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**Culture, heritage and language recognition: geographical
names as culture, heritage and identity**

Tangata Whenua Place Names maps of New Zealand – challenges and lessons learned

Summary**

At the 2023 session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, New Zealand reported on two new map publications, *Tangata Whenua Place Names – Te Ika-a-Māui* and *Tangata Whenua Place Names – Te Waipounamu*.¹ Each map shows original/traditional/ancestral Māori geographical names. In the report, the project, design and consultation undertaken were explained.

The maps were launched in July 2023 and distributed to every iwi,² marae,³ school, government agency and council. Responses were generally positive and congratulatory. However, consultation fell short for a handful of Māori geographical names, with feedback revealing errors. These have been resolved in the digital maps. Remediation for the printed maps involved distributing a “revision sheet” to the distribution list and including the revision sheet with every map subsequently purchased from the distribution warehouse, which will continue until the next print run of the maps fixes the errors.

* GEGN.2/2025/1.

** The full report was prepared by Wendy Shaw, Secretary of the New Zealand Geographic Board Ngā Pou Taunaha o Aotearoa. The report will be available at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/sessions/4th_session_2025/, in the language of submission only, as document GEGN.2/2025/65/CRP.65.

¹ Tangata whenua means “people of the place”. See GEGN.2/2023/34/CRP.34, available at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ungegn/sessions/3rd_session_2023/documents/GEGN.2_2023_34_CRP34.pdf.

² Iwi refers to a large tribal group.

³ Marae are places where Māori tribal groups communally gather for formal events and to learn and observe traditional protocols and practices.



Cartographic mapping that requires amendments sometimes uses a revision sheet as a practical and cost-effective solution. Sometimes stickers are used. While best efforts are made to ensure that content is correct, as soon as a map is printed it becomes obsolete and out of date because of the ever-changing nature of spatial information in the real world.

The report provides a brief recap of the background in producing the maps and the consultation undertaken. It then focuses on the feedback, impact and resolution for incorrectly depicted Māori geographical names. The report addresses a deep concern for the potential loss of other traditional and historical names and narratives. The challenges and lessons learned from the project will offer understanding and insights.
