

Australian National Flag Day, 2007

On Monday, 3rd September 2007 Australia will celebrate the 106th Anniversary of the Australian National Flag – the chief symbol of our nation and a significant part of our heritage.

In those 106 years Australia has changed in many ways. We have seen the growth of our population from some 5 million to over 20 million. People from all parts of the world have come here, to make Australia their home. With them they have brought riches in diversity and culture, and most importantly they have contributed to make Australia the great nation which it is today.

After 106 years the Australian Flag is probably more important today, to us as a nation, than it was in 1901. We have seen our flag carried by the men and women of our defence forces from Gallipoli in 1915, right through to Iraq, Afghanistan, Timor and Solomon Islands. Today our flag flies proudly wherever Australians compete at the world's greatest sporting events around the globe. Who could not feel great pride when we saw our flag raised at the 2000 Olympic Games? Who could not feel great pride to see the flag carried on ANZAC Day.

As Australians we are all proud of who we are, whether our ancestors arrived on the first fleet or whether they came more recently to make Australia home. The symbol of our nation has united all people who call themselves Australian. It is something we all can – and should - be extremely proud of. The flag is our history and our future.

Critics argue that the inclusion of the British Union Jack on our flag is an embarrassing acknowledgment of our colonial past – that it somehow makes us less independent. To the contrary. I would argue that the presence of the Union Jack is a reminder that we were fortunate to inherit a robust democratic system of government and an independent legal structure. These are the very pillars of our way of life that we have fought for in wars and battles in both hemispheres for the past century. The flag is a symbol of our freedom – with the stars of the Southern Cross proudly proclaiming that we occupy a unique place in the world.

So it is at times like these that we should recognise and proudly fly our national symbol, paying tribute to those who have made the commitment and the sacrifice to allow us to enjoy our way of life today.