

Geographic Names Standardization Policy for Niue

United States Board on Geographic Names
Foreign Names Committee



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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 Niue 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, Niue—a single, upraised coral atoll locally known as ‘The Rock’—had a population of 1,611, of whom 1,501 were native-born Niueans.¹ Of the remainder, 84 (5.2 percent) came from New Zealand; 18 (1.1 percent), from other Pacific Islands; and 8 (0.5 percent), from Asia.

b. Language

Per the Vagahau Niue Act of 2012, Vagahau Niue (also known as Niuean; ISO-693-3 code ‘niu’) is the official language of Niue, though English is the statutory national working language.² Two dialects exist; *Motu*, spoken in the north, and *Tafiti*, spoken in the south. These are mutually intelligible, differing only in a few words, none of them toponymically significant³. Niuean is a Tongic language (subdivisions: Tongan, ISO-693-3 code ‘ton’; Niuean), but linguists believe they have identified Samoic (subdivisions: Sāmoan, ISO-693-3 code ‘smo’; Pukapuka, ISO-693-3 code ‘pkp,’ spoken by about 450 people on the Cook Islands) and Eastern Polynesian influences.

Niue was annexed to New Zealand in 1901 but adopted self-government in free political association with that country in 1974.⁴ Due to the island’s limited economic and educational

¹ *Niue Census of Population and Households 2011*. Report prepared by Statistics Niue, Department of Finance, Planning and Statistics. Available via *Prism: Explore the Statistics of Pacific Island Countries and Territories*, ‘Census.’ English. <<http://prism.spc.int/reports/census>> Accessed May 16, 2018.

² *Government of Niue/Ko e Fakatufono a Niue*, ‘Niue Acts’ (scroll to and click ‘Act 321 Vagahau Niue Act 2012’). English. <<http://www.gov.nu/wb/pages/legislation/niue-acts.php>> Accessed May 16, 2018. The Constitution of Niue, Article 23, defines the status of English. *Pacific Islands Legal Information Institute*, ‘Niue Primary Materials.’ English, Niuean. <<http://www.paclii.org/countries/niue.html>> Accessed May 16, 2018. In 2006, the Government of Niue published four volumes (2,274 pages) of Niue laws, updated to reflect the country’s self-governing status. All but 33 pages—the translated table of contents—are in English. *Government of Niue/Ko e Fakatufono a Niue*, ‘Niue Laws.’ English. <<http://www.gov.nu/wb/pages/legislation/niue-laws.php>> Accessed May 16, 2018.

³ *Motu* means ‘island people’; *tafiti*, ‘people from far away.’ According to tradition, Tongans comprised the latter group.

⁴ This differs from full independence in that, per the Niue Constitution, New Zealand is responsible for providing necessary economic and administrative assistance to Niue, as well as for defending the island nation and its Exclusive Economic Zone.

opportunities, about 23,883 Niueans lived in New Zealand as of 2013. Of Niueans born in New Zealand, fewer than eight percent can speak Niuean.⁵ Niuean experts recently conferred to find ways to sustain the language, which the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has classified as ‘definitely endangered.’⁶

c. Geographic Names Standardization

No Niue government entity is responsible for standardizing geographic names. Though the Vagahau Niue Act established the Niue Language Commission to promote and standardize the language, the Land Act of 1969—designed to ‘provide for the control and tenure of land, the survey of land, the registration of title to land and other like purposes’—stipulates that ‘[e]very instrument affecting Niue land shall be in the English language and shall be accompanied by a translation into the Niuean language to the satisfaction of the Registrar.’⁷ Encompassing 261.5 sq km, the entire island is only about fifty percent larger than Washington, DC. All but one village lies along the island periphery; the interior remains undeveloped. Niue has neither mountains, valleys, hills, rivers, lakes, ponds, nor most features associated with larger land masses. Thus, few place names exist. Those in this policy derive from the *Niue Census of Population and Households 2011*, other government documents, and the handful of authoritative maps.

3. Toponymic Policies

a. Orthography

The Vagahau Niue alphabet has sixteen Latin letters:

*A a, E e, F f, G g, H h, I i, K k, L l, M m, N n, O o, P p, S s, T t, U u, V v.*⁸

Parliamentary Counsel Office/Te Tari Tohutohu Pāremata (New Zealand Legislation), ‘Niue Constitution Act 1974.’ English, Niuean. <<http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1974/0042/latest/DLM412778.html>> Accessed May 16, 2018.

⁵ *StatsNZ/Tatauranga Aotearoa*, ‘2013 Census Ethnic Group Profiles.’ English. <http://archive.stats.govt.nz/Census/2013-census/profile-and-summary-reports/ethnic-profiles.aspx?request_value=24712&tabname=Languagesspoken> Accessed May 16, 2018.

⁶ See the following media stories regarding the Vagahau Niue Conference held April 12-13, 2017 in the village of Mutulau, Niue: *Cook Island News*, ‘And call for preservation of their language.’ April 18, 2017. <<http://www.cookislandsnews.com/item/64031-and-call-for-preservation-of-their-language/64031-and-call-for-preservation-of-their-language>>; *Radio New Zealand*, ‘Call to Niueans to fight to preserve language.’ April 13, 2017. <<https://www.radionz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/328765/call-to-niueans-to-fight-to-preserve-language>>; *Island Culture Archival Support*, ‘The Preservation of the Niuean Language.’ June 16, 2017. <<https://islandculturearchivalsupport.wordpress.com/2017/06/16/the-preservation-of-the-niuean-language/>> All material in English, accessed May 16, 2018. Note the recent establishment of Niue Language Week (October 15-21, 2017) by the New Zealand Ministry for Pacific Peoples (*Te Manatū mō Ngā Iwi o Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa*) to promote use of the language: <<http://www.mpp.govt.nz/language-culture-and-identity/pacific-language-weeks/niue-language-week/>>. *UNESCO Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger*, ‘Interactive Atlas.’ English, French, Spanish. <<http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/index.php>> All accessed May 16, 2018.

⁷ Land Act 1969, ‘Language of instruments.’ The Act is available for download via *Pacific Islands Legal Information Institute*, ‘Niue Primary Materials.’ English. <<http://www.pacilii.org/countries/nu.html>> Accessed May 16, 2018.

⁸ Older Vagahau Niue-English dictionaries first list words beginning with vowels, followed by those beginning with consonants.

Note that:

- *T t* takes the sound of *s* before *e* and *i*;
- *G g* takes the sound of *ng*, as in *sing*;
- The London Missionary Society, which arrived in 1846, introduced *R r* and *S s* to transliterate Biblical names. Both occur only in foreign loan words.⁹ Of these two letters, only *S s* appears in initial position of words transliterated into Niuean, almost all of which derive from English, with a handful from Sāmoan and Biblical Hebrew;
- Vowels are pronounced generally as in continental languages; however, they can be short or long. The former appear as shown above; the latter, perhaps with a macron (¯):
Ā ā, Ē ē, Ī ī, Ō ō, Ū ū

- Some Niuean words have double vowel (extended) sounds. Their pronunciation and meaning differ from those of words containing the same vowel with or without a macron:
 - *maama* = ‘to be bright’
 - *māmā* = ‘to be light in weight or color’
 - *mama* = ‘chewed food,’ ‘ring,’ or ‘a slug’

Niueans do not use double vowels and macrons consistently, deriving the intended meaning from context. An exhaustive examination of authoritative maps and lists reveals that macrons do not arise in Niuean place names, even when a constituent element contains one.

b. Romanization

Romanization is not required for Niuean.

c. Diacritics

Niuean geographic names do not contain diacritics.

d. Generic Terms

A generic is a term used to describe a geographic feature, such as ‘river,’ ‘hill,’ or ‘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 in Niue.

e. Hyphenation, Capitalization, Reduplication, and Spelling

Most Niuean toponyms describe a characteristic, an event, a creature, or a legend related to

⁹ The discerning reader may wonder why *R r* do not appear in the Niuean alphabet presented above. This policy follows the convention set by Wolfgang Sperlich, a linguist of Austronesian languages, in his *Tohi Vagahau Niue/Niue Language Dictionary* (1997), the most up-to-date, extensive, and authoritative lexicon of Niuean. Compiled under the auspices of the Government of Niue and the University of Hawaii, this dictionary contains no entries for *R r* but a few dozen for *S s*, one of which may derive from Sāmoan. Sāmoans themselves landed on Niue about 1,100 years ago, with Tongans following in the sixteenth century. Neither the Sāmoan, the Tongan, nor the Pukapukan alphabets contains *R r*, though the former two possess *S s*. Hence, no word containing *R r* in Niuean texts, including maps, derives from any of these constituent Polynesian languages.

the geographic feature in question. Almost always monolexical and compounded from two or more elements or morphemes, Niuean place names can be semantically dense. With the exception of *Tuhia-atua* (a section of the southwestern coast used as a canoe landing), hyphenation does not occur in names identifying a single place.¹⁰ Thus:

- *Anaheke* = *ana* (cave) + *heke* (slippery)
- *Fuata* = *fū* (trunk of a tree) + *ata* (a kind of tree, *Ficus tinctoria*)
- *Tamakautoga* = *tama* (boy) + *kau* (close to a side) + *toga* (south) = ‘boy from the south’
- *Vaonamu* = *vao* (bush) + *namu* (mosquito) = ‘mosquitos in the bush’

Names of roads that run through two different named areas should be hyphenated, as they appear on authoritative maps. Hence:

- *Malekau-Makauga Road*
- *Patuutu-Fukau Bush Road*
- *Vinivini-Motoliku Bush Road*

Names with more than one element usually contain a foreign generic. Whatever the language, capitalize all terms:

- *Matapa Chasm*
- *Avatele Bay*
- *Tomb Point*

As in other Oceanic languages, reduplication — the repetition of all or part of a verb or morpheme to intensify or magnify meaning — occurs in Niuean. Unfortunately, tradition and not set rules govern application of this phenomenon. The analyst is advised to consult authoritative place name sources.

- *Anaana* = ‘many caves’ > *ana* (cave)
- *Foufou* = ‘many *fou* plants’ > *fou* (a shrub or tree, *Hibiscus tiliaceus*)
- *Makaapiapi* = ‘many stones’ > *maka* (stone) + [*apiapi* (crowded) > *api* (to camp)]
- *Tukitukipule* = ‘tap the shell’ > [*tukituki* (to knock, rap) > *tuki* (knock, smash)] + *pule* (shell)
- *Vahavaha* = ‘widely spread out’ > *vaha* (horizon)

f. Long and Short Forms

Long forms of Niue geographic names are rare; the only one appears to be the name of the island:

- Long form: *Niue Island* Short form: *Niue*

Short forms of names may 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

¹⁰ This appears to be a longstanding principle. None of the almost three hundred place names that Edwin M. Loeb provides in his *History and Traditions of Niue* (Honolulu: Bishop Museum, 1926; pp. 14-22) contains a hyphen or diacritic mark.

short name should be ranked as the primary name.

g. Abbreviations

Abbreviations do not occur in Niuean toponyms.

h. Numbers

Very few Niuean geographic names contain numbers, cardinal or ordinal. Those that do affix the number at the end of the name, sometimes in a slightly altered form:

- *Huvalu* = *hū* (to hide) + *valu* (eight); hence, ‘eight crabs in the same hole’¹¹
- *Pofitu* = *pō* (night) + *fitu* (seventh); hence, ‘cave where man spent his seventh night’¹²
- *Halatoafa* = *hala* (inland road) + *toa* (ironwood tree, *Casuarina equisetifolia*) + *foa* (four)

4. Political Geography Policy

a. Country Name

Approved name *Niue*

b. Capital Name

Approved name *Alofi*

c. First-Order Administrative Divisions (ADM1)

Niue has no ADM1s. Fourteen village constituencies send one elected representative each to the Niue Assembly, a Westminster-style legislative body.

Village Constituencies

Alofi North
 Alofi South
 Avatele
 Hakupu
 Hikutavake
 Lakepa
 Liku
 Makefu
 Mutalau
 Namukulu
 Tamakautoga
 Toi

¹¹ Loeb, p. 16

¹² Loeb, p. 19.

Village Constituencies

Tuapa

Vaiea

d. Conventional Names

The Niue country file in the GNDB contains no conventional or anglicized variant names. To remove or add conventional and anglicized variant 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.

Niue has neither boundary disputes nor a unique geopolitical situation.

5. Source Material

Maps

Niue, published by Land Information New Zealand. 1:50 000. Downloadable in TIFF, GeoTIFF, and shapefile formats. Map displays a host of features: airport, boat ramps, buildings, caves, fences, golf courses, gravesites, landfills, orchards, reefs, roads, and wharfs, among others. *Land Information New Zealand – Toitū te whenua, 'Pacific Region Maps.'*

<https://www.linz.govt.nz/land/maps/pacific-region-maps>

Map of Niue, published by the Department of Lands and Survey, New Zealand. Entire island: 1:50,000; detail Alofi: 1:12,500. Third edition, 1985. Displays main roads, buildings (hotels, hospital, schools, administrative and other public offices), telephone lines, radio antennae, caves, and reefs, among other features.

Place Names

Niue Census of Population and Households 2011. Contains the official names of all villages on the island but not of any other features.

http://prism.spc.int/images/census_reports/Niue_2011_Population_Households_Census.pdf

History and Traditions of Niue, Edwin M. Loeb. Honolulu: Bernice P. Bishop Museum, 1926; pp. 14-22. Loeb spent seven months on Niue conducting field research for the Bishop Museum. He had access to all available government documents, gleaning about three hundred place names therefrom. Not all of these may exist any longer, nor did Loeb record associated geographic coordinates.

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b3125088;view=1up;seq=9>

Dictionaries

Tohi Vagahau Niue / Niue Language Dictionary. Edited by Wolfgang Sperlich. Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1997. Latest, most comprehensive dictionary of Niuean. Endorsed by then-

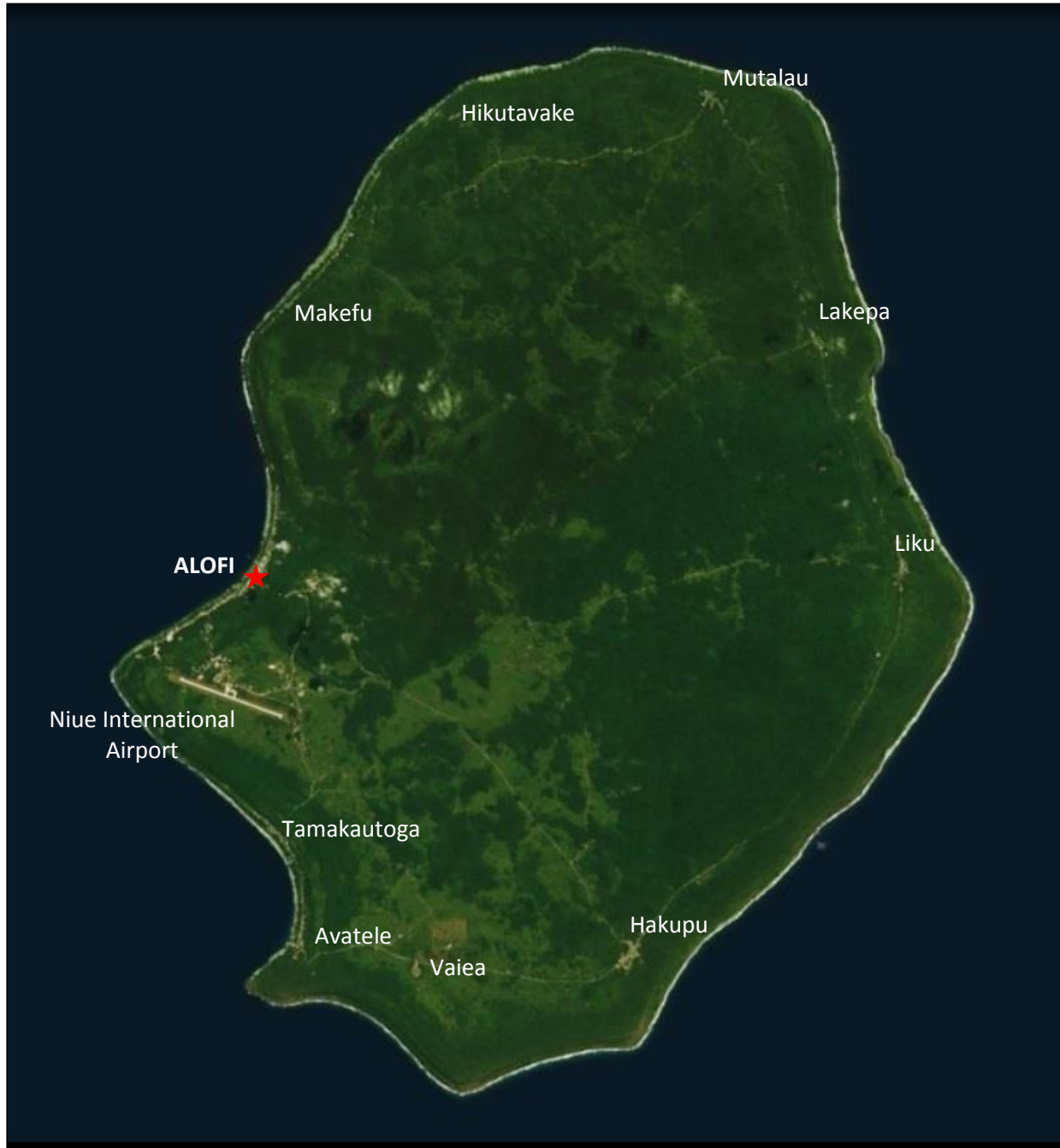
Premier Frank Fakaotimanava Lui, the lexicon contains about 10,000 Niuean words and discusses principals of orthography, pronunciation, and grammar. An English-Niuean list features about 4,000 entries.

Appendix A: Map of Niue



Source: *Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, 'Story: Niueans.' English.
<<https://teara.govt.nz/en/map/46703/niue>>

Appendix B: Satellite Image of Niue



Source: *National Geographic*, 'MapMaker Interactive' (Image by Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS). English <<https://mapmaker.nationalgeographic.org/#/>> Note the absence of interior development.

Appendix C: Generics in Niue Place Names

The following generic terms, from Wolfgang Sperlich's *Tohi Vagahau Niu/Niue Language Dictionary* (1997), may appear in maps of Niue but more likely in literature about places on the island.

Generic	Translation	Designation Code (DSG)	Comment
<i>afaga</i>	beach, landing area (for canoes)	BCH	
<i>āluna</i>	plain	PLN	
	plateau	PLAT	
<i>ana</i>	cave	CAVE	
<i>faama</i>	farm	FRM	From English 'farm'
<i>faituga</i>	church	CH	
<i>fale</i>	house	HSE	<i>Fale</i> , a generic term, serves as the root of many other more specific kinds of building designations
	building	BLDG	
<i>fale fonu</i>	community hall, assembly house	BLDG	
<i>fale hio</i>	house (modern style)	HSE	
<i>fale pōuli</i>	prison	PRN	Lit., 'house of darkness'
<i>fale tali fenoga</i>	guesthouse	GHSE	Lit., 'house of greeting'
	hotel	HTL	
<i>fale tapu</i>	church	CH	Lit., 'house of worship'
<i>falekaho</i>	bamboo house	HSE	
<i>feofeo</i>	coral reef	RFC	Reduplication of <i>feo</i> , 'coral'
<i>feutu</i>	cliff	CLF	
<i>hala</i>	path, trail	TRL	
<i>ietoka</i>	rock (partially submerged in the sea)	RK	
<i>kautahi</i>	coast	CST	
<i>kemu</i>	camp	CMP	From English 'camp'
<i>kovili</i>	whirlpool	WHRL	
<i>kuali</i>	quarry	MNQR	From English 'quarry'
<i>loto</i>	small pool on a reef	POOL	
<i>maaga</i>	village	PPL	
<i>malē</i>	village green, open space	AREA	
<i>mataafaga</i>	beach	BCH	
<i>matamaka</i>	small islet	ISL	
<i>moana</i>	ocean, deep sea	OCN	
<i>motu</i>	island	ISL	
<i>mouga</i>	mountain	MT	
<i>oneone</i>	sand	SAND	
<i>pahua</i>	ravine	RVN	
<i>paipai</i>	small hill	HLL	
<i>palia</i>	hill	HLL	

Generic	Translation	Designation Code (DSG)	Comment
<i>puhī</i>	blow hole	BLHL	From <i>puhi</i> , 'to blow'
<i>taue</i>	reef channel	CHN	
<i>tafuna</i>	mound	MND	
<i>taone</i>	town	PPL	From English 'town'
<i>toafo</i>	coastal area before cliffs	CST	
<i>tumutumu</i>	mound	MND	
<i>uaafo</i>	wharf	WHRF	From English 'wharf'
<i>ulu</i>	grove	GROVE	
<i>ulu futi</i>	banana plantation	ESTB	Generic: <i>ulu</i> ('grove,plantation') ¹³
<i>uluulu</i>	reef	RF	
<i>uta</i>	shore	SHOR	

¹³ *Ulu*, when combined with certain qualifiers, may present compound nouns for which no designation code exists. Hence, *ulu niu* is a coconut plantation; *ulu talo*, a taro plantation.