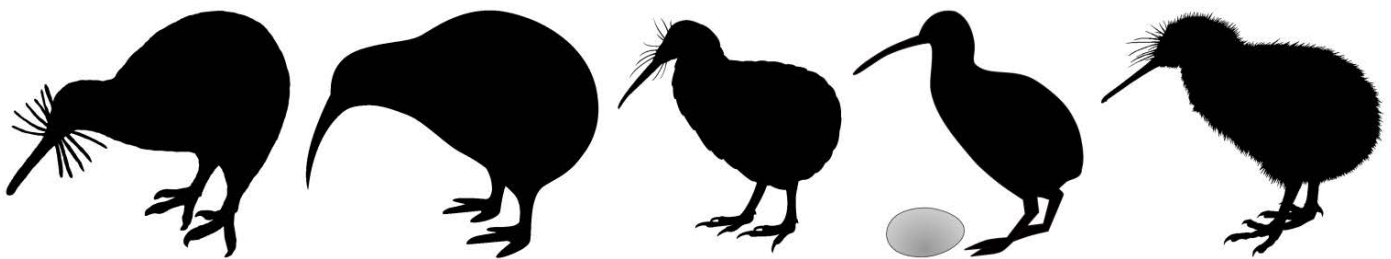


Arguably the three most internationally-recognised symbols of New Zealand, and thus those most suitable for use on a national flag, are the Southern Cross, the kiwi, and the silver fern. The Southern Cross is considered elsewhere on nz.flagoptions.com, so this document will limit its focus to the kiwi and silver fern.

In the wider world, the kiwi is probably best known as a black silhouette, generally one that is devoid of much realism. An abstract kiwi silhouette might also be acceptable for use on a national flag, but one could argue that a more realistic silhouette would be preferable. From a suitable image, one might trace and extract the kiwi that appears on the New Zealand dollar, for example, to derive something like the first silhouette depicted below. Compared to the second silhouette, which has been extracted from a New Zealand Air Force roundel, the 'dollar' kiwi might be the better, even if the somewhat less familiar, choice.

An Internet search for 'kiwi silhouette' will turn up a few that are both reasonably realistic and free to use, such as the remaining silhouettes depicted below, but one could wish for more. A comparative grouping of realistic silhouettes for all five kiwi species, for example, would be quite a find. In the end, a designer may only be able to obtain a 'perfect' kiwi silhouette by laboriously making one from scratch, beginning with a tracing from an image of an actual bird. Otherwise, the pickings will be pretty much as illustrated below.



The iconic silver fern is only one of hundreds of fern species in New Zealand, but for a national flag it is the only one that matters. Curiously though, the representations of silver fern fronds that New Zealanders are inundated with, in countless corporate and sporting logos, are predominantly abstract rather than realistic. One notable exception is the silver fern frond that is depicted on New Zealand passport covers.



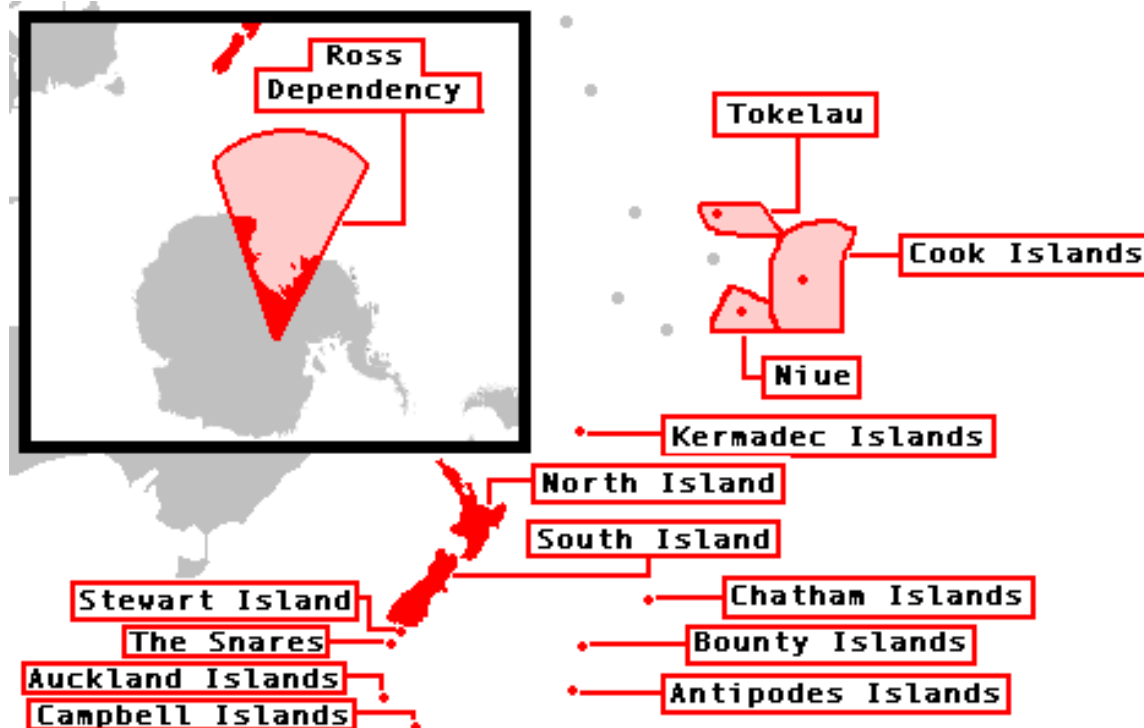
Actually the frond is only suggested, by an artful depiction of some of its leaves along the right edge of the cover. On a cursory glance the fern seems completely realistic, and the graphic designer responsible for the exemplary design certainly *began* with a real fern frond, or to be more precise, with a real *leaf* from a frond. Beginning at the bottom of the passport cover edge, that single leaf was then progressively copied upward with a proportionally smaller size. The fern frond is not actually true-to-life after all, and therein lies a lesson for would-be New Zealand flag designers: one can build a realistic *looking* silver fern frond from a single, genuinely realistic leaf. The advantage for the designer is complete control of the overall shape of the frond. In nature, by contrast, silver fern fronds exhibit all sorts of irregularities, including a few that a designer may want to emulate somewhat for greater realism, such as a curving stem or irregular leaf lengths and spacings.

Silver fern fronds are not only remarkable for their undersides.* Their leaves are almost perfectly-scaled miniatures of an entire frond, each with its own set of staggered leaves progressing to a point, such that one might be tempted to call them 'frondlets' instead of leaves, and each frondlet's 'leaflets' are doing their best to mimic the full frond as well. This beautiful property of natural 'self-similarity' is completely lost when a silver fern frond is given an abstract treatment, such as those that are routinely seen by New Zealanders in logos and the like, as well as on every new fern-based flag design that they have ever been exposed to.

The case made here is that a 'realistic' silver fern frond, built up in the manner illustrated by the New Zealand passport cover, will be a far better symbol for a New Zealand national flag than any abstract representation. Abstract silver ferns cannot *help* but seem like logos, because virtually every possible abstract version of a silver fern is in fact being *used* as a logo, right now, all over New Zealand and even far beyond its borders. By contrast there is nothing *less* logo-like than a realistic silver fern frond. Modern flag manufacturing processes can easily accommodate more realistic versions of silver fern fronds, mooted that argument, so the only remaining argument is that of pedantic vexillologists, who loathe anything realistic on a flag, obtusely insisting that only stylised abstractions are suitable. Tell that to the people of Norfolk Island. If the pine on their flag were any more stylised it would simply be a green triangle.

National flags often include stripes, stars, or other elements of a certain number to symbolise specific aspects of the nation that the flag represents. On the flag of the USA, for example, thirteen red-and-white stripes represent that nation's original colonies, whilst fifty white stars represent its current states. On the Oz flag, each seven-pointed star mirrors the Commonwealth Star in their Coat of Arms, and likewise represents Australia's six official states and its various territories.

The whole of the Realm of New Zealand is comprised of more than 600 islands, but several more manageable numbers can be used symbolically for a New Zealand flag, based on certain criteria, and depending upon how one counts.



The '**New Zealand mainland**' is sometimes regarded to be only the North Island and the South Island (**2 islands**), but usually it is considered to include Stewart Island (**3 islands**).

'**New Zealand proper**' is perhaps most often regarded as a unitary term that includes the three islands of the mainland plus all of the offshore islands within five kilometres. However, all of New Zealand proper is divided into official regions (**16 regions**).

The parts of the full '**Realm of New Zealand**' can be numbered in several different ways. The major constituents are often listed as NZ proper plus the four pink areas in the map above, namely the Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau, and the Ross Dependency (**5 items total**), but one can also think of the realm as including the Chatham Islands, the Kermadec Islands (**7 items total**), or even the New Zealand Subantarctic Islands (**8 items total**).

Alternatively one can think of the realm as including the three main islands of NZ proper plus four, six, or seven of the other items listed above (**7 items total, 9 items total or 10 items total**), but there is nothing to stop one from thinking of the realm as being the sixteen official regions of NZ proper plus four, five, six, or seven of the above items (**20, 21, 22, or 23 items total**).

One can easily justify the use of sixteen stripes, stars, or other items in a New Zealand flag design. One could also use one to three items of the same type to represent the main islands of NZ proper, with four, six, eight, or more items of a different type to represent the broader realm, or one might even rationalise a grouping of, say, up to 23 or 24 identical items to represent the entire realm.

* Various 'fiddlehead' fern species exist throughout the world, but in New Zealand the spirals of unfurling silver fern fronds, or perhaps more often the abstract Māori motifs that they inspire, are called koru. Koru-based designs are widely used in New Zealand, with or without Māori consent, but arguably neither they nor any other Māori symbols are appropriate for a national flag, any more than a Scottish bagpipe, a Polynesian fly-whisk, or an Asian yin-yang. Appropriating a symbol of *any* minority New Zealand culture for use as the main focus of a national flag design would be entirely antithetical to the broader purposes of that flag.

Of all the recommendations given in the '[Precepts](#)' PDF concerning the design of a New Zealand national flag, that which advises against the use of Māori iconography is perhaps most apt to meet resistance. Whether from a conscientiousness desire to be culturally inclusive, or simply from 'white guilt', the urge to make any new national flag tip a hat to Māori culture can be strong. The purpose of this addendum, then, is to bolster the arguments for abstaining from such approaches.

Amongst the flag design submissions for the 2015/2016 New Zealand flag referendums, the well-intentioned impulse to pay some kind of homage to the Māori origins of the nation was manifested in two general categories, first as designs for which a Māori symbol served as the main focal element, and second as designs for which Māori-style motifs were incorporated.

Designs in the first category included all those for which a koru was the most prominent element, as well as the central red triangle of the Red Peak flag, given that it symbolised, according to social media hype, the red meeting house of a Māori marae. Any designs based on Māori weapons such as mere or taiaha would also have been included in this category, as would any designs representing a whakairo carving, a waka, a hei-tiki, a haka dancer silhouette, a hongī greeting silhouette, or any other exclusively Māori symbol.

Designs in the second category included all those that had 'Māori-stylised' Union Jacks, that is, Jacks that were modified to incorporate koru-based curlicues rather than all straight lines, as well as any other design elements that were embellished with curling flourishes, tukutuku weaving patterns, or other Māori motifs.

Designs of the first category, for example those based on koru, could not be thought of as 'national' flags but essentially only as Māori flags, hence they were unlikely to ever garner the wide support of a Pākehā-majority nation, nor even from other cultural segments of the populace, including from other Polynesian minorities. Given that Māori are already well-represented by their own flags, as shown to the left, it would hardly be appropriate to also give the NZ national flag a 'Māori-esque' character, no matter how well-meaning the impulse to do so.



Designs of the second category with stylised Union Jacks were certainly artistic, and the efforts of their designers to meld Pākehā and Māori culture into a single symbol were admirable, but a Union Jack is still a Union Jack. A primary motivation for flag change is to replace the Jack with far more appropriate New Zealand symbols like the silver fern or the kiwi silhouette, so retaining *any* dominant Jack will be a no-go.



Flag designs with Māori-stylised main features besides the Union Jack were also inappropriate, as well as unlikely to be widely recognised internationally. Taken to an extreme, one ends up with something like Shane Hansen's 'Te Tui Wairua' design, which is artistically fabulous yet is arguably simply another form of a Māori flag.

Notwithstanding all of the above, it is still possible to honour Māori in a national flag design through the incorporation of red-white-and-black, since New Zealand's national colours are widely regarded to include black as well as red-white-and-blue. Otherwise a flag's design will best be free of *any* Māori character. It is well-documented that the Māori turnout for the 2015/2016 flag referendums was extremely low, and that the small Māori voting block was mainly in favour of retaining the current flag. It is reasonable to conclude that flag designs with koru or curlicues are unlikely to ever inspire Māori, who already have their own good flags. More importantly, such designs are guaranteed to be even *less* inspiring to the New Zealand majority.

Finally, those who have reviewed this website may point out that some of the flag designs that it showcases are evocative of the Union Jack. This is not hypocrisy. The ideal national flag will please the greatest number of New Zealanders. Most Pākehā, or a 'majority of the majority' if you will, and even many Māori, take genuine pride in the colonial English heritage of New Zealand. Evoking the Union Jack as a minor element in a new flag design is therefore not off-limits, as long as that evocation does not dominate the design nor supplant more appropriate New Zealand symbols. Actually, any design with a vertical or a diagonal cross, red stripes, white stripes, red stripes atop white stripes, or simply some red-white-and-blue, will more or less *unavoidably* evoke the Union Jack. It is neither necessary nor especially desirable for a new national flag of New Zealand to be a *complete* departure from the current flag, either in colour or in content, and possibly the more severe its departure, the less likely it will be to enjoy majority support.