



**Trent Zimmerman MP**  
Member for North Sydney

**SPEECH IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
AUSTRALIAN FLAG 120<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
30 August 2021**

Thank you Mr Speaker

Just over a month ago so many millions of Australians shared the common experience of a late night to watch the opening games of the Tokyo Olympics.

The two weeks of Olympic sporting competition and Australia's incredible success were, for many, the bright spot during COVID lockdowns.

At the opening ceremony and at so many medal presentations that followed, we were united in pride when we saw the best of our athletes represent our nation under the Australian flag.

When Patty Mills and Cate Campbell walked into the Olympic stadium and we saw our flag in their hands we let out a collective cheer.

We did so again last week when Danni Di Toro and Ryley Batt held our flag at the opening ceremony of the Paralympics.

For 120 years that flag has been there above and with Australians in our best of times and during the worst. During the triumphs of our achievements and in the horrors of the military battlefield. It flies over this Parliament on that great flag pole that is the apex of our national democracy.

I want to thank the Member for Stirling in bringing this motion to the House so we can properly acknowledge the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that moment our flag was first unfurled by Sir Edmund Barton to fly over the Royal Exhibition Building in Melbourne on 3 September 1901.

The path to federation and Australian nationhood was a singularly great achievement of the Australians of that time. We were a nation not born from conflict or revolutionary wars but instead created by the best of democratic ideals and processes.

It was to be a similar process for the design of the Australian flag, created as it was through an international design competition that attracted almost 33,000 entries.

The award for the winning design was to be shared by five people who represented the egalitarianism of the new Commonwealth.

Ivor Evans, was a fourteen-year-old schoolboy from Melbourne; Leslie John Hawkins, a teenager apprenticed to a Sydney optician; Egbert John Nuttall, a Melbourne architect; Annie Dorrington, an artist from Perth; and even a Kiwi was in the mix: William Stevens, a ship's officer from Auckland, New Zealand.

For their efforts, the winners shared in a 200 pound prize pool, including money donated by a tobacco company – something we probably best try to forget today. But it was a princely sum at the time.

Two years after its first display King Edward VII formally approved the design for the Flag of the Commonwealth Australia and in 1953 the Menzies government enacted the Flags Act which confirmed the blue ensign as our national flag.

In 1996 Australian National Flag Day was formally proclaimed by the Governor General and has been celebrated ever since on 3 September.

Sadly COVID restrictions will mean that many of the celebrations that otherwise would have been held this week have moved to online platforms.

As an ambassador for Flag Day Australia I had been looking forward to MC'ing the commemorations planned for Martin Place in Sydney, but this is not to be.

None-the-less this coming Friday is an important occasion to reflect on the history and the enduring symbolism of our flag.

I have long supported the Australian flag in its current form. In fact, one of my first television experiences was participating in A Current Affair debate on the future of the flag hosted by the legendary Jana Wendt between the then President of Young Labor and me, in my role as Young Liberal President.

Our flag reflects who and where we are as a nation.

The Southern Cross represents our geography as the most notable constellation of the southern skies.

Its importance spans tens of thousands of years for indigenous Australians as it has in more recent times for nations of the Southern Hemisphere like New Zealand and our own.

The Commonwealth star represents our federation with its representation of our six states and our territories.

The Union Jack, in recent times, has become perhaps the most contested element our flag.

In 1901 its presence would have been relatively uncontroversial such was our allegiance to Britain at the time.

Since then its significance has evolved. I see its presence as a reminder not just of our history. More importantly it is an enduring reminder that while our constitution was shaped by the democratic forms of many nations, including the structure of institutions in the United States, it is the liberal democratic ideals of the Westminster system that has guided our own development as a nation.

Symbols do matter and Australians are proud of the Australian flag.

So this Friday I hope all of us will pause to remember the incredible 120 year history of our flag and all it has and continues to represent about our incredible nation.