

National Archives of Australia Advisory Council

ANNUAL REPORT **2005–06**



Bird flu no laughing matter for Kooka and Gumnut

We're pretty sure you know who wrote and illustrated *Snugglypot and Cuddlepie*, but did you know that the same author also designed posters for baby clinics?

Well, this drawing of a kookaburra and a gumnut baby, each with a mask over their mouth, was crafted by none other than May Gibbs, and was found in a 1935 government research file that included press cuttings on the influenza epidemic of 1919.

The folios of correspondence, reports, newspaper cuttings and photographs were used in the preparation of a series of official pamphlets called 'service publications', published by the health department between 1912 and 1935. The file was maintained by Dr JHL Cumpston, the department's first Director-General, who would never have imagined the relevance of the drawing today given the outbreak of bird flu.

You can see more information about this **Find of the Month** on our website at www.naa.gov.au.

May Gibbs image: © The Spastic Centre of New South Wales and The Northcott Society 2006.



National Archives of Australia Advisory Council

Establishment and functions

The National Archives of Australia Advisory Council is established under subsection 10 (1) of the *Archives Act 1983*.

The principal function of the Council is to furnish advice to the Minister for the Arts and Sport and the Director-General of the National Archives of Australia on matters that relate to the functions of the Archives.

The Minister or the Director-General may refer matters relating to the functions of the Archives to the Council for advice, or the Council may in turn furnish advice to the Minister or the Director-General.

Council membership

Composition

The Archives Act provides for a Council consisting of:

- a senator chosen by the Senate;
- a member of the House of Representatives chosen by the House; and
- 11 other members appointed by the Minister.

Membership during the year

Mr Paul Santamaria SC (Chairman)

Mr Peter Grant (Deputy Chairman)

Senator the Hon. John Faulkner

The Hon. Alex Somlyay MP

Ms Barbara Belcher

Mr Ian Hancock

Mr Patrick Morgan

Mr Tony Rutherford

Mr Allan Taylor

Dr Jane Wilson



National Archives of Australia Advisory Council. Back row (*l to r*): Mr Patrick Morgan, Mr Tony Rutherford, Mr Peter Grant, (Deputy Chairman), Mr Ian Hancock, Director-General Mr Ross Gibbs, PSM, Senator the Hon. John Faulkner, Mr Allan Taylor, AM. Front row (*l to r*): Ms Barbara Belcher, Mr Paul Santamaria, SC (Chairman), Dr Jane Wilson, Ms Belinda Hogarth-Boyd (Executive Officer). Canberra, June 2006. Absent: The Hon. Alex Somlyay, MP

Summary of activities

The Council met on four occasions in 2005–06:

2 September 2005	Canberra
18 November 2005	Perth
3 March 2006	Canberra
2 June 2006	Canberra

Statements required under the Archives Act

The Archives Act requires the Minister and the Director-General to place before the Council certain materials that specifically relate to disposal practices and special access matters.

National Archives' records disposal practices

Section 25 of the Archives Act requires the Director-General to furnish the Council with a statement setting out the particulars of the practices for the destruction or other disposal of Commonwealth records agreed upon between the Archives and an Australian Government institution. At each meeting of

the Council, the Archives provides advice on records disposal actions in train.

In 2005–06 records disposal authorities (RDAs) were issued to the Australian Electoral Commission, Australian War Memorial, Department of Family and Community Services, Geosciences Australia, Australian National University, Australian Communications and Media Authority, Australian Prudential Regulatory Authority, Department of Finance and Administration, and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

The Archives is now marking the conclusion of major RDAs with a signing event jointly hosted by the Director-General and the head of the agency involved. On occasion, Council members were able to attend these events, to add to the recognition being accorded to the agency and to underscore the overall significance of recordkeeping and records management in public administration.

Throughout the year, the Council also received updates on the Archives' whole-of-government functional analysis project, which will inform record disposal decisions in the future. Consultation on this project, including with the Council, continues.

Special access to official records

Section 56(2) of the Archives Act provides that access may be granted to official records not available for public access (that is, records not yet 30 years old – in the ‘closed period’ – or records assessed as being exempt from public access). Applications to access closed period or exempt records are made directly to agencies responsible for controlling them; deciding whether to grant access to the records is the responsibility of these agencies. Special access arrangements have been in place since 1988 to assist agencies to make decisions about records not yet available for public access.

In accordance with the requirements of section 56(5) of the Archives Act, at each meeting of the Advisory Council, the Archives provides advice on requests for, and decisions relating to, access requested under section 56(2).

Five applications for access to records under section 56(2) were received in the reporting period. All applicants were granted access by the agencies concerned, and none was refused. Of two requests received before the reporting period, one was refused and the other is pending a decision by the agencies concerned.

Particular issues

In addition to regular statements provided in accordance with the Archives Act, the Council is provided with regular reports by the Archives on its activities in managing archival records and its role in ensuring the preservation of essential current records of the Australian Government aligns with key priorities.

Specific areas of focus for the Council during the year are discussed below.

Release of Cabinet records

On 1 January each year, the Archives releases Cabinet records that have reached the open access period (are 30 years of age). At its June 2006 meeting, the Advisory Council was provided with a review of the Cabinet release process. A number of refinements to the process were agreed. Advice on these matters was to be forwarded to the Minister early in the new financial year.

The Council also supported the RG Neale Lecture series, which involves the annual release of selected Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade records. The additional records release promotes the Archives and draws attention to the Archives’ extensive collection. The inaugural RG Neale Lecture was held on 1 May 2006.

Review of reference services

Following the 2005 Review of Reference Services, the Council endorsed the provision of online services and digital access as the primary means of accessing the Archives’ collection. The Archives will continue to offer reading room services, but will redirect resources to meet the needs of over 84 per cent of researchers who choose to use the collection through the Archives’ online or remote services.

The Council supports the Archives’ proposals to extend digitisation programs to material held in the Archives’ state and Darwin offices, thereby greatly enhancing the accessibility of this material. The Council noted the Archives’ program of stakeholder consultation about changes to its reference services.

Storage

The Council welcomed the Government’s decision to assist the Archives to enter a pre-commitment lease for a major new storage and preservation facility in the Australian Capital Territory.



Attending the launch of *Celebrating the Dutch in Australia*: (l to r) Advisory Council Chairman Paul Santamaria SC, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Niek van Zutphen, and Director-General Ross Gibbs in Canberra, March 2006.

Prime Ministers Centre

For some time, the Council had seen merit in the concept of a distinct institution to collect the records, including the personal papers, of Australia's prime ministers. The Council welcomed the Government's announcement in the May 2006 Budget of its intention to develop a 'Gallery of Australian Democracy', including a Prime Ministers Centre, at Old Parliament House.

Recordkeeping in the Australian Public Service

The Council was briefed on the Archives' recordkeeping staff consultancy with the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (now Immigration and Multicultural Affairs). The Council encouraged the Archives to disseminate lessons learnt from this work more broadly throughout the Australian Public Service. Subsequently, the Archives developed recordkeeping training initiatives to assist departments and agencies in best practice recordkeeping.

Personal records services

The Archives' collection policy for personal records is to acquire the papers of a target group of people who have been closely associated with the Australian Government in an official capacity.

In November 2005, the Council approved the broadening of the target group of people from governors-general, prime ministers, deputy prime ministers, Cabinet and other ministers, parliamentary secretaries, presidents of the Senate and speakers of the House of Representatives to include ministers assisting, leaders and deputy leaders of the Opposition, leaders and deputy leaders of political parties, leaders of the Government and the Opposition in the Senate, Federal and High Court judges, and other persons who have made a significant contribution to the democratic leadership of the nation or otherwise have a close association with the Australian Government.

This will ensure that valuable official records, as well as related private material that may complement the official record, are retained by the Archives.

Archives' international activities

At its meeting in March 2006, the Council reviewed a paper on the range of international activities in which the Archives was engaged.

The Council supported continuing these efforts where they are consistent with Australian Government foreign policy, where the Archives derives clear benefit and, where appropriate, costs are recovered. The Council agreed with the terms of a report to the Minister on these activities.

2006 Census time capsule project

Through the year, the Council received progress reports on a proposed provision, beginning with the 2006 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census, for members of the

public to indicate their willingness to have name-identified census information retained by the Archives for 99 years and then released for public access. The Council supported this change because it will deliver richer demographic information for future researchers. The Council noted the need for consequential changes to the Archives Act.

Enhancing visitor numbers

Over several meetings, the Council discussed strategies to enhance visitor numbers to the Archives' National Office, Canberra. The Council supported a number of specific initiatives and encouraged the Archives to pursue resources for others so that the full potential of the historic East Block building, in which the Archives' National Office is housed, could be realised and visitor experience maximised.

Advisory Council subcommittees

Publications Advisory Group

During the year, the Publications Advisory Group met on two occasions. The group considered the Archives' publications program, with a particular focus on online publishing and a proposed scholarly history of the Archives. Members of the Publications Advisory Group include Mr Tony Rutherford and former Council member Ms Nina Riemer.

Department of Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee

During the year, the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) Subcommittee did not formally meet. The subcommittee remained in regular contact with the Archives and consulted on the records disposal authority being developed for DVA. The subcommittee also considered the long-term storage arrangements of DVA case files.

Members of the subcommittee are Mr Peter Grant, Dr Jane Wilson, Mr Allan Taylor and Mr Ian Hancock.

Financial information and secretariat services

Funds for the operation of the Council are provided from funds allocated to the Archives. Major expenditure items consist of members' remuneration and travel allowances and fares to attend Council and subcommittee meetings.

In addition to direct financial support, the Archives provides secretariat and administrative services to the Council from its budget.

Accrued expenditure items for 2005–06

Item	Cost (\$)
Remuneration	9 807
Travelling allowance	4 253
Fares	35 942
Other travel expenses	615
Total	50 617

Freedom of Information section 8 statement

Section 8 of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (FOI Act) requires each agency to publish detailed information about the way it is organised, its powers, the kinds of decisions it makes, the documents it holds, the ways members of the public can obtain access to these documents, and any arrangements for public involvement in the work of the agency.

The main body of this annual report explains the establishment and major functions of the National Archives of Australia Advisory Council. This statement supplements that general information to meet the requirements of section 8 of the FOI Act.

Organisation

Secretariat and administrative support for the Advisory Council is provided by the Archives, and the Executive Officer is an officer employed by the Archives.

The Council usually meets four times each year. Members serve for terms not exceeding three years and may serve an additional term.

Powers

As an advisory body, the National Archives of Australia Advisory Council has no decision-making or other powers directly affecting members of the public.

Decisions

Under section 11 of the Archives Act, the National Archives of Australia Advisory Council is an advisory body and has no decision-making power or other powers directly affecting members of the public.

Functions

The functions of the National Archives of Australia Advisory Council are defined in section 11 of the Archives Act as follows:

- 1) The Council shall furnish advice to the Minister and the Director-General with respect to matters to which the functions of the Archives relate.
- 2) The Minister or the Director-General may refer any matter of the kind referred to in subsection (1) to the Council for advice and the Council may, if it thinks fit, consider and advise the Minister or the Director-General on a matter of that kind of its own motion.

Documents

The National Archives of Australia Advisory Council does not hold any documents that are open to public access on payment of a fee or are customarily available free of

charge. The annual report of the Advisory Council is tabled in Federal Parliament. The Council secretariat maintains files containing documents about the administration of the Council, papers discussed at its meetings, and correspondence on its activities.

Access

All inquiries concerning access to documents under the FOI Act may be directed during normal business hours to:

Executive Officer
National Archives of Australia Advisory Council
c/- National Archives of Australia
PO Box 7425
Canberra Mail Centre ACT 2610

Tel: (02) 6212 3925
Fax: (02) 6212 3931
Email: execoff@naa.gov.au

The Executive Officer may also be contacted regarding inquiries or comments relating to the National Archives of Australia Advisory Council Annual Report.

Facilities for access to documents are provided at the office of the National Archives of Australia, via the address listed above.

Arrangement for outside participation

Persons or bodies outside the Australian Government may participate in the Council's advisory role by making representations to the Chairman or any member of the Council.