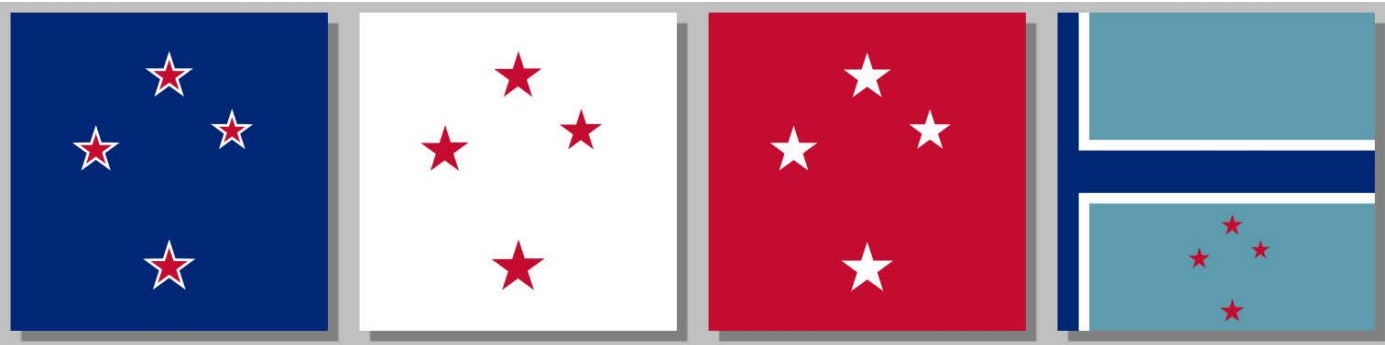
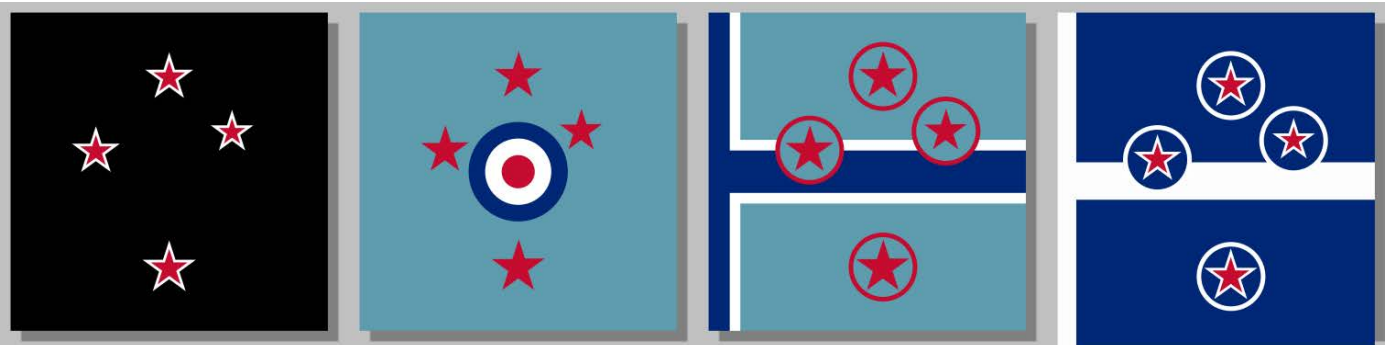


About 150 years ago, New Zealand depicted the Southern Cross on the fly of its national flag. It was the first nation to do so, preceding Australia by more than 30 years. The design of the New Zealand version has never varied. It consists of four stars, each with five points. On the fly of the national flag the stars are red, further contrasted from the blue field by a white fimbriation. The same fly, with a red-and-white Southern Cross on a blue field, is also currently used for the Customs Service ensign, the Army ensign, the government ships ensign, and the Ross Dependency flag.

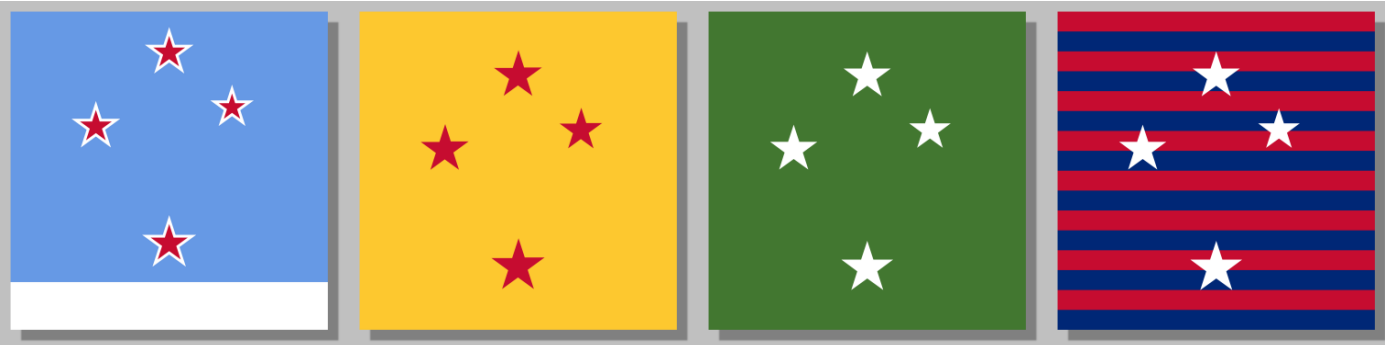
The design has also been easily adapted to other official New Zealand flags. For naval ships ensigns, red stars appear on a white field. For civil ships ensigns, white stars appear on a red field. For civil aviation ensigns, red stars appear on an azure blue field. No matter the colour of the stars or of the field, the design is iconic. As a result it is arguably the most internationally recognised symbol of New Zealand, even surpassing silver fern fronds and kiwi silhouettes.



It would therefore be the height of folly for a new national flag design to do away with the Southern Cross. Nor would the Cross be likely to retain its current recognisability and symbolic strength if it is resized or reoriented for a new flag. Such changes would also negatively impact the practicality of the Southern Cross for use in other official flags and ensigns of New Zealand. If anything the use of the Cross should be expanded, in revised Army, Air Force, and civil aviation ensigns, and possibly others. The stars of the Cross might be given circular backgrounds or 'halos' when other elements appear in the fly, to better offset the stars and to make them effectively larger and more easily recognised.



There are several logical implications. A new national flag cannot have a white, red, or azure blue fly, because those fly colours must be reserved for civil and Defence Forces ensigns. A new flag might have a black fly, like that suggested for the Army ensign fly above, but black flags can have negative connotations. A powder blue fly, like that proposed for the fly of the Ross Dependency flag below, would be difficult to distinguish from azure blue. A gold fly would conflict with the current colour of the Niue flag. A green fly would probably simply be unpopular. It follows that there is a strong argument to retain the blue fly of the current national flag, along with the Southern Cross in its current format.



The one permissible alternative would be a fly with stripes in two colours, probably red-and-black or red-and-blue, as in the example at the right above, in which sixteen stripes might represent New Zealand's regions. Such a fly would be utterly distinctive from those of all other national flags, for which multiple stripes are always red-and-white or blue-and-white. The stripes would vastly improve recognition of the flag in windless conditions, when the stars of the Southern Cross can become lost in the folds. White stars would also afford far better contrast than the red stars of the current flag, whilst the stripes would prevent any possible confusion with the white stars of Australia's Southern Cross.