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English

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**United Nations Group of Experts on  
Geographical Names****2025 session**

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Item 8 (a) of the provisional agenda\*

**Culture, heritage and language recognition: Geographical names  
as culture, heritage and identity****Exploration and research for the standardization of marine  
geographical names as cultural heritage of the Republic of Korea<sup>1</sup>**

Submitted by the Republic of Korea

**Summary \*\***

The Korea Hydrographic and Oceanographic Agency is responsible for the standardization and management of marine geographical names in the Republic of Korea. The agency has been conducting research to explore marine geographical names and safeguard its value as cultural heritage. Korea's effort and institutional support for the recognition and preservation of marine geographical names as cultural heritage have progressed for years in parallel with a standardization project of marine geographical names.

The country's standardization project of marine geographical names began in earnest during the first phase nationwide survey (2005-2015), which marked the initial stage of recognizing local generic terms. During this period, field surveys and interviews with local residents helped recognize local generic terms for the first time. However, the main focus at this stage was placed on the standardization of marine geographical names, with the principle of changing local generic terms different from regions to standardized generic terms. During the second phase nationwide survey (2016-2022), the need for preserving local generic terms was raised, leading to a paradigm shift in recognition of local generic terms. Since then, local generic terms have been preserved by adopting the form of 'specific term + local generic term + standardized generic term,' with the standardization principles. In particular, detailed information on the meanings and origins of local generic terms was stored in the database. The third phase in-depth survey, which started in 2023, has intensified efforts to actively explore and research local generic terms. Systematic studies have been conducted on the meanings and origins of local generic terms by taking linguistic, historical, and geographical approaches in collaboration with local residents through field surveys. Moving forward, the Republic of Korea will continue to make an effort to explore and research marine geographical names as cultural heritage, with plans to establish an integrated framework for preservation and management during the third phase survey.

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\*\* Prepared by the Korea Hydrographic and Oceanographic Agency, Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries, and Jihyun Kang, Boomae Jung, Sanghee Jeon and Hyo Hyun Sung, Republic of Korea

<sup>1</sup> This paper pertains to the UNGEGN resolutions VIII/1(Promotion of minority group and indigenous geographical names), IX/5(Promotion of the recording and use of indigenous, minority and regional language group geographical names).

## **Exploration and research for the standardization of marine geographical names as cultural heritage of the Republic of Korea**

### **1. Introduction**

In the UNGEGN Strategic Plan and Programme of Work, Strategy 4 — Culture, Heritage, and Language Recognition — acknowledges the significance of geographical names and aims to systematically preserve names through various plans and activities. Many geographical names are passed down from generation to generation verbally, reflecting linguistic modality of the past distinct from contemporary linguistic system and embodying cultural and historical meanings. This tendency is even more pronounced in geographical names used for geographically remote features or used by specific local communities. Marine geographical names refer to names given to sea surface or undersea features. These names are often given and used by local residents (indigenous group) who rely on the water for their living. Identification of indigenous languages in such marine geographical names and standardization of them in accordance with principles require relevant research and policy support.

The Korea Hydrographic and Oceanographic Agency (KHOA) is responsible for the standardization and management of marine geographical names in the Republic of Korea. The Agency has been systematically conducting surveys on marine geographical names since the establishment of the Korea Committee on Marine Geographical Names in 2001. Korea's efforts for the recognition and preservation of marine geographical names as cultural heritage have progressed for years in parallel with the standardization projects of marine geographical names. This report is intended to introduce how the country has collected and preserved the value of marine geographical names as cultural heritage, aligning with Action Items (4-ii-5) of UNGEGN Strategy 4\*\*\*\*. In particular, it outlines the progressive developments of its efforts and response strategies to raise awareness of and safeguard marine geographical names as cultural heritage from the country's full implementation of the standardization projects in 2005 to the present.

### **2. The First Phase of The Nationwide Marine Geographical Name Survey (2005–2015): Initial Recognition of Local Generic Terms**

The Republic of Korea started its survey on marine geographical names in the 1960s, but it was 2005 when the survey was systematically carried out for the standardization of marine geographical names. The country conducted its first-phase nationwide survey from 2005 to 2015, dividing all Korean coasts into 11 zones. During this period, the survey primarily focused on exploring marine geographical names on nautical charts to register standardized names domestically and modify inappropriate exonyms. At the same time, efforts were made to internationally register undersea feature names, with a total of 924 marine geographical names registered domestically.

Field surveys and interviews with local residents were carried out to verify the recognition of geographical features and their names on nautical charts, as well as to assess the use of exonyms. This was the first time to recognize local generic terms. However, the main focus of this period was placed on the consistent standardization of marine geographical names rather than the preservation of local generic terms. Instead of using local generic terms different from regions, standardized generic terms were used. For instance, 'Munju Cho' registered in 2015 was originally referred to by local residents as 'Munju-geol.' The field survey revealed that '-geol' was a local generic term indicating 'a relatively wide reef where fish commonly inhabit.' However, the name was registered as 'Munju (specific term) + Cho (standardized generic term)' instead of 'Munju (specific term) + geol (local generic term)' using the standardized generic term. In the case of rock which covers and uncovers, as an exception, '-Am' was commonly used as a standardized generic term in all Korean coasts. However, '-Yeo, -Seo, -Tan' which were used in specific regions were also accepted according to a new principle and registered as incorporated in geographical names.

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\*\*\*\* Share Member State' treatment of geographical names in indigenous groups (policies and principles, field collection methodology, naming of both cultural and physical features, etc.).

In conclusion, the first phase nationwide survey saw the recognition of local generic terms in its early stage. The registration of marine geographical names at that time followed the principle of changing local generic terms different from regions to standardized generic terms.

### **3. The Second Phase of the Nationwide Marine Geographical Name Survey (2016–2022): A Paradigm Shift in the Recognition of Local Generic Terms**

The Republic of Korea conducted its second phase survey from 2016 to 2022 by dividing its coasts into 6 zones. It aimed to compliment the first phase survey while exploring marine geographical names on official publications to register domestically and internationally for the second survey. As a result of this effort, a total of 253 marine geographical names were registered domestically. During this period, the survey was carried out beyond nautical charts to explore previously registered names, as well as marine geographical names on nautical publications, and other official publications. Based on findings from the field surveys, detailed information such as the origins of geographical names, registration data, updates, and references was organized by category.

The second phase survey saw the importance and values of local generic terms as cultural heritage collected from the first phase survey and raised the need to preserve them. Efforts were made to create a process to include regional generic terms in the standardization of marine geographical names. In the previous phase, geographical names with local generic terms were standardized and registered as ‘specific term + standardized generic term,’ and variant names were not recorded in the database. In this regard, discussions became robust in 2019, leading to various proposals for preservation of local generic terms, as outlined below.

- 1) Standardizing a geographical name as ‘specific term + local generic term + standardized generic term’ without recording variant names in the database.
- 2) Registering a geographical name as ‘specific term + standardized generic term’ while recording variant names in the database.
- 3) Registering a geographical name as ‘specific term + local generic term + standardized generic term’ while recording variant names in the database.

The UNGEGN recommended to use endonyms at that time, and the Guideline for Standardization of Geographical Names by the National Geographic Information Institute of the Republic of Korea specified that variant names for each geographical name should be managed separately, and it is allowed to duplicate generic terms. Based on these, the country set out the following standardization principles for local generic terms in marine geographical names.

- 1) If a local generic term holds unique cultural or historical significance, a standardized generic term is added for standardization after duplicating the local generic term.
- 2) If a regional generic term is simply originated from a dialect, a standardized generic term is added for standardization after omitting the local generic term
- 3) Local geographical names must be recorded in the database.

In conclusion, during the second phase nationwide survey, marine geographical names were standardized in the form of ‘specific term + local generic term + standardized generic term’ according to the standardization principles. For example, ‘Moemitjjam Cho’ includes the local generic term ‘jjam,’ which locally refers to an underwater rock. The above marine geographical name was registered as ‘Moemit (specific term) + jjam (local generic term) + Cho (standardized generic term).’ Additionally, the meanings and origins of specific terms and local generic terms from field surveys were stored in the geographical name database. Keeping a record of them is essential to preserve local generic terms, as their meanings and definitions may fade over time.

#### 4. The Third Phase of the In-Depth Marine Geographical Name Survey (2023–Present) : Research and Preservation of Local Generic Terms

The third phase survey has been conducted to explore additional candidates for domestic registration from unregistered names in the integrated list of marine geographical names since 2023. According to the standardization principles established in the second phase, the third phase survey has focused on preserving local generic terms. A specific term is followed by a local generic term while adding a standardized generic term as a generic term. In particular, the third phase survey has strengthened the work on the origins of names by integrating findings from not only field surveys but also in-depth literature reviews (ancient literature, modern records, local history materials, geographical name studies) and expert consultations. This holds great significance because the research is based on reliable and evidence-based information, as well as on field surveys. Furthermore, the geographical name database includes the meanings and origins of local generic terms to preserve marine geographical names as cultural heritage (Figure 1).

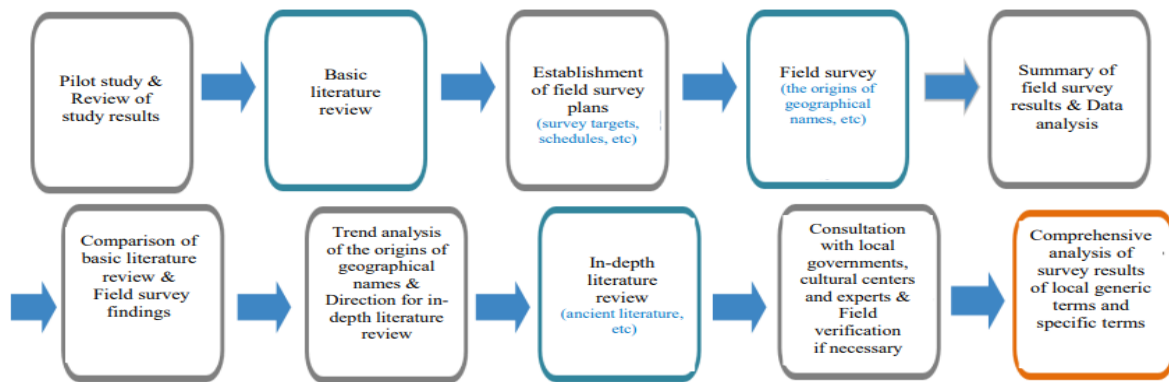


Figure 1. Research Process of Local Generic Terms and Specific Terms

The survey was conducted in the northern coast of Gangwon-do from 2023 to 2024 (Figure 2).

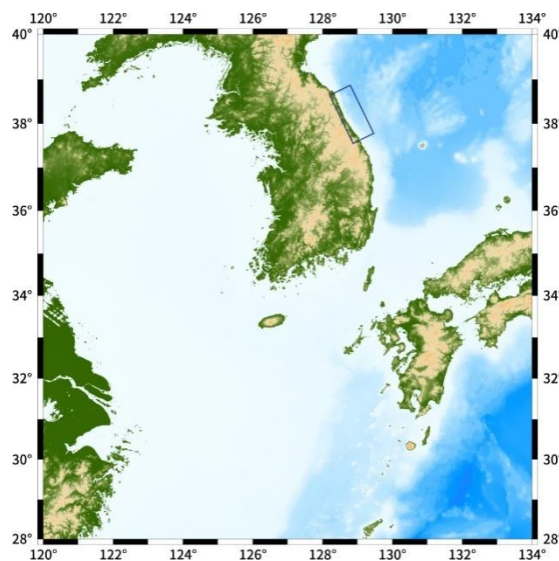


Figure 2. The Third Phase of the In-Depth Marine Geographical Name Survey (2023–2024)

In this process, local generic terms and specific terms used by local residents were collected and in-depth

literature reviews were carried out for each name. The list of local generic terms and specific terms was made after integrating and analyzing the backgrounds of naming features based on findings from field surveys and in-depth literature reviews. The in-depth literature reviews included geographical names recorded in sources such as 'Dictionary of Place Names in Korea (1966-1986),' 'Topography Maps of Korea (1894-1918),' 'Joseon-Jiji-Jaryo; The regional information and geographical names survey in Joseon (presumed 1910),' 'Regional Geographies of Joseon Dynasty (15th-19th century),' and 'Old Maps (18th-19th century).' Regarding regional languages, 'Standard Korean Dictionary' by the National Institute of Korean Language, 'Urimalsaem (an open-type Korean language dictionary),' and various dialect dictionaries were used to confirm the dictionary meanings of words. Additionally, local materials such as 'The Reports about Investigating Basic Vocabularies of Fishing Villagers (2011)' by the National Institute of Korean Language and 'The Origin of Korean Geography Name : Regional division' helped understand geographical names in the context of fishing village areas. As such, historical documents and materials from different periods were collected and analyzed to explore local generic terms and specific terms. Along with interviews with local residents and expert consultations combined, the tendency of naming local generic terms and specific terms was identified.

Local generic terms for underwater rocks(reef, 'Cho' in Korean), such as -seonge, -daengi, -naegi, and -jjam were collected from the field survey in Gangwon-do. There are cases of geographical names based on the local generic terms reflecting local language, such as Gundanseonge, Seopdaengi, Naksannaegi, Saetbaramnaegi, and Sangbogijjam. These names are passed down in the local community in the form of a specific term followed by a local generic term. To standardize these names, Gundanseonge Cho, Seopdaengi Cho, Naksannaegi Cho, Saetbaramnaegi Cho, and Sangbogijjam Cho were registered following the naming principles of 'specific term + local generic term + standardized generic term.'

In conclusion, the third phase survey has focused on preserving local generic terms. In accordance with the standardization principles established in the second phase, a specific term is followed by a local generic term while adding a standardized generic term as a generic term. Unlike the second phase survey focusing on field surveys, the third phase survey has placed stress on systematizing local generic terms collected from field surveys. It has also worked on managing detailed information in the database by taking historical, geographical, and linguistic approaches to the meanings and origins of local generic terms based on field surveys, literature reviews, and expert consultations.

## 5. Conclusion

Currently, local generic terms are expressed through various words in the region, exhibiting patterns of common names, confused names and semantic diversification. Therefore, surveys pay close attention to understanding the semantic differences of local generic terms within their regional context. An integrated study is also being conducted on specific terms reflecting local language through field surveys and historical literature reviews in collaboration with local residents. A case in point is 'Seopdaengi.' 'Seop' is the Gangwon dialect for mussels, embodying local language in a specific term. This holds great linguistic significance because it reveals that both pure Korean language and local language used by language users were preserved in Korean marine geographical names before they were recorded in Chinese characters. Furthermore, unique geographical names passed down in the region carry not only the environmental awareness of residents but also cultural and historical significance. This is directly in line with UNGEGN's key agenda items of 'geographical names as cultural heritage,' and 'preservation of endonyms and regional languages.' Therefore, it is necessary to continue to study local generic terms by integrating field surveys and historical literature reviews in collaboration with local residents. Furthermore, there is a need to expand the database that can store and share information such as the origins of geographical names and to continue practical activities to promote geographical names as cultural heritage.

**Points for discussion:**

The Group of Experts is invited to:

- (1) Take note of the historical efforts of the Republic of Korea in the exploration and preservation of marine geographical names as cultural heritage and the results of their gradual improvement and deepening.
- (2) Contribute to the establishment of standardization principles for the conservation of local geographical names as cultural heritage.