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Australian Government

**Department of Climate Change, Energy,
the Environment and Water**
Australian Antarctic Division

Australian Antarctic Place Names Policy 2026

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This policy sets out the principles, criteria and standards used by the Australian Antarctic Division's (AAD) Place Names Committee when considering proposals for naming features in Australia's Antarctic and sub-Antarctic territories.
- 1.2. It provides guidance to the AAD Place Names Committee and ensures alignment with national and international Antarctic place-naming practices.

2. Scope

- 2.1. The geographical extent of the AAD Place Names Committee's jurisdiction with regards to the naming of features above the low water line is the same as the Australian Antarctic Territory (AAT) and the Territory of the Heard Island and McDonald Islands (HIMI) and extends beyond the coastline to include the territorial seas¹.
- 2.2. Names for features located below the low water line, and names for oceanographic features, may be considered by the AAD Place Names Committee and then be referred to the Australian Hydrographic Office (AHO)² for further consideration.

3. Authority

- 3.1. As per the Australian Administrative Orders, DCCEEW is responsible for the administration of the AAT and HIMI.
- 3.2. The AAD is the responsible DCCEEW division and the AAD Head of Division is the emanation of the Commonwealth of Australia with responsibility for administering these territories, including for naming places.
- 3.3. The AAD Place Names Committee makes recommendations on the naming of geographical features to the Head of Division.

4. Principles for Place Naming

Context

- 4.1. SCAR's Standing Committee on Antarctic Geographic Information (SCAGI) maintains the Composite Gazetteer of Antarctica, a compilation of names of features in Antarctica.
- 4.2. In 2021, under leadership from Australia, SCAGI updated the [International Principles and Procedures for Antarctic Place Names](#) document.
- 4.3. Australia has opted to adopt these principles and procedures as the basis for naming features in Antarctica.

¹ The Territorial Sea "is a belt of water not exceeding 12 nautical miles in width measured from the territorial sea baseline. Australia's sovereignty extends to the territorial sea, its seabed and subsoil, and to the air space above it. This sovereignty is exercised in accordance with both customary international law and the provisions of UNCLOS." As defined by the Australian Hydrographic Office, Mariner's Handbook for Australian Waters.

² In accordance with ICSM resolution R00/11/06. Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping (ICSM) 2012 Principles for Naming Water Bodies, Seabed, Undersea and Coastal Hydrographic and Oceanographic Features.

General Principles

- 4.4. Place name assignment should seek to reflect Australia's long Antarctic history, but also reflect our changing culture, with a focus on inclusion. Names should not cause offence on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, age or disability.
- 4.5. Name proposals should consider relevant Government and departmental policies, including the First Nations Strategy.
- 4.6. Further background information is available at Appendix 1.

Place Name Proposals

- 4.7. Anyone may propose a new place name. Proposals for new names may be made to the AAD Place Names Committee by completing the online [Nomination of new Antarctic place name](#) form.

Assessment of Place Name Proposals

- 4.8. The AAD Place Names Committee considers place name proposals with regard to the following criteria:
 - i. Priority of discovery
 - ii. Consideration of circumstances of publication of any previous name(s) for the feature
 - iii. Significance of the feature, noting the feature classification at Section 5.3
 - iv. Position of the feature - both absolute, and relative to other features
 - v. Suitability of the proposed name
 - vi. Appropriateness of the proposed name with particular regard to euphony and elegance (how it sounds and looks)

Personal and Non-Personal Names

- 4.9. Preference is given to non-personal over personal names.
- 4.10. Personal names are typically considered only for third-order features and posthumously, where a significant contribution to the Australian Antarctic Program is demonstrated.

Treatment of Unnamed Features

- 4.11. Unnamed geographical features should only be assigned names following consideration by the AAD Place Names Committee, endorsed by the Division Management Committee (DMC), and approved by the AAD's Head of Division, in accordance with the Committee's Terms of Reference.
- 4.12. Until formally named, such features should be described in relation to nearby well-known features and referred to as such on maps and diagrams and in all reports, including positional reference and extent.

5. Naming Rules and Standards

- 5.1. The AAD Place Names Committee should apply the approach recommended in the [International Principles and Procedures for Antarctic Place Names](#) document when selecting new names.
- 5.2. Where a foreign name exists, the approach outlined in the [International Principles and Procedures for Antarctic Place Names](#) should be followed, with due consideration to the criteria in 4.8 above.

Classification of features

- 5.3. Features in Antarctica are, for the purposes of allocating place names, grouped into three broad categories:
 1. First order features
 - Regions or "lands" (e.g., Princess Elizabeth Land)
 - Coasts (e.g., Ingrid Christensen Coast)
 - Seas (e.g., Davis Sea)
 - Major plateaux (e.g., Kent Plateau)
 - Extensive mountain ranges (e.g., Prince Charles Mountains)
 - Major submarine deeps, ridges, plateaux
 - Ice shelves (e.g., Shackleton Ice Shelf)
 - Large glaciers (e.g., Lambert Glacier)
 2. Second order features
 - Peninsulas (e.g., Broad Peninsula)
 - Lesser mountain ranges (e.g., Mawson Escarpment)
 - Prominent individual peaks (e.g., Mt Henderson)
 - Lesser glaciers (e.g., Sørsdal Glacier)
 - Prominent capes (e.g., Cape Darnley)
 - Islands (e.g., Anchorage Island)
 - Gulfs (e.g., Edward VIII Gulf)
 - Large bays or bights (e.g., Prydz Bay)
 - Straits or passages, harbours (e.g., Horseshoe Harbour)
 - Extensive submarine reefs, shoals, or shallows (e.g., Petersen Bank)
 - Extensive sub-glacial mountains and valleys
 3. Third order features
 - Minor mountains and hills (e.g., Tarbuck Crag)
 - Nunataks (e.g., Haupt Nunataks)
 - Cliffs (e.g., Blustery Cliffs)
 - Minor shore features (e.g., Walkabout Rocks)
 - Points and minor capes (e.g., Zappert Point)
 - Minor bays and coves (e.g., Newcombe Bay)
 - Anchorages
 - Lesser ridges and valleys (e.g., Trajer Ridge)

- Parts of these features
- Submarine reefs, shoals, and shallows of small extent

Personal Names

5.4. The [International Principles and Procedures for Antarctic Place Names](#) document recommends that:

Living persons should only be commemorated if they have made exceptionally significant contributions to Antarctic research or have given other notable service in Antarctica.

5.5. Similarly, the Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping (ICSM) Place Names Working Group (PNWG), has taken the view that:

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.

5.6. Accordingly, the AAD Place Names Committee will normally only consider personal names for third order features and then only if a compelling case can be made for the name in question.

5.7. The person whose name is being proposed must have made a significant contribution to the Australian Antarctic Program to be considered, and the onus is on the nominator(s) to establish this connection.

5.8. The person whose name is being proposed for a place should have been deceased for at least 12 months.

Descriptive Names

5.9. When selecting non-personal place names, the following types of names should be avoided:

- i. Descriptive names based on shape or colour (e.g., Basalt Pinnacle, Broad Valley), as these could be mistaken for general descriptions.
- ii. Names containing two generic terms (e.g., Crag Rock)
- iii. Names that replicate or resemble existing place names, including those created by prefixes such as "New" or "Little".
- iv. Names that are inappropriate, offensive or in bad taste.
- v. Names that may be construed as advertising a commercial or industrial enterprise such as the name of a commercial businesses, trade name, non-profit organisation, or commercial product.

Acceptable Themes

5.10. With the above considerations, the following naming themes could be considered:

- Names indicating the position of a feature (e.g., Corner Peak)
- Names of mammals (e.g., Elephant Island)
- Names of birds (e.g., Pintado Island)
- Names of plants (e.g., Lichen Lake)
- Descriptive features (e.g., North and South Portal, the Lookout)
- Geological names (e.g., Marine Plain)

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- Names of fossils (e.g., Laternula Lake)
- Names descriptive of emotion at the time of discovery (e.g., Cape Disappointment)
- Names commemorating the date of discovery (e.g., Candlemas Islands)
- Australian names (e.g., Commonwealth Bay)
- Australian Indigenous names
- Names indicating the type of scientific or field work conducted in the vicinity (e.g., Theodolite Hill)
- Names indicating local conditions to navigators (e.g., Deception Island)
- Mythological names (e.g., Mount Cyclops, Cape Cerberus)
- Names of ships (e.g., Discovery Inlet, Thala Valley)
- Names arising from groups of ideas (e.g., Scylla and Charybdis Glaciers)
- Names applying a theme (e.g., the anniversary of an event)

Consultation

- 5.11. The AAD Place Names Committee will work to ensure that the views of the Australian Antarctic community, alongside the broader public interest, are taken into account when it considers place name proposals.
- 5.12. The AAD Place Names Committee will seek the views of family members, where known, when naming a place for a deceased person.
- 5.13. Consultation will be undertaken with the relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples or representative bodies, consistent with ICSM PNWG guidance.

Appendix 1 – Additional Background Information

A names committee³ was established by a Ministerial instrument in 1952 (revised in 1982 and again in 2004), rather than through legislation and it acted as the national authority for place names for the AAT and HIMI. The committee adopted a name change in 1982 to become the Australian Antarctic Names and Medal Committee (AANMC).

In December 2014, the Government recommended that the AANMC be ceased and that *“The Department of the Environment to absorb the functions of the Committee and provide advice on place names and medal recipients to the Environment Minister (who will provide advice on medal recipients to the Governor General).”*

At a meeting⁴ on 29 January 2015, the Head of Division determined that a names committee be established within the AAD. The new names committee would consider place name proposals and provide recommendations to the AAD Executive for endorsement and AAD Director for approval. With the AANMC ceasing to exist, the Ministerial instrument of 1952 (as amended) is no longer applicable.

At a meeting of the Division Management Committee on 21 April 2026, the acting Head of Division re-established the AAD Place Names Committee with updated Terms of Reference and Place Names Policy.

Existing Names

When Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition (ANARE), now the Australian Antarctic Program (AAP), established its first continental station at Mawson, the AAT had already been explored to some extent by British, French, American, German, Australian, Norwegian and Russian parties. As a result, some features had already been named by more than one nation, and others had been given non-Australian names which were already in common use e.g. Windmill Islands, Vincennes Bay, and other names appearing in the Hansen Atlas and in the records of the US Navy's Operation Highjump.

Australian Antarctic Gazetteer

The Australian Antarctic Gazetteer⁵ is a database managed and hosted by the Australian Antarctic Data Centre. It includes officially recognised geographic names from the Australian Antarctic Territory, the Territory of Heard Island and McDonald Islands, Macquarie Island, as well as informal names and the names of assets.

Each gazetteer entry includes key details about the feature, which may include a feature description, naming origin, location, supporting images or map references, approval details and links to related AADC applications.

³ The committee's name from 1952 to 1982 was the Antarctic Names Committee of Australia (ANCA) and was also referred to as the Australian Committee on Antarctic Names and the Australian Antarctic Place Names Committee.

⁴ Attended by Tony Fleming, Jason Mundy, Ursula Harris, Rebecca Malcolm and Rhonda Bartley.

⁵ <http://data.aad.gov.au/aadc/gaz/>

All gazetteer records are stored in a database directly accessible through the AADC Geographic Information System (GIS). When producing maps, AADC staff use the gazetteer directly as the authoritative source for placing names at appropriate scales.

There are many Australian and international bodies that depend on, or link to, the Australian Antarctic Gazetteer. Below is information about these bodies.

Tasmanian Place Names Advisor Panel

The Tasmanian Place Names Advisor Panel, within the Tasmanian Department of Natural Resources and Environment, is responsible for the assignment of names to places in Tasmania, including Macquarie Island. Users can search for names through an interactive map, or by entering a place name to view details of the feature⁶.

The Australian Antarctic Gazetteer and the Composite Gazetteer of Australia⁷ include all names for the Macquarie Island region.

Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping Place Names Working Group

The Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping (ICSM), an Australian intergovernmental body, covers surveying and mapping issues, as they relate to Government activities, to ensure continued cooperation in these activities on a national basis. The 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.”

With assistance from Geoscience Australia, the ICSM and contributing agencies, have developed the Composite Gazetteer of Australia⁸. It contains place names from Australia and its external territories by automatically ingesting individual jurisdictional gazetteers to produce a composite dataset. Copyright of the Gazetteer data resides with the relevant State, Territory and Australian Government agencies which are custodians of the data.

Information relating to the ICSM is coordinated through the Australian Antarctic Data Centre.

Australian Hydrographic Office

The Australian Hydrographic Office (AHO) manages undersea feature and maritime names information as part of Australia’s place and geographic names framework.

Following the establishment of the Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping (ICSM), the AHO’s responsibilities were confirmed in Resolution R00/11/06 – Limits of Oceans and Seas and Offshore Undersea Features (23 May 2001), replacing National Mapping Resolution 393. These responsibilities include researching, processing and managing:

- Undersea feature names beyond Australia’s coastal waters
- The names and limits of oceans and seas adjacent to Australia (see Fact Sheet - Limits of Oceans and Seas Around Australia)

⁶ <https://www.placenames.tas.gov.au/>

⁷ <https://placenames.fsd.org.au/>

⁸ <https://placenames.fsd.org.au/>

- Names of maritime and navigational features, and coastal, hydrographic and oceanographic features not managed by State or Commonwealth place names bodies
- Submission of approved naming proposals to the GEBCO Sub-Committee on Undersea Feature Names (SCUFN)

To meet these responsibilities, the AHO maintains the Hydrographic and Undersea Feature Names (HUFN) database. Public access to the database is being developed. In the meantime, names under AHO authority are available in the Gazetteer of Australia.

Maritime Gazetteer of Australia

The Maritime Gazetteer of Australia (MGA) is maintained by the AHO. It is a searchable database⁹ containing all the place names used in Australia's official navigational charts, which includes Australian mainland, offshore territories, Antarctica, and Papua New Guinea.

Latitude and longitude fields in the MGA represent the position of the name on the chart. "Note this is not necessarily the position of the feature itself, which may only lie partially on the chart (for example an ocean). The MGA does not provide the gazetted geographic position of features."¹⁰

SCUFN

[The GEBCO Sub-Committee on Undersea Feature Names \(SCUFN\)](#) is the international body responsible for standardising the naming of undersea geographic features around the world. SCUFN maintains and makes available a digital gazetteer containing the official names, generic feature types, and geographic positions of features on the seafloor.

SCUFN was established to address the need for a uniform policy in the handling and standardisation of undersea feature names. Consistent naming is essential for producing reliable bathymetric maps and nautical charts used internationally.

The role of SCUFN is:

- To define the nomenclature used for undersea features, e.g. canyon, plateau, fracture zone, etc., as well as naming guidelines.
- To consider and decide on names that have been submitted to the Sub-Committee.

All names selected by SCUFN are contained in the IHO-IOC GEBCO Gazetteer of Undersea Feature Names, IHO publication B-8.

SCAR Composite Gazetteer of Antarctica

In 1992, the SCAR Working Group on Geodesy and Geographic Information identified the need to provide the scientific community with two products

1. A compilation of all existing geographic names of Antarctica, and
2. A set of internationally relevant guidelines for selecting existing names and proposing new names for geographic features.

⁹ <http://www.hydro.gov.au/prodserv/publications/mga/mga.htm>

¹⁰ From <http://www.hydro.gov.au/prodserv/publications/mga/mga.htm> cited March 2026

This led to the creation of the SCAR Composite Gazetteer of Antarctica (SCAR CGA)¹¹, a centralised database for all geographic names in Antarctica. The SCAR CGA was collated by the Italian Programma Nazionale di Ricerche in Antartide (PNRA), in the framework of the SCAR Standing Committee on Antarctic Geographic Information (SCAGI). The database is currently hosted by the AADC and is compiled and maintained by PNRA. The SCAR CGA does not have any legal standing, as there is no overarching Antarctic naming authority.

The SCAR CGA now contains over 39,000 place names, corresponding to approximately 20,356 geographical features across the continent. Place-name information has been submitted by the national naming authorities of 26 countries. The SCAR CGA web application provides access to this compilation, enabling people to view names, locations, and descriptive information from all contributing nations.

International Principles and Procedures for Antarctic Place Names

To complement the SCAR CGA and promote consistency in Antarctic place naming, SCAGI prepared SCAR report 41, *International Principles and Procedures for Antarctic Place Names*, published in October 2021. This document provides an internationally accepted framework for the use of existing Antarctic place names and the standardisation of new names for features south of 60°S. The document supports SCAR’s goal of encouraging one name per feature wherever possible, helping to reduce over-naming, ambiguity and inconsistencies in Antarctic place naming.

United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

The United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN)¹² is responsible for efforts to standardise names for international use. A representative from the ICSM serves as Australia and New Zealand’s delegate to UNGEGN.

The UNGEGN web site lists searchable geographical names databases¹³. It includes the Australian Antarctic Gazetteer and SCAR Composite Gazetteer of Antarctica.

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¹¹ <https://data.aad.gov.au/aadc/gaz/scar/>

¹² <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/default.html>

¹³ <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/geonames.html>