

Address by John Howard

Transcript of the Prime Minister
The Hon John Howard MP
National Flag Day Address
Melbourne
3 September 2001

Thank you very much to the Governor of Victoria John Landy, the Premier Mr Steve Bracks, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Simon Crean, the newly elected Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Sir Gustav Nossal and my parliamentary colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

It's great to be back in the forecourt of the Exhibition Building here in Melbourne. And it's particularly pleasing that I return on the 100th anniversary of the first raising on the 3rd of September in the year 1901 of the flag chosen as a result of a wide competition to represent the newly created Commonwealth of Australia. There were some 32,823 entries received in that competition from all over the world. I understand that one of the entries came from an unnamed State governor and there were five people who shared the winning of that competition, and they were Annie Dorrington who was a well known artist from Perth; Ivor Evans a 14 year old Melbourne school boy who's father owned a flag making business; Lesley Hawkins an 18 year old from Leichhardt in Sydney who was apprenticed to a Sydney optician at the time; Eggbert Nutall an architect with the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works; and William Stevens, a first officer with the Union Steamship Company of New Zealand.

And as all of us who have presented probably hundreds if not thousands of flags at various schools ceremonies, the original flag we will know, we will know that the original flag chosen in 1901 featured a six-pointed Commonwealth star representing the Australian states, and a seventh point was added in 1908 to represent the territories, the first of which was Papua. It is true that it took a long time before there was unambiguous acceptance of the flag chosen as one central undeniable national emblem of Australia.

But it is equally true that from the very early times, after the choosing of the flag in 1901, it began to be very widely recognised particularly by the Australian military forces. This flag is flown on the ships of the Royal Australian Navy since its inception in 1911. In 1914 the flag was flown over HMAS Australia in its famous engagement which sank the German raider the Emden near Cocos Island. It was carried by our soldiers at Gallipoli. It was used in the famous Cooee march from Gilgandra in country New South Wales in 1915. It was often flown on the Western Front during WW1. And there is of course in WWII, the famous Changi Flag, the proud possession of Captain Strawbridge who kept it hidden inside a calico bag in his pillow during his time in the Changi prison camp, risking execution if it were found. This flag became a symbol of hope for many men in the camp and was proudly flown when the camp was liberated.

And in 1945 the Australian flag was raised in Singapore following the Japanese surrender. Australian prisoners had made an Australian flag in secret and this was the first flag to fly over a liberated Singapore after the Japanese defeat. And that particular flag is now held at the Australian War Memorial.

So it has a long history of passionate identification with a separate Australian identity. My personal commitment to the flag as an appropriate symbol of the Australian nation is based both on history and tradition, but also recognition of an historical truth. It represents the special characteristics of the Australian identity with the Southern Cross and it acknowledges our history with the Union Jack in the corner of the flag which in turn itself is a combination of the symbols of England, Scotland and Ireland and Wales. It is appropriate that we express our respect for the Australian national flag as a symbol of the achievements of the Australian nation and on an occasion such as this it is appropriate to reflect on what has been achieved over the last 100 years. And I would have thought that everybody who participated either as an athlete or as a spectator, either in person or on television, would have been greatly moved and warmed by the passionate commitment of Australian audiences both to Advance Australia Fair and the Australian National Flag at the Olympic Games in Sydney last year. And having just had the great privilege last Saturday night, and I say this not with any trepidation before a Victorian audience, but having had the great privilege last Saturday night to see the magnificent victory of the Australian Wallabies over the All Blacks in the Bledisloe Cup, the obvious warmth, the obvious warmth that Australian crowds have toward the Australian flag and the Australian national anthem make it very plain to me that they will indefinitely remain great unifying national symbols of all of the Australian people.

So I am really delighted to be here today. I congratulate the Australian National Flag Association on its support for the Australian flag and its commitment to the continuity of the history of this country. Its traditions, its past, its present as well as its future and long may that beautiful flag fly over the Commonwealth of Australia. Transcript of the Governor-General
Peter Hollingworth
"Festival of the First Flag"
Townsville

8 August 2001

Thank you to Mayor Tony Mooney and Mrs Mooney, members of the Federal and State Parliaments, Representatives of Local Government, Leaders of church community

Thank you for your warm welcome to my wife and me. One hundred years ago next month, the people of Townsville welcomed Australia's first Governor-General, Lord Hopetoun to the city and bestowed on him a great honor.

Today, in my first weeks of service as the nation's 23rd Governor-General and my first visit to North Queensland, I've been invited by the Townsville City Council to take part in a similar ceremony. Similar in form. Similar in terms of the official people involved. But in 2001, as we mark 100 years of nationhood, the unfurling of the Australian flag carries so many more proud layers of meaning to the people of Townsville and to people across Australia.

When Lord Hopetoun visited the city at short notice in September of 1901, the idea of inviting him to unfurl the new nation's recently designed flag was a great achievement in public relations masterstroke. The Commonwealth Flag had been raised only once before on September 3, just a few weeks earlier in Melbourne, by Australia's first Prime Minister, Edmund Barton. Because the ailing Governor-General had chosen to spend the cooler months up north at his brother-in-law's property in Cairns, it was his wife, Lady Hopetoun, who had taken part in the Melbourne ceremony. The Governor-General's first chance came in Townsville when a local sail and flag-maker William McKenzie decided off his own bat, it would seem to make a replica of the newly designed flag for Lord Hopetoun to unfurl. And when he did, the significance was not lost on the crowd that had gathered to meet him at the Town Hall, or on the recently installed Governor-General himself who declared:

It has afforded me very great pleasure indeed to unfurl this grand new flag, and I feel highly honored that the first time I have been present at its unfurling should have been in Townsville, the Queen City of the North.

One hundred years later, the Australian flag stands, as it did then, as a symbol of unity. But after 100 years of nationhood, it has come to symbolize much more in terms of our national character and our achievement in many fields. For many Australians, and for residents of Townsville in particular, the flag is strongly associated with our military history. And with the brave men and women from Australia's armed services who, in war and in peace, have done credit to our country and helped shape our identity as an independent nation.

This week these two proud stories of Townsville - the story of the Governor-General and the flag, and the much longer story of the city's military history come together in Federation North - Townsville's centerpiece event for the Centenary of Federation. Over the next four days the city will host visitors from all over Australia. A variety of activities, ceremonial and celebratory, will reflect on history, inform and entertain. While many centenary events over the last six months have focused on our political history, Federation North is more about people and the role they've played in shaping Australia over one hundred years. The point has not been lost on me that it was the vote of the people of North Queensland in the crucial referendum, in voting yes for federation that Queensland agreed to join the Commonwealth. So this is an occasion for governments, the armed forces and the people to celebrate our shared achievement, and reflect on how, together, we continue to build on a strong foundation to create a just and caring society.

So it now gives me great pleasure to officially launch Federation North. And to say, in the words of my predecessor, that I, too, feel highly honoured to have been present for this historic unfurling of the Australian flag in Townsville, the Queen City of the North.