

National symbols

This fact sheet explains Australia's key national symbols, including the Coat of Arms, our flags, the national anthem, the floral emblem and our national colours. It explains the history and significance of each symbol.

Coat of Arms



The Commonwealth Coat of Arms is the formal symbol of the Commonwealth of Australia. It is used to identify the authority and property of the Australian Government, the Australian Parliament and Commonwealth courts. For example, it appears on the cover of Australian passports, government buildings and some 50 cent coins.

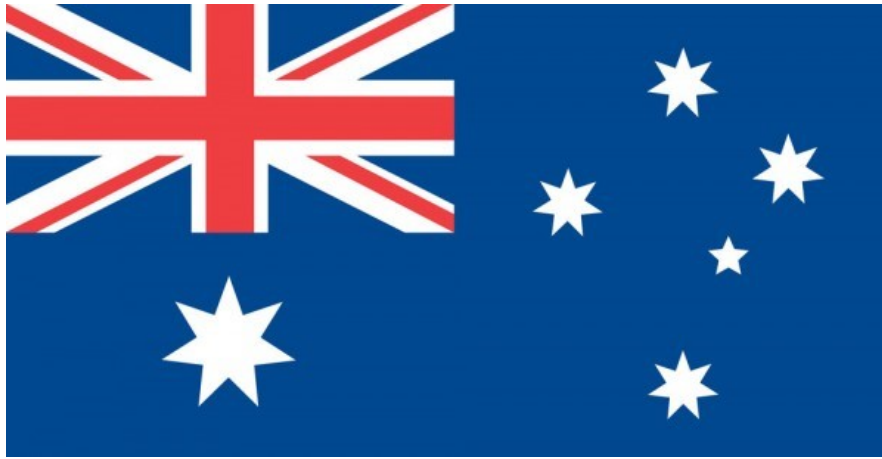
The first Commonwealth Coat of Arms was introduced on 7 May 1908. The current Coat of Arms was introduced on 19 September 1912.

The Commonwealth Coat of Arms contains a shield with the symbols of the 6 Australian states. These symbols are enclosed in a border to represent federation in 1901, when the states united to form Australia.

The shield is held by 2 native Australian animals, a kangaroo on the left and an emu on the right. The gold Federation—Commonwealth—Star above the shield has 7 points. One point represents each of the 6 states and the seventh point represents all the territories. There is a scroll displaying the word 'Australia' beneath the shield. The national floral emblem, golden wattle, forms the background.

Australian flags

The Australian national flag is one of the country's most recognisable symbols. It was first flown on 3 September 1901 at the Royal Exhibition Building in Melbourne but was not proclaimed as the official national flag until 1953.



The flag includes a Union Jack, a white Federation Star and the Southern Cross, all on a blue background. The Union Jack represents Australia's historical link with the United Kingdom and our continuing place in the Commonwealth.

The Federation Star has 7 points which represent the 6 states and the territories of Australia. The seventh point was added in 1908 and has been the only change to the flag. The Southern Cross is a constellation of stars which can only be seen in the southern hemisphere.



Australia has other official flags, including the Australian Aboriginal flag and the Torres Strait Islander flag. Both of these flags were proclaimed on 14 July 1995.

The Australian Aboriginal flag is made up of three colours—black, red and gold. Black symbolises the Australian Indigenous people. Red symbolises the colour of earth and ochre, which is used in Indigenous ceremonies. The circle of gold in the centre of the flag represents the sun.



The Torres Strait Islander flag contains a white dhari—a traditional dancer's headdress—which is an important symbol for Torres Strait Islanders. Below the dhari is a white five-pointed star—a symbol of sea navigation. The 5 points represent the island groups in the Torres Strait, and white represents peace.

These symbols are on a blue background, surrounded by panels of green and black. Blue represents the sea, green represents the land and black represents the people.

National anthem

Advance Australia Fair is Australia's national anthem. It was written by Peter Dodds McCormack in 1878 but did not become Australia's national anthem until much later.

From 1901 to 1974, Australia's national anthem was *God Save the King/Queen*. In 1973, a competition was held for a new national anthem. The judges decided that the entries did not meet the standard of other popular Australian songs—*Advance Australia Fair*, *Waltzing Matilda* and *Song of Australia*. They recommended that 1 of these 3 songs be chosen as the new national anthem. In a national poll conducted in 1974, 51.4% of people chose *Advance Australia Fair*, followed by 19.4% who voted for *Waltzing Matilda*. As a result, the government changed the national anthem to *Advance Australia Fair*.

In 1976, the new government reinstated *God Save the Queen*. In 1977, another poll was conducted and *Advance Australia Fair* was again chosen.

A further 7 years passed before *Advance Australia Fair* was proclaimed the national anthem by the Governor-General on 19 April 1984.

National floral emblem



Australia's national floral emblem is the golden wattle, *Acacia pycnantha*. It was proclaimed by the Governor-General on 19 August 1988.

When in flower, the golden wattle is green and gold—Australia's national colours. The floral emblem has been used in many official designs, including stamps, currency, awards and the Commonwealth Coat of Arms. The emblem of the Order of Australia is a single wattle flower.

National Wattle Day is celebrated on 1 September. It is around this time of year that the golden wattle starts to bloom.

National colours

Australia's national colours are green and gold—colours found in the Australian environment. Gold represents sand, grain, fleece and mining. Green represents trees and crops. Green and gold are also the colours of Australia's national floral emblem, the golden wattle.

Green and gold were proclaimed the national colours on 19 April 1984, together with the national anthem. These colours are mainly associated with Australia's sporting achievements in international events, such as the Olympic Games.

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