

The Australian Flag

Design of the flag

The Australian flag is composed of three parts:

The Union Jack (British flag) in the top left corner,
The 'Star of Federation' in the bottom left corner, and
The Southern Cross, taking up the right half of the flag.

The Union Jack shows that the first colonization by Europeans was by Britain. In case you didn't know, Australia started as a penal colony. The Star of Federation is a seven pointed star. They came to the number seven, by giving each state (six in all) a point on the star, and having one more point for Australia's territories (of which there are several). There are two mainland territories, and several overseas, including two in Antarctica. The Southern Cross is a constellation that can be seen from all of Australia's states and territories.

All the stars have an inner diameter (circle on which the inner corners rest) of $\frac{4}{9}$ the outer diameter (circle of outer corners), even the 5-point star. The positions of the stars are as follows:

- **Commonwealth Star - centered in lower hoist,**
- **Alpha - straight below center fly $\frac{1}{6}$ up from bottom edge,**
- **Beta - $\frac{1}{4}$ of the way left and $\frac{1}{16}$ up from the center fly,**
- **Gamma - straight above center fly $\frac{1}{6}$ down from top edge,**
- **Delta - $\frac{2}{9}$ of the way right and $\frac{31}{240}$ up from the center fly,**
- **Epsilon - $\frac{1}{10}$ of the way right and $\frac{1}{24}$ down from the center fly.**

The positions of alpha-epsilon are given with respect to the center of the square fly, and distances in terms of hoist width of the flag. See this page at the Ausflag site for more details.

History of the flag

A competition was held to find the flag that would be adopted by the new nation of Australia late last century (Australia became a nation on 1 January 1901). The competition, initially started by the Melbourne newspaper, The Review of Reviews, attracted the new Federal Government who joined the competition and doubled the prize money to 150 pounds. Thousands (32,823) of submissions were received.

The first condition of the entry rules stipulated that the design "should be based on the British Ensigns, as the flag of the country added to its folds, signaling to the beholder that it is an Imperial Union Ensign of the British Empire." This essentially meant that inclusion of the Union Flag in the design was mandatory. The judges (five of them Naval officers) refused to consider designs that did not contain the Union Flag.

Something very interesting occurred: six of the flags received (no two from areas close to one another) were virtually identical. Not only had the same design been received six times independently from different parts of the country, but it looked good too. The flags differed only in small details (the number of points on the various stars, the size of the Union Jack, etc). The committee looking at the flags eventually decided on a flag that was not exactly the same as any one of the six, but similar to all of them. Australia's first Prime Minister, Edmund Barton, announced the

winning design in Melbourne on 3 September 1901. The design had a mixed reception and caused some controversy at the time, usually on aesthetic grounds rather than its Anglophile nature. The prize money was shared between the six contestants. The flag was not actually adopted officially until 1952.

In the original design the Federation Star contained only 6 points and the Southern Cross was represented by stars ranging from 5 to 9 points to indicate their relative apparent brightness in the night sky.

The adoption of the winning flag design was never debated in the Australian Parliament - it was sent to the Imperial Authorities in England to be approved. It wasn't until late 1902 that King Edward VII formally notified the Australian Government of the approval, and this approval was finally Gazetted on 20 February 1903.

It was about 1952 that the government decided to encourage private use of the blue flag. Until that time, the blue flag was only allowed to be used by the government, and people were allowed to use the red one (required at sea, permitted but not encouraged on land).

The 'Flags Act 1953' (Act No. 1 of 1954) was passed by the Commonwealth Parliament in November 1953 proclaiming definitively the Australian Blue Ensign as the national flag and the Australian Red Ensign as the proper colors for merchant ships registered in Australia.

Other Australian Ensigns

The Australian Army is represented by and protector of the Australian National Flag. In addition to the Commonwealth Ensign, there are three other official Australian ensigns:

The Australian Red Ensign

Merchant Navy, designed like the Australian flag, but with a red field with white stars. Proclaimed in the Flags Act 1953. Covers Australian registered ships under section 30 of the Shipping Registration Act 1981.

The Australian White Ensign

Royal Australian Navy, designed like the Australian flag but with a white field and dark blue stars. Gazetted in 1967.

The Sky-blue Ensign

Royal Australian Air Force, designed like the Australian flag but with a pale blue field, the southern cross rotated clockwise c. 20 degrees and the blue roundel with white inner and red kangaroo of the Royal Australian Air Force in the lower fly. Gazetted in 1982.

Flying the Australian National Flag

Flying the Australian Flag is a way of exhibiting pride in our nation and respect for our heritage. The Australian Flag was born with the creation of Federation at the dawn of the 20th Century. An international contest resulted in 32,822 entries - seven judges representing Army, Navy, Mercantile Marine, Pilot Services and Parliament unanimously choosing five identical winning designs. Thus was produced 'the flag of stars'.

The Exhibition Building, Melbourne, was used to display the numerous flag entries, the exhibition being opened on 3 September 1901, by Lady Hopetoun, the wife of Australia's first Governor-General, together with Edmund Barton, Australia's first Prime Minister. On the building's dome, a huge flag of the winning design flew gloriously in a strong south-westerly breeze.

The Union Jack reflected the new Federation's historical background, the Southern Cross its place in space, and the large star the six States making up the Federation. Here was a flag containing history, heraldry, distinctiveness and beauty. (In 1908 the Government decided that a seven-pointed star, symbolic of the six States and the Territories, should replace the large six-pointed star shown in the original design of the Flag - to represent the Territories and to conform with the Star in the Crest of the Coat of Arms granted that year.)

For many years the Commonwealth Blue Ensign was regarded as an official flag, and its use on land was restricted to government establishments.

In February 1947, the Prime Minister, Mr. J.B.Chifley, issued a press statement encouraging the application of a directive given in 1941 by the then Prime Minister, Mr. Menzies, that there should be no restriction on the flying of the Commonwealth Blue Ensign. Its greater use on public buildings, by schools and private citizens was encouraged provided it was flown in a manner appropriate to the use of a national emblem.

In 1951 King George VI approved a recommendation by the Government that the Commonwealth Blue Ensign be adopted as the Australian Flag.

Official Dates On Which The Flag Should Be Flown

- **January 1 - Anniversary of the establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia**
- **January 26 - Australia Day (and on the public holiday observed by each individual state and territory)**
- **February 6- Anniversary of the accession of the Sovereign**
- **April 21 - Anniversary of the birthday of the Sovereign**
- **April 25 - ANZAC Day (flown at half-mast until midday, then masthead until sunset)**
- **May 9 - Anniversary of the inauguration of Canberra as the Seat of Government of the Commonwealth (Canberra only)**
- **June 2 - Anniversary of the Coronation of the Sovereign**
- **June 10 - Birthday of the Consort of the Sovereign**

June...

Official Birthday of the Sovereign and Commonwealth Day (actual date of the Queen's Official Birthday proclaimed annually)

- **August 4 - Birthday of the Queen Mother**
- **October 24 - United Nations Day**
- **November 11 - Remembrance Day** (flown at the peak from 8 am to 10:30 am; half mast until 11:03 am; at the peak for the remainder of the day)
- **November 14 - Birthday of the Heir Apparent**

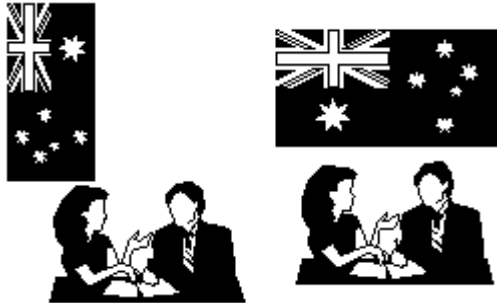
Flying the National Flag -General Guidelines

The following guidelines apply to the Australian national flag and to flags generally around the world:

- **The flag should be raised briskly and lowered ceremonially.**
- **The flag should be treated with the respect and dignity it deserves as the national emblem.**
- **The flag should not normally be flown in a position inferior to that of any other flag or ensign.** Nor should its size be smaller than that of any other flag or ensign. (See the following diagrams for rules about flying the Australian national flag with other flags.) When flown in Australia, the Australian national flag takes precedence over all other national flags.
- **The flag should always be flown aloft and free and not allowed to fall or lie on the ground.**
- **The flag should not be used to cover a statue, monument or plaque for an unveiling ceremony; to cover a table or seat; or to mask boxes, barriers or the space between floor and ground level on a dais or platform.**
- **When the flag is raised or lowered, or when it is carried past in a parade or review, all present should face the flag and remain silent. Those in uniform should salute.**
- **Two flags should not be flown on the same flagpole.**
- **The flag should not be flown upside down, not even as a signal of distress.**
- **When the flag is represented, for example, as an illustration for commercial or advertising purposes: it should be used in a dignified manner and reproduced accurately; it should not be defaced (that is, have superimposed on it printing or illustration); it should not be covered by other objects and all symbolic parts of it should be identifiable.**
- **The National flag may be displayed at night, but only when properly illuminated. Street lighting or outside house lights may be adequate.**
- **FLAG DISPOSAL: When a flag has worn out, it should be disposed of privately and in a dignified manner. Cutting into small unrecognizable pieces is one method. Beware of burning as most modern flags are made from polyester which could be toxic when burnt.**

Flying the National Flag Alone

When displayed against a wall the canton (the position of honor) should be in the left uppermost quarter. Even when displayed vertically, the rule is applied. When displayed on a speakers platform it should appear to the left of the speaker as viewed by the audience.

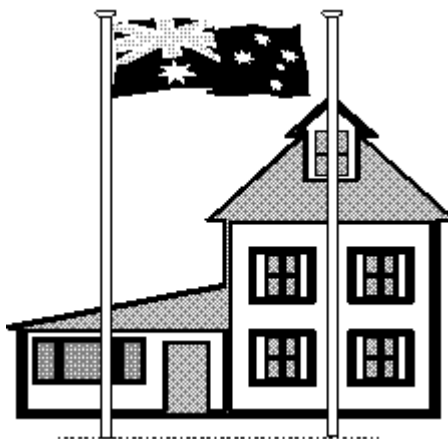


When displayed on a rope ensure the rope is tight and the hoist edge of flag is as close as possible to the rope. When suspended vertically in a street ensure the canton is:

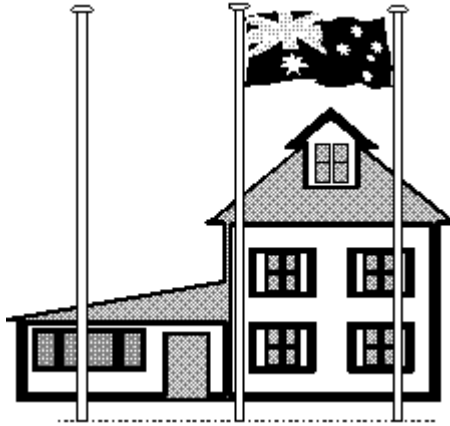
- a) facing North on East-West street
- b) facing East on North-South street



When the Australian flag is flown alone in front or on top of a building with two flagpoles, it should be flown on the left.



When the Australian flag is flown alone in front or on top of a building with more than two flagpoles, it should be flown in the center or as near as possible to it.



Flying The Australian Flag With Other National Flags

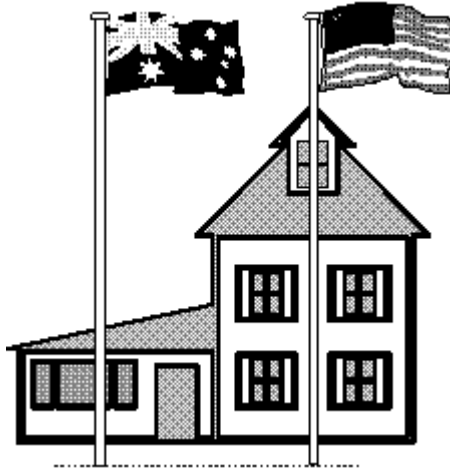
General Notes:

When the Australian flag is flown with other National flags all the flags and flagpoles should be of the same size. National flags should not be flown together on the same flagpole. International protocol is that one National flag should not fly higher than another.

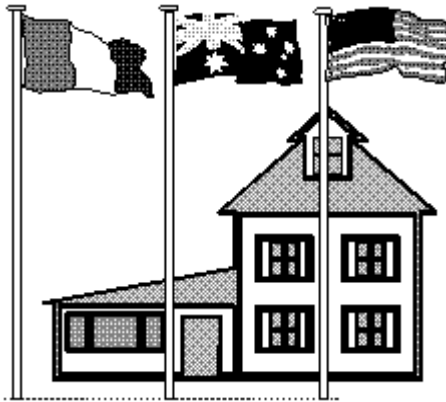
However the Australian flag takes the position of honor. (refer to following diagrams)

When raising flags, the Australian should be raised first and when lowering, the Australian lowered last. However if all flags can be raised and lowered together then that procedure should be followed.

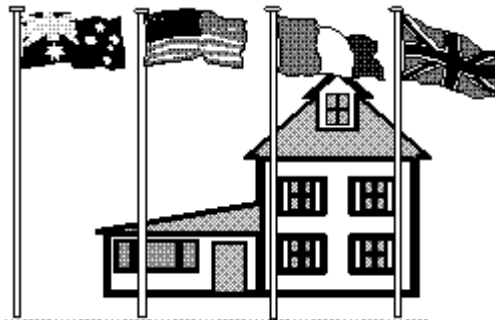
When flying with one other National flag the Australian flag should be on the left flagpole.



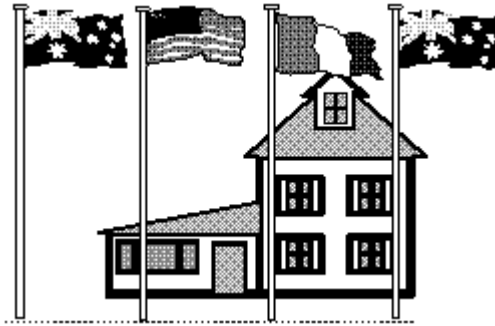
In a line of National flags where the number is odd and only one Australian flag is available, it should be flown in the middle.



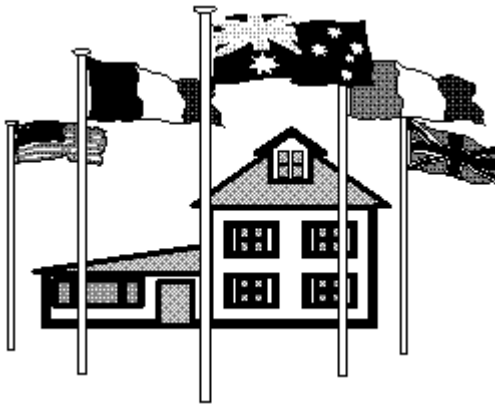
In a line of National flags where the number is even and only one Australian flag is available, it should be flown on the left.



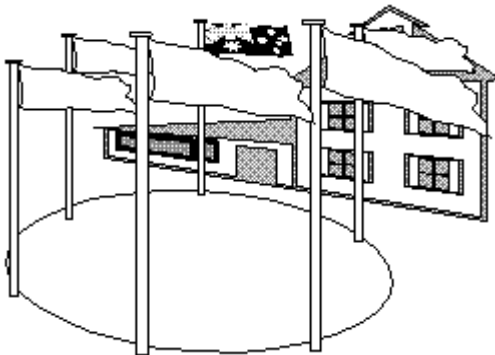
In a line of National flags where the number is even and two Australian flags are available, they should be flown at either end. Ensure the flagpoles are the same height.



In a semi circle of National flags the Australian flag should be flown in the middle.



In a circle of National flags the Australian flag should be flown immediately opposite the entrance to the building or arena.



When crossed with another National flag, the Australian flag should be on the left side and its staff should cross in front of the staff of the other flag.

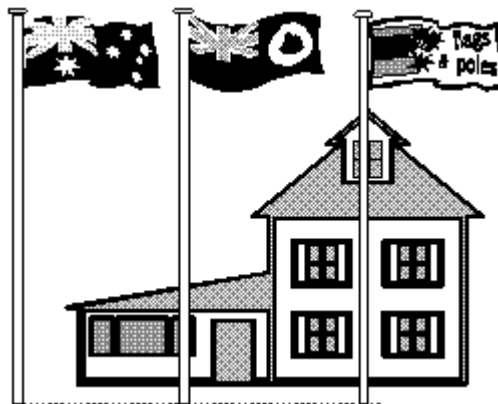


Flying The Australian Flag With State & Other Flags

General Notes:

When flying the Australian flag with State flags, company flags or club pennants the rules of precedence apply. The Australian Flag should be flown on the left. No other flag should be flown higher than the Australian flag (exception: flagpoles fitted with a gaff, see relevant diagram)

In the example (left), the order of precedence would be Australian to the left, the State flag to the right of the Australian and the Company flag to the right of the State flag.

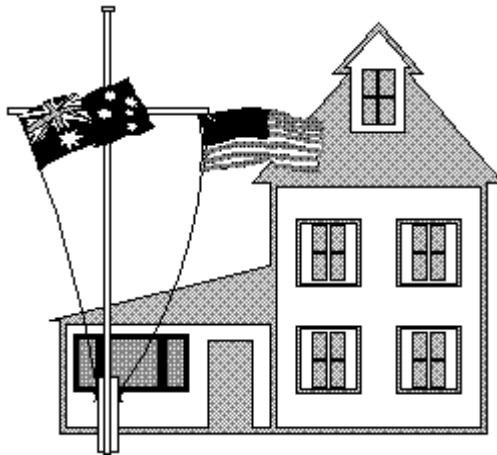


In the example, with two Australian flags available place one at either end. The state flag then goes on the first available flagpole from the left. The Company flag then goes on the next available flagpole from the left.

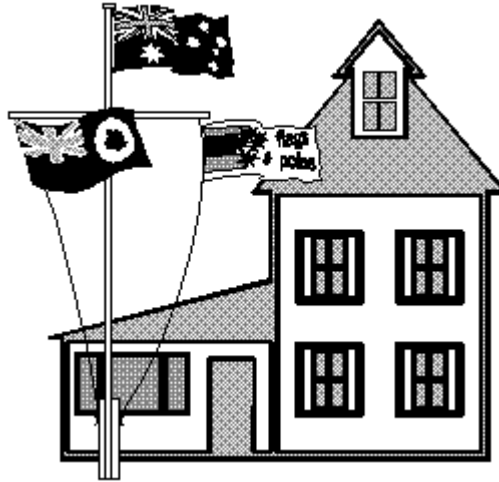


Flying The Australian Flag On Flagpoles With Yardarms Or A Gaff

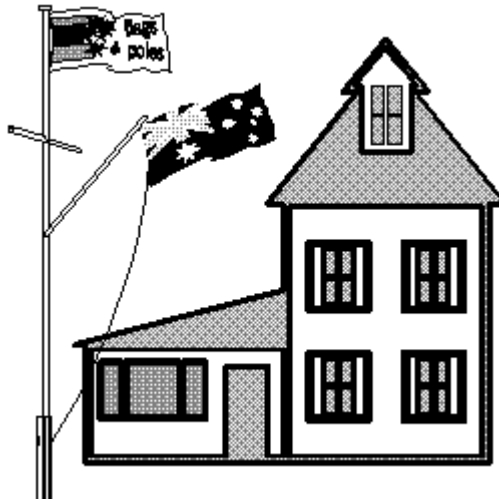
When flown on a flagpole fitted with a yardarm and flying with another National flag the Australian flag should be flown on the left side of the flagpole.



When flown on a flagpole fitted with a yardarm and flying with a State flag and house flag, the Australian flag should be flown from the top of the flagpole, State flag on the left and house flag on the right.



On a flagpole fitted with a gaff, fly the Australian flag on the gaff, which is the position of honor. This is a tradition dating back to the days of sailing ships, where the flag had to be kept free of the ships rigging.

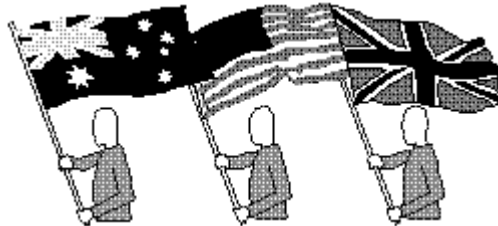


Carrying The Australian Flag In A Procession

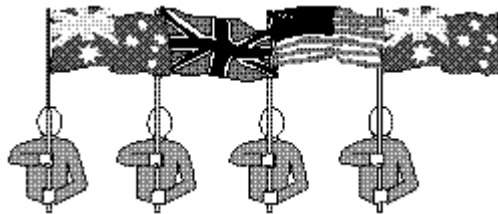
General Note:

When carried in a procession the Australian Flag should never be lowered as a form of salute.

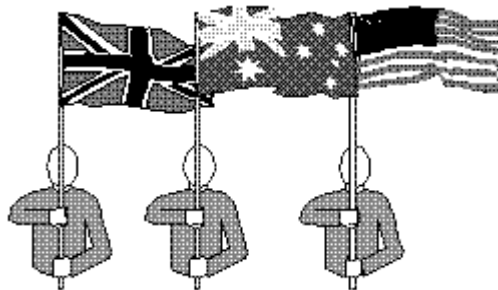
When carried in single file the Australian flag should lead. The staff should be held with the right hand higher than the left hand.



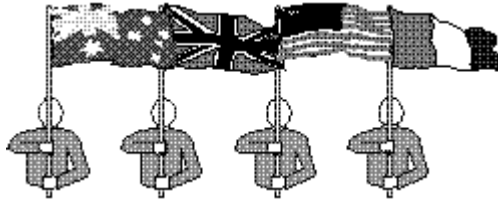
In a line of flags carried abreast it is preferable that an Australian flag is carried at each end of the line.



In a line of flags (an odd number) carried abreast, where only one Australian flag is available it should be carried in the center.



In a line of flags (an even number) carried abreast and only one Australian flag is available it should be carried on the right side of the line (facing the direction of travel).



Half Masting For Mourning

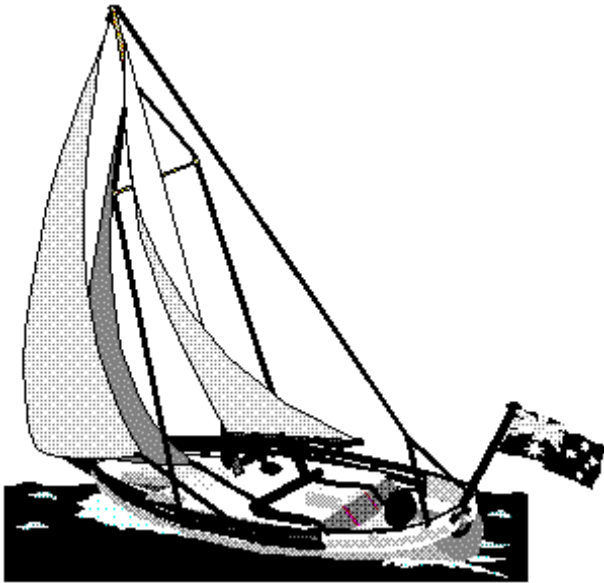
Flags are flown at the half-mast position as a sign of mourning.

The Flag is brought to the half-mast position by first raising it to the top of the mast and then immediately lowering it slowly to the half-mast position (this position is estimated by imagining another flag flying above the half-mastered flag). It must be lowered at least to a position recognizably "half-mast" to avoid the appearance of a flag which has accidentally fallen away from the top of the mast owing to a loose flag rope. A satisfactory position for half-masting would normally be when the top of the Flag is one-third of the distance from the top of the mast.

Flags should be flown at half-mast when directed by the responsible Commonwealth minister. The following are examples when the flag should be flown at half mast:

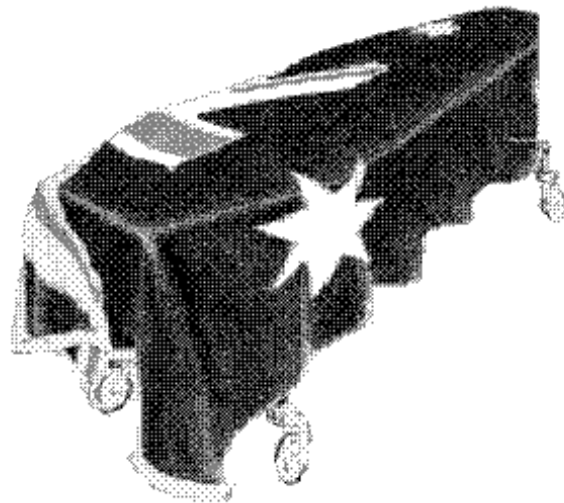
- **On the death of the Sovereign - from the time of the announcement of the death up to and including the funeral.** (It is customary on the day when the Accession of the new Sovereign is proclaimed for flags to be raised to the top of the mast from 11 a.m. until the close of business).
- **On the death of a member of the royal family- by special command of the sovereign and/or by direction of the responsible Commonwealth government minister.**
- **On the death of the Governor-General, or a former Governor-General.**
- **On the death of a distinguished Australian Citizen, in accordance with protocol.**
- **On the death of a foreign Sovereign or Head of State of a foreign country with which Australia maintains diplomatic relations - on the day of the funeral, or as directed.**
- **On the death of a distinguished local citizen , as decided by the authorities in a city or town - the flag would be flown on the day or part of the day, of the funeral, in that locality only.**

Flying The Australian Flag On A Ship Or Boat



The Australian Flag On A Coffin

On a funeral casket drape the canton over the left shoulder of the casket. The flag should be removed before lowering into the grave or after the service at a cremation. The deceased's headdress, sword or baton, awards or medals and flowers may be placed on the flag covering the casket.



Public Holidays

All organizations and individuals are urged to fly the National Flag on days of national commemoration. On those days that regularly fall on public holidays, it is permissible for the flying of flags to be restricted to General Post Offices and other principal government buildings in the State capitals, main post offices and principal government buildings in the Territories, and chief post officer in major country centers, that is where the population exceeds 10,000 people.