

Submission to the Tune review

I present this brief submission to your enquiry, particularly in respect of the functions of the National Archives of Australia (NAA).

I am an independent researcher who has extensively accessed material held by the NAA and have visited all its mainland offices for research.

The material accessed has been enormously beneficial in understanding little known aspects of Australian history and the resultant publications and presentations have attracted not only great local interest but also substantial international goodwill (in my work, particularly from Japan).

I believe the role of the NAA in maintaining and facilitating access to past records of Government administration is a critical part of the accountability and openness important to a true democracy.

For the most part the service has been friendly, professional and timely. There have been three areas, in my own direct experience, of some difficulty in access to information.

1. There have been a number of times when simple access applications (notably to the Canberra office) have not been responded to within 90 days. This is suggestive of inadequate resources.
2. There have been cases where files sought could not be found or have been destroyed. That any files transferred to the care of the NAA have been destroyed without digitization is, in my view, improper.
3. For many years I have been seeking the extensive photographic records taken of Japanese civilian internees during World War 2. After the war, these files were gathered by the Central Investigation Service (CIS) in Canberra and on occasions used by the Department of Immigration, but both Army Central Records and the successor agencies to the CIS claim no record of them, and the NAA claims never to have received them. That such documentation with no security issues and no remaining privacy issues should 'disappear' suggests a political decision that it should not see the light of day. (A reason for this may perhaps have been related to a Government decision to reject any compensation claims.)

To me it seems improper that hundreds of millions of dollars are being spent on the glorification of war and of military hardware while hiding information on innocent residents caught up in a past conflict. What freedoms do we go to war to protect?

The cases I raise relate to the availability of records from a pre-digital era and obviously there are massive new issues around greatly expanding amounts of digital records, but the starting point must always be the right of the public to know and the responsibility of public servants to create and preserve concise and accurate records.

I hope your recommendations will enshrine this and perhaps also put measures in place for the NAA to be able to pursue records which should reasonably have been expected to arrive.