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## Every post's a loser

IT'S been lovely to see the Easter spirit alive and well this year. I especially like the lengths Australia Post has gone to in an effort to treat us all like Bunnies.

In particular, may I say congratulations to the egghead responsible for sending an entire mail-out of "Letters to Householders" around the country, explaining that "letters" as a form of communication were dead. Simply brilliant.

Actually, I lie. It was even better than that. The letter explained, through a wonderful combination of gobbledygook, doublespeak and obfuscation that "letters" as we know them are on their death bed, currently hooked up to a life-support machine called the "taxpayer", but unless we all pay more money they have zero chance of resurrection.

It's Australia Post's way of using blackmail to pay for regular mail. Or, as they put it, the new "non-urgent" service. If you're slightly confused, and who wouldn't be, let me try to translate.

Australia Post says: "We are planning to introduce a new non-urgent regular letters service that will take two days longer to deliver than the current delivery timetable."

This should be interpreted as; worse than the current service as it takes longer to reach the mailbox. But it gets better because there's this: "You will still be able to send mail at the current speed. This option will be called the 'Priority' service and will be available at a higher price than the Regular service".

On top of that, a section headed "Stamp price review" says: "we need the senders of mail to pay the true cost of this service".

So, cutting through all the Swahili, what we now pay for will be much slower, but we'll pay more. What we used to



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pay for will be the same, but to use it we'll pay a heck of a lot more. In other parts of the world it's called a first and second-class mail system, but for political reasons our postal boffins don't want to use that terminology.

The bottom line looks like serving up a stamp at \$1 for the non-urgent service and north of that for the new, or should I say old, renovated service now called "priority". As a sop to pensioners, eligible concession holders will be able to buy 50

stamps at the current 60-cent level.

Thankfully there are no plans to introduce a special North Pole service fee, so the rumour is Christmas cards are set to be held at 65 cents.

Now, you may be wondering how, after a proud history that goes back all the way to the colonial Cobb & Co service, our national postal system can change faster than you can say hot cross bun? The short answer is the internet.

Letter volumes have been going down the gurgler and, according to Australia Post boss Ahmed Fahour, the operation is at crisis point, desperate for reform.

Fahour should know. Last year he was paid a salary of \$4.6 million. That's almost 10 times the size of the pay packet for the US Postmaster General - a head postie with a considerably bigger delivery round.

For a taxpayer-funded executive in charge of a largely

protected monopoly, it would be reasonable to expect decent results, but the opposite is true.

He recently delivered half-yearly figures showing a 56 per cent fall in profit, which could lead to its first annual loss in more than 30 years.

This calamitous position has led Fahour to jump, hippity-hoppity, to his favoured two-tier mail solution and his pumping the theory that unless it happens, the post office as we know it is dead and buried.

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