

New Zealand Geographic Board to publicly consult on 'h' in Wanganui

30 March 2009

The New Zealand Geographic Board Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa (the Board) has decided to seek the New Zealand public's views on a proposed name change from Wanganui to Whanganui.

As the national place naming authority, the Board is required by law to consider proposals to assign, alter, approve or discontinue names for geographic features and places, including cities.

The Board received a proposal to change the place name of Wanganui to include an 'h' (Whanganui) on 12 February 2009. The proposal was submitted by lawyers McCaw Lewis Chapman, acting for Te Rūnanga o Tupoho. The Board considered the proposal at its meeting on 27 March 2009.

Based on the Board's statutory function to examine the spelling of place names, and to collect and encourage the use of original Māori place names, the Board has decided to proceed to the public notification stage of the process.

This means any member of the public will be able to have their say, whether supporting or objecting to the proposed change, said Board Chairperson Dr Don Grant.

"The Board feels there is a valid case made to change the spelling of the name of the city, and that the public should be given an opportunity to make their views known directly to the Board," he said.

"Wanganui, the name given to the town to reflect its position near the mouth of the Whanganui River, was spelt incorrectly and has never been formally gazetted by this Board or its predecessors. It is therefore not currently an official New Zealand place name."

The Board obtained advice on the Māori place name spelling from Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori (the Māori Language Commission). The current use of 'Whanganui' in the associated river name, the parliamentary electorate, and in some business names in the city was also a consideration. The Board also reconfirmed the 1991 decision to correct the spelling of the river.

The Board carefully considered the Wanganui District Council's views opposing the spelling change, and acknowledged that the name 'Wanganui' had a long history of local usage.

However, Dr Grant said early settlers clearly intended the name of the city to be derived from the Māori name of the river, and consistent modern usage of the language showed the spelling should be Whanganui, not Wanganui.

"While the Board acknowledges the historical transcription was based on the local pronunciation, the mechanics of standardising a previous unwritten language, together with its full meaning/translation, signal that the name was intended to be 'Whanganui'. This is about correcting a mistake made more than 150 years ago."

Dr Grant said this was a matter of spelling, not pronunciation. The Board noted that while the 'h' was silent in historical usage, many English words and place names had silent letters – for example the 'k' and the 'g' in the 'Poor Knights Islands'.

The Board noted the results of a referendum held in 2006, when a considerable number of Wanganui residents indicated their preference to retain the current spelling. However, the Board was conscious that declining the proposal at this point would not allow views both for and against to be expressed by other Wanganui residents and the wider rural Wanganui community, and also nationally by the New Zealand public. Proceeding to the public notification stage would gauge a fuller response.

This was the first time the Board had received a proposal to change the name of a New Zealand city, Dr Grant said. The Te Rūnanga o Tupoho proposal was comprehensive and well-researched.

“This is an issue of great importance to many, so the Board felt it important to allow the New Zealand public a chance to comment.”

A formal period of consultation will begin in six weeks, when the proposed name change is gazetted, and the public will be informed through notices in national and local newspapers and publications.

Members of the public will then have three months to make submissions supporting or objecting to the proposed name change by email, fax or post, to the Board’s secretariat. If a person objects to the proposal, they can suggest an alternative proposal or support the existing name.

“There has already been much public debate on the Wanganui name issue, so we expect that three months will allow people enough time to submit their views for the Board’s consideration,” Dr Grant said.

The next meeting of the Board is likely to be held in September or October 2009.

For more information visit www.linz.govt.nz

Background

The New Zealand Geographic Board Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa (the Board) assigns, approves, alters or discontinues the use of names for geographic features (eg place names), undersea features, and Crown-protected areas in New Zealand, its offshore islands and its continental shelf and the Ross Sea region of Antarctica.

The Board is a statutory body of government operating under the New Zealand Geographic Board (Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa) Act 2008 and reports to the Minister for Land Information([link is external](#)).

The Surveyor-General (a statutory officer within Land Information New Zealand) is Chairperson (ex-officio) of the Board, which comprises nine other members. The Board secretariat is located within Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) and provides the Board with administrative support, research assistance and advice.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. How can people make submissions?

Anyone can make a submission to support or object to a proposed official name within New Zealand's territorial boundaries. Public notification of the proposed name is published in the NZ Gazette (link is external), relevant newspapers or other news publications, and in the consultation and decisions section of the LINZ website.

People can email, fax or post their submission to the Secretary for the New Zealand Geographic Board at:

Secretary for the New Zealand Geographic Board Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa
c/- Land Information New Zealand
160 Lambton Quay
Private Box 5501
Wellington 6145
New Zealand

Fax +64 4 460 0112

Email customersupport@linz.govt.nz

For more information, view the submission section of the LINZ website www.linz.govt.nz (go to place naming and street names/consultation and decisions). A summary of the Te Rūnanga o Tupoho proposal will be posted on the LINZ website within the next couple of weeks.

Q. Can people make a submission before the public notification period?

People can contact the Board's Secretariat at any time; however those wishing to make a submission either for or against the name change are encouraged to do so during the formal public notification period, between mid-May and mid-August.

Q. Why does the public notification period not start until six weeks after the Board has met?

The decision to accept the name change proposal for the purposes of public consultation is expected to be gazetted in mid-May. This allows sufficient time for post-meeting formalities and to arrange for appropriate public notice.

Q. Which newspapers and publications will the public notice be published in?

Public notices tend to be included in national newspapers and the newspapers in the locality of the place in question.

Q. Can anyone make a submission, including an organisation?

Yes, any individual or entity can make a submission.

Q. Can anyone attend the Board's meeting when it considers the public submissions – is it an open meeting?

No. The meeting is attended by Board members only and secretariat staff. The public notification stage is intended to allow all formal and public submissions to the Board for its due consideration. The Board only accepts written submissions.

Q. What happens after public submissions have closed?

The Board will consider the submissions at its next Board meeting, which is likely to be scheduled for September or October 2009. If the Board agrees with (upholds) any objections to the name change, then the Board can make the final decision not to change the name. If the Board does not agree with (rejects) any objections, the New Zealand Geographic Board Act 2008 requires the Board to refer the decision to the Minister for Land Information. The Minister then makes the final determination.

Q. How will the public know what the Board decides?

Determinations are published in the NZ Gazette, in newspapers and other publications, as well as on the LINZ website. The Board would also likely issue a media release.

Further information about place naming and the New Zealand Geographic Board

Visit the Land Information New Zealand website for information about place naming and the New Zealand Geographic Board:

[Place naming](#)

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