

# Board accepts 'Whanganui' place name proposal

17 September 2009

The New Zealand Geographic Board Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa has accepted a proposal by Te Rūnanga o Tupoho that Wanganui city be spelt 'Whanganui'.

The Board's decision will now be referred to the Minister for Land Information, who may confirm, modify or reject the decision. The Board will recommend to the Minister that a minimum 12 month transition period be applied. Both names could be used during the transition period.

Board chairperson Dr Don Grant said the Board is referring the final determination to the Minister because objections were received on the proposal, and these objections were not upheld.

"If the Minister confirms Whanganui as official, government departments and local authorities that publish new documents (such as maps, but also including web pages) will be expected to use the official name. However, for private businesses and organisations, it would only apply to publications they produce that are intended for travellers or tourists, and for geographic and scientific publications.

"Businesses could choose whether to adopt the official name in their business name and their publications, or whether to retain the current spelling Wanganui. Even within the tourist industry, there would be no requirement to change the names of any business or company – such as motels and guest houses.

"The Board wants to minimise the costs involved in a decision such as this, and believes the 12 month minimum transition period will ensure costs are kept down for those affected."

Dr Grant said the Board considered all the submissions it received, and weighed up the community's views and the history and long-term usage of Wanganui.

Public submissions on the proposal were relatively evenly split, with 444 opposed, and 436 in support. Nine were neutral. Views expressed directly to the Minister for Land Information included 22 opposed and one in support.

"We took careful note of the Wanganui District Council submission, the referendum conducted by the council in 2009, and the research of Dr Diana Beaglehole commissioned by the council," Dr Grant said.

Other information the Board considered included evidence of the use of the 'h' in early historical records, and the fact that the issue of spelling was one that began from the 1840s. Views of the Human Rights Commission and the Māori Language Commission were also noted.

"In the end we could not overlook the fact that Wanganui is not correctly spelt and it is a Māori name that is of significant cultural importance," Dr Grant said.

"Historical evidence has shown that early settlers clearly intended the name of the city to be derived from the Māori name for the river, and consistent modern usage of the language showed the spelling should be Whanganui, not Wanganui."

Dr Grant wished to thank the public for their involvement.

“Like other public consultation processes, this process was about providing people with an opportunity to consider the arguments on both sides and then voice their opinion so that the Board could take into account a range of views and their reasons.” The Board’s report to the Minister will include a summary of the submissions and the points made on both sides of the debate as well as the reasons for the Board’s decision.

Te Rūnanga o Tupoho and the Wanganui District Council were advised of the Board’s decision this morning.

The Minister’s final determination, once made, will be advised via a media release.