



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

Dear Mr Tune

On behalf of the Professional Historians Association New South Wales & Australian Capital Territory (PHA NSW & ACT) I welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the review of the functioning and efficiency of the National Archives of Australia. The PHA NSW & ACT represents 110 practising professional historians in NSW and the ACT. We wish to add our voice to that of our peak body, the Professional Historians Australia (see [http://www.naa.gov.au/Images/ProfessionalHistoriansAustralia\\_tcm16-104784.pdf](http://www.naa.gov.au/Images/ProfessionalHistoriansAustralia_tcm16-104784.pdf)), to emphasise the importance we attach to the National Archives of Australia (NAA).

Access to archival records is integral to the successful practice of historians' work. Moreover, the NAA plays a crucial role in preserving our national history. The NAA represents a fundamental part of our democracy in ensuring that Australians can see evidence of the decisions and actions of government, from which they can form their own interpretations of the national story. This is why we believe that the role of the institution as a repository and preserver of records should be maintained and properly supported.

The transfer of any of the NAA's key functions or services to another agency or department, government or non-government, would diminish its authority and threaten to dilute its expertise. The NAA has already suffered a serious deterioration in its funding, leaving it to face the prospect of being unable to meet its legislated requirements, let alone enabling it to deliver services to the Australian Government and to the Australian public in the digital age, and placed some parts of the archival collection at risk; most notably the unique, audio-visual records held on magnetic tapes, at risk.

## **DIGITISATION**

PHA NSW and ACT historians appreciate the effort that has gone into digitisation of records. This has enabled much greater access, especially by researchers who are located in places distant from repositories holding particular files. However, the service of digitisation on demand disadvantages those without the resources to pay. Furthermore, the current scale of fees for digitisation, which allots a 'standard' file size to each individual series, while saving staff time, has resulted in wildly erratic costs for digitisation.

An issue that is significant for our members is that many files contain large maps and plans, architectural drawings or engineering drawings. When a historian orders digitisation of a file with such material, those large format maps or plans are not always digitised as part of the order even though they can be crucial for understanding of a place or site that they are researching. This often means the historian or researcher has



to travel to the repository holding those files, negating any benefit of the digitisation costs incurred.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. An increased budget for the archive to continue to build the digital collection without having to rely on the user pays system.
2. Where users do have to pay, a finer gradation of file sizes for particular series would ensure more rational and equitable digitisation costs.
3. We propose that larger repositories at Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra acquire large flat-bed scanners and that a specific charging regime for copies of large scale maps, plans or drawings be implemented.

**HUMAN RESOURCING**

At present, the examination of records that have been requested but are not yet examined can take up to 90 days, although significantly longer periods have been reported by some of our members. This can mean serious delays for researchers, such as those of our members working on commissioned histories with set deadlines and result in work having to proceed without access to all possible sources of information about the subject.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

4. Increased human resourcing of the NAA to enable records to be examined more quickly before they are released for open access.

**STATE AND TERRITORY BASED READING ROOMS**

The PHA NSW & ACT support the continuing operation of the Sydney based office. However a major impediment to the work of our members is the restricted hours of the Sydney reading room, and to a lesser degree those of Melbourne and other cities. The opening of the Sydney reading room on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday only and no access on weekends for any of the offices including Canberra, restricts access to the records required for our professional work. With an increasing digitisation delay this further compounds issues around access.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

5. Consideration of extending opening days to include more weekday access and Saturday opening.

The PHA NSW & ACT believe in the crucial role that the NAA plays in telling of the history of Australia and encourage the proper resourcing and support needed to continue in this role.

Yours Sincerely

Dr Mark Dunn  
Chair  
Professional Historians Association NSW & ACT