

# AUSTRALIAN PLACE NAMING PRINCIPLES

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INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE ON  
SURVEYING AND MAPPING

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

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We acknowledge the diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia and their continued connection to land.

There are many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and naming systems across Australia that have been in place for thousands of years.

Many names from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages have become official names, used by all Australians.



*Natures window with river flowing through gorge, Kalbarri National Park WA.*

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

<https://www.icsm.gov.au/what-we-do/place-names-working-group>

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## ACCESSIBILITY

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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](mailto:icsm@ga.gov.au)



*The city from the hills, Adelaide SA.*

# CONTENTS

|                                                                             |    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Foreword.....                                                               | 5  |
| Glossary .....                                                              | 6  |
| Principles .....                                                            | 7  |
| Principle 1: Place naming across Australia is consistent and enduring ..... | 7  |
| 1.1. Language .....                                                         | 7  |
| 1.2 Name changes .....                                                      | 7  |
| Principle 2: Place naming information is accurate and accessible .....      | 8  |
| 2.1 Accessible.....                                                         | 8  |
| 2.2 Unique .....                                                            | 8  |
| 2.3 Clearly described .....                                                 | 8  |
| 2.4 Places which cross State / Territory / jurisdictional boundaries.....   | 8  |
| 2.5 Offshore Places.....                                                    | 8  |
| 2.6 Road names .....                                                        | 9  |
| Principle 3: Place naming promotes connection and inclusivity .....         | 10 |
| 3.1 Connection.....                                                         | 10 |
| 3.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Place Names .....                 | 10 |
| 3.3 Dual Naming .....                                                       | 10 |
| 3.4 Commemorative Names .....                                               | 10 |
| 3.5 Unacceptable names .....                                                | 11 |
| 3.6 Consultation .....                                                      | 11 |



*New Norfolk and Derwent River, TAS.*

# 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.

These 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 inclusion. They recognise 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 naming 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 reflects 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. This represents a positive contribution towards Australia's reconciliation journey.

**Annaliese Walster**

**Chair**

Intergovernmental Committee  
on Surveying and Mapping

# GLOSSARY

| Term                                                 | Definition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Feature                                              | A place with identifiable characteristics (e.g. 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.<br><br>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'.                                                   |
| Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) | A broad term which is used to refer to the rights Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to their heritage and culture. ICIP can include knowledge, songlines, language, dance, symbols and art as well as medicines, language, bush foods, sacred sites and ecological knowledge <sup>1</sup> . |
| 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.                                                                                                                              |
| Offshore feature                                     | Any feature located in the ocean and away from the coast.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Place name                                           | An official or unofficial name recognised 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 include 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 of defined terms which enables standardised classification of information.                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |



*River Torrens / Karrawirra Parri, Adelaide SA.*

<sup>1</sup> <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. 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/individual-state-and-territory-gazetteers](https://icsm.gov.au/individual-state-and-territory-gazetteers).

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.



Parliament House from Mount Ainslie Lookout, Canberra ACT.



Directional signage, Lorne VIC.

## PRINCIPLE 1: PLACE NAMING ACROSS AUSTRALIA IS CONSISTENT AND ENDURING

All features and 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'.
- Contain cardinal indicators or qualifying terms, as listed in the 'Geographical Name Affix' vocabulary, available here: [linked.data.gov.au/def/gn-affix](https://linked.data.gov.au/def/gn-affix)

### 1.2 NAME CHANGES

Place names should not be changed unless there is a compelling reason to do so.

## PRINCIPLE 2: PLACE NAMING INFORMATION IS ACCURATE AND ACCESSIBLE

Place names are a key descriptor in databases that support a broad range of key government and industry services. To ensure reliability and usability, place names must be accurate and readily accessible. Uniqueness is especially critical for names that form part of a street address, such as road or locality names, to avoid confusion - including for the timely provision of emergency services.

### 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, available here: [placenames.fsdof.org.au](http://placenames.fsdof.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.
- A new road name, regardless of road type, should not be duplicated in the same or an adjoining locality.
- 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](http://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.
- Phonetic spelling and a recording of the pronunciation of the name, if available.

### 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 OFFSHORE PLACES

- States and Territories are responsible for the naming of any feature within its legislated coastal waters<sup>2</sup> e.g. islands.
- The Australian Hydrographic Office<sup>3</sup> is responsible for the naming of undersea features beyond legislated coastal waters.



Heart Reef in Whitsundays, QLD.

<sup>2</sup> Coastal Waters (State Powers) Act 1980

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hydro.gov.au/>

## 2.6 ROAD NAMES

Concise and unique road names are essential for creating accurate address information and ensuring efficient service delivery, particularly for emergency response agencies where timely and precise location data is essential.

- A road name should be clear, unambiguous and easily read on signage.
- All public roads should be named.
- Private roads that provide access to properties 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.
- 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 should have the same name.
- 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: [linked.data.gov.au/def/road-types/standard-australia](https://linked.data.gov.au/def/road-types/standard-australia).

For information specific to Addressing, please refer to the Australia/New Zealand Standard for Rural and urban Addressing (AS/NZS4819:2011).



Road sign with pronunciation, Kilgariff NT.



Great Ocean Road, Eastern View VIC.

## PRINCIPLE 3: PLACE NAMING PROMOTES CONNECTION AND INCLUSIVITY

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 supporting the creation of new names derived from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 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 proposed place name using Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language should seek permission from the relevant Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples as the custodians of their language and culture.

### 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.



Gaanha Bula / Mount Canobolas, Orange NSW.



Pride Square in Newtown, Sydney NSW.

### 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:
  - The person should be held in high regard by the community and have made a significant, relevant contribution to the area.
  - The name should be applied posthumously and consent from the family should be sought where practical.
  - All or any part of the person's name may be used, except for initials, titles, honorifics, or postnominals.
  - For places that form part of a street address (e.g. localities and roads), only one part of a person's name should be used (e.g. first or last name).
- Consideration should be given to commemorative names that acknowledge under-represented groups in our diverse communities.

### 3.5 UNACCEPTABLE NAMES

Place names must not:

- Cause harm by being derogatory, racist, discriminatory or offensive.
- Include words protected or restricted by Commonwealth or other legislation, unless the appropriate approvals are sought, e.g the term ANZAC<sup>4</sup>, or Defence terms<sup>5</sup>.
- Infringe on any established or implied rights, e.g. copyright, trademarks and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP).
- Be perceived as promoting commercial or business interests.

### 3.6 CONSULTATION

- Where a community will be impacted by a new or altered place name appropriate consultation should take place.
- 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.



Following a public consultation process, Fraser Island was renamed as K'gari, QLD.

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

5 <https://www.legislation.gov.au/F2016L01568/latest/text>

# DOCUMENT CONTROL

## DOCUMENT APPROVAL

| Name and Position                                 | Date       | Signature                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Rafe Benli, Chair, ICSM Place Names Working Group | 08/09/2025 |  |
| Annaliese Walster, Chair, ICSM                    | 22/10/2025 |  |

## DOCUMENT VERSION CONTROL

| Version | Status   | Date       | Comments                                                                        |
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## DOCUMENT REVIEW

This document will be reviewed every 5 years.



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