

# Past Attempts to Change New Zealand's Flag

John Moody

Secretary, New Zealand Flag Association

In this paper I will give you a brief history of the New Zealand Flag,

- Reasons for wanting to change it.
- Reasons for wanting to retain it.
- Past attempts to change it.
- The current situation.
- What the flag may be changed to.
- Concluding by drawing all the above points together.

## Brief Background to the Flag

The New Zealand Flag that came into being with the Ensign Act of 1902, in clause 2 of this act the flag was described as follow -

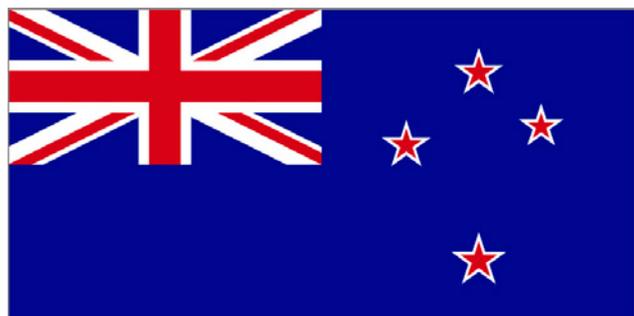
*"The New Zealand Ensign shall be the Blue ensign of the Royal Naval Reserve, having on the fly thereof the Southern Cross, as represented by 4, five pointed Red stars with White borders."*

NB. Reference to the Blue ensign of the Royal Naval Reserve was later changed to the Blue ensign of His Majesty's fleet.

HM King Edward VII signed the New Zealand Ensign Act on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1902. The then governor of New Zealand signed this proclamation on 9<sup>th</sup> June 1902.

In clause 3 of this Act it stated that the "ensign should be recognised of the colony for general use on shore, within the colony and on all vessels belonging to the government of New Zealand."

Because the New Zealand Flag retains the Union Flag as part of its design there have been calls to change New Zealand flag to have a more distinctive indigenous design, more reflective of the unique characteristics of New Zealand.



The New Zealand Flag

## The Following Reasons Have Been Given to Support Changing New Zealand's Flag

- The current New Zealand Flag is too colonial and gives the impression that New Zealand is still a British colony and *not* an independent nation.
- The current flag of New Zealand is too similar to the Australian flag, often creating to unnecessary confusion.
- The New Zealand Flag does not adequately represent the multi-cultural nature of modern day New Zealand.

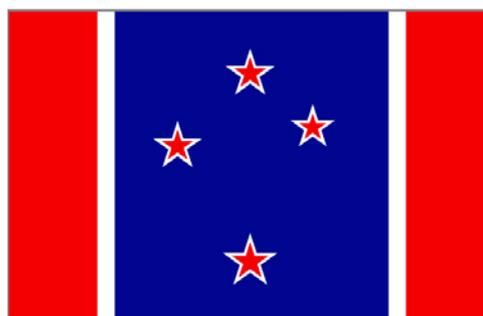
## Reasons For Retaining The Flag

- The New Zealand Flag reflects the strong ties between the United Kingdom and New Zealand.
- There have been no viable, attractive alternative flags put forward to replace New Zealand's current flag.
- New Zealanders have fought and died under this flag in numerous wars and battlefields through out its history.

## Past Attempts to Change New Zealand Flag

Along with calls to change New Zealand flag there have been various flag designs and proposals to replace the flag of New Zealand.

The first noted attempt to change the New Zealand Flag, was made by Mr Clark Titman, in mid-1967. His design was very similar in appearance to the Canadian flag. It consisted of two Red stripes on the hoist and fly of the flag a broad separate blue stripe, separating the blue and red components of the flag are two thin white stripes. In the centre of the blue stripe there are four red Stars with white borders representing the Southern Cross.



Clark Titman's Design

The red stripe on the hoist is said to represent the highest colour of Maori Manna (Honour). The red stripe on the fly is said to represent the British.

An interesting aside about Mr Titman's ancestry is that his ancestor Abraham Clark signed the declaration of Independence for New Jersey in 1776. In 1777 according to Mr Titman, Abraham Clark was a member of the Continental Congress the day the 13 star flag was adopted for the United States.

In May 1973, at the 57th annual conference of the New Zealand Labour Party, a remit was presented which called for "New Zealand to be declared a republic, change the national flag, and the National anthem" this remit was subsequently lost.

In November 1979, the Minister of Internal Affairs Mr Alan Highet, proposed a flag with a silver fern in the fly replacing the Southern Cross. The New Zealand flag would otherwise be unchanged.

In 1980 the department of Internal Affairs suggested a "New Flag For New Zealand" The department thought it would be appropriate for New Zealand to consider a new flag for its 150th anniversary in 1990.

1980 also, saw a major news article written by Brian MacKrewl, in *The Press* - the Christchurch daily newspaper. The headline read "Flag Wavers ask if It's Time For a New National Banner" This article detailed the history of the New Zealand Flag and what may emerge in the future.

The same article inspired Mr AH Calder to forward his ideas of what an alternative New Zealand flag could look like. His designs used the NZ ZN logo, which was used for the 1974 commonwealth Games, held in Christchurch. It is notable how cleverly this logo includes the Union flag in its design. One flag uses the logo in its entirety; the other uses the logo centred on the hoist with four black five pointed stars, representing the Southern Cross, on a white ground.



AH Calder's Design

Another proponent of flag change was Mr DA Bale, who designed a Canadian-styled flag. It differed from Canada's Flag in that it used blue stripes to replace the red stripes of Canada, the maple leaf was replaced by a blue koru. This flag emerged in the early 1980's.

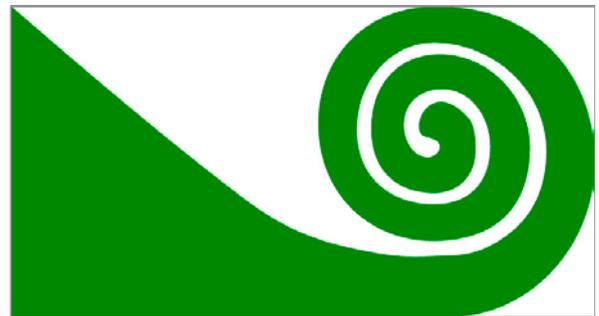


Canada's Flag



DA Bale's Design

A very serious move to spark debate concerning a new flag was made by Frederick Hundertwasser, in March of 1983. His design was a white/green bi-colour incorporating a green fern spiral, on a white ground. This flag attracted much media attention as well as much controversy.



Frederick Hundertwasser's Design

1984 saw a New Zealand Member of Parliament Mr Ken Shirley; propose a black and white flag. This flag had a black ground with a white Koru on the hoist, and four white five pointed stars, representing the Southern Cross, on the fly. This flag was unfurled on the steps of New Zealand Parliament.

1984 also saw the newspaper *The Christchurch Star*, run a competition for a new national flag. Much interest in this was aroused and many entries received from its readers.

A keen supporter for flag change, Mr Mike Rodwell, went for simplicity when he designed his flag. It had a black ground with four, white-bordered red stars, in the centre of the ground each star having five points. The design dates from the mid-1980's.

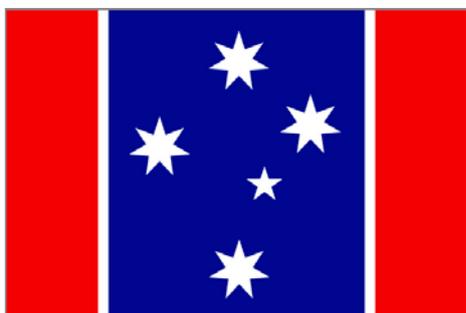
In December 1988 a controversy arose when Mr Laurence Soljack, promoted his flag design. This flag looked like an elongated version of Mr Titman's flag. Mr Titman

claimed Mr Soljack copied his design, modified it and claimed it as his own.



Laurence Soljack's Design

In 1997 Ausflag promoted a flag very similar to Mr Titman's design. Ausflag is an organisation promoting a more distinctive Australian flag. Mr Titman again claimed that Ausflag copied his design.



One of Ausflag's Designs

At the Labour Party conference of 1989 there were again calls for a new flag for New Zealand. A remit was forwarded at this conference "Calling for a competition to Redesign the flag that would discourage use of the Union Jack" A hand vote was taken on this remit the remit was lost 144 to 136.

The movement to change the national flag came into greater prominence when the *New Zealand Listener* (a popular national publication) ran a national high profile competition in 1990. This attracted a great deal of attention and once again much debate arose. Interest was high from the general public, with many designs entered. The winning design by Mr David Bartlett was a horizontal tri colour of unequal stripes of blue, white and green, with four white stars being placed on the fly of the blue stripe.



David Bartlett's Design

1992 saw Neil Anderson forward a flag design very similar to David Bartlett's flag again this flag used unequal stripes, this time of blue gold and green. The four stars were white and were placed in the centre of the blue stripe. Mr Anderson said his flag was based on a 1982 concept. In 1999 Mr Anderson again promoted this design for consideration by the general public.



Neil Anderson's Design

In 1993 Mr Bernard Harker presented a flag design with a black ground a white kiwi towards the hoist and four white bordered red stars on the fly. The word *Aotearoa* appeared in white beneath the kiwi and the stars.

1994 saw a flag design from Mr Peter Watson the flag had a white ground with a Maori design in the colours of red, white and blue.

In 1994 Mr James Parr designed a flag with a black ground, the Union flag appeared in the canton. In the fly was a white kiwi surrounded by three white ferns.

1998 was to prove a significant year for efforts to change the flag. This came about with Vexillologist, Mr James Dignan, leading an Internet discussion about alternative New Zealand flag designs. A number of designs came into prominence, with the favoured design being a silver fern with a red diagonal.



A 1998 Design

In September 1998 the then minister of Cultural Affairs, Ms Marie Hasler, made the following statements "it's time to replace meaningless flag" "flag change inevitable" "chuck out Union Jack". Her proposal was a black flag with a silver fern. The then Prime Minister Mrs Jenny Shipley supported her minister in calling for a new flag. This proposal attracted much media attention and national interest, as well as criticism from such groups as the Return Services Association. This attempt to

change the flag was the most serious seen so far in New Zealand.



Marie Hasler's Design

The latest attempt to change New Zealand's flag was made by Mr Jason Troup in May 2000. His design again used the colours blue, white and green, with four gold stars representing the Southern Cross and a white koru towards the fly. Gold stars were said to represent wealth. Blue the sky and freedom; white, New Zealand "the land of the long white cloud" and the spirit of the people; green for the land, the koru for rebirth and new life.

### The Current Situation.

- Changing the flag in New Zealand is meeting resistance and ingrained conservatism. This can be seen by the campaign launched by the Returned Services Association with the slogan "Keep it this Way" featuring the current New Zealand flag on decals and bumper stickers. These can easily be found on car windows.
- There was also "the flag, anthems, and names protection bill" which was proposed by the then Member of Parliament Mr Graeme Lee, who wanted a 65% majority in parliament to favour changing the flag, instead of a bare majority of 51%. This bill was lost.
- There is also a timidity from those who would like to see change, but do not dare risk a backlash from the general public. Such as our Prime Minister Helen Clarke, who although an avowed Republican has stated that she thinks New Zealand's relationship with the British monarchy is absurd. She has said "she considered any re-design of the New Zealand flag to be well into the future" she further stated "as with the question of becoming a republic she thought it unwise to push things to far ahead of public opinion".
- Opinion polls continue to show the majority of New Zealander's are opposed to changing New Zealand's flag, as was shown by the latest poll held in the *National Business Review* of August 1999, where 64% of those polled opposed changing New Zealand's flag, with only 24% favouring change. Interestingly, these percentages changed when an alternative flag design was presented in this case the black flag with

the silver fern (Ms Marie Hasler design) with those opposing flag change dropping to 60% and those favouring change rising to 33%.

- Opinion opposing flag change is in slow decline with those in favour of flag change gradually rising, especially if presented with an attractive alternative design.

### What The Flag May Be Changed To

In my opinion the New Zealand flag will be changed within the next 10 -15 years for the following reasons:

- The declining influence of Britain in New Zealand's affairs.
- New Zealand's increasing self-awareness as an independent South Pacific Nation.
- New Zealand's inevitable move to republican status

I think the flag could feature the kiwi, the koru, the silver fern or the Southern Cross. The flag that is in increasing evidence and use is the black flag with the silver fern. This may well be the model for New Zealand's future flag.

Two significant occasions which saw the display of this flag were celebrations in Auckland when New Zealand retained the Americas Cup and the march past of the New Zealand Team at the Sydney Olympics. Team members were holding this flag with only the official flag bearer carrying the official New Zealand Flag.

It seems that this silver fern Flag is gaining defacto acceptance by the public of New Zealand, surely the first step towards it becoming a future New Zealand flag.

Therefore, in conclusion I have walked you through a history of the New Zealand flag to date, both historical and current. The many reasons for changing the current flag and reasons to retain the current flag. Past attempts to change the flag and some suggestions as to what New Zealand's flag will become in the future.