
1 July 2019
Paris, France

Mr David Tune AO PSM
Independent Reviewer
c/o Tune Review Secretariat
National Archives of Australia
Queen Victoria Terrace
Parkes ACT 2600

Re: International Council on Archives Submission as part of the Functional and Efficiency Review of the National Archives of Australia

Dear Mr Tune,

I write to you as Secretary General of the International Council on Archives (ICA). In this submission I wish to address the value of archives, along with the role of the National Archives of Australia internationally and nationally.

International Council on Archives

The ICA is a neutral, non-governmental organisation, that has operated for over seventy years uniting archival institutions and practitioners across the globe to advocate for good archival and information management and the protection of documentary heritage, regardless of format. Moreover, this organisation produces reputable standards and best practices and encourages dialogue, exchange, and transmission of archival and information knowledge and expertise across national borders. With more than 1500 members in 199 countries and territories the Council's ethos is to harness the cultural diversity of its membership to deliver effective solutions and enable a flexible, imaginative profession. It is also the international advocate for records and data as evidence for transparency, accountability and good governance.

The value of archives

Archives fulfill many functions and are essential to ensuring open and transparent democracies. Too often documentary and cultural heritage are valued only when they are lost whether through human-made disasters or natural disasters. A recent example is the fire at National Museum of Brazil resulting in the loss not only of valuable artifacts, but also important linguistic archives documenting now extinct native languages and the localisation of

all ethnic groups of Brazil from 1945.¹ One museum employee summed up the research his colleagues lost as follows: "I feel very sorry for my colleagues, some of whom have worked here for 30 or 40 years. Now all evidence of their work is lost, their lives have lost meaning, too."² Whilst archives play an important cultural role, they are also central to transparency, accountability and good governance. Without information governments cannot make decisions, citizens cannot assert or defend their rights, nor can they hold governments and others to account for their decisions. Working in Africa, I have met people who have not been paid because of poor information management practices in government departments. I have also met people who not been able to claim their pensions because archives never received their files or because the archives did not have the resources to properly care for records resulting in their loss or destruction. These are worst-case scenarios, but they demonstrate what can happen when archives and information management are not seen as core functions to enable the work of administrations.

Digital technologies have greatly changed how we work, and we document our lives, but at their core these technologies are fueled thanks to information and data. They document decisions, actions and transactions taken by government and are embodied in data set, visualisation, code, algorithm, video, word document, power point presentation. Decision-makers need to be cognisant of the fact that digital data and information are also records of long-term value and enable archives to identify, transfer, preserve and make them accessible. Governments need to stop perceiving archives as repositories of the obsolete, archives are repositories of the present and future and in order to fulfil this mandate they need funding, capacity and the ability to exchange with colleagues nationally and internationally.

International

The National Archives of Australia (NAA) has an incredibly important role to play internationally and nationally. Their international participation allows them not only to share best practice they have developed in various areas, but equally to learn from others to create more innovative information management and archival solutions for Australia. However, this can only be achieved if NAA staff are able to participate in international meetings, conferences and training events where they can exchange with colleagues from around the world.

NAA also plays an important role in the UNESCO Memory of the World (MoW) programme which was created to address '...the parlous state of preservation of, and access to, documentary heritage in various parts of the world.' It is thanks to the contribution of NAA

¹ McCulloch, Gretchen (2018). "Folks, there's nothing left...". *All Things Linguistic*. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180904121003/https://allthingslinguistic.com/post/177712815507/folks-theres-nothing-left-from-the-linguistics> from the original on 4 September 2018. Retrieved 28 June 2019

² BBC News 'Brazil Museum Fire : Funding cuts blamed as icon is gutted' <https://web.archive.org/web/20190518144504/https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-45398084> from the original on 3 September 2018. Retrieved 28 June 2019

and the Government of Australia, at UNESCO, that valuable documentary and cultural heritage can be saved, but this means allowing people to participate in meetings and share their expertise. Not only does NAA work on the MoW programme but it is also involved with the PERSIST project which is dedicated to the preservation of digital documentary heritage and creating a network of experts that can develop platforms or techniques to preserve these resources. All these contributions at the international level enable NAA and Australia, more broadly, to be leaders in the cultural and documentary heritage space and reinforce the essential character of records and data for good governance, accountability, transparency and culture. This is a function that should be maintained, because as mentioned, information, records and data are central to economy, innovation and democracy and Australia needs its experts in that field to be present internationally but that requires the on-going support and investment.

National³

Archives have multiple functions they must carry out simultaneously: advise on the care and management of government records in departments, identify records for long-term preservation, preserve records as evidence in perpetuity and make the information accessible and re-useable for archives users. There is no other institution in government that can play this role.

Current government records are created in different forms, that may not always be recognised by decision-makers as 'historical records' these include data sets, computer software, code, algorithms, visualisations for policy, videos, photographs, along with word documents and power point presentations. Often government departments do not have the capacity or capability to ensure the on-going availability of these records before they must be transferred to the archives. The NAA needs legislative powers and concomitant resources (trained personnel and funding) to advise on the care of these records while they remain in government departments or compel their transfer to safeguard them. If not, there is a serious risk that departments will not put the proper care in managing these assets, risking their loss and/or corruption.

Secondly these records then need to be transferred and preserved, this type of work requires investment in areas such as infrastructure, personnel and training. To ensure the safe transfer and preservation of digital records an institution needs not only trained and experience digital archivists, but also front-end and back end developers, user experience researchers, business analysts, database administrators, and data scientists. There is also the underlying software

³ The observations and recommendations in this section are based on my experiences working at the Interim Head of Digital Selection and Transfer at National Archives UK. My observations are evidenced in two research papers I worked on 'Digital landscape in government 2014-2015: A business intelligence review' see:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/digital-landscape-in-government-2014-15.pdf> and 'The application of technology assisted review to born-digital records transfer, Inquiries and beyond' see:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/technology-assisted-review-to-born-digital-records-transfer.pdf>

and infrastructure that need to be considered, in order to preserve records and ensure their authenticity overtime. The up-front costs may seem large, but the loss or corruption of the government record, if proper resources are not allocated, will pose a greater risk, negatively impacting citizens' lives and the efficacy and trustworthiness of government.

Finally, another core archival function is access of paper and digital records. The value add of the archives is not only the preservation information and data but also enabling citizen access. Government needs to provide NAA with enough resources to process and make available not only digital records but also paper records, especially if it wishes to respect its access periods as described in section 3(7) of the Archives Act. Continued cuts will effectively put the NAA in a persistent position of inability to deliver against its legislative requirements, affecting the transparency and accountability of the Australian Government. This was my experience when I worked at UK National Archives and paper records as well as digital records were not processed in a timely fashion against legislative deadlines or based on information provided in press releases. Archives regardless of format must be properly maintained and made available for consultation, but this requires a sustained commitment from government to enable the archives' access to adequate resources (people, infrastructure and funding) in order to fulfil its mandate.

I hope that the Government of Australia will invest in its archives so that it will continue to play a vital role both nationally and internationally in upholding democratic principles and ideals. Archives are not the realm of stacks of dusty paper, they are the foundation of democracy and justice.

I thank you for your time and attention and remain at your disposal should you wish to speak to me.

Sincerely



Dr Anthea Seles
Secretary General/Secrétaire générale
International Council on Archives/Conseil International des Archives