

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

Inquiry into the State Records Act 1998 and the Policy Paper on its review
Hearing – Monday 1 June 2020

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

Mr Adam Lindsay, Executive Director, State Archives and Records Authority of NSW and Sydney Living Museums

1. You have been the Executive Director for the two organisations which have been operationally merged now for some nearly twelve months. How have you found that process? Has there been cultural resistance to the merger? Is there a fear – as some critics suggest – that it's not been a merger but rather a takeover? How have you addressed that?

Being the leader of Sydney Living Museums (SLM) and the NSW State Archives and Records Authority (SARA) is a great privilege. Built by those who have come before me and the current staff of both, I benefit from a wonderful legacy.

Bringing the two organisations together has been challenging from an operational point of view due to the amount of duplication that comes from being two separate entities with separate systems, boards, processes, policies etc. Harmonising this has been difficult, particularly as there are aspects that cannot be brought together without becoming one entity, which compromises interoperability, results and resource allocation to some degree.

In terms of the hearts and minds of the team, there was initial scepticism and cultural resistance to bringing the organisations together. Initially this revolved around SARA thinking it had lost half a Chief Executive and Sydney Living Museums not knowing me as a leader. To overcome this, I focused on clear, consistent and regular communications, delivering results in targeted areas to show the benefits of partnered organisations and setting clear principles for working together (e.g. no win-lose outcomes; win-neutral or win-win only). Then, I concentrated on communicating a combined vision for both organisations, and showing the results of the work we would do together. It was important at this juncture to speak to the full range of professionals across both entities – including Archivists, Historians, Architects, Curators and Heritage, Logistics and Project professionals.

To date, there has been a considerable amount of convergence, limited only by the constraints described above and in my answers to the subsequent supplementary questions. As time went on, it became clear to most that bringing the organisations together to create something new is a compelling forward direction – both practically and creatively. Through vision setting and communication, and outcomes of joint endeavours, it has become clear that the whole is more than the sum of its parts.

While I receive a lot of feedback, below is an excerpt of an email I received from a staff member recently, which demonstrates what I have described:

You are already communicating the benefits and opportunities with great passion and intellectual rigour. Your emphasis on enhancing the cultural capital of the two organisations, exploring new ways to share with our audiences and arguing from the base of your strong commercial acumen makes it a no-brainer for most of us. My sense from conversations with colleagues at SLM is that they are onboard with your vision.

Extending from this, I do not believe that any feelings of a takeover or even a merger exist. Many of the staff are excited by the prospect of creating something new together and see the benefits of this proposal.

Looking more widely, many in the history, arts and culture sectors have expressed great praise for the work that SARA and SLM are doing together. This is also the case for SARA's counterparts in other jurisdictions, who are complimentary of the work we are doing to surface material in the State Archives Collection in conjunction with the objects and places in the care of SLM. Through the past twelve months of operational merger there has been no subjugation of obligations generally or specifically and no signs of a takeover.

Enshrining the new entity with the existing and new obligations outlined in both the current Acts and the policy proposal paper, and equipping the new entity with the full resources of the existing separate entities will also prevent any possibility of a takeover. This has been at the forefront of the development of these policy proposals as a way of addressing these concerns.

Although the prospect of change can be confronting initially, the past 12 months has proved to me that these policy proposals will blaze a new trail by creating a powerful, sustainable organisation dedicated to preserving the State's significant historic collections and to propagating and increasing the knowledge and appreciation of our history.

2. How do you respond to claims that both SARA and SLM are too Sydney centric? Will the proposed merger respond to this perception?

For SARA, this statement is not accurate. SARA has a network of Regional Archives Centres, located in host institutions in Armidale, Broken Hill, Newcastle, Wagga Wagga, Wingecarribee and Wollongong which provide access to State archives of regional significance and to copies of key State Archives. This network was established in 1963 and has continued to grow in a number of ways since. SARA also has a further 40 community access points throughout the State.

Through its' branding, SLM has certainly developed the perception of a Sydney focus. In reality, SLM holds several properties to the far west of Sydney, as well as Meroogal which is located in Nowra and focuses on developing strong regional partnerships through its' regional touring exhibition program.

SLM also operates the Endangered Houses Fund (EHF) which is a conservation program that identifies significant 'at risk' properties across the State and saves them from demolition or unsympathetic development to ensure they remain available for future generations to enjoy. Current EHF properties retained by SLM include the Nissen Hut at Belmont North near Newcastle and Beulah in Gilead. Other EHF properties have been located in diverse areas of NSW such as Moruya, Moss Vale and Glenwood.

SLM is keen to shift toward a perception among audiences that it is state wide and this will be achievable through the rebrand that will occur if the proposed new entity is created.

A highly important growth opportunity for the proposed new entity will be a focus on greater regional reach and engagement with more regional and rural centres across NSW. Both organisations currently have strong regional touring programs and will support one another to grow our regional presence.

The proposed new entity will move away from the current limitations placed on SLM by the perceptions of its' existing Sydney brand focus. The new entity will hold the remit of creating access to the history and records of the entire state, and through the combination of the assets of SLM and SARA further regional engagement growth will be able to be realised.

3. Would SARA's role in regulating recordkeeping be sidelined after the establishment of a new entity?

No, under the proposed amendments to the Act the role of the new entity in regulating recordkeeping will actually be strengthened and become more realistic.

Under the current *State Records Act 1998* (The Act) SARA has minimal power or authority to validate compliance with the policies it develops for public offices. Additionally, there is often the misconception that SARA can, by virtue of power and resource, force public offices to comply with the Act. This is far from correct, let alone realistic in any way.

The proposal to include a 'monitoring' power under the revised Act will enable the new entity to compel public offices to audit their own recordkeeping practices in whole or in part and to report back on the findings of their investigation. The information collected from this proposed monitoring power is vital to strengthen the new entity's ability to create evidence-based policy and education programs that allows for government accountability and efficiency while also protecting the State's archival assets.

Additionally, it is envisaged that the proposed Recordkeeping Committee will have the independent power to create the recordkeeping framework and standards for public offices to enable them to comply with the requirements of the Act, as well as having the determination for permanent retention of records of enduring value. This is an overall increase to the regulatory power and profile in the State of NSW.

This model moves towards more pragmatic and effective regulation that enables public offices to have accountability for their own actions, which is the only effective method through which recordkeeping requirements can ever realistically be complied with.

4. Preservation and management of the State's Archives is important. Will there be a decrease in this activity if a new entity is established?

No, the new entity is proposed to maintain the principal objects of both the existing *State Records Act 1998* and *Historic Houses Act 1980*. No existing functions, powers or responsibilities of either existing agency will be lost or sidelined and the presentation and management of the State's Archives will remain a priority of the new entity.

Under the proposed amendments to the Act, public offices will be required to make and implement plans to transfer control of records of enduring value to the NSW State Archives; including for material in digital formats. These plans may involve the immediate or postponed transfer of custody. This is of vital importance in understanding what Archives (or future Archives) exist but remain in the custody of NSW public offices.

It is proposed that records in the open access period will be open by default, unless the public office that is responsible for the records makes a 'closed to public access' (CPA) direction. This direction could be based on a risk assessment, as is the case under the current provisions. Self-determination for public offices to close records remains the same

as per the provisions of the current Act and there is no proposed reduction in the ability for public offices to legitimately close records and ensure security, privacy and confidentiality where it is required.

The open access period will be reduced from 30 to 20 years in line with other jurisdictions and contemporary citizen expectations. This change could be phased in over a period of time.

Each of these measures have been proposed to strengthen the new entity's ability to manage and preserve the State's Archives to the highest standards.

5. Is the backlog of NSW State Archives increasing or decreasing?

Like virtually all cultural collecting institutions, NSW State Archives has a backlog of material which comprises physical items and documentation. Although the legacy backlog is steadily decreasing, the State Archives Collection also grows at a rate of between 1,000-3,000 linear metres each year.

As a consequence, the organisation has to strike an appropriate balance between managing the ingesting of new records coming into the Collection and addressing the legacy backlog of material. As an example of this, all new material coming into the custody of SARA is documented within 3 months of receipt to ensure that full physical control can be gained and valuation and audit requirements can be met. When this is understood in the context of there being up to 3 kilometres of new material each year, and the requirement to meet the strict auditing guidelines and scrutiny that comes with managing a state asset with a value in excess of \$1billion, the imperative to balance and focus finite resources becomes more easily comprehensible.

The existing backlog of physical items has been estimated at c.6 kilometres. It comprises material that was transferred to NSW State Archives prior to the *State Records Act 1998* and which was not as well identified or controlled as current transfers are. This material therefore requires significant resources to address these legacy issues but is being made more discoverable each year. For example, high level details of this backlog material (mainly in the form of listings and indexes) have now been made available online. This has resulted in thousands of additional State Archives being made discoverable and accessible to the public.

The documentation backlog comprises over 9,000 series and approximately 43,000 consignments of records all of which require documentation work to varying degrees. This is being steadily addressed within existing resources.

Some of the key highlights from the backlog material that has been addressed this financial year include records of the establishment and operation of the Sydney Observatory and records of the Chelmsford Royal Commission. The latter has been key to assisting enquiries for legal purposes.

6. Why was no business case done to support the proposal to merge the two organisations into one entity?

The proposal to create a new State Cultural Institution that places our history at the forefront of cultural programming is an intellectual and cultural idea, and not solely borne out of a need to create financial or administrative efficiencies. It is a creative concept which allows NSW, as the first State and with assets of importance to the nation and the

entire Pacific Region, to blaze the trail in this important area and help create contemporary relevance for the stories of our past, in the present, for the betterment of the future.

As such, a business case was not undertaken prior to the proposal to create a new entity being put forward to the Committee. NSW has a duty to prioritise engagement with our history and this duty is only becoming more pressing as time goes on. The need to engage with our Colonial and pre-Colonial history – particularly on matters of placing Aboriginal and diverse voices in that narrative – is paramount. This proposal is primarily focused on the conceptual and legislative framework for creating this entity.

The Collections, assets, staff and collective expertise of SARA and SLM are best placed to achieve this vision. Further, the new entity is proposed to function with the recurrent budgets of the existing two entities, meaning costs are largely immaterial in the scheme of the proposition.

There is also the question of value: the procurement of an external business case is estimated to cost upwards of a million dollars and would be a waste of State resources and taxpayer money, without SLM and SARA having further assurance that the proposition will be politically and legislatively supported. With the in-principle support of the Committee to the proposed new entity, SLM and SARA will conduct a thorough review as due diligence prior to the creation of the new entity. A main feature of this work will be to identify the financial benefits to be realised and where any residual savings can be allocated within the organisation, and will serve as performance indicators for the transition process and beyond.

It is offered as evidence that in their 12 months of partnership SLM and SARA have been able to reduce costs significantly through the development of shared services. The resources that this has freed up have been used to create new interest in the Collections, programs and efforts of SARA and SLM. These financial efficiencies are expected to improve further, with the removal of legal and administrative barriers that currently require the duplication of functions like external auditing, annual reports, collection valuation and annual accounts.

7. How is the State Archives Collection relevant to SLM & its properties?

The material in the State Archives Collection holds incredible value to SLM's properties. This ranges from government records relating to the use and history of the buildings themselves, to stories of the people who passed through those buildings and sites, why and how they were built, and to the culture and context of the world to which those sites respond.

The great breadth of material available in the State Archives affords the opportunity for lateral thinking about how we can connect the stories of our past to SLM's sites. At the Hyde Park Barracks, as an example, there is an exhibition display on Frontier Violence and the story of the Myall Creek Massacre. Although this story is not directly related to the Hyde Park Barracks, it is connected by the several convicts and ex-convicts who were charged in the massacre and passed through the Barracks at one time.

This kind of lateral thinking allows SLM's properties to make deeper and broader connections with a wider cross-section of society. The State Archives will help SLM to tell more diverse stories about our past, in settings that will help to contextualise them.

8. How do you respond to the submission that suggested the proposal will result in "limiting access through mediated exhibitions rather than enhancing access through a more equitable digital future"?

Firstly, and as was iterated in the first hearing into this matter, I would highlight that this isn't an either/or proposition that will preference exhibitions over digital access or indeed any of SARA's existing functions or any of SLM's. Both functions are highly valued and will be important elements of the proposed new entity. Furthermore, it is limiting to suggest that exhibitions and digitisation are the only, or even the primary means of creating access to collections.

Exhibitions are a valid and important means of access to collections. They are also an important catalyst for stabilisation, conservation and digitisation of primary material, which leads to a 'more equitable digital future'. Exhibitions, whether curated, mediated or presented with a more limited institutional voice, are an important way for diverse audiences to engage with topics, material, collections and places of importance.

Exhibitions will not limit access to the State Archives Collection. Conversely, they will diversify the groups of people who access and engage with the State Archives Collection, beyond those who would ordinarily come to the Reading Room or look at our catalogue. Exhibitions signal to people who may not wish to or be able to engage with an inherently academically organised collection that they too can and should benefit from the content of centuries of history. So too do they expand the audience segments who visit SLM properties beyond those looking to visit an historic property to those who wish to engage with an exhibition on a particular topic, staged at an historic property.

I would add, and **underscore strongly**, that a singular strategy of digitising the State Archives Collection and publishing it in the online catalogue, organised in the Australian Series System (which is wonderful, by the way), may increase access but only for a very small, infinitesimal portion of the community, and it would not be equitable.

Through the creation of a single entity, this policy proposal imagines a future far more democratic and equitable by signalling to the whole community – not just researchers and academics -- that the State Archives Collection exists *and* is worthy of exploration.

The new entity will have a positive obligation to propagate and increase knowledge and appreciation of history – in the same way an art gallery increases knowledge and appreciation of art. The new entity will achieve this mandate by increasing access to and the attractiveness of its assets through the creation of content that engages people in history using the expertise of archivists, historians, curators, artists, designers and the public themselves.

As an example of one of the many other ways we propose to increase equitable access: in late June SLM produced and live-streamed an education program on convict love tokens at the Hyde Park Barracks Museum to over 11,200 students. Students from every state and territory in Australia as well as several schools in the USA participated. This level of access and participation from young people is unprecedented for SARA and could very well be replicated and developed by the new entity using the State Archives Collection.

In summary, exhibitions are just one of the ways that the new entity will be able to increase access equity. The new entity will be able to broaden the way people in NSW of diverse ages, backgrounds, interests, education and skill levels engage with our past by

diversifying access points, embracing inclusive storytelling, and acknowledging multiple perspectives. The agency will have an increased capacity for regional outreach and connection through an expanded touring exhibitions program and regional partnerships. It will be able to develop education programming and resources which provide more relevant and in depth access to the State Archives Collection than ever before.

9. How do you respond to the submission that stated “the reliance of the agency on profits from the government records repository to fill statutory obligations is not sustainable in the long term”?

The profits of the Government Records Repository (GRR) enhance the funding from NSW Treasury, they do not replace it. Government funding is still required and the government investment in SARA is higher this financial year than it has been in a number of prior years.

The GRR has delivered a significant profit each and every year since it first went off-budget in 1990. The majority of GRR revenue is currently derived from services related to physical records services. The demand for these services has both a long term, and a stable outlook. Accordingly, SARA is confident of the continued generation of profits into the future.

The contribution of the GRR is not only directly financial. Through the GRR, the wider NSW State Archives is able to access benefits of economies of scale. For example, digitisation capacity, capability and equipment is available to preserve and make accessible the State Archives Collection at a standard and cost that would not be achievable without the GRR.

Additionally, SARA is the only archival institution in Australasia that does not have concerns over physical storage capacity for its archival collection. Through the GRR SARA is able to self-fund the construction of storage capacity, with the GRR funding the construction of the largest and most recent building at the SARA Kingswood site. This also allows SARA to defray the holding costs (depreciation, maintenance etc.) of these buildings by having the GRR utilise them to generate revenue until the space is required by the archival collection.

The GRR and the business model of SARA is a government success story and a model for Cultural and Collecting Institutions to emulate.

10. Has the government’s arrangement with Land Registry Services limited access to State Archives?

No, the arrangement has not limited access to the records in question, which now form part of the State Archives Collection.

Previously, these records were free to view in Queens Square at the Land Titles Office, with a fee applied for any requests for copies. Digital copies of these records remain accessible and free to view at the Western Sydney Records Centre Reading Room.

11. Are State Archives equipped to preserve born-digital records?

Yes. SARA acknowledges that the digital age brings significant challenges to the recordkeeping profession, challenges that must be met if we are to preserve born-digital records and avoid a digital dark age.

The *State Records Act 1998* is format neutral and digital records are therefore subject to the same requirements of creation, preservation, disposal and/or transfer and access as their analogue counterparts.

Consequently, the recordkeeping policy framework, advice and guidance that SARA produces includes digital recordkeeping and digital records.

In terms of digital archives (the small percentage of digital records that are required to be retained in perpetuity), SARA has recently replaced end of life control systems with the State Archives Management System (SAMS) launched in 2019. SAMS is the integration of a discovery layer, a control system and a digital preservation system, Rosetta.

Rosetta can manage born digital formats used most extensively by Government and SARA assists in the migration of formats for transfer into Rosetta. This management includes storage and accessibility of digital State Archives, the latter for the first time.

The system is also scalable and able to be tailored for different formats as more digital archives are transferred to the State Archives. It is a system that is used by other Australian and International cultural institutions.

12. How will you ensure digitisation remains a priority if this reform proceeds?

There are two areas which are often conflated through use of the term 'digitisation' but which are two distinct areas of NSW State Archives' work:

1. State Archives Collection material created in physical formats that have been scanned into digital form for access and/or preservation purposes. This is digitisation.
2. Management of 'born digital' State Archives – this means material that is only created in electronic form and transferred to NSW State Archives. This is not digitisation.

State Archives Collection material scanned into digital form

SARA holds Digitisation of the State Archives Collection as a key strategic objective. Digitisation has significant benefits in respect of preservation of, and access to, the State Archives Collection, two of the key responsibilities of SARA.

SARA has a number of initiatives that prioritise digitisation and which will continue should the reforms proceed. These include:

- Providing funding for digitisation of priority formats. In 2019/20, this resulted in the digitisation of over 500 Education department films.
- Developing partnerships for digitisation. The most recent example of this is a partnership with the Australian Railway Historical Society (NSW) where by the Society's volunteers are digitising one of the most popular series of rail photographs for use by both organisations,
- NSW State Archives' volunteers undertaking metadata capture to ensure discoverability of digitised material.

For this financial year (YTD May 2020), SARA has uploaded over 200,000 images of material from the State Archives Collection. This includes State Rail Personal History Cards and Householders Returns from the 1828 Census. This is the largest ingest of

digital records from the NSW State Archives Collection into the catalogue, displaying the continued commitment of SARA to prioritising digitisation.

Additionally, SARA is required under the current Act to maintain accessibility of Archives. This mandates digitisation for preservation of content. This requirement will be maintained under the proposed new Act and be conferred on the new entity.

'Born digital' State archives

NSW State Archives has processes and systems in place to facilitate the transfer of 'born digital' State Archives into the State Archives Collection from public offices. This includes the newly implemented State Archives Management System which controls, manages and preserves such material with a capability and capacity that SARA has never had before.

There are over 6.5 million files held as State Archives. This material includes records of the Chelmsford Royal Commission and a database of Business Names Registration records.

Increasing transfer of 'born digital' State Archives is also a strategic priority of NSW State Archives. Work has commenced to promote and facilitate increased transfer. This includes the reviewing transfer procedures to ensure they are fit for purpose for digital transfer.

13. How many people learn about the State Archives collection through the exhibition program? Has this increased engagement with the collection?

SARA launched a new exhibitions program in 2017/18 which has been highly successful in increasing engagement with the State Archives Collection, signalling the appetite for diversified access opportunities to the archives.

SARA's exhibitions are made physically in partnership with a space provider (e.g. Government House for *The Queen's Album* exhibition) or, less frequently, through the use of the entry space at the Western Sydney Record Centre. They are also made available online and are toured regionally by partnering libraries and cultural institutions.

Year	Annual Exhibitions Visitation	Annual Exhibitions Digital Access	Total Annual Exhibitions Engagement
2019/2020 (YTD End May 2020)	228,270	224,068	452,338
2018/2019	477,587	136,913	614,500
2017/2018	12,000	407,724	419,724

These figures are further supported by the current exhibition program, *A Thousand Words*, which is the first joint exhibition of SLM and SARA. The exhibition presents 100 of the most compelling photographic images from the rich collections of Sydney Living Museums and NSW State Archives, created between the 1880s and the 1980s.

This exhibition was launched online on 9 May and has attracted over 75,000 page views to date and more than half a million views across social media in the lead up to the launch of the exhibition. These impressive figures are indicative of the successful exhibitions and programming the SLM and SARA will create together.

14. What is the motivation to create a new cultural institution out of SARA & SLM? Where did it come from? Was a merge with other cultural institutions considered?

This legislative review commenced in 2018 when SARA was moved from the portfolio of the Minister for Finance, Services & Innovation to the Minister for the Arts. At this time, there was consideration of opportunities in relation to SARA's operating model and whether there were synergies with other cultural institutions.

In 2018 the Minister for the Arts hosted a 'History Roundtable' for stakeholders to discuss the future of History and History-telling in NSW. The roundtable was attended by multiple NSW Cultural Institutions as well as experts from across the field. The proposal to establish a new cultural institution with a focus on protecting and sharing the stories of NSW was first raised during this roundtable.

From there, the proposal to establish a new entity with a focus on the History of NSW was developed in consultation with key stakeholders and in consideration of the best outcome for the public.

With the partnering of SLM and SARA from July 2019, the benefits of this proposal were empirically established and the proposition was thus included in the existing review of the *State Records Act 1998* and put forward to the Committee for consideration.

A point worth making is that this is a proposal for the **creation of a new cultural institution**. What may be seen as a merger has been carefully constructed so that one entity does not subsume or take precedence over the other. This is a foundational principle of the proposal – that the new cultural institution builds upon the strengths of the two and creates a stronger, more prominent entity for the people of NSW.

A range of options were initially considered, including a partnership with the NSW State Library. Each of these options were ruled out for a number of reasons, principally as they failed to preserve the best of what existed while simultaneously creating opportunity to better engage audiences in the contemporary relevance of our history. The value of this proposition is based in the complimentary weaknesses and strengths of SLM and SARA as they currently exist.

The following circumstances are specific to SLM and SARA, and directly give rise to the value of the proposal.

- SLM holds properties with space for interpretation, programming and exhibitions; where SARA has none.
- SLM lacks extensive collections and archives, where SARA has one of the most extensive and significant archival collections in the world.
- SLM has existing expertise and infrastructure to support education, exhibitions, programming, marketing and digital content where SARA has the expertise and infrastructure to support collections and archives management, digitisation, research and policy making.
- SLM and SARA are similarly sized and resourced organisations, meaning the risk of the combined entity becoming an unequal partnership is low.
- Both entities have relatively low brand awareness and cultural cachet meaning the loss of the existing brands, and the creation of a new one is of low risk.

15. Have standards for documentation, arrangement, description, digitisation or anything else been lowered to achieve outcomes?

The documentation, arrangement and description of archives in their context (essentially cataloguing) is a core component of archivists' work and is key to the discoverability of our Collection.

There has been no turn away from the high standards to which SARA performs this core work.

There has certainly been the adoption of a pragmatic approach to this work, which optimises discoverability of the State Archives Collection. It involves publishing basic key information on the material in the State Archives Collection. This includes documentation of government agencies along with establishing agency dates and relationships such as succeeding and preceding agencies. The previous level of research required to describe these agencies has been limited in order to focus greater attention on providing series and item listings to the State Archives Collection.

The approach does not impact the ability to provide deep documentation for certain records (eg. records of likely high interest), nor the ability to retrospectively undertake more detailed documentation in the future.

Supplemented by a new control and management system, this approach has resulted in far more of the Collection being made accessible than ever before, including over 6,500 series' of records that had never appeared before in public catalogues. The public simply did not know the material was held.

There has also been an increase in digitisation activity in more recent years. This includes a project in 2016 which digitised material at risk due to technological obsolescence and chemical degradation.

For this financial year (YTD May 2020), NSW State Archives has uploaded over 200,000 images of material from the State Archives Collection. This includes State Rail Personal History Cards and Householders Returns from the 1828 Census, now listed on the UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register.

16. Has there been any progress to digitise at risk archives? If so, what?

There has been significant progress made in this vital work. SARA would classify the 'at risk' records in our archival collections as those which are under significant threat due to their eventual technological obsolescence. At this point, there are no archives at immediate risk of content loss due to their at-risk status.

Formats such as videotapes are likely to be inaccessible by 2025. Digitisation of these items (including documentation, conversion to digital format and metadata capture to ensure discoverability by the public) is therefore a priority.

In 2016 SARA successfully managed a bulk digitisation project of key at-risk archives including DVCPros, videos and cassettes, successfully delivering a \$3.42M program of emergency digitisation.

In 2019-2020 SARA continued the work to digitise at-risk formats focusing on completing the digitisation of a series of 16mm films from the Department of Education. Over 500 reels from this series were targeted for digitisation to an archival preservation standard.

Continued funding will always be needed and is being allocated wherever possible to continue to meet this challenge. A particular focus of future activities will be the glass plate negative collection from the Government Printing Office that documented detailed aspects of life in NSW in the first half of the 20th century. A further \$350,000 will be allocated to Collection Digitisation and Barcoding in the coming financial year.

17. Are audio visual records or early paper records placed at further risk by this proposal to merge?

No. Again, the proposed new entity is not planned to lose the statutory obligations of the *State Records Act 1998* for the creation, management and protection of the records of public offices of the State and to provide for public access to those records. As such, the creation of the proposed new entity will in no way adversely impact on audio visual or early paper records.

In fact, the creation of the proposed new entity will augment the need to care for records of all formats through a higher profile for the organisation and the Collection and the consequent anticipated increase in usage. This will drive greater business outcomes around digitisation, collection care and accessibility.

Further, audio visual records and early paper records probably hold some of the highest relevance and appeal with respect to the creation of dynamic exhibitions and engaging digital and social media content. If anything, the creation of the proposed new entity will drive the prioritisation of these types of records.

18. Would SLM close the Justice and Police Museum and give it to SARA as their Sydney City Reading Room, as suggested by Dr Watts?

While SLM may consider utilising the Justice and Police (J&P) Museum in a different manner in the future, decommissioning the property entirely is directly inconsistent with SLM's legislative remit to care for, manage, interpret and make accessible the properties in its care.

The J&P Museum is a significant heritage property and requires a high level of heritage conservation and maintenance expertise, which SARA does not have the capacity to manage.

SLM strongly refutes the J&P Museum is either excess to purpose or not fit for purpose (as described by Mr Watts in his testimony) and it would be financially irresponsible for SARA to maintain such an expensive heritage property for the purposes of a reading room. Any functions that the existing SARA might require a CBD base for would be better served out of a more appropriate and cost effective space.

19. Did the Trust sell the air rights to J&P Museum?

No. To our knowledge there is currently no mechanism in the City of Sydney's *Local Environmental Plan 2012* (to which the J&P Museum is subject) which allows for the sale or transfer of air rights. The J&P Museum is eligible for an award under the City of Sydney's Heritage Floor Space scheme, which allows for the sale and transfer of

unutilised floor space ratio for sites listed as local heritage items in the LEP. This scheme incentivises the care and conservation of heritage properties in the Sydney CBD, however SLM has neither applied nor been awarded any rights in relation to this scheme for the Justice & Police Museum.

Unrelated to either Heritage Floor Space or air rights, SLM granted easements for light and air to the owners of a neighbouring property in 2013. The neighbour also granted cross-easements in favour of SLM, formalising historical arrangements in which parts of the museum's facilities were constructed within the envelope of the adjoining property.

The easements were requested and granted in relation to a proposal for the redevelopment of the neighbouring site. SLM's heritage experts determined that the development plans would not adversely affect the heritage fabric of the J&P Museum or its operations. The deed of easement requires that the owners of the neighbouring property consult with SLM should their development plans change.

The Trust sought independent advice on the commercial value of the easements, based on similar transactions throughout the Sydney CBD, and the parties agreed to a financial consideration of approximately \$2.85m.

In line with the provisions of the HHT Act, the granting of the easement was approved by the Governor of NSW.

20. Has there been any suggestion that this proposal will lead to privatisation?

There is no aspect of the proposal that suggests privatisation. In fact, the proposal strengthens the Government's ownership and management of the cultural assets that are the significant sites managed by Sydney Living Museums and the extraordinary State Archives Collection.

21. Why merge these institutions? What can you achieve as a new institution that you cannot achieve as two?

We are proposing to create a new Executive Agency that will illuminate the history of NSW by protecting and sharing the evidence and stories of our past to inform and shape our understanding of the present.

The foundation for this new Cultural Institution will be formed from the collections, assets, staff, infrastructure, expertise and capacity of the existing Sydney Living Museums and NSW State Archives and Records Authority.

The NSW State Archives Collection is among the most culturally significant archival collections in the world and Sydney Living Museums holds a portfolio of some of the State's most significant heritage sites and properties.

Together, they will create a solid basis for this forward looking and innovative proposition that signals a commitment to the protection of the cultural assets of the State and to evolving and growing our history and recordkeeping practices in line with contemporary technologies, philosophies, accessibility and the public interest.

The increased remit and weight of the new Cultural Institution will create a level of cultural cachet that both SLM and SARA have been unable to garner in the past. This will have huge benefits in the space of fundraising, philanthropy, corporate sponsorship and overall

competitive strength when appealing to government for funding, all of which comes from being a more substantial organisation.

The creation of the new Cultural Institution will be a prime opportunity for NSW to develop a publicly recognised, contemporary and attractive brand for history which will ultimately lead to greater audience engagement. For the people of NSW to garner value from the collections, assets and expertise of this agency, they must know what it is and what it does. This is something that both SLM and SARA have struggled to achieve independently of one another.

As an Executive Agency the Cultural Institution will have greater flexibility and agility to employ the best people to protect, research and make accessible our past. The increased capacity and remit of this agency will also afford the existing staff of SLM and SARA more expansive development opportunities and career prospects.

Although only a halo benefit, SLM and SARA have been able to establish a series of administrative and financial efficiencies through their twelve months of partnership. The creation of this agency will remove the legal and administrative fences that exist for SLM and SARA through their separate governing legislations. This will lead to even greater administrative and financial efficiencies that will allow important Government resourcing to be diverted back into the areas of the agency that really matter.

Should the new proposed entity be created, it will resolve the following, which represent only some of the existing fences that are created by SLM and SARA being in a partnership rather than a unified entity.

- SLM and SARA have a shared financial services team who are currently required to duplicate all accounting processed due to the entities having separate accounts, ABN's and reporting requirements.
- For compliance with auditing requirements, a series of unnecessarily complex processes must be followed when the two entities are sharing the cost of a purchase or project. This involves billing one another for half of the cost of the purchase, effectively doubling the work of the financial services team for each transaction.
- It is similarly complicated with respect to payroll processes for staff members who are assigned to roles, or who are completing projects, on behalf of both institutions. Again, this involves the two entities tracking, auditing and billing each other for the employees' time.
- This creates complexity with respect to the need for the two legally separate entities to determine who will fund certain employees, projects or purchases with mutual benefits.
- Where practicable, the organisations use the same systems, however their IT networks remain separate. This creates a slew of difficulties, and leads to staff needing to have separate accounts, and often separate computers, to access both the SARA and SLM sides of the system.
- SLM and SARA also share a Human Resources and recruitment team, who are a useful example of the inefficiency created by having two networks and IT systems. Recordkeeping is of paramount importance to the HR team, who are required to flip between the two networks and Content Management accounts of SLM and SARA to be able to properly store their records. Other examples of this issue include the need to duplicate all their work in the Government recruitment system Taleo etc.

- The two distinct IT networks also impact on the ability of staff to move freely across the sites, as they must pre-plan, with the assistance of ICT to have a connection wherever they go. To circumvent this issue the Mint, as an example, has been set up with separate SARA connected hotdesks and SLM connected hotdesks which limit flexible working opportunities for staff.
- Although happily partnered, for risk and governance reasons SLM and SARA follow proper legal conventions with respect to any business interactions they have. For example, SARA permanently utilises an office at the Hyde Park Barracks. As separate legal entities, this means that a legal contract and licence for use must be established. This involves legal and financial resources to enable, which wouldn't be necessary as a singular legal entity.
- Similarly, all SARA collection items that are to be displayed or used in connection with an SLM produced exhibition, or onsite at an SLM property, require that usual collections loans processes are undertaken. Although the partnership fosters fantastic collaboration, the entities remain legally separate, meaning that contractual agreements and transactions must be treated in the same way they would with any external organisation. There are no administrative or financial gains for either institution in this way, whilst partnered but not legally joined.
- Further, intellectual property and copyrights must continue to be considered and accounted for with the production of any shared or collaborative content.
- The entities must continue to produce two separate Annual Reports, two separate sets of Annual Accounts and pay for two sets of auditing fees with the Audit Office of NSW. This is both a huge administrative burden and a waste of staffing resources and money.
- Both entities value their collections and must do this separately at the moment, having to duplicate conversations with Auditors, valuers and Treasury.
- As per each of their guiding legislations, the organisations are currently run by two separate strategic Boards who have no responsibility or remit to consider or comment on the decisions and direction of one another. Although no issues have arisen in this respect to date, it would be incredibly difficult to mediate or navigate any strategic differences or decisions that arose between the two. Additionally, the Chief Executive must report to two Boards (plus 5 sub-committees and a Foundation Board), two Audit Committees, the Minister (on certain matters) and the Department for administrative and staff management matters.

22. How do you respond to the Professional Historians Association who say in their submission “that State Archives should be focussing upon improving access to the records, not shifting its purpose across to activating the collection” and that the Archives’ catalogue is “problematic” and there is a “lack of digitised collections”?

To reiterate a previously expressed sentiment, this is not an either/or proposition, it is an ‘and’ proposition that will not shift the focus from access to activation. It will promote **both** and I also maintain that activating the Collection is improving access to the Collection and to a greater number of people and is in line with contemporary public expectation. I will not elaborate further on this point as I have covered it in my answers to previous questions.

SARA continues to focus on improving access to the State Archives Collection. Any enhancement to the activation of the Collection does not and will not alter the statutory obligation of the *State Records Act 1998* or its core purpose. In many instances the activation of the Collection through ‘social media, exhibition, book or podcast’ is the way in which people are made aware of the existence of SARA for the first time. The

awareness established through these initiatives is therefore a key initial point of access to Collection.

SARA's commitment to access as a core business activity has been no better demonstrated than in the current health context. The Western Sydney Reading Room was one of the first in the country to re-open after COVID-19 restrictions were eased allowing the re-opening of cultural institutions.

The NSW State Archives Collection catalogue is relatively new. It provides unprecedented control, management and accessibility of the State Archives Collection and is the greatest step forward for the organisation in terms of systems for some years. It also has a significantly increased capability for access, in an interface that is contemporary, and was consulted on widely with a number of bodies and individuals prominent in the history community. Universally, feedback was positive and most (if not all) suggestions for enhancement were accommodated or are being actively explored.

As with all such projects there have been some teething issues. The migration of this data from the previous catalogue requires continued refinement and activities to rectify these issues has been a priority. The catalogue does support contextual documentation and conforms to archival standards while allowing for greater interactions with public users, including such elements as tagging State Archives metadata. This will allow for greater accessibility to the NSW State Archives Collection. The catalogue is a robust system that has also been adopted by other Australian and international cultural institutions.

Keyword accessibility to the catalogue is an essential entry point into the NSW State Archives Collection which reflects modern discoverability of information. It is by no means the only entry point. More experienced users are still able to access the Collection through contextual information, which is the crux of the PHA's concerns.

The processes associated with the creation of digital assets from analogue or physical items includes all the activities involved in creating a digital copy, making it accessible, and managing it over time. It is a significant undertaking for any organisation and especially for those institutions that deal with text-based material. Digitisation activity also needs to balance the competing needs of the condition of original material and public demand for digitised content.

As has been previously iterated throughout my responses, SARA has a number of initiatives that prioritise digitisation and will result in increased digital material being made available. These include:

- Providing funding for digitisation of priority formats. In 2019/20, this resulted in the digitisation of over 500 Education Department films.
- Developing partnerships for digitisation. The most recent example of this is a partnership with the Australian Railway Historical Society (NSW) where by the Society's volunteers are digitising one of the most popular series of rail photographs for use by both organisations,
- NSW State Archives' volunteers undertaking metadata capture to ensure discoverability of digitised material.

23. Dr Watts listed ‘core work’ undertaken by SLM – including building/garden conservation/management, decorative arts collection management, placemaking, stakeholder engagement, education, commercial, publishing, conferences, library, programs such as Sydney Open & Festivals etc – which he said has nothing to do with SARA. Is this true?

Although SLM and SARA have some different functions, their core remit is very similar. SLM exists to conserve, protect and make accessible the State’s significant heritage properties; SARA exists to conserve, protect and make accessible the State’s Records and Archives. The very clear thematic link between these institutions is focussed on making the history of NSW accessible.

With respect to the list of functions referred to by Dr Watts, there are a great number that overlap across both institutions. This includes but is not limited to, collection management, conservation, research, education, stakeholder management, commercial services, library management and curation.

Further, in the same way that both venue hire and curatorial research are important but unrelated functions of SLM, the functions of SARA and SLM that are unrelated will still be able to work harmoniously to enhance the broader successes of the proposed new entity. The new entity will have a broad remit and deliver a wide range of functions, and this is precisely the strength of this proposal and all contribute to propagating and increasing the knowledge and appreciation of History. The diverse expertise and capacity of the new entity will be the reason for its success and continued relevance.

24. Is this merger just a response to declining budgets and the inability for SARA and SLM to make ends meet and remain a going concern as has been suggested?

The budgets for SARA or SLM have not been declining and this proposal is not in response to the budget position, real or imagined, of either entity.

As a definition, budget is composed of total revenue (government operational grant, government capital grant and self-generated revenue) and total expenditure.

Although there has been and will continue to be fluctuations in government funding there has also been significant government investment in areas such as the capital works programs of both SLM and SARA.

For Sydney Living Museums, compared with the financial year 2008-09 when Dr Watts retired, the estimated total government operational grant for the current financial year is 18.8% higher; the government capital grant is 24.4% higher and self-generated revenue is 11.7% lower (acknowledging that COVID-19 has eliminated all self-generated revenue for a number of months in the current financial year). Expenditure, using the same comparator periods, has increased by only 5.6%.

For NSW State Archives, comparing the same periods (financial year 2008-9 with the expected results for the current financial year), the estimated total government operational grant for the current financial year is 37.3% higher; the government capital grant is 1851.9% higher (and helps to fund improvements to collection storage areas and digitisation) and self-generated revenue is 84.2% higher. Expenditure, using the same comparator periods, has increased by 93.2% and this is being directly invested in the core functions of the Institution.

It is clear from the above data that the creation of the proposed new entity is not in response to addressing budget shortfalls.

In the coming twelve months, we are making significant investments in a range of areas that are of relevance to this submission and the underlying notion that core duties have or will become diluted. The significant investment happening across SARA & SLM is matched by a momentous energy from a happy, engaged and expert staff who plan for and deliver this core work.

Investment in our collections & sites: to preserve the important historic assets of the State & increase their utility, use & accessibility | Total investment \$7,478,000

We will be investing \$350,000 in digitising and barcoding more of the State Archives Collection, to improve management and preservation outcomes.

The air handling units at the Museum of Sydney will also be upgraded, at a cost of \$750,000, greatly improving environmental conditions, which are essential to protect our Collection and loaned objects. The Mint will receive more than \$600,000 of upgrades including roof repairs, sandstone and brickwork stabilisation and Reception will be relocated to the Rum Hospital. Interior finish restoration will ensure that the presentation standard of Elizabeth Bay House remains high. Work at Elizabeth Farm will include remediation of some interior construction and finishes and an external lighting renewal. We will invest \$200,000 in The Woolshed at Rouse Hill Estate, dating to c.1858, which will have repairs to its structure and shell. \$220,000 will be used to upgrade to all the internal electrical wiring at Rose Seidler House and Vacluse House will have \$360,000 worth of remediation to significant sandstone and metalwork features and an upgrade to external paths, drainage, grates and fences, which will improve the visitor experience as they wander the grounds. The Hyde Park Barracks will also receive some additional 'finishing touches' and a \$400,000 conservation effort will be conducted on the Nissen Hut, purchased under SLM's Endangered Houses Fund.

The Western Sydney Records Centre will have more than \$3M of work completed including new fire suppression in Stage 1, the Vaults and the Annex, plus additional security measures will be put into place across the site. Plus, we will improve traffic management, which will benefit our team members – particularly our Drivers – and visitors.

Following our two recent purchases of important contemporary Aboriginal artworks, one of which is in direct response to the State Archives Collection and is on display as part of the *A Thousand Words* exhibition, I will be building the Sydney Living Museums Collection through more targeted acquisitions, with a particular focus on diverse voices and perspectives at the Museum of Sydney.

Investment for our people: to increase engagement, comfort, safety & efficiency | Total investment: \$870,000

We are investing nearly \$700,000 in technology and ICT hardware with direct benefit to team members, the largest of which is the rollout of Office 365, which will underpin a more comprehensive flexible working strategy for SARA & SLM.

We will purchase some new systems, including a new phone system for the SLM Bookings Team, a contractor management system for SLM and a WHS incident management system for both entities.

Investment in our commercial operations: to ensure we are strong & sustainable | Total investment \$2,789,000

More than \$1M will be spent upgrading the commercial kitchens at The Museum of Sydney, The Mint and Vaucluse House in the coming months, providing vital investment into these much-loved spots across Sydney. Significant work will be carried out in the Gold Melting Room at the Mint, to ensure that this remains a key revenue generating space for SLM.

We will also investing more money in digitisation equipment at SARA, that will increase our capability to earn profitable revenue from our commercial digitisation business and enhance our Collection digitisation, taking our total investment in this area to \$600,000 over the past two years.

The gorgeous Elizabeth Bay House will have the ladies bathroom upgraded, enhancing the attractiveness of this as a function venue and improving general visitor amenities. The Young Street Terraces will receive some upgrades, to address compliance with the building code.

Investment in the back-end: to ensure we have secure & compliant systems underpinning our work | Total investment \$1,398,000

This type of investment is vital in ensuring we have secure, compliant systems. To this end, this year we will spend \$170,000 to upgrade the Finance and HR systems that underpin both Institutions. \$60,000 will be used to update Firewalls for SARA & SLM.

SARA is also investing a considerable amount of money (almost \$1M) improving cyber security and digital storage, for our Collection and Commercial capability. It will also underpin our investment (approximately half a million dollars) in desktop and office hardware that we made last financial year and that staff will benefit from in the coming months.

25. Dr Watts states there are very few good quality exhibition spaces at SLM, making the rationale for a merger wishful thinking – is this true?

This is not accurate. While any number of rooms and spaces across the SLM portfolio could be used as exhibition spaces (that is to display original items), notwithstanding considerations such as climate-control requirements, there are 14 spaces which have historically been used for exhibitions, both temporary and permanent, with a combined space of over 950sqm.

In addition to the 2 exhibition galleries and the Panorama gallery at Museum of Sydney, there are 5 exhibition spaces at Elizabeth Bay House, 2 at Justice and Police Museum, 2 at Hyde Park Barracks, at 1 each at Vaucluse House and Rouse Hill Estate.

Further to this, there are numerous installations and displays at each site, including The Mint and the Caroline Simpson Library and Research Collection, which house objects from the collection, AV displays, commissions and interpretation material.

Moreover, the presentation of exhibitions is only one of the many benefits that the new entity will provide. There are many other means of communicating and interpreting history, which do not require climate-controlled museum-standard conditions. This includes activating information, stories and untold histories contained in collections and

enlivening these through public programs, education programs, video/digital content, artist/writer commissions, residencies and presentations & publications that are regularly activated indoors and outdoors across all of SLM's 12 properties. As an example of this, there are many films and significant moving image material in the State Archives Collection that would be very meaningful to show at the Museum of Sydney's Warrane Theatre.

Further, despite the increase in capability that SLM's current spaces offer to SARA, there is a strong desire to create a new Museum of History with significance to all Australians and visitors to Australia. The ambition and potential of this plan extends beyond the current property portfolio and would require a newly dedicated space, with leading capabilities to achieve what is envisaged. A Museum of History is sorely needed and the creation of this new entity would place NSW in an ideal position to realise it.

26. Would a combined entity only display the SARA Collection?

No, in the same way that other Cultural Institutions with significant collections (e.g. AGNSW) continue to partner with and source material from external sources, the proposed new entity would not be restricted to only displaying items from the existing SLM and SARA collections.

Inbound loans are often used during the creation of content, and there is no reason why the proposed new entity would cease sourcing external material where it will enrich an exhibition, activation or interpretation display.

27. Why remove the word "historic" and replace it with "significant" in the new Act?

The proposal to replace the word 'historic' with 'significant' in the Act is a future-proofing proposition that seeks to de-limit the stringent property acquisition remit of the newly formed entity. The Historic Houses Trust was initially established in 1980 to care for and manage the colonial property Elizabeth Bay House and it was with this property in mind that the wording of the existing Act was drafted.

It would be consistent with the broadened remit of the new entity, as well as the increased Collection, to broaden the scope of property acquisitions imposed by the use of this language. The term 'significant' as opposed to 'historic' does not have any connotations of age, but instead of the importance or relevance of the site to our collective history. As a term, 'significant' allows us to categorise specifically too: social significance, historical significance, cultural significance etc and expands the prospects for the entity to engage people in our history without limiting connotations.

The potential to acquire properties of contemporary significance will also allow us to interpret spaces and tell stories of relevance to a more modern Australia, from our enduring Indigenous history, to our patterns of migration, and the contemporary social issues we collectively face.

28. Did SLM recently lose a large quantity of members and bequests as stated by Dr Watts?

To my knowledge, the statement that SLM has recently lost a large quantity of members and bequests is not accurate.

It is our understanding that Dr Watts made this statement during his testimony in relation to the 'Friends of the Historic Houses Trust', now known as the 'Historic Houses Association of Australia'.

To provide some context about this organisation, in 1998 an association named the 'Friends of the Historic Houses Trust' (the Friends) was incorporated as an entity within its own right, uniting two existing groups associated with SLM's properties – the Friends of Elizabeth Bay House (est.1977) and the Friends of Vaucluse House (est.1972). The aim was to create an umbrella Friends' organisation to promote a common goal – the support of SLM and its heritage properties. After 2013, the Friends' relationship with SLM ceased and they became a national charitable organisation now known as the 'Historic Houses Association of Australia' (the Association). The Association is fully independent of Government.

The Friends (and now the Association) administers a membership program, which contributes to the funding of their operations. During their association with SLM the program provided Friends members with access to SLM's properties, as SLM did not then run its own internal membership program. Membership fees were paid directly to the Friends organisation. In turn, the Friends provided SLM with financial support from time to time.

In 2013 an external Audit Report on the Friends was produced by Deloitte, and identified significant governance irregularities and high level operational risks. The then SLM Board withdrew support from the Friends of Historic Houses Trust, as they were not satisfied that the Friends' Executive Committee had responded appropriately to these findings, nor were they satisfied with their commitment to remediating the findings and significant risks.

Following the then Board's withdrawal of support, SLM honoured the memberships administered by the Friends organisation, allowing their members access to all SLM sites for the remainder of 2013. SLM's records show that the Friends had approximately 3,600 memberships at this time, as opposed to the figure of 8,000 stated by Mr Watts in his testimony.

When SLM discontinued association with the Friends, SLM did not lose these 3,600 members, as they were not members of SLM in the first place.

Of the \$700,000 in income reported in the Friends' 2012/13 financial statements, the Friends provided SLM with \$62,000 in financial support that year.

On 29 September 2014, SLM announced its own in-house members program. By comparison, the SLM membership program contributed \$213,157 directly to the organisation in the 2018/19 FY and had approximately 3,730 members in June 2019.

With respect to Mr Watts' assertion that \$30 million worth of bequests were withdrawn, we have been unable to locate records of any prospective bequests being formally withdrawn in connection to this action. We are also unable to verify that \$30 million worth of bequests were withdrawn at any point, as was asserted by Mr Watts in his testimony. However, I have been informed anecdotally that there were potential property bequests that did not eventuate around this time but I have been unable to substantiate these claims.