



**Ngā Pou  
Taunaha o  
Aotearoa**

New Zealand  
Geographic Board

## Standard for New Zealand place names

NZGBS60002

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## Introduction

Toitū te whenua, kia toitū anō ōna korero.

Land remains, may its stories remain as well.

Under the New Zealand Geographic Board (Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa) Act 2008 (NZGBA) the New Zealand Geographic Board Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa (NZGB) assigns, approves, alters and discontinues official and recorded place names in New Zealand<sup>1</sup>.

This standard provides guidelines for making a place name proposal to ensure that naming features and places in New Zealand is undertaken in a way that meets the provisions of the NZGBA, delivers the NZGB's strategic goals, contributes to effective location identification, and reflects New Zealand's culture and heritage.

It aims to provide proposers with a concise reference to guide them in meeting the minimum requirements for place name proposals, and to help the NZGB achieve quality and consistency in its decision making. The criteria are closely aligned to international best practice for standardised, consistent and accurate place naming.

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<sup>1</sup> Applying to mainland New Zealand and its offshore islands out to the 12 NM territorial limit, including Treaty place names, but not including the Ross Dependency of Antarctica, undersea features or Crown protected areas

## Terms and definitions

For the purpose of this standard these terms and definitions apply:

| <b>Term/Abbreviation</b> | <b>Definition</b>   |
|--------------------------|---|
| altered name             | The name of a feature or place that has been changed and made official.   |
| alternative name         | One of two or more official names for the same feature or place. Alternative names may be used separately or together.                    |
| approved name            | The recorded name of a place that the NZGB has approved as official without public consultation.  |
| assigned name            | The official name of a feature or place that did not previously have an official name. It may have had a recorded name or not had a name. |
| associated name          | A feature or place with the same specific term as another feature or place, based on their physical connection or proximity.              |
| collected name           | An unofficial original Māori name for a place that usually has another name.  |
| dual name                | Two names for a feature or place from different languages, usually Māori and English, used together as one name.                          |
| generic term             | The part of the name that describes the type of geographic feature or place.  |
| geographic feature       | As defined in <a href="#">section 4 of the NZGBA</a> .  |
| macron                   | A horizontal line over vowels in Māori words, for meaning and pronunciation.  |
| NZGB                     | New Zealand Geographic Board Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa <sup>2</sup>  |
| NZGBA                    | New Zealand Geographic Board (Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa) Act 2008  |
| official geographic name | As defined in <a href="#">section 4 of the NZGBA</a> .  |
| original Māori name      | A Māori place name that existed prior to European settlement, whether or not it has been spelled correctly.                               |
| orthography              | The conventions and rules of how to write a language.   |
| place                    | As defined in <a href="#">section 4 of the NZGBA</a> .  |
| recorded name            | As defined in <a href="#">section 4 of the NZGBA</a> .  |
| specific term            | The part of the name that doesn't usually describe the type of geographic feature, unless it is part of a composite name.                 |

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<sup>2</sup> Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa means the memorial markers of the landscape

## Further information

See the following for further information on place naming:

- New Zealand Geographic Board (Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa) Act 2008:  
<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2008/0030/latest/DLM1065412.html>
- Frameworks of the New Zealand Geographic Board Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa:  
<https://www.linz.govt.nz/resources/guide/frameworks-new-zealand-geographic-board-nga-pou-taunaha-o-aotearoa>
- NZGB Generic Terms policy:  
<https://www.linz.govt.nz/resources/guide/nzgb-generic-terms-policy>
- NZGB's 2018 statement on the use of macrons to standardise Māori place names:  
See page 70 of the Frameworks document under the heading 'Recorded place names with updated orthography'.

# 1. Criteria for place names

The NZGB will take into account these criteria when considering proposals to assign, approve, alter or discontinue official and recorded place names.

## 1.1 Acceptable names

- (a) Names that reflect New Zealand's exploration, events, tradition and history, and its diverse and inclusive society and culture.
- (b) The NZGB encourages contemporary Māori place names and the restoration of original Māori place names.
- (c) The surname or traditional ancestral Māori name of a person who has been deceased for at least two years, was a notable leader, of good character, and/or contributed to, or had a strong association with the feature, place or area.
- (d) Names that recognise the priority of discovery of significant places, including those of Māori pre-European contact.
- (e) Descriptive names that characterise shape, colour, composition or other distinguishing features, provided that they are not too general and do not need to be explained.
- (f) Names of native flora and fauna associated with a place.
- (g) Names that contribute to a theme in an area.

## 1.2 Unacceptable names

- (a) Names that are derogatory, discriminatory, frivolous, offensive, or in poor taste.
- (b) Names of institutions, organisations, commercial entities, commercial products, contributors of funds, or similar.
- (c) Names of living people.
- (d) Names of pets.
- (e) Numbers, roman numerals, abbreviations, acronyms, or similar. The exception is the honorific 'Saint' which is abbreviated to 'St'.

## 1.3 Undesirable names and other considerations

- (a) The names of populated places should be unique and unambiguous. Populated place names should support identification for emergency services and property addressing.
- (b) New names should be distinctive and preferably unique. Qualifying words, such as Upper, West and Right Branch, or generic terms, may be used to distinguish between associated features with the same specific name.

- (c) Names that improve the gender balance in New Zealand's place names are encouraged.
- (d) A name that already exists in a neighbouring area or is already in use throughout New Zealand should be avoided except where the story/kōrero explains the unique heritage and meaning(s) of the name. This avoids confusion and makes it easier to identify the correct place in an emergency. However, associated names with different generic terms are allowed.
- (e) Long-term existing names or names that are in common local use may take precedence over new names if they conform to this standard. Some long-term existing names (Māori and non-Māori) will not conform to the standard but are historically embedded.
- (f) Names that honour a person more than once should be avoided.
- (g) Long names are undesirable but may be acceptable when they do not impact emergency services, or the name is culturally, traditionally, or historically important.
- (h) Minor features or places of low importance or physical significance should not be named.
- (i) There should be a compelling or overriding need, such as identification for emergency services, to name features in designated wilderness areas and pristine/remote conservation areas with wilderness characteristics.

## 1.4 Generic terms

Refer to the NZGB's Generic Terms Policy which can be downloaded from:

<https://www.linz.govt.nz/resources/guide/nzgb-generic-terms-policy>

- (a) A generic term should accurately describe the type of feature being named.
- (b) A generic term can be English or Māori, but not both unless they have been in long-term use together.
- (c) A Māori generic term should generally be commonly known in the area. Some Māori place names include the generic term as part of the name, which is acceptable.
- (d) Generic terms should distinguish different features that have the same specific name, especially when they are nearby.
- (e) Natural features should usually have a generic term included in their name.
- (f) Names for populated places should not include a generic term unless it is already in long-term common use or is named after an associated geographic feature.
- (g) Generic terms should not be abbreviated.

A list of Māori and English generic terms can be downloaded from:

<https://geographicfeatures.linz.govt.nz/>

## 1.5 Orthographic standards

- (a) Names should conform to the conventions and rules of standard NZ English or te reo Māori. The NZGB may take into account historical spelling or long-term local use.
- (b) The correct use of macrons, hyphens, etc on Māori place names is dependent on expert advice from a licensed translator. The orthographic conventions of Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori (the Māori Language Commission) should be followed. However, advice from relevant hapū or iwi associated with the name will be taken into account.
- (c) The addition of a macron does not usually alter the meaning of a Māori place name but standardises its written form.
- (d) The English possessive form should not be used. However, existing names with the possessive [s] that do not have the possessive apostrophe, have been in long-term use and have low public value will not be altered.
- (e) Foreign names must be Romanised and should be in the form of the country of origin.

## 1.6 Altered names

A name may be altered when:

- it is culturally inappropriate,
- the location of a feature or place is unclear,
- there are compelling reasons for safety,
- it corrects a significant wrong or grievance,
- it is confusing or ambiguous,
- it does not follow established long-term local or common use,
- it standardises the orthography.

Any alteration should balance the cultural and historical significance of the name against long-term use and the practical need for location identification.

## 1.7 Dual names

- (a) Dual names, where both names are used together as one name, recognise the equal and specific significance of both names. Generally, an original Māori name should be the first part of a dual name in recognition of the right of first discovery. The order may be reversed in special circumstances, such as where there are considerations for emergency services and maritime safety responses.
- (b) Dual names are to be separated by a forward slash with a space either side.

## 1.8 Alternative names

There should be one name for one place. Alternative names are only assigned in exceptional circumstances. If alternative names are assigned either name can be used.

## 2. The process for naming places

Information about making a place name proposal is at <https://www.linz.govt.nz/regulatory/place-names/propose-place-name/proposing-names-new-zealand-and-its-offshore-islands>

A flowchart of the process is attached in **Appendix A**.

## Appendix A: The process for naming places in New Zealand

