



Australian Government

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Excerpt from the booklet *Australian flags* – Part 2: The protocols for the appropriate use and the flying of the flag

Australian flags describes the history and significance of the Australian National Flag and other flags of Australia, and explains the protocol for flying and displaying flags within Australia.

The 3rd edition of *Australian flags* has a new structure to make the book easier to read and new illustrations to describe flag protocol:

- Part I outlines the elements of the Australian National Flag;
- Part II explains the protocols for the appropriate use and the flying of the Australian National Flag;
- Part III details other official flags of Australia; and
- Part IV outlines the history of the Australian National Flag.

Australian flags can be used as an educational resource and a source of general information about the history and proper use of the Australian National Flag and other flags of Australia by the Australian community, flag marshals and visitors to Australia.

Australian flags can be obtained free of charge through the Constituents' Request Programme by contacting the electorate office of your local Senator or Member of the House of Representatives.

This excerpt and further information on Australian national symbols can be obtained at www.itsanhonour.gov.au

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PART 2:
THE PROTOCOLS FOR THE
APPROPRIATE USE AND
THE FLYING OF THE FLAG



THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL FLAG MAY BE FLOWN ON EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR. IT IS IMPORTANT TO OBSERVE CORRECT FLAG PROTOCOL WHEN FLYING THE FLAG. THE FOLLOWING GUIDELINES APPLY TO THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL FLAG AND TO FLAGS GENERALLY.

WHO CAN FLY THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL FLAG?

Any person may fly the Australian National Flag. However, the flag should be treated with the respect and dignity it deserves as the nation's most important national symbol.

Flag protocol is based on longstanding international and national practice.

DIGNITY OF THE FLAG

The flag should not be allowed to fall or lie on the ground.

The flag should not be used to cover a statue, monument or plaque for an unveiling ceremony; to cover a table or seat; or to mask boxes, barriers or the space between the floor and the ground level on a dais or platform.

The flag should never be flown when in damaged, faded or dilapidated condition. When the material of the flag deteriorates to a point where it is no longer suitable for use, it should be destroyed privately, in a dignified way.

FLYING AND HANDLING

When flown in Australia or on Australian territory the Australian National Flag takes precedence over all other flags with the exception of the United Nations Flag on United Nations Day (refer to page 35). See the order of precedence (page 25) when flying the Australian National Flag in company with other flags.

The flag should not be flown in a position inferior to that of any other flag or ensign. The superior position is based on the formation of the flagpoles in the set, not the height of the flag on the flagpole.

The flag should not be smaller than that of any other flag or ensign.

The flag should be raised briskly and lowered with dignity.

The flag should always be flown aloft and free as close as possible to the top of the flag mast, with the rope tightly secured.

Unless all the flags can be raised and lowered simultaneously, the Australian National Flag should be raised first and lowered last when flown with other flags.

When the flag is raised or lowered, or when it is carried in a parade or review, all present should face the flag and remain silent. Those in uniform should salute.

The flag should be raised no earlier than first light and should be lowered no later than dusk.

The flag may only be flown at night when illuminated.

Two flags should not be flown from the same flagpole.

The flag should not be flown upside down, even as a signal of distress.

DISPOSAL OF FLAGS

When a flag becomes dilapidated and no longer suitable for use, it should be destroyed privately and in a dignified way. For example, it may be cut into small unrecognisable pieces then disposed of with the normal rubbish collection.

DISPLAYING THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL FLAG

Whether the flag is displayed flat against a surface (either horizontally or vertically), on a staff, on a flag rope, or suspended vertically in the middle of a street, the canton should be in the uppermost left quarter as viewed by a person facing the flag.

In the case of the Australian National Flag, the Union Jack should be seen in the top left quarter of the flag. ¹



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Even when the flag is displayed vertically, this rule must be followed, although to the casual observer the flag appears to be back to front. The reason for this is that the canton is the position of honour on the flag.

When the Australian National Flag is displayed alone on a speaker's platform, it should be flat against the wall or on a staff on the right of the speaker as he or she faces the audience. ²



2

When displayed on a flag rope (a 'halyard'), the flag should be as close as possible to the top, with the flag rope tight.

If the national flag is vertically suspended in an east-west street, the canton should be towards the north. In a north-south street the canton should be towards the east. ³



3

USE OF FLAGS ON CONFERENCE TABLES

Should it be decided to place the flags of nations on a conference table, a single flag representative of each nation present should be placed in front of the leader of that country's delegation. ⁴



FLYING THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL FLAG ALONE

When the Australian National Flag is flown alone on top of or in front of a building with two flagpoles, it should be flown on the flagpole to the left of a person facing the building. ⁵



When flown alone on top of or in front of a building with more than two flagpoles, the Australian National Flag should be flown in the centre or as near as possible to it. ⁶





FLYING THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL FLAG WITH OTHER NATIONAL FLAGS

When the Australian National Flag is flown with the flags of other nations, all the flags should, if possible, be the same size and flown on flagpoles of the same height. According to international practice, no national flag should fly above another in peacetime.

The Australian National Flag must, however, take the position of honour.

When flying with only one other national flag, the Australian National Flag should fly on the left of a person facing the building. **7**

When flying the Australian National Flag along with several other national flags, the flags should follow the Australian National Flag in alphabetical order.

The Australian Government's policy in relation to the flying of other nations' flags is to fly only the official flags of nations recognised by Australia.

In a line of several national flags, and where there is an odd number of flags and only one Australian National Flag is available, the Australian National Flag should be flown in the centre. **8**

If there is an even number of flags and only one Australian National Flag is available, the Australian National Flag should be flown on the far left of a person facing the building. **9**

If there is an even number of flags and two Australian National Flags are available, one should be flown at each end of the line. The flagpoles must be of uniform height. **10**

When crossed with another national flag, the Australian National Flag should be on the left of a person facing the flags and its staff should cross in front of the staff of the other flag. **11**

In a semi-circle of flags, the Australian National Flag should be in the centre. **12**

In an enclosed circle of flags, the Australian National Flag should be flown on the flagpole immediately opposite the main entrance to the building or arena. **13**







FLYING THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL FLAG WITH STATE AND OTHER FLAGS

When flying the Australian National Flag with state flags and/or other flags (such as local government flags, house flags, club pennants, corporate and company flags) in a line of flagpoles, the order of the flags should follow the rules of precedence. The Australian National Flag should always be flown on the far left of a person facing the building. ¹⁴ With the exception of a flagpole fitted with a gaff (see page 17), a house flag or club pennant should never be flown above a national flag.

For example, if the Australian National Flag was being flown with a state flag and a local government flag, the Australian National Flag would be flown on the far left (the position of honour), the state flag to the right of it and the local government flag to the right of the state flag.

If there are two Australian National Flags, one can be flown at each end of a line of flags. ¹⁵

In a single or double row of flagpoles, arranged at right angles from a structure, such as a building or memorial, the Australian National Flag should be flown on the far left flagpole nearest the kerb. ¹⁶ If two Australian National Flags are available the second flag should be flown on the flagpole on the right nearest the kerb.

In a double row of flagpoles, where there is no formal focal point, such as a building or memorial, the Australian National Flag should be flown on the diagonal corners of the arrangement, with all other flags being arranged according to precedence as for a single row. ¹⁷







FLYING THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL FLAG ON A YARDARM

When the Australian National Flag is being displayed from a flagpole fitted with a yardarm and is flying with another national flag, the Australian National Flag should be flown on the left of the yardarm and the flag of the other nation should be flown on the right of the yardarm, as viewed from the front of the flagpole/gaff combination. ¹⁸



If the Australian National Flag is being displayed from a flagpole fitted with a yardarm and is flying with a state flag and a house flag or pennant, the Australian National Flag should be flown from the top of the flagpole, the State flag on the left of the yardarm, and the house flag or pennant on the right of the yardarm, as viewed from the front of the flagpole/gaff combination. ¹⁹



FLYING THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL FLAG ON A FLAGPOLE WITH A GAFF

If the flagpole is fitted with a gaff, the Australian National Flag should be flown from the peak of the gaff, which is the position of honour, even though the Australian National Flag is then lower than the flag flying from the top of the flagpole. This international tradition originates from the days of sailing ships, when it was necessary to keep the flag free of the ship's rigging. ²⁰

The next position of prominence is the peak of the flagpole, then the left-hand side of the yardarm, then the right-hand side, as viewed from the front of the flagpole/gaff combination.



FLYING THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL FLAG AND RED ENSIGN ON SHIPS

The Australian red ensign is the flag to be flown by Australian-registered merchant ships. Either the Australian National Flag or the Australian red ensign can be flown by government ships, fishing vessels, pleasure craft, small craft and commercial vessels under 24 metres in tonnage length, but not both ensigns at the same time. ²¹



The rules for flying flags on non-defence ships are set out in sections 29 and 30 of the *Shipping Registration Act 1981* and regulation 22 of the Shipping Registration Regulations. Foreign vessels may, as a courtesy, fly from the foremast either the Australian National Flag or the Australian red ensign when berthed in an Australian port.



FLAGS FLOWN AT SOUTH HEAD SIGNAL STATION, NSW
PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN VAUGHAN, VEXILLOGRAPHER

CARRYING THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL FLAG IN A PROCESSION

In a line of flags carried in single file, the Australian National Flag should always lead. Flags are carried so that the right hand of the carrier is above the left hand. 22

In a line of flags carried abreast, it is preferable to have an Australian National Flag carried at each end of the line. 23



22

If, however, only one Australian National Flag is available, the following applies:

- If there is an odd number of flags, the Australian National Flag should be carried in the centre of the line.
- The flag next highest in order of precedence should be flown to the left of the Australian National Flag (as seen by a viewer facing the flag bearers), the next ranking flag to the right of the Australian National Flag and so on. 24



23

- If there is an even number of flags, the Australian National Flag should be carried on the right-hand end of the line facing the direction of movement (that is, the left end of the line as viewed by a person facing the flags). 25

LOWERING THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL FLAG IN A PROCESSION

The Australian National Flag should not be lowered as a form of salute, even when it is appropriate for other flags or ensigns being carried in a procession to be lowered as a form of salute.



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FLYING THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL FLAG AT HALF-MAST

Flags are flown in the half-mast position as a sign of mourning. 26

To bring the flag to the half-mast position, the flag must first be raised to the top of the mast (the 'peak'), then immediately lowered slowly to the half-mast position. (This position is estimated by imagining another flag flying above the half-masted flag – in European mythology, the flag flying above is the flag of death.) The flag must be lowered to a position recognisably half-mast so that it does not simply appear to have slipped down from the top of the flagpole. An acceptable position would be when the top of the flag is a third of the distance down from the top of the flagpole.

When lowering the flag from a half-mast position, it should first be raised briefly to the peak, then lowered ceremoniously.

Under no circumstances should a flag be flown at half-mast at night, whether or not the flag is illuminated.

When flying the Australian National Flag with other flags, all flags in the set should be flown at half-mast. The Australian National Flag should be raised first and lowered last.

There are occasions when direction will be given by the Australian Government for all flags to be flown at half-mast. Some examples of these occasions are:

- On the death of the Sovereign (King or Queen) – the flag should be flown from the time of announcement of the death up to and including the funeral. On the day the accession of the new Sovereign is proclaimed, it is customary to raise the flag to the top of the mast from 11 a.m. until the usual time for closure of business
- On the death of a member of the royal family – by special command of the Sovereign and/or by direction of the Australian Government
- On the death of the Governor-General or a former Governor-General
- On the death of a distinguished Australian citizen, in accordance with protocol
- On the death of the head of state of another country with which Australia has diplomatic relations – the flag would be flown at half-mast on the day of the funeral or as directed
- On days of national commemoration such as Anzac Day and Remembrance Day.

Flags in any locality may be flown at half-mast on the death of a local citizen or on the day, or part of the day, of their funeral.

DRAPING A COFFIN

The Australian National Flag may be used to cover the coffin of any deceased Australian citizen at their funeral. The canton should be draped over the 'left shoulder' of the coffin, representing the heart. The flag should be removed before the coffin is lowered into the grave or, at a crematorium, after the service. The deceased's service headdress, sword or baton, awards or medals if any and family flowers may be placed on the flag covering the coffin. Care should be taken during the interment to maintain the dignity of the flag. 27



FLYING THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL FLAG ON PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

All organisations and individuals are encouraged to fly the Australian National Flag on public holidays.

DISPLAY AT POLLING PLACES

Where possible, the Australian National Flag should be displayed in or near every polling place on days when votes are being cast in a national election or referendum.

FLYING THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL FLAG ON AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS

The Australian Government has directed that the Australian National Flag be flown on its buildings during normal working hours on normal working days. This will vary on days of mourning, when the flag is flown at half-mast, and on days of national commemoration.

If more than one flagpole is available at an Australian Government building, other flags, such as house flags, may be flown from the additional flagpole, with the Australian National Flag in the pre-eminent position.

COMMERCIAL USE OF THE FLAG OR FLAG IMAGE

The Australian National Flag, or representation of the flag, may be used for commercial or advertising purposes without formal permission, subject to the following guidelines:

- The flag should be used in a dignified manner and reproduced completely and accurately
- The flag should not be defaced by overprinting with words or illustration
- The flag should not be covered by other objects in displays
- All symbolic parts of the flag should be identifiable.

It is not necessary to seek formal permission to use the Australian National Flag for commercial purposes. However, the Awards and Culture Branch is available to provide advice on the appropriate use or representation of the Australian National Flag for commercial purposes.

In regard to the importation of items bearing an image of the Australian National Flag, importers consult the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet for approval of the item before applying for an import permit through the Australian Customs Service.

FLAG FOLDING

The following diagrams show how to fold the flag properly:

- A Start like this
- B Fold lengthwise bottomsides to topside once and then once again
- C Bring the ends together
- D Now concertina by folding backwards and forwards towards the hoist edge
- E Keep the flag bundled by winding the halyard around and under itself.





C

D

E

SPECIAL DAYS FOR FLYING FLAGS

The follow list shows days of commemoration on which the flying of the Australian National Flag and, where appropriate, other flags, is particularly encouraged. Unless noted otherwise, these days are celebrated nationally.

1 January – *Anniversary of the establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia*

26 January – *Australia Day*

March, second Monday
– *Commonwealth Day*

21 March – *Harmony Day* – Harmony Day began in 1999 and celebrates Australia's success as a diverse society united as one family by a common set of values.

25 April – *Anzac Day* – Flags are flown at half-mast until noon then at the peak until the usual time for closure of business.

9 May – *Anniversary of the inauguration of Canberra as the seat of government (Australian Capital Territory only)*

27 May to 3 June – *National Reconciliation Week* – In recognition of 27 May as the anniversary of the 1967 Referendum which successfully removed from the Constitution clauses that discriminated against indigenous Australians and 3 June as the anniversary of the High Court decision in the Eddie Mabo land rights case of 1992.

The Australian Aboriginal Flag and the Torres Strait Islander Flag should be flown on additional flagpoles, where available, next to or near the Australian National Flag on Australian Government buildings and establishments.

If there is only one flagpole available, the Australian Aboriginal Flag and the Torres Strait Islander Flag should not replace the Australian National Flag. If there are two flagpoles available, it is at the discretion of the authority concerned to determine which flag should be flown with the Australian National Flag.

June, second Monday – *Celebrated as the Queen's birthday, except in Western Australia, where it is observed in October.*

July, nominated week – *NAIDOC Week* (originally an acronym for National Aboriginal and Islanders' Day Observance Committee, the acronym has since become the name of the week) – NAIDOC Week is held every year to celebrate and promote a greater understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culture.

The Australian Aboriginal Flag and the Torres Strait Islander Flag should be flown on additional flagpoles, where available, next to or near the Australian National Flag on Australian Government buildings and establishments.

If there is only one flagpole available, the Australian Aboriginal Flag and the Torres Strait Islander Flag should not replace the Australian National Flag. If there are two flagpoles available, it is at the discretion of the authority concerned to determine which flag should be flown with the Australian National Flag.

3 September
– *Australian National Flag Day*

17 September – *Citizenship Day*
– Citizenship Day was introduced in 2001 and is an opportunity for all Australians to take pride in our citizenship and reflect on the meaning and importance of being Australian.

24 October – *United Nations Day* – The United Nations Flag, if available, should be flown all day. If only one flagpole is available, the United Nations Flag should be flown, even if that flagpole is ordinarily reserved for the Australian National Flag. If two flagpoles are available, the United Nations Flag should be flown in the pre-eminent position.

11 November – *Remembrance Day*
– Flags are flown at the peak from 8 a.m., at half-mast from 10.30 a.m. to 11.02 a.m., and at the peak again from 11.02 a.m. until the usual time for closure of business.

ORDER OF PRECEDENCE

The Australian National Flag takes precedence in Australia over all other flags when it is flown in company with other flags.

Thereafter when flown in the community the order of precedence of flags is:

- 2: National Flag of other nations
- 3: State and Territory Flags
- 4: Other flags prescribed by the *Flags Act 1953* including:
 - the Australian Aboriginal Flag and the Torres Strait Islander Flag in either order; and
 - the Defence ensigns which should be flown in the following order:
 - the Australian Defence Force Ensign
 - the Australian White Ensign
 - the Royal Australian Air Force Ensign.
- 5: Ensigns and pennants – local government; Commonwealth, state and territory agencies; non-government organisations.

The order of precedence may be varied in the following circumstances:

- On military occasions or establishments, the Australian National Flag may be followed in the order of precedence by the prescribed Defence ensigns and military pennants ahead of other flags, ensigns and pennants.
- On Commonwealth occasions and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island occasions for their peoples, the Australian Aboriginal Flag or the Torres Strait Islander Flag may follow the Australian National Flag ahead of other flags prescribed under the *Flags Act 1953*, state and territory flags and other ensigns and pennants.

The order of the State flags is New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania (the order in which the State badges appear on the Commonwealth Coat of Arms) with flags of the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory following in alphabetical order.

In the absence of a flag or flags higher in the order, a flag shall follow the flag being flown that is higher in the order.

The order of precedence does not require that a flag listed in the order must be flown in company with other flags in the order.