

Ensigns of New Zealand

Dean Thomas

As the roots of New Zealand’s flags lie in the ensigns of the United Kingdom, one can correctly ascertain at a quick glance that New Zealand was a former colony. However, retaining these designs—given New Zealand’s current status as a Dominion of the Crown—contrasts with the majority of former British colonies. Various ensigns now in use in New Zealand have “broken the mold” somewhat, with a potpourri of tradition and originality.

Blue Ensign/National Flag

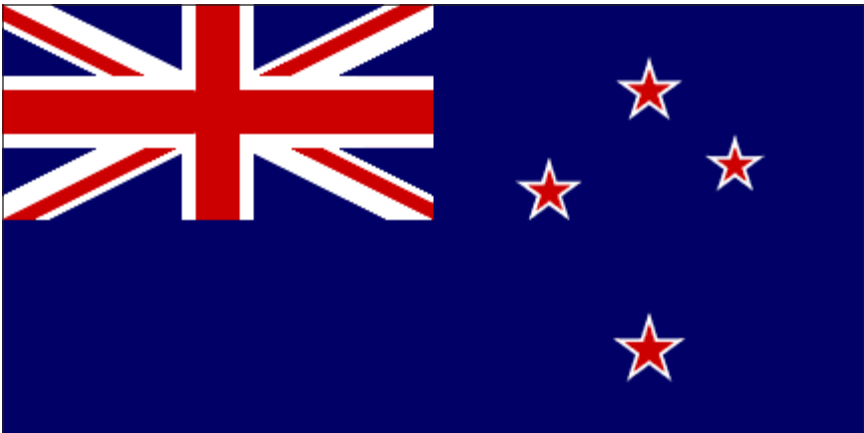


Figure 1. R/W/B

The Imperial Colonial Naval Defence Act of 1865 ruled that all ships owned by a colonial government must fly the Blue Ensign with the badge of the colony on it. At that time, New Zealand did not have an official badge or emblem—only the Union Jack—and as such flew the Blue Ensign without a distinguishing badge. In 1866, the government steamers *St. Kilda* and *Sturt* were reprimanded by visiting British ships for flying the Blue Ensign without the colony's badge. This embarrassment prompted the government to devise an emblem for placement on the flag, in compliance with the Act.

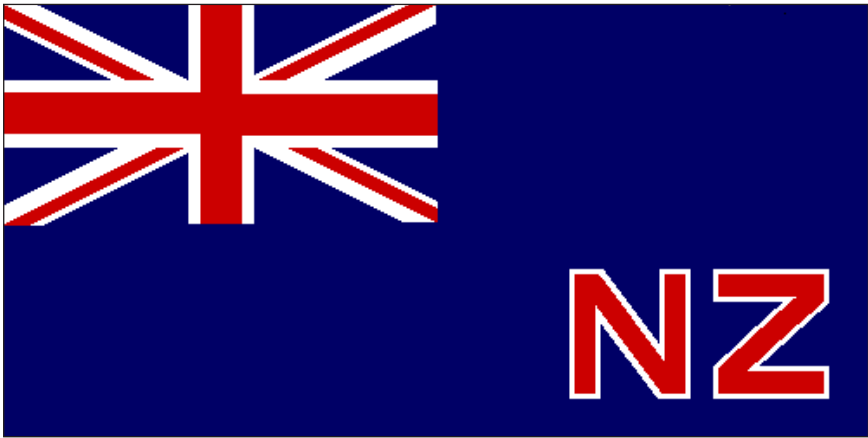


Figure 2. 1867 Blue Ensign, R/W/B

Initial ideas for the design of New Zealand's emblem included the seal of New Zealand and the words "New Zealand", however both were found too difficult to work into the design of the Blue Ensign. Four stars in the form of the Southern Cross were also proposed, but were rejected as not being exclusively representative of New Zealand. In 1867, the colonial government settled on the abbreviation "NZ" in red lettering with a white border to represent New Zealand on the Blue Ensign. This emblem was short-lived and in 1869 was replaced by the earlier suggestion of the Southern Cross, composed of four red stars fimbriated in white. (The origin of this suggestion remains a mystery.)

Officially, this flag was only for maritime purposes, but it gradually came to be used on land even though the Union Jack remained the sole

legal flag of New Zealand. Further confusion was caused by the introduction of a new International Code of Signals, which instituted a new signaling flag for New Zealand in 1899. The signaling flag was identical to the Southern Cross flag except for the addition of a white disc surrounding the red stars; it came into force 1 January 1900.

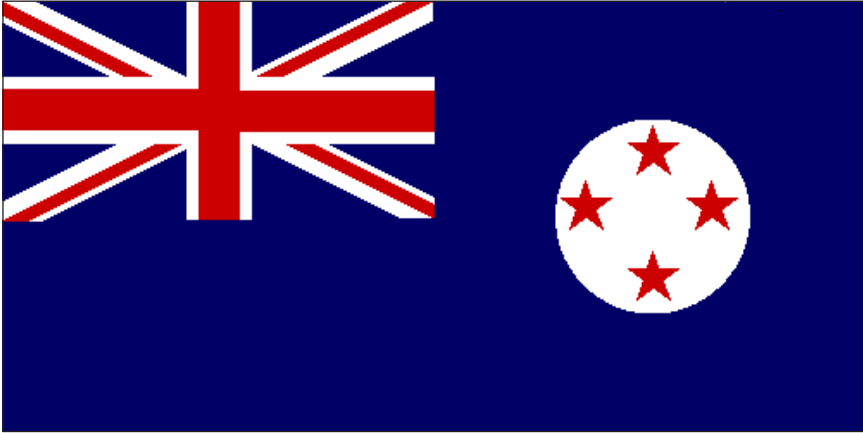


Figure 3. 1899 Signaling Flag, R/W/B

That flag was also for use at sea or in foreign ports. However, its use spread on shore to public buildings and commercial advertising, causing much consternation in the New Zealand House of Representatives. During parliament debates it was harshly described as being ‘mutilated’ or ‘an abortion’ or, more curiously, as ‘a Hennessy’s brandy capsule’. With the outbreak of the Boer War in 1899 and its associated patriotism and flag-waving, the confusion surrounding the correct flag was an embarrassment to New Zealand’s premier, Richard Seddon.

Seddon’s response was to introduce the New Zealand Ensign and Code Signals Bill in 1900 to make the Blue Ensign with the stars of the Southern Cross in the 1867 format (red stars fimbriated in white and no disc) the legal flag of New Zealand. The Bill received general acclaim in the House, but met with opposition when it reached Sir Robert Stout, who was acting as governor in the absence of the Earl of Ranfurly. Stout disapproved of the Bill as he felt the clause reserving the Act for Her Majesty’s approval trampled on the governor’s right to decide an appropriate course of action.

Seddon disagreed, and refused to alter the offending clause, as he considered a constitutional principle to be at stake. In the end, the wrangling all came to nothing as the British Admiralty had concerns entirely unrelated to the mechanism by which the Bill was set aside for Queen Victoria's assent.

The British Admiralty objected to the proposed use of the Blue Ensign 'for all purposes', as set out in the preamble of the Act. In the United Kingdom, the privilege of flying the Blue Ensign was reserved for government ships and other distinguished vessels. It was feared that this distinction would be watered down should the New Zealand bill be approved, as all New Zealand-registered merchant ships would be automatically granted the right to fly the Blue Ensign under its provisions. The New Zealand government therefore agreed to specifically limit the use of the Blue Ensign at sea to those 'vessels owned and used by the New Zealand Government', or where a warrant to fly the Ensign had been obtained from the Admiralty.

The Bill was replaced by another modified New Zealand Ensign Act, which was passed by the House on 5 November 1901, after debate as to whether the Southern Cross ought to include five stars as did the flag of Victoria (Australia). His Majesty King George V approved the Act on 24 March 1902 and His Excellency the Governor's proclamation to this effect was published in the New Zealand Gazette on 12 June 1902. A description of the flag followed on 27 June 1902, detailing alterations to the size and position of the stars. The Act was replaced by various Shipping and Seamen's Acts, including those of 1903 and 1908, but the provisions concerning the New Zealand flag remained effectively unchanged until the Flags, Emblems, and Names Protection Act of 1981 came into force.

The royal assent granted on 12 June 1902 is regarded as the official birthday of New Zealand's national flag. As a vehicle flag, the New Zealand Blue Ensign is only authorized to be used by the prime minister, government ministers, ambassadors, and high commissioners.

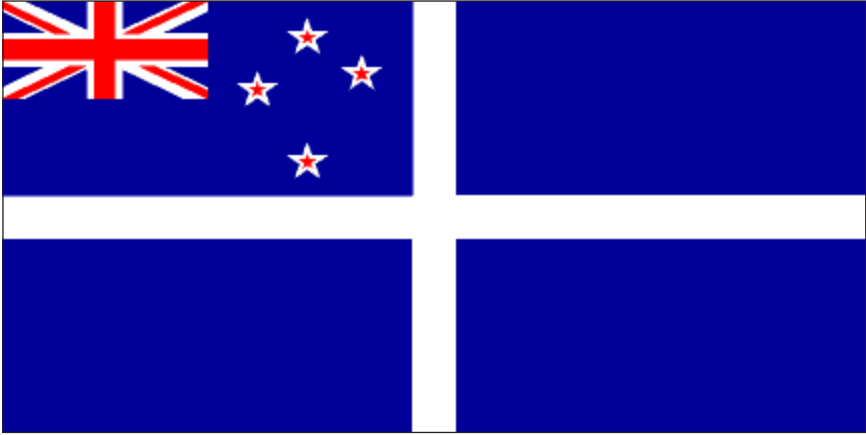
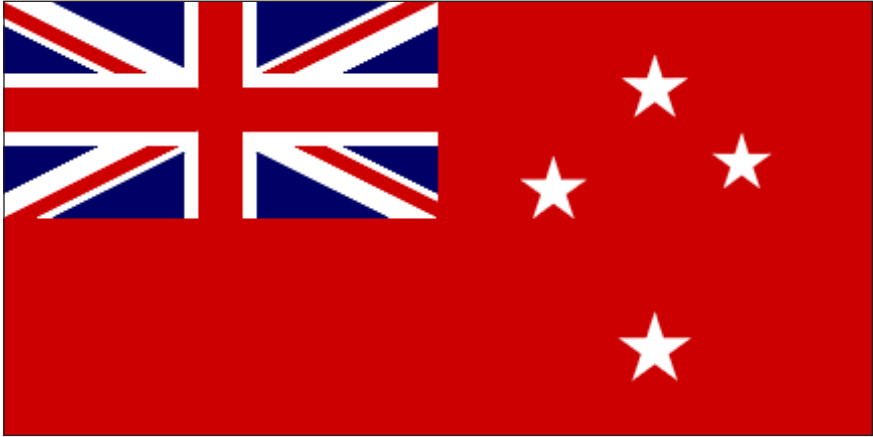
New Zealand (Yacht) Blue Ensign

Figure 4. W/B

The New Zealand (Yacht) Blue Ensign, authorized in August 2000 for restricted use in New Zealand and overseas, was derived from the pre-1893 ensign of the Auckland Sailing Club (which became the Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron in 1902). Its use is currently restricted to the RNZYS (Auckland) and the Royal Akarana Yacht Club (Auckland), and to their members. Both clubs have adopted rules regulating the ensign's use, consistent with the traditional rules for the use of the British Blue Ensign, traditional flag etiquette, and New Zealand legal requirements. Royal Port Nicholson Yacht Club (Wellington) elected not to receive a royal license for the new ensign.

Starting in 1902, these three yacht clubs and their members had been granted the right to fly a British Blue Ensign on their vessels. (Today the flag officers of the RNZYS may apply for warrants to wear the New Zealand White Ensign—the Naval Ensign—on their own yachts.) The version granted in 1938 for the Royal Akarana Yacht Club was defaced with the Club's badge of a naval crown above a Polynesian voyaging canoe. Various legal issues contributed to the evolution of those ensigns' use and the eventual adoption of the new ensign in 2000.

Red Ensign*Figure 5. W/R*

With the New Zealand Ensign Act of 1902, the New Zealand Red Ensign, with four white stars in the same positions as on the Blue Ensign, became the correct flag for New Zealand merchant vessels. Due to the significance of the color red to the indigenous Maori population, the Act allowed the Red Ensign to be used on land on occasions of Maori significance.

In 1887, the British Board of Trade had set up a committee to revise the International Code of Signals. Details of the revised code, due to come into use on 1 January 1901, were published in 1898. It continued the existing practices in force at the time that, “A ship wishing to make a signal hoists her ensign with the code flag under”. A new ensign therefore was introduced to identify British colonial merchant ships, which consisted of a white circle in the fly of the Red Ensign, with the badge of the colony inside the circle.

The nautical adviser to the New Zealand Marine Department had recommended that four red stars be set in the circle on the Red Ensign for New Zealand-registered merchant vessels, and a similar badge used on the Blue Ensign for government vessels. The New Zealand House of Representatives agreed, and the governor of New Zealand, the Earl of Ranfurly, forwarded a request for approval of these ensigns to London on 5 July 1898. The ensigns were authorized by an Admiralty Warrant dated 7 February

1899, announced in the New Zealand Gazette on 23 November 1899, and came into use on 1 January 1900.

The New Zealand Red Ensign had not been changed by the New Zealand Ensign Act 1902, but in the following year, the Shipping and Seamen Act, Part XIV, (No. 96) Section 341, replaced the white disc in the fly of the Red Ensign with four five-pointed white stars, placed in the same positions as on the Blue Ensign.

White Ensign

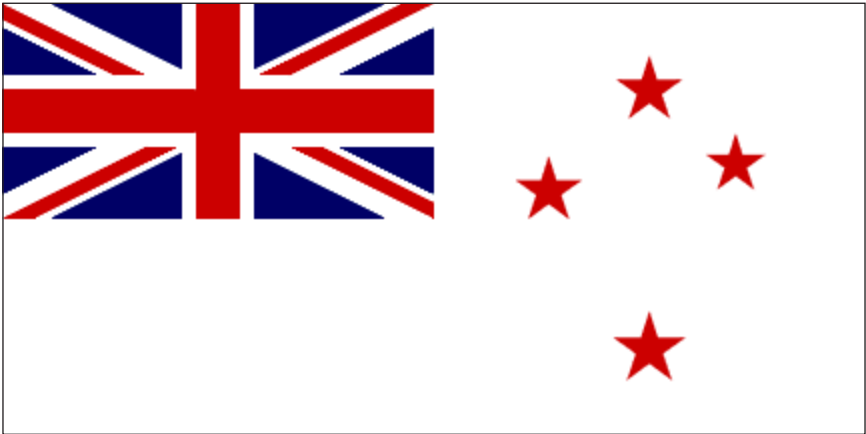


Figure 6. R/W

Under the same 1869 proclamation that created the Blue Ensign with the white-fimbriated stars, New Zealand naval vessels were entitled to wear the British Blue Ensign with the badge of the colony in the fly. Since the formation of the Royal New Zealand Navy, the British White Ensign was used to show its close connection with the Royal Navy. In peacetime this was usually worn on the New Zealand Station from 8 A.M. local time until sunset, but in wartime it was worn continuously. It was also worn continuously on any ship flying the Royal Standard and on any vessel escorting a ship flying the Royal Standard or the standard of a foreign head of state.

On 20 June 1968, at the Navy Office HMNZS Wakefield, in Wellington, the new naval ensign was officially hoisted, replacing the British White

Ensign. According to the *New Zealand White Ensign Regulations 1968*:

The ensign shall comply with the description of the New Zealand Ensign, as set out in the notice by the Minister of Marine published in the Gazette on the 24th day of June 1902..., save that the lower canton of the hoist and the fly thereof shall be white and the Southern Cross on the fly shall be represented by red stars as in the New Zealand ensign increased by the width of the white borders to the stars in that ensign.

The resulting flag is of the same layout as the New Zealand Red Ensign, except that the red background and white stars were exchanged. Certain officers of the Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron are entitled to use the White Ensign on their yachts.

Royal New Zealand Air Force Ensign



Figure 7. R/W/B/B–

Like the Blue, Red, and White Ensigns, the ensign of the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) follows the British pattern—in this case the Royal Air Force Ensign.

The RNZAF Ensign, created in August 1939, is identical to the RAF Ensign (a Cambridge blue [Pantone 557] background with the red-white-

blue roundel in the fly), except for the letters N and Z (in white) placed in the center of the red disc of the roundel. The square periods after both letters were removed when the RNZAF Ensign design was revised in 1960.

The letters are now as large as possible within the red roundel and thus elongated and noticeably taller than they are wide. The flag is officially described as “the Ensign of the Royal Air Force defaced by the addition of the letters N Z superimposed in white upon the red roundel of the ensign” (PRO document AIR 30/140).

The Royal New Zealand Air Force Ensign is hoisted daily at RNZAF establishments and Air Training Corps squadrons. It is also flown on RNZAF aircraft carrying foreign and commonwealth heads of state and heads of government, the prime minister, cabinet ministers, the chiefs of staff, ambassadors, and other distinguished persons.

Civil Air Ensign

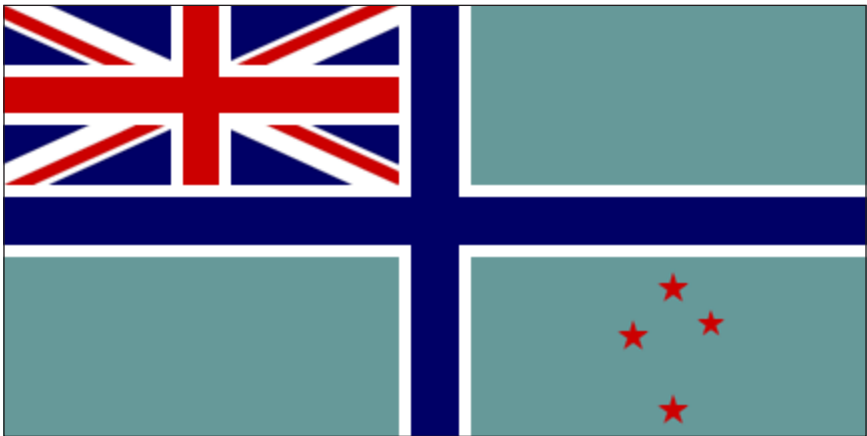


Figure 8. R/B—, Cross B/W

Continuing the practice of adapting existing British Flag designs for local use, the New Zealand Civil Air Ensign—the civilian counterpart to the RNZAF Ensign—was brought into use to be used by New Zealand-registered aircraft (non-military). This flag was adopted for use on 16 November 1938. It is identical to the British Civil Air Flag, which is Cam-

bridge blue with a dark blue cross fimbriated in white, except that it adds four white-edged red five-pointed stars in the pattern of the New Zealand National Flag in the lower fly quarter.

This flag was instituted by an exercise of the Royal prerogative. Governor-general Lord Galway submitted the original design to King George VI and, upon his Majesty's pleasure being made known, the flag became "recognized as the proper national colors to be flown by British aircraft registered in New Zealand".

The ensign may be flown on any New Zealand aircraft, licensed aerodrome, or place authorized as an aerodrome. Also, airlines owning New Zealand-registered aircraft may fly the ensign upon or in proximity to their principal office or place of business.

The Civil Aviation Authority of New Zealand may also fly the New Zealand Civil Air Ensign on its buildings and aircraft. However, individuals wishing to fly the ensign must first obtain permission in writing from the Director of Civil Aviation (c/o Civil Aviation Authority of New Zealand, Aviation House, P.O. Box 31441, LOWER HUTT 6315).

This flag is one of the least commonly seen of all of the New Zealand ensigns. It has generally fallen into disuse in favor of the Blue Ensign. According to Christian Fogd Pedersen's *Flaggor i färg*, 1973, the colors of the Civil Air Ensign should be the same as the Air Force Ensign.

Police Ensign



Figure 9. R/W/B

The New Zealand Police Ensign was first instituted in 1961 and is flown at every police headquarters station in New Zealand, or where a commissioned officer is in charge. This flag broke the tradition of other New Zealand flags in that instead of the Union Jack being in the canton, the entire New Zealand Blue Ensign was placed in the canton.

The background of the flag is royal blue and the emblem of the New Zealand Police (the letters NZP surmounted by a crown and bordered by two ferns—all in white) appear in the fly. The NZP emblem usually appears as a screen-printed patch, though flags with appliquéd emblems are starting to appear.

Only one flag company has the contract to manufacture this flag in New Zealand—Flagmakers NZ in Wellington. Written permission must be obtained from the New Zealand Police before Flagmakers can sell this flag to any non-police affiliated person or group.

Ministry of Transport Ensign

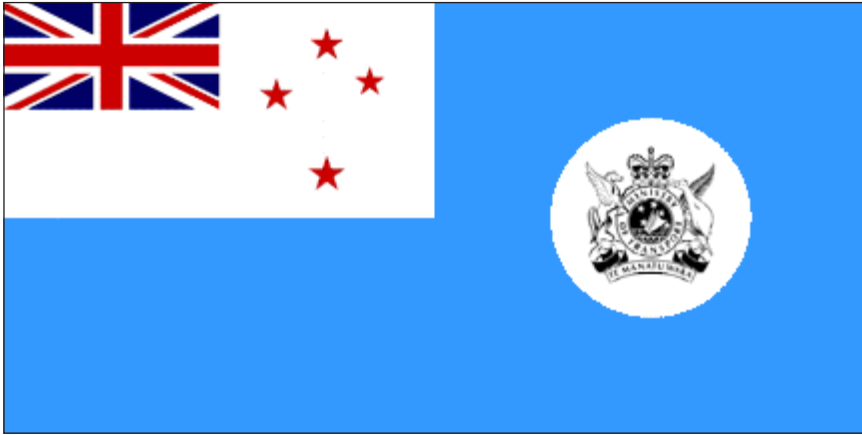


Figure 10. W/B—

The Ministry of Transport Ensign was established in 1968: a field of Cambridge blue with the New Zealand Naval Ensign forming the canton, and the Ministry's badge within a white disc in the fly. When the Transport Department merged with the Air Department in 1968—becoming the Ministry of Transport—the flag was introduced with the intent of reinforcing its image as a law enforcement agency. This flag flew at the Transport Ministry in Wellington. After the merger of the ministry's Law Enforcement Division (Traffic Police) with the New Zealand Police, the ministry became a policy—rather than enforcement—ministry, and as such the flag has not been used since 1998.

The flag has been very rarely seen in New Zealand. While the Cambridge Blue background can be said to have been derived from the Air Department part of the Ministry of Transport, the use of the New Zealand Naval Ensign has been far more difficult to explain, as the Ministry of Transport is not part of the RNZN or the Ministry of Defense.

Fire Service Ensign



Figure 11. R/W/B

One of the newer ensigns used in New Zealand (post-1990), the Fire Service Ensign follows the same design format as that of the Police Ensign, except the Fire Service emblem is placed in the fly.

The flag is invariably screen-printed rather than appliquéd, given the complexity of the Fire Service emblem.

As with the Police Ensign, only one company has the contract to manufacture this flag in New Zealand—Flagmakers NZ in Wellington, and written permission must be obtained from the New Zealand Fire Service before Flagmakers can sell this flag to any person or group not affiliated with the Fire Service.

New Zealand Customs Ensign



Figure 12. R/W/B

According to the regulations of New Zealand Customs: “The Customs flag shall be the New Zealand Ensign with the addition in the fly of the words ‘NZ Customs Service’ in bold characters [in white].” (Cf. 1966, No. 19, s. 11)

The resulting flag has to be regarded as the most uninspiring design of all of the New Zealand government ensigns. This ensign replaced an earlier design (below).

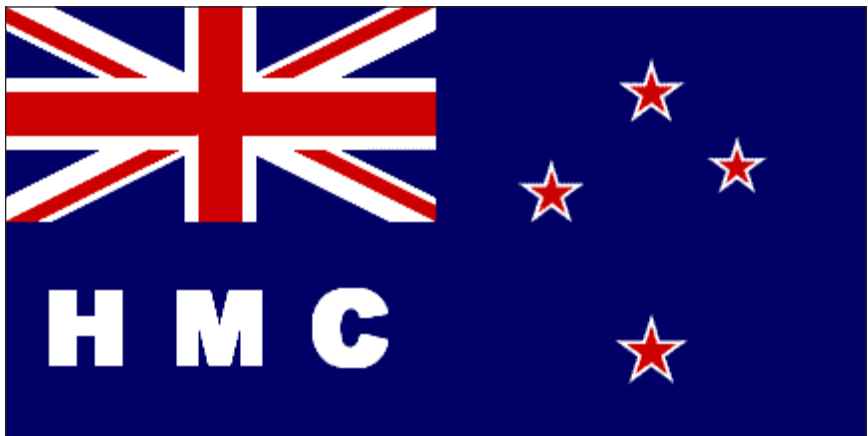


Figure 13, Pre-1966 Customs Ensign R/W/B

In fact, *An Encyclopedia of New Zealand* (1966) gives this information on the earlier flag:

The (New Zealand Customs Department) Flag is flown over the HM Customs Department's Building in Wellington and consists of the letters 'H.M.C.' in bold white capitals beneath the Union Jack on the New Zealand Ensign.

Conclusion

Each of these ensigns, in some way, recalls its British counterpart. All but one use the Southern Cross in red stars—sometimes fimbriated in white, and when on a white field, slightly enlarged. Some use an entire national flag or other ensign as a canton—leading to a flag on a flag on a flag. Their fields all draw on the usual palette of blue, red, white, and Cambridge blue. Developed over more than a century's time, they show remarkable consistency.

Debate about changing the national flag continues in New Zealand. Should such a change take place, the other ensigns in use would inevitably change as well. However, as the country's mood still favors retaining the current Blue Ensign, no undue urgency regarding the other flags seems evident.

Source of illustrations. Flags of the World (fotw.net).