

Independence of Papua New Guinea, 1975

The nation of Papua New Guinea achieved its independence from Australia on 16 September 1975. Officiating at the main ceremony held in Port Moresby were His Royal Highness Prince Charles, Prince of Wales (representing Queen Elizabeth II, the British monarch); Sir John Kerr, Governor-General of Australia; Australian Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam; and Chief Minister of Papua New Guinea, Michael Somare, who became the country's first Prime Minister. The new country became a constitutional monarchy with membership of the British Commonwealth.

Australian administration, 1906–75

Papua New Guinea was administered by Australia as a single territory from 1945. It comprised the former British protectorate of Papua – which had been an Australian territory since 1906 – and the former German colony of New Guinea, which became Australia's responsibility as a Mandated Territory of the League of Nations (1921–42) and a United Nations Trust Territory following World War II.

Territory administration was the responsibility of an Australian Government Administrator who reported to the Australian Department of External Territories (Department of Territories, 1951–68) and, from 1973, to the Papua New Guinea Office. From 1951, the Administrator was assisted by an appointed Legislative Council, which in 1964 was replaced by an elected House of Assembly. As a prelude to independence, Papua New Guinea became a self-governing territory on 1 December 1973.

Records about the independence of Papua New Guinea

The National Archives holds a wide range of records documenting the processes that led to Papua New Guinea independence. These include records of key agencies such as the Department of External Territories (and Territories), Department of Foreign Affairs, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and the Attorney-General's Department. Photographs of independence day ceremonies and celebrations are also held.

Record series relating to Papua New Guinea independence

A selection of the National Archives holdings is listed below by series. You can find records of interest using [RecordSearch](#) – search using the series number shown and narrow results by using keywords such as 'papua new guinea' and 'papua new guinea independence'.

Administrative files

Department of External Territories / Department of Territories / Papua New Guinea Office (CA 1579)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
Correspondence files	1965–ongoing	A9334

Department of External Affairs / Foreign Affairs (CA 5987)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
Correspondence files	1914–93	A1838

Australian High Commission, Port Moresby (CA 7733)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
Correspondence files	1965–ongoing	A9334

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (CA 1401)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
Correspondence files	1903–ongoing	A463
Correspondence files (classified)	1913–ongoing	A1209
Whitlam ministries – Cabinet submissions	1972–75	A5915
Whitlam ministries – Cabinet files	1972–75	A5931

Attorney-General's Department (CA 5)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
Correspondence files	1901–ongoing	A432
Correspondence files (classified)	1973–74	A5034

Photographs

Australian Information Service (CA 1578)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
Black and white photographic negatives	1953–76	A1501

<u>Contact print albums for VIP visits and other important occasions</u>	1954–ongoing	A8281
<u>Black and white photographic negatives and prints</u>	1971–ongoing	A6180
<u>Colour photographic negatives</u>	1971–ongoing	A8746

Selected records about Papua New Guinea independence

Key selected records held by the National Archives, many from the series given above, are listed below.

Collection references

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
<u>Papua New Guinea – Constitutional process for granting self-government or independence</u>	1962–65	A432, 1962/3185
<u>Papua New Guinea – future association with Australia on self-government or independence</u>	1965–66	A452, 1965/3353
<u>Preparation of Territory of Papua New Guinea for independence as a united country</u>	1970–73	A1209, 1971/9229
<u>Papua New Guinea – independence</u>	1972–74	A452, 1973/205
<u>Papua New Guinea – relations with Australia – transitional arrangements up to Independence</u>	1971–72	A1838, 3080/10/1 part 1
<u>Papua New Guinea – relations with Australia – transitional arrangements up to Independence</u>	1972	A1838, 3080/10/1 part 2
<u>Papua New Guinea – relations with Australia – transitional arrangements up to Independence</u>	1972–73	A1838, 3080/10/1 part 3
<u>Papua New Guinea – relations with Australia – transitional arrangements up to Independence</u>	1973–74	A1838, 3080/10/1 part 4
<u>Papua New Guinea – relations with Australia – transitional arrangements up to Independence</u>	1974	A1838, 3080/10/1 part 5
<u>Papua New Guinea – relations with Australia – transitional arrangements up to Independence</u>	1974	A1838, 3080/10/1 part 6
<u>Papua New Guinea – relations with Australia – transitional arrangements up to Independence</u>	1974–75	A1838, 3080/10/1 part 7
<u>Papua New Guinea – relations with Australia – transitional arrangements up to Independence</u>	1975	A1838, 3080/10/1 part 8
<u>Papua New Guinea – relations with Australia – transitional arrangements up to Independence</u>	1975	A1838, 3080/10/1 part 9
<u>Legal aspects of Papua New Guinea independence – general</u>	1975–86	A1838, 1490/17/1 part 4
<u>Papua New Guinea – Independence celebrations</u>	1974–75	A1838, 3080/1/1/4/1 part 1
<u>Papua New Guinea – Independence celebrations</u>	1975	A1838, 3080/1/1/4/1 part 2
<u>Papua New Guinea – Independence celebrations</u>	1975	A1838, 3080/1/1/4/1 part 3

<u>Papua New Guinea – Independence celebrations</u>	1975	A1838, 3080/1/1/4/1 part 4
<u>Papua New Guinea – Independence celebrations</u>	1975	A1838, 3080/1/1/4/1 part 5
<u>Papua New Guinea – Independence celebrations</u>	1975	A1838, 3080/1/1/4/1 part 6
<u>Papua New Guinea – Independence celebrations</u>	1975	A1838, 3080/1/1/4/1 part 7
<u>Papua New Guinea – Independence celebrations</u>	1975	A1838, 3080/1/1/4/1 part 8
<u>Papua New Guinea – Independence celebrations</u>	1975	A1838, 3080/1/1/4/1 annex
<u>Prime Minister's attendance at Papua New Guinea independence celebrations – briefing notes</u>	1975	A1209, 1975/1780
<u>Papua New Guinea Independence Act 1975 (Assent copy)</u>	1975	A1559, 1975/98
<u>Independence gift for Papua New Guinea</u>	1975	A5931, CL1626

Further sources of information about Papua New Guinea

For further information about records held by the National Archives relating to Papua New Guinea refer to the National Archives guide Papua New Guinea Records 1883–1942: Microfilm Collections (compiled by Peter Nagle, 1998, 136pp).

See also:

- *Fact sheet 48 - Papua New Guinea Patrol reports*
- *Fact sheet 148 - Records of Papua New Guinea, 1883–1942*
- *Fact sheet 235 - Francis Edgar Williams, anthropologist of Papua*
- *Fact sheet 258 - Torres Strait Treaty, 1978*