

United States Board on Geographic Names
Foreign Names Committee
Statement Regarding the US Board on Geographic Names' Decision on the Name "Sea of Japan"¹

The US Board on Geographic Names (US BGN) is aware of regional and national sensitivities associated with the name of this geographic feature, and with similar toponymic issues in many parts of the world. The basis for the US BGN's decision on the name "Sea of Japan" rests on two of the Board's policies covering the selection of standard names in areas outside of the United States.

The first policy addresses selection of standard names for bodies of water and maritime features that contain area beyond the territorial sovereignty of a single nation. Board policy² states that a single conventional name, if one exists, will be chosen as the standard name for such features for official use in US Government publications.

The second policy covers the selection of a conventional name, defined as an English-language name in widespread and current usage. Qualification of an English-language name under the criterion of "widespread and current usage" is determined by consulting, among other sources, the latest editions of the various print and online English-language geographic references

In applying these policies to the case of the seas separating the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese Archipelago, the Board's Foreign Names Committee has determined that the longstanding BGN-approved name "Sea of Japan" is still the appropriate standard name for use in official US Government publications.

Resolution III/20 of the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names is frequently mentioned in discussions regarding this high seas feature. This resolution provides recommendations "... considering the need for international standardization of names of geographical features that are under the sovereignty of more than one country or are divided by two or more countries." It is the view of the US Board on Geographic Names that this resolution does not apply to high seas or maritime features that are beyond the limits of national sovereignty. We believe that Resolution III/20 (and related Resolutions I/18 and II/25) are relevant in the context of geographic features of shared sovereignty, such as mountain ranges or rivers that cross international boundaries.

¹ APPROVED 9 September 2014

² Maritime Features policy approved 29 November 2005