

SECTION 9

DECIMAL ISSUES, 1966-2001

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

This section covers those decimal stamps issued under the authority of the Postmaster-General's Department and Australia Post, from the introduction of decimal currency on 14 February 1966 up to the end of 2001. It has been divided into three volumes:

Decimals I: All issues from 1966 up to 1 July 1975, when the Australian Postal commission was established.

Decimals II: 1975 to the end of 1991

Decimals III: 1992 to the end of 2001.

The period saw a much-increased awareness by the Post Office in the potential of the philatelic market. The major philatelic innovations of the period were the introduction of stamp packs in 1969, and official first day covers in 1970. Stamp issue policy underwent radical changes, with the issue of more stamps featuring subjects of broader public appeal, and more frequent replacement of definitive issues, and the introduction of the curiously titled "short term definitives". One reason for the increasing numbers of new stamps was that the period was one of increasing inflation which saw many changes to the base letter rate and numerous changes to other rates and charges.

All stamps between 1966 and 1975 were produced at the Note Printing Branch in Melbourne. The introduction of decimal currency coincided with the increased use of multicolour photogravure as the printing process of choice for stamps. Rotary recess printing remained in use for some definitive stamps, in particular the lower denominations including the base rate stamp, but in 1973-74 a policy decision by the Post Office saw the discontinuation of recess-printing. At the same time, the replacement low value definitives designs were changed to feature marine life and gemstones. This meant the discontinuation of the use of the monarch's portrait on any Australian definitive stamps (and in particular on the base rate stamp), for the first time since 1914.

DECIMALISATION

The decision for Australia to convert from sterling to decimal currency was made in 1963, and the changeover date of 14 February 1966 was fixed. The new monetary unit was to be the dollar, comprising 100 cents, and equivalent to 10/-, making 1 cent equivalent to 1.2d. The new base letter rate was fixed at 4c (= 4.8d), which was effectively a reduction from the existing 5d rate.

The Note Printing Branch was faced with an enormous task, as it was responsible not only for producing the new Australian Commonwealth decimal stamps, but also those for the Australian Territories. At the same time it had to maintain sufficient stocks of the £sd issues. Also, the primary function of the Branch remained the manufacture of Australian bank notes, which required a similar changeover.

In the circumstances, it was decided that to ease the workload, the majority of Australian decimal stamps would adopt existing designs, and as a matter of convenience for the Post Office and public alike, these designs would be the equivalent decimal denominations. New denominations which were required (all photogravure stamps) used existing reserve designs commissioned by the Post Office some years previously. Essentially, the only new design was for the 1c to 4c Queen's Portrait stamps; these utilised the Buckley portrait on the existing 5d stamp in a new layout.

The decimal issue was placed on sale on 7 February 1966, one week before the official changeover date. This was to enable businesses to obtain advance supplies and avoid the rush expected on 14 February. In this period the stamps could be purchased only in full sheets, and could not be used for postage before 14 February. Thus, although 7 February 1966 was the first date of sale of the decimal stamps, 14 February was their effective first day of use and the date which is always cited as the date of issue.

Sterling stamp issues remained valid for postage until 14 February 1968. After that date all Australian Commonwealth issues from 1913 (and those Colonial issues still valid for postage) were demonetised for postal use. Pre-decimal stamps could be offered for repurchase to the Post Office until 13 February 1971, after which these stamps became fully demonetised.