



Australia Post

ADMINISTRATION OF THE MAIL REDIRECTION SERVICE

June 2009

Report by the Commonwealth and Postal Industry Ombudsman,
Prof. John McMillan, under the *Ombudsman Act 1976*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across the world, major postal administrations provide a redirection service to their customers, and Australia Post is no exception. This service can be used to have mail addressed to an individual at a given address forwarded to another address of their choosing. The mail redirection service is relied on by many Australians who would like their mail to be delivered other than as addressed. People who move house, go on holiday, want mail to go to a personal Post Office Box (PO Box) instead of a street address, or who work in remote areas may all want their mail redirected.

The reliability of the service is of high importance to its users. When a redirection service fails, mail may go to the customer's old address—which may be empty, or occupied by other people—or may be returned to sender. Complaints to the Postal Industry Ombudsman about failures of the redirection service are notable for the levels of frustration and even distress experienced by people who do not know where their mail is.

The consistent level of complaints to the Ombudsman about redirection issues, and the importance of a reliable redirection service to the Australian community, led the Ombudsman to decide to investigate the service and the most common reasons why it goes wrong.

Our investigation established that the redirection service relies heavily on manual intervention: application forms are still paper-based and are sent by post from the receiving office to a central location to be entered on to the computer. Redirection stickers are printed out, but are applied by hand by delivery people to mail which is to be redirected. Identification of mail to be redirected depends on a delivery person looking through a folder and matching sheets of stickers in the folder to addresses on a sorting frame.

The scope for human error to affect the process is significant. When it does, it is important that complaints are handled quickly and efficiently so that problems are corrected. The complaints we receive and our investigation suggested that this did not always happen.

We recognise that a redirection service will never be a substitute for making sure that mail is addressed to where the recipient wants it to go. But there will always be circumstances where this is not possible or is not effective. Following consideration of the things that go wrong with the system, and the reasons why they go wrong, the Ombudsman has made a number of recommendations to improve the administration of the mail redirection service.

The Ombudsman makes eight recommendations which are set out in Part 6 of this report.

We provided a draft of this report to Australia Post for its comment. Its response is reproduced in full at the end of this report, with our commentary on that response included in Part 1. We welcome Australia Post's commitment to reviewing certain aspects of the redirection service with a view to improving accuracy and dealing with complaints more effectively. We will be monitoring progress in these areas, particularly in relation to complaint handling, on a six-monthly basis for the next two years.

PART 1—INTRODUCTION

Background

1.1 In common with many postal services worldwide, Australia Post offers a mail redirection service. This service can be used to have mail addressed to an individual at a given address forwarded to another address of their choosing.

1.2 The service is typically used when a householder moves house, as a temporary expedient to ensure that mail is not missed before the change of address is notified to others. However we have encountered other situations in which people use the service. Examples include:

- people going on holiday
- temporary relocation for work
- property renovations
- people without a fixed abode having mail from a previous address forwarded to a friend
- people renting or cancelling a PO Box and wanting mail redirected to or from their street address.

1.3 There is no maximum period permitted by Australia Post for redirections, so long as the renewal fee is paid in time.

1.4 Complaints relating to the redirection service form a steady part of the Postal Industry Ombudsman's (PIO) work. Generally, the complaints relate to the service not working, and mail being delivered to the 'old' address, although we also regularly receive complaints about mail being redirected without the addressee's consent.

Table 1: Approaches received by the PIO involving redirection issues, by financial year

	2006–07 ¹	2007–08	2008–09 ²
Total Australia Post approaches	1818	2083	1689
Approaches involving redirection issues	146	136	129
Percentage involving redirection issues	8	6.5	7.6

¹ For 2006–07, records were searched for the keyword 'redirection'. For subsequent years, following a change in the way we recorded redirection issues, we searched for approaches with at least one redirection issue recorded.

² 1 July 2008 to 31 March 2009.

1.5 We are aware that Australia Post receives large numbers of complaints about redirections as well. In a written answer given to the Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts following budget estimates hearings in May 2008, Australia Post advised that it had received 65,000 complaints about redirections in 2007 through its centralised enquiry number—there would presumably have been additional complaints made in person at post offices, and by other means such as letter or internet.

1.6 Where a redirection does not work, the consequences that follow can include loss of privacy, financial loss owing to late or non-payment of accounts, and lost mail (whether disposed of by the person at the address it was delivered to, or returned to sender and lost in that process). Many people report to us the uncertainty caused by a mail redirection failure—they believe that they should have had mail, but never receive it. Although people may not be able to prove that a particular item was lost, they will often feel that their usual volume of mail has not been reaching them.

1.7 The Ombudsman decided in the circumstances to investigate Australia Post's administration of the mail redirection service as a whole, with a view to identifying any obvious deficiencies in the process and procedures and making recommendations for improvement.

1.8 Australia Post's mail hold service provides the facility for mail to be held at an Australia Post delivery facility during the temporary absence of a resident. The process for applying for and actioning mail hold is similar to redirections, except that mail is retained by Australia Post instead of being sent to another address.

1.9 The Ombudsman also receives complaints about failure of the mail hold service; nearly all are about a failure of the service to commence or continue. The observations made in this report about redirection failure, particularly failure to start and service failure, are also applicable to the mail hold service. For the sake of clarity this report primarily refers to mail redirection, but its conclusions and recommendations should be considered in relation to mail hold as well.

Methodology

1.10 We wrote to Australia Post to request copies of all documents in its possession, such as procedural manuals, that were relevant to the mail redirection service. We undertook a site visit to a delivery centre to view these procedures being carried out.

1.11 We also conducted a detailed analysis of complaints about mail redirection investigated by the Ombudsman during the period July 2007 to December 2008.

1.12 We contacted another postal service, Canada Post, to ask it for information about how it handled redirections. Canada Post was chosen because an Ombudsman staff member had previously visited its Vancouver facility and spoken with staff there about redirections among other subjects; and because Canada, as a geographically large country with population distributed between densely-populated urban areas and remote locations, has many similarities with Australia. We are indebted to Canada Post for the helpful assistance provided to us.

Australia Post response

1.13 We provided a draft of this report including the recommendations at Part 6 to Australia Post for its comment. Its response is reproduced in full at the end of this report. We welcome Australia Post's commitment to reviewing certain aspects of the redirection service with a view to improving accuracy and dealing with complaints more effectively.

1.14 We acknowledge that some of our suggestions may pose difficulties to Australia Post in implementing, and that Australia Post is best placed to assess the practical and operational challenges involved. We do not, however, consider that means that no action should be taken in relation to the issues we have identified. We are of the view that Australia Post should focus more attention, in the first instance, on fixing the causes of redirection failures, in addition to making efforts to better address these issues after complaints have been made.

1.15 It is evident from the complaints received by us that the redirection system is prone to error, and this report highlights some of the specific areas in which things go wrong. If Australia Post does not agree with our suggestions for addressing these issues, we take the view that Australia Post should conduct its own analysis of the issues with a view to identifying solutions to these problems that can be implemented within Australia Post's operational constraints.

1.16 We wish to comment specifically on two elements of Australia Post's response. The first is the suggestion that printing of redirection stickers at the point that they were required 'would increase the cost of redirections'. In our view, Australia Post's response does not contain sufficient analysis or cost information for us to be able to conclude that the increase would be disproportionate to the benefit that would be gained. Customers might be prepared to pay a modest increase in redirection fees if this made the service more reliable. We remain of the view that providing the facility to print redirection stickers where they are required would be an obvious way of avoiding the problems caused when stickers run out.

1.17 Secondly in relation to renewals, we understand that the terms and conditions of service provide that mail should be delivered as addressed on expiry of a redirection. Our recommendation is that, for a limited time after the date of expiry, the customer should be able to reactivate the expired redirection on payment of a renewal fee. By definition the customer has already demonstrated their entitlement to redirection, and we do not see the necessity for this entitlement to be demonstrated all over again in circumstances where the customer is a few days late in renewing. Australia Post's response seems to us to focus more on applying the strict letter of its conditions of service than on providing good service to its customers.

PART 2—HOW THE SYSTEM WORKS

Application

2.1 A person requiring redirection of their mail has to complete a paper form and take it, together with identification and payment, to their local postal outlet. It is possible for a person who is unable to attend a post office, for example because they are overseas, to give written authority to another person to make the application for them. Someone must however attend the post office and prove their identity, and verify their right to make the application for redirection.

2.2 Identification is checked in order to ensure that the person making the application has the right to do so. Mail redirection carries a risk of identity theft, and it is to be expected that measures will be taken to minimise this risk. An applicant is, however, permitted to include other names on their application form and sign a declaration that they are entitled to do so.

2.3 The customer pays for the redirection, and the application is then forwarded, in hard copy, to a Mail Redirection Workcentre.

2.4 The customer also has the opportunity on the application form to ask Australia Post to notify certain organisations of their change of address. This facility has been the cause of some confusion to people in the past, with complaints being received by the Ombudsman that customers' addresses have been passed to commercial organisations for advertising purposes when they had not consented to this.

2.5 The notification service involves Australia Post advising organisations that can demonstrate they already have the customer's old address, that the customer has moved. Australia Post does not add people's names to unaddressed mailing lists as part of the redirection application process.

Processing

2.6 At the mail redirection centre, an operator enters the details of the redirection into Australia Post's web-based Mail Redirection System (MRS). This involves entering the application lodgement date, start date, application reference number, and 'from' and 'to' addresses. A finish date will also generally be entered.

2.7 One day after the details are entered on the system, a 'security letter' is automatically generated and sent to the applicant at their old address. This advises that a redirection application is being processed and asks the resident to contact Australia Post if they have any concerns. The security letter acts as an additional safeguard against fraudulent redirection applications.

Implementation

Letters

2.8 In a typical urban delivery facility, letter mail is sorted by postal delivery officers (PDOs) onto sorting frames, which have slots for the individual addresses on the PDO's delivery round. It is the PDO's responsibility, once the mail is sorted, to apply redirections to the relevant mail.

2.9 Information about redirections is accessed by staff at the delivery facility for the customer's old address. This is done by printing out daily lists, a task which is usually carried out by a designated officer at the delivery centre. The lists printed at a delivery facility will carry information about new redirections and cancellations affecting that facility. There is also a 'check' function that allows the generation of a list of redirections that need to be checked for some reason.

2.10 For each new redirection, sheets of yellow redirection stickers are printed out. These sheets include two labels at the top which are used for identification purposes only and are not suitable for applying to mail as they do not have bar codes on them (which are required for automatic sorting). The lists and stickers are then given to team leaders, who distribute them to the relevant PDOs.

2.11 The PDOs maintain folders in which they keep sheets of redirection stickers, enclosed in clear plastic sleeves. These folders, and the stickers in them, serve as a guide to existing redirections for that delivery person's round. A delivery person may have as many as 150 current redirections for a typical round with 900 delivery points.

2.12 Once a PDO has sorted all their mail into the sorting frame, they will then go through their redirection folder methodically, identifying each current redirection in the folder. The stickers in the folder have the name and address of each person whose mail is to be redirected, and the delivery person will examine the relevant address slot to see if there is any mail for the named redirection in it.

2.13 Where more than one person at an address has asked to have mail redirected, there may be one sticker with two or more names on it, or separate stickers with individual names on them. Where there are separate stickers, they are kept in separate sleeves in the delivery person's folder.

2.14 Sorting may be carried out at other locations such as licensed post offices (LPOs), for example in regional areas where a mail round is operated out of a local post office. Post offices may also be responsible for sorting mail into PO Boxes. Where this is the case, the post office in question is provided with the daily lists, and obtains redirection stickers from its local mail delivery facility. These are delivered when mail is transferred from the delivery facility to the post office for sorting.

Parcels

2.15 Parcels are generally handled in a different way from letters, using a parcel contractor for delivery. The documentary information we were given by Australia Post³ suggests that the contractor should sequence all parcels for their round in delivery order, and check them against a *Summary Parcel Contractor Report* for active redirections. They should then identify and remove from their round any parcels to be redirected, and pass them to their supervisor who would apply the redirection stickers and return the parcels to the mail stream (if necessary).

2.16 The information we were given when we visited an Australia Post delivery facility differed from this. We were informed that a parcel contractor would typically be responsible for delivery to a specific postcode, and an area of that size could have as many as 1500 active redirections. For that reason, it was impractical to attempt to consider each redirection to see whether it affected any of the day's parcels before delivery.

³ *Australia Post General Procedures Manual—Delivery—Change of Address*, section 4.45 *Delivery officer/contractor (parcels)—responsibility requirements*.

2.17 We were advised that the proportion of parcels that required redirection was lower than letter mail, because people tend to order parcels to be sent to their current address. Also, many parcels are delivered to the householder in person, not just left, so if the householder is not the addressee parcels will often be refused. Accordingly, on a risk basis, parcels redirections are handled by checking refused and returned parcels to see if they should have been redirected, before returning to sender.

Multiple items for redirection

2.18 Where for some reason letter mail cannot be machine sorted, and there are multiple items to be redirected at once, they may be redirected by being placed in an official envelope with a redirection label on it. If items can be machine sorted they should have an individual redirection label affixed, according to the documents provided to us.

2.19 We were advised, however, that in practice, multiple items of mail received for redirection on one day may be placed in an official envelope and forwarded with a redirection label placed on the envelope, to save time and resources in applying stickers to large numbers of mail items.

Signature items

2.20 Items requiring a signature will be forwarded, with a redirection label being entered in the delivery journal for the old address to show this has been done. Registered items, overseas insurance, cash on delivery, customs and express post platinum mail items are put into the normal mail stream following a redirection. A signature will still be required from the addressee at the new address.

Joint addressees

2.21 Where mail is addressed to more than one person (for example Mr and Mrs Smith) and:

- one of the persons is still at the address—the mail is delivered as addressed
- each has a redirection in place to a different address—mail is considered to be undeliverable and will be returned to sender.

International redirections

2.22 Australia Post offers an international redirection service. However, mail can only be redirected internationally if it either does not require customs documentation (because it is a letter containing documents only), or already has customs documentation on it (because it came from overseas). Mail that cannot be redirected internationally, or mail requiring a signature on delivery, will be returned to sender.

Renewal

2.23 Twenty one days (for domestic redirections) or 28 days (for international) prior to expiry of the redirection, a renewal letter is automatically generated and sent to the address to which mail is being redirected. Customers can renew a redirection by post, or over the counter at a post office.

2.24 Renewals can only be processed by the MRS operator on or before the expiry of the redirection. After that time the redirection details have to be re-entered into the MRS, and customers are required to submit a new application if they do not renew before the expiry of their redirection. The renewal invitation indicates when renewal

must be requested by to allow the renewal to be processed before the redirection expires.

Alteration and cancellation

2.25 Changes can be made to a redirection by the person who originally applied, or by an agent who is authorised in writing. An authorised agent has to present a letter of authorisation, relevant identification and either the original or a copy of the form and the receipt for the service.

2.26 A redirection may be altered or cancelled before its end date. An application to alter may be made where the addition or removal of a name from the redirection is requested, or where the length of the redirection is to be changed. All other alterations (such as the destination address) must be made by cancelling the old redirection and taking out a new one.

2.27 An application for alteration or cancellation must be made on the appropriate form and supported by identification.

PART 3—HOW PROBLEMS OCCUR

3.1 The complaints we receive about the mail redirection service can be grouped into a number of categories, including:

- redirection did not start
- redirection started, but was unauthorised by a person affected
- redirection started, but failed
- redirection did not stop
- there was a problem renewing a redirection.

3.2 Of these themes, by far the most common that we deal with is the failure of a redirection that had, at some stage, been working effectively.

3.3 We analysed 134 complaints about redirections that we investigated between July 2007 and December 2008. These cases were selected by identifying cases investigated where redirection was recorded as an issue, and then disregarding those which, on consideration, were not actually about the redirection system.

3.4 The following table shows the most common conclusions of redirection complaint investigations conducted by the Ombudsman.

Table 2: Conclusions of redirection complaint investigations conducted by the Ombudsman—July 2007 to December 2008

	Number of cases	Percentage of whole
No identifiable Australia Post error	30	22.5
General error by the delivery person in identifying mail for redirection and applying stickers to it	30	22.5
Error by the delivery person in separating mail that should have been delivered as addressed from other mail that was to be redirected, often in the context of some but not all family members changing address	17	13
Problems with reprinting redirection stickers	11	8
Problems with data entry into the MRS	11	8
Delivery Centre failed to action new redirection	9	7
Other problems with the MRS process, such as lost application forms	8	6
All other	18	13
TOTALS	134	100

3.5 This part of our report details how these outcomes relate to the general complaint themes identified above, and makes suggestions as to how the incidence of the more common problems could be reduced.

Failure to start

3.6 A number of complaints to the Ombudsman involve customers who have applied for a redirection service which never commenced.

3.7 There are two main reasons why this might occur:

- there are problems with the way the application is entered into the MRS, either because this does not happen at all, or because there are errors in the data entered
- the application is entered correctly onto the MRS but is not initiated by the relevant delivery facility.

3.8 We have dealt with very few complaints where investigation has suggested that the MRS software has been at fault, for example in identifying the wrong delivery facility for a redirection,⁴ and we have no reason to believe that MRS systems errors are prevalent.

Redirection not entered, or not correctly entered, onto MRS

3.9 A redirection might not get into the MRS in the first place because an application form has been lost at the facility where it is processed, on the way to the MRC, or in the MRC, and not entered into the system.

3.10 It appears to us that a simple way of avoiding this happening is for the redirection to be entered onto the MRS at the point of sale. The MRS is a web-based system, so presumably there is no technical reason why access could not be provided at all locations where an application form can be accepted.

3.11 Documents provided to us by Australia Post showing the data entry screens for the MRS⁵ indicate that it is not a complex process and it appears that any computer-literate person could enter the requisite data in a short space of time.

3.12 We consider that Australia Post could usefully look at ways to transfer the data input function for the MRS to the point of sale, thereby eliminating the risks involved with transmission of a paper application from point of sale to a remote data input location.

3.13 Another advantage to be gained from this proposal is that the customer could be asked to check the data as it is inputted into the system, and confirm that there are no errors. From time to time we receive complaints where data input errors have caused problems. Having the customer confirm the details would not eliminate all errors, but should reduce the incidence of keying errors in the system.

3.14 Other postal jurisdictions, such as the US, Canada and Great Britain, allow applications for redirections to be made online. This may be in conjunction with a requirement to provide identity documents in person or by post. We welcome Australia Post's indication in its response to this report that it is hoping to introduce a similar facility for its customers.

⁴ Widgemooltha, WA receives mail via the main DC in Kalgoorlie, but also from the DC in Norseman. In one case the MRS forwarded a redirection to the Kalgoorlie DC which worked, but failed to include the Norseman DC in the redirection.

⁵ *MRS3 User Guide*.

Delivery facility fails to initiate new redirection

3.15 In some cases investigated by the Ombudsman, a redirection that had been paid for and entered onto the MRS did not commence. Investigation showed that this was because it had never been initiated at the delivery facility and no redirection stickers had ever been printed out.

3.16 In one case, a redirection was required to be actioned at an LPO. The relevant delivery centre was aware of the redirection, but a failure in communication meant that the LPO was never informed. As the LPO was aware that the resident had moved away, but was unaware that her mail should be redirected, they returned it to sender.

3.17 We have not identified any systemic reason why a new redirection might be overlooked, although having dedicated staff members responsible for redirections in mail delivery facilities (see Recommendation 3 in Part 6 of this report) would reduce the risk of this happening.

3.18 In addition, a prompt and thorough response by Australia Post Customer Relationship Centres (CRCs) to complaints about redirections not starting, along the lines discussed in Part 4 of this report, would enable problems of this nature to be rapidly identified and corrected.

Unauthorised redirection

3.19 This subject heading covers a broad range of circumstances in which mail is redirected, but one or more of the individuals whose mail is redirected does not want it to be.

3.20 Broadly speaking, there may be one of two situations in which this happens: an accidental situation in which mail is 'caught up' in a redirection from an address, or a deliberate attempt to redirect someone's mail without their permission.

Accidental redirection

3.21 Mail is redirected by reference to named addressees, not an address. This is consistent with the principle that a person requesting a mail redirection must prove their identity and confirm their authority to redirect mail. Mail for previous occupants, or mail that has been erroneously delivered to an address, is not covered by a resident's authority to redirect mail addressed to them. Redirection of 'all mail' or mail addressed to 'the occupier' or 'the resident' is not usually permitted, because this mail is intended to go to the person actually residing at the premises.

3.22 Problems may occur when people with similar names receive mail at the same address, some of whom want mail redirected and some of whom do not. This may happen when a relationship breaks up, or when a member of a family leaves home with other family members remaining.

3.23 Some of these situations may be difficult for Australia Post to deal with, particularly where family members have the same initial. In some cases Australia Post may refuse or cancel a redirection service where it is difficult to separate out the mail of similarly named people. Customers should bear in mind that mail redirection is no substitute for advising people of a change of address so that mail can be correctly addressed in the first place.

3.24 We do receive complaints where it is apparent that mail has been caught up in a redirection because sufficient care has not been taken by the sorting or delivery person to distinguish, for example, 'A Smith' from 'J Smith'. There is no systemic reason for these errors, although they illustrate the importance of sorting and delivery staff being diligent in applying redirections for which they are responsible. The significance of such errors is minimised where there is an effective complaints service available to customers with redirection issues, a theme that we discuss in Part 4.

Case study: A family affair

Mr AB rented a PO Box, and obtained a redirection of his mail from his home address to the PO Box. Mr AB's mother, Mrs ZB, lived with him, and her mail started to be redirected to Mr AB's PO Box as well, even though the redirection was in AB's name only.

Mr AB complained to Australia Post without effect. Only after he complained a second time, and the delivery person responsible for redirecting his mail was counselled about their work performance, did the problem cease.

Deliberate redirection

3.25 We do not encounter many cases where fraudulent redirection of mail is demonstrated. Allegations of fraudulent redirection are most often made in situations of family breakdown. However it can be difficult to distinguish between cases where a deliberate attempt is being to obtain an estranged partner's mail, and where a redirection has been applied for without an appreciation of the legalities (for example, a departing partner wanting mail addressed to 'Mr and Mrs' to be redirected to them, when it cannot be without the consent of both parties).

3.26 Deliberate unauthorised redirection of mail (in the sense of being fraudulent) is a criminal offence and may be reported to the police as such. More often, complaints are about the 'grey areas'.

3.27 We consider that generally speaking, Australia Post draws the line appropriately between seeking identification from applicants and avoiding an over-rigorous insistence on comprehensive identification from all persons named on an application form. Applicants are already required to make a statement that they are authorised to apply on behalf of all affected parties, and we do not consider that the interests of the public would be served by demanding that all applicants attend the post office in person with their identification.

3.28 We do however expect that Australia Post should deal promptly with complaints of unauthorised redirection, and take them seriously. We do not consider that there is any evidence of a systemic failure to do so, but cases of concern do sometimes arise when it is not clear that a complaint has been dealt with well, or escalated appropriately, as discussed in Part 4.

Ex-residents

3.29 A variation on the theme of unauthorised redirection is the case where a former resident of a property maintains a redirection of their mail from that property, and the current resident considers that they should not do so because this allows the former resident to continue giving that address to people for correspondence.

3.30 In one case we dealt with, a householder complained that her former housemate was still using her address, with a redirection in place to divert mail

elsewhere. The complainant had fallen out with the former housemate and did not want her associated with her address any more. Because the former housemate had actually lived at the property and there was no apparent unlawful purpose in her having a redirection, Australia Post correctly allowed the redirection to stand.

3.31 In another case, a complaint was made that a previous resident of an address had a number of dubious business interests, and despite having moved away some years ago, was still using the address for his business purposes and had a redirection in place to divert the mail. The complainant was worried that bailiffs would come knocking on his door—or worse.

3.32 Australia Post can cancel a redirection if it considers that it is being used for unlawful purposes, and we advised the complainant that if that was his concern, he could tell Australia Post this.

3.33 These complaints illustrate a possible issue with the fact that Australia Post does not set any time limit on redirections. The absence of a time limit also encourages the proliferation of redirections as a substitute for advising people of a change of address; and the more redirections there are, the more likely mistakes are to be made. Other jurisdictions have time limits on redirections: the UK, for example, only allows a maximum of two years.

3.34 We recognise that there may be legitimate reasons for people wanting long term redirections—for example, a nurse who owns a property in a metropolitan area but has been working for some years in remote areas of Australia. We do not suggest that redirections should never be allowed to continue beyond a certain time.

3.35 We consider, however, that Australia Post should review whether redirections should be allowed to continue indefinitely where there is no good reason to do so—for example, where the applicant has no pecuniary interest in the address the redirection is from.

Service failure

3.36 The bulk of complaints to the Ombudsman about redirections relate to service failure. By this we mean a redirection that has started, but then stops (before the due date) without reason, or is only intermittent in its effectiveness.

3.37 The frustration of customers in such circumstances is only compounded if the problem appears to be fixed, but then recurs. We discuss this situation below in relation to complaint handling.

3.38 We note a frequent complaint theme of ‘unidentified missing mail’. This is where a customer suspects—or even asserts that they are sure—that they are not getting all their mail under a redirection, but cannot identify with precision what mail is missing.

3.39 This theme often arises following a confirmed redirection failure. Whether or not it can be proved that further mail is missing, the uncertainty felt by these complainants is real. It is a further reason why mail redirection failures can be said to have knock-on effects over and above the individual, demonstrated incidences.

Case study: Mail missing

Ms C complained to us that she was not receiving mail under a redirection. A mail monitor was placed on the redirection and the situation improved.

Eight months later Ms C contacted us again. She did not believe she was obtaining all her mail and she was being charged late fees for bills she had not paid. Ms C mailed herself two envelopes from work, with a correct return address on them, but neither of them reached her. We suggested Ms C advise Australia Post of the recurrence of the problem.

After a further three months Ms C came back to the Ombudsman. She was still being charged late fees and was sure that her redirection was not effective.

We investigated Ms C's complaint and Australia Post made changes to Ms C's mail delivery arrangements that it considered should address the problem once and for all.

Stops

3.40 A commonly identified reason for a service stopping altogether (before the due date) is a failure at the delivery facility to identify mail for redirection or to apply redirection stickers to mail.

Identifying redirections

3.41 The current redirection system relies heavily on delivery people recognising that mail to a certain address is subject to redirection by referring to the stickers contained in their folder, and then manually applying stickers to mail that is to be redirected. The potential for human error is correspondingly high.

3.42 In a number of complaints we have investigated the reason for a redirection not working seems to relate to the delivery person overlooking that mail for a particular address needed to be redirected.

3.43 One possible approach, which is adopted in Canada, is for the mail slot for an address that is subject to potential redirection to be identified with a coloured marker card which has the details of the redirection on it. This card acts as a visual reminder that there is a redirection for the address—and if there is more than one, there will be more than one card.

3.44 Having a marker card in the sorting frame for each redirection would reduce the incidence of delivery people overlooking that a particular address had a redirection associated with it, and would increase the impact of new redirections.

3.45 The problem is perhaps less acute in smaller locations, such as LPOs, where mail is sorted. However, wherever mail is being physically separated into a sorting frame or PO Boxes, we suggest that there is merit in having a physical marker to remind sorters that certain addresses have a redirection associated with them.

3.46 In Canada, the person sorting mail is responsible for placing mail subject to a redirection next to, and on the right of, the marker card. Once the sort is complete, the mail for redirection is bundled with the marker card and removed from the frame.

3.47 The mail bundled with the cards is then processed by specific officers whose job this is. They are able to print redirection labels on demand for each redirection, and then return the redirected mail to the mail stream.

3.48 The Canadian system, in our view, lowers the likelihood of human error, and should be considered as a model by Australia Post. The physical identification of redirections in sorting frames provides a prompt to sorting staff that mail may need to be redirected, and the processing of mail for redirection by another staff member provides for a measure of quality assurance—so, for example, if mail for J Smith was accidentally bundled with the redirection card for A Smith, the redirection officer would be likely to notice this and return the mail for delivery as addressed.

3.49 We recognise that such a system will only be viable in larger delivery facilities, but implementing it in larger facilities only would still benefit the majority of redirections being handled by Australia Post.

Running out of stickers

3.50 In a number of complaints we have investigated we have been advised that there was a failure to print more stickers when the previous batch ran out, which led to mail not being redirected. The mail would be delivered as addressed or, in the event that the address being redirected from was a PO Box that had been re-let, might be returned to sender.

Case study: A sticker situation

Ms D telephoned Australia Post to complain she had not received mail under her redirection for two weeks. She was told someone would call her back.

Two days later Ms D called Australia Post back as she had not heard anything. She again requested a call back.

Six days later Ms D called Australia Post a third time to advise she had found mail at her old address, including important legal documents. She told the customer service representative she spoke to that she would take legal action if she did not hear back from Australia Post.

The next day an Australia Post team leader contacted the relevant delivery centre. A check showed that the stickers for Ms D's redirection had run out and mail had not been redirected.

3.51 The process at the delivery centre is for delivery people to advise their supervisor that stickers are running low or have run out, and for the supervisor then to obtain replacement stickers from a central work area and give these to the delivery person. The potential for delay, confusion or forgetfulness is obvious.

3.52 Problems can also arise at locations such as LPOs if stickers run out, because they have to be re-ordered centrally and there can be a delay in providing replacement stickers.

3.53 In our view, it is unacceptable for a redirection to fail because the required stickers have run out. Just as there should be processes in place to make it easier for delivery people to identify addresses subject to redirection, there should be the ability rapidly to obtain replacement stickers where these have run low.

3.54 The Canadian model for redirections discussed above avoids this problem, as stickers are produced on demand by the redirections staff. We have already suggested that Australia Post consider the merits of introducing such a system.

3.55 If this is not done, we cannot see any reason why facilities should not be made available to reprint stickers close to or at the point they are going to be used. We consider that it is not an unreasonable expectation that computer/printing facilities will be available at any location where mail is being sorted and potentially

redirected, and it should be possible for stickers to be printed out at any such location.

3.56 The supervisor responsible for any mail sorting area should be able to access this facility themselves without having to apply to another work area, and other locations (such as LPOs) with sorting responsibilities should have access to a networked computer with the ability to print labels.

3.57 We recognise that there may be costs involved in ensuring ready access to printing of stickers. However, there is equally a cost involved where redirections fail for want of stickers—to the customer, and to Australia Post where they have to deal with and rectify complaints. We do not consider that it is an unreasonable expectation that adequate computer facilities should be made available to work areas that require them to discharge their functions.

3.58 Additionally, a physical marker in mail slots subject to redirection (as suggested above) could have the required stickers clipped to it, instead of being in the delivery person's folder as is current practice. This would allow the facility manager to see at a glance whether stickers were running low, and to print more.

Delivery to wrong address

3.59 From time to time we deal with complaints that redirected mail has gone to the wrong address. This can happen with any mail item, redirected or not, and may simply be the result of human error.

3.60 We have however identified occasions on which the mis-delivery is a result of incorrect information being entered in the MRS in the first place. We refer to Recommendation 1, which we believe would reduce errors in inputting data by giving the customer a chance to see the data in the format that it has been input into the system.

Delay in forwarding

3.61 Complaints have been made to the Ombudsman of redirected mail being forwarded in batches, either bundled together or under cover of an official Australia Post envelope.

3.62 We understand that all mail should be forwarded individually except where multiple items that cannot be machine sorted are involved,⁶ when they may be sent together in an official envelope. We are aware that in practice, large numbers of items received for redirection on the same day may be sent together under cover of an official envelope. The temptation may be to collect mail over a number of days before sending it on in one envelope, and some of the complaints we have received indicate that this may be happening.

3.63 Customers are entitled to expect that mail will be redirected on the date it would have been delivered to the old address, and we will continue to investigate cases where this appears not to have happened. We are mindful, however (as customers should be), that multiple redirected items may arrive at the new address on the same day because of the way they have travelled through the postal system. Customers may expect some additional delay with redirected items and we will investigate only where delays seem unreasonable in all the circumstances.

⁶ *Australia Post General Procedures Manual—Delivery—Change of Address*, section 4.7.2.

Failure to stop

3.64 Generally speaking we do not deal with many complaints that a redirection did not stop when it should have done. This could happen if a delivery officer was unaware, or overlooked for some reason, that a redirection had stopped.

3.65 Customers may cancel a redirection, and the cancellation requires three working days to take effect. The cancellation will then appear on the daily lists for the relevant delivery centre. There is a possibility that cancellation could be overlooked, and we have considered complaints in which this seems to have happened.

3.66 If Australia Post adopted a system whereby mail slots subject to redirection were physically marked, as referred to in Recommendation 3, it would be easier for delivery facility management to make a visual check that cancellations and cessations had been actioned. The marker would be removed from the relevant mail slot and the chances of a redirection wrongly continuing would be reduced.

Extension or renewal

3.67 A number of issues arise in relation to extension, or renewal, of redirection services. We have received complaints from people who did not receive a renewal letter before their redirection lapsed, when they would have liked to renew it. Renewal is an easier process than the initial application, because customers do not have to fill in an application form and provide identification at the post office in order to renew their redirection.

3.68 The MRS does not, generally speaking, allow for renewals to be processed after the redirection has concluded. This leads to problems where people renew a day or two late but are then told that they have to lodge a new application in person, supported by identification.

3.69 We have been advised that renewal letters are generated automatically and sent to the new address, and we accept that for one reason or another, a letter may go astray or be overlooked by the recipient. We do not have any systemic concerns about the generation of these letters.

3.70 We do however consider that the system should be more flexible in cases where a renewal deadline has only recently expired. We have dealt with one complaint where the customer paid the renewal fee at their local post office the day before the redirection expired, but because it could not be processed until after the expiry date, the customer was told they had to go through the application process again.

3.71 In our view, where a redirection has only recently expired and the customer simply wants it renewed (without alteration), this should be permitted without a new application being lodged. Consideration would have to be given to a 'cut-off' date after which renewal is no longer allowed, but we suggest that this should be long enough to cover most cases where a redirection stops because the customer did not get their renewal letter—say 28 days. The period may need to be longer for international customers. Customers could be given the option in their initial application to select a 'no renewal' option if they had specific security concerns.

3.72 We have dealt with complaints from overseas where the customer is frustrated because they are told they have to lodge a new redirection application in

person in Australia, because their old one has lapsed. Again, this can be because a renewal notice was not received.

3.73 Overseas customers are not always told by Australia Post Customer Relationship Centre (CRC) staff that they can appoint an agent to apply for them. Some customers would have been assisted by this information, and in our view CRC staff should have this possibility in mind whenever handling an international redirection enquiry.

3.74 We have dealt with complaints in which customers were told by a CRC that agents could act on their behalf, but they did not realise that the agent would need certain documentation such as the original redirection application receipt with them. Accordingly when the agent attended at the post office, they were unable to complete the transaction on behalf of the overseas customer. Although this information is available on Australia Post's website, consideration should be given to drawing it specifically to the attention of customers.

Parcels

3.75 We discussed in Part 2 how the practice relating to the redirection of parcels appears to differ from the written instructions provided to us by Australia Post. Whereas the written instructions suggest that parcels should be checked against daily lists before delivery to identify any for redirection, this would be impractical given that one parcel contractor's round might have as many as 1500 redirections associated with it. Checking for redirections is therefore carried out if parcels are refused on delivery or returned afterwards.

3.76 We take it that in smaller delivery facilities, parcels for redirection might be identified before delivery is attempted. However we understand the practical reasons why parcels for delivery in urban areas cannot be dealt with in the same way as letters. There appear to us to be two main areas of risk associated with the current situation.

3.77 Firstly, if Australia Post's written instructions to staff on how to deal with parcels redirections are different from current practice, then either the written instructions, or the practice, need to change. It puts staff in a difficult position if, for however good a reason, they are not following the guidance given to them by their employer on how to operate the redirections system. We therefore consider that Australia Post should review this area of its operations and ensure that its written instructions to staff on parcels redirections accord with what staff are doing on the ground.

3.78 This would also avoid any confusion about Australia Post's expectations of its staff in relation to redirecting parcels. We have recently investigated complaints in which parcels have been delivered to an old address, and then returned to sender or refused by the occupants, without the existence of a redirection being identified.

3.79 If reliance is going to be placed on identifying parcels redirections after delivery to the old address has been attempted, then there needs to be a clear policy that all parcels that are refused or returned to sender must be checked against a current list of active redirections before being returned to sender, or held at a mail redistribution centre.

3.80 Secondly, Australia Post introduced its 'Safe Drop' program nationwide towards the end of 2008. Under this program, parcels that do not require a signature

can be left in a safe place at the addressee's premises, rather than being taken back to a post office and a card left for collection.

3.81 Whilst the Safe Drop program confers some advantages on delivery people and customers alike, it seems to us that it increases the risk of a parcel that should have been redirected being left at an address, and retained by the occupant. There may be no permanent record that the item was left under the Safe Drop program, and if it is not delivered to the customer's new address, it may be too late to recover it by the time a complaint is made. Equally if an address was subject to a mail hold, a parcel might be left under the Safe Drop program without the hold being identified.

3.82 We accept that the chances of a parcel requiring redirection are smaller than those of a letter, because it is more likely that a parcel will be addressed to where a person is currently residing. In practical terms, it may therefore be appropriate to manage this issue on a risk basis in the way that has been described to us.

3.83 Customers should however be aware that it may be more important to ensure that their parcel mail is correctly addressed, whether or not they have a redirection in place, than it is for letter mail. We will continue to monitor this issue when dealing with complaints involving redirection of parcels, and the Safe Drop program, in the future. If it appears to us that there are systemic problems associated with parcel delivery, redirections, and the Safe Drop program, we will consider investigating this issue further.

PART 4—REDIRECTION COMPLAINT HANDLING

4.1 Inevitably, things will go wrong with the redirection service from time to time, whatever measures are put in place to improve its effectiveness. As discussed above, having a redirection in place is not a substitute for advising people of a new address. Although people may have redirections in place for other reasons than a permanent move, such as holidays or temporary absence, use of the redirection service carries with it a risk that it will not be 100% effective.

4.2 We have already pointed out that the failure of a redirection, which people will assume is operating correctly, may have far-reaching consequences in terms of a person's privacy, their personal and business affairs, and their peace of mind. For these reasons we consider that it is important that people should be able to complain about redirection service failures, and have those complaints dealt with quickly and effectively.

4.3 It has been a matter of concern to this office that we receive complaints from customers who have tried, often multiple times, without success to have Australia Post fix their redirection problems. Of the 134 complaints about redirections analysed for the purposes of this report and described at the beginning of Part 3 above, 58 (or 43%) involved repeated unsuccessful attempts by the complainant to resolve the issue with Australia Post.

4.4 When we investigate it often turns out that the matter is a simple one, such as a lack of redirection stickers, or insufficient care being taken to separate redirected mail for an address from mail that is not to be redirected. Often, the customer has spoken to Australia Post's CRC about the problem several times but it has not been followed up with the delivery centre, or the delivery centre has not actioned the problem.

4.5 In our view, there should be recognition by all Australia Post staff, both in CRCs and delivery facilities, that redirection issues are serious and require prompt attention. Training to that effect should be provided to all relevant staff.

4.6 It is also important that, where a problem has been identified and fixed, the customer should be advised of this. If the only way the customer can find out if the situation will improve is to wait and see, they may be left uncertain as to whether any remedial action has been taken.

4.7 In one case we investigated, we were advised that standard procedure was for the CRC to mark customer complaints about redirections as 'resolved' once the delivery facility had been informed, without waiting to find out from the facility what the problem was and that it had been dealt with. In one complaint however, the delivery facility had not addressed the problem, leading to the customer still not receiving the service they had paid for, and having to complain to the Ombudsman to achieve a resolution.

4.8 Ensuring that the customer has specific information about problems that have been discovered and the steps taken to fix them will provide greater levels of assurance that their issues have been properly addressed. It also acts as a check for the CRC that the customer's problem has been correctly identified and resolved.

4.9 We would expect as a minimum that a complaint about a failing redirection service should be handled in the following way:

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- The MRS should be checked and the details confirmed with the customer as correct. This should show whether, for example, the correct redirection address, names, start and end dates have been applied.
- If the MRS is correct, the relevant delivery facility should be contacted without delay. The manager should be advised of the customer's complaint and the complaint should be acknowledged.
- The delivery facility manager should check that the relevant delivery person's redirections folder accurately reflects the redirection that should be in place. If the problem is with the redirection not having effect, the delivery person's folder should be checked to ensure there is an adequate supply of stickers, and the delivery person spoken to, to see if there is any reason for the problem.
- If the problem is mail repeatedly being incorrectly caught up in a redirection, or incorrectly delivered, a mail monitor should be applied to the address in question.
- The customer should be advised of the action taken. The whole process should not take longer than the basic Australia Post service standard of ten working days and should ideally not take that long.

4.10 The mail monitor referred to above is a process whereby delivery facility management make a specific check on the way in which mail to a given address has been sorted. It is an effective way of providing quality assurance that mail has been correctly sorted to a particular address, and has been appropriately redirected—or not redirected—if a redirection is in force.

4.11 The history of complaints to the Ombudsman suggests that the above process is not always followed: if it was, the incidence of customer dissatisfaction relating to redirection errors could be reduced.

Case study: Follow-up failure

Ms E took out a redirection to an interstate address after she moved house. However, she found out that her mail was being returned to sender instead of redirected, and so she complained to Australia Post.

One week later the problem was still not fixed, so Ms E complained to Australia Post again.

After another month things had still not improved. Ms E contacted Australia Post again. This time she was told that the redirection had not been working because the stickers had run out.

Our investigation showed that Ms E's first two complaints had been dealt with by the CRC sending an email to the relevant delivery centre. However, no response had been requested and the complaints had been marked as 'resolved' even though the cause of the problem was not discovered.

Only after Ms E had lodged her third complaint, in some distress as Australia Post records showed, was her issue properly investigated and the problem identified—that the delivery centre had not advised Ms E's LPO of the redirection or sent stickers to it for redirecting mail.

4.12 We understand that there are privacy and security concerns related to dealing with complaints about redirections by telephone, and we are sensitive to those when handling complaints on this subject. For example, a caller could make a complaint with a view to 'fishing' for information about a redirection they want to know more about.

4.13 It is in our view reasonable for Australia Post to take steps to ascertain the identity of telephone callers with redirection issues, and requests such as asking for the original redirection customer reference number are appropriate in that context. We acknowledge that sometimes a customer who cannot provide sufficient details over the telephone will need to attend a post office in person to pursue their query.

4.14 It is important, however, that security requirements are not allowed to obscure a genuine complaint about a redirection. If a telephone caller provides apparently convincing information on the telephone that a redirection is failing, then the CRC operator should log this as a complaint and should consider contacting the delivery facility—the customer can always be told that they cannot be given information about the redirection or the outcome of the complaint unless they can identify themselves.

PART 5—CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Redirections are a valuable part of the service offered by Australia Post, and the fact that they are offered by postal administrations worldwide emphasises their usefulness to the public.

5.2 Although it is unrealistic to expect a 100% accuracy rate with any redirection service—customers need to appreciate that redirection is ‘second-best’ to having mail addressed to where it is wanted—the number of complaints to Australia Post, and to us, about redirections is notable.

5.3 We are of the view that problems arise because of the substantial reliance on human intervention to put redirections in place, and the opportunity for error that arises.

5.4 In our view there are solutions that can be put in place to address some of the more common human errors. Data keying at point of sale that can be verified by customers, and more specialised staff at delivery facilities, with particular responsibility for redirections, would help.

5.5 At delivery facilities, better visual cues, and information that can more readily be checked by management on a ‘walk round’ basis, should be provided about what addresses in a sorting frame are subject to redirection. It should be possible to reprint redirection stickers straight away, at the location they are required, when they run short.

5.6 Accepting that issues will arise from time to time, we consider that Australia Post needs to reinforce to staff the importance of complaints about redirections and have clear, streamlined, and effective procedures in place for resolving them.

5.7 Some complaints received by the Ombudsman suggest that Australia Post could usefully review whether to allow redirections to continue indefinitely, at least where the person having the redirection has no pecuniary interest in the property that mail is being redirected from.

5.8 A further source of customer dissatisfaction could be removed if the rules around renewal of redirection were modified.

5.9 The next section of this report sets out the Ombudsman’s recommendations arising from this investigation. These recommendations should be read as referring to the mail hold as well as the mail redirection service where relevant. We will follow up with Australia Post in six months’ time as to its implementation of these recommendations.

PART 6—RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The Ombudsman makes the following recommendations in relation to Australia Post's administration of the mail redirection service:

Recommendation 1

Australia Post should consider ways in which it could transfer the data input function for mail redirections to the point of sale. This should include the customer being able to verify the data being input before it is saved into the system.

Recommendation 2

Australia Post should review whether to allow redirections to continue indefinitely without good reason, for example, by setting a maximum term for redirections where the applicant no longer lives at or has any ownership interest in the address the redirection is from.

Recommendation 3

Australia Post should review the way in which redirection stickers are fixed to mail items that are to be redirected. In particular Australia Post should consider:

- physically marking mail slots that correspond to addresses from which mail is being redirected, by way of a card or other marker
- having staff members in delivery facilities whose job it is to process and apply stickers to redirected mail once it has been sorted, so that this responsibility no longer falls on delivery staff.

Recommendation 4

Australia Post should make facilities available wherever redirection stickers are in use for those stickers to be reprinted on site.

Recommendation 5

Australia Post should permit the renewal of a redirection for a reasonable period after it has ended without requiring a new application to be lodged. The 'reasonable period' should be long enough to catch cases where the customer did not renew because they did not receive a renewal notice, and should be longer for overseas than for domestic customers.

Recommendation 6

Australia Post CRC staff should be reminded that international customers can appoint an agent to apply for redirection services on their behalf. Where the agent needs to have a particular document, such as an original receipt, CRC staff should specifically advise the customer of this.

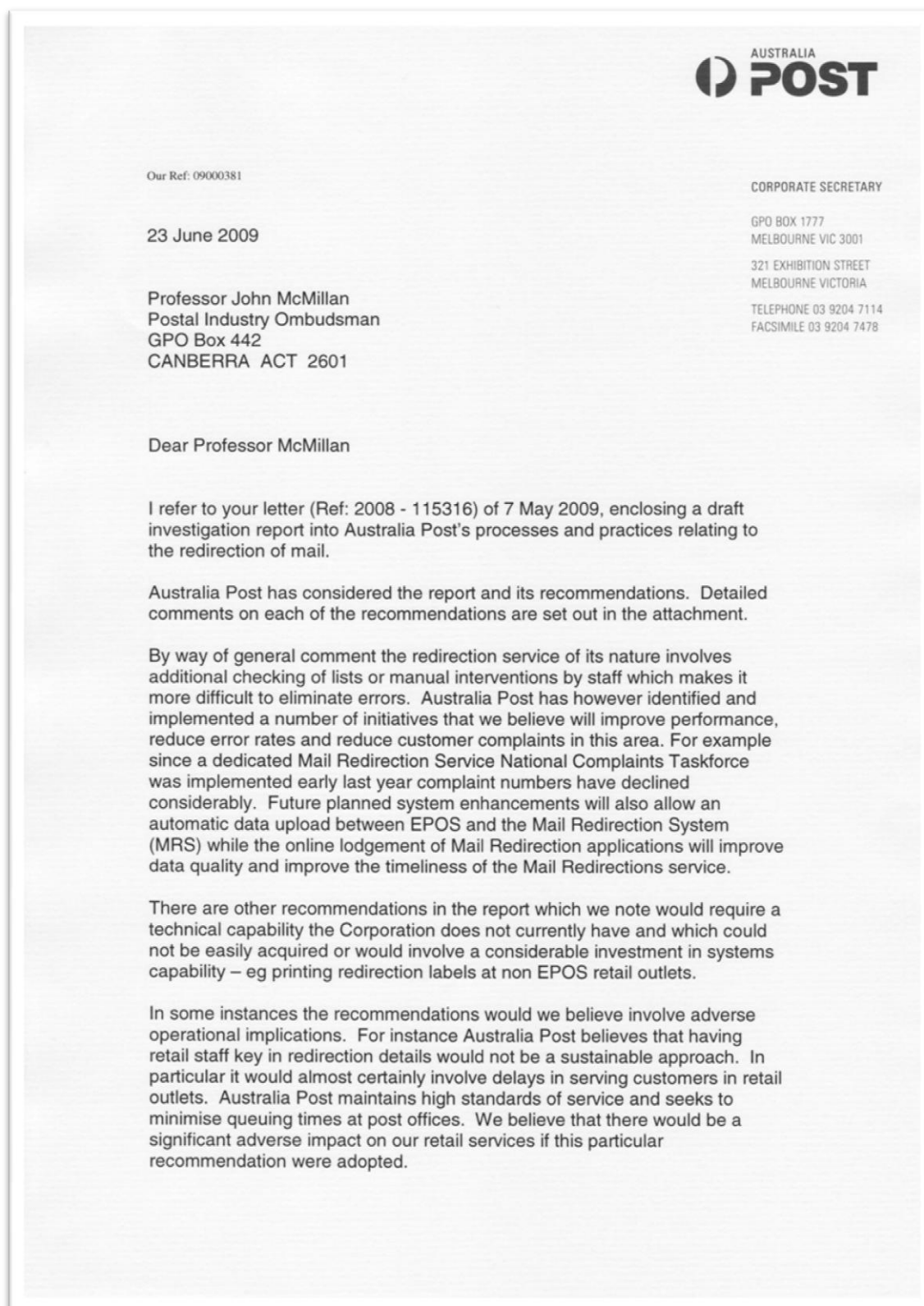
Recommendation 7

Australia Post should review the written instructions it provides to staff about parcel redirections with a view to ensuring that those instructions are practicable and are in accord with what happens in practice. Steps should then be taken to assess compliance by staff with the instructions they have been given.

Recommendation 8

Australia Post should provide specific training to staff to ensure that complaints about redirection failure receive a high priority. Complaint handling processes should be structured in the manner outlined in Part 4 of this report.

APPENDIX 1—AUSTRALIA POST RESPONSE



In relation to parcels, there are some initiatives being proposed, which are subject to funding, to improve the reporting of active redirections to parcels centres as well as allow parcel centres to more easily order redirection stickers. It is acknowledged however that the redirection of parcels is operationally difficult and presents special challenges. This is an area that we will continue to examine for potential improvements in the tracking and management of parcels, as well as reviewing the effectiveness of our procedures.

Our detailed comments on the specific recommendations contained in the report are attached. In particular the comments draw attention to what we see as the operational, customer service and systems investment implications of the recommendations.

I would be happy to discuss these matters further with you as required.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Paul Burke', written in a cursive style.

Paul Burke
ACTING CORPORATE SECRETARY

Attachment

The Conclusions and Recommendations in the Ombudsman's Report on the Administration of the Mail Redirection Service - Australia Post Comment.

Recommendation 1: Data Transfer

Australia Post should consider ways in which it could transfer the data input function for mail redirections to the point of sale. This should include the customer being able to verify the data being input before it is saved into the system.

- The existing Point of Sale (EPOS) system is not setup for this type of functionality.
- Regardless Australia Post is of the view that having retail staff key in redirection details would almost certainly involve delays in serving customers at postal outlets.
- To ensure minimal time spent at the counter for our customers, we have identified an opportunity to develop and implement an online lodgement of MRS applications which would allow customers to input their own information and submit online rather than rely on retail staff (which will allow for online validation of addresses).

Recommendation 2: Maximum/ Indefinite term for Redirections

Australia Post should review whether to allow redirections to continue indefinitely without good reason, for example, by setting a maximum term for redirections where the applicant no longer lives at or has any ownership interest in the address the redirection is from.

- Limiting the number of times a customer can renew a redirection application depending on their individual circumstances would be difficult to administer and has the potential to alienate or cause frustration with our customers. This would be particularly the case if, as suggested, counter staff had to establish whether an applicant was entitled to renew a redirection on the basis of criteria such as a continuing pecuniary interest in a property. There would also be technical impediments in implementing any such requirement as there is currently no data transfer between the Mail Redirection System and EPOS. As a result retail staff would be unaware of the number of times a customer had renewed a redirection.

Recommendation 3: Mail Redirection Stickers

Australia Post should review the way in which redirection stickers are fixed to mail items that are to be redirected. In particular Australia Post should consider:

- Physically marking mail slots that correspond to addresses from which mail is being redirected, by way of a card or other marker
- Having staff members in delivery facilities whose job it is to process and apply stickers to redirected mail once it has been sorted, so that this responsibility no longer falls on delivery staff.

This recommendation has previously been trialled however it was deemed that the process was not a practical solution. There were a number of disadvantages to the solution, namely:

- The number of cards in a sorting frame can be significant. For example one high volume round in St Kilda Victoria DC has had 133 current redirections out of 818 points.

- The cards take up slot space and mail for the address now has double the previous mail volume (mail for the new and old addressee). To adjust the frame slot size for redirection addresses (that cease and commence on a daily basis) is impractical due to the requirement to readjust the vsort frame in line with the variations.
- The cards/inserts need to be readily identifiable and are usually larger than the letters that they are inserted amongst. This means that the cards/inserts cause additional difficulties during mail sorting and generally had to be inserted after the sorting was completed. This requires reference to the redirection list to identify the addresses where the redirections are current. It is important to note that the redirection mail is not all mail in the slot but only the relevant "addressee".
- The card/insert model also identified that the cards were an additional ongoing expense due to the natural wear and tear from being inserted and removed frequently. The requirement to store addressee details on the insert also meant they were often replaced.
- The increase in machine sequencing of mail means less use of the sorting frame and placing markers into the frame is not a long term solution.

It is important to note that the identification of the individual redirection addressees and non-redirectioned mail for the address is done by the individual PDO and requires reference to a list of current redirection prior to the departure for letterbox delivery. If the PDO is identifying the physical letters that require redirection, it is more effective for them to place the redirection sticker on the envelope at the time it is in their hands. To resort it back into the frame for another staff member to remove it again and check the redirection details is inefficient and an example of double handling.

Recommendation 4: Re-print of Redirection Stickers

Australia post should make facilities available wherever redirection stickers are in use for those stickers to be reprinted on site.

Redirection processing is controlled in a number of larger delivery centres within each state. The redirections are entered and labels etc are produced for all outlets within their catchments. The vast majority of sites are within close proximity to their controlling office and replacement redirection labels are readily available. Clear instructions are in place for staff and agents to re-order labels prior to using what is on hand.

The redirection label is printed on high quality self adhesive stickers. These stickers are selected to provide high quality readability for the printing and this requires a suitable printer. To increase the number of printers capable of printing at the correct temperature and of high enough quality would increase the cost of redirections. The printed barcode needs to be able to be read by the optical character reader in the sorting equipment. Incorrect printing of the label can result in mail delay as the previous barcodes will be read resulting in the mail being resent to the redirecting office.

Mail should not be delivered as addressed if a PDO runs out of stickers. The plastic sleeve still has a sticker available to alert the PDO that a redirection is in place for that address until more stickers are available. Delivery staff that run out of stickers for a particular address should be able to write the new address on the article.

Retail outlets (corporate, franchise and LPOs) do not have capability to print redirection labels in store and they do not have access to the Mail Redirection system.

It is acknowledged that it is unsatisfactory that running out of labels should cause the redirection not to work. It is a problem that we will continue to look at ways of preventing or reducing its incidence.

Recommendation 5: Mail Redirection Renewal

Australia Post should permit the renewal of a redirection for a reasonable period after it has ended without requiring a new application to be lodged. The 'reasonable period' should be long enough to catch cases where the customer did not renew because they did not receive a renewal notice, and should be longer for overseas than for domestic customers.

The Mail Redirection service is a paid service offered by Australia Post with clear guidelines for staff and customers. The customer has entered into an agreement with Australia Post to have their mail redirected for a specific period of time.

As per Schedule 8 - Change of Address - Mail Redirection Service Terms and Conditions; Clause 14.2:

Upon expiration or termination of the Mail Redirection/ Mail Hold agreement, articles received at the delivery office will be delivered as addressed or otherwise dealt with by Australia Post in accordance with the Australia Post Terms and Conditions.

Australia Post cannot deliver mail other than as addressed unless the Corporation has been authorised to do so. As a courtesy all Mail Redirection customers are sent an invitation to extend their mail redirection three weeks ahead of its expiry. It is ultimately their responsibility to ensure that they act in sufficient time if they wish to extend the period of the redirection. Once a redirection application has expired there are the normal costs involved in processing an application including establishing the entitlement of the customer to make the application and entering the data.

Recommendation 6: International Customers

Australia Post CRC staff should be reminded that international customers can appoint an agent to apply for redirection services on their behalf. Where the agent needs to have a particular document, such as an original receipt, CCC staff should specifically advise the customer of this.

This process is detailed as part of the International Complaint Handling Guidelines for CCC staff, which has recently been released. To assist with the smooth integration of these new guidelines, a discussion point will be added to the CCC Team Briefs in the month of July. The conditions and document requirements are set out in the guidelines and staff are able to refer to these when advising customers of the process.

Recommendation 7: Parcels Redirection

Australia Post should review the written instructions it provides to staff about parcels redirections with a view to ensuring that those instructions are practicable and are in accord with what happens in practice. Steps should then be taken to assess compliance by staff with the instructions that they have been given.

Section 4.4.5 and 4.4.6 of the June 2008 Delivery Guidelines explain the Delivery Officer/ Contractor (Parcels) responsibilities and requirements for parcel redirection.

A number of change requests are awaiting funding approval to improve the Mail Redirection service relating to parcels, these include:

- A method whereby the Parcel Centre user can reprint labels for an entire area without having to log on and off multiple times.
- Improve the layout of the Parcel Report. Currently contractors need to go through a report that is very lengthy and hence sometimes parcels to be redirected may get missed.
- Improve the Parcel Summary report to include all relevant information for mail redirection of parcels.

The proposed changes will improve the reporting of active redirections to Parcel Centres so that the report is more manageable, and Parcel Centres will be able to more easily order redirection stickers.

Recommendation 8: Customer Complaints

Australia Post should provide specific training to staff to ensure that complaints about redirection failure receive a high priority. Complaint handling processes should be structured in the manner outlined in part 4 of this report.

New Customer Complaint Handling Guidelines were launched in November 2008 that provide a detailed and structured approach/instructions on the steps to be taken in handling complaints regarding the redirection service. It gives a clear guide to CCC staff on how to thoroughly investigate the complaint, identify the problem, ensure remedial action is taken at the facility as necessary and provide advice to the customer. Under the guidelines the customer should be advised of the outcome of the investigation, the reason for the fault and corrective action taken by the delivery centre. The guidelines will improve the handling of complaints and further ensure that prompt corrective action is taken. The guidelines will continue to be reinforced through training and staff briefing sessions.

Recently a Proactive Complaints Management (PCM) System was introduced to provide a more detailed national view of complaints and implement key strategies to decrease the complaint numbers for the Mail Redirection service. In conjunction with the roll out of PCM, the following supporting actions have also been undertaken:

- A National Complaints Management taskforce meets every second month to monitor complaint levels and implement strategies to assist decrease complaints; and
- In December 2008 complaint reporting codes were reviewed to improve and provide more accurate reporting.

The above initiatives have already resulted in an improvement in relation to the volume of mail redirection complaints. For example complaints represented 3.4% of the total volume of applications for the 2007/8 financial year. Following the implementation of these initiatives they are forecast to represent 3% for 2008/09.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Check lists	Used to flag redirections in relation to which there may be an issue.
CRC	Customer Relationship Centre
CRN	Customer Reference Number
Daily lists	Information provided to delivery officers on a daily basis containing current and updated relevant information; includes a <i>Daily List (New Start)</i> for new orders and <i>Cancellation List</i> for expired orders.
DC or DF	Delivery Centre or Delivery Facility—any location processing mail items for day-to-day delivery.
Delivery person	The person responsible for delivery of mail to the customer. For the purposes of this report also includes contractors with this responsibility.
LPO	Licensed Post Office
Mail redirection folder	Used by delivery officers to store and access redirection labels
MRS	Mail Redirection System
New address	The address to which a customer requests mail to be redirected
Old address	The address from which a customer requests mail to be redirected
PO Box	Post Office Box
Redirection (yellow) stickers	The redirection labels to be affixed to mail which is subject to a redirection request.