Guidelines for flying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags

Summary
This document provides guidance and protocols for flying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags at Queensland Health facilities. The guidelines should be used with discretion and in accordance with the Australian and Queensland Government protocols.

Introduction
Cultural safety is one of the most critical elements in people accessing our services and identifying as being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags are a significant means of demonstrating our recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and encouraging access to health services. Flags can be used to promote a sense of community partnership and demonstrate our commitment towards closing the gap.

Flying of the Australian and Queensland flags is also described in the context of flying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags.

History and significance of flags
History and significance of the Aboriginal flag

The Aboriginal flag is an official flag of Australia and was recognised under Federal legislation in July 1995. Designed by Aboriginal Elder Harold Thomas in 1971, this flag symbolises Aboriginal identity. Mr Thomas has been recognised as the designer of the Aboriginal flag by the Federal Court and has been granted backdated copyright of the design to 1971. The top half of the flag is black to represent the Aboriginal people. The red in the lower half represents the red earth (the relationship to the land) and the red ochre used in Aboriginal ceremonies. The circle of yellow represents the sun (giver of life) and yellow ochre.
Guidelines for flying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags

Queensland Health 2011

History and significance of the Torres Strait Islander flag

The Torres Strait Islander flag is an official flag of Australia and was recognised under Federal legislation in July 1995. The flag designed by Torres Strait Islander Mr Bernard Namok, is emblazoned with a white Dhari (headdress) which is a prominent symbol of Torres Strait Islander peoples. The white five pointed star beneath it symbolises peace, the five major island groups and the navigational importance of stars to the seafaring people of the Torres Strait. The five island groups include:

- Northern Division (Boigu, Dauan, Saibai)
- Eastern Islander (Darnley, Murray, Stephen)
- Western Division (St. Pauls, Kubin, Badu, Mabuiag)
- Central Division (Yorke, Coconut, Warraber, Yam)
- Southern Division (Thursday Island and Inner Islander, NPA and Mainland Australia)

The green stripes represent the land, the black stripes represent the people, and the blue represents the sea.

History and significance of the Australian flag

The Australian National flag is Australia’s foremost national symbol. The Australian flag has three elements on a blue background: the Union Jack, the Commonwealth Star and the Southern Cross. 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 star is also featured on the Arms. The Southern Cross is shown on the fly of the flag in white. This constellation of five stars can be seen only from the southern hemisphere and is a reminder of Australia’s geography.
History and significance of the Queensland flag

The Queensland State flag dates from the time when Queensland was a self-governing British colony with its own navy and was officially approved in 1876. The State flag comprises the State badge inserted in the Blue Ensign. The Royal Crown superimposed on a Maltese-style cross was approved as the Queensland badge in July 1876. The shape of the cross resembles the insignia of Australia’s highest military award for valour - the Victoria Cross. The badge represents the Royal Crown on the Maltese Cross and is officially described as: “On a Roundel Argent a Maltese Cross Azure surmounted with a Royal Crown”. It was adopted as part of the flag on 29 November 1976 and incorporated in the Coat of Arms in 1893.

Flag flying protocols

The following need to be considered when flying any flag in a Queensland Health facility:

- Most importantly, flags should be flown and displayed in a dignified manner and should not be used as a curtain to unveil a monument or plaque, or used as table or seat cover or allowed to fall to or lie upon the ground.
- The Australian flag should be flown in the position of honour.
- The Australian flag must be hoisted first and lowered last. When flying the Australian flag with State flags and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags, in a line of flagpoles, the order of the flags should follow the rules of precedence (see below).
- Flags should not be flown at night unless properly lit.
- More than one flag should not be flown from one halyard (flag pole).
- The flags should be of identical size (standard flag size is 6ft x 3ft).
- The flagpoles should be of identical height (a standard flagpole is around 6m) – exceptions apply.
- If there is only one flagpole available it is preferred that the Queensland flag remain.
- A tattered or dilapidated flag should not be flown and should be destroyed in private.
- Flags are flown at half-mast position as a sign of mourning. Half masting should be undertaken by first taking the flag to the top of the mast and lowering to the half-mast position, which is when the top of the flag is approximately one-third of the distance down from the top of the mast. The flag should be raised to the top of the mast again before lowering if for the day.
- Further information can be obtained from the Australian Government and Queensland Government resources described below.
**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flag protocols**

These protocols have been developed as advice for Queensland Health facilities when flying the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander flag/s:

- It is highly recommended that Queensland Health Service Districts undergo community consultation prior to the raising of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander flags.

- It is critical that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags are flown upright (See picture page 1). The Aboriginal flag always has the black half upward to the sky and the red half downwards. The Torres Strait Islander flag is upright when the Dhari appears like downward horse shoe.

- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags are of equal status and the selection of which of these flags to fly will depend on local circumstances and relevance.

- During NAIDOC Week and Reconciliation Week each year, the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander flags take precedence over the Queensland State flag where only two flagpoles are available. They should not replace the Australian flag which will continue to be flown in the first flagpole in the position of precedence. Where there are three flagpoles, the Australian flag would be flown, followed by the Queensland, followed by the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander flags.

**Australian National flag protocols**

The Australian flag should always be flown on the far left of a person facing the building, in a position of honour (See Diagram1). The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet have developed the Australian protocol booklet, “Australian flags – Part 2: The protocols for appropriate use and the flying of the flag.” Part 2 except can be accessed online at:


**Queensland State flag protocols**

Department of Premier and Cabinet have developed a detailed Queensland protocol, “Flying the Flag - The Queensland State Flag”. This can be accessed at online at:


The Department of Premier and Cabinet have specific protocols when flying flags on State Government buildings.


If you require endorsement for flying flags contact the Department of Premier and Cabinet for further information.
**Precedence for flying flags outside Queensland Health facilities**

Precedence can be achieved by order (left to right) and/ or by height. The following illustrations show the practical application appropriate for Queensland Health facilities, observing the protocols described by both the Australian and Queensland Governments.

**Precedence of flying flags (left to right)**

One flagpole: Queensland flag (Queensland Government policy)

Two flagpoles: Australian flag and Queensland flag

Two flagpoles: Preferred display during NAIDOC and Reconciliation Week

– Option 1
– **Option 2**

Queensland flag should be replaced by the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander flag during Reconciliation and NAIDOC Week.

**Three flagpoles: Australian, Queensland and Aboriginal OR* Torres Strait Islander flags**

- The Aboriginal flag can be interchanged with the Torres Strait Islander flag dependent on locality and community preference. A hospital flag can also be included as an optional flag when there are three or more flagpoles.
- This option allows for the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander flag to be flown daily.

– **Option 1**

– **Option 2**
Four flagpoles: Australian, Queensland, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags

![Flags](image1.png)

Alternative option: Australian, Queensland, Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and hospital flags

![Flags](image2.png)

*(courtesy of Royal Brisbane and Women’s Hospital)*

The Australian flag is still being flown is a position of honour and precedence; then follows from left to right: Queensland State Flag, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander flags and the hospital flag. This layout would allow for all flags to be flown daily.