

# Australian flags and significant dates

**Warning** – First Nations teachers and students are advised that this curriculum resource may contain images, voices or names of deceased people.

## Glossary

**anniversary:** a yearly celebration of a significant date or past event.

**colonisation:** the act of one country taking over another.

**colony, colonies:** a name given to a specific area that has been invaded.

**constellation:** a group of stars that make up a pattern, such as, the Southern Cross.

**copyright:** the exclusive right, granted by law, to use and control a literary, musical, dramatic or artistic work.

**dhari:** a distinct ancestral headdress used in dance and ceremony in the Torres Strait (a Meriam Mir word) (Queensland Museum 2010).

**First Nations people:** Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

**half-mast:** a position that's lower than the usual height of a flag on a flagpole; the position where a flag is flown to indicate death or mourning.

**Luritja:** Aboriginal people from an area in the southern Northern Territory.

**ochre:** iron oxide from natural earths used for paint. Ochre is an important material for many First Nations people.

**protocol:** rules defining the proper placement and use of flags.

**reconciliation:** the restoration or repair of a relationship; becoming friendly again.

**seafaring:** travelling and following the sea.

## Flag protocol

There are different rules for how a flag is used and these rules are called protocol. You have most likely seen different flags flown, including flags flown at **half-mast**, and it's important to understand how different flags in Australia are used and what the rules are around flying them.

### Australian national flag protocol

The Australian national flag should be flown on all government buildings during opening hours. It's flown at half-mast as a sign of respect when an important Australian citizen, governor, royal member or foreign leader has died. It should never be flown upside down or with two flags flown on one flagpole.

The national flag is flown on all government buildings on:

- 1 January – Commonwealth of Australia anniversary
- 26 January – Australia Day
- 25 April – Anzac Day (half-mast until noon)
- 3 September – Australian National Flag Day
- 17 September – Australian Citizenship Day
- 11 November – Remembrance Day (half-mast between 10.30 and 11.02 am)

### Aboriginal flag and Torres Strait Islander flag protocol

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags are flown alongside the Australian national flag on public buildings on these days:

- 26 May – National Sorry Day
- 27 May – 3 June – National Reconciliation Week
- 3 June – Mabo Day
- July – NAIDOC Week.

### General flag protocol

- Raise a flag quickly, but lower it slowly and respectfully.
  - Only raise and lower the flag between dawn and dusk.
  - The Australian national flag should always be raised first and lowered last.
  - Fly only one flag on each flagpole.
  - Flag should be flown as high as possible on the flagpole (unless at half-mast during a time of mourning).
  - Flags should be the same size as each other and in good condition.
  - Never fly flags upside-down.
  - Don't allow the flag to touch the ground.
- (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2020b)

## Symbolism of flags

### Australian national flag



- Blue is based on the British blue banner.
- Union Jack is a historical symbol of British colonisation.
- Southern Cross is a **constellation** only seen in the southern hemisphere.
- Commonwealth Star (also known as the **Federation Star**) is a seven-pointed star; the points represent the six states and the seventh point represents the territories. (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2020a).

## Aboriginal flag



- Black represents First Nations Peoples of Australia.
- Red represents **ochre**, red earth and the spiritual connection to the Country.
- Yellow represents the sun, which gives and protects life.

## Torres Strait Islander flag



- Green represents land.
- Blue represents sea.
- Black represents First Nations people.
- White represents peace.
- Five-pointed star represents the five major islands of the Torres Strait and is a **seafaring** symbol used for navigation.
- **Dhari** (a headdress) represents Torres Strait Islander people (Torres Strait Island Regional Council 2016).

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## Significant dates commemorated in Australia

There are many significant dates in the calendar for First Nations people; below are some of them.

26 January	Survival Day/Australia Day
13 February	National Apology anniversary
19 March	National Close the Gap Day
26 May	National Sorry Day
27 May	The 1967 Referendum anniversary
27 May – 3 June	National Reconciliation Week
3 June	Mabo Day
1 July	Coming of the Light festival (Torres Strait)
July (from the first Sunday)	NAIDOC Week
4 August	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day
9 August	International Day of the World's Indigenous People
2 September	Indigenous Literacy Day
13 September	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People anniversary
10 December	Human Rights Day

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## References

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2020a, *Australian national flag*, Australian Government, viewed 11 September 2020, <https://pmc.gov.au/government/australian-national-flag>

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2020b, *Australian national flag protocols*, Australian Government, viewed 11 September 2020, <https://www.pmc.gov.au/government/australian-nationalflag/australian-national-flag-protocols>

Torres Strait Island Regional Council 2016, *Torres Strait Islander flag*, Torres Strait Island Regional Council, viewed 13 November 2020, <http://www.tsirc.qld.gov.au/our-work/torres-strait-islander-flag>

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