



**NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF AUSTRALIA**

**The essential future role of the  
National Archives of Australia in the digital-age**

**A submission to the**

**Tune Review**

**A Functional and Efficiency Review  
of the National Archives of Australia**

**from the**

**National Archives Advisory Council**

11 July 2019



**Australian Government**  
**National Archives of Australia**

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## Letter of Transmittal

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

I write on behalf of the Advisory Council (the Council) for the National Archives of Australia (National Archives), to provide this submission, inform your work as the Independent Reviewer undertaking a Functional and Efficiency Review (FER) of the National Archives of Australia.

The National Archives of Australia is a national institution with an important role: to impose record keeping obligations in respect of Commonwealth records and after the passage of time to facilitate their release to the public. This role is essential, to support the integrity of decision making and to uphold the accountability of public officials to Government, the Parliament and the public.

Over recent years, the Advisory Council has become increasingly concerned by the serious deterioration in the funding position of the National Archives. Successive efficiency dividends and savings measures imposed upon the National Archives have substantially diminished its capacity to perform its functions and to deliver services to the Australian Government and to the Australian public.

Not only is the National Archives struggling to perform its existing functions and services, it is also behind in digital reform – unable to meet expectations of the Australian public and ability to receive government information in the digital age. This requires significant investment and is imperative to a 21<sup>st</sup> century National Archives. It has also placed some parts of the archival collection at risk; most notably the unique, audio-visual records held on magnetic tape which require immediate digitisation to avoid loss through obsolescence.

It is the considered view of the Advisory Council that the Review should focus on the following areas critical to the operations, efficiencies and effectiveness of the National Archives of Australia:

- sustainable funding, without which the digital transformation of the National Archives is not possible and unique audio-visual heritage materials will be lost;
- digital capability and cyber security enhancements;
- opportunities for whole of government efficiencies through the National Archive's leadership on information policy and management, and storage, preservation and digitisation strategies;
- a new National Archives Bill, that would enable the operations of the National Archives to seize the opportunities of the digital age; and
- funding to undertake a feasibility study for a new National Archives Public Building.

I commend the Advisory Council's submission for your consideration.

Yours sincerely



Dr Denver Beanland  
Advisory Council Chair

11 July 2019

## Executive Summary

The National Archives of Australia Advisory Council welcomes the invitation to make a submission to the *Tune Review - A Functional and Efficiency Review of the National Archives of Australia*, extended to the Advisory Council by the Attorney-General, the Honourable Christian Porter MP, Minister for the National Archives, in his correspondence of 11 January 2019.

The National Archives of Australia is a national institution with an important role: to impose record keeping obligations in respect of Commonwealth records and after the passage of time to facilitate their release to the public. This role is essential, to support the integrity of decision making and to uphold the accountability of public officials to Government, the Parliament and the public.

Over recent years, the Advisory Council has become increasingly concerned by the serious deterioration in the funding position of the National Archives. Successive efficiency dividends and savings measures imposed upon the National Archives have substantially diminished its capacity to perform its functions and to deliver services to the Australian Government and to the Australian public. Not only is the National Archives struggling to perform its existing functions and services, it is also behind in digital reform – unable to meet expectations of the Australian public and ability to receive government information in the digital age. This requires significant investment and is imperative to a 21<sup>st</sup> century National Archives. It has also placed some parts of the archival collection at risk; most notably the unique, audio-visual records held on magnetic tape which require immediate digitisation to avoid loss through obsolescence.

It is the considered view of the Advisory Council that the Review should focus on the following areas critical to the operations, efficiencies and effectiveness of the National Archives of Australia:

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- digital capability and cyber security enhancements;
- opportunities for whole of government efficiencies through the National Archive's leadership on information policy and management, and storage, preservation and digitisation strategies;
- a new National Archives Bill, that would enable the operations of the National Archives to seize the opportunities of the digital age; and
- funding to undertake a feasibility study for a new National Archives Public Building.

It is the view of the Advisory Council that the National Archives is now in an unsustainable budgetary and resource position and, is unable to properly meet its legislated requirements. Since 2014-15, there has been a more than \$7.0 million (10 per cent) a year reduction in the appropriation; this has forced the National Archives to reduce its Average Staffing Level (ASL) by 14 per cent (57) from 412 in 2014-15 to 355 in 2018-19. In 2019-20, this will see further decrease in the annual appropriation by \$8.9 million and, an accumulative reduction of 16 per cent (67) in ASL, down to 345.

The perilous budget position of the National Archives has also seriously set back its plans for its own digital transformation in step with developments across government, resulting in inadequate digital capability for the future and introducing cyber vulnerabilities into its current technical infrastructure. This has placed the digital records of government at risk – both those already in the custody of the National Archives and also the growing volume of government data that cannot yet be transferred to the Archives. The digital archival records of the Commonwealth are currently fragmented across hundreds of separate systems and government entities exposed to compromise, obsolescence or loss.

To properly perform the functions assigned to the National Archives under the Act, and to satisfy minimum public expectations, the Advisory Council recommends that the staffing level of the organisation be increased by 193 full time employees (FTE) to 538 FTE.

The National Archives has a national presence and, therefore, in line with Government policy for the decentralisation of the Australian Public Service, consideration should be given to the economic benefit of locating some functions outside Canberra, creating jobs in rural and regional Australia.

Commensurate with the increase in staff, additional budget should be allocated to permit the National Archives to fulfil its information policy, digitisation and information technology programmes. The Advisory

Council estimates on the basis of advice, that National Archives will require an increase in its annual appropriation in the order of \$37 million in 2020/21 (totalling \$111 million), rising to an additional \$65 million per annum over the forward estimates, for an annual appropriation of \$141 million in 2023-24. Forecast out to 2026/27, an increased in the order of \$77 million, for an annual appropriation of \$153 million. This reflects a staged and sustainable approach to funding required for the National Archives of Australia to adequately fulfil its obligations as prescribed by the *Archives Act 1983*.

In 2017, the Honourable Angus Taylor MP, then Assistant Minister for Cities and Digital Transformation, highlighted that analysis undertaken by the Digital Transformation Agency, had identified that the Commonwealth Government was spending in the order of \$6 billion per annum on ICT, and this was forecast to increase by 50% to \$9 billion per annum. The Advisory Council, on advice, believes the additional funding required for the National Archives could be more than offset by savings within the existing \$9 billion currently expended annually by government entities on the management of digital systems and information management across government, and the at least \$265 million per annum that is spent by entities on physical file and digital storage.

Austender figures for new contracts for the period 2015/16 – 2017/18, showed government entities spent \$390 million on physical file storage and a further \$400 million on digital storage. This does exclude further expenditure by Defence and specialist agencies. Across government, considerable savings will be achieved through consolidation of physical and digital storage arrangements, digitisation of government records and information, and early storage, more effective disposal, transfer and preservation of data. Consideration should be given to a regime of inter-agency fees and charges levied by the National Archives commensurate with the efficiencies and savings it delivers to government.

The Advisory Council believes that reform of the *Archives Act 1983*, through modernisation, clarification of powers and functions, updating exemptions and refreshing the legislation, is essential to enable the digital transformation of the National Archives of Australia so that it can fulfil its purpose in the digital age. This includes cyber security enhancements to meet the essential measures recommended by the Australian Cyber Security Centre and facilities capable of administering digital information carrying a national security classification.

The Advisory Council believes that the National Archives should have a public building in the Parliamentary Zone that is fit for purpose. This will require a commitment of \$5 million for a feasibility study and business case, within the forecast increase to annual appropriation.

The National Archives of Australia is trusted by the Australian people as a source of authentic government records about past government decision-making. However, failing the allocation of additional funding in the future the National Archives will not be able to undertake its legislated functions for the Government or Australian people.

# 1.0 The Advisory Council

## 1.1 The significance of the Advisory Council

The National Archives of Australia Advisory Council performs a critical independent role within the broad overall governance of the National Archives. Whilst its role is advisory, in accordance with reporting requirements set out in Part IV Section 11 of the *Archives Act 1983*, the Advisory Council provides an important assurance that the National Archives is conducting its activities with propriety, integrity and accountability. It monitors the performance of the National Archives, providing guidance on its strategic priorities and policy framework.

The Advisory Council comprises 11 members appointed by the Government and two members appointed by the Parliament of Australia. The Appointment of Parliamentary Members to the Advisory Council is indicative of the importance placed upon the role of the Advisory Council by the Parliament of Australia.

Its principal functions are to provide advice to the Minister and to the Director-General on matters that relate to the functions of the National Archives. These have included in recent times strategic priorities, and policy framework to ensure the National Archives delivers on its legislated mandate and enduring, fundamental and unique role for government.

The Minister or Director-General may refer matters about the functions of the National Archives to the Advisory Council for advice or the Council may on its own initiative provide advice to the Minister or the Director-General. It generally meets quarterly, with one meeting annually held outside of Canberra. The Advisory Council has extended a standing invitation to the Minister to attend its meetings.

## 1.2 The Advisory Council priorities for the sustainability of the National Archives

The Advisory Council has supported the goals, strategies and plans to transform the institution into a contemporary, world leading digital archive as set out in the National Archives' *Corporate Plan 2018-19 to 2021-22* and its *Strategic Plan 2020*.

Over recent years, the Advisory Council has become increasingly concerned by the serious deterioration in the funding position of the National Archives and the adverse impact this has had on the performance of its role, its functions and the services it delivers to the Australian Government and the Australian public.

Despite repeated policy and funding proposals, the National Archives is the only national cultural institution that has been unable to secure any funding from the \$500 million Public Service Modernisation Fund or any other new appropriations that go to the underlying sustainability of the institution's functions. The Advisory Council has noted that, since 2016/17, some cultural institutions have received further appropriations to address strategic challenges impacting on their operations, in many instances ameliorating the impact of the efficiency dividends and savings measures. However, despite the urgent funding requirements of the National Archives, it has received no additional monies.

The Advisory Council has been committed to management's approach to reforming and reviewing the requirements for a National Archives, so it can meet the demands of government and public as a 21<sup>st</sup> century Archives. Whilst the National Archives, in 2018/19, received specific targeted one-off funding allocations to enable digital access to the records of former Prime Ministers and to house the Collection of Prime Ministerial Gifts, and more recently a funding commitment to commence digitisation of the World War II Service Records these funds do not support the ongoing budget and resource sustainability of the National Archives.

Notwithstanding the reduction in budget, the National Archives of Australia has not stood still; it has continued to respond to the urgent and immediate challenges it faces, using the finite resources available.

In the absence of additional funding, the Advisory Council supported the National Archives recognition of the need for change and to progress key initiatives. Moving into 2018/19, whilst still allowing for reserves for specified liabilities such as employee entitlements and provisions for make-good and other payables, \$10.9 million in reserves were identified for reinvestment, which enabled the National Archives to establish the Digital Archives Taskforce for 18 months, from 1 July 2018 to 31 December 2019. In March 2019, it received approval from the Minister for Finance for an Operating Loss of \$6.0 million in 2018-19. The expected loss is

made up of \$4.4 million of one-off costs for investment in digital information management and capability priorities, and the implementation of a Voluntary Redundancy Program in 2018-19 to further reduce staff numbers to ensure that the National Archives remains financially sustainable in the future. The remainder is for adjustments related to accounting for property leases.

Significantly, reform of the *Archives Act 1983* is essential to bring the National Archives into the digital age, so that it can meet the expectations of the Australian Government and the Australian people. The Advisory Council believes that, for the National Archives to discharge its responsibilities under the *Archives Act 1983* and for it to support the digital transformation and service delivery priorities of government to the Australian public, it needs to be appropriately funded on a sustainable basis.

Furthermore, it supports the case for the development of a permanent and purpose-built National Archives Public Building in the Parliamentary Zone to deliver improved visitor and learning experiences to the Australian public and to provide the necessary scalability of its services, as well as commercial and philanthropic capability for the National Archives to realise new funding streams and use of the collections across the creative and digital economies.

In summary, the Advisory Council believes the strategic priorities are:

- sustainable (indexed) funding, without which the digital transformation of the National Archives is not possible and unique audio-visual heritage materials will be lost (Section 4, 6 and 7);
- digital capability and cyber security enhancements (Section 6);
- opportunities for whole-of-government efficiencies through the National Archive's leadership on information policy and management, storage, preservation and digitisation strategies (Section 7);
- a new National Archives Bill, that would enable the operations of the National Archives to seize the opportunities of the digital age (Section 5); and
- funding to undertake a feasibility study for a new National Archives Public Building (Section 9).

### 1.3 Representations to the Government

In support of submissions by the National Archives to Government, the Advisory Council has made ongoing representations on various matters to its Minister, the Attorney-General; it has also made representations to the Prime Minister, the Minister for Finance, the Minister for Veterans Affairs and to the Minister for Infrastructure, Regional Development and Territories.

In particular, the Advisory Council has set out representations to the Attorney-General on key matters of concern and priority for the appropriate and effective functioning of the National Archives, including the:

- need for adequate and appropriate funding for the sustainable operation of the National Archives;
- urgency to save collections that are at risk of loss, in particular, unique audio-visual heritage materials;
- enduring, fundamental and unique role and purpose of National Archives in Australia's representative democracy;
- critical digital capability and cyber resilience, leaving the National Archives and the collection vulnerable to obsolescence, attack, compromise or loss;
- role of the National Archives as an essential service to the public — providing access to the authentic records of government;
- essential need to modernise the *Archives Act 1983* for the digital age with a new Bill;
- important contribution made by the National Archives to soft-power diplomacy in support of the Government's policy objectives in our region; and the
- need for a new National Archives Public Building.

In response, the Attorney-General resolved that there were a range of issues relating to the functions, powers and resourcing of the National Archives which would benefit from examination — initiating the Tune Review.

## 2.0 The essential role of the National Archives of Australia

The key role of the National Archives of Australia is to ensure that Australians have access to the authentic evidence of the decisions and actions of the Australian government. It achieves this by exercising an independent authority over all Commonwealth officials and contractors engaged to undertake government functions, preventing the destruction of records that must be retained to support integrity in decision-making, accountability for actions taken, and to uphold the rights and entitlements of individuals.

The National Archives is the largest archival institution in Australia. It is the only cultural institution with a national presence, with public research centres and storage facilities in every state and territory capital city.

The National Archives collection represents the memory of our nation. The records of the Commonwealth, collected since Federation, are the primary source references upon which successive generations of Australians can make fresh observations of past events and interpret for themselves the story of Australia, its identity, its values and its history. The National Archives holds many important records documenting the individual and collective histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and their contributions to the identity and history of this nation.

The National Archives receives in excess of 40,000 applications per year to access records previously closed to the public due to their national security sensitivity, privacy considerations. To open the files, the exemption provisions of the Act have to be observed, this requires careful examination by National Archives staff with archival expertise and consultation with relevant agencies. Records and information created by government will continue to require special considerations around restrictions and access into the digital age, particularly in light of information created that is more sensitive in nature. This is a fundamental role of the National Archives.

### CASE STUDY – Royal Commission into the Home Insulation Program

In his report of August 2014, Ian Hanger AM QC was sharply critical of the standards of government record keeping in the digital environment. He referred to the policy-setting role of the National Archives, which was undermined by the lack of a whole-of-government resource to achieve proper implementation of those standards and by a tendency for public servants to bypass accountability during periods in which they were “too busy”.

Section 14.2 of the report, entitled *Australian Government document management*, stated:

*“As I mentioned in Chapter 1 of this Report, considerable delay and frustration was caused by the way in which documents were provided by the Commonwealth to this Commission. What the process has revealed is a quite inadequate system of document management and record keeping by those involved in the Home Insulation Program (HIP).*

*In providing proper advice, and in recording all key decisions, it is necessary for there to be a system of record keeping and for that system to be enforced. It is evident that those engaged in the HIP did not keep detailed records of key decisions and how they were arrived at. Many claimed they were simply too busy to do so. The emails and other internal documents ought to have been better recorded than they were. As noted in the 2003 version of the APSC Guide,<sup>33</sup> in 1995 the National Archives of Australia issued a policy under the Archives Act 1983 (Cth) that electronic records have the same status as paper records.*

*The policy states that: “All digital data created or received in the conduct of Commonwealth business are Commonwealth records under the Archives Act 1983 and need to be managed in accordance with the Act. Commonwealth Government agencies must manage electronic records with the same care as they manage paper records. Agencies must not dispose of electronic records except under an appropriate disposal authority issued by the National Archives of Australia.”*

*I am not in a position to judge whether the deficiencies in record-keeping and record storage evident in the HIP and in DEWHA are indicative of a broader problem, either within the Department or more widely within Government. However, these deficiencies are very likely exacerbated by the Machinery of Government changes that have occurred since 2010, as well as the lack of compatibility between the various records management systems used by different departments. In conclusion, I suggest that there would be merit in efforts to move towards a whole-of-Government record-keeping system.”*

Prior to public access, records preserved by the National Archives are also made available on a restricted basis to serve legal proceedings, Royal Commissions, the Australian National Audit Office, Ombudsman,

and other integrity and accountability bodies. Records of this kind would also be crucial to the functioning of the Government's proposed Commonwealth Integrity Commission.

The National Archives is much more than a back-up service or storage facility. The value created by the National Archives comes from its preservation facilities; these ensure that the collective memory of Australia is carried forward to the present as a national information resource and is readily available to the nation to make informed decisions about the future.

The National Archives fulfils a very specific and unique role. As a documentary heritage institution, it provides access to unpublished and sensitive primary source material that could not be managed by a library or museum. As an integrity and accountability agency, it sets record keeping standards and manages access to government records in a manner that could not be achieved through FOI or Privacy officers embedded in the various Commonwealth entities. The National Archives independence from the entities that create the records upholds its role as a trusted source of authentic government information by the Australian people.

The Advisory Council strongly recognises and endorses the responsibility of the National Archives as a national and regional leader. As Australia's *National Archives*, the institution has a responsibility to contribute to the capacity of other jurisdictions where this is in Australia's interest. This role is expressed in the Archives Act as "to develop and foster the co-ordination of activities relating to the preservation and use of the archival resources of the Commonwealth and other archival resources relating to Australia". Through its liaison and collaboration with the national, regional and international archival community, it makes a substantial contribution to the continued evolution of the role and capability of archives across Australia and supports Australia's broader foreign policy objectives through its engagement with the cultural institutions of other nations.

The National Archives of Australia is trusted by the Australian people as a source of authentic government records about past government decision-making. However, failing the allocation of additional funding in the future the National Archives will not be able to undertake its legislated functions for the Australian public.

### 3.0 Government obligations to the Australian people

The Australian Government has, as a matter of national policy, given commitments regarding the integrity, accountability, transparency and access to government information.

Australia, as a member state of UNESCO, supports the implementation of the **Universal Declaration on Archives**, adopted in September 2010. The Declaration states:

*Archives record decisions, actions and memories. Archives are a unique and irreplaceable heritage passed from one generation to another. Archives are managed from creation to preserve their value and meaning. They are authoritative sources of information underpinning accountable and transparent administrative actions. They play an essential role in the development of societies by safeguarding and contributing to individual and community memory. Open access to archives enriches our knowledge of human society, promotes democracy, protects citizens' rights and enhances the quality of life.*

In 2015, Australia signed up to the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, through education, cultural and archival programs and partnerships, ensuring that government information is secure and authentic, and providing access to government information and data. The National Archives contributes, particularly to five of the 17 goals:

- Goal 4: Quality Education
- Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
- Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
- Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals.

#### **CASE STUDY: Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse**

The Royal Commission handed down its final report in December 2017. Significantly, an entire volume of its recommendations (Volume 8), was dedicated to issues of Record Keeping and Information Governance. In total, 23 Recommendations were made, with specific responsibilities allocated to the National Archives under two broad areas:

- First, at records and recordkeeping by institutions that care for or provide services to children. The Royal Commission found that creation of accurate records and the exercise of good recordkeeping practices are critical to identifying, preventing and responding to child sexual abuse. Emphasising also the importance of records in alleviating the impact of child sexual abuse for survivors, the Commission made recommendations to improve records and recordkeeping practices within institutions.
- Secondly, the Royal Commission examined information sharing between institutions with responsibilities for children's safety and wellbeing, and between those institutions and relevant professionals. Identifying poor management of information and inadequate policies for long term accessibility of these records, the Commission made recommendations to improve information sharing so as to better protect children from sexual abuse in institutions.

The investigation of the Royal Commission into the connection between records management and the access to rights and entitlements by vulnerable individuals, coupled with the comprehensive set of recommendations, serves as a powerful example of the importance of Government wide management of records by an independent and accountable authority.

From late 2016, Australia announced its first plan for the Government's Open Government Partnership with aims to deliver on commitments to enhance access to information, civic participation, public accountability, as well as technology and innovation for openness and accountability.

Developed collaboratively with civil society, it comprised ambitious commitments to strengthen and improve:

- Transparency and accountability in business;

- The availability of open data and the digital transformation of government services;
- Access to government information;
- Integrity in the public sector; and
- Public participation and engagement.

The Government's commitments to the **Open Government Partnership** aim to deliver on its commitment to enhance access to information, civic participation, public accountability, as well as technology and innovation for openness and accountability.

The Government's second National Action Plan 2018-20 launched in September 2018, comprises further commitments building on the lessons and successes of the first Plan; it consists of a focussed set of commitments to enhance access to information, civic participation, public accountability, as well as technology and innovation.

The National Archives' leadership in the development and implementation of the *Information Management Standard* and *Digital Continuity Policy 2020*, its development of a new policy framework from 2021 and its representations to reform and modernise the *Archives Act 1983*, specifically deliver on Commitment 3.1, to improve information management and access laws for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The importance of these commitments is highlighted, when considering that information and data management failures that erode the rights and entitlements of citizens and damage trust in government have been repeatedly identified in Government inquiries, audits, reviews and investigations. Since 2013, five out of seven Royal Commissions have highlighted poor information management practice across government and the private sector.

One quarter of all Commonwealth Ombudsman investigations in 2018 found information management was deficient and did not support good decision making.

The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) identified information management deficiencies in more than a third of all audits undertaken in the 2016-17 financial year alone. The ANAO's Audit Report No.53 2011–12 on Records Management in the Australian Public Service highlights ANAO's long term scrutiny of records and information management issues in the broader Australian Public Service landscape.

In 2015 *The independent Review of Whole-of-Government Internal Regulation* (Belcher Red Tape Review) also identified inefficiencies in information and data management practices and directed the National Archives of Australia to work more closely with agencies on digital transformation-related matters. In the same period, Peter Shergold's report *Learning from Failure: Why large government policy initiatives have gone so badly wrong in the past and how the chances of success in the future can be improved* – repeated similar issues, and raised fundamental information management concerns around the Australian Public Service's lack of understanding of recordkeeping obligations – particularly in the digital era.

## 4.0 Cultural significance of Australia’s collective memory

The cultural and historical significance of government records for future generations cannot be over emphasised. The role that the National Archives of Australia plays in this as an independent institution is crucial to the leadership and governance necessary to ensure that the right records are kept, that access to those records is provided in a digital age, and conversely, that the record is disposed of appropriately. This is particularly so for education and other projects of cultural and historical significance that illuminate who we are as individuals as well as shape our collective identity.

The Advisory Council stresses this not only in light of important digitisation projects such as that regarding the rapidly degrading audio-visual tapes that are in need of urgent digitisation, but also with regard to the preservation of objects and material in the collection that cannot be digitised. It is every Australian’s democratic right to have access to records and material about them or their nation and to know that it is being appropriately preserved and will be accessible by future generations. This highlights the need to recognise the importance of the National Archives alongside contemporary stories and interpretations, in the course of reconciliation between all communities.

### CASE STUDY: *Facing two Fronts: the fight for respect*

A bold and innovative exhibition curated by the National Archives of Australia, *Facing Two Fronts: the fight for respect*, originally on show in Canberra, toured to Darwin, before going on display for the Centenary of the Armistice, at the Sir John Monash Centre near Villers-Bretonneux in France, November 2018.

Through the lens of military service and the stories of those who served, *Facing Two Fronts* shone a light on a centenary of Indigenous Australians at war and their fight for social justice when they returned from war.

A tale of two worlds, one of inequality and racism, the other of mateship and patriotism, is being traced in a new National Archives of Australia digital exhibition.

How did war become a platform for advocating the civil rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

“Indigenous Australians have served in the Australian military since Federation. Their role was significant, yet largely unrecognised. For some, armed service provided equality, for others discrimination.”

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people didn’t have access to benefits, recognition or other rights afforded to European – Australians. With an increased awareness of the extent of discrimination of Indigenous soldiers, they had a platform upon which to advocate for civil rights.

“The National Archives was proud to have this digital exhibition as the first visiting program at the Sir John Monash Centre, a museum that commemorates Australian servicemen and women who served on the Western Front during World War I. It greatly valued the opportunity to promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s experiences in the hub of the Australian Remembrance Trail along the Western Front.”

This digital exhibition featured extraordinary images, stirring video portraits, and original records from the Archives’ Darwin collection and the Northern Territory Archives Service.



The *Facing Two Fronts* on display for the Centenary of the Armistice, at the Sir John Monash Centre, located at Villers Bretonneux, France, November 2018



Exhibition story: Uncle Joe McGinness (right), pictured with Sir Robert Menzies, was instrumental in coordinating the 1967 Referendum Campaign giving Indigenous people the right to vote.

### CASE STUDY: *A ticket to Paradise?* – the story of post-World War II immigration

*A Ticket to Paradise?*, an interactive exhibition with personal stories added by visitors, delves into the rich diversity of the nation's migrants and their experiences, and looks at promotional campaigns which presented a Utopian view of Australia as a welcoming country full of opportunity.

The exhibition features archival film footage, audio recordings, and many images of migrants taken between the 1940s and 1990s, and a special interactive globe featuring personal stories of migration.

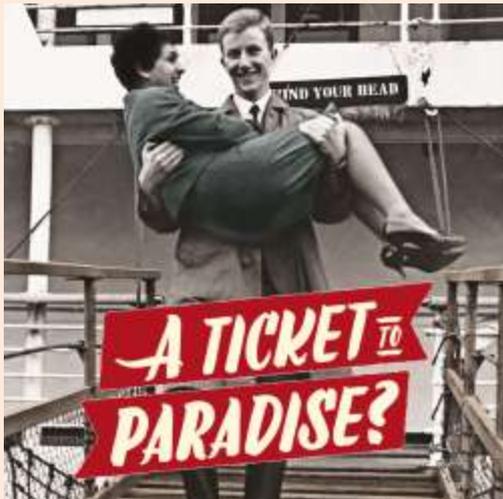
It examines the rich diversity of Australian immigrants and the government's ambitious plans after World War II to encourage mass migration.

'The program transformed the nation socially, economically and culturally,' said curator Dr Sara King. 'It has resulted in a community where, today, one quarter of our population was born overseas, and nearly half of us have at least one parent born elsewhere.'

'In *A Ticket to Paradise?* the National Archives endeavoured to show the human story of migration, with recordings of new and archival personal experiences. These stories give an insight into the rich, complex and so very different experiences of the migrants and refugees who have settled here. They help us understand that the migrant experience is as diverse as the 7 million people who have arrived here from more than 200 different countries to shape Australia into the place we know today.

While most people are aware of this aspect of our cultural heritage, many don't realise the wealth of immigration history held by the National Archives, from personal and family stories to government campaigns and policies.

This exhibition tour has been supported by the Department of Home Affairs.



Brian Jonmundsson and his wife Visitacion arrive in Sydney, 1963. (NAA: A12111, 1/1963/4/41)



The exhibition on display, with curator Dr Sarah King exploring immigration stories added by visitors

The National Archives has a dedicated history in opening the collection up to all Australians, allowing the public to explore their own connection to the nation's cultural heritage, identity, values and history. For almost thirty years, the National Archives has curated and toured exhibitions, education and public programs around Australia – including to rural and regional areas, that tell the nation's story – commencing with the seminal exhibition in 1993 about the Stolen Generations and the historical impact it had on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. *Between Two Worlds: The Commonwealth government and the removal of Aboriginal children of part-descent in the Northern Territory* – was a touring exhibition prepared by the National Archives as part of the Commonwealth government's celebration of the International Year for the World's Indigenous Peoples.

In light of the reconciliation journey with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, the National Archives contributes to the process of healing through its family history research function. Indeed, this extends to nearly all Australians; it is why its collection is unique in that it holds personal records relating to almost every Australian citizen and resident – through family, migration or war records – allowing all Australians to develop a deeper understanding of their own identity and their part in the history of this nation.

The National Archives holds the *Bringing Them Home Index* which was created as an outcome of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families (1997). There is a level of cultural protocol that requires ongoing consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to access this information. The access issues and funding to support this is understated in the context of the cultural-historical benefits. This underscores the National Archives cultural function and its social-impact benefit, which extends more broadly beyond just the cultural sector, to *Closing the Gap* and savings across health, justice and education sectors.

For example, a book written in 2018 acknowledged the contribution of WA Aboriginal enlistees to mark the Centenary of the Armistice. The research undertaken in consultation with the Aboriginal community revealed over 60 enlistees who had never been previously recognised and were added to the national register. Some were rejected because they were 'not of substantial European descent' due to the legislation and policies at the time. The digitised World War I records as part of the National Archives 'Discovering ANZAC's' project allowed the researchers to access records online, which conveyed important genealogical and family information in addition to the military information. An impactful result of this project was that the descendants of the Aboriginal enlistees were connected with family who they had never known before. The National Archives holds much information and records relating to the Australian people that is, and will continue to be, important for family history research.

The ability of the National Archives to recognise the cultural importance of the World War I Service Records and digitise them is something that government departments would not recognise. The skill of the expert archivist to understand the social and cultural context of the record and its function, in addition to the history it presents, is imperative to continue to shape this nation's diverse and collective identity.

More digitisation funding is required to make records available online. This is especially important for those who do not have easy access to urban centres and, therefore, the National Archives state reading-room facilities. Investment in digitisation will also have a positive impact for those in remote or regional locations.

There is a critical importance for communities to have access to information for their own use and for historical projects that uncover truth and promote trust in government.

From the Federation documents to war records, immigration files, important records documenting the individual and collective histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and their contributions to this nation, to a rich tapestry of photos and audio-visual materials, and so much more, the National Archives collection is the authentic and essential evidence of Australian Government activities and decisions that shaped our nation and the lives of its citizens.

It tells the story of Australia and its people. It is the memory of our nation for our citizens today and future generations to come. However, failing the allocation of additional resources in the future the National Archives will not be able to undertake this work for the Australian people.

## 5.0 Legislation for the Digital Age

The *Archives Act 1983* is analogue legislation in a digital age. It pre-dates the Internet and requires urgent modernisation to meet the rapid and ever-evolving challenges of the digital world and the transformation of government.

The National Archives today is confronted with the growing challenge of dealing with government record holdings, with preliminary estimates suggesting this will exceed 54 petabytes before 2030 – well beyond the current digital storage and preservation capacity of the National Archives. The government records management regime contemplated by the current legislation is designed for paper records that can be stored for lengthy periods of time; this regime is unsuited for the management of digital information which, if left for extended periods of time, becomes vulnerable to loss, deterioration, or obsolescence of data formats.

### 5.1 The benefits of reforming the legislation

Over the past four years, the Advisory Council has invested significant time and effort in discussing, consulting and working with the National Archives on its strategic priorities. In particular, with the support of the former Attorney-General, the Honourable George Brandis QC, the Council undertook an extensive process of review and consultation, including with the Australian intelligence community, about the reform and modernisation of the *Archives Act 1983*, to equip it for the digital age. Advice, and a proposed draft National Archives Bill, was presented to the former Attorney-General in June 2017.

This advice and representations were subsequently brought to the attention of the Attorney-General, the Honourable Christian Porter MP, in early 2018. Also, advice and policy positions, documented in a Policy Position Paper, were endorsed by the Advisory Council and submitted to the Minister in September 2018.

The Advisory Council dedicated considerable energy and time to its deliberations, working with and providing advice to the National Archives on the proposed modernisation of the Archives Act. The Advisory Council was consulted extensively on the drafting of the proposed draft Bill and the policy positions outlined in the Policy Position Paper and it endorsed the proposed reforms.

In assessing the current operation of the various provisions in the Archives Act that relate to the exemption of Commonwealth records concerning national security, defence or international relations issues, and scoping the possible amendments to be included in the proposed new Archives Bill, both the National Archives Advisory Council and the Attorney-General's Department consulted with representatives of the Australian intelligence community.

A decision was made that no amendments would be proposed to the existing exemptions prescribed by the current Act. It was recommended that security exemptions should be considered separately, informed by the outcomes of the ongoing *Comprehensive review of the legal framework governing the National Intelligence Community*.

In taking the steps to modernise the Archives Act, the National Archives and the Advisory Council is conscious of the need to ensure that the proposed legislation is in plain English, clear, readable and accessible – for legal practitioners, agencies and all Australians.

Reform of the Archives Act, through modernisation of the legislation, clarification of functions and powers, and the updating of exemptions, is essential to enable the digital transformation of the National Archives, so that it may fully deliver on its legislated remit in the information age.

Reflecting the vision and strategic direction of the National Archives in **a new proposed objects clause** would highlight the key relationships between the Australian people, Commonwealth Government departments and agencies and the National Archives. A new proposed objects clause would also emphasise the importance of the National Archives' lead role in information governance policy and mandatory standard-setting, ensuring the integrity, accountability, transparency, and preservation of records as an asset to government and the Australian people.

It is important for the National Archives to be able to set mandatory standards for information governance across the Commonwealth Government to improve the accessibility of records into the future. Updating the Archives Act will **create efficiencies in information management** and result in **real budget savings to**

**government.** The reforms will clarify, and prevent fragmentation of, information governance, management responsibilities and transfer processes across the Commonwealth Government and its agencies.

It is necessary to **clarify the functions and powers**, and practical operation of the Archives Act within the contemporary information framework across government, to better realise the vision, mission and role of a transformed National Archives.

Providing authentic evidence of decisions requires that records must have adequate stewardship throughout their life cycle. This requires established standards for the creation, management, preservation and maintaining of government records; unambiguous arrangements relating to their transfer and custody; and a clear mandate for the National Archives to enter into arrangements for the delivery of innovative programs and partnerships to empower its role.

The reform of the Archives Act will enable best practice to be adopted for the handling of records in the digital age. This will be achieved by **retaining what has worked** well to date in the operation and administration of the Act, and **implementing changes informed both by the long-term lessons learned** in carrying out the functions of the National Archives and recent technological advances.

This reform will also bring the Archives Act in line with other information legislation, correcting a lag behind other modernising legislative reforms in relation to information governance.

As a matter of urgency, the Advisory Council requests that the Government give priority to the passage of a new National Archives Bill through the Parliament.

## 6.0 Digital Capability and Digitisation

The National Archives is functioning as an 'analogue archive in a digital world', with inadequate digital capability for the secure storage of digital material transferred to it from Australian Government entities as a mandatory requirement under the Archives Act.

The Australian Government is committed to making Australia among the top three e-Governments by the year 2025 and is rapidly moving all public engagement and services onto digital delivery platforms. In today's operating environment, the records of the Commonwealth are digital – and they're being created in greater volume and with greater velocity than ever before. The National Archives has an immediate and urgent requirement for a digital capability to match this pace of change and to exercise its core functions in the new digital environment.

These core functions of archives go much further than the simple storage of data. A basic back-up of data may be useful in the short term to recover from a system failure, however, a data back-up does not do anything to enable the long-term use and re-use of information, nor does it provide any guarantee of integrity or authenticity. Specialist archival skills are needed to understand what records must be preserved, and specialist technical skills are needed to determine and capture relevant metadata to best enable future access. Digital preservation is a continuous activity; data formats must be periodically migrated to keep pace with evolving technology and the integrity of data must be forensically monitored to prevent data corruption. In the digital environment, archiving begins the instant a record is created, hence ongoing training and guidance is required for government officials and contractors.

The digital capability to perform these functions will need to be acquired, configured and integrated into the business processes of the National Archives, through a combination of specialist archival skills and technology skills working closely together, to develop storage and access strategies that stand the test of time, and that can be progressively automated for efficiency and scalability. It will need close engagement with all stakeholders across the life cycle of the records, from the creators through to government and public access, on an ongoing basis. It will also need stable and long-term links with research organisations to develop pilots and trials exploiting new and emerging technologies.

The critical mass of skills and facilities needed to sustain this capability and ensure seamless operations and integration with evolving technology platforms and services, is significant in itself. However, it has to be stressed that this investment of capability has the potential to deliver major cost savings across government. Current information management practices involve maintaining large data sets over long periods of time; this is inefficient, costly and contrary to best practice. The ability of the National Archives to cull low value or duplicate data and to consolidate the most valuable data as archival records onto a single digital platform will drastically reduce overall data management costs, whilst the securing the information against cyber threats.

Empowering and providing adequate resourcing for the National Archives will enable it to deliver on the Prime Minister's stated expectation for better service delivery to the Australian public by the Australian public service, *"Congestion busting needs to happen in the bureaucracy. I want to see some congestion busting in the bureaucracy, ensuring that we get things done"*. (Prime Minister Scott Morrison, 23 May 2019, [www.theaustralian.com.au](http://www.theaustralian.com.au))

### 6.1 Vital investment in Capability and Security

The National Archives urgently requires:

- the capacity to accept the increasing volumes of digital material created across government;
- the systems necessary for the ongoing preservation of that information;
- ongoing cyber security enhancements to meet the essential measures recommended by the Australian Cyber Security Centre; and
- facilities capable of administering digital information carrying a national security classification.

Through its *National Storage Strategy and Plan*, the National Archives has developed a nationally consistent pathway to take its storage capability from its current to future state in the context of the Australian Government's digital transformation agenda; this will provide the capacity and capability to continue to store records of national significance, in any format, and in cost effective ways that meet the National Archives' statutory conservation, preservation and accessibility obligations.

### **CASE STUDY: Poor Management of Digital Records is Exposing the Commonwealth Government to Severe Risks**

Australian National Audit Office produced a report into "The Integration of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection and the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service" in June, 2018.

In its report, the ANAO concluded that "The department's record keeping continues to be poor" and that *"This finding repeats the outcomes of a substantial number of audits and reviews going back to 2005. The department's own assessment is that its records and information management is in a critically poor state. The problems and their solutions are known to the department, and it has an action plan to address them, although numerous previous attempts to do so have not been successful."*

The ANAO noted that:

*"Other independent reviews have also pointed to record keeping deficiencies and their consequences. As far back as 2005, a report into the unlawful detention of Ms Cornelia Rau found evidence of a record keeping system that is seriously flawed. It was difficult to pull together all DIMIA records on this case because relevant documents were kept in several different locations and as both hard copy and computer records. Throughout its investigations the inquiry found DIMIA file management practices poor, and there seemed to be no unified organisational approach to file establishment, access and control ... File discipline was lax. This situation exposes DIMIA to risk."*

Similarly, an unpublished report found that the unlawful detention in June 2017 of two Australian citizens was caused partially by access to poor data.

The ANAO also highlighted severe vulnerabilities threatening the proper long-term management of records that are routinely called upon to establish the rights and entitlements of individuals. The report found that the department has **200 million documents** stored in network drives (estimated to be growing at 55 per cent per year), **238 million records** in the department's electronic records system, **241 shelf-kilometres** of paper-based files and an **'unknown quantity'** of records stored in **emails**.

The Department itself assessed the serious impact this had on the integrity of its operations:

*"These issues aren't new and have been highlighted in various reviews over the last decade resulting in:*

- *Poor decision making and advice to key stakeholders or for individuals*
- *Failure to comply with legislative requirements due to poor information and records management policies, systems and practices*
- *Failure to deliver on strategic objectives and priorities (risk and crisis management)."*

The ANAO report is illustrative of the systemic information management problems that exist in government agencies; and the potential this has to deny individuals their rights and entitlements.

The National Archives is defining the processes, skills and tools that will equip it for a digital future, providing the requirements that shape its strategies for the ongoing development of our human capital and technical infrastructure. The Digital Archives Program (DAP) transformation of the National Archives will deliver a new Enterprise Digital Archive, enhanced digital preservation capability and a new access platform:

- improving the security (including against cyber-threats), information governance and management of government information;
- creating efficiencies and cost savings for government agencies; and

- delivering better services and access to the collection for the Australian public, researchers, as well as use by creative and data industries.

A new digital literacy program will equip staff with the contemporary skills and competencies to work with digital tools and resources to deliver new services to the Commonwealth Government and the general public.

The initial capability is being acquired by the expenditure of capital funding reserves however, completion of the capability will not be possible without additional funding.

## **6.2 Australia's at-risk unique audio-visual heritage collections**

The Advisory Council shares the consensus view held by the international Archival community that material recorded on 20<sup>th</sup> century magnetic tape formats will in most cases, be irretrievably lost by the year 2025. The combination of the deterioration of the tape itself and the technological obsolescence of the necessary playback equipment will preclude access to the material for research and will also remove any possibility for preservation of the content. Large scale digitisation of the National Archives' tape holdings is urgently required.

The National Archives holds the largest collection of audio-visual records on magnetic tape in Australia. Within the almost 1million film, audio and video items, are 220,000 unique items of audio-visual heritage on magnetic tape; this can only be preserved through digitisation. At current resourcing levels, digitisation of this material would take more than 80 years.

The National Archives at-risk audio-visual collection includes:

- recordings of Indigenous languages and ceremonies;
- records of legal proceedings regarding Native Title Claims;
- ASIO surveillance footage;
- scientific research material from agencies including CSIRO and Defence; and
- the exploration of Antarctica from the Australian Antarctic Division.

The Advisory Council strongly supports the need for digitisation of this material before it is irretrievably lost. It requires an investment of \$25 million over a 7-year period.

The loss of the nation's heritage collections would have a lasting impact on the Australian public whether that be film makers, researchers, Commonwealth agencies, broadcasters, civil society, school students, families, or the global community – irreversibly damaging Australia's cultural heritage, identity and memory. It would also limit the National Archives' ability to commercialise and leverage new collaborative and other innovative opportunities in the creative and digital economies.

## **6.3 Digitisation of World War II Service Records**

The National Archives of Australia holds the records that document the men and women who have served in the Australian defence forces since Federation in 1901. This includes over a million records that document the men and women who served in the Australian armed services – Army, Navy and Air Force - in World War II.

Access to these records continues to be one of the most popular requests made to the National Archives, as more and more Australians seek to discover the untold stories of their own relatives and how they defended this nation during times of war. Over the past 3 years, the National Archives has received on average 10,000 requests per year for Defence service records to be digitised and made available online.

At present digitisation is done on demand, with a fee charged by the National Archives to recover costs. The National Archives regularly receives requests to reduce or waive the fee from members of the public including family members of veterans, indicating that there is a demand for the evidence of Australians who have served our nation to be freely available to the public.

To date the National Archives has digitised almost 200,000 files, however at current resource levels it may take many decades to digitise the entire collection, by which time some records may have deteriorated and become unreadable.

As we approach the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the end of World War II, it would complement Australia's commemoration of the Centenary of ANZAC to remember at an individual and personal level the service and sacrifice of each of the men and women who served their country in World War II.

This would also complement the 'Gift to the Nation', an initiative of the Howard Government that digitised all World War I service records in 2006. These digitised records are now hosted on the interactive [Discovering Anzacs](#) website, including education resources and community contributed content, enriching our understanding of the sacrifices made and the enduring impact of war on Australia.

It is for these reasons, the Advisory Council has been pro-active in its representations to Government regarding this important matter, recommending that \$15 million be allocated to digitisation of World War II Service Records.

The Advisory Council welcomes the election commitment of \$10 million made by the Minister for Veteran Affairs, as part of the Government's Plan to Respect and Support Veterans and Their Families. It encourages the Government to make additional funding available to enable the National Archives to deliver on this commitment, which to digitise all the records and make them publicly available will cost \$15 million.



**Image: Joe McGinness' service record ID photograph, 1942. NAA: B883, DX977**

## 7. Funding and resource sustainability

Over recent years, the Advisory Council has become increasingly concerned with the serious deterioration in the funding position of the National Archives. Successive efficiency dividends and savings measures imposed upon the National Archives have substantially diminished its capacity to perform its functions and deliver services to government and the Australian public. It has also placed some parts of the archival collection at risk; most notably the unique, audio-visual records held on magnetic tape that require immediate digitisation to avoid loss through obsolescence

In order for the National Archives to discharge its responsibilities under the *Archives Act 1983*, and support the digital transformation priorities of government, it needs to be appropriately funded on a sustainable basis.

### 7.1 The Impact of Government Savings Measures and Efficiency Dividends

There is an unsustainable and underlying impact of government savings measures and the application of the efficiency dividend on the resources available to the National Archives.

Since the 2014-15 budget year, savings measures and increases to efficiency dividend rates have had an underlying and sustained impact by reducing the National Archives available appropriation in the order of \$7.0 million (10 %) a year and a reduction in its estimated Average Staffing Level (ASL) of 57 from 412 published in the 2014-15 Portfolio Budget Statements (PBS) to 355 in the 2018-19 PBS. In 2019-20, this will see further decrease in the annual appropriation by \$8.9 million and, an accumulative reduction of 16 per cent (67) in ASL, down to 345.

The Report – *Telling Australia's Story – and why it's important*, tabled on 2 April 2019 by the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories, also noted the amplified and unsustainable impact of the efficiency dividends on the National Cultural Institutions, including the National Archives and recommended that this be reviewed.

### 7.2 Modernisation and sustainability funds

Despite numerous policy and funding proposals, the National Archives did not receive any funding from the \$500million Public Service Modernisation Fund (PSMF), nor subsequent budget appropriations for modernisation or sustainability of functions and services.

Distributed across the forward estimates commencing in 2016/17, at least \$67.5million was awarded to other national cultural institutions for *'institutions to restructure the delivery of core programs and services to maximise efficiencies and future sustainability'*, *'critical capital works to enhance public safety and access, better meet legislative obligations, preserve and leverage new opportunities for self-generated commercial revenue, maintain collections and to meet ongoing operational costs'* and *'digitisation of material and upgrade of critical infrastructure for its Trove digital resource and to upgrade other critical infrastructure'*.

In particular, the Advisory Council notes that \$10.736 million was awarded to the Australian War Memorial; \$9.76 million of this is for *'an organisational review and restructure [and] upgrade and restructure the outdated and highly customised information, communication and technology (ICT) systems underpinning the agency's core capabilities and to continue to deliver its core activities under the Australian War Memorial Act.'* A further \$5 million was also allocated to the Australian War Memorial, to develop the business case for additional exhibition space and a subsequent commitment of \$500 million to build new gallery spaces.

The Advisory Council has noted that, in addition, some cultural institutions have received further appropriations to address strategic challenges impacting their operations, in many instances ameliorating the impact of the efficiency dividends and savings measures. However, the urgent funding requirements of the National Archives have not addressed.

The Advisory Council is deeply concerned by the lack of appropriate and sustainable funding to the National Archives. This is impacting its essential role in the preservation and maintaining of government records, including the historical analogue collections, current digitised records and the contemporary and future digital information of Government, leaving it at serious risk of compromise, obsolescence or loss.

### 7.3 Operating loss

The National Archives recognised the need for change and to progress key initiatives to meet its obligations under the *Archives Act 1983* and the digital transformation priorities of government. To make a start, the National Archives is using available funds from within its cash reserves. Moving into 2018/19, whilst still allowing for reserves for specified liabilities such as employee entitlements and provisions for make-good and other payables, \$10.9 million in reserves were identified for reinvestment, which enabled the National Archives to establish the Digital Archives Taskforce for 18 months, from 1 July 2018 to 31 December 2019.

In March 2019, the National Archives received approval from the Minister for Finance to post an Operating Loss of \$6.0 million in 2018-19. The expected loss includes costs for investment in:

- digital information management and capability priorities;
- the implementation of a Voluntary Redundancy Program in 2018-19 to reduce staff numbers to ensure that the NAA remains financially sustainable in the future; and
- adjustments related to accounting for property leases.

### 7.4 Opportunities for new revenue

The Advisory Council recognises that as the government already funds departments for the ongoing management of records, the National Archives should be appropriately funded to deliver on its responsibilities for the ongoing preservation of government records, through the:

- provision an adequate and sustainable appropriation so it has the necessary resources;
- implementation of a levy or equivalent funding mechanism for life-cycle management of information; and
- the National Archives having the ability to apply new charges.

The Tune Review, in considering sources of revenue for the National Archives, should consider the total of current funding allocated for overall management of government digital systems and information. Recognising the National Archives' statutory role within this information management regime, funding could be routinely allocated to the National Archives from within that existing expenditure sources.

Alternatively, the National Archives could be empowered to levy a yearly charge on departments and agencies, recognising the ongoing costs of future transfer and ongoing preservation of archival records.

Unconnected to the above, the Advisory Council recommends the National Archives be given charging powers to apply fees for discretionary services to the Australian public. Furthermore, the National Archives should have the flexibility to apply that revenue to the employment of additional staff to deliver improved services and investment in technology that will open new digital service channels.

Whilst recognising the application of fees and charges in some circumstances, the Advisory Council believes the Australian public have a right to a basic level of access and services provided by the National Archives, free of charge. The Advisory Council's view is that careful consideration should be given to any change in the fee regime which should involve public consultation before implementation.

It is the Advisory Council's view that, through efficiencies, funding necessary for the sustainability of the National Archives can be found within existing government expenditure on digital systems and information management across government.

### 7.5 Sustainable Resourcing

To adequately perform the functions assigned to the National Archives under the Act and in accordance with minimum public expectations, the Advisory Council recommends that the staffing level of the organisation is increased in the following areas:

#### Government Information Management

- Developing Commonwealth Government policy related to digital records management

- Development of tools and resources to improve the capability of Commonwealth entities in the creation, receiving, preservation and maintaining of records; combined with 'Agency Engagement' services that provide advice and assistance to address specific issues as they arise

### **Digital Archival Capability and Practice**

- Develop and maintain the Digital Archival strategy and standards for the preservation and ongoing accessibility of digital archival resources
- Operate and sustain the Commonwealth's digital archives as a core component of the National Archives.

### **Declassification**

- Maintain consistent, effective and efficient cooperative arrangements with Commonwealth Entities in support of the National Archives declassification role
- Maintain a trained, security vetted capability adequate in size to handle the growing number of requests for the declassification of archival material

### **Public Engagement**

- Strengthen the National Archives' capability to enter into appropriate and ethical commercial partnerships, raising revenue while expanding the accessibility of the collection
- Provide adequate and timely reference services in response to the growing number of requests for access to archival material
- Build and maintain on-line, digital access channels, with advanced search capability suited to Archival material; including complex digital objects.

The performance of these front-line services will require the organisation to grow its corporate capability across the areas of ICT, financial management, procurement, legal services and commercial operations to ensure the quality of public services is maintained.

In considering the optimum staffing level required to deliver the functions of the National Archives, comparisons have been made with equivalent functions performed by other collecting institutions and information policy agencies; for example, the National Library of Australia, the Office of the Information Commissioner and The National Archives of the UK. In making these comparisons, special account needs to be taken of the distinct scale and scope of the activities of the National Archives of Australia, including its:

- collection comprises 44 million items, compared with 11 million in the UK National Archives and 6 million in the National Library of Australia;
- public presence in every capital city of Australia and 13 locations in total; compared with only one public office maintained by the comparable institutions; and
- unique Australian role in the declassification of sensitive government documents, including the responsibility to defend appeals in the AAT and the Courts.

With this in mind, the Advisory Council recommends that the National Archives of Australia grows its workforce to a Full Time Equivalent staffing level of 538, by 2026-27. The scale of recruitment is quite significant and would need to be managed over a period of several years.

Noting the national presence of the Archives and the opportunities of digital technology to distribute the work of the organisation, consideration should be given to the economic benefit of locating some functions outside Canberra, creating jobs in rural and regional Australia.

Commensurate with the increase in staff, additional budget should be allocated to permit the National Archives to acquire ICT capability and to fund its information policy, public engagement and digitisation programs. Again, this growth cannot be achieved in a single step and, would need to be managed progressively over several years, ultimately achieving an additional budget of at least \$77 million per annum, appropriately increased each year.

This increase in annual appropriation would be more than offset by savings made across the Commonwealth, through savings in physical and digital storage of government records and information and efficiencies gained through early sentencing of data.

If the funding required by the National Archives were provided, then additional funding would not be required for the digitisation of at-risk audio-visual collections and World War II Service Records.

## 8. Efficiencies for Government

Each year the Commonwealth, analysis shows in the order of \$9 billion is spent on the management of digital systems and information, with at least \$265 million per annum that is spent by entities on physical file and digital storage. It is the Advisory Council's view that opportunities exist for significant efficiency gains through a whole of government integration of information governance principles and the harmonisation of agency work practices. Adequate resourcing of the National Archives policies and programs is necessary to realise these efficiencies.

In the digital environment, the early transfer of government records into a consolidated managed digital archive with the National Archives will enable government agencies to substantively reduce the need for their own storage capacity whilst improving agency access to this information, which will support better policy, decision-making and service delivery.

In the present digital environment, for example, this transfer could occur as earlier as three years after the records are no longer in use, which relieves the department of the costly data storage, whilst assuring the proper preservation of the archival records.

These efficiencies are also available through the proper management of paper records. It is estimated at least \$265 million per annum is currently being spent by government on storage of paper and digital records.

Further, with the capacity to digitise these paper records and earlier transfer, with digital records, greater savings would be made.

Efficiencies and savings for government and the necessary funding for the National Archives is to be found through:

- consolidation of storage;
- centralised digitisation and earlier determination and transfer to the National Archives;
- improved management and access to government information; and
- new legislation.

The forecast initial increase of \$37 million in funding in 2019/20 through to an additional \$77 million in annual funding required by the National Archives to achieve these outcomes amounts to less than 1% of government's \$9 billion spend on digital systems and information management.

These funding forecasts if allocated to the National Archives include allocations for the digitisation of at-risk audio-visual collections and World War II Service Records.

## 9. A National Archives Public Building – ‘the people’s place’

The National Archives of Australia is the only national collecting institution without a permanent and purpose built national public building located in Canberra and, specifically, in the Parliamentary Zone.

The nation’s archival collection is vast – 44 million items that document the people and events that have defined Australia’s national identity. It is independently valued at over \$1.53billion. The national archival collection is among Australia’s most valuable assets and should be fully playing its part in the cultural life, identity and memories of the Australian nation.

The Archival resources of the Commonwealth are primary source evidence – allowing every Australian to make fresh observations of past events and find their own understanding of who we are as a nation and what it means to be an Australian.

A proper public building for the National Archives will contribute to the cultural and economic prosperity of Australians. A National Archives building could be a platform for:

- asserting the significance of records, government and public, to Australia’s national identity and its integrity of purpose
- resolving some of the social and cultural tensions around Australia’s history in a respectful, neutral and transparent way
- fostering deeper interest and engagement from potential philanthropic, commercial, and public interests.

Every year, many thousands of school students from all over the country visit Canberra to witness the Australian Parliament, visit the War Memorial and view the collections of various museums and galleries. The opportunity to also visit the Nation’s Archives and understand how Australia has developed since Federation will foster within all Australians a deeper understanding of what it means to be a citizen of this nation.

The current national office, East Block in the Parliamentary Zone was sold to a private vendor on the basis of an eight-year lease, with an option to extend for a further two years, to continue to house the National Archives of Australia. This is a short term, stopgap measure. The small scale of East Block presents significant limitations to increasing visitation, raising revenue and meeting the increasing expectations of contemporary and future audiences.

### 9.1 New National Public Building Concept

The National Archives engaged Johnson Pilton Walker (JPW) to develop concept designs that will ensure the National Archives is appropriately embedded in the character and identity of the Parliamentary Triangle, responding to the objectives set out in the Consolidated National Capital Plan.

A new National Archives Public Building and enhanced public programs and services will activate and drive visitation to the Parliamentary Zone as a new civic meeting place and a cultural destination for the Australian public and tourists to the national capital, seven days a week, in alignment with sister institutions, the National Library of Australia and the National Gallery of Australia. A new National Archives Public Building will meet the growing expectations of the Australian public to be able access Australia’s public records, as well as expanded opportunities for cultural learning experiences and school programs.

The report, *Telling Australia's story - and why it's important*, released on 3 April 2019, by The Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories, noted important contribution made by the National Cultural institutions to tourism and school education programs. It highlighted contributions by the ACT Government which submitted that national cultural institutions form an integral part of the Canberra visitor experience, local economy and international audiences’ understanding of and trust in Australia. Museums Galleries Australia also noted that Canberra’s recent tourism boom ‘was driven significantly by the attractions of the iconic national institutions. In

2017, Canberra had a record-breaking almost 3 million overnight visitors, including almost 250,000 international visitors. Annually, the institutions also play host to more than 165,000 students from all over Australia for curriculum linked learning experiences.



*Concept image: Atrium and public spaces in a new National Archives Public Building.*

It provides an elegant solution to:

- Recognise and acknowledge Australia's first peoples with the main building entrance leading from Reconciliation Place, into Archives Hall;
- Provide dynamic and immersive experiences in the permanent Federation, Archives Collection, National Capital and Digital Media galleries and temporary exhibition gallery;
- An auditorium to seat 350 for public programs, conferences and venue hire events;
- A dedicated education centre for school groups, a volunteers' space to enhance program delivery and visitor experiences and a space for the new Archives Members program;
- A research centre (digital and analogue collection access) with dedicated hubs for Family History and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research; and
- Office space for staff, staff amenities and meeting rooms.

## **9.2 Feasibility Study**

Leveraging the concept design work already undertaken and to ensure evidence based, cost effective planning for this major new building development, funding for a feasibility study of \$5m is required to provide detailed advice on design specifications and construction, maintenance and sustainable operational costs, including an assessment of commercial potential, audience engagement, legal requirements and NCA site and environment assessment requirements.

The Advisory Council requests an additional \$5 million be allocated to the National Archives to undertake a feasibility study for a new National Archives Public Building. This figure is included in the forecasts for additional recurrent funding.