



Our Currency Story – Part 1

Many of us are aware that there was a time when people did not need money and relied on the land and the sea to meet their basic needs for food, shelter and clothing. As more complex social structures emerged, self-sufficiency was no longer enough. Increasing contact between different tribes and communities brought about the concept of swapping or barter of commodities.

Europeans were the first to bring money to Fiji. During the early nineteenth century, visiting ships' captains bartered with Fijians for sandalwood and beche-de-mer. However, once a European settlement was established, hard currency was required by planters and traders to conduct business with the outside world. Attempts at commercial development of these islands were hampered by the lack of any acceptable tender until the establishment of the Pax Britannica in 1874, a period of relative peace in Europe and the world (1815-1914) during which the British Empire controlled most of the key maritime trade routes and enjoyed unchallenged sea power. Before the founding of a recognised regulator of currency in Fiji, paper money used included bills of exchange, cheques on colonial banks in Australia, New Zealand as well as Tonga, notes in hand, drafts, promissory notes, currency tokens, foreign currency and certificate of indebtedness.



In 1914, the Fiji Currency Board was established to manage Fiji's monetary affairs and to issue and redeem currency which was the focal point of Fiji's currency system for the next 60 years. English coins were used at first. In 1934, the Currency Board introduced Fiji's first coinage of pennies and shillings, which were manufactured at the Royal Mint in London. The British system of measuring currency in pounds, shillings and pence remained in circulation until 1969. The pennies and halfpennies, made of copper mixed with nickel, had a distinctive feature - a hole through the center. In World War II, these became popular souvenirs with American soldiers based in Fiji. The other denominations were sixpences, shillings and two shillings made from 50 percent silver. At the time of the first coin issue, Fiji got a consignment of notes which became the sole notes to be legal tender, meaning they became the only money to be accepted in Fiji in exchange for goods and services.

In 1936, Fiji was one of the few Commonwealth countries to mint a one penny coin featuring the name of King Edward VIII, who abdicated in one of the great constitutional dramas of the 20th Century. In 1947, 12-sided nickel and brass three penny bits made their appearance and were minted until 1967.

The world wars presented many disruptions and challenges. For a while, coins had to be minted in San Francisco on the West Coast of America instead of the Royal Mint. The San Francisco coin manufacturers produced halfpennies and pennies in brass, and sixpence, one shilling and

two shilling pieces in 90 percent silver. At one stage during the war, with the acute shortage of metal, the Government Printer printed a supply of notes in one shilling and two shilling denominations and some Fiji one penny notes were printed in Australia.

In 1942 when some normal notes became scarce, the Reserve Bank of New Zealand agreed that the New Zealand £1 and £5 notes, being printed by the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, be overprinted for local use, by the Government Printer.

In 1969, Fiji changed to a decimal currency system, following many other countries who were adopting decimal currency as a more convenient and easier monetary structure to use. Fiji's currency structure became the 1c, 2c, 5c, 10c and 20c coins, and the \$0.50, \$1, \$2, \$5, \$10 and \$20 notes. The 50 cents and the one dollar note were converted to coins in 1975 and 1995 respectively.

In November 1995, a \$50 note denomination was introduced, followed by a new set of notes in 2007 including the new \$100 denomination, in varying sizes, to aid the visually impaired. In October 2008, the issuance of 1 and 2 cents coins ceased. In February 2009, a new set of smaller size and lighter coins were introduced.

The larger size coins of 5, 10, 20 and 50 cents as well as the 1 and 2 cents were demonetized in April 2009. These changes arose from the global rise in metal prices and RBF's efforts to contain currency production costs.

In December 2012, Fiji launched a completely new family of notes and coins. This included historic currency design changes – the replacement of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's portrait with local flora and fauna designs on all note and coin denominations, introduction of Fiji's first \$2 coin and Fiji's first polymer note in the \$5 denomination. These changes were made to promote Fiji's biodiversity, improve note durability and save costs for the nation.



Fiji's notes of today are printed by De La Rue Currency from the United Kingdom. The company has been our suppliers since 1914. Our coins are minted by the Royal Canadian Mint. Fiji's current currency structure comprises the 5c, 10c, 20c, 50c, \$1 and \$2 coins, and the \$5, \$10, \$20, \$50 and \$100 notes.

This article is the first of a three part series on Fijian currency. Part 2 of this series will feature an article on why the RBF introduces new series of banknotes and coins. The article will also include some interesting tips on getting to know your

Currency and how to care for the banknotes. Part 3 will feature an article on Ceasing Legal Tender status of Old Currency and will provide insights on why old Fijian Currency are demonetized and what happens to these once they are withdrawn from circulation.