

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flags

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The Aboriginal Flag

History

The Aboriginal flag was designed by Harold Thomas, a Luritja man from Central Australia. It was created as a symbol of unity and national identity for Aboriginal people during the land rights movement of the early 1970s. Gary Foley took the flag to the East Coast where it was promoted and eventually recognised as the official flag of the Australian Aboriginal people.

- The flag was first flown at Victoria Square in Adelaide on National Aborigines Day, 12 July 1971.
- The flag was chosen as the official flag for the Aboriginal Tent Embassy and was first flown there in 1972.
- In 1995, the Australian Government proclaimed the flag as an official 'Flag of Australia' under section 5 of the *Flags Act 1953*.
- In 1997, Harold Thomas was recognised as the author of the artistic work under the *Copyright Act 1968*.

Symbolic Meaning

The symbolic meaning of the flag colours (as stated by Mr Harold Thomas) are:

- **Black:** Represents the Aboriginal people of Australia.
- **Red:** Represents the red earth, the red ochre and a spiritual relation to the land.
- **Yellow:** Represents the Sun, the giver of life and protector.

Harold Thomas

Harold Thomas was born in Alice Springs; his mother a Luritja woman and his father a Wombai man. He was sent to St Francis' Anglican boys home in Adelaide and in 1965 won a scholarship to the South Australian School of Art, becoming the first Aboriginal to graduate from an Australian Art School. He also has an Honorary Degree in Social Anthropology from Adelaide University. In 1970 he started working as a survey artist at the South Australian Museum, where he designed the flag. Since then, Harold has continued to work as an artist, with his works on display in several Australian galleries.

Copyright

In 1997, the Federal Court of Australia officially recognised Harold Thomas as the author of the flag. This protects the flag under the *Copyright Act 1968* and so it may

be only reproduced in accordance with this legislation or with the permission of Mr Thomas.

For guidance about using the Aboriginal flag, its colours, or the Torres Strait Islander Flag refer to the Commonwealth Flag Officer (phone 02 6271 5629 or 02 6271 5111) at the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

The copyright license for the manufacture and marketing of the Aboriginal flag has been awarded by Mr Thomas to Carroll and Richardson Flags. Flags that do not have a white header at the left side, or flags that do not show the Carroll and Richardson label could be infringing the copyright owned by Mr Harold Thomas. Purchases of flags and merchandise can be made directly from Carroll and Richardson:

Carroll and Richardson Flags
188 Whitehorse Road
Balwyn VIC 3103

Ph: 03 9817 1377
Fax: 03 9817 1146

Government Info Shops in any capital city can also be contacted. For addresses for each of these State Offices see the website www.flags2000.com.au (under Australian stockists).

Useful Resources

AusFlag Website - Aboriginal Flag - www.ausflag.com.au/flags/ab.html

The Torres Strait Islander Flag



History

The Torres Strait Islander Flag was created as a symbol of unity and identity for Torres Strait Islander peoples, designed by the late Bernard Namok, then a 15 year old school student from Thursday Island. It was the winning entry from a design competition held as part of a Cultural Revival Workshop, organised by The Islands Co-ordinating Council in January 1992. It was recognised by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission in June 1992 and given equal prominence with the Aboriginal flag.

In July 1995, it was recognised by the Australian Government as an official 'Flag of Australia' under the *Flags Act 1953*.

Symbolic Meaning

Each part of the flag is designed to represent something about Torres Strait Island culture.

- **Green:** Represents the land.
- **Blue:** Represents the sea.
- **White:** Represents peace.
- **Black:** Represents the Indigenous peoples.

The *dhari* (headdress) represents Torres Strait Island people and the five pointed star represents the 5 major Island groups. The star also represents navigation, as a symbol of the seafaring culture of the Torres Strait.

The Island Co-ordinating Council also chose the design as its simplicity would allow each Torres Strait community to incorporate their own emblem into the design for local identification.

Copyright

For guidance on the use and reproduction of the Torres Strait Islander Flag, contact the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission - National Media and Marketing Office or the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

To purchase the Torres Strait Islander Flag, contact a Government Info shop in any Capital city. For addresses for each of these State Offices see the website www.flags2000.com.au (under Australian stockists).

Useful Resources

AusFlag Website - Torres Strait Islander Flag - www.ausflag.com.au/flags/torres.html

References

- Ausflag. 1995, *Aboriginal flag*, available at <http://www.ausflag.com.au/flags/ab.html>
- Ausflag. 1995, *Torres Strait Islander flag*, available at <http://www.ausflag.com.au/flags/torres.html>
- AusInfo. 2000, *Guidelines for Commonwealth information published in electronic formats*, Version 1.1, Department of Finance and Administration, Canberra.
- Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. 1992, 'Torres Strait gets a flag and a major land rights victory', *ATSIC News*, vol.2, no. 4, p.5.

Horton, David (Editor). 1994, *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra.