

AUSTRALIAN COINS & BANKNOTES

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Introduction

Australia's most recent major currency development was the redesign and reprinting of banknotes on polymer (plastic) stock.

These new polymer notes use sophisticated Australian technology and maximise protection against counterfeiting.

Decimal currency was introduced into Australia on 14 February 1966 and comprises coins of five, 10, 20 and 50 cents and one and two dollars, with notes of five, 10, 20, 50 and 100 dollars. The five, 10, 20 and 50 cent coins are made of cupro-nickel (75 per cent copper, 25 per cent nickel) and the one and two dollar coins are made of aluminium bronze. The banknotes are printed on polymer.

Australia's currency also includes \$5, \$10 and \$200 coins but these are commemorative or collector coins and are not in general circulation.

Coins

Coins are minted at the Royal Australian Mint in Canberra, the national capital. The obverse side (or head) of all coins carries the year of issue and a portrait of Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, also Queen of Australia. The current portrait design, in use since 1985, is by Raphael Maklouf. This design replaced the portrait of the Queen by Arnold Machin which was standard on all coins between 1966 and '84. The standard reverse (or tail) designs are reproductions of Australian fauna and these have been designed by Stuart Devlin, except for the \$2 coin which depicts the bust

of an Aboriginal Elder sculpted by Horst Hahne.

The five cent coin depicts an echidna, or spiny ant-eater, one of only two egg-laying mammals. It grows to about 45 cm (17.7 inches) long and depends on its spines for protection. Echidnas live in most Australian habitats.

The 10 cent coin shows a male lyrebird dancing, its magnificent tail expanded and thrown forward over its head. A clever mimic, the lyrebird inhabits the dense, damp forests of Australia's eastern coast.

The reverse of the 20 cent piece presents the world's only other egg-laying mammal (or monotreme), the platypus. The Platypus is found on the banks of waterways on the east of the continent. It has webbed feet, rich, brown fur and uses its duck-like bill to hunt for food along the bottom of streams and rivers.

The standard 50 cent piece carries a representation of the Australian Coat of Arms which is the six state badges on a central shield supported by a kangaroo and an emu, with a background of Mitchell grass. The 50 cent piece is often minted with special designs for commemorative purposes. The 1994 coin, for example, carries a design which commemorates the International year of the Family. Other commemorative designs have appeared on the 50 cent coin in other years.

The one dollar coin is also used to carry commemorative designs. Introduced in 1984, the standard coin depicts five kangaroos, one of Australia's most recognisable animals. Commemorative designs include the International Year of Peace in 1986, Australia's bicentenary in 1988, the 1992 Barcelona Games

and, in 1993, Landcare Australia which raised awareness of water quality issues in Australia.

The two dollar coin shows an Aboriginal tribal elder set against a background of the Southern Cross and native grass trees. The design restores to Australian currency a recognition of Australia's Aboriginal heritage, a recognition which was temporarily absent when the one dollar coin replaced the one dollar note in 1984.

The one and two dollar coins are made of 92 per cent copper, six per cent aluminium and two per cent nickel. They feature interrupted milling along the edge as an aid for visually impaired people.

The Royal Australian Mint also produces collector coins and limited mintage commemorative coins. These include \$5 coins commemorating the opening of Parliament House in 1988, the 75th anniversary of ANZAC in 1990, and the Year of Space in 1992. In 1994 the Mint produced Australia's first bi-metallic coin featuring the centenary of Women's Suffrage in South Australia. A \$10 sterling silver series featuring the coat of arms of all Australian states and territories was also produced.

Other series include the Masterpieces in Silver, a commemoration of Australia's history on coins which will conclude in 2001 at the centenary of Federation of States into the Commonwealth. The Mint's flagship is its \$200 gold coin which was first produced in 1980, with 1994 marking the conclusion of a six year series called Pride of Australia and depicting the country's unique wildlife.

Australia's commemorative and collector coins are mainly designed by members of the Royal Australian Mint's resident design team, headed by award winning engraver Horst Hahne. Public design competitions have been run. The first, for the 1992 Year of Space non-circulating commemorative \$5 coin was won by John Skillington.

Notes

Australia's currency has notes of five denominations, each increasing in size with its value and each depicting personalities or themes of historical interest.

A commemorative \$10 note, the first polymer note in the world, was issued in 1988 with the theme of Australian settlement. A young Aborigine wearing body painting is portrayed with some other elements of Aboriginal culture. The ship Supply from the First Fleet is shown on the other side against a background of Sydney Cove. As well, a group of people illustrates the diverse backgrounds from which the Australian nation has evolved.

The note is printed on polymer substrate and the security features include an optically variable device with an image of Captain Cook surrounded by a clear area, as a deterrent to counterfeiting. This replaces the metallic thread and watermark portrait of Captain Cook on other paper notes.

Australian currency notes are produced by Note Printing Australia in Melbourne, a division of the Reserve Bank of Australia.

Source: DFAT