

Australia's national anthem

Advance Australia Fair – written and composed by Peter Dodds McCormick in 1878 – was proclaimed Australia's national anthem on 19 April 1984. The former national anthem *God Save the Queen* remained the Royal anthem to be played at occasions in Australia attended by members of the Royal family.

Deciding a national anthem

God Save the Queen (or *King* depending on the gender of the British monarch) had been used on official and ceremonial occasions since Federation in 1901. Over the twentieth century – and especially during times of war – there were periods of interest in it being replaced by an anthem representing Australian nationalism and achievement.

The 1970s competitions

The Australian National Anthem and Flag Quests Committee, a non-government body, launched a competition for a new national flag and anthem in August 1971. By Australia Day 1972 over 400 hundred entries had been received. These were handed to the Australian Council for the Arts for judging. Prime Minister Gough Whitlam announced in January 1973 that the Council would conduct a national anthem quest offering monetary prizes for lyrics and music. Of the 2500 lyric entries submitted, the judges selected just six as suitable with each writer awarded \$500. All 1300 music entries received were rejected.

The 1974 public opinion poll

In February 1974 the Australian Bureau of Statistics held a public opinion poll to determine the relative popularity of the three 'unofficial' Australian songs: *Advance Australia Fair*, *Waltzing Matilda* and *Song of Australia*. Just over half of the 60 000 people sampled preferred *Advance Australia Fair* (51.4 per cent), followed by *Waltzing Matilda* (19.6 per cent). Using this result Prime Minister Whitlam announced to Parliament on 8 April 1974 that *Advance Australia Fair* had been chosen by the people of Australia as the new national anthem (but *God Save the Queen* would be retained for all regal occasions).

In 1976 the incoming government of Malcolm Fraser reinstated *God Save the Queen* as the 'national anthem' to be played on all regal and vice-regal occasions but provided that for civilian events, any of the four songs could be used.

The 1977 plebiscite

Another poll to select a tune for a national song was conducted in May 1977. Fueled by debate in 1976 over an appropriate song to represent Australia at the Montreal Olympic Games, the Fraser government requested the Australian Electoral Office hold a direct national poll in conjunction with a set of constitutional referenda. Over 7 million of the 8.4 million people on the electoral roll chose to vote. Again, *Advance Australia Fair* was the preferred song, followed by *Waltzing Matilda*, *God Save the Queen* and *Song of Australia*.

Even after the plebiscite, a further seven years and a change of government passed before *Advance Australia Fair* was proclaimed as Australia's national anthem.

Records relating to Australia's national anthem

The National Archives holds a range of records relating to the national anthem. The table below includes records of the Australian National Anthem and Flag Quests Committee including entries received, records of the 1974 poll, miscellaneous correspondence from government departments, a Cabinet Office record and the copyright registration for *Advance Australia Fair*. Individual items as well as whole series of records relating to the national anthem are listed.

Registrar of Copyright – New South Wales (CA 1275)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Advance Australia Fair – assignment of copyright</u>	1914–43	A1718, 196

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (CA1401)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Australian national anthem – suggestions</u>	1948–55	A463, 1956/232 part 1
<u>Australian national anthem – suggestions</u>	1955–60	A463, 1956/232 part 2
<u>Australian national anthem – suggestions</u>	1960	A463, 1956/232 part 3
<u>Development of an Australian national anthem and tune for a national song</u>	1967–74	A1209, 1978/1103 part 1
<u>Development of an Australian national anthem and tune for a national song</u>	1974–76	A1209, 1978/1103 part 2
<u>Development of an Australian national anthem and tune for a national song</u>	1976	A1209, 1978/1103 part 3
<u>Development of an Australian national anthem and tune for a national song</u>	1976–77	A1209, 1978/1103 part 4
<u>Parliamentary question 526 – poll to determine a new national anthem for Australia</u>	1973	A463, 1973/4441

<u>National anthem quest – administrative procedures</u>	1973–88	A463, 1973/2555
<u>National anthem – state preferences</u>	1976	M1356, 37
<u>National anthem</u>	1976–83	A1209, 1977/1164

Prime Minister’s Department (CA 12)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>National anthem Advance Australia Fair proposal</u>	1953	A462, 828/4/7

Australian High Commission, United Kingdom (CA 241)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Suggestions for a new Australian national anthem</u>	1967–73	A3211, 1973/128 part 1
<u>Suggestions for a new Australian national anthem</u>	1973–74	A3211, 1973/128 part 2

Australian National Anthem and Flag Quests Committee (CA 1457)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Records of the Australian National Anthem and Flag Quests Committee</u>	1971–74	AA1975/370
<u>Correspondence and sound recordings in relation to entries submitted for national anthem contest</u>	1971–74	C1969

Department of Immigration (CA 51)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Proposal for new national anthem</u>	1972–78	A446, 1973/95005

Australian Bureau of Statistics (CA 1776)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Records of the national anthem public opinion poll</u>	1973–74	AA1974/619

Governor-General (CA 1)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Petition from Mr Freeman – Australian national anthem</u>	1973–74	A2880, 2/6/70

Cabinet Office (CA 1472)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>The Australian national anthem [Submission Nos. 1825, 1898, 2495 and 5271 refer]</u>	1976–82	A10756, LC91 part 1

How to find more information

Individual record items about the national anthems, including sound recordings, can be identified by conducting searches in [RecordSearch](#). Try keyword phrases such as: 'national anthem', 'anthem quest', 'anthem contest', and 'australian anthem'. RecordSearch is available in all research centres and on our website.