. Where possible the feature type should align with the feature catalogue, available here: **icsm.gov.au/education/feature-catalogue**.

- the place name's origin information, such as the reasoning for the name and any associated stories or background. It is encouraged to also provide phonetic spelling and a recording of the pronunciation of the name.

2.4 PLACES WHICH CROSS STATE / TERRITORY / JURISDICTIONAL BOUNDARIES

- The name for any feature that crosses a State / Territory / jurisdictional boundary should be the same on both sides of that boundary and be decided by consensus with all relevant naming authorities.

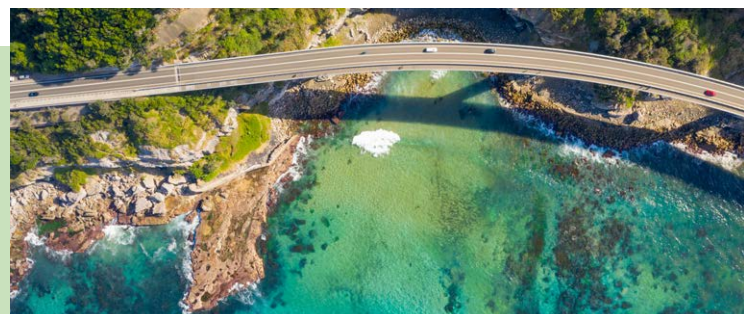## 2.5 ONSHORE AND OFFSHORE PLACES

- States and Territories are responsible for the naming of islands, waters and undersea places within their legislated coastal waters[2] and internal waters.

- All place naming activities in areas beyond legislated coastal waters (offshore) should be referred to the Australian Hydrographic Office as required by ICSM Resolution ROO/11/06 Limits of Oceans and Seas and Offshore undersea features[3].

2.6 ROAD NAMES

The naming of roads should follow all principles in this document and:

- A road name should be clear and unambiguous.

- All built public and private roads should be named. A road name should not be applied to a proposed road, where there is no intention to construct the road in the near future.

- A road name should apply to a continuous length of road even if it crosses administrative boundaries. If a road is broken due to redesign or redevelopment, then a new name is to be given to the non-continuous parts. Exceptions include:

  - A highway that passes through a town or city may be assigned a local name,
  - Two sides of a road divided by a median strip,
  - Intersects with another road or roads.

- A road name should consist of a unique term followed by a road type, as listed in the road types vocabulary, which can be accessed here: **https://linked.data.gov.au/def/road-types/standard**.

For information specific to Addressing, please refer to the Australian Addressing Creation & Maintenance Standard, available here: **icsm-au.github.io/addr-creation-maintenance/doc.html**

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2 Coastal Waters (State Powers) 1980 Act (Cth)
3 https://www.hydro.gov.au/

PRINCIPLE 3: PLACE NAMING PROMOTES CONNECTION, INCLUSIVITY AND THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS

Australia is a multicultural nation and place names promoting diversity and cultural inclusivity are encouraged. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander names in particular play an important role in reawakening language and culture. This may include the reinstating of traditional place names, or the creation of new names derived from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's diverse languages.

3.1 CONNECTION

- Place names should have a connection to the feature or area they represent.

3.2 ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PLACE NAMES

- Any place naming action should seek permission from the relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the custodians of their language and culture, with consideration to the right to control their use.

3.3 DUAL NAMING

- Dual names are a way to assign two names to a geographical feature, including one Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander name Dual names are not appropriate for roads or localities.

- Dual names should be represented by name, space, forward slash (/), space, name e.g. Wambuul / Macquarie River. Both names should be displayed on official maps and signage.

3.4 COMMEMORATIVE NAMES

- Place names can commemorate a person(s), significant event or a place's historical use. Commemorative names should have a significant connection to the place they are applied.

- When commemorating a person(s) the name must be applied posthumously and consent from the family should be sought where practical. They should not include initials, titles, honorifics or postnominals.

- A commemorative name may use a person's first name, last name, or full name. For places that form part of a street address (localities and roads), only a single name should be used.

3.5 UNACCEPTABLE NAMES

Place names must not:

- Be derogatory, racist, discriminatory, frivolous, or offensive.

- Be perceived as promoting commercial or business interests.

- Include words protected or restricted by Commonwealth or other legislation, unless the appropriate approvals are sought, e.g the term ANZAC[4], or Defence terms[5].

- Infringe on any established or implied rights, e.g. copyright, trademarks and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP).

3.6 CONSULTATION

- The impacted community or communities should be consulted for all new or altered place names.

- If using Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language in a place name, culturally appropriate engagement must be undertaken to obtain consent to use the name and record the meaning or story associated with the name.

4 https://www.dva.gov.au/recognition/commemorations/protecting-word-anzac

5 https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/consol_reg/dr2016147/s74.html