

THE AUSTRALIAN FLAG

From 1770 when Captain James Cook raised the British flag on Australian soil, until Federation in 1901, the Australian colonies used the Union Jack at official functions.

In 1900, with Federation looming, enthusiasm for a National flag grew, and competitions were held across the nation to find a design for a National flag. Entries poured in from Australia and around the world, and the winning design (which differs only slightly from our present flag) was independently submitted by five entrants.

The Australian National flag was not formally adopted until 1953, when the Menzies government passed The Flags act — an Act of Parliament which formally laid out the appearance and status of the flag.

Since then the Australian National Flag has been flown for all official purposes. The flag consists of a blue background with the Union Jack in the upper right quarter. Below is a large, seven-pointed white star (symbolising the six States of Australia and the Territories of the Commonwealth), and four smaller white stars with seven points and one with five to represent the Southern Cross, a constellation seen only from the southern hemisphere.

However, the question of whether the National flag should be modified or

replaced arises with regularity. In particular, a movement which encourages the inclusion of the Aboriginal flag has received significant publicity and varied support in recent years.

The Aboriginal flag, which consists of a yellow sun in the centre of two horizontal strips of black and red, has become well recognised throughout the country. Together with the National flag it was carried by Australian runner Cathy Freeman during her victory lap at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics — an event which highlighted once again the question of whether the National flag should be modified or replaced.