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Technical expertise: writing systems and pronunciation

Audio pronunciation functionality in the *New Zealand Gazetteer* for Māori geographical names

Summary**

The report builds on the information provided in the New Zealand government report for the 2023 session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.¹

Most New Zealanders and visitors mispronounce Māori geographical names. To encourage correct pronunciation, the New Zealand Geographic Board Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa has engaged an expert licensed translator and linguist to record audio files for those Māori geographical names in the *New Zealand Gazetteer*² whose standardized orthography has been confirmed. This is a relatively recent initiative that the Board has undertaken despite having historically shied away from any form of advice on pronunciation, preferring in the past to focus on correct written orthography.

Last year, the Board completed the audio recordings of a further 2,152 Māori geographical names, making 6,382 in total available in the *Gazetteer*.

The Board has also established a free bulk download function to enable all the audio files to be reused in other systems and products, for example by the media when delivering news items on television or the radio, in online Māori language dictionaries

* [GEGN.2/2025/1](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gegn/sessions/4th_session_2025/).

** The full report was prepared by Wendy Shaw (New Zealand), Secretary, New Zealand Geographic Board Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa. The report will be available at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gegn/sessions/4th_session_2025/, in the language of submission only, as document GEGN.2/2025/63/CRP.63.

¹ Available at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gegn/sessions/3rd_session_2023/documents/GEGN.2_2023_32_CRP32.pdf.

² See <https://gazetteer.linz.govt.nz/>.



and in public consultations on public works being undertaken in specific named places.

The report includes comments on the evidence-based value of the new functionality, which has provided the Board with the impetus to continue to pursue proper pronunciation, although it is not a statutory requirement. The functionality includes recognition of growing user expectations that audio files be included in the *Gazetteer* to assist with pronunciation and meaning. The report will include a discussion of some challenges that have emerged, such as regional accents and dialects that were not fully captured and the resulting criticism by some groups. The connection with relevant Sustainable Development Goals will also be addressed.
