

Submission
No 24

INQUIRY INTO STATE RECORDS ACT 1998 AND THE POLICY PAPER ON ITS REVIEW

Organisation: Society of Australian Genealogists

Date Received: 9 April 2020

The Hon. Shayne Mallard, MLC
Chair, Standing Committee on Social Issues
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

9 April 2020

Reference: SAG090420/Review of the State Records Act 1998 & Historic Houses Act 1980

Dear Mr Mallard

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the consultation of the Review of the State Records Act 1998 and Historic Houses Act 1980. The proposal intends to join two agencies that are utilised by members of the Society of Australian Genealogists (SAG) whose functions we would wish to be enhanced given the value of their collections to family historians.

We would wish to emphasise the point of 'citizen expectations about government accountability and accessibility' is crucial as a principle to endorse this change process. The main concern to be raised for this response is that the policy paper has few details regarding the extent or any changes of public access in the short to medium term for the current collections or resources that have been safeguarded to move to the new Authority. The current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic aside, we would hope that there would be minimal disruption to current levels of access as part of the change activity.

Please note the Society's comments below against the desired four policy outcomes that have been endorsed by the Board this month:

a) That the stories that shape the social, historic & cultural identity of NSW are widely shared & understood

Response from SAG: This concept is fully supported and that high standards of preservation and access are maintained and enhanced with the new Authority.

b) That records of enduring value to the citizens of NSW are managed, preserved & made accessible

Response from SAG: These further synergies provide the control, or transfer of custody, of items or collections to the new Authority under the condition that 'records of enduring value, no longer in active use'. That is, the new Authority would be bound to have these kept and maintained. This is supporting with the proviso that there is provision for items to return to 'business use' to other agencies or organisations which could include short-term loans for exhibitions.

c) That citizens have timely access to records documenting the activities & decisions that shape NSW & the lives of its citizens

Response from SAG: SAG would like to support the points 4. and 5. on page 7 of the policy paper outlining the pragmatic changes to records under a risk assessment model. It is expected that the

agency changes would facilitate expansion and simplification of public access, and at the same time, that digitisation efforts would be increased to provide remote access to those records where online access is possible. Resourcing to build up access capabilities is not addressed and our preference would be to see an overall increased budget to support the online provision and display of records and collection items.

d) That NSW public offices create, keep & protect records as evidence of their activities & decisions.
Response from SAG: SAG would like to extend broad support to this proposed outcome and support the raising of standards of record keeping. The policy paper, however, does not detail how any breaches of recording keeping requirements would be addressed to offer some public transparency – this would be welcome in the establishment of the Authority alongside shared standards of agency recordkeeping which could be shared with other organisations such as ourselves who are responsible for our own collections.

In addition to the above responses, the Society of Australian Genealogists would also like to offer expertise to the new Authority through SAG officer and volunteer support to contribute to any committees or working groups as part of the proposed transition.

Yours sincerely

Melissa Hulbert
President