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The Royal Historical Society of Queensland

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Commissariat Store

a museum built by convicts

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Mr David Tune AO PSM
Independent Reviewer
c/o Tune Review Secretariat National Archives of
Australia
Queen Victoria Terrace, Parkes ACT 2600 [Email: review@naa.gov.au](mailto:review@naa.gov.au)

Dear Mr Tune,

The Royal Historical Society of Queensland has an extensive library and runs a regular research, conference and lecture program about Queensland history, which is published in our *Queensland History Journal*. The Society was founded in 1913 and has members across Queensland, interstate and some overseas. The Society activities are outlined on our website:
www.queenslandhistory.org.

The National Archives of Australia (NAA) holds the memory of the Commonwealth of Australia in our democracy. The NAA's role of preservation is fundamental under their legislation. Integrity, accountability and transparency are essential to this preservation of the authentic records of the government and nation. This needs to be achieved with a sense of certainty and independence. Access to those records is a matter of equal importance and needs to be efficient and timely.

In recent years the NAA has made a major effort to provide access to its records, particularly military service files of World War I and a variety of records relating to immigration and naturalisation. This has been welcomed by the community of family history researchers. It has raised the public profile of NAA.

The NAA is to be commended for seeking to improve access to its records more broadly. The fundamental task for NAA to improve its efficiency and reputation with researchers is to address the basis on which access decisions for the records are made viz. items (or document by document) rather than by series of records. The vast bulk of the NAA's archival records (approx. 85%) are not on open access because of the access decision method of access. This is a major burden for NAA and is in contrast to the system of access decisions for whole series with a variety of closure periods as in the State archives jurisdictions. The access decision system by series has operated successfully in the states for many decades. Research projects are delayed or even abandoned because of delays in obtaining access to NAA records. There has been some effort recently of NAA listing the individual batch file titles to assist researchers but this is not a real solution. Even for NAA records in the open period certain records are closed to access. There appears to be a need for a scholarly approach by NAA to making decisions rather than using automated systems / checklists.

The numbers of applications by researchers for access to records needs to be limited to ensure fairness to all researchers. The NAA has also introduced fees for services and self-service digitisation which assist.

Utilisation of the NAA's records by Australia's historians collectively adds knowledge to Australian history and offer new interpretations of the past for Australian people. Our history is too important to be left to the mythmakers and sensationalists.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr Ruth S. Kerr OAM
Hon Secretary & Member of National Archives of Australia Consultative Forum, Brisbane