

National Archives of Australia

Annual Report 2004–05





Director-General's review of 2004–05

In 2004–05 the Archives enhanced its contribution to the development of Australian culture and identity. We delivered on this objective by focusing throughout the year on the Archives' strengths: its state/territory infrastructure throughout Australia, its strong national partner networks, its extensive national touring exhibitions program and its excellent website.

The local presence and local partnerships, in particular, were fully exploited during 2004–05 to make the remarkable stories about Australia contained in the Archives' collections better known to more Australians. For example:

- In the Northern Territory, the Archives cooperated with the Dhuruputjpi community in eastern Arnhem Land and the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory to produce 'In Memory of Dhakiyarr', an album compiled from the resources of the Archives, celebrating the life story of the Aboriginal warrior Dhakiyarr Wirrpanda. The Dhakiyarr story was told in several

related ways, including a ceremony at Dhuruputjpi with the Acting Chief Justice, David Angel, on an Archives' *Uncommon Lives* website launched in Canberra by the Northern Territory Administrator Ted Egan and members of the Dhudi-Djapu clan, and in a Film Australia documentary screened by ABC television.

- At the other end of Australia, *Beacons by the Sea* – a Visions of Australia-funded touring exhibition of the Archives – was launched at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston. Following this, a Tasmanian Lighthouse Trail was created to tell the stories of local lighthouses through displays and exhibitions in museums, schools and libraries across the island; the Lighthouse Trail was accompanied by a purpose-built website funded by the Tasmanian Education Department.

Commitment to providing strong support for the Archives' exhibition program proved successful. During the year the Australian



Attending a digital preservation conference in Canberra, September 2004. From left to right: Justine Heazlewood (Public Record Office Victoria), Dianne Macaskill (Archives New Zealand), Janet Prowse (Queensland State Archives), Ross Gibbs (National Archives of Australia), Richard Marciano (San Diego Supercomputer Center), Liz Reuben (Department of Family and Community Services), Fynnette Eaton (US National Archives and Records Administration).

stories told in our various exhibitions, particularly in *It's A Dog's Life!* and *Beacons by the Sea*, both funded by Visions Australia, became even more popular in regional Australia, with more venues taking the shows (21 venues across Australia), attendances increasing (43% up on 2003–04), and local media interest increasing. The Wagga Wagga *Daily Advertiser* in particular has become fascinated by the Archives' exhibitions, providing pages of coverage to *It's a Dog's Life!*

In recent years, the Archives has developed standards, policies and procedures that will enable Australian Government agencies to create, keep and make appropriate use of their records in a digital environment. This year, the full archival cycle was completed when we transferred 'born digital' records into our prototype secure digital vault. Having helped agencies create their records in an e-government world, we can now take those records into our custody and care for them for as long as they are required by the Australian people.

In February, Senator Amanda Vanstone launched for the Archives a new service particularly

for the descendants of migrant Australians. The *Making Australia Home* kit has enabled migrants and their families to locate and retrieve information about their arrival in Australia. The service involves Archives' staff searching our vast holdings of migration records for the relevant records and providing copies in a special presentation folder. The service helps migrants and their families piece together their family history.

A key event for the Archives every year is the release under the 30-year rule of the records of Federal Cabinet. The Prime Minister of the day, the Hon. Gough Whitlam, spoke to journalists at the release, presenting his view of the events of 1974. The release caused interest and comment in the media.

The Archives is conscious of the Government's – and the public's – desire to see efficient management of cultural assets through appropriate collaboration with other cultural institutions.

We have continued our longstanding collaboration on the Australasian Digital Records Initiative through our leadership of the Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities.



Director-General Ross Gibbs and author Tim Bowden at the Archives' Hobart office during the Antarctic Midwinter Festival.

In June, the Archives collaborated with AusAID to provide assistance to the Solomon Islands Government in relation to recordkeeping practices. We will provide further assistance to the National Archives of the Solomon Islands in 2005–06.

The National Archives of Australia Advisory Council continued its important work in assisting and guiding the deliberations of the Archives. In particular, the tireless efforts of the Council in speaking on our behalf have resulted in the decision to allow the co-branding of our products with the Australian Coat of Arms and our logo. Council members have given valuable assistance in the review of our publications.

Financial performance

In 2004–05 the Archives' operating revenues were \$71.808 million and operating expenses were \$68.820 million, resulting in a net operating surplus of \$2.988 million. The surplus arises through the addition of new transfers of records to the collection as assets in accordance with accounting standards.

The Archives received an unqualified audit opinion on its 2004–05 financial statements.

A range of external financial pressures affect the Archives, as they do other Australian Government agencies. Some of these pressures are significant, and we will continue to carefully examine our business priorities and processes so we can continue to provide a value-for-money outcome to the Australian people.

During the year, and in accordance with accounting principles, the Archives' collection was re-valued at \$1 093 400 324. The value of the collection has an impact on our insurance premiums and our depreciation funding.

Improving our business processes

Last year I reported that the Archives had undertaken a number of reviews of its operations, which resulted in the Archives:

- placing priority on helping government agencies manage and preserve digital information;
- recognising the need for a reinvigorated

focus on partnerships and regional leadership; and

- re-examining its storage, preservation and digitisation requirements in collaboration with other agencies.

We changed the internal structure of the Archives to give a more strategic focus to these priorities. The National Coordination Branch was created with a focus on engagement with stakeholders in government and the profession. Government Recordkeeping was renamed Digital Government to emphasise our capacity to provide a full range of archival services in a digital environment. The Collection Preservation and Management Branch was split into two to provide a strategic focus to our extensive and vital physical preservation program.

During the year a former staff member of the Archives was convicted of obtaining a financial advantage by deception in relation to a contract he had administered while an employee of the Archives. I am extremely proud of the staff at the Archives who have dealt with this case. They have demonstrated considerable professionalism and integrity throughout the investigation and prosecution. We have made a number of changes to our contracting arrangements to ensure greater internal scrutiny throughout procurement processes.

The Archives took advantage of the Australian Public Service Commission's Leadership Capability Framework to assess the leadership strengths and weaknesses of its management team. The assessment involved 360-degree feedback on the leadership performance of all SES and EL2 staff at the Archives. The results of this important analysis have allowed us to tailor a new learning and development program that acknowledges the strengths and addresses the development needs of the leadership group. This renewed focus on leadership will stand us in good stead for the future.

The year ahead

The Archives will continue to pursue amendments to the *Archives Act 1983*. The amendments to the Act will strengthen our role in helping Australian Government agencies create, manage and use their electronic records.

Despite the trend toward digital government, many thousands of paper records are still created by government every day. A proportion of these records are transferred to us as 'national archives' for safekeeping. Pressure on our storage facilities is growing. In addition, digital records have specific storage requirements that the Archives must provide.

A significant focus of our work in 2005–06 will therefore be to develop strategies to use more effectively our current collection preservation facilities, while also exploring options for occupying new, state-of-the-art facilities in future.

In 2005–06 the Archives expects to put in place a new approach to the transfer of records into its custody. We will implement a transfer plan targeting agencies that have completed functions-based records disposal authorities and are likely to hold records of greatest archival significance.

The Archives will build on its broad range of recordkeeping products and standards by developing a framework to increase awareness, skills and knowledge of recordkeeping issues in Australian Government agencies. This framework will emphasise e-government issues and will explore new methods of delivering training and increasing agency recordkeeping capabilities.

During 2005–06 the Archives will develop and implement two national communication strategies. One strategy will increase the community's active engagement with the national collection and raise community awareness of the services we offer. The second strategy will focus on digital government

recordkeeping. It will be aimed at government, agencies, industry and the profession.

The Minister for the Arts and Sport called for collecting institutions to develop five-year preservation plans. The Archives' preservation plan helps us account for the preservation funding we have received and gives us a basis for decisions about preservation priorities.

The Archives has experienced directly the impact of a changing Australian workforce with the retirement of a number of long-serving staff members during 2004–05. In particular, we will very much miss former Assistant Director-General Steve Stuckey, who retired in March 2005 after 32 years with the Archives.

Finally, I would like to recognise the dedication and professionalism of my colleagues at the National Archives. Their passion for the role of the Archives and the commitment they show to their work is the foundation of the organisation's success in achieving its outputs and in providing a rewarding and dynamic place to work. I pay tribute to the diversity of people who together manage and promote the precious resource that is the National Archives' collection, and who thereby serve the Australian people.

Ross Gibbs

Director-General