



Guidance Document

Procedures for Selecting NZ Common Fish Names and Approved Foreign Fish Names

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Title

Guidance Document: Procedures for Selecting NZ Common Fish Names and Approved Foreign Fish Names

About this document

This guidance document outlines the process undertaken for selecting NZ Common Fish Names and Approved Foreign Fish Names.

Related Requirements

[Animal Products Notice: Production, Supply and Processing \(the PSP Notice\)](#)

Document history

No.	Version Date	Section Changed	Change(s) Description
1	January 2008		
2	December 2016		New format and branding
3	July 2023	2 & 4	Updated references to legislation and broken links.

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1 Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline:

- What is required to request changes or additions to the New Zealand List of Scientific Names of Fish
- What is required to request changes or additions to the Approved Fish Names List
- The procedures that are followed by the Ministry for Primary Industries to process these requests.

2 Background

Common fish names for use in New Zealand are given in the New Zealand List of Scientific Names of Fish

Approved foreign fish names are those approved for use on labelling and are given in the Approved Fish Names List.

Approved Fish Names List

<https://mpi.govt.nz/document-vault/194>

New Zealand List of Scientific Names of Fish

Schedule 5 of the PSP Notice:

<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/50182>

Common fish names for use in New Zealand and approved foreign fish names are determined by the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) and the New Zealand Seafood Standards Council (NZSSC) in accordance with procedures agreed to by industry and the NZSSC.

3 Definitions

MPI The Ministry for Primary Industries

NZSSC New Zealand Seafood Standards Council

WTO World Trade Organisation

3.1 Fish Name Definitions

Terms	Definitions
Common Fish Name (CFN)	The Common Fish Name for a species of fish approved by MPI after consultation with the NZSSC Council and recorded in the New Zealand List of Scientific Names of Fish on the MPI website
Common Group Name (CGN)	A common fish group name for one or more species of fish recorded in the New Zealand List of Scientific Names of Fish on the MPI website
Finfish	Includes all species of finfish of the Classes Agnatha, Chondrichthyes, and Osteichthyes, at any stage of their life history, whether living or dead
Fish	Means any finfish or shellfish
Scientific name	An animal or plant's unique scientific name as per international convention. Each binomial name consists of a genus name and a species name, both of which are italicised. The scientific names used in the New Zealand List of Scientific Names of Fish are those advised by relevant experts in New Zealand

Taxonomic Group Name (TGN)	An animal or plant's taxonomic group names as per international convention
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4 How to request a change or addition to a Fish Name list

Applications to change or add a new NZ common fish name or an approved foreign fish name must be made on the Official Application Form and submitted to the MPI.

Before preparing an application:

- (1) Download and read the application form:

[Proposed Amendment to the New Zealand List of Scientific Names of Fish and/or Approved Fish Names List \(PDF version\)](#)

[Proposed Amendment to the New Zealand List of Scientific Names of Fish and/or Approved Fish \(Word version\)](#)

- (2) Read Section 5 (Selecting NZ Common Fish Names) of this document, and/or
- (3) Read Section 6 (Selecting Approved Foreign Fish Names) of this document.

Applications that do not comply with all relevant requirements may be returned to the applicant.

4.1 NZ Common Fish Names

When considering whether to request changes or additions to the New Zealand List of Scientific Names of Fish, applicants should:

- check to establish whether the species already has a Common Fish Name;
- apply the Procedures For Selecting Common Fish Names when selecting proposed name/s; and
- demonstrate that they have consulted with key stakeholders who may have an interest in the application.

MPI will evaluate each application in accordance with the protocol for determining fish names and will decide, in consultation with the NZSSC, whether the application will be approved. For information regarding consultation, contact the NZSSC, see <https://www.nzssc.co.nz/contact>

4.2 Approved Foreign Fish Names

When considering whether to request changes or additions to the list of approved foreign fish names for a species, applicants should:

- check to establish whether the species already has a Common Fish Name;
- provide clear evidence (see explanatory box below), including translations of documents and name elements, that the proposed name is approved or required by the prospective importing country for the species concerned; and
- demonstrate that consultation with those who have an interest in the application has been carried out. This would normally include consultation through the NZSSC, who would identify and consult with other interested parties. For information regarding consultation, contact the NZSSC, see <https://www.nzssc.co.nz/contact>

Evidence can include web pages from the relevant importing country competent authority website, a letter or other formal document produced by that competent authority, scientific journals or other scientific publications in the foreign language linking the proposed name exclusively with the species concerned, or in some cases

with a group of related species. MPI reserves the right to determine which foreign country government agency constitutes the relevant competent authority in this regard.

5 Procedures for Selecting NZ Common Fish Names

5.1 Application

The procedures described in this section relate primarily to selection of New Zealand common fish names. However, sections 5.3 and 5.4 provide guidance that can also be used to assess whether a foreign name is worthy of consideration.

Refer to section 6 for further information on Procedures for Selecting Approved Foreign Fish Names.

5.2 Structure

The procedures described in this section are used to select NZ common fish names. They have been developed and agreed to by MPI in consultation with the NZSSC.

The procedures consist of the following elements:

- Overriding obligations
- General principles
- Steps for selecting common names
- Guidelines for selecting common names
- Guidelines for deriving new names where no appropriate name currently exists.

5.3 Overriding Obligations

All reasonable measures must be taken to ensure that the process and outcome of assigning common fish names is consistent with relevant New Zealand legislation and with New Zealand's international obligations.

5.3.1 International Obligations

As a signatory to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Agreement, New Zealand is required to comply with relevant WTO codes and guidelines, including the WTO Code of Good Practice for the Preparation, Adoption and Application of Standards.

Accordingly, when assigning common fish names all reasonable measures must be taken to comply with the WTO Code of Good Practice for the Preparation, Adoption and Application of Standards, including the following provisions:

- a) accord products originating from other members of the WTO, no less favourable treatment than products of New Zealand origin; and
- b) ensure that unnecessary obstacles to international trade are not created; and
- c) where international standards exist or their completion is imminent, use the relevant parts of them as a basis for its work, except where they would be ineffective or inappropriate.

5.3.2 New Zealand Legislation

When assigning common fish names all reasonable measures must be taken to ensure compliance with New Zealand legislation. The decision-making process should also be guided by MPI's goal to provide a food

regulatory programme that protects and promotes consumer health, improves the safety and suitability of food and provides information to enable consumers to make informed choices.

The Fair Trading Act includes provisions with potential relevance to the assignment of common fish names, including provisions that:

- prohibit people in trade from engaging in misleading or deceptive conduct;
- prohibit false or misleading representations about goods or services;
- prohibit unfair trading practices; and
- provide for consumer information and product safety standards regulations and unsafe goods notices.

In addition, the Commerce Act prohibits conduct that restricts competition i.e. restrictive trade practices.

5.4 General Principles when Assigning Common Fish Names

MPI has compiled the following general principles for selection of common names.

Unless special circumstances exist that justify otherwise:

- a) No two species or family will have the same approved common names.
- b) Subspecies and hybrids will not generally be given a common name.
- c) Historical names in regular use or widely accepted names or combinations will have priority over less used or less well-known names.
- d) Simplicity of names and name structure will be fundamental to the naming process. (i.e., whenever possible, long-winded names, and unnecessary suffixes and hyphens should be avoided).
- e) Names should avoid ambiguity. For example:
 - i) where names combine well (elements are easily determined and unambiguous), use one word (e.g. Elephantfish);
 - ii) where combinations involve vowel or letter pairing, use hyphens (e.g. Blue-eye, Spot-tail);
 - iii) separate names to maintain 'readability' if the word elements are unclear (e.g. as a suffix, 'fish' combines well but 'shark' is sometimes confusing);
 - iv) the combining of long names with multiple descriptors should be avoided (e.g. 'Greenbackflounder' is unwieldy and better separated as 'Greenback flounder').
- f) Names should generally conform with other members of the family or generic-level grouping (e.g., an un-named species of flathead should typically be called 'Newname Flathead').
- g) Generic or family names (i.e. scientific names) may be used as common names (e.g. Conger Eel for *Conger verreauxi*), or in modified form (e.g. Sprats for *Sprattus antipodum*).
- h) A common fish name need not be intimately tied to scientific name changes (i.e., if the scientific name of a particular species changes, the common name should remain unaffected unless there is a good reason for change).
- i) Patronyms or names intended to honour persons (apart from those that are historically entrenched) are discouraged. However, such names should be used when no user-friendly, diagnostic descriptors are available.
- j) Care should be taken to construct the correct form of the descriptor, for example:
 - i) 'Orangespot' refers to a species with a single orange spot or bilateral pair of spots;
 - ii) 'Orangespotted' refers to a species with multiple orange spots;
 - iii) 'Orange Spotted' is non-specific (e.g., 'Orange Spotted Catshark' refers to a member of a group of 'spotted catsharks' in which the species has either orange spots or an orange body – in this case, the former).
- k) The expression 'Common', or emotive terms such as 'Dangerous', as part of a fish's name should be used sparingly.

- l) Descriptors of size (e.g. 'Little', 'Large') should be avoided unless strongly diagnostic of the species or group in question.
- m) The use of common names that are also widely used for other organisms should be avoided unless pre- or suffixed to make them distinct.
- n) Family group names follow internationally accepted names (Fishes of the World, Joseph S. Nelson, 2006) unless alternatives are well entrenched in New Zealand mainstream literature.

5.5 Steps for Selecting Common Name Candidates

(1) Step 1

- a) If the species has a common name as in the New Zealand List of Scientific Names of Fish, then use that common name.
- b) If the species is not listed in the New Zealand List of Scientific Names of Fish go to step two.

(2) Step 2

- a) If the species has one or more Maori, vernacular or marketing names in New Zealand, go to step three.
- b) If the species does not presently have a documented Maori, vernacular or marketing name in New Zealand:
 - i) derive a candidate name or names based on the general principles above, then
 - ii) assign a name using the Guidelines for Deriving New Names below.

(3) Step 3

- a) If the species has a single Maori or vernacular name (iconic or otherwise in New Zealand) then retain that name in full or in part (given due attention to general principles above).
- b) If the species has more than one Maori or vernacular name, select a name based on the general principles above and the Guidelines for Selecting Names below.

5.6 Guidelines for Selecting a Name from a Group of Candidate Names

The following criteria should be considered when selecting a name from a group of potentially available candidate names. The relative importance of each will depend on the case at hand and flexibility is often needed:

- a) Names that have been widely used across New Zealand for more than a century (historical names), or nationally entrenched names, would generally have preference over recently derived, less well-used names.
- b) A regional name where the species is most commonly encountered / caught would normally have priority over less frequently used names or names used where the species is less common.
- c) Names used in recent mainstream field guides have wide public exposure and should generally be followed. It should also be noted that later guides are more likely to have applied each common name to the correct species.
- d) A name that most effectively distinguishes a species from its closest relatives (e.g., by reference to a diagnostic feature) is preferred over less obvious or irrelevant combinations.
- e) Where none of the above applies, names should be selected in full or in part based on their simplicity, unambiguous nature, and readability.

5.7 Guidelines for Deriving New Names (Where no New Zealand Name Exists)

Names should be derived on a case-by-case basis using one or more of the following criteria and considering relevant issues relating to the selection of existing names (above):

- a) Adopt commonly used, local group names where they exist.
- b) Use FAO or other international group names that are well known and widely applied elsewhere.
- c) Construct descriptors based on:-
 - i) the meaning of the scientific species name (e.g., *Allocyttus niger* is called 'Black oreo dory' because 'niger' means 'black');
 - ii) structural attributes, coloration, and colour pattern;
 - iii) suitable adjectival modifiers reflecting the geographic distribution of the species;
 - iv) ecological or biological characteristics of the species;
 - v) colourful, romantic, fanciful, metaphorical, otherwise distinctive and original names.
- d) Use well-accepted Maori names as descriptors.
- e) Repetition of frequently used descriptors (e.g., 'Spotted', 'Banded', 'Striped', 'New Zealand', 'Deepwater') should only be used when no other distinctive attribute exists.

6 Procedures for Selecting Approved Foreign Fish Names

As noted in section 5.1, the procedures described in Sections 5.3 and 5.4 relating to selection of New Zealand common fish names, provide guidance that can be used to decide whether a foreign name is worthy of consideration. Before making a formal approach to MPI, potential applicants should use these sections to assess the validity of the proposed fish name.

Note that in situations where the competent authority in an importing country requires a particular name for a species, the competent authority requirement overrides any particular principle or consideration contained in these procedures, except where deception, fraud or misleading labelling is likely to result.