

Australian Decimal Postal Rates – 1973 to 1982 Overseas Airmail

In this third installment covering the period July 1973 to April 1982 which begins with the introduction of metric weights & measures, we will be looking at the rates for various classes of mail sent overseas by airmail. In the first article on this period we dealt with domestic mail (both surface and airmail), and in the second with overseas surface mail.

Overseas Airmail Rates

The four classes of airmail items we will be considering are Letters, Postcards & Greeting Cards, Other Articles (including small packets) and Aerogrammes. Parcels remain outside the scope of our review.

The five charging zones for overseas airmail items we discussed when examining overseas airmail rates in the period 1966-1973 remained in effect for the duration of the 1973-82 period also. The major countries and regions in each zone are listed below –

Zone 1 – New Zealand

Zone 2 – South Pacific and South-East Asia

Zone 3 – Hong Kong, China, Philippines, Japan, India, Pakistan, Thailand, Hawaii

Zone 4 – North America, Middle East, Israel

Zone 5 – United Kingdom, Europe (incl. Russia), Africa, Central & South America

The conversion to metric weights & measures saw the basic weight-step for airmail items change from “per ½ oz” to “per 10g” (for Letters and Postcards & Greeting Cards) and from “per 2 oz” to “per 50g” (for Other Articles), with aerogrammes continuing to be charged on a “per item” basis.

This brought about a reduction of over 25% in the first weight-step for letters, postcards and greeting cards from the equivalent of 14g (½ oz) to 10g, and as a result the airmail rates for these items were actually reduced from the levels under imperial measures. For example, the rates for letters to Zone 5 countries fell from 35c per ½ oz to 30c per 10g and postcards & greeting cards from 18c per ½ oz to 15c per 10g. These reductions of course did not add up to 25%, and so the new rates really amounted to a rate increase for any-one sending an article the weighed more than the basic weight-step. In addition, by October 1974 the rates had increased back to their pre-metric levels while the new lower weight-steps remained.

The other major change to rate structures during this period was the move away from fixed increments per weight-step towards a reducing scale as items got heavier. This change was implemented with the 1 July 1978 rate increase, and provided substantial savings for any-one sending higher weight-step items while more accurately reflecting the real cost of delivery borne by Australia Post.

For example, before the 1978 rate change a 50g airmail greeting card to Zone 4 cost \$1.25 to send being five-times the 25c per 10g charge. It would have been difficult for Australia Post to argue that delivering one 50g item to the USA should cost the equivalent of delivering five separate base-rate items. After the 1978 rate change the cost of sending a base-rate airmail greeting card to the USA increased from 25c to 30c, but sending that same 50g greeting card item actually fell to 70c.

Of course this adds a level of complexity to the rates tables, and to reflect this we have adopted individual rates tables for each charging zone (or group of charging zones with the same rates).

In April 1982, the rate structures were again changed substantially with the introduction of the “standard article” concept to overseas airmail rates, the lifting of the basic weight-step to 20g, and another significant reduction in the cost of sending heavier articles (no doubt as Australia Post sought to compete more vigorously with the growing use of freight express companies such as FedEx, DHL and UPS).

For example, a legal document with covering letter sent to Hong Kong (Zone 3) as a 500g airmail letter in early 1982 under the rates as shown in the tables below would have cost \$10.25 (\$1.25 up to 50g plus 20c per extra 10g). After the 1 April 1982 rate change the cost of sending that same item fell to just \$4. April 1982 is where we end our current examination and further exploration of these new rates structures will have to await a future article.

Letter Airmail Rates

The tables below set out the airmail letter rates for items sent overseas by airmail to each Zone in turn (items weighing more than 2 kgs were subject to parcel rates) –

Airmail Letters – Zone 1	Up to 10g	Up to 20g	Up to 30g	Up to 40g	Up to 50g	Per extra 10g
Rate effective from:						
1 October 1973	\$0.10	\$0.20	\$0.30	\$0.40	\$0.50	\$0.10
1 October 1974	\$0.15	\$0.30	\$0.45	\$0.60	\$0.75	\$0.15 *
1 September 1975	\$0.25	\$0.50	\$0.75	\$1.00	\$1.25	\$0.25 *
1 July 1978	\$0.30	\$0.40	\$0.50	\$0.60	\$0.70	\$0.10
31 March 1980	\$0.35	\$0.45	\$0.55	\$0.65	\$0.75	\$0.10

* per extra 20g

Airmail Letters – Zone 2	Up to 10g	Up to 20g	Up to 30g	Up to 40g	Up to 50g	Per extra 10g
Rate effective from:						
1 October 1973	\$0.15	\$0.30	\$0.45	\$0.60	\$0.75	\$0.15
1 October 1974	\$0.20	\$0.40	\$0.60	\$0.80	\$1.00	\$0.20 *
1 September 1975	\$0.30	\$0.60	\$0.90	\$1.20	\$1.50	\$0.30 *
1 July 1978	\$0.35	\$0.50	\$0.65	\$0.80	\$0.95	\$0.15
31 March 1980	\$0.40	\$0.55	\$0.70	\$0.85	\$1.00	\$0.15

* per extra 20g

Airmail Letters – Zone 3	Up to 10g	Up to 20g	Up to 30g	Up to 40g	Up to 50g	Per extra 10g
Rate effective from:						
1 October 1973	\$0.20	\$0.40	\$0.60	\$0.80	\$1.00	\$0.20
1 October 1974	\$0.25	\$0.50	\$0.75	\$1.00	\$1.25	\$0.25 *
1 September 1975	\$0.35	\$0.70	\$1.05	\$1.40	\$1.75	\$0.35 *
1 July 1978	\$0.40	\$0.60	\$0.80	\$1.00	\$1.20	\$0.20
31 March 1980	\$0.45	\$0.65	\$0.85	\$1.05	\$1.25	\$0.20

* per extra 20g

Airmail Letters – Zone 4	Up to 10g	Up to 20g	Up to 30g	Up to 40g	Up to 50g	Per extra 10g
Rate effective from:						
1 October 1973	\$0.25	\$0.50	\$0.75	\$1.00	\$1.25	\$0.25
1 October 1974	\$0.30	\$0.60	\$0.90	\$1.20	\$1.50	\$0.30 *
1 September 1975	\$0.40	\$0.80	\$1.20	\$1.60	\$2.00	\$0.40 *
1 July 1978	\$0.50	\$0.80	\$1.10	\$1.40	\$1.70	\$0.30
31 March 1980	\$0.55	\$0.85	\$1.15	\$1.45	\$1.75	\$0.30

* per extra 20g

Airmail Letters – Zone 5	Up to 10g	Up to 20g	Up to 30g	Up to 40g	Up to 50g	Per extra 10g
Rate effective from:						
1 October 1973	\$0.30	\$0.60	\$0.90	\$1.20	\$1.50	\$0.30
1 October 1974	\$0.35	\$0.70	\$1.05	\$1.40	\$1.75	\$0.35 *
1 September 1975	\$0.45	\$0.90	\$1.35	\$1.80	\$2.25	\$0.45 *
1 July 1978	\$0.55	\$0.90	\$1.25	\$1.60	\$1.95	\$0.35
31 March 1980	\$0.60	\$0.95	\$1.30	\$1.65	\$2.00	\$0.35

* per extra 20g

Postcard & Greeting Card Airmail Rates

Postcards and greeting cards continued to be entitled to specific reduced airmail rates (unlike surface mail where postcards were subject to the same rates as letters and greeting cards were entitled to printed matter rates).

From the September 1975 rate increase there was a rationalisation of the airmail postcard and greeting card rates with five different rates for five different zones becoming just two different rates (one for items sent to Zones 1, 2 and 3 and another for items sent to Zones 4 and 5). For ease of reference we have kept separate tables for each of the five Zones.

This rationalisation was somewhat short-lived, with separate rates for each Zone being introduced again with the rate increase of 1 April 1982 (our end-point for this article). However, it is interesting to note that such rationalisation was a glimpse into the future as by 1999 all airmail letter rates were grouped into just two Zones (Asia-Pacific and Rest of the World) and one single rate applied for airmail postcards and greeting cards sent to any-where in the world.

The tables below set out the rates for postcards and greeting cards sent overseas by airmail to each Zone in turn (items weighing more than 2 kgs were subject to parcel rates) –

Airmail PCs / GCs – Zone 1	Up to 10g	Up to 20g	Up to 30g	Up to 40g	Up to 50g	Per extra 10g
Rate effective from:						
1 October 1973	\$0.07	\$0.14	\$0.21	\$0.28	\$0.35	\$0.07
1 October 1974	\$0.11	\$0.22	\$0.33	\$0.44	\$0.55	\$0.11 *
1 September 1975	\$0.20	\$0.40	\$0.60	\$0.80	\$1.00	\$0.20 *
1 July 1978	\$0.25	\$0.30	\$0.35	\$0.40	\$0.45	\$0.05
31 March 1980	\$0.30	\$0.35	\$0.40	\$0.45	\$0.50	\$0.05

* per extra 20g

Airmail PCs / GCs – Zone 2	Up to 10g	Up to 20g	Up to 30g	Up to 40g	Up to 50g	Per extra 10g
Rate effective from:						
1 October 1973	\$0.08	\$0.16	\$0.24	\$0.32	\$0.40	\$0.08
1 October 1974	\$0.12	\$0.24	\$0.36	\$0.48	\$0.60	\$0.12 *
1 September 1975	\$0.20	\$0.40	\$0.60	\$0.80	\$1.00	\$0.20 *
1 July 1978	\$0.25	\$0.30	\$0.35	\$0.40	\$0.45	\$0.05
31 March 1980	\$0.30	\$0.35	\$0.40	\$0.45	\$0.50	\$0.05

* per extra 20g

Airmail PCs / GCs – Zone 3	Up to 10g	Up to 20g	Up to 30g	Up to 40g	Up to 50g	Per extra 10g
Rate effective from:						
1 October 1973	\$0.10	\$0.20	\$0.30	\$0.40	\$0.50	\$0.10
1 October 1974	\$0.13	\$0.26	\$0.39	\$0.52	\$0.65	\$0.13 *
1 September 1975	\$0.20	\$0.40	\$0.60	\$0.80	\$1.00	\$0.20 *
1 July 1978	\$0.25	\$0.30	\$0.35	\$0.40	\$0.45	\$0.05
31 March 1980	\$0.30	\$0.35	\$0.40	\$0.45	\$0.50	\$0.05

* per extra 20g

Airmail PCs / GCs – Zone 4	Up to 10g	Up to 20g	Up to 30g	Up to 40g	Up to 50g	Per extra 10g
Rate effective from:						
1 October 1973	\$0.13	\$0.26	\$0.39	\$0.52	\$0.65	\$0.13
1 October 1974	\$0.15	\$0.30	\$0.45	\$0.60	\$0.75	\$0.15 *
1 September 1975	\$0.25	\$0.50	\$0.75	\$1.00	\$1.25	\$0.25 *
1 July 1978	\$0.30	\$0.40	\$0.50	\$0.60	\$0.70	\$0.10
31 March 1980	\$0.35	\$0.45	\$0.55	\$0.65	\$0.75	\$0.10

* per extra 20g

Airmail PCs / GCs – Zone 5	Up to 10g	Up to 20g	Up to 30g	Up to 40g	Up to 50g	Per extra 10g
Rate effective from:						
1 October 1973	\$0.15	\$0.30	\$0.45	\$0.60	\$0.75	\$0.15
1 October 1974	\$0.18	\$0.36	\$0.54	\$0.72	\$0.90	\$0.18 *
1 September 1975	\$0.25	\$0.50	\$0.75	\$1.00	\$1.25	\$0.25 *
1 July 1978	\$0.30	\$0.40	\$0.50	\$0.60	\$0.70	\$0.10
31 March 1980	\$0.35	\$0.45	\$0.55	\$0.65	\$0.75	\$0.10

* per extra 20g

Other Articles Airmail Rates

The items grouped together as “Other Articles” in the Post Office Rates Booklets such as printed papers, samples and merchandise, as well as small packets, continued to be entitled to reduced rates of postage for carriage by airmail overseas.

As mentioned above, the conversion to metric weights & measures saw the basic weight-step for Other Articles sent by airmail change from “per 2 oz” (equivalent to 56g) to “per 50g”. This was obviously not considered to be a significant difference as the Other Articles airmail rates remained unchanged upon metric conversion.

As we have previously noted, the base rate for Other Articles items with their 50g weight-steps was higher than the corresponding airmail rate for letters. This meant that it was cheaper to send light-weight items at letter rates than at Other Articles rates, there being no reduction in cost until at least the second weight-step was reached. This explains the lack of small covers to be found endorsed “printed matter” and the like, and the lower survival rate of larger and bulkier items makes these difficult to find.

The tables below set out the rates for Other Articles (up to 500g) sent overseas by airmail to each Zone in turn (rates for items over 500g closely followed parcel rates with minor variations that are beyond our scope; small packets weighing more than 500g were subject to parcel rates) –

Airmail Other Articles – Zone 1	Up to 50g	Up to 100g	Up to 150g	Up to 200g	Up to 250g	Per extra 50g
Rate effective from:						
1 October 1973	\$0.15	\$0.30	\$0.45	\$0.60	\$0.75	\$0.15
1 October 1974	\$0.24	\$0.48	\$0.72	\$0.96	\$1.20	\$0.24
1 September 1975	\$0.40	\$0.80	\$1.20	\$1.60	\$2.00	\$0.40
1 July 1978	\$0.50	\$0.80	\$1.10	\$1.40	\$1.70	\$0.30
31 March 1980	\$0.55	\$0.85	\$1.15	\$1.45	\$1.75	\$0.30

Airmail Other Articles – Zone 2	Up to 50g	Up to 100g	Up to 150g	Up to 200g	Up to 250g	Per extra 50g
Rate effective from:						
1 October 1973	\$0.25	\$0.50	\$0.75	\$1.00	\$1.25	\$0.25
1 October 1974	\$0.30	\$0.60	\$0.90	\$1.20	\$1.50	\$0.30
1 September 1975	\$0.50	\$1.00	\$1.50	\$2.00	\$2.50	\$0.50
1 July 1978	\$0.60	\$1.00	\$1.40	\$1.80	\$2.20	\$0.40
31 March 1980	\$0.65	\$1.05	\$1.45	\$1.85	\$2.25	\$0.40

Airmail Other Articles – Zone 3	Up to 50g	Up to 100g	Up to 150g	Up to 200g	Up to 250g	Per extra 50g
Rate effective from:						
1 October 1973	\$0.30	\$0.60	\$0.90	\$1.20	\$1.50	\$0.30
1 October 1974	\$0.40	\$0.80	\$1.20	\$1.60	\$2.00	\$0.40
1 September 1975	\$0.60	\$1.20	\$1.80	\$2.40	\$3.00	\$0.60
1 July 1978	\$0.75	\$1.30	\$1.85	\$2.40	\$2.95	\$0.55
31 March 1980	\$0.80	\$1.35	\$1.90	\$2.45	\$3.00	\$0.55

Airmail Other Articles – Zone 4	Up to 50g	Up to 100g	Up to 150g	Up to 200g	Up to 250g	Per extra 50g
Rate effective from:						
1 October 1973	\$0.40	\$0.80	\$1.20	\$1.60	\$2.00	\$0.40
1 October 1974	\$0.50	\$1.00	\$1.50	\$2.00	\$2.50	\$0.50
1 September 1975	\$0.70	\$1.40	\$2.10	\$2.80	\$3.50	\$0.70
1 July 1978	\$0.85	\$1.50	\$2.15	\$2.80	\$3.45	\$0.65
31 March 1980	\$0.95	\$1.65	\$2.35	\$3.05	\$3.75	\$0.70

Airmail Other Articles – Zone 5	Up to 50g	Up to 100g	Up to 150g	Up to 200g	Up to 250g	Per extra 50g
Rate effective from:						
1 October 1973	\$0.45	\$0.90	\$1.35	\$1.80	\$2.25	\$0.45
1 October 1974	\$0.55	\$1.10	\$1.65	\$2.20	\$2.75	\$0.55
1 September 1975	\$0.75	\$1.50	\$2.25	\$3.00	\$3.75	\$0.75
1 July 1978	\$0.95	\$1.70	\$2.45	\$3.20	\$3.95	\$0.75
31 March 1980	\$1.05	\$1.85	\$2.65	\$3.45	\$4.25	\$0.80

Aerogrammes

Aerogrammes are a separate class of mail available only to overseas countries offering reduced rates of airmail postage in most cases lower than the applicable letter or postcard / greeting card rates. The exception as we have seen in other cases was New Zealand, and it remained cheaper to send an airmail letter to New Zealand than to send an Aerogramme for much of the current period under review.

The preferential Aerogramme rate only applied if the correspondence was limited to writing on the paper that was folded up to comprise the aerogramme. If anything was enclosed (an additional sheet of paper, or a photo or newspaper clipping or the like), the aerogramme was subject to letter rates. Accordingly, only a single weight-step rate applied for aerogrammes.

Unlike other classes of mail discussed, a single aerogramme rate applied to all overseas countries irrespective of charging zone. The table below sets out the rates for Aerogrammes –

Aerogrammes	All Zones
Rate effective from:	
1 October 1973	\$0.14
1 October 1974	\$0.20
1 September 1975	\$0.25
1 July 1978	\$0.30
31 March 1980	\$0.33

I trust that our ongoing study of decimal postal rates is proving useful to those already engaged in forming a collection of Australian decimal postal history and gives others encouragement to join them.