



HANDBOOK ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES



South African Geographical
Names Council

South African Geographical Names Council
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Table of contents

What are geographical names?.....	1
What is the South African Geographical Names Council?.....	1
What does the SAGNC do?.....	1
What geographical names are covered by the SAGNC?.....	2
What geographical names fall outside the jurisdiction of the SAGNC?.....	2
Provincial Geographical Names Committees (PGNCs).....	2
Why geographical names should be standardised.....	3
Policies for standardisation	4
Principles for geographical names in South Africa	4
Recognition of names not previously approved	5
Can existing names be changed?	6
Who may apply for approval of a name?.....	8
How standardising is done.....	8
How to apply for approval of a geographical name.....	8
Assistance with application	10
Time span from application to approval.....	10
Specimen application form.....	11

MISSION

The mission of the South African Geographical Names Council is to standardise geographical names in South Africa; to redress, correct and transform the geographical naming system in South Africa.

What are geographical names?

They are the names of features on the earth that are natural, or manmade and adapted, and they can be populated or unpopulated.

What is the South African Geographical Names Council?

The South African Geographical Names Council (SAGNC) was established by the South African Geographical Names Council Act, 1998 (Act No. 118 of 1998), as the body responsible for standardising geographical names in South Africa. It is constituted by the Minister of Arts and Culture.

The SAGNC consists of experts in place names, the official languages and cultural history, as well as one representative from each province and representatives of the Chief Directorate of Surveys and Mapping, the SA Post Office, and the Pan South African Language Board.

The secretariat of the SAGNC is provided by the Department of Arts and Culture.

What does the SAGNC do?

- It establishes the policies and principles for the naming of geographical features in South Africa.
- It standardises the geographical names under its jurisdiction. To do this it determines the name to be applied to each geographical feature, and the written form of the name.
- It recommends standardised names to the Minister for approval. It receives and records approved geographical names and makes them known through publications and on the Internet. It liaises

with the United Nations (UN), the UN Economic Commission for Africa, geographical names authorities of member nations of the UN, and other international agencies concerned with the standardisation of geographical names.

What geographical names are covered by the SAGNC?

- Geographical names of national concern including, but not limited to, towns, suburbs and any form of human settlement, post offices, railway stations, highways and government dams.
- Natural landforms, e.g. mountains, hills, rivers, streams, bays, headlands and points, islands, passes, 'poorts' and 'neks'.

What geographical names fall outside the jurisdiction of the SAGNC?

- Juristic names, i.e. the name of the country, the names of provinces and the names of local authorities.
- Features under the control of local authorities, e.g. streets, municipal buildings, squares, parks, cemeteries.
- Privately owned buildings and farms.
- Cadastral names (names of geographical areas used for the registration of land ownership).

Provincial Geographical Names Committees (PGNCs)

Provincial Geographical Names Committees are established in terms of section 2(2)(a) of the South African Geographical Names Council Act, 1998. They are established by the provincial department responsible for arts and culture after consultation with the SAGNC.

Functions of a Provincial Geographical Names Committee

- A PGNC is responsible for advising local authorities and working with them in ensuring that they apply the principles of the SAGNC to the names under their jurisdiction.
- A PGNC makes recommendations to the SAGNC on the names of geographical features that fall within its provincial boundaries. It should do preparatory work for the submission of names to the SAGNC, and is responsible for seeing to it that local communities and other stakeholders are adequately consulted.
- A PGNC liaises with the SAGNC on promoting research and ensuring that unrecorded names are collected.

Why geographical names should be standardised

- People tend to give the same name to different places.
- Names may sound the same or the spelling of one place name may be very close to that of another.
- Names can be spelled in different ways.
- In a multilingual country such as South Africa, places often have more than one name.

These situations lead to misunderstandings and confusion. In order to avoid this, geographical names are standardised by authorities throughout the world.

It is important to standardise names for the purpose of affirming a country's history and national identity, and for purposes such as trade and commerce, transportation, communications, regional and environmental planning, social services, science and technology, elections and censuses, tourism, disaster management and search-and-rescue operations, etc.

Those who prepare maps and gazetteers of geographical names, both nationally and internationally, depend on the geographical names authorities of countries to provide them with standardised names.

Policies for standardisation

Standardisation is based on:

- The current orthographic (spelling) rules of the languages from which the names are derived.
- The wishes of the local population provided they are not in conflict with the principles of the SAGNC.
- The historical use of the name.
- Redress, where a name is changed on the basis of historical considerations.
- United Nations resolutions on the standardisation of geographical names.
- Any other relevant factors which the SAGNC may identify.

Principles for geographical names in South Africa

The same policies and principles established by the SAGNC apply to all geographical names including those that do not fall under the direct jurisdiction of the SAGNC. Provincial Geographical Names Committees should ensure that local authorities are aware of these principles so that they can be applied to the names of streets and other features that fall under the jurisdiction of local authorities.

One name for one entity

Each individual feature or entity should have one official name.

Geographical names that should generally be avoided

- Names that have already been approved for other places in South Africa.
- Names of places in other countries, and names of countries.
- Names of which the spelling or pronunciation is so close to that of an existing name that confusion might result.
- Names that are blasphemous, indecent, offensive, vulgar, unaesthetic or embarrassing.
- Names that are discriminatory or derogatory as regards race, colour, creed, gender, political affiliation or other social factors.
- Names that are too long or clumsily compounded.
- Names consisting of a personal name only, without an additional generic element (such as “park”).
- Names that may be regarded as an advertisement for a particular commercial product, service or firm.

Naming places after persons

- Names of living persons should generally be avoided.
- Geographical entities named after persons should be in accordance with the stature of the persons concerned (not, for instance, naming an obscure feature after a person of national importance).
- Written permission should, where possible, be obtained from the individual or the individual’s family or heirs before that person’s name is used.

Recognition of names not previously approved

Names which are already well established and in popular use may be submitted to the SAGNC. Names that have been approved by a parastatal body or the government of an independent state or self-

governing territory now reincorporated into South Africa may also be submitted.

Can existing names be changed?

Geographical names are part of the historical, cultural and linguistic heritage of the nation, which it is more desirable to preserve than destroy.

One of the objects of the SAGNC is to facilitate the transformation process for geographical names.

Application may be made for an existing geographical name to be changed if the applicant believes that it does not meet the policies and principles of the SAGNC. The application must be made on the same form that is used for new names, and should be accompanied by a detailed motivation and, where possible, supporting documents. Evidence must be provided that stakeholders have been consulted.

Some legitimate grounds for changing names

- A name may be objectionable because it replaced an existing name which certain people would like to see restored.
- Some linguistic modifications of names may be offensive.

Changes for the sake of standardisation

It may be necessary to make changes of the following kinds:

- When an existing name is granted official status, its form may have to be standardised (e. g. its spelling may have to be modernised).
- A decision will have to be taken regarding the relative status of alternative names. Where different spellings of the same name are used for different entities (such as a suburb and a post office, or a river and a town), the form should be standardised. The form

used for a particular entity should be fixed.

- The number of entities to which a particular name applies should be limited.

Categories of names likely to be submitted for change

The following are the most common cases in which changes might be proposed:

- A name which existed in the past but which is not at present officially recognised, and which it is now proposed to restore.
- An entity which has one or more official names, but for which other names exist, including informal names and translated or variant forms in other languages, which are not officially recognised, and which it is now proposed to recognise.
- An official name which is a modified form of a name from another language.
- Names which do not conform to the present orthography of the language concerned.
- Names which do not conform to the rules of writing names adopted by the SAGNC.
- Names which are dialectal forms.
- Names which are historically incorrect, either in spelling or factually.
- A place with an existing official name or names which it is nevertheless proposed to replace with a brand new name for political or cultural reasons.

Considerations to be taken into account when reviewing names

- Archives, oral tradition and other resources should be consulted.
- When consideration is given to whether an original name should

be restored, one factor to be taken into account may be that the original language in which the name was given may have disappeared, in which case the needs and convenience of present day society may be more important.

- It may be impossible to ascertain the correct form of the original name because its form in the language of origin (e.g. San and Khoi languages) is unknown.
- Certain legislation other than the SAGNC Act governs certain kinds of geographical names (i.e. the name of the country, names of provinces and local authorities, and cadastral names).

Who may apply for approval of a name?

All government departments, provincial governments, local authorities, the SA Post Office, property developers and any other body or person may apply.

How standardising is done

The SAGNC receives all applications for the approval of geographical names under its jurisdiction and ensures that proper consultation has taken place and that the name meets the Council's requirements in all respects.

The SAGNC takes the final decision on the form or forms of names and recommends them to the Minister.

Once a name has been approved by the Minister, that name has been standardised. It is then published in the *Government Gazette*.

How to apply for approval of a geographical name

Application forms are available from the SAGNC. (See specimen form

at the back of this handbook.) Applicants should take care to give all the required information on the application form. The following are especially important:

1. How far and in what direction the feature is situated from the nearest town/magistrate's office e.g. 15 km north-west of.....).
2. The geographical co-ordinates in latitude and longitude (if possible). An A4-size map should also be submitted if possible.
3. The direction and distance from the nearest magistrate's office must be specific, e. g. 15 km SE of.....
4. The language of the name. If a name consists of different parts in more than one language, e.g. isiZulu plus English, state both.
5. Names should be written in upper and lower case letters, not all in capitals, to indicate where capital letters should be used, e.g. eMbalu or GaBosela.
6. The origin and meaning of the name. Historical aspects of a name, reference to a geographical feature, or naming in honour of a person should be detailed as comprehensively as possible. Oral traditions may be quoted from informants, and archival documents can be attached.
It is not sufficient to say that something has been named after an existing feature such as a river: the meaning of the name should be given. If a name is taken from the name of a plant, the name and a description of the plant should be given, with its name in another language as well if possible.
7. Each application must give the details of the principal informant who suggested the name.
8. A second choice must also be given. It speeds the process if the SAGNC is given a second choice in case the first choice is unacceptable for some reason (such as duplication of a name that has already been approved).
9. Please use only the prescribed application form. (Do not retype.)
10. Supporting documents giving information about the name are welcome.
11. Submit the application form to the Tribal Authority and or Local

Authority for signing or affixing of an official stamp and then send to the PGNC for consideration.

12. If sending a fax or e-mail, please back it up by sending the original signed documents by registered mail.

Assistance with application

The SAGNC would like members of local communities to be involved in naming. Where the public are unable to complete the application form, they may apply through their local authority to the Provincial Geographical Names Committee for assistance. The PGNC may in turn request assistance from the SAGNC, who may refer the matter to specialist researchers.

Time span from application to approval

The Council meets three times per year. As delays are often caused by incomplete or incorrect information on the application form, applicants should be aware that the standardisation of a name may be a lengthy process. Provision should be made in the planning process for a waiting period of at least three months and care should be taken to complete the application form as required in order to prevent an even longer delay.

Specimen application form

SOUTH AFRICAN GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES COUNCIL

APPLICATION FOR PROPOSED *NEW* GEOGRAPHICAL NAME
AND/OR CHANGE OF EXISTING GEOGRAPHICAL NAME

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY:

Name approved by Minister: _____
Date: _____

NB: Use one form for each proposed feature to be named.

001	Proposed name	First choice	
		Second choice	
002	(i) Give the meaning and the language from which the name has been derived. (ii) Give the origin of the name if you know it. (e.g. Gauteng, Place of Gold)		
003	For which feature is the proposed name intended? (e.g. a post office, railway station, town, township, suburb, mountain, bay, beach, cape, dam, gorge, hill, island, kloof, lake, neck, pan, pass, plain, ridge, river, stream, valley or vlei, settlement or village)		
004	In which Magisterial District and Province is the place situated?		

005	(i) How far and in what direction is the feature situated from the nearest town/magistrate's office (e.g. 15 km north-west of)? (ii) Indicate the geographical co-ordinates in latitudes and longitudes (if possible). Enclose an A2 size map.	Lat : Long:
	First choice	Second choice
006	Is the proposed name of long standing (50 years or more), relatively new (10-50 years), or new (5 years or less)?	
007	In the case of a proposed change of a name, give former name and reasons for the change.	
008	<u>Particulars of applicant</u> Name: _____ Address: _____ _____ _____ Tel.: _____ Fax _____ E-mail: _____ Status of applicant _____ <i>Official authority of individual or other applicant, e.g. tribal authority, representing state department, Transnet, provincial government, Local Authority, private company, interest group, and other.</i> Signature: _____ Date: _____	

009	Particulars of person and/or stakeholder who acted as informant who provided information regarding the name (a) Name: _____ (b) Address: _____ _____ _____ Tel.: _____ Fax: _____ E-mail: _____
010	Recommendation by Tribal Authority/Local Council Signature: _____ Date: _____ Official Stamp
011	Recommendation by PGNC Signature: _____ Date: _____ Official Stamp

Please send this form to:

The Secretariat
South African Geographical
Names Council
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