

# Commemorative naming fact sheet

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## Commemorative naming

The Geographical Names Board of New South Wales (GNB) has the role of assigning names to places and natural features. The GNB's guidelines and procedures are aimed at ensuring community input, giving all interested parties a say in a naming decision and minimising duplication of names.

The end result is a clear community identification of what name applies to which place or feature and to enable clear communication in times of emergency, for delivery of services and, in many cases, as a reminder of our history.

The GNB seeks to recognise outstanding achievement in the community by commemoratively naming relevant geographical features. Acts of bravery, community service and exceptional accomplishment by both individuals and groups are grounds for this recognition.

The GNB has bestowed honours of this nature on many individuals and groups. Returned service men and women, famous sporting identities, educators, industry leaders, former elected civic officials, famous Aboriginals, community leaders and everyday Australians have all been commemorated in this fashion.

The most vexing naming decisions arise when features are named after people, especially those still living. The GNB's experience is that proposals of this kind invariably lead to division in the community.

Most jurisdictions around the world prohibit the use of names of living persons and apply severe restrictions to the use of the name of any deceased person. For example, the United States Board on Geographic Names 'will not consider names that commemorate or may be construed to commemorate living persons'.

The Australian guidelines talk of ascribing names of living persons 'only in very exceptional circumstances'. These guidelines were born from long experience.

Therefore, the GNB strongly recommends that local councils do not prepare proposals to name features to honour living persons. Alternatives are to use commemorative plaques or naming a particular community facility such as a building after the person to be commemorated.

The GNB's primary directive is to give precedence in using names of Aboriginal origin associated with the feature or a name with an historical background in the area of the feature. Local councils are encouraged to use these long standing practices wherever possible.

In all naming proposals, local councils are encouraged to undertake consultation with the community prior to submitting a proposal to the GNB. This is no different to existing participative procedures adopted by councils on a wide range of issues aimed at achieving an equitable solution brokered by the local council for the benefit of the community.