

Submission
No 55

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

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 30 April 2020

Partially
Confidential

Inquiry into the *State Records Act 1998* and the Policy Paper on its review

This submission is a personal submission: I am a freelance Professional Historian / Public Historian working in NSW. My research and work includes extensive oral history projects, curating exhibitions, tours, research and writing history for commercial or not-for-profit and community organisations.

I regularly use State Records and the Library of the Sydney Living Museums.

Support historical perspectives as part of public debates and in government, and the safe-keeping of documentary, environmental and other historical records.

Submission summary

- I support the four policy outcomes.
 1. Stories that shape the social, historical and cultural identity of NSW are widely shared and understood;
 2. Records of enduring value to the citizens of NSW are managed, preserved and made accessible;
 3. Citizens have timely access to records documenting the activities and decisions that shape NSW and the lives of its citizens;
 4. NSW public office create, keep and protect records as evidence of their activities and decisions.
- However it is imperative that responsible formal record keeping of state documentation is properly housed and made available to the public.
- I am also concerned by the lack of any documentation for this review and the slight consultative process.
- The work of State Records is very different to that of Sydney Living Museums and I do not support a combination of these two entities.
- The role of State Archives is to regulate, manage and properly store the records of NSW. Users of and Readers at State Archives (whether professional researchers or family researchers) are all telling stories about NSW. And the role of the expert staff who know the records and guide researchers cannot be overstated.
- The role of Sydney Living Museums is a very different outreach program
- The reduction to 20 years for open access period – I support – however I am very concerned about the records for mental health and hospital patients.
- I cannot support the creation of a new executive agency of State Archives and Sydney Living Museums. Not only are the reforms insubstantial but these two entities offer very different services to the people of NSW.
- Both entities are important but provide different services and should not be combined: securing and maintaining public records is a statutory role which should be maintained as a separate

entity. Interpreting history and telling stories is a separate role which Sydney Living Museums does with exemplary skill.

- I support the Professional Historians' Association's call for a State Historian; the development of a program of annual Archives fellowships to encourage scholarship; and greater support by government for representation of historians to be appointed to government and non-government boards.

Terms of Reference

a) The role and purpose of State Records Authority of NSW and Sydney Living Museums

Storage of and access to the documentation and archives of government agencies is the role of State Records – a very different role from Sydney Living Museums which interprets history particularly through a number of buildings it cares for.

This is a very simplistic summary but these two activities are related but utterly different and should remain separate: the development of exhibitions and publications and interpretation of buildings is a very different role from record keeping.

b) adequacy of the State Records Act

This review of the *State Records Act* is limited and the consultation process inadequate.

c) factors constraining public access to and use of the documentary and material heritage of NSW

Access to the documentary heritage of NSW has been constrained for decades by annual budget cuts and a shameful lack of government commitment to good record keeping.

d) the operation and effect of the proposed reforms

i) effect of reforms on NSW public offices, government agencies etc.

Policy outcome 1, "Stories that shape the social, historical and cultural identity of NSW are widely shared and understood" – is practiced across the professional and personal history research realms – formally and informally.

ii) Whether proposed reforms support digital government

State Records should be playing a leading role across public offices in best practice of record keeping to ensure the preservation of records for the future. The State Records Act needs to work hand in glove with GIPAA to support digital government, public access and the archive.

iii) Whether proposed reforms will increase public knowledge and enjoyment of the stories that shape our social, historical and cultural identity, enhancing social outcomes for the people of NSW

Not every story is joyful ... all are interesting but there are many stories of difficulty and care should be exercised in the way in which access to some are provided – such as mental health institutions, divorce and social welfare.

iv) Whether proposed reforms will enhance the protection of the key cultural assets of NSW

It is unclear how the reforms will demonstrate this! Very little information has been provided wot explain how this will be done, therefore making this impossible to properly comment upon.

In Summary

I do not support the combining of these two entities. I do support increased funding of State Records. And I look forward to further extensive consultation before further decisions are made.

Yours sincerely

– 30 April 2020