**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 second was introduced on 19 September 1912 and is still used today.

The Commonwealth Coat of Arms contains a shield with the symbols of the six Australian states. These symbols are enclosed in a border to represent federation in 1901, when the states united to form a nation. The shield is held by two native Australian animals, a kangaroo to the left and an emu to the right. The gold Commonwealth Star above the shield has seven points. One point represents each of the six states and the territories of Australia. The seventh point was added in 1908 and has been the only change to the flag.

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 the country’s most recognisable symbol. It was first flown on 3 September 1901 at the Royal Exhibition Building in Melbourne. However, it was not proclaimed as the official national flag until 1953.

The flag includes a Union Jack, a white Commonwealth 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 Commonwealth Star has seven points which represent the six 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. These flags were proclaimed on 14 July 1995.

The Australian Aboriginal flag was first flown on 12 July 1971 at Victoria Square in Adelaide. The flag is made up of three colours — black, red and gold. Black symbolises 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 was adopted in May 1992. It 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 five 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 one of these three 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 Whitlam government changed the national anthem to *Advance Australia Fair*.

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

A further seven 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.

The first day of September each year is National Wattle Day. It is around this time of year that the golden wattle starts to bloom.

National colours

Australia’s national colours are green and gold.

Green and gold are 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.

Champion BMX rider Caroline Buchanan, riding in Australia’s national colours at the London 2012 Olympic Games

LINKS

Other websites

*It’s an Honour*


*Australian National Botanic Gardens: Floral Emblems of Australia*