



NATIONAL
ARCHIVES
OF AUSTRALIA

Archiving Web
Resources :
A Policy for
Keeping Records
of Web-based
Activity in the
Commonwealth
Government

Revised January 2001

ISBN 0 642 344221 3

© Commonwealth of Australia 2001

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968* no part may be reproduced by any process without prior written permission from the National Archives of Australia. Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be directed to the Publications Manager, National Archives of Australia, PO Box 7425, Canberra Mail Centre ACT 2610.

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	4
1.1 Purpose	4
1.2 Scope	4
1.3 Objective	4
1.4 Related National Archives publications	4
1.5 Key definitions	5
2. BACKGROUND	7
2.1 The Commonwealth online environment	7
2.2 Recordkeeping issues in the online environment	7
2.3 Preservation responsibilities for the records of public websites	8
3. POLICY STATEMENT	11
3.1 Commonwealth websites contain and generate records	11
3.2 Commonwealth web resources are publications	11
3.3 Commonwealth web-based records need to be kept	12
3.4 Conduct business risk assessments of Commonwealth web resources	15
3.5 Make and keep adequate records of Commonwealth web resources	15
4. FURTHER INFORMATION	17
4.1 Commonwealth sources	17
4.2 Other sources	17
4.3 Contact details	18
FIGURE 1	10

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose

This document sets out the National Archives' policy on the status and management of Commonwealth Government websites and other online resources as Commonwealth records. The online resources covered by the policy are:

- public websites;
- virtual private networks (VPNs);
- extranets;
- intranets; and
- individual web-based resources (services and publications).

The management of records resulting from the activity of electronic commerce (e-commerce), including the use of Public Key technology, is not covered in detail by this policy. At the time of publication, a National Archives policy on keeping records resulting from e-commerce, and guidelines for undertaking this, were under preparation and due for release in 2001.

1.2 Scope

This policy applies to all Commonwealth organisations that are subject to the *Archives Act 1983* and which:

- maintain a public website, intranet, extranet or virtual private network;
- use the Internet to provide services and products to the public; and/or
- conduct business over the Internet.

1.3 Objective

The objective of this policy is to provide clear directions to Commonwealth agencies to help them put in place internal mechanisms for creating, managing and retaining web-based records, for as long as those records have value. The policy should help agencies establish in-house policies and procedures for retaining web-based records to meet business and accountability requirements and societal expectations. It should also enable agencies to meet their legal obligations for the retention and disposal of records under the *Archives Act 1983*.

1.4 Related National Archives publications

At the time of publication of this policy, a companion document, *Archiving Web Resources: Guidelines for Keeping Records of Web-based Activity in the Commonwealth Government*, was under preparation.

While this publication sets out broad policy advice and directions of the National Archives, the companion document will offer guidelines and specific strategic and technical advice on how agencies can comply with the policy. This policy is expected to remain fairly stable over the medium term, but it is expected that the guidelines will be updated regularly to reflect technological changes and advances in our understanding of strategic and technical best practice in managing web-based records.

The other key National Archives' publication that should be used in conjunction with this policy is the [Administrative Functions Disposal Authority](#). This publication stipulates the National Archives' retention and disposal requirements for Commonwealth records that relate to the general administrative functions of government. The Publication and Information Management functions in this Disposal Authority are of particular relevance to Commonwealth web-based records.

The National Archives requires that all Commonwealth records, including the web-based records described in this policy, be captured into recordkeeping systems that comply with the Australian Standard AS 4390–1996, *Records Management*. It is therefore important that agencies design and implement AS 4390-compliant recordkeeping systems. To assist them in this process, the National Archives has published the [Designing and Implementing Recordkeeping Systems \(DIRKS\) Manual](#).

Metadata is a vital tool for managing and providing access to electronic resources. The National Archives has issued two metadata standards that are relevant to web-based records. The [Recordkeeping Metadata Standard for Commonwealth Agencies](#) describes and defines the metadata that agencies should create and manage for all records held in electronic recordkeeping systems. The related [Australian Government Locator Service](#) metadata standard defines the metadata that agencies should use to describe their web-based services and information to improve the accessibility and discoverability of those resources via web-based search facilities.

There is intentional overlap between these two standards, with the expectation that a lot of metadata created for recordkeeping purposes can also be re-used for online resource discovery purposes. Both standards are available on this website.

1.5 Key definitions

Extranet

An intranet, or portion of an intranet, to which an organisation allows access by selected external entities, such as individuals or companies considered partners of the organisation.

Gateway site

A public website which comprises links to web pages and other websites around a common theme. Also known as a 'metasite', 'portal' or 'umbrella site'. An example is the Information Management Website, administered jointly by the Office of Government Online and the National Archives of Australia.

Intranet

A site, internal to an organisation, which uses the same network technology and protocols as a public website, but is for internal or restricted external use only.

Public website

A collection of electronic files, usually under common administrative control, linked together and made accessible to the public via the World Wide web.

Publication

noun Something that is published. *verb* The function of having works, irrespective of format, issued for sale or distribution internally or to the public (source: *Administrative Functions Disposal Authority*).

Records

Recorded information in any form, including data in computer systems, created or received and maintained by an organisation or person in the transaction of business or the conduct of affairs and kept as evidence of such activity (source: Australian Standard AS 4390–1996, *Records Management*)

Virtual Private Network (VPN)

A private data network that uses the public telecommunication infrastructure (ie the Internet). Privacy is maintained by employing secure protocols and security procedures such as data encryption. Organisations can choose to use VPNs as extranets or wide-area intranets. For example, FedLink is a Commonwealth VPN that will be used as a wide-area intranet, linking all Commonwealth departments and agencies together in a secure online environment.

Website

In this document, a generic term that refers to all types of web-based sites, including public websites, VPNs, extranets and intranets.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Commonwealth online environment

The Internet is changing the way business is conducted in both the public and private sectors.

In the public sector many Commonwealth agencies are routinely maintaining public websites and workplace intranets as means of information dissemination, communication and collaboration. Increasingly, public Commonwealth websites are being extended to incorporate online service provision.

Extranets and virtual private networks are also being set up which enable Commonwealth agencies to conduct business with partners, customers and each other in secure online environments.

The Commonwealth Government, in a range of initiatives designed to establish Australia as a leading participant in the global information economy, has committed Commonwealth agencies to an online future. Many of these initiatives are designed to assist agencies in meeting the Government's commitment to deliver all appropriate Government services over the Internet by 2001.

The great majority of Commonwealth agencies maintain some form of online presence, with increasing numbers publishing official material online and conducting their business using web-based technologies with no paper or other media equivalent. At present, records are being created in the online environment which are not, in many cases, being managed in any systematic way. Not surprisingly, recordkeeping practitioners are becoming increasingly concerned about the state of recordkeeping in the online environment.

2.2 Recordkeeping issues in the online environment

The provision of services and information resources over the World Wide Web raises important recordkeeping issues for all government agencies. These issues are reflected in the kinds of questions asked of the National Archives, including:

- Is a website, as a whole, a publication or a record?
- If web resources are records, how can they be captured into a recordkeeping system, described and preserved, and how long should it be kept?
- Should changes to the content of Commonwealth web resources be tracked and, if so, how?
- Can an agency be held accountable for something it had on its website six months or a year ago?
- Are there any technical solutions for managing web resources as records over time?
- If individual records exist only on a website, how should they be managed?
- Should the strategies used to capture records of static web resources be different from those used to capture records of dynamically generated web resources and the delivery of web-based transactional services?
- For recordkeeping purposes, is it better to conceive of a website as an organic whole or as a series of interrelated items/resources?

The National Archives recognises that many factors have to be taken into consideration when dealing with these issues. In particular, it is obvious that no single ‘rule’ can be formulated to cover all types of scenarios in the online environment. Accordingly, the following policy statement comprises different directions for different online circumstances.

Many of the ‘how to’ questions listed above are addressed in the companion document to this policy, [Archiving Web Resources: Guidelines for Keeping Records of Web-based Activity in the Commonwealth Government](#). The primary intention of the policy and guidelines is to ensure that all records of value in the online environment are identified and captured into AS 4390-compliant recordkeeping systems and thus retained in a reliable, useable and accessible format for as long as they are required.

2.3 Preservation responsibilities for the records of public websites

Commonwealth agencies are not expected to take full responsibility for the preservation of the records of their public web resources over time. As with other electronic records, the preservation of web-based records is intended to be a shared responsibility. Both the National Archives of Australia and the National Library of Australia have responsibilities for preserving web-based records and publications of national archival value.

The National Archives of Australia and the National Library of Australia have complementary (but not mutually exclusive) roles in preserving the documentary record of the Commonwealth Government. Agencies, too, have a responsibility in that they need to create and maintain full and accurate records of their activities. These responsibilities, of course, extend to the online environment.

2.3.1 National Archives of Australia

The National Archives:

- ensures the creation and capture of Commonwealth records which meet specified business needs, accountability requirements and community expectations; and
- is ultimately responsible for the preservation of these records for as long as they have value.

The National Archives will, over the coming months, develop a policy for taking electronic records, including Commonwealth public websites, into its custody. The National Library, through its PANDORA project (Preserving and Accessing Networked Documentary Resources of Australia), is already committed to taking selected Commonwealth online publications into its collection.

2.3.2 National Library of Australia and AusInfo

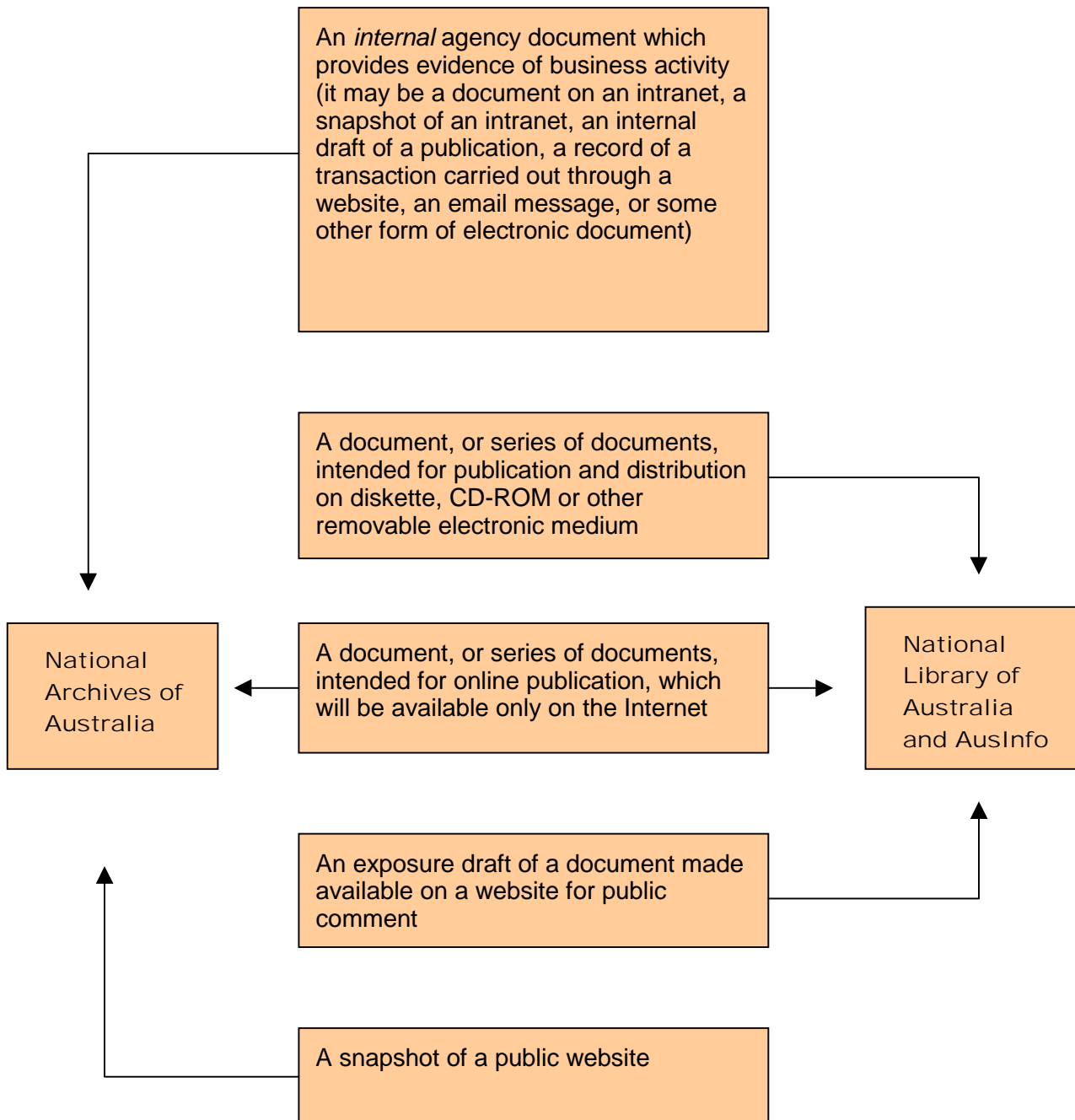
The National Library, in partnership with AusInfo, develops and maintains a comprehensive national collection of Australian publications relating to Australia and Australian people. As part of this role, it preserves Commonwealth Government publications.

In the online environment, there are times when the responsibilities of the National Archives and the National Library overlap.

For example, under the Publication function in the *Administrative Functions Disposal Authority*, the National Archives states that a publication produced only in electronic form on an agency's public website must be captured and preserved as a record by the authoring agency. However, under the currently voluntary scheme, the National Library should also be notified of the existence of the item so that it can capture it in its PANDORA online archive.

Figure 1 on the next page shows the respective responsibilities of the National Archives and the National Library and AusInfo for the preservation of Commonwealth electronic records.

FIGURE 1 NATIONAL ARCHIVES, NATIONAL LIBRARY AND AUSINFO PRESERVATION RESPONSIBILITIES



3. POLICY STATEMENT

Public agency web resources document an important component of the interaction between the Commonwealth Government and the Australian public. A Commonwealth agency is accountable for resources delivered or made available over its public website both now and in the future. It must also be able to meet any legal obligations and community expectations for evidence of present and past positions, advice, guidance, transactions or instructions on particular matters delivered over its public website.

3.1 Commonwealth websites contain and generate records

Both internal and public websites contain copies of records, including reports, guidelines and advice, policies and procedures. Often these records already exist in formal recordkeeping systems in their original formats, placed there by their content authors or agency recordkeeping staff.

Nevertheless, content is increasingly being created for direct placement on websites. This content may take the form of a static document, or may be created dynamically from a database behind the website. The implications of this are that, unless specific agency procedures are in place, many individual records documenting the business of the agency will never be captured into a recordkeeping system.

Websites can also be used as the technology to underpin interactions between an agency and its clients. Agencies must ensure that records documenting these transactions are captured into their recordkeeping systems.

Best Practice 1

Commonwealth agencies must identify records which exist on their website(s), or which are about to be placed online. They must ensure that these records are captured into a formal recordkeeping system, along with sufficient metadata documenting the content, context and structure of the records and their placement on the website.

3.2 Commonwealth web resources are publications

The dual purpose of a Commonwealth website is to:

- publish information, including advice and instructions, to client groups; and
- facilitate the provision of products and services to clients who are (depending on the type of site) members of the Australian public, other Commonwealth organisations, agency business partners, or internal agency staff members.

Due to the inherently ‘public’ nature of web resources, the National Archives considers them to be publications. As was the case in the paper environment, *publications are also records* and are subject to the disposal provisions of the *Archives Act 1983*. Of course, as was the case in the past, different classes of publications may be required to be kept for different lengths of time.

Best Practice 2

Commonwealth agencies must ensure that full and accurate records of their web resources are captured and maintained for as long as they are required – whether for business reasons, to meet accountability requirements or to meet expectations of the Australian community.

3.3 Commonwealth web-based records need to be kept

Records need to be kept to satisfy business and accountability requirements and community expectations. A small number of records are retained as national archives because they provide a rich and concise source of evidence about the nature of Commonwealth government and its activities over time. For more information, see the National Archives publication, [Why Records Are Kept: Directions in Appraisal](#). Like other records, websites will need to be kept for differing times depending on the context of their creation.

This reality is reflected in the National Archives' new [Administrative Functions Disposal Authority](#). Different disposal actions for the different types of web-based records are specified under the Production activity of the Publication function.

3.3.1 Retain records of public Commonwealth web resources as national archives

Public Commonwealth web resources document both the structure and the public face of the Commonwealth Government. At a given point in time an agency's public website comprises information about:

- its structure and organisation;
- the legislation it administers, or under which it operates;
- the functions for which it is responsible;
- its current public policies, guidelines and advice;
- its current products and services; and
- instructions for the access and use of those products and services.

Best Practice 3

Commonwealth agencies need to make and keep records that accurately document their public web resources over time, so that it is possible to reliably establish the content of their websites at any particular point in time from the past.

A single exception to the public website rule is the case of public gateway or 'portal' sites. Such sites comprise many links to other online resources – particularly external sites – and have little or no value-added content of their own. As such, they are unlikely to be required long term for business or archival purposes. Records of gateway sites need only be retained whilst the site remains active and continues to be referenced. The National Archives would consider their disposal when reference ceases to be a 'normal administrative practice'.

3.3.2 Retain records of Commonwealth virtual private networks and extranets to meet accountability and business requirements

The nature of the use of virtual private networks and extranets is such that Commonwealth agencies need to take great care in determining their requirements for making and keeping records of them.

Best Practice 4

If VPNs and extranet sites are used as a means of conducting official business between Commonwealth organisations, or between the Commonwealth and its business partners, suppliers or vendors, then accurate records of them need to be created and kept by Commonwealth agencies. As with other kinds of sites, this will involve:

- capturing and retaining individual records on the website into an established recordkeeping system; and
- keeping track of changes to the content of these websites over time.

These sites are likely to also require the creation and capture of further records relating to site security. Such records include audit logs, which track use of the site.

Conducting a website risk assessment will help a Commonwealth organisation to determine the extent to which it needs, for accountability and business purposes, to keep records of a VPN or extranet.

3.3.3 Retain records of Commonwealth intranets to meet business requirements

An agency intranet is often a 'site of convenience' – a centralised repository of information which is constructed to assist internal staff in their day-to-day work. Much of the information posted to an agency intranet is likely to already exist elsewhere in the organisation.

Best Practice 5

Commonwealth intranets may contain individual documents recording transactions or publications not created or kept in any other form. Such records must be captured and retained in the recordkeeping systems of Commonwealth agencies, together with relevant metadata.

Best Practice 6

Commonwealth agencies should determine the value to their internal business operations of keeping records of their intranets over time. For example, an agency which uses an intranet for collaborative projects between different workgroups may wish to track the progress and changing status of a project, as recorded on the intranet, over a specified period of time.

3.3.4 Capture and retain individual records posted on websites according to disposal authorities**Best Practice 7.1**

Commonwealth agencies should ensure that individual records posted on their websites are captured in an established recordkeeping system. Such records should be captured and retained in accordance with relevant existing disposal authorities.

Best Practice 7.2

Wherever possible, such records should be captured into a recordkeeping system at the time of creation in their original formats. Metadata describing the details of the posting of a record to a website (for example, dates, format, and authorisations for posting / removal) should be embedded in or linked to the record in the recordkeeping system.

3.3.5 Capture and retain records of web resource production and maintenance

Records which document the processes involved in planning, designing, producing and maintaining Commonwealth web resources should be captured and retained according to relevant classes in the *Administrative Functions Disposal Authority*. Relevant classes can be found under both the Information Management and Publication functions in this Disposal Authority.

3.3.6 Capture and retain records of web-based transactions

Any web-enabled service or transactional facility provided by an agency will both generate and be made possible by records. Without a record there is no evidence of a transaction. In the absence of legally sustainable evidence of a transaction having occurred, the transaction itself simply cannot be completed and will be deemed by a court of law to have not taken place.

Best Practice 8

Commonwealth agencies must capture full and accurate records of web-based transactions into recordkeeping systems that can guarantee the authenticity, reliability and accessibility of the records.

3.4 Conduct business risk assessments of Commonwealth web resources

This policy prescribes that records of Commonwealth web resources be created and retained to meet particular accountability requirements, business needs or community expectations. Where web resources are not retained as national archives, they should be managed and maintained in accordance with the business recordkeeping requirements of the agency.

This policy does not dictate how *often* agencies should make records of their web resources – for example, how often a snapshot of a website might be taken, or to what extent changes to websites should be tracked over time. Such decisions can only be made intelligently in the context of an agency’s particular business risk environment.

Any Commonwealth agency that administers a website must assess the business risk it faces in maintaining an online presence, whether it be in a public, restricted or purely internal environment. The factors it must take into account when performing such an assessment include:

- current state of recordkeeping in the agency;
- purposes for which the web resources are used;
- nature and criticality of material on the website;
- audience of the web resources; and
- frequency of change and updating and timeliness of information on the website.

Using the above list as general guidance, a Commonwealth agency must ascertain:

- the likelihood of it being called to account/held liable/subject to litigation for the content of its website(s), whether in a current, recent or older manifestation; and
- its current ability to prove or disprove the existence of particular content on its website(s) at a given date and time.

The results of the risk assessment should be documented and used to guide the agency’s strategies for web-based recordkeeping. Further assessments should be made over time to ensure that these strategies, as implemented, remain adequate to the task. .

3.5 Make and keep adequate records of Commonwealth web resources

Based on the findings of the website business risk assessment, an agency must determine what constitutes ‘adequate’ records. The answer will not be the same across all agencies.

Best Practice 9

Commonwealth agencies should:

- determine and document their own definition of ‘adequate’ web-based recordkeeping; and
- ensure that they make and keep records of their web resources in ways that satisfy that definition.

Determining what is adequate is not possible if an agency is not aware of its recordkeeping requirements. Specific advice for determining recordkeeping requirements is available in the *Designing and Implementing Recordkeeping Systems (DIRKS) Manual*.

In addition, the companion document to this policy provides a set of guidelines to help Commonwealth agencies formulate strategies and implement procedures for keeping adequate web-based records in their particular online environments.

As a final note, agencies should understand that the term ‘adequate’ is used here in the sense of keeping ‘enough’ records. The flexibility accorded Commonwealth agencies in this area does not extend to the quality of their internal recordkeeping processes. That is, where agencies have the choice, and choose to make and keep records of their websites, the National Archives expects those records to be complete, accurate and authentic.

4. FURTHER INFORMATION

4.1 Commonwealth sources

AusInfo, *Guidelines for Commonwealth information published in electronic formats*, rev. ed., January 2000

Australian Archives, *Managing Electronic Records: A Shared Responsibility*, July 1997

Australian National Audit Office, *Electronic Service Delivery, including Internet Use, by Commonwealth Government Agencies*, Audit Report No. 18, 1999-2000, available at http://www.anao.gov.au/uploads/documents/1999-00_Audit_Report_18.pdf

Commonwealth of Australia, [Archives Act 1983](#)

National Archives of Australia, [Administrative Functions Disposal Authority](#), March 2000 (See, in particular, the Publication and Information Management functions)

National Archives of Australia, *Appraisal Guidelines for Commonwealth Records*, March 2000

National Archives of Australia, *Archiving websites: Guidelines for keeping records of web-based activity in the Commonwealth Government*, A companion document to this policy statement available at <http://www.naa.gov.au/records-management/publications/Archiving-web-guidelines>

National Archives of Australia, [AGLS Metadata element set Part 2: usage guide: a non-technical guide to using AGLS metadata for describing resources](#), 2002

National Archives of Australia, *Australian Government Recordkeeping Metadata Standard Version 2.0*, July 2008, available at <http://www.naa.gov.au/records-management/publications/AGRkMS.aspx>

National Archives of Australia, [Why Records Are Kept: Directions in Appraisal](#), March 2000

National Archives of Australia & New South Wales State Records, *Designing and Implementing Recordkeeping Systems (DIRKS) Manual*, February 2001, available at <http://www.naa.gov.au/records-management/publications/DIRKS-manual.aspx>

National Archives of Australia and the Office for Government Online, *AGLS Metadata Element Set Part 2: usage guide*, Version 1.3, 2002, available at http://www.naa.gov.au/Images/AGLS_usage_guide_v1-3_tcm2-881.pdf

National Library of Australia, *Guidelines for the Selection of Online Australian Publications Intended for Preservation by the National Library of Australia*, last updated August 2005, available at <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/selectionguidelines.html>

4.2 Other sources

The following sources may also prove useful in developing strategies and procedures for managing websites and other online resources as records:

IM Forum – Internet and Intranet Working Group, *An Approach to Managing Internet and Intranet Information for Long Term Access and Accountability*, 24 September 1999, available at: <http://www.imforumgi.gc.ca>

IM Forum – Internet and Intranet Working Group, *Managing Internet and Intranet Information for Long Term Access and Accountability – Implementation Guide*, 24 September 1999, available at: <http://www.imforumgi.gc.ca>

McClure, C.R., & Sprehe, J.T., *Guidelines for Electronic Records Management on State and Federal Agency websites*, February 1998, available at <http://www.ii.fsu.edu/~cmclure/guidelines.html>

4.3 Contact details

For further information about this policy or the related guidelines, contact:

Adrian Cunningham
Director, Recordkeeping Standards and Policy
National Archives of Australia

Phone: (02) 6212 3988

Fax: (02) 6212 3989

Email: adrian.cunningham@naa.gov.au