

Submission  
No 52

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

**Organisation:** Records & Information Professionals of Australasia

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Standing Committee on Social Issues  
NSW Parliament

Dear Committee Members

Inquiry into the State Records Act NSW

In response to the call for submissions, consultation was conducted with our New South Wales members. Three broad questions were put to the membership and the following represents RIMPA's views on the proposed changes to the NSW State Records Act.

1. Should the State Archives and Records Authority remain as one single entity?

The majority of the NSW membership felt that the State Archives and Records Authority should remain as a single entity and not merge with Sydney Living Museums.

It is felt that merging these two entities into one single entity would weaken the Authorities independence and their position of authority within NSW government. There would be conflicts of interest and competing funding decisions and potential loss of information that may not have everyday interest for the community and loss of specialised expertise.

The merging of two organisations can jeopardise the focus and aims of each entity as records professionals have clear expectations that the State Archives and Records Authority provide guidance to agencies on the creation, capture and management of business information and planning for future emerging technologies. As a separate entity it is perceived that this aim would be more focused and directly related to business aims and cultural brief.

It was further felt that whilst the two entities did have a shared purpose '*to tell our stories and preserve our collective memory*', the State Archives & Records Authority's main focus was information holdings, rather than built structures as is the focus of Sydney Living Museums. Without the merging of other 'collecting' type institutions, it appears to be a limited approach to bring together agencies to tell stories and preserve our collective memory. Considered the vast amount of information held by State Records & Archives Authority, only a small portion of the State Archives would tell stories and illuminate history of relevance to Sydney Living Museums. The synergies do not seem to warrant merging the two.

To date, there has been much activity to bring agencies on a journey from paper based processes, with strong focus on recordkeeping systems and a little on business systems.

Given the State Archives & Records current positioning, we are not sure they are in a position now or post these amendments to take a leadership role in the broad digital space and if they merge with Sydney Living Museums that moves them further into the cultural mode. Important in many ways, but it leaves the digital landscape and business activities crying out for a compass (or a digital navigation system).

Through collaboration between both agencies, the outcome of *'telling stories and preserving our collective memory'* can still be achieved.

2. Should the Act change to clearly mandate the creation and keeping of records of the activities of public offices?

The membership felt that there was a lack of formal auditing to measure compliance with the existing Act. Although surveys are currently undertaken it was felt a more formal approach was necessary which would also support the agency in confirming they are meeting legislative requirements. The Act needs to be strong and enforceable in relation to the requirement to create and keep records of activities as well as a requirement to preserve and maintain records of enduring value for the people of NSW.

There needs to be a clear definition of agency records and implementation of information governance across the information landscape to ensure capture of all records irrespective of where the information is initially created or held.

It was also felt that a greater emphasis needed to be placed on requirements to make and keep records across all business systems including emerging technologies. Greater focus needs to be placed on Information Governance beyond traditional electronic and records management systems. The State Archives & Records authority should place as equal importance and focus on Information Governance as well as the focus on culture and history.

3. Do you or your organization believe that the current State Records Act meets current citizen and government expectations?

Although it was felt that citizens had access to a lot of information via agency websites and could access other information through the GIPA process, overall the membership felt that the current Act no longer met the expectations of citizens and agencies.



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A continued theme of auditing and non-compliance with the Act was evident. The current Act includes limited and impractical provisions for monitoring and enforcing compliance which as consequence leads to poor practices and destruction and loss of history.

Examples such as the destruction of certain record types by Local Government was raised in response to recent natural disasters and requirements of citizens to gain access to records to rebuild their homes.

Citizens expect accountability through access to records which cannot be achieved while poor or non-compliance practices go unchecked.

A focus on accountability and transparency along with opportunities and risks in managing digital information (e.g. documents, information governance across all systems, social media, data, metadata, migration, system lifecycles (upgrades, integration, decommissioning, recordkeeping and data integrity, long term preservation) is needed.

The National Archives of Australia had done a lot work in that space with digital transition/transformation initiatives DC2020 and Information Management Standard for Australian Government and Information governance and it was felt that the State Archives & Records Authority could leverage off this and they need to take a leadership role in that space.

The issue of the volume of records now being created everyday through digital systems was identified making it more difficult to apply standards for this creation and then more difficult for citizens to access these records, which supports the need for a holistic Information Governance approach.

The topic of access was identified as important along with the competing needs of privacy. A more state wide collaborate updated approach to access to information is required.

Thank you for considering our submission.

Yours sincerely,

Nicole Lewis ARIM  
NSW Branch President