

CORPORATE OVERVIEW

DIRECTOR-GENERAL'S REVIEW OF 2002-03

In April 2003, Mr Ross Gibbs was appointed Director-General of the National Archives. Ms Anne-Marie Schwirtlich resigned from the post of Acting Director-General in February to take up the position of CEO and State Librarian of the State Library of Victoria. Mr Steve Stuckey was Acting Director-General in the intervening period.

During the past year the Archives has performed strongly in its dual role as the adviser to the Australian Government on recordkeeping and the custodian of public records held in trust for all Australians.

An outline of significant developments is set out below.

Building the collection

The Australian Bureau of Statistics transferred the last of 1 422 rolls of microfilm containing name identified census returns from the 2001 Census to the Archives in September 2002. The census returns contain information relating to almost 10 million Australians who nominated to have copies of their return preserved for future generations. The microfilms were deposited in one of the Archives' security vaults where they will remain until they are released to the public in August 2100.

In August 2002 the Archives received the last of over 1 million World War II service dossiers from the Department of Defence. The service dossiers constitute the largest single transfer to the Archives and are expected to become the most highly used records in the collection.



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Requests for access to the over 1 million war service dossiers held by the Archives peaked following the launch of the World War II Nominal Roll in November 2002.

Looking at the Nominal Roll (left to right): Mr Tom Morris (veteran and former prisoner of war), Ms Dana Vale (Minister for Veterans' Affairs), Madeline and Abbey Higgison, General Peter Cosgrove (Chief of the Australian Defence Force) and Mr Ian Cartwright (Veteran's Affairs).

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Extract from a defence service record.

Making the collection visible, accessible and known

The *Australia's Prime Ministers* website was launched by the Prime Minister, the Hon. John Howard, MP in November 2002. Developing the website was a significant element of the Prime Ministers Papers Project undertaken to make Prime Ministers' records accessible to the public and to enhance understanding of Australia's national leadership and political history.

Two significant groups of records held by the Archives were added to the Australian register of the UNESCO Memory of the World program in April 2003. The records comprise a set of 17 landmark documents relating to the constitutional history of the Commonwealth of Australia, and 14 plans and design drawings for Canberra prepared by Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahoney Griffin in 1912.

This year the Archives completed a four-year project to make the migrant selection documents for 'Displaced Persons' more accessible to the public. These migrant selection documents were compiled between 1947 and 1953 in the course of selecting people who were displaced during the Second World War for migration to Australia. The items received preservation treatment and were listed by individual name on the Archives' database RecordSearch. These records form a valuable historical and genealogical record of a very significant group in Australian postwar migration history.

Preserving the collection

This year marked the second year of preservation funding to extend the useful life of the collection. In 2002–03 the Archives received a budget allocation of \$15.3 million of which \$12.3 million was available for use to protect and preserve significant numbers of items in the collection. The Archives bases preservation priorities on the different deterioration rates of items in the collection, such as magnetic and digital media, paper records created during World War II, audiovisual records, maps, plans and photographic media, so that the more rapidly decaying materials are treated before they reach a critical state. The Archives devises and applies cost-effective ways to reduce the rate of deterioration for all records, or transfers them to more stable media, so that they can continue to be available for use for as long as possible.

The Archives developed a trial version of new software, named Xena, to enable transfer of digital records from Australian government agencies into the Archives' digital repository and to preserve them so that they are accessible to researchers

in the future. The project is internationally groundbreaking in the field of digital preservation, and complements the Archives' strategies to improve recordkeeping in the Australian Government. The software converts electronic records into standardised formats that do not require the original software or hardware to access them.

Extensive refurbishment of the film preservation and sound preservation studios was undertaken in the Sydney office. In addition, construction commenced on an isolation vault for vinegar syndrome affected film. Vinegar syndrome is a type of deterioration associated with acetate film, the most common type of film used from the 1930s to current times, which releases acetic acid vapour. The isolation vault will prevent the acetic acid vapours from contaminating film that has not been affected.



Improving recordkeeping

In February 2003 the Archives issued the *General Disposal Authority for Source Records that have been Copied, Converted or Migrated*. This authority, subject to a number of exclusions and conditions, permits agencies to destroy a wide range of source records provided adequate reproductions are maintained in their place. This is a significant development for the Archives, as it is the first in the world to implement disposal authorisation for records that have been copied.

The Archives continued to promote awareness of recordkeeping as an essential element of good corporate governance. The Archives assisted the Australian National Audit Office in its assurance and control assessment audit of recordkeeping in selected Australian government agencies. The audit drew heavily on the *e-permanence* suite of standards and guidelines developed by the Archives for the creation, management and disposal of Commonwealth records. The Auditor-General has flagged interest in conducting a further audit of recordkeeping next financial year.

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Prime Minister the Hon. John Howard, MP and Acting Director-General Anne-Marie Schwirtlich browsing the *Australia's Prime Ministers* website at the launch in November 2002.

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The *Australia's Prime Ministers* website (primeministers.naa.gov.au).

During the year the Archives conducted a comprehensive survey of recordkeeping in the Australian Public Service. The information yielded from the survey will inform the Archives' future planning and priorities for improving recordkeeping in the Australian Government.

In December the AGLS Metadata Standard was launched as an Australian Standard (AS 5044). The Archives was the lead agency in the development of this standard.

Community support for the Archives

The Archives receives community support in a variety of ways. This support is valuable because it not only increases the capacity of the organisation, but also fosters strong relations with the community. Examples include:

- Assistance from numerous volunteers who help to make the collection more accessible. Appendix A recognises, in a small way, their contribution.
- Projects established under the *Work for the Dole* scheme in Perth, Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney. The Archives' *Work for the Dole* projects are the first national projects in the 'national significance' category ever undertaken as part of the scheme. The Melbourne project was highly commended in the Prime Minister's awards for *Work for the Dole* projects.

Improving facilities

The Archives' property strategy to refurbish or relocate from ageing premises to improved and more efficient facilities continued this reporting period.

The relocation of the Archives' premises from Rosny Park on the outskirts of Hobart to premises in the central business district was completed in September 2002. The President of the Senate, Senator the Hon. Paul Calvert opened the new facilities in November 2002.

Work has commenced on the refurbishment of the Brisbane office.

Staff

Negotiations were completed in April 2003 for the Archives' certified agreement covering the period 2003–04, to take effect in July 2003.

The commitment and professionalism of Archives' staff contribute to the progress and success of the organisation, reflected in the results reported for this financial year. The number of invitations

to speak to external audiences and the number of requests to provide advice and to collaborate on projects, coupled with the popularity of the Archives as a destination for visiting overseas archivists, is testimony to the reputation of its staff.

Financial outcome

During the financial year 2002–03, operating revenues, including revenue from Government, were \$150.336 million and operating expenses were \$65.501 million resulting in a net operating surplus before capital use charge of \$84.835 million. After taking into account the capital use charge of \$84.270 million, the operating result was \$0.565 million.

The Archives received an unqualified audit report on 22 August 2003. Its financial management is sound and the financial position reflects this.

Outlook

The Archives is in a strong position to adapt to growing demands placed on the organisation. Innovative approaches to the management of resources, including staff, finances and the collection, will enable the Archives to ensure reliable recordkeeping within the Australian Government in the interests of accountability, and to ensure that the collection is visible, accessible and known. It will also enable the Archives to retain its high standards in the provision of services to both the public and Australian government agencies.

ROLE OF THE ARCHIVES

The National Archives of Australia was established as an Executive Agency in February 2001. The functions of the Archives were confirmed to be primarily as prescribed by the *Archives Act 1983*. The Archives' responsibilities are:

- to play the leading role in the management of Commonwealth records;
- to make available to the public Commonwealth records over 30 years old, with certain exemptions;
- to encourage and facilitate the use of the archival resources of the Australian Government; and
- to provide leadership in developing and coordinating the preservation and use of the archival resources of Australia.

The National Archives contributes to the maintenance and understanding of political, social and cultural values in Australia by:

- promoting the role of records as evidence in supporting the rule of law;
- supporting the effectiveness and accountability of government administration; and
- preserving and providing access to documentation of the interaction between the Australian people and their government.

The Archives meets its responsibilities under the Archives Act by providing public access to official records and by developing policy and providing advice to government and its agencies on the creation, management, preservation and disposal of Commonwealth records. It maintains information about the structure of government and records created by Australian government agencies, which form the archival resources of the nation.

COMMONWEALTH RECORDS

The majority of records of concern to the National Archives were created or accumulated by the Australian Government, which encompasses public service departments and agencies, statutory authorities, government business enterprises, military units, committees of inquiry and royal commissions. The Archives has responsibilities in relation to the records of Parliament and the courts. Private records of Governors-General, Ministers and senior Australian government officials are also deposited with the Archives to complement the official record.

The Archives' charter covers both non-current and current records. It is concerned not only to preserve those records forming part of the archival resources of the nation, but also to promote the efficient management of all Commonwealth records for government and public purposes.

The records covered by the Archives Act exist in all the different formats that government agencies have used over time to record information and transact business, including paper, digital and audiovisual. While most Commonwealth records date from 1901, significant quantities of nineteenth-century records are also in the Archives' custody. They relate to functions such as customs and defence that were transferred from the Australian colonies or States to the Australian Government on or after Federation.

RESPONSIBLE MINISTER

The Minister responsible for the National Archives is Senator the Hon. Rod Kemp, Minister for the Arts and Sport, together with the Portfolio Minister, Senator the Hon. Richard Alston, Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts.

Under the *Archives Act 1983* the Minister may give directions, not inconsistent with the Act, to the Director-General in relation to the exercise of his powers and the performance of his duties under the Act.