Geographic Names Standardization Policy
for Nauru

United States Board on Geographic Names
Foreign Names Committee

December 2017
1. Introduction

This geographic names standardization policy has been prepared as an aid to those geographic names experts who are the working staff for the United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN) in the standardization of the geographic names of Nauru for United States Government use. The BGN and its staff work to effect consistent treatment of geographic name spellings in US Government databases, publications, maps, and charts. The country policies are intended to satisfy, in part, the statutory requirements levied upon the BGN in Public Law USC 80-242 to develop principles, policies and procedures for geographic names standardization, and to promulgate decisions with respect to the principles of geographic nomenclature and orthography.

2. Languages and Language Policy

a. Demographics

As of 2011, the last year for which data are available, Nauru—a single island with an area of 21 sq km—had a population of 10,084. Of these, 9,418 (ninety-five percent) were citizens of Nauru, 132 (one percent) of Kiribati, 58 (one-half percent) of Fiji, and 125 (one percent) of the People’s Republic of China.\(^2\)

b. Language

Nauruan (ISO-693-3 code ‘nau’) is the native language of Nauru; however, English is the language of government, commerce, and education. Nauruan may be part of the Micronesian family, which includes Marshallese, Kiribati (Gilbertese), and Carolinean, among others, but evidence is inconclusive.

c. Geographic Names Standardization

No Nauruan government agency is responsible solely for geographic names standardization, nor has any native entity—public, private, or academic—published a comprehensive gazetteer.\(^4\) Indeed, the Nauruan language itself has not been standardized; no monolingual Nauruan dictionary exists. Place names on the handful of authoritative maps available derive from work performed by the Australian government, which administered Nauru—then a United Nations trust territory—from 1947 until 1966, when the island became self-governing.\(^5\) The single exception, a 1:10,000-scale map published by the Nauruan Directorate of Lands and Survey, Ministry of Island Development and Industry, is in English.

The Republic of Nauru Government Gazette is the sole native and official, if unsystematic, source of

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\(^1\) Slightly less than one-eighth the size of Washington, DC.


\(^3\) Nauruan is not an official language, the Constitution of Nauru stating merely that ‘[t]he government must take positive and practical measures to preserve and advance the use of the Nauruan language.’ RONLAW: Nauru’s Online Legal Database, ‘Constitution of Nauru (Nauruan Culture Amendments) Bill 2013.’ English. <http://ronlaw.gov.nr/nauru_lpms/> Accessed July 28, 2017. The Constitution itself has not been translated into Nauruan.

\(^4\) In 1974, the Defense Mapping Agency Topographic Center published a list of 75 Nauruan toponyms approved by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names. See ‘Sources’ for complete bibliographic information.

\(^5\) Though settled by Polynesians and Micronesians about three thousand years ago, with respect to Western priorities such as official place naming, Nauru is a very young nation, having achieved independence January 31, 1968.
geographic names. The Gazette provides authoritative spellings of hundreds of features—including districts, villages, land parcels, and even commercial establishments—as rendered in land ownership and transfer decisions by the Nauru Lands Committee and the Supreme Court of Nauru. Appendix C provides further information regarding the nature of this source.

3. Toponymic Policies

a. Orthography

The Nauruan alphabet consists of 30 basic modern Latin letters, four of them modified by diacritical marks:

A a, Ā ā, B b, C c, D d, E e, F f, G g, H h, I i, J j, K k, L l, M m, N n, Ň ň, O o, Ō ō, P p, Q q, R r, S s, T t, U u, Ü ū, V v, W w, X x, Y y, and Z z.

Almost half of these letters were added during the island nation’s colonial days to accommodate German loan words and, later, those of Kiribati—6 (ISO-693-3 code ‘gil’) and Tok Pisin—7 (ISO-693-3 code ‘tpi’) speaking immigrants. Others were added during an incomplete 1938 language reform effort. Neither the additions nor the diacritics appear in Nauruan place names, with the exception of Ň ň. NG ng or N n usually replaced Ň ň in typewritten documents and continue to do so even in most software-generated ones. Still, Ň ň can appear in signage and a few government reports:


The name of the hotel in the image above presents a unique case.8 Named after an ADM1, Meneņ may also be written Meneng or Menen, even in the same sentence. For example, a 1977 liquor license application for a shop in this hotel gives the description: ‘N.C.S. Liquor Bottle Shop – Menen Hotel: situated in the district of Meneng.’9 Which of the three—Meneņ, Meneng, or Menen—should be collected as the primary name and which relegated to variant status? In the absence of Nauruan official

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6 Also knowns as Taetae ni Kiribati, Kiribatese, and Gilbertese.
7 Tok Pisin (also known as ‘Pidgin English’ or ‘New Guinea Pidgin’), originally a trade pidgin, has developed into a creole and become an official language of Papua New Guinea.
8 No other known Nauruan place name contains Ň ň.
policy, preferred native spelling can be determined by analyzing usage frequency in government documents. In typed ones from the late 1960s to about 2001, the tilde (~) rarely appears over N n, and then only added with a pen or pencil or by other improvised means:

![MENEN HOTEL
MENEN HOTEL RESTAURANT; SITUATED IN THE DISTRICT OF MENENG](image)


The advent of computers has not increased the diacritic’s popularity. From 1968, when Nauru gained independence, to 2016, Meneng appears in 1316 issues of the Gazette; Menen, in 415; Meneñ, in but a handful. Thus, Meneng must prevail as the primary name.

b. Romanization
Romanization is not required for Nauruan.

c. Diacritics
The following diacritics may appear in documents containing Nauruan geographic names. Neither Ā ā, Ō ō, nor Ū ū appear in any known toponyms:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Name</th>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Unicode Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N, Latin capital letter with tilde</td>
<td>Ñ</td>
<td>00D1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N, Latin small letter with tilde</td>
<td>ñ</td>
<td>00F1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

d. Generic Terms
A generic is a term used to describe a geographic feature, such as ‘river,’ ‘hill,’ and ‘lake.’ If the term does not identify the actual feature, it should be considered a false generic and not be added to the generic field of the Geographic Names Database (GNDB). Generic terms are not collected for populated places. Pure Nauruan-language place names generally consist of a single term without a separate generic component.

e. Hyphenation, Capitalization, and Spelling
Hyphenation does not occur in Nauruan place names.

Nauruan place names overwhelmingly consist of single words, though sometimes an English generic may be added. Capitalize the initial letter of each part of a name:

- Aiwo
- Eateirobduwabim
Due to the lack of a comprehensive Nauruan gazetteer, dictionary, or grammar, toponymists should consult the Republic of Nauru Government Gazette and authoritative maps listed in the ‘Sources’ section below to ensure correct place name spelling.

f. **Long and Short Forms**
Long forms of Nauruan geographic names are few and those of administrative and political divisions:

- Long form: Yaren District  
  Short form: Yaren
- Long form: Republic of Nauru  
  Short form: Nauru

Short forms of such names usually appear on maps and lists. Long and short forms of names of populated places are approved when supported by official evidence. In most instances, the short name should be ranked as the primary name.

g. **Abbreviations**
Abbreviation of Nauruan geographic names does not occur.

h. **Numbers**
Numbers do not arise in Nauruan geographic names.

4. **Political Geography Policy**

a. **Country Name**

Approved short form  
Nauru
Approved long form  
Republic of Nauru
Approved Nauruan short form  
Naoero
Nauruan long form  
Repubrikin Naoero

b. **Capital Name**
Nauru has no officially designated capital. The district of Yaren (ADM1), where the Nauruan parliament sits, acts as the *de facto* national capital.

Approved Form  
Yaren

c. **First-order Administrative Divisions (ADM1)**
Nauru is divided into fourteen administrative districts, which have no seats:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>GEC</th>
<th>GENC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aiwo</td>
<td>NR01</td>
<td>NR01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anabar</td>
<td>NR02</td>
<td>NR02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anetan</td>
<td>NR03</td>
<td>NR03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anibare</td>
<td>NR04</td>
<td>NR04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**d. Conventional Names**

The Nauru country file in the GNDB contains no conventional names. To remove or add names, BGN approval is required.

**e. Unique Geopolitical Situations**

For the latest country-specific boundary dispute information, consult the US Department of State Office of the Geographer and Global Issues.

Recent Nauruan political figures, scientific studies, and media reports have argued that rising sea levels due to climate change may eventually render Nauru uninhabitable.\(^{11}\) The entire population lives within a narrow, fertile belt, which encircles the island, the interior having been mined-out for phosphate during the last century and rendered a craggy wasteland.

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5. Source Material

Maps

The Republic of Nauru Directorate of Lands and Survey, Ministry of Island Development and Industry, has produced a Nauruan map (1:10,000 scale) with title and legend in English. Features displayed include district boundaries, official buildings, homes, schools, medical facilities, cemeteries, commercial businesses, phosphate works, roads, the international airport, and physical geographic features (sand, vegetation, reefs, and the lagoon). Undated.

The United States Geological Survey (USGS) has published a map (1:10,000 scale) featuring first-order administrative boundaries and rail car tracks leading to the phosphate stockpile in the center of the island. (Undated; presumably created in conjunction with USGS reports from 1994 and 1998 on Nauru’s mineral industry.) <https://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/country/asia.html#nr>


Another CIA map displaying ADM1 boundaries, the national airport runway, local and state administrative offices, hospitals, and phosphate works infrastructure is in the Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection of the University of Texas at Austin. 1988. <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/islands_oceans_poles/nauru.jpg>

Place Names

Republic of Nauru Government Gazette. Part of RONLAW: Nauru’s Online Legal Database, the Gazette provides the only extensive and official native source of place names. Issues date back to 1968. A search tool allows the user to find gazettes containing documents from the Ministry of Lands and Survey (Home Affairs), the Nauruan government branch that settles questions of land ownership and transfer. English. <http://ronlaw.gov.nr/nauru_lpms/>

Fiji, Tonga, and Nauru: Official Standard Names Approved by the United States Board on Geographic Names. In 1974, the Defense Mapping Agency Topographic Center, a precursor of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, published a list of 75 Nauruan toponyms approved by the US Board on Geographic Names. Compiled from three maps produced in Canberra and Wellington during the 1960s, a soft copy of the list is available via the Hathi Trust. English. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/002518029>
Appendix A: First-Order Administrative Division (ADM1)
Map of Nauru

Appendix B: Satellite Image of Nauru


Appendix C: Nauruan Language and Land

Language
Nauruans, an ethnic group of uncertain origin, inhabited Nauru for 3,000 years without a written language. Indeed, the relationship of Nauruan to other Micronesian and Polynesian languages remains unclear. In 1899, German-born American Protestant missionary Reverend Philip Adam Delaporte (1868-1928) and his wife came to Nauru. They quickly opened native language schools, slowly introduced German as the language of instruction, developed an alphabet, and translated and wrote several spiritual and educational texts. In 1907, after seven years of work with two native converts, Delaporte published a translation of the New Testament and a slim German-Nauru dictionary.

Meanwhile, Franco-German, Roman Catholic Father Alois Kayser (1877-1944) arrived on Nauru in 1902 and ministered on the island for almost four decades, becoming a recognized expert in the native language. He designed his own Latin-based alphabet, which allowed him to translate songbooks and catechisms and to adapt Bible stories into Nauruan. He also wrote a Nauruan grammar, but only a handful of copies were disseminated, in 1936.

Since Kayser and Delaporte’s publications, no significant, comprehensive work—either in Nauruan, or on Nauruan language, grammar, or orthography—has appeared. Further, the two missionaries—possibly due to divergent religious creeds—never collaborated, producing separate orthographic systems whose differences still have not been reconciled.

A Nauru Language Committee, established in the 1930s and later reestablished as the Nauru Language Bureau, has had no discernible effect on language preservation and standardization. Consequently, though about ninety-five percent of the population speaks Nauruan at home, only about twenty-six percent can read and write it. Nauru’s turbulent colonial history is partly to blame.

Land

For centuries, Nauruan tribal or clan chiefs likely settled all matters regarding land ownership, exchange,

12 See Andrew Pawley and Roger Green, ‘Dating the Dispersal of the Oceanic Languages’ and Geoffrey S. Nathan, ‘Nauruan in the Austronesian Language Family’ in Oceanic Linguistics, Vol 12, No. 1/2, Papers of the First International Conference on Comparative Austronesian Linguistics, 1974: Oceanic (Summer-Winter, 1973): pp. 1-67 and 479-501, respectively. Pawley and Green observe that Nauruan is among the ‘very poorly documented’ Oceanic languages but ‘at least is probably Oceanic and possibly Nuclear Micronesian’ (23).


14 Kayser may also have begun assembling a list of words for an English-Nauru dictionary. Four copies of this list exist, two in the Hamilton Library (Honolulu), one in the Canberra Menzies Library (Australia), and another in the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau (Australia); heir authorship, however, cannot be confirmed.


and inheritance. What records exist suggest that Nauruans could own land outright, pass it along at will, and even lease resources, such as coconuts and fish. In 1888, Germany administered the island as a colony, discovering rich phosphate reserves and exploiting them until 1914, when Australia administered Nauru (and continued to exploit phosphate) for Great Britain and New Zealand. In 1920, a worldwide influenza epidemic killed eighteen percent of Nauruans. Leprosy and tuberculosis took further tolls in the 1930s.

In 1928, the Nauru Lands Committee was established to resolve questions of land tenure arising from the flu epidemic and colonial incursions. The Nauru Local Government Council nominated, and the Administrator of Nauru appointed, the five to nine persons comprising the Committee. In 1942, however, the Japanese occupied the island and forcibly removed 1,200 Nauruans (sixty percent of the population) to Truk (now Chuuk, part of the Federated States of Micronesia); about 500 starved to death. The Allies bombed Nauru heavily during World War II, after which the island reverted to Australian administration, with Great Britain and New Zealand as co-trustees. Phosphate exploitation resumed, as prewar questions regarding land ownership became even more complicated.

The Nauru Lands Committee was reestablished legislatively in 1956 and functions to this day, using all available records and, commonly, anecdotal evidence offered by interested parties to settle disputes. Unless appealed before the Supreme Court of Nauru, determinations are legally binding. For this reason, place names contained in the Committee’s decisions should be taken as official. The Committee, part of the Nauru Department of Home Affairs, publishes all of its decisions in the Republic of Nauru Government Gazette. A typical document appears below. Columns of particular interest to the toponymist:

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19 The German administration did compile a Grundbuch von im Marshallinseln und Nauru, a registry of land parcel ownership and transfers, during the early part of the twentieth century.

20 MacSporran cites an example that suggests the complexity of the work the Committee must carry out to reach fair and accurate decisions:

‘On the day the Committee and any interested parties go to the area in question and anyone seeking to lay claim to the land asserts his claim. Often this will be done by a person asserting that his father took him to the area and showed him certain stones which were placed to mark the boundary. It is asserted that these stones were placed there many years ago by ancestors. Other claimants will dispute this and make similar assertions about their own ancestors.’ Op cit.
1. DISTRICT: Official spelling of district names.\textsuperscript{21}
2. TYPE OF LAND: ‘c.l’ (i.e., ‘coconut land’), land suitable for agriculture; ‘p.l’ (i.e., ‘phosphate land’), land containing phosphate deposits, which exploitation renders unsuitable for development of any kind.
4. SHARE: Of cultural interest, this column quantifies the portion of land inherited or transferred. Because land parcels can stay within a family for generations, shares of one part in a thousand are not unheard of. Almost all parcels have a name.


\textsuperscript{21} Despite the presence of \( ñ \) in Meneñ, analysts should follow the guidance in ‘Orthography’ above.

Sometimes, especially in older decisions, the Committee includes an outline map of a parcel in question, which can have a highly irregular shape. Note the presence of parcels whose names and ownership have not been determined. Numbers indicate angular rotation of borders from true north.