



# about Australia

## national anthem

- 'Advance Australia Fair' is the national anthem of Australia. A revised version of a late nineteenth century patriotic song, it was officially declared the national anthem on 19 April 1984.

### The composer

Peter Dodds McCormick, a Scot, composed 'Advance Australia Fair' under the pen-name 'Amicus' (*amicus* is the Latin word for 'friend'). It was first performed in Sydney on Saint Andrew's Day, 1878. An amended version was also sung by a choir of 10,000 at the inauguration of the Commonwealth of Australia on 1 January, 1901. In 1907, the Australian Government awarded McCormick £100 for his composition. Peter McCormick died in 1916 and 'Advance Australia Fair' became free of copyright in 1966. The Commonwealth of Australia, however, does copyright the officially proclaimed lyrics and particular arrangements of music. Non-commercial public use of the anthem is permitted, but commercial use requires permission.

Some of the original words of the song have been changed for the official version. 'Australia's sons let us rejoice' was the original first line; this has been replaced with 'Australians all let us rejoice'. In the third verse of the original song, two lines were changed—'To make our youthful Commonwealth' became 'To make this Commonwealth of ours', and 'For loyal sons beyond the seas' became 'For those who've come across the seas'.

### How 'Advance Australia Fair' became the national anthem

The official anthem was 'God Save the Queen' (or 'King') from 1788 to 1974, although numerous commercial and official competitions were held over the years to find a substitute. The first was held in 1840.

John Dunmore Lang, who published an 'Australian Anthem' and an 'Australian Hymn' in 1826, was an early advocate of a distinctively Australian anthem. Carl Linger of South Australia wrote 'The Song of Australia' in 1860, and it was suggested to the Prime Minister in 1929 as a possible national anthem.

The issue of a truly national anthem was raised persistently before the 1956 Olympic Games, which were held in Melbourne. 'Advance Australia Fair' and 'Waltzing Matilda' were the two songs most strongly favoured then as the new anthem. 'Waltzing Matilda' was composed in 1895, with lyrics by one of Australia's best known poets, AB 'Banjo' Paterson.

On Australia Day, 26 January, in 1972, the number of entries (more than 400) received in an Australia-wide national anthem quest gave an indication of the interest in a new anthem.

Exactly a year later a government-sponsored competition was announced, which drew 2500 entries for the words and 1300 for the music. The judges selected six entries for the words, but rejected all the musical entries.

## The polls and what followed

The quest for an Australian national anthem continued. In 1974 a public opinion poll sampled an estimated 60 000 people to select from three possible anthems: 'Advance Australia Fair', 'Waltzing Matilda' and 'Song of Australia'. 'Advance Australia Fair' polled 51.4 per cent. Following this result the then Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, announced that 'Advance Australia Fair' would be the national anthem, except on specifically Royal occasions, when both it and 'God Save the Queen' would be played.

In 1976, after a change of government, 'God Save the Queen' was reinstated for Royal, vice-regal, defence and loyal toast occasions, with 'Advance Australia Fair' to be played on all other official occasions.

In May 1977, however, a national poll was conducted to ascertain the public choice of a national song. This time more than seven million people were issued with ballot papers. The results were: 'Advance Australia Fair' 43.2 per cent, 'Waltzing Matilda' 28.3 per cent, 'God Save the Queen' 18.7 per cent and 'Song of Australia' 9.6 per cent. Despite the poll results, adoption of the new national anthem met widespread opposition.

It was not until April 1984 that the Governor-General issued a proclamation that 'God Save the Queen' was designated the Royal Anthem, to be played at public engagements in Australia attended by the members of the Royal family. 'Advance Australia Fair' was finally declared to be the Australian national anthem.

Usually 'God Save the Queen' is played at the start of Royal functions and 'Advance Australia Fair' at the end, unless it is more appropriate to play both anthems at the start. 'Advance Australia Fair' is played at all other official functions.

### ADVANCE AUSTRALIA FAIR

*Australians all let us rejoice,  
For we are young and free;  
We've golden soil and wealth for toil;  
Our home is girt by sea;  
Our land abounds in nature's gifts  
Of beauty rich and rare;  
In history's page, let every stage  
Advance Australia Fair.  
In joyful strains then let us sing,  
Advance Australia Fair.  
Beneath our radiant Southern Cross  
We'll toil with hearts and hands;  
To make this Commonwealth of ours  
Renowned of all the lands;  
For those who've come across the seas  
We've boundless plains to share;  
With courage let us all combine  
To Advance Australia Fair.  
In joyful strains then let us sing,  
Advance Australia Fair.*

## Further information

It's an honour—Australia celebrating Australians [www.itsanhonour.gov.au](http://www.itsanhonour.gov.au)

Last updated January 2008

Satellite imagery © Commonwealth of Australia, Geoscience Australia, ACRES.

Western Australian coastline.

