

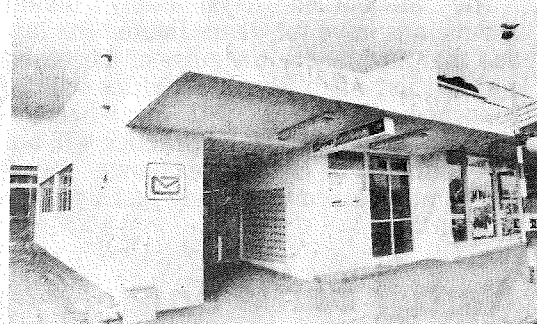
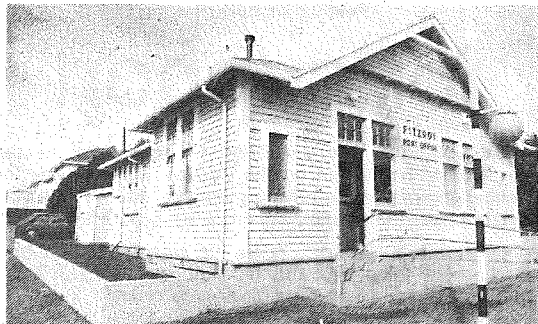
Post Offices to close

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By PHIL TUMATAROA

Four more Post Offices in Taranaki are being closed and nine others are to be down-graded.

The Fitzroy and Moturoa branches in New Plymouth will be closed by the end of September and the Mokau and Kaponga branches will be closed by the end of October.



The Fitzroy (left) and Moturoa Post Offices, New Plymouth, will be closed by the end of next month as NZ Post undertake a massive reshuffle of customer services. Mokau and Kaponga branches are also to be closed. The four offices were losing money.

These branches will be replaced by postal delivery centres in suitable retail outlets that will only process mail and sell stamps.

The shake-up will also see 25 jobs on the line, New Zealand Post Ltd district manager John Small said.

The announcement has an ironic twist to it as the closures and rationalisation by NZ Post are a direct result of changes implemented in July by Telecom.

Facilities

Mr Small said when Telecom withdrew its account payment facilities on July 4 from all its Taranaki branches it was the "death knell" for NZ Post as this was a big part of its business.

He says the move, tipped earlier by Taranaki MP Roger Maxwell resulted in dramatic declines in the business levels of NZ Post.

Mr Small would not comment on the degree of the decline, except to say that the four branches to be closed were all costing the corporation money.

"Those branches were barely viable and the changes Telecom made made them unviable," he said.

The 25 affected staff were all notified personally yesterday although the decision to restructure the

corporation's Taranaki operation was made in July.

Apart from job losses at the four branches other staff changes will be effective by late September or early October.

These staff include the Hawera and New Plymouth area managers and come from varying age groups, positions and backgrounds, said Mr Small.

The outlets and the number of staff affected are as follows: New Plymouth (3), Inglewood (1), Waitara (2), Hawera (2), Manaia (1), Opunake (1), Patea (2), Stratford (3) and Waverley (1).

Cost

In all six positions will be lost at the four branches being closed these are: Mokau (1), Fitzroy (2), Moturoa (2) and Kaponga (2). Kaponga has only part-time workers, who are counted as equally one full-timer.

These people will have a range of options open to them including severance

payments, redeployment and reallocation.

"We will accommodate them if we can, the other alternative of course is that they are severed," he said.

Mr Small said there are not many opportunities to reallocate people within the province, but in some cases special arrangements could be made.

He said depending on the wishes of employees, staff unaffected by the cut-backs may be able to take voluntary severance and those targeted in the shake-up could replace them.

"But until we know the wishes of these people we cannot say just what will happen, it's a bit too early."

The whole exercise is

expected to cost NZ Post a significant amount said Mr Small.

A \$500,000 bill is expected in severance payments alone, he said.

The reshuffle is unique to the province, as Taranaki's Telecom operation is the only one in the country to have withdrawn its account payment facilities.

Outlets

"The move has had a flow-on effect right through all our outlets," he said.

Mr Small defended the announcement with a philosophy he said has applied to NZ Post since corporatisation.

"I have said I will keep reviewing the business

levels at all the outlets I've got. If business levels keep going down I will have to act on it."

He said customers can be assured that the changes will not reduce the quality of service from the corporation.

He said already people in Moturoa and Fitzroy have registered an interest in setting up a postal delivery centre at their businesses and these inquiries are being investigated.

The number of permanent full service branches have almost halved since late 1986 with only 17 left in the province.

There are, however, 31 NZ Post outlets remaining but the others have only limited services.