

**Submission
No 51**

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

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Submission to the Standing Committee on Social Issues.
Review of the *State Records Act, 1998*.

Following the recent release of the *State Records Act, 1998* Review Policy Paper, I wish to convey my concerns with it to the Standing Committee.

The Review was originally to look at strengthening the Act's powers to support digital operations and improve information management across the NSW Government sector. The proposals in the Policy Paper relating to these areas are all sound and should be supported by the Committee.

However, these outcomes have become subsumed by a proposal to roll the State Archives and Records Authority into a larger heritage institution that will manage government records alongside objects, buildings and places of interest. The desired outcome is enhanced 'Storytelling'.

While this administrative change may be convenient for Government, it totally ignores the essential role of records and archives.

Archives are not about Storytelling. They are about democracy, citizens' rights, Government transparency and individual accountability. Archives can contribute to great stories, but that's not what they are created to do.

The State Archives and Records Authority, as evidenced by its name, does two things: it preserves, it documents and it makes available the State's archival collection; it also ensures government records are properly created and maintained today for use now and into the future.

Both these roles are essential. To lump records in with objects, buildings and places of interest reduces the Authority to a body seen merely to collect pretty things. The other essential role of the Authority - the enforcement of standards on government agencies - will be diminished by association. One half of the Authority's work will be severely compromised by the other.

The placement of Archival institutions within heritage bodies has proven ineffective in jurisdictions within Australia and across the world. Archives function best when located within central agencies but with independent status. This allows them to actively pursue their objectives relating to government recordkeeping while also fulfilling a cultural role. The national Archives of both the USA and the UK, for example, are independent agencies. They are effective leaders and promoters of good governance while also being superb storytellers.

The creation, maintenance and accessibility of accurate records, whenever and in whatever format they are created, are essential responsibilities of any democratic Government. These responsibilities should not be buried under 'Storytelling'.

Jenni Stapleton

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