

COMMONWEALTH BUREAU OF CENSUS AND STATISTICS,

Canberra, F.C.T.

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CONFIDENTIAL. To be treated as strictly confidential until released for publication on the MORNING of TUESDAY, 3rd MARCH, 1931.

COST OF FOOD AND GROCERIES, JANUARY, 1931.

The results of the investigations made under the direction of the Minister for Home Affairs by the Commonwealth Statistician and Actuary, (Mr. Chas. H. Wickers), as to the price of food and groceries (46 commodities) have been made available for the month of January, 1931.

CHANGE OF BASE PERIOD. Special attention is directed to the base period to which the index numbers in the attached tables are computed. In tabulations of retail prices of food and groceries prior to and including December, 1929, the base (1000) to which the index numbers were computed was the weighted average aggregate cost in the year, 1911, for the six Capital Cities of the commodities included in the investigations. The desirability of computing retail price indexes on a post-war period base was considered by a Conference of Statisticians and it was resolved that the period of five years, 1923-27, be adopted as base for retail price indexes as from January, 1930.

It is intended to continue the computation of the retail price index numbers (food, groceries and rent of all houses) used by the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration in the determination and adjustment of rates of wage on the original base, viz., year 1911 = 1000, and to publish these figures in the Quarterly Summary of Australian Statistics.

Compared with the previous month, December, 1930, an increase under one per cent (0.6) was recorded in the case of the 30 principal towns regarded as a whole, and a similar increase in the weighted average for the Six Capital Cities of the Commonwealth. In four States increases were recorded when compared with the previous month, Queensland with an increase of 2.4% showing the greatest rise, then Western Australia, 1.6%; South Australia, 0.9%; and Victoria, 0.8%. The remaining States showed decreases, Tasmania with 0.5% registering the greater fall, while New South Wales showed a fall of 0.3%.

Compared with the corresponding month, January, of last year, decreases were recorded in all of the States, South Australia with a decrease of 15.7% registered the greatest, followed by Western Australia, 15.1%; Queensland, 13.3%; Tasmania, 11.6%; New South Wales, 10.9%; and Victoria, 10.4%. The weighted average index number for the 30 Towns considered as a whole was 876 in January, 1931, compared with 993 in January, 1930, a decrease of 11.8%. In the following table, particulars are given in the form of index numbers of the price levels of food and groceries in January, 1931, compared with July, 1914, the base period, 1923-1927, January, 1930, and December, 1930. In the last column the percentage increase in January, 1931, compared with July, 1914 is shown. The base, 1000, to which the index numbers are computed, is the weighted average aggregate cost in the recently adopted five-yearly base period, 1923-1927, for the six Capital Cities of the commodities included in the investigations. The increase in the cost since July, 1914, was greatest in New South Wales, 40.3%, followed in the order named by Victoria, 37.9%; Queensland, 32.9%; Tasmania, 30.8%; South Australia, 25.5%; and Western Australia, 12.3%. The increase in the 30 Towns considered as a whole since July, 1914, was 34.6%. The actual cost of the regimen of food and groceries for the month of January, 1931, was highest in New South Wales, and lowest in Queensland. In the case of the individual towns, the cost was greatest in Broken Hill and lowest in Toowoomba. Compared with the previous month prices of flour, mutton and pork showed a general tendency towards a lower level, while bread, milk and ham were lower in price in a number of the towns. Tea, potatoes, onions and butter, on the other hand, showed higher prices in the majority of the towns. Bread, flour, milk, eggs, and all cuts of meat were retailed at reduced prices in Sydney, while tea, jam, butter, potatoes, and onions were higher in price. In Melbourne, bread, flour, and milk showed reductions, while increases were recorded in the prices of tea, potatoes, onions, butter, bacon and ham. Tea, potatoes, onions, cheese, eggs, beef, and mutton were at increased prices in Brisbane. Pork, on the other hand, was lower in price in that city. In Adelaide, flour, potatoes and eggs were slightly lower in price, while tea, butter, cheese and ham showed increases. Flour, tea, milk, ham, and meat showed reduced prices in Perth. Potatoes, onions, butter, and eggs, on the other hand, were higher in price. Flour, potatoes, cheese, eggs, bacon, ham, and all cuts of meat were lower in price in Hobart, while tea, onions, and butter were retailed at higher prices in that city.

RETAIL PRICE INDEXES.

Based upon the cost of Food and Groceries only.

January, 1931.

Retail Price Index Numbers for each of the 30

Principal Towns in Australia for the period specified.

Weighted Average cost in the Six Capital Cities during the five-yearly period, 1923-1927 = 1000.

Town.	July, 1914.	Average - 5-yearly period, 1923-27.	January, 1930.	December, 1930.	January, 1931.	Percentage Increase from July, 1914 to Jan- uary, 1931.
Sydney	645	1012	1024	919	915	41.9
Newcastle	642	1015	1022	855	903	40.7
Broken Hill	821	1155	1250	1111	1094	33.3
Moulburn	651	1018	1080	895	880	33.1
Mathurst	613	974	1010	902	896	46.2
Weighted Aver. - N.S. Wales (5 Towns) ..	652	1016	1030	921	918	40.3
Melbourne	619	978	948	843	852	37.6
Mallarat	617	989	934	859	863	40.8
Geelong	619	993	995	865	871	40.7
Geelong	609	967	941	840	822	35.0
Marrambool	608	967	962	859	854	40.5
Weighted Aver. - Victoria (5 Towns) ..	613	978	951	845	852	37.9
Brisbane	531	960	914	774	725	34.5
Toowoomba	582	934	911	781	794	36.4
Rockhampton	546	933	936	834	858	32.3
Charter Towers	596	1074	1000	892	903	29.7
Warwick	505	951	942	736	736	31.6
Weighted Aver. - Queensland (5 Towns) ..	605	9965	927	785	804	32.9
Adelaide	699	1025	1006	833	846	21.0
Adelaide	688	1032	1039	948	949	37.9
Port Pirie	722	1060	1031	927	932	29.1
Mount Gambier	595	989	1009	849	823	39.3
Peterborough	749	1064	1103	916	917	22.4
Weighted Aver. - S. Australia (5 Towns) ..	697	1026	1013	846	854	22.5
Perth	749	1042	1025	855	870	16.2
Albionville	931	1179	1164	954	998	7.2
Northam	-	1104	1030	926	937	-
Gambury	793	1034	1144	931	922	16.3
Geraldton	809	1112	1110	914	926	14.6
Weighted Aver. - W. Australia (5 Towns) ..	796	1060	1045	873	887	12.3
Robart	678	1027	995	879	875	29.1
Launceston	640	1013	981	882	867	35.5
Burnie	-	1040	1032	919	896	-
Devonport	-	1035	965	869	864	-
Queenstown	725	1127	1037	1026	1027	29.7
Weighted Aver. - Tasmania (5 Towns) ..	672	1027	954	886	873	30.8
Weighted Aver. - Aust- ralia (30 Towns) ..	651	1003	993	871	876	34.6
Weighted Aver. - Aust- ralia (6 Capitals) ..	645	(base) 1000	937	867	872	35.2
Canberra (a)	(b)	(b)	1121	994	993	-
Townsville (a)	(b)	1091	1095	879	904	-

(a) Not included in weighted averages. (b) not available.