



RACGP

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

Flag protocol – About the three flags

Australia has a national flag but also recognises other flags, including state and territory flags, the Aboriginal flag, the Torres Strait Islander flag, Defence Force Ensigns and the Australian Red Ensign (flown at sea by Australian registered merchant ships). This protocol focuses on flying the Australian National flag, Aboriginal flag and Torres Strait Islander flag together.



The Australian National Flag

The Australian National Flag has three elements on a blue background. The Union Jack in the upper left corner (or canton) acknowledges the history of British settlement. Below the Union Jack is a white Commonwealth or Federation star. It has seven points representing the unity of the six states and the territories of the Commonwealth of Australia. The Southern Cross is shown in white. This constellation of five stars can be seen only from the southern hemisphere and is a reminder of Australia's geography.



The Australian Aboriginal flag

The top half of the Australian Aboriginal flag is black to symbolise Aboriginal people. The red in the lower half represents the earth and the colour of ochre, which has ceremonial significance. The circle of yellow in the centre of the flag represents the sun. Mr Harold, a descendent of the Luritja people of Central Australia, designed the flag.

Permission is not required to fly the Australian Aboriginal flag, however, the Australian Aboriginal flag is protected by copyright and may only be reproduced in accordance with the provisions of the *Copyright Act 1968* or with the permission of Mr Harold Thomas. Contact details are: Mr Harold Thomas, PO Box 41807, CASUARINA NT 0810. Any flag items must be purchased only from licensed dealers who have obtained copyright permission from Mr Thomas.



The Torres Strait Islander flag

The green panels at the top and bottom of the Torres Strait Islander flag represent the land and the central blue panel represents the sea. The black lines dividing the panels represent the Torres Strait Islander people. The centre of the flag shows a white dhari (dancer's headdress) and is a symbol for all Torres Strait Islander people. Underneath the dhari is a white five-pointed star. The points of the star represent the five major island groups in the Torres Strait and white symbolises peace. The star also represents navigation as a symbol of the seafaring culture of the Torres Straits.

Permission is not required to fly the Torres Strait Islander flag, however, the Island Coordinating Council holds copyright in the Torres Strait Islander flag. Requests for permission to reproduce the Torres Strait Islander flag should be addressed to: Secretary of the Island Coordinating Council, PO Box 501, Thursday Island QLD 4875, Telephone: 07 4069 1446, Fax: 07 4069 1868. Any flag items must be purchased only from licensed dealers who have obtained copyright permission from the Island Coordinating Council.

General information about flags

- Flags should always be handled and displayed in a respectful manner.
- Flags should always be flown freely and as close as possible to the top of the flagpole.
- Two flags should not be flown from the same flagpole.
- The flag should never be flown if it is damaged, faded or dilapidated. When the material of a flag deteriorates, it should be destroyed privately and in a dignified way.
- The flag should not be flown upside down, even as a signal of distress.
- The flag should not fall or lie on the ground or be used as a cover (although it can be used to cover a coffin at a funeral)
- When multiple flags are flown together, they must all be the same size.

Where to display the flags

Flying the flags is one of the many possible ways to show respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. All Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) offices should have a set of all three flags, plus three flag poles with a floor stand. Where space is an issue, small desk flag sets (about 30 cm high) can be obtained from RACGP Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health.

The three flags can be displayed:

- in the reception area
- in large meeting rooms
- near speakers at RACGP events
- on tables and lectern.

A requirement of the RACGP Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) is that all faculty office locations have the three flags on display at reception – a small desk flag set is appropriate for this purpose. Larger flags can be displayed anywhere in the building. The display of larger flags is not a requirement of the RACGP RAP, however, this initiative is strongly encouraged as a sign of respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

How to fly the three flags together



From a stand with three flagpoles

When flying all three flags together, the Australian National Flag takes precedence over the other flags.

When using the stand provided, the Australian National Flag flies from the central pole as this is the highest pole. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags are equal in status and can be flown on either side of the national flag. There is no rule stating that the Aboriginal flag must be to the right of the Australian National Flag and the Torres Strait Islander flag on the left of the Australian National Flag or vice versa.



These rules also apply when displaying the desk set flags.



Flown from three separate flagpoles

If all three flags are being flown from poles of the same height, the Australian National Flag is displayed on the flag pole to the far left with the other two flags to the right.



Hanging on a wall

When flags are displayed hanging on a wall, the Australian National Flag is displayed on the far left with the other two flags to the right.

When flying your State or Territory flag, the order of precedence is:

- Australian National Flag
- State or Territory flag
- Aboriginal flag and Torres Strait Islander flag

Further information about Australian flags can be found at www.itsanhonour.gov.au/symbols/flag.cfm