

A New Flag for Western Australia



*A Proposal to the
Parliament of Western Australia
by Ausflag*

January 2022



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1. Arguments for Change

We believe the arguments for a new state flag are compelling:

The current state flag is relatively dull and barely indistinguishable from other state flags

Not enough people recognise it and fly it

WA could become the first Australian state to adopt a flag without the Union Jack

All current State flags are similar in appearance and difficult to distinguish from one other (especially when hanging limply on a flagpole). They are dull and uninspiring – the people of Western Australia deserve better.

In contrast, the Northern Territory has a long tradition of very effectively using its flag. It has engendered strong pride in the Territory for Territorians. It is widely flown by businesses and residents alike.

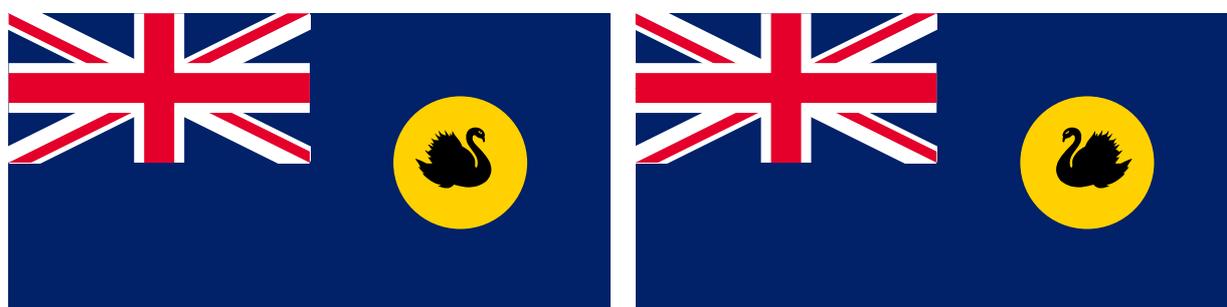
Western Australia could become the first Australian State to adopt a flag without the Union Jack – an honour no other State would ever be able to take away.

Canada changed its flag in 1965 and it is now universally accepted as one of the world's most recognisable and loved flags. A multi-party parliamentary committee had a long debate about replacing the Union Jack that led to the decision to change the flag and recommended adoption of the specific design which has proved so successful.

2. History of the current WA flag

The current State flag – the State’s second – was formally adopted on 3 November 1953. It is a British Blue Ensign defaced with the State badge. The badge depicts WA’s emblem of the black swan on a yellow disc.

The black swan has been associated with WA since early settlement. The Dutch explorer Captain Willem de Vlamingh named the Swan River in 1697 due to the number of swans he saw there. And in the years after the foundation of the settlement in 1829, the areas of Perth and Fremantle were generally referred to as the Swan River Colony.



1875–1953

1953–present

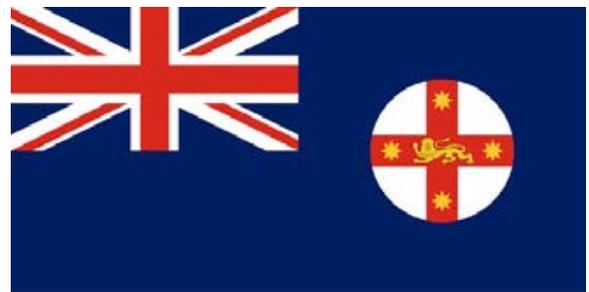
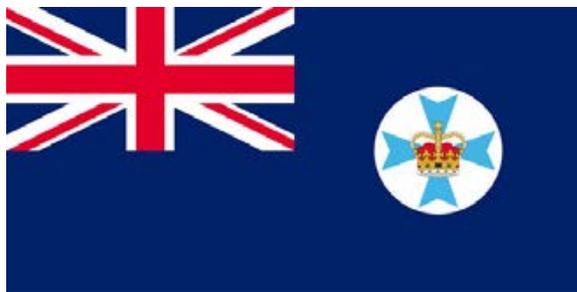
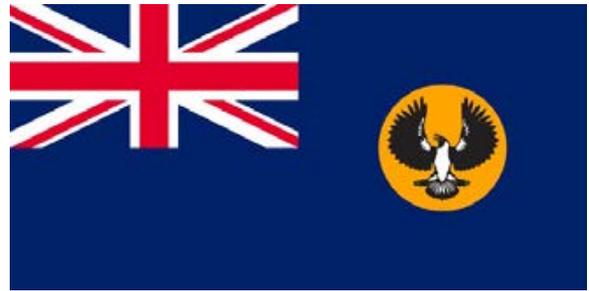
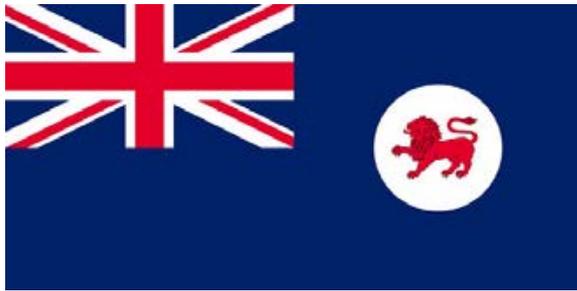
The State flag is unarguably a colonial flag. Its design was prescribed by a British Act of Parliament - the British Colonial Naval Defence Act (*Imp*) of 1865 – which required that any colonial government vessel should “*wear the Blue Ensign with the seal or badge of the colony in the fly thereof.*”

On 17 August 1869, an Order in Council was issued to the Governors of the Colonies to put this Imperial Act into effect. In 1870 Frederick A. Weld, Governor of WA, submitted to the British Colonial Office a sketch of a black swan on a yellow background as the badge.

This flag was only ever intended to serve the interests of the British Admiralty and to represent the colonial Government. It was never intended to be flown by the public.

In 1936 the College of Arms in London noted that in approving the Commonwealth Coat of Arms in 1912, they had agreed to the swan facing the “wrong” direction – the same direction as it appeared in WA’s first flag. Animals should face towards the hoist of the flag, as the other direction is seen as a ‘retreat’ position. Nothing was done to address this until, in the lead-up to the Royal visit in 1954, the Parliament of Western Australia corrected the direction of the swan on 3 November 1953.

The current state flags – but which is which?



3. The Failure of the Current Design

While the black swan is widely recognised and much loved in Western Australia, the state flag is not nearly as successful in symbolising Western Australia's pioneering spirit and tradition of independent thought and expression.

Western Australia has a proud history as a fiercely independent State. It was the only colony not to be carved out of New South Wales, and the only state to have voted on secession from the Commonwealth.

While few would seriously argue for secession today, the unique spirit that defines Western Australia lives on.

A state flag which currently portrays Western Australia as a British Colony is diametrically opposed to this spirit and to how Western Australians see themselves.

The Western Australian flag was only ever intended to serve the interests of the British Admiralty and not the Western Australian public. It was designed by a Colonial Government for limited Government use and there has never been any affirmation of the design by the WA public. The change in direction of the swan in 1953 was in response to a call for accuracy in making the flag, but no one asked if the flag should change more fundamentally. The flag was formally described in the Schedule of the State Flags Act 2006, which had no element of public consultation.

Western Australia can do much better and there is a solution: Western Australia can be the first Australian state to adopt a flag without the Union Flag (Union Jack).

Imagine the power of a new flag for Western Australia - one that emotionally connects with the people, and one that they proudly fly. One that is attractive and distinctive enough to wave at sporting events. One that defiantly shows that Western Australia is a leader.

We believe we have such a design.

4. The Proposed Design

The greatest challenge in advocating a new flag is finding an alternative design that is preferable to an incumbent. Dr Brendan Jones, a long-serving director of Ausflag, designed a stunning new flag for Western Australia in 1999 (*see page 6*) which includes the official state colours (black and yellow), the much-loved black swan (*Cygnus Atratus*), and the Southern Cross (*Crux Australis*).

The black panel symbolises Western Australia's indigenous heritage and night sky, while the Southern Cross represents that first and foremost we are Australians and provides a link to the national flag. The larger yellow field is symbolic of Western Australia's sun, mineral wealth and its enormous areas of desert, while the black swan is the iconic symbol of WA.

Black and yellow have also been adopted as the colours of many representative sporting teams from Western Australia.

Another benefit in adopting this design would be that the presence of the Union Jack on the current WA flag is a barrier to reconciliation with our first peoples.

In a speech at the Museum of Sydney on 25 January 1998, former chairperson of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and former Australian of the Year, Lowitja O'Donoghue said (in respect of the national flag) that the presence of the Union Jack "*symbolises a narrow slice of our history including a significant period when the rights of Australia's indigenous peoples were overlooked*" and that it "*symbolises dispossession and oppression*".

This proposed design also complements the flags of the Northern Territory flag (adopted 1 July 1978) and the Australian Capital Territory (adopted 25 March 1993) (*see page 7*).

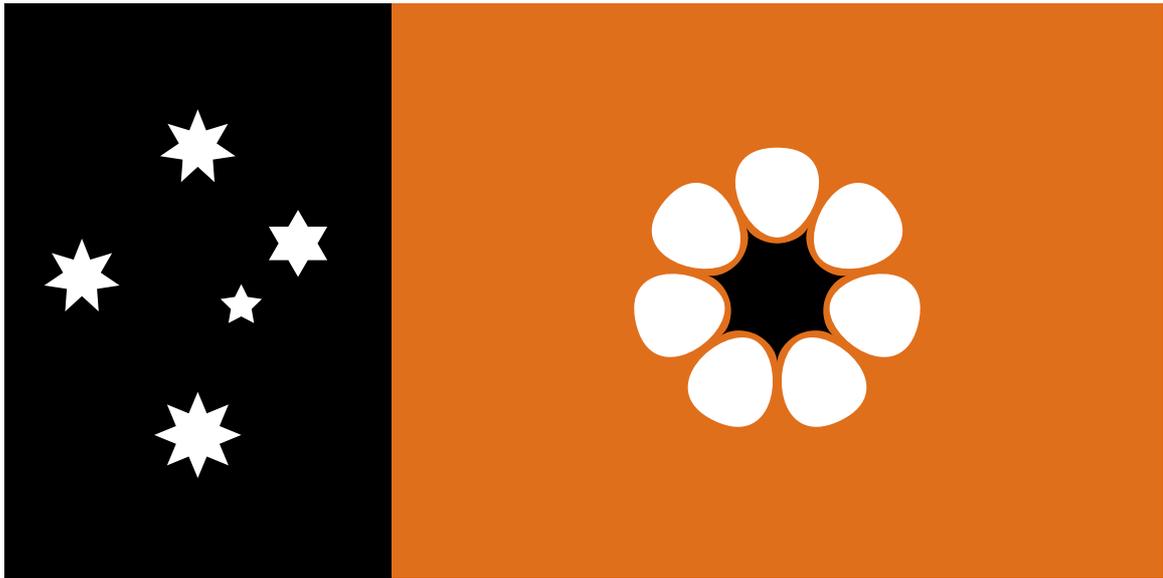
By dropping the Union Jack, WA can finally have a state flag to represent all Western Australians and a flag that is emotionally embraced. And the achievement of being the first Australian state to do so would be a true legacy.

Western Australia



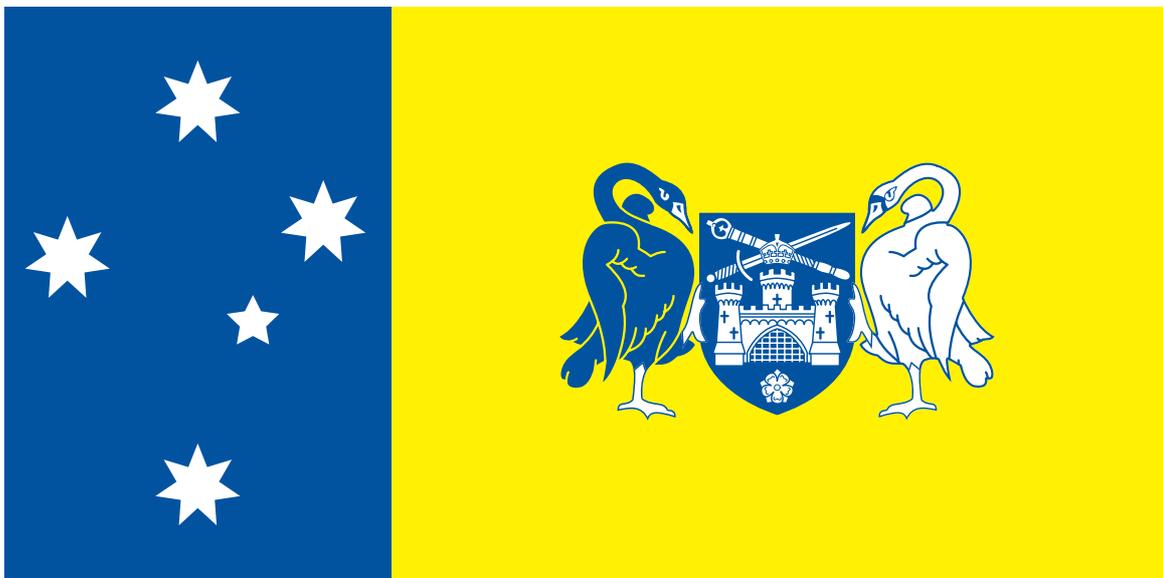
Black | White | Yellow: PMS 107C

Northern Territory



Adopted 1 July 1978

Australian Capital Territory



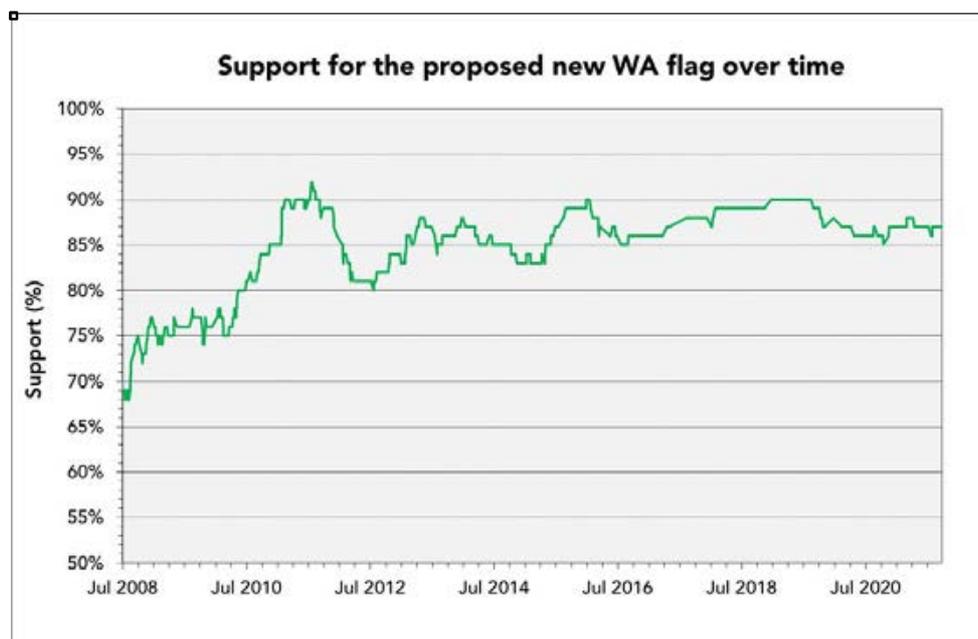
Adopted 25 March 1993

5. Public support for the Proposed Design

Since 2001, on Dr. Jones' personal website¹, members of the public have been able to vote on his proposed alternative state flag designs. While the limitations of self-selected internet polls need to be understood and taken into account, it still provides some insight into the public's views on the design and how that has evolved over time.

On this site, Western Australian residents are simply asked “*If a referendum was held between the current state flag and this new design, would you vote for this new design?*”

The results are compelling – over the past 10 years, support for this proposed WA flag has slowly increased from just under 70 percent support to consistently over 85 percent.



The percentage support shown is the moving average of the previous 200 votes cast

This is a rare example of where public support has been demonstrated for a new flag design in preference to an existing flag. It usually takes considerable time for the public to prefer a new flag, logo or name to an existing one.

For example, the new Canadian flag did not achieve majority public approval until *after* it was adopted and flying on flagpoles.

¹ <http://bc.id.au/flags/wa.html>

6. The Centenary of Parliament House flag

In 2004, a flag whose design was extremely similar to Dr. Jones' flag was flown in the forecourt of Western Australia's Parliament House in recognition of its centenary, which also coincided with the 175th Anniversary of the founding of Western Australia.



This flag is thought to have been approved by the WA Parliament in late 2003 with responsibility assigned to the President of the Legislative Council, Hon. John Cowdell MLC. There does not seem to have been any specific legislative approval of the flag, rather the centenary celebrations were subject to the oversight of the Speaker, President of the Legislative Council and the Parliamentary Services Committee. Hence it appears that this flag was approved by the parliamentary officers for use in connection with the centenary.

The flag was first raised on the forecourt of Western Australia's Parliament on 19 January 2004, and used only during 2004. It is not known when it was last lowered.

The only difference between this flag and Dr. Jones' design was that the stars were yellow on black instead of white on black, the black panel at the hoist appeared to be wider, and the swan was of the same design as on the current WA flag rather than the slightly more stylised design of Dr. Jones. It is not known whether Dr. Jones' flag, which predates this one, was used as 'inspiration' for this design.

This may have been a 'toe in the water' by the WA Parliament at the time to test public reaction to the prospect of a new WA flag. We believe it is time to take more robust steps in that direction.

7. Effecting Change

The flag of Western Australia is covered by the *State Flag Act 2006* of the Western Australia Parliament. The current flag is depicted in Part 2 of the Schedule to this Act.

The *State Flag Act 2006* was originally a private member's bill introduced into the Legislative Assembly by the then Leader of the Opposition, Mr Colin Barnett and passed with the bipartisan support of the then Labor Government. A new Western Australian flag could be adopted by simple amendments to the *State Flag Act 2006*, and the initiative for such a change could come from the Government, or from parliamentarians by another private member's bill.

As State flags do not arouse the same degree of passion as the national flag (no-one has “fought and died” for a State flag), the public may not object to the parliament making this decision. If, however, a popular mandate to make this change was thought necessary, a State plebiscite could be held to support any parliamentary change, giving Western Australian residents for the first time anywhere in Australia's history the right to vote for a flag to represent them. A plebiscite would also encourage future widespread use of the new design.

Proponents of a change would make it explicit that adoption of a new State flag is not making any statement in respect of the Australian National Flag. The many supporters of the national flag would be assured that the State Government and the public would continue to use both the national and State flags wherever it is appropriate to do so, as well as confirming continued use of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island flags as additional flags.

Note that the Governor's flag, which from 1988, is the current WA State flag with the addition of a crown above the State badge could remain unchanged – representing a continuation of the traditions of the Queen's representative in WA.

Opportunities to make lasting, symbolic and popular change are extremely rare. When a flag design has been found which apparently commands support levels above 80 percent in preference against the incumbent, change should be irresistible. A new flag for Western Australia is truly one of those once-in-a-lifetime opportunities.

Ausflag considers that a change of State flag can be considered on a non-partisan basis and Ausflag commends this proposal to all members of Parliament.

Identity Crisis!

Mass Myopia



Would leaders ever appear like this when broadcasting to the world?



So why do we continue to advertise to the world that we're a British branch office. (Little Britain)





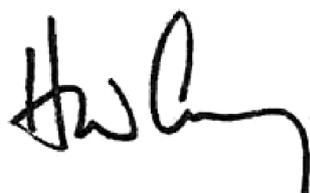
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