

21 June 2019

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

#### SUBMISSION FOR TUNE REVIEW OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF AUSTRALIA

The University of New South Wales (UNSW) Canberra has a dual stake in the future of the National Archives of Australia (NAA): first, as a research institution requiring timely access to official documents and, second, as a close collaborating partner in the preservation and presentation of public records.

For more than fifty years, UNSW Canberra has delivered high quality research and education at the intersection between one of the world's leading universities and a military academy whose graduates have become significant national and international figures. The Faculty consists of four Schools, which educate undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral research students across the humanities, social sciences, business, cyber security, engineering, IT, logistics, management, space and most disciplines in the physical sciences. Our faculty conduct leading edge research in all those areas and play an important part in Australia's knowledge exchange. In the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, the School of Business, and the Australian Centre for the Study of Armed Conflict and Society (ACSACS), researchers are producing monographs, scholarly articles and position papers that bear upon Australian political, social, cultural and economic history and that depend upon timely access to records in the NAA's custody, both now and into the future.

UNSW Canberra has also established the Howard Library in the former Ministerial Wing of Old Parliament House, holding more than 10 000 items spanning the former Prime Minister's political career from 1974 to 2007. In this role, UNSW Canberra is now a partner with the National Archives of Australia as a custodian of the official papers of John Howard's career in the federal parliament, including his terms as Prime Minister, under the terms of a deed of arrangement signed in 2014. This unique arrangement is a model for future prime ministerial libraries in Australia.

The University embraces the opportunity to collaborate with the NAA and to participate in the preservation of records with enduring national significance for future generations.

UNSW Canberra welcomes the chance to contribute to this review. In addition to affirming the critical importance of the NAA to academic scholarship and public policy, the University responds to each of the three key areas identified by the review.

- *the enduring role of the National Archives in the protection, preservation and use of Commonwealth information;*

The NAA has a unique and indispensable role in collecting, preserving, managing and making accessible records of Australian government, public service and civic decision making, and in this way ensuring transparency and accountability for democratic governance. As the largest archival institution in Australia, moreover, it should have a leading role in modelling best practice information management for the digital age.

UNSW Canberra notes with deep concern the recent statement from the NAA Advisory Council that successive funding decreases in place the NAA at risk of being unable to meet critical and legislated functions under its Act. There are grave implications, not only for researchers but for Australian citizens, when the records generated by government are not accessible. All Australians have an entitlement to access official records for both personal and professional reasons.

That a perception of inefficiency, incapacity and of a culture of secrecy rather than transparency should be associated with an institution of such national and international importance is alarming to UNSW Canberra. The NAA needs to enjoy the confidence and the goodwill of all stakeholders, especially in an age when greater access to public records is taken for granted.

- *how the National Archives might best perform this role;*

The NAA's capacity to service clients seems to have fallen below an acceptable minimum standard. Researchers on our campus report waiting two to three years and even longer for access to the records on which their research projects depend. The NAA's capacity to deliver requested items is clearly insufficient. The lack of capacity is evident in new restrictions on the numbers of items that researchers are able to request. We have noted the imposition of notional 'caps' that impose stepped and further delays depending on the volume of work requested. For our researchers, this restriction mitigates against thorough and conscientious research, particularly of complex agencies or decisions and longer historical periods.

The NAA's move to pass on increased digitisation costs to clients is proving to be prohibitive for many clients. UNSW Canberra is aware that this policy risks increasing inequity in access. The agency's capacity to respond to the challenges of digital forms of record and governance is bordering on unsatisfactory, imperilling full and transparent record-keeping now and into the future. The Record Search interface is an antiquated system that is difficult to navigate. It is not intuitive for users and lacks full coverage of the collection. A major upgrade is urgently needed. We note that digital delivery is managed much more efficiently by overseas institutions with parallel roles.

Although digitisation of materials on demand is the current practice, a more strategic approach is needed to address critical vulnerabilities across numbers of different formats, both photographic and audio-visual. UNSW Canberra also would like to see the allocation of strategic resourcing to increase the NAA's capacity to ingest, process and make accessible new and held items that are not currently accessible within Record Search. The University understands that up to 60 per cent of the NAA's holdings are not presently identifiable through Record Search. This is simply not good enough.

It is imperative that funding levels are sufficient to allow the NAA to perform its critical role in Australian civic life fully and efficiently, and that it be afforded sufficient resources to provide enough capacity to respond to current and future challenges innovatively and productively.

- *what powers, functions, resources, and legislative and governance frameworks the National Archives needs to effectively and efficiently undertake this role in the digital age.*

We believe there is no alternative: resourcing and funding needs to be increased to better support the core functions of the NAA. Funding needs to be more consistent, by which we mean predictable and sustained, to allow better long-term planning and strategising to meet challenges and address backlogs.

A larger, more collaborative and better funded digital preservation strategy must be supported as a matter of national importance, to serve the NAA as well as other Federal archival and collecting institutions. Sufficient funding is required to:

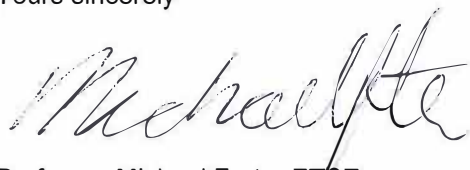
1. future proof collection, management and preservation of born-digital records;
2. implement a digital delivery strategy that is robust, interoperative, responsive and functionally efficient for clients;
3. urgently preserve audio-visual and other fragile items in immediate danger of loss; and
4. enable federal GLAM institutions to collaborate, share facilities and scale up endeavours to meet the demands of the digital age.

Decision-making processing relating to the release of government and agency records need to be centralised within the NAA while becoming more efficient and transparent, to address delays and perceptions of politically-motivated secrecy and partisan frustration of reasonable research and inquiry.

The Australian nation is at a turning point in the management of government information and official records. This information and these records are part of the national estate and deserve to be protected for future generations. The only organisation with legislative authority to provide national leadership is the NAA. Its future has never been more important to preserving and promoting the national interest.

UNSW Canberra commends every endeavour to improve the capacity and services of such a valuable institution. We would welcome the opportunity to present oral evidence should the Review receive supplementary submissions.

Yours sincerely



Professor Michael Frater FTSE  
Rector  
UNSW Canberra

The SECRETARY  
The NATIONAL ARCHIVES  
The AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT