

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why do we need to talk about changing the flag?

The current flag was adopted in 1902 and since the 1960s, New Zealanders have been debating whether it should be replaced. Suggestions for alternative flag designs have from time to time been put forward but there has never been an official public debate.

Has the flag changed before?

Yes, three times. In 1834, the Flag of the United Tribes of New Zealand was chosen to represent New Zealand. Following the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, the Union Flag ('Union Jack') became New Zealand's official flag. The New Zealand Ensign was officially adopted in 1902.

For more information on the New Zealand Flag and its history, see

<http://www.mch.govt.nz/nz-identity-heritage/flags> and
<http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/politics/flags-of-new-zealand>.

How much will this process cost?

The estimated cost is \$25.7m over two years. Most of the cost is in holding two postal referendums (\$17.3m) and public consultation (\$6.7m). To have a process which is seen as legitimate, and for the outcome to endure, it is important to do it properly. Our current flag has served us for over a century, and it is possible that a new flag would serve us for another century or longer.

What about other symbols of state (eg New Zealand Coat of Arms)? If the New Zealand Flag changes, will these other symbols need to change also?

The current New Zealand Flag is only one design element of the New Zealand Coat of Arms. If the flag changed, the Coat of Arms would not become invalid or obsolete so government departments which use the Coat of Arms on their stationery and websites (etc) would continue to do so even if there was a change of flag.

The same is true for those other items which incorporate the New Zealand Coat of Arms, such as the Seal of New Zealand. A number of other flags and ensigns, including the New Zealand Police and New Zealand Fire Service flags are based on the current New Zealand Flag. If it changed, those agencies may revisit their flags in future, but change would not be automatic.

What about the national Māori flag – would this process affect that flag?

No. In 2009 Cabinet recognised the Māori (Tino Rangatiratanga) flag as the preferred national Māori flag, and noted that it will complement the New Zealand Flag. A change to the New Zealand Flag would not affect the status of the national Māori flag.

If we get a new flag, what happens to the current one?

If New Zealanders choose a new flag, the current flag will not become unlawful. Over time, as these flags wear out, it is likely that natural replacement will occur. It is also likely that legislation will continue to protect the current flag against misuse.

How do I have a say in the process?

A panel of New Zealanders, the Flag Consideration Panel, will provide opportunities for people to submit their designs, ideas, and suggestions. This process is expected to occur from May to August 2015. After that, the panel will report back to Cabinet with a shortlist from which 3-4 designs will be chosen to go forward for voting.

The first referendum will be held in late 2015. Voters will be asked to indicate the design they prefer the most. The design that gets the most votes will go forward to the second referendum where voters will choose between that design and the current flag.

Who will be on the Flag Consideration Panel?

Membership will be based on nominations from the Cross-Party Group of MPs. The panel is likely to represent a cross-section of New Zealand society.

Who can vote in the referendums?

Only people who are eligible to vote in a general election and are enrolled to vote will be able to vote in the postal referendums. However, New Zealanders of all ages will be able to submit design ideas and suggestions to the Flag Consideration Panel.

What if I don't want the flag to change?

You get that choice in the second referendum.

What will happen after the second referendum?

The legislation that enables the flag referendums will include mechanisms that make any decision binding. That means New Zealanders can be sure that if the alternative design receives the largest number of votes in the second referendum, it will become the new national flag; if the current flag receives the largest number of votes, it will remain the New Zealand Flag. If a new flag is chosen, the referendum legislation will specify when the new flag will become official.