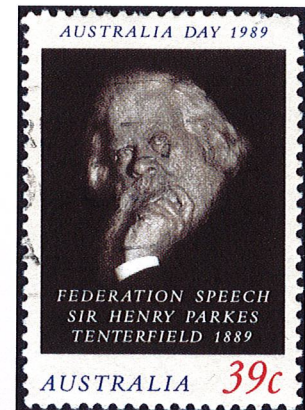


Steps to Federation

The Australian Constitution was written in the last decade of the nineteenth century. It followed a number of events that promoted the idea that the British colonies of Australia and New Zealand should join together to become one nation. These events included improvements in communication which helped the colonies think of themselves as a unified group, as well as actions by other nations in the region that were seen as a threat of invasion.

During this time there were a number of meetings attended by representatives of the colonies who decided that Federation was a good idea. A constitution for the new nation was written, and referendums organised to be held in each colony to allow the people to decide if they wanted their colony to be part of the Federation. During this time New Zealand, which had been one of the most enthusiastic participants in the early stages, pulled out. Western Australia showed little interest early on, but surprisingly joined at the last minute. Had these two decisions gone the other way, Australia today would be a very different place. New Zealand would have been an Australian state, and Western Australia would have been a separate nation.



The 100th anniversary of Parkes' Tenterfield Oration was commemorated in 1989 with a special stamp.

Federation Timeline

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| 1881 | The Sydney to Melbourne rail link was completed. |
| 1884 | Germany annexed north-eastern New Guinea, making many colonists nervous about the expansion of other nations in the region. It was thought that a single nation would have a stronger defence force and would be better able to defend itself. |
| 1889 | Sir Henry Parkes made a stirring speech in favour of Federation at Tenterfield, NSW. |
| 1890 | The Australasian Federation Conference met in Melbourne, and agreed to call a Constitutional Convention. |
| 1891 | The draft Constitution was drawn up at the National Australasian Convention in Sydney. |
| 1893 | A conference at Corowa, NSW, called for a constitution to be discussed at a conference of elected representatives from all the colonies, including New Zealand. |
| 1895 | The Premier's Conference in Hobart agrees with the Corowa conference proposal. A severe drought grips most of Australia. |
| 1896 | At Bathurst, NSW, a People's Convention debates the 1891 draft constitution. |
| 1897 | The National Australasian Convention meets in Adelaide and Sydney, and draws up another draft constitution. It is debated in the colonial parliaments. |
| 1898 | The National Australasian Convention in Melbourne agrees on the final draft of the constitution. The Premiers agree to hold referendums to gain the approval of the people. The first referendums are held in South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania. New South Wales does not endorse the constitution. |
| 1899 | At the Premier's Conference, amendments are made which make the constitution more attractive to New South Wales. The referendums are held again, and passed in the original four colonies. Queensland endorses the constitution in September. |
| 1900 | The constitution is approved by the British Parliament. In July, Western Australia belatedly joined the Federation at its first referendum. |
| 1901 | The nation of Australia is proclaimed on the first day of the new century. Edmund Barton is sworn in as the nation's first Prime Minister. |