



## NEW CALEDONIA: A PREVIEW OF A FUTURE IN SUSPENSION

**Nicolas Hugot**

Societe Francaise de Vexillologie

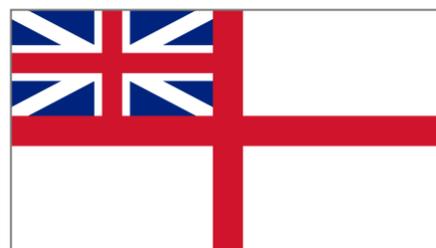
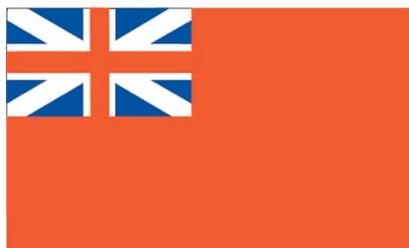
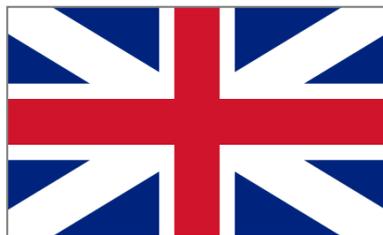
### INTRODUCTION

New Caledonia is a special Collectivity (Territory) of France located in the southwest Pacific Ocean, approximately 1,200 km east of Australia and more than 16,000 km east of metropolitan France. The archipelago, part of the Melanesia sub-region, includes the main island of Grande Terre, the Loyalty Islands, and other islands. Grande Terre of New Caledonia is France's largest French island, twice the size of Corsica (the second-largest French island, in the Mediterranean Sea). Its population of over 260,000 consists of a mix of Kanak people (the original inhabitants of New Caledonia), people of European descent (mostly French), Polynesians (mostly Wallisians), and Southeast Asians. The capital city of the territory is Nouméa.

### EXPLORATIONS AND POSSESSION (1774)

#### 1.1. British exploration

The first people – the Melanesians – arrived around 1300 B.C. The second wave of immigration – Polynesians – dates back 900 years.



A land of hybrids, it was named Caledonia – the former name for Scotland – in 1774 by the British navigator James Cook, due to its resemblance to his native land.

Kingdom of Great Britain 1606–1800, Union Flag

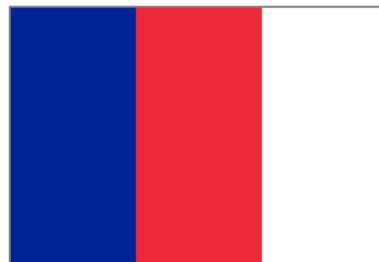
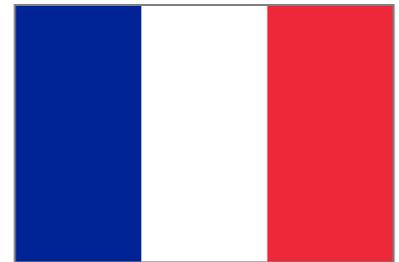
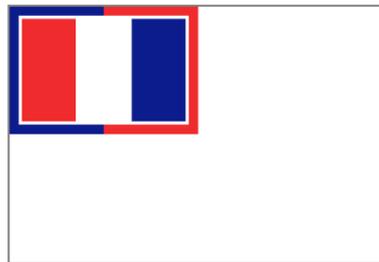
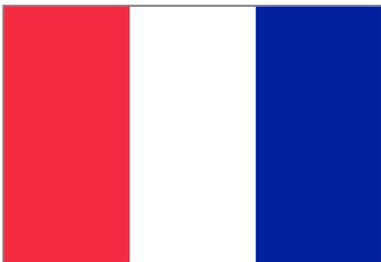
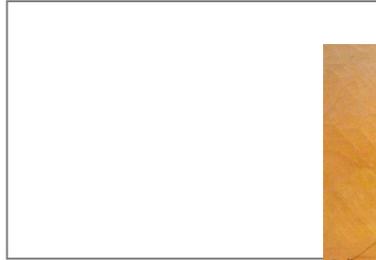
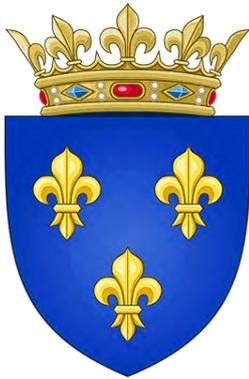
Kingdom of Great Britain 1707–1800, Royal Coat of Arms

Kingdom of Great Britain 1707–1800, British Red Ensign

Kingdom of Great Britain 1707–1800, British White Ensign

## FRENCH EXPLORATION

The west coast of Grande Terre and the Isle of Pines were approached by the French naval officer Admiral Antoine de Bruni d'Entrecasteaux in 1793.



Kingdom of France, 1364–1789,  
Royal Coat of Arms

Kingdom of France 1661–1789,  
French Naval Ensign

painting of the French Naval Ensign  
(1779)

Kingdom of France then 1<sup>st</sup> Republic,  
1790–1794, national flag (unofficial)

Kingdom of France then 1<sup>st</sup> Republic 1790–1794, French Naval Ensign

Revolutionary regimes 1794-1814, French national flag

1<sup>st</sup> Empire 1804–1815, Imperial Coat of Arms

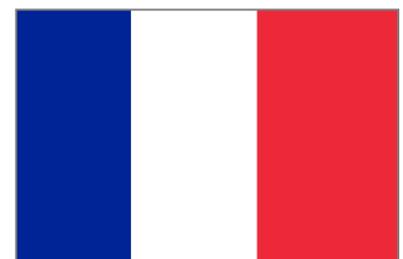
Kingdom of France 1815–1830, Grand Royal Coat of Arms

Kingdom of France 1830–1831, July Monarchy Coat of Arms

Kingdom of France 1831–1848, July Monarchy Coat of Arms

2<sup>nd</sup> Republic 1848, French National Flag (24 February– 5 March!)

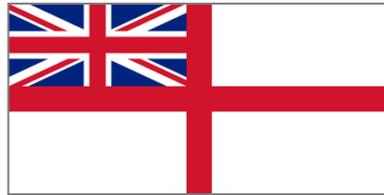
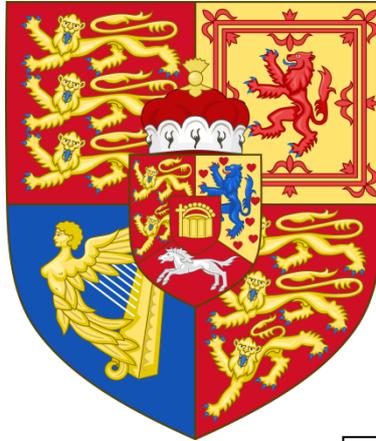
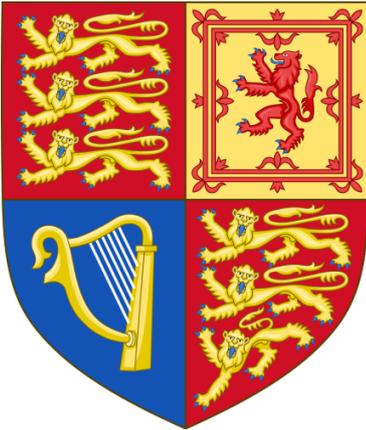
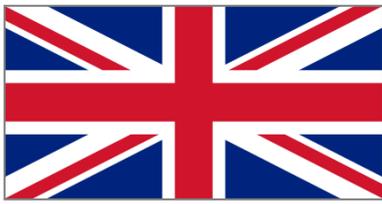
French naval ensign 1853 – present



## 1.2. BRITISH SETTLEMENT

In the 1840s, British missionaries tried to evangelise some aboriginals.

United Kingdom 1801–present, Union Flag



United Kingdom 1801–, Royal Arms  
1801–1816  
United Kingdom, Royal Arms 1816–  
1837  
United Kingdom , Royal Arms 1837–  
present  
United Kingdom 1801–present,  
White Ensign

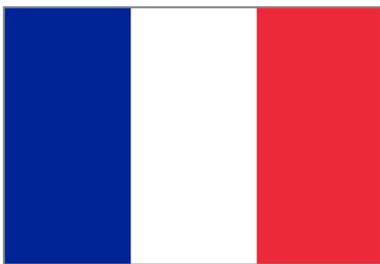
## 1.4. AMERICAN VISIT

In 1849, the American ship *Cutter* visited Grande Terre; unfortunately, the local tradition of cannibalism was lethal to the entire crew.

United States of America, 30-star Flag 1848–1851



## 1.5. FRENCH DEPENDENCY



French National flag 1830—present.

Formal possession of New Caledonia was taken for France by Admiral Febvrier Despointes on 24 September 1853 and Port-de-France (later called Nouméa) was founded on 25 June 1854.



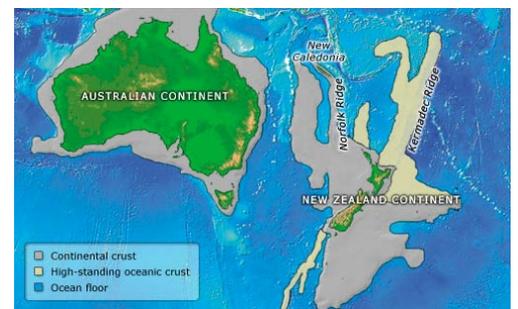
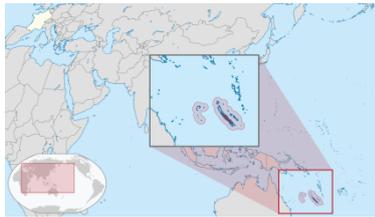
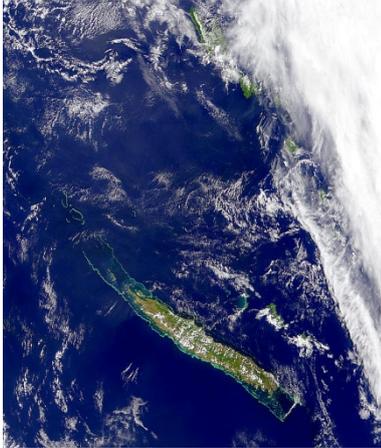
2<sup>nd</sup> Empire 1852–1870,  
Imperial Coat of Arms

New Caledonia became a penal colony (like French Guyana in South America), with more than 20,000 criminals and political prisoners sent there until 1897. In 1878, a violent rebellion against French rule occurred, and a guerrilla war was fought by the Kanaks (Kanak means “man” in the Hawai’ian–Polynesian language) against the French.

## 2. WHAT NEW CALEDONIA LOOKS LIKE

### 2.1. Geography

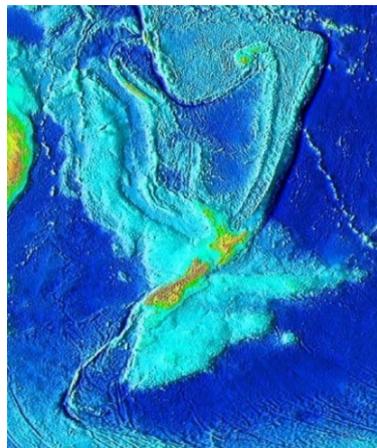
One can find on the Internet a map of the islands drawn by German cartographers from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century technology allows for more modern maps, even for satellite photographs of the land.



New Caledonia in Oceania  
New Caledonia on the globe  
New Caledonia map  
New Caledonia satellite image

### 2.2. Bathymetry

New Caledonia is part of Zealandia, a fragment of the ancient Gondwana supercontinent, and it separated from Australia 60–85 million years ago. It is speculated that New Caledonia separated from Australia roughly 66 million years ago, subsequently drifting in a north-easterly direction, reaching its present position about 50 million years ago.



Australian and New Zealand continents  
Zealandia bathymetry  
New Caledonia and Vanuatu bathymetric map

### 2.3. Climate and landscapes

The climate is tropical, with a hot and humid season in summer and a cooler, dry season in winter. Most of the island is covered by wet evergreen forests (east coast), while savannahs dominate the lower elevations (west coast). The New Caledonia lagoon is one of the largest in the world. It is surrounded by the New Caledonia Barrier Reef.



Landscape in south of Grande Terre



Landscape in north of Grande Terre



Poe Beach, north Grande Terre

#### 4. Flora and fauna

New Caledonia has the richest biodiversity in the world per square kilometre. The biodiversity is caused by Grande Terre's central mountain range (1,629 m at Mont Panié); which has created a variety of niches, landforms and microclimates, where endemic species thrive.



Cook Pines (*araucaria columnaris*), Isle of Pines

New Caledonian flora and fauna derive from ancestral species isolated in the region when it broke away from Gondwana.

The Cook pine is a symbol included into the country's emblem. The endemic kagu appears on the coat of arms of the capital city Nouméa.

The ship represents history and the founding of the city by navigators, the kagu is the principal animal symbol for the city (and also country), and the seahorses and lagoon blue recall the location of the city on the ocean.



A kagu (*Rhynochetos jubatus*)



Coat of arms of the city of Nouméa

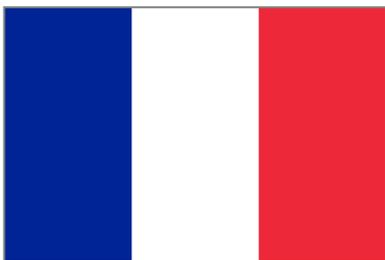
#### 2.5. Indigenous people

The Kanak people, part of the Melanesian group, are indigenous to New Caledonia. Their social organization is traditionally based around clans. They constitute 94% of the population in the Loyalty Islands Province, 74% in the North Province and 27% in the South Province. The Kanaks tend to be of lower socio-economic status than the Europeans and other settlers.

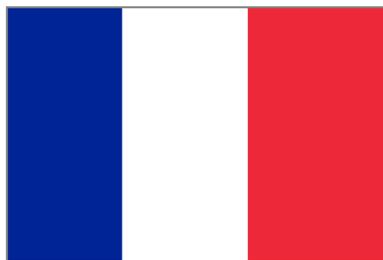
The 28 Kanak languages spoken in New Caledonia are part of the Oceanic group of the Austronesian family. Kanak languages are taught from kindergarten (4 languages are taught up to the bachelor's degree). Kanak languages are not related to the Australian family of aboriginal languages.

#### 3. FRENCH RULE (1853)

After official settlement in 1853, New Caledonia was insulated from the many changes of regimes of metropolitan France.



French national flag

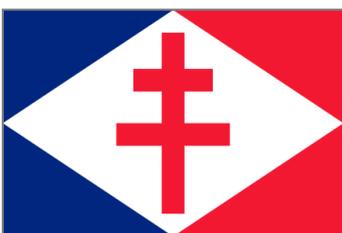


French naval & civil ensign

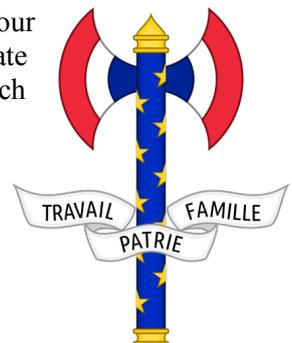
The 2<sup>nd</sup> Empire ended with its defeat by the Prussians in 1870, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Republic was established. The national flag and the civil and naval ensign did not change, however.

Nor did they change when the 3<sup>rd</sup> Republic was abolished in favour of the French State

in 1940 (Vichy France, under German control). But an informal emblem of the French State was introduced. **right)**

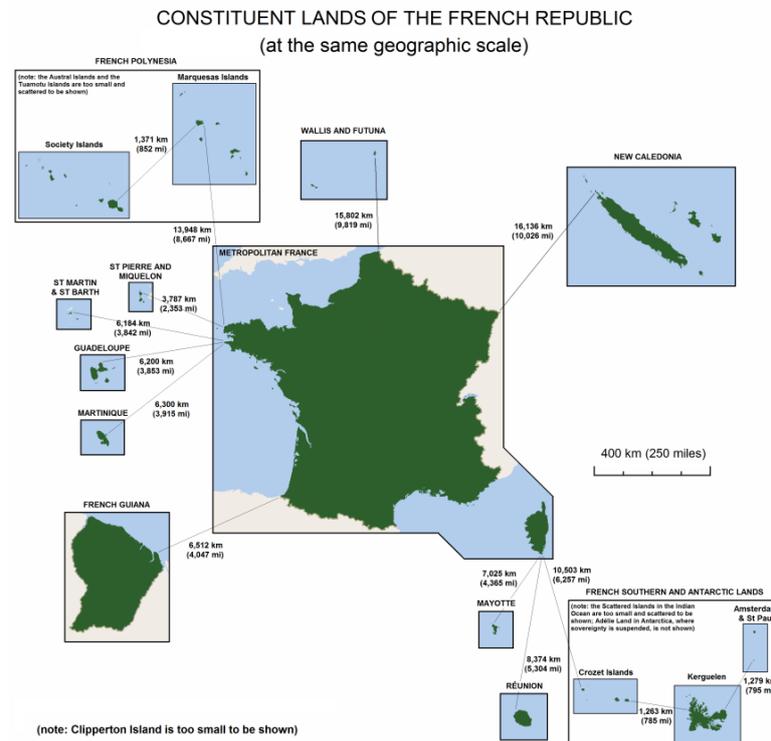


Meanwhile, the opposing Free France movement organised, and from 1941 to 1944 displayed a flag and an ensign defaced with the Cross of Lorraine. **(left)**



The French State was ultimately defeated in 1944. Institutional arrangements were made in 1944–1945 to accommodate the end of the war, and the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic was proclaimed in 1946. A politically unstable regime, it was replaced in 1958 by the 5<sup>th</sup> Republic, the current regime of the nation.

As of 2015, constituent lands of the French Republic are shown below:



#### 4. THE “EVENTS” (1984–1988)

Between 1976 and 1988, New Caledonia adopted five statutes. Each became a source of discontent and serious disorder, culminating in 1988 with a bloody hostage-taking in Ouvéa, ending a 4-year period (1984–1988) of civil unrest recalled as the “Events”.



Flag of the Caledonian Union at the Sarramea Congress (1982)



Flag of FLNKS, definitive version with black “flèche faitière”

The main opponent to French rule at the time was (and still is) the Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS).

In the FLNKS flag, the blue symbolises both the sky and more importantly the ocean surrounding New Caledonia. The red symbolises the blood shed by the Kanaks in their struggle for independence, socialism and unity. The green symbolises the land itself and by extension the ancestors buried within it. The yellow disc is a representation of the sun and the symbol upon it is a “flèche faitière”, a kind of arrow which adorns the roofs of Kanak houses, thrust through “tutut” shells.



Flag of FLNKS, variant with red “flèche faitière”

A common vexillological mistake found throughout the internet is the black fimbriation of the yellow disc, fimbriation which actually does not exist, as clearly expressed in the legislation enacted by the Congress in July 2010.



Image of an incorrect FLNKS flag

## 5. MATIGNON AGREEMENTS (1988)

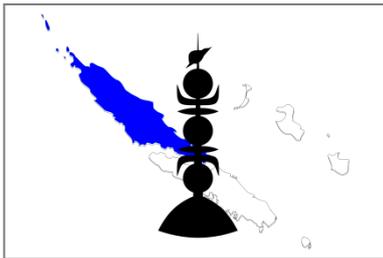
The Matignon Agreements, arranged under the aegis of the Government of France, were signed in the Hôtel Matignon, Paris (site of the French Prime Minister's office, equivalent to 10 Downing Street, London) by Jacques Lafleur and Jean-Marie Tjibaou on 26 June 1988 between loyalists, who wanted to keep New Caledonia as a part of the French Republic, and separatists, who did not.

The accords established a ten-year period of stability and development. Institutional and economic provisions were made for the Kanak community. The New Caledonians agreed not to raise the independence issue during this period. The agreements provided amnesty for those involved in the Ouvéa hostage-taking incident in 1988, and cancelled all proceedings in regard to the deaths of 4 military policemen and 19 members of the independentist Kanaks.

The Matignon Agreements were approved by French and New Caledonian voters in a referendum held on 6 November 1988, in which they were asked "Do you agree to allow New Caledonian residents to vote for self-determination in 1998?". A majority – 80% - voted "yes". Voter participation in the referendum was 37%, with 12% of the ballots blank or void.

Detailed information can be found in two articles in *Franciae Vexilla* Nos. 91 and 105.

New Caledonia is divided into three provinces (created by law on 9 November 1988): the South Province (capital city: Nouméa) accounts for 75 % of the population, while the North Province (capital city: Kone) is home to 18 % and the Loyalty Islands Province (capital city: Lifou) hosts the remaining 7 %, each with its own flag.



Flag of the North Province (notice the Kanak "flèche faïtière" emblem)

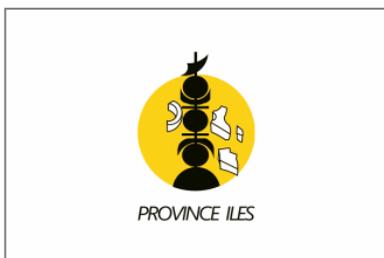


Flag of the South Province (notice the French Tricolour in the sail)



Flag of the Loyalty Islands Province (again a "flèche faïtière" emblem)

According to *Flags of the World*, the Loyalty Islands flag bears the name of the province, whereas other sources indicate there is no writing on the flag. This matter is not resolved by looking at the province hall, which displays only FLNKS and Tricolour flags.



Loyalty Islands (FOTW version)



The province hall of the Loyalty Islands Province

## 6. NOUMÉA ACCORD (1998)

However, self-determination did not take place in 1998. Instead, on 5 May 1998 the Nouméa Accord was signed under the aegis of the Government. It scheduled the transfer of sovereignty for 2018. The accord was approved by 72% of New Caledonians in a local referendum held on 8 November.

The Nouméa Accord promised to grant political power to New Caledonia and its original Kanak population, until the territory decides whether to remain within the French Republic or become an independent state in a referendum to be held between 2014 and 2018. It set the groundwork for a 20-year transition that will gradually transfer power to the local government.

Under the conditions of the accord, which gave additional autonomy to the island, the vice-president of New Caledonia must be a pro-independence politician if the presidency is held by an anti-independence politician. Article 1.5 of the accord introduces “identity signs” defined as a set of symbols representing the territory. They are: the name of the country, the flag, the motto, the anthem and the graphic design of banknotes.

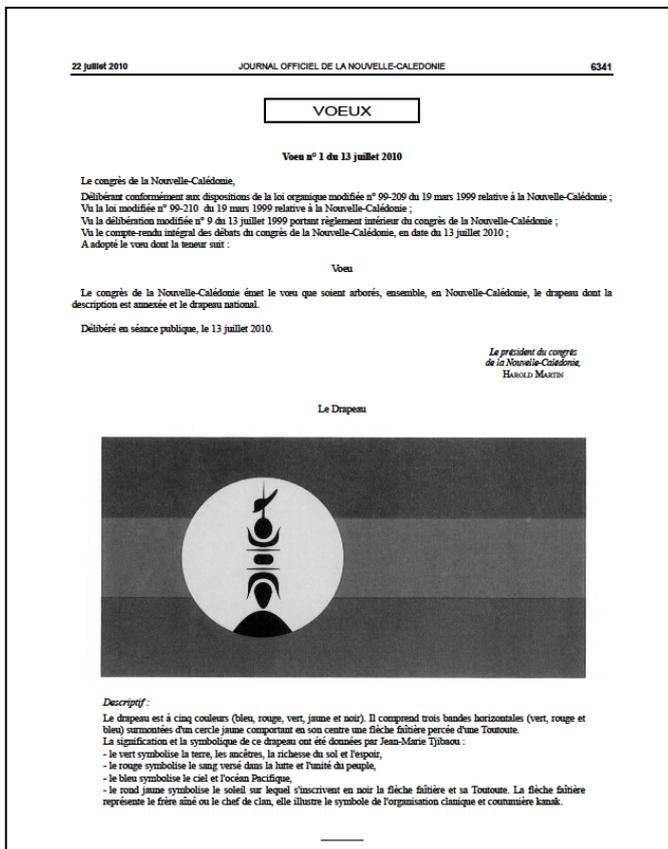
Three signs were officially established on 18 August 2010 (the artwork contest launched on 30 October 2007): the officially recognised anthem “Soyons unis, devenons frères” (Let us unite, let us become brothers), played after the national “La Marseillaise”, motto “Terre de parole, terre de partage” (Land of speech, land of sharing) and the graphic design of banknotes.



Specimens of banknotes, “flora” and “fauna”



Up to 2010, the only flag used to represent New Caledonia was the French Tricolour. However, as part of a compromise between pro-independence activists and those who loyally support ongoing French rule, the Congress of New Caledonia voted on 13 July 2010 in favour of a motion to fly the Kanak flag alongside the French Tricolour.



On 17 July 2010, the French Prime Minister took part in a ceremony in Nouméa where the FLNKS flag was hoisted alongside the French Tricolour, thus giving New Caledonia a second officially adopted flag.

However, the debate on finding a unique permanent official territorial flag continued, the adoption of the Kanak flag proving controversial. Some New Caledonians argued for a completely new flag for New Caledonia, which would incorporate designs from both the Tricolour and the Kanak flag. A new flag would promote a “common destiny” for ethnic Kanak and ethnic French residents in New Caledonia.

Not happy with a “two-flag situation”, some stakeholders have presented proposals for a new flag, following contests organised on the internet, as far back as the signature of the Nouméa Accord in 1998.



*un drapeau pour la*  
**Nouvelle-Calédonie/Kanaky**



In November 1998, Pierre Gay, a Swiss vexillologist, organised a flag contest open to all internet users willing to suggest a new flag for New Caledonia.

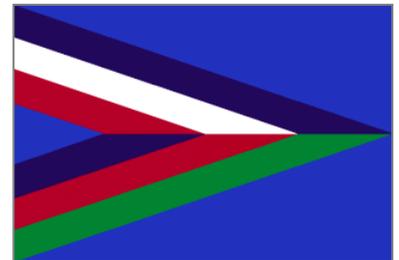
A first vote took place on 15 December 1998. Because of the absence of official reaction, the contest was re-opened through 15 March 1999. The website presented 86 flag proposals. 7 of them were favoured and presented apart with their authors' name.



7<sup>th</sup> rank: proposal 29, Thanh-Tâm Lê



Equal 5<sup>th</sup> rank: proposal 5, Pierre Gay **(left)**



Equal 5<sup>th</sup> rank: proposal 18, anonymous **(right)**



3<sup>rd</sup> rank: proposal 4, Pierre Gay



3<sup>rd</sup> rank: proposal 45, Emmanuel Sotter **(left)**

2<sup>nd</sup> rank: proposal 17, Pierre Gay **(right)**



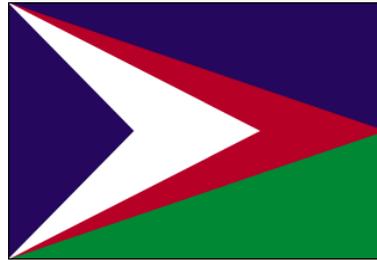
1<sup>st</sup> rank: proposal 55, Gvido Petersons

There was no more reaction from the official representatives than the year before. The contest ended.

Below is my own selection of the flags I found most interesting.

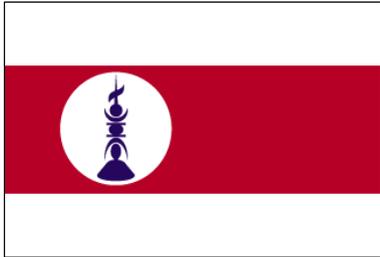


Proposal 7



Proposal 33

Proposal 35

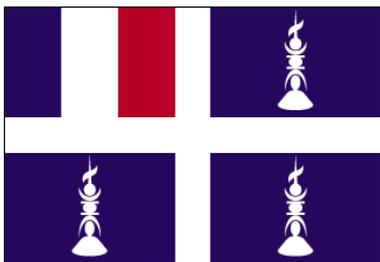


Proposal 36

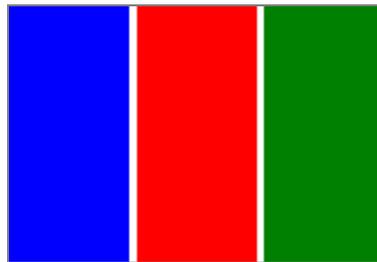


Proposal 40

Proposal 53

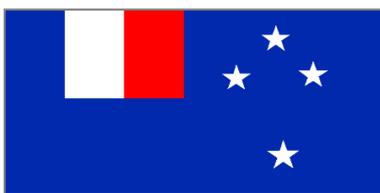


Proposal 83



Proposal 61

Proposal 71



Proposal 86

“Quel drapeau pour notre pays?”



Opération  
**QUEL DRAPEAU  
POUR NOTRE PAYS ?**



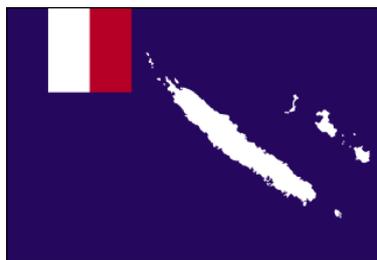
In February 2004, the political party “Calédonie mon pays” and association “Génération destin commun”, both in favour of the implementation of the Nouméa Accord, revived the idea of a common flag. 25,000 copies of a flyer were printed presenting 80 design proposals, most of them taken from the previous contest, and this time including the FLNKS flag.



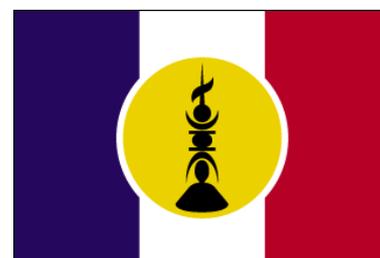
“Calédonie mon pays” received 500 replies as of May 2004, and results were published on the website. The 1999 winner won again.



Ranked 7<sup>th</sup>



Ranked 6<sup>th</sup>



Ranked 5<sup>th</sup>



Ranked 4<sup>th</sup>



Ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>



Ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>, variant of the official FLNKS flag (with yellow disc centred)

Ranked 1<sup>st</sup>

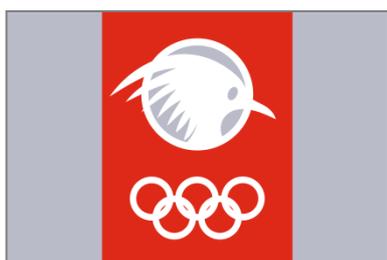


This winning design then became the official proposal of the political party “Calédonie mon pays”.

### “Collectif pour un Drapeau Commun”

This association was created in July 2010, immediately following the signing of the Nouméa Accord. It set up a website [www.drapeaunc.com](http://www.drapeaunc.com) which gathered flags directly imagined and proposed by internet users. The contest opened on 15 August 2010. The website claimed approximately 1,000 voters.

Alas, apart from the winning design, all other proposals seem to have been erased from the internet; the contest website itself is now unreachable.



Flag of the Territorial Olympic Committee

The winning flag resembles that of the Territorial Olympic Committee and most sport delegations travelling abroad, that is red and grey with the New Caledonian emblem in the centre (nautilus shell, Cook pine and “flèche faïtière”).



Winning design of the 2010 contest, bearing the official emblem of the territory

## EMBLEM OF NEW CALEDONIA

The emblem of New Caledonia consists of a nautilus shell in the foreground; the symbol behind it is a “fleche faïtière”. It was designed in 2004.



New Caledonia Government logo



“Maison de la Nouvelle-Calédonie, Paris” logo

It now appears, slightly modified, on the Government logo and on that of Maison de la Nouvelle-Calédonie in Paris, the tourism structure promoting New Caledonia to the French.



The Congress also chose a logo for itself. New Caledonia Congress’s previous logo (**left**).

New Caledonia Congress’s current logo (**right**) (note the removal of the Tricolour)



Actions have yet to be taken to choose the remaining identity sign, the new name for the country. Some proposed the association of both names of “Kanaky” and “New Caledonia”, based on the model of regional neighbour Papua New Guinea, thus giving “Kanaky New Caledonia”.

One can find on the Internet a “flag of Papuan-Melanesian peoples” (**left**) interesting because it bears the “fèleche faïtière”, the main graphic symbol of the FLNKS flag. (authenticity difficult to acknowledge)

## 7. RECENT CREATIONS



The Tjibaou Cultural Centre, designed by Italian architect Renzo Piano and opened in 1998 outside of Nouméa, is the icon of Kanak culture named for an assassinated independence leader.

The Pacific Games New Caledonia 2011 logo (right) bears a stylised pattern of the traditional architecture.



The same colours of blue and yellow appear on the Pacific Games Port Moresby 2015 logo. The mascot is a bird, resembling a toucan, as much as the kagu is the national bird of New Caledonia.



Pacific Games Port Moresby 2015 logo (left)

Pacific Games Port Moresby 2015 mascot (right)



Regionally, New Caledonia, although not an officially recognised independent state, is a member of the Pacific Community.



Flag of the Pacific Community

Eventually, if no progress is really ever made, this flag debate in New Caledonia could be resolved by the adoption of the Earth Flag.



### Contact details:

Nicolas HUGOT  
Meudon (Île-de-France)  
France

E-mail: [nicolas.hugot@laposte.net](mailto:nicolas.hugot@laposte.net)