

## The national Maori flag - flags of New Zealand



Elements of the  
flag

On Waitangi Day 2010 the nation  
over the Auckland Harbour Bridge  
Premier House, the National War  
government departments.

## MCH, 2010r Nation Dates FINAL

### The origins of the flag

In 1989 the government approved an initial \$20 million dollars  
towards commemorating the sesquicentenary of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. In  
response a coalition of Maori independence organisations, collectively known as Te  
Kotahitanga, agreed to seek 'creative ways' to inform Maori about Treaty breaches. Te  
Kawariki, an organisation based in the far north, came up with the idea of running a national  
Maori flag competition - with the winning design ready in time for the 1990 commemorations.

Their idea arose from a trip a group of Maori activists had made to Australia some years earlier.  
While in the country to support Aboriginal opposition to the 1982 Commonwealth Games in  
Brisbane, they visited Aboriginal activists in Redfern, Sydney. They were impressed by the  
prominent display of the Aboriginal flag throughout the big Aboriginal community. In Te  
Kawariki's own account of their activities, *20 years of protest action 1979-1999, Te Kawariki*, one  
of their members describes the experience:

It was everywhere - on t-shirts, on flagpoles, on hats, on bags, on walls, and  
even spray-painted onto a couple of broken down cars on the road. A stunning  
and powerful symbol that required no words, no explanations, no descriptions.  
It was just there - in your face, behind your back, beneath your feet, waving  
above your head, and watching you from the sidelines. You just couldn't ignore  
it. The flag. It blew us away.

I remember vowing that one day we would have a flag of our own - a symbol of  
our struggle for Maori independence.

Kotahitanga endorsed the flag competition idea and Te Kawariki subsequently publicised it.  
Rather than advertising in the mainstream media, Te Kawariki used local iwi radio and the Black  
Power newspaper. The latter was used because it offered free advertising, but also because it  
was a Maori organisation, and had a national and Australian circulation.

The designs that came in were discussed by Te Kawariki but it was agreed that none of them  
reflected what they were looking for. A collective of Maori women artists was asked for input.  
Three of them, Linda Munn, Hiraina Marsden and Jan Dobson Smith, subsequently came up with  
the winning design. It was shown at hui in the north before being hand sewn by Jan Dobson  
ready for its launch in 1990. Posters were printed with an explanation of the meaning of the  
flag, written by Walter Erstich.

The flag was launched shortly before Waitangi Day 1990 during a hikoi from Te Rerenga Wairua  
(Cape Reinga) to Waitangi.

### The use of the flag

Te Kawariki claim that they 'did not actively promote the flag' and that 'it travelled on its own'.  
They acknowledged that some Maori had picked it up, but that others hated it or preferred

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other designs. But the flag gained national visibility through the group's protest activities on Waitangi Day. According to Aroha Harris, author of *Hikoi: forty years of Maori protest*, from about 1985 the far north group 'developed a critical presence at Waitangi Day celebrations'. By the mid to late 1990s the group was producing the flag in a range of formats - including hats, badges, t-shirts and bumper stickers - with the words Tino Rangatiratanga/Maori independence. The proceeds went to fund protest activities and CORSO Aotearoa.

In 1999 the flag made the headlines after protesters scaled the flagpole at the Waitangi Treaty Grounds and successfully replaced the New Zealand flag with several Maori sovereignty flags. This action was repeated the following year. At the time Governor-General Sir Michael Hardie Boys was critical of the 'few young hotheads' who he said had raised the flag. But veteran Maori activist Titewhai Harawira argued that the protestors had been quite right to protest at the lack of recognition for a Maori flag, and that one should fly next to the New Zealand flag.

Over the next decade the flag continued to appear at protests at the Waitangi Treaty Grounds and elsewhere on Waitangi Day. It also appeared at other protests throughout the country, for example the 80-day occupation of Pakaitore (Moutoa Gardens) in 1995, and during the foreshore and seabed hikoi in 2004.



Foreshore and seabed hikoi

The flag made headlines again in February 2007 after Transit refused a request by a Maori sovereignty group, Te Ata Tino Toa, to fly it on the Auckland Harbour Bridge on Waitangi Day. Transit explained that it was their policy to fly the New Zealand flag and, on request, the flags of other countries. But Te Ata Tino Toa argued that 'corporates' (including yachting's Team New Zealand) had been allowed to fly their flag and that it was a 'disgrace' that this 'right' was not extended to Maori.

The debate heated up again in May that year after Transit allowed the flag of the European Union to be flown. Maori Party MP Hone Harawira argued that this was 'hypocritical' and that he would be referring the matter to the Race Relations Office. Transit subsequently admitted that it was wrong to treat the European Union as a country, but announced that it was already reviewing its flag policy. The review resulted in a 'simplified' policy which allowed only the New Zealand flag to be flown.

### Behind Australia

The Australian Aboriginal flag was originally designed as a protest flag in 1971. On 14 July 1995 it and the Torres Strait Islander Flag were officially proclaimed as 'Flags of Australia' by the Australian government. Many buildings in Australia now fly the Aboriginal flag as well as the Australian flag.

Te Ata Tino Toa asked Transit to reconsider its decision in January 2008 but its stance had not changed. In protest against this decision the group asked various organisations throughout the city, including Auckland University, to support them by flying the flag in the five days before Waitangi Day.

### The national Maori flag

In January 2009 Te Ata Tino Toa asked Maori Party co-leader Pita Sharples to support its application to Transit to fly the flag on the Harbour Bridge. By this time the Maori Party was a coalition partner in the National-led government, and Sharples was the Minister of Maori Affairs. He advised the media that he would raise the issue with ministers but there was initial scepticism that the idea would gain sufficient

support. This rapidly changed after Prime Minister John Key advised that he had no particular objection to a Maori flag being flown from the bridge, if Maori could agree on a flag. In appreciation of his stance Te Ata Tino Toa sent the Prime Minister a tino rangatiratanga t-shirt addressed to Hone Kei, Pirimia.

Over July and August 2009, 21 public hui were held nationwide, and written and online submissions were invited from Maori and other interested New Zealanders. Four flags of national significance were identified for consideration as the preferred national Maori flag: the New Zealand flag; the New Zealand Red Ensign; the national (United Tribes of New Zealand) flag; and the Maori (Tino Rangatiratanga) flag.

Over 1200 submissions were received, with 79% of submitters identifying themselves as Maori. Of the total submissions, 80.1% selected the Maori (Tino Rangatiratanga) flag as the preferred national Maori flag. The feedback received also indicated that it should be flown on Waitangi Day and other significant occasions.

On Waitangi Day 2010 the national Maori flag flew over the Auckland Harbour Bridge for the first time. It also flew at other nationally significant sites including Parliament, the Beehive, the National War Memorial, Te Papa, the National Library of New Zealand, and a number of government buildings. But there was far from universal support for the flag; some considered it too divisive and/ or preferred to fly the United Tribes flag. It did not fly at Waitangi Treaty Grounds, and Ngai Tahu and Te Arawa did not support it being flown at official commemorations in their area.

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