

Management Advisory Committee

Note for File: a Report on Recordkeeping in the Australian Public Service

Launch at the National Archives of Australia

Friday 31 August 2007

Address by Ross Gibbs, PSM, Director-General

National Archives of Australia

Opening

Thank you Lynelle and thank you Dr Shergold.

Welcome to the National Archives. I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to you today at the launch of this important report.

We welcome the release of *Note for File* by the Management Advisory Committee. It will form the basis of a new approach by the Archives in our relations with government agencies.

I would just like to acknowledge two people and two agencies here today.

Firstly, Ben Mc Devitt, the CEO of CrimTrac. CrimTrac has recently generated one of the most successful of our Records Authorities. Ben and I signed it at his place just last month. Secondly, I would like to

acknowledge Rob Cornell, because over the past month we have signed three record authorities for agencies in the Attorney General's Department: CrimTrac I have already mentioned, Insolvency Trustee Service, Australia and, mainly because of the security and confidentiality issues, the largest and most complex record authority ever generated – that for the Australian Federal Police which was signed here at the Archives on 8 August. Thank you to the Secretary and everyone here today who was involved in those three very successful projects.

It is appropriate that the launch should take place in our Memory of a Nation exhibition gallery. *Memory of a Nation* illustrates the important consequences of good records management for preserving, interpreting and presenting aspects of our history as a nation. Here are the archives of our nation ranging from first Prime Minister, Edmund Barton's handwritten draft revisions of the constitution during the Federal conventions in the 1890's showing – bringing alive – how our nation's foundation document was created, to a framed photograph of Don Bradman at the first PM's 11 cricket match at Manuka – on the photo wall to your left. You will notice there too, just above the Don, an historic image of a recordkeeper at work.

The Archives has worked closely with the Management Advisory Committee and the Australian Public Service Commission, through our

representative on the working group, Helen Walker, and, more recently, by providing technical and other advice that has informed *Note for File*.

In recent months the Archives has also worked on a number of new products designed to assist departments and agencies to meet their records management responsibilities.

Some of those new products are available here today.

Messages from MAC and other reports

With the business of government increasingly being done by email and other electronic means, with intensive scrutiny from parliamentary committees and the public, it has never been more important to keep and hold information. It is vital to an understanding of the way we make decisions and do our business.

Earlier this month the Ombudsman, Prof. John McMillan - thank you for being here today John - in a very timely report, particularly because of its proximity to today's launch, identified ten lessons for public

administration, the first 'lesson' being 'to maintain accurate, comprehensive and accessible records'. We agree.

Note for File reinforces the message about the importance of good records management and supports recent recommendations from the ANAO - the Australian National Audit Office - that the Archives needs to provide more practical support to help agencies meet their obligations.

I would like to assure Ian Macphee, who is also with us today, that we agree with that too.

In heeding the message of *Note for File*, of the Ombudsman and of the Auditor-General the Archives is adopting a new approach to developing record authorities that does not involve the DIRKS process and is

more practical

more flexible, and involves only a

single submission

We have begun this exercise by stripping almost 100 separate recordkeeping advices from our website and replacing it with three key pieces of advice. This may involve some initial concern for people in my organisation and in agencies. But I think it will be a healthy exercise. From here we begin re-building a new more accessible set of streamlined

recordkeeping advices, in consultation with agencies, on a new Archives website.

This is similar to a message I gave in an address to Pacific Islands Public Service Commissioners in Samoa last month, 'Pacific Recordkeeping for Good Governance'. Thank you Lynelle for providing the opportunity for me to speak at that conference. Based on the National Archives ' recent experience in assisting in the rebuilding of the recordkeeping infrastructure in the Solomon islands, I provided simple business reasons for keeping records accompanied by a simple process for . Preparation of that address for a Pacific Islands audience, and the audience response, helped clarify for me how much we had overcomplicated procedures in Canberra. 'Back to basics' is a simple message but also a necessary and sensible one.

Earlier this year, to provide a sharper recordkeeping focus for the Archives, I established a new branch, the Government Information Management Branch, with the job of reviewing the records management support we provide agencies.

The new Branch has assisted us to develop a new process for obtaining Records Authorities that is more practical and flexible and less resource

intensive than in the past. We are about to begin work with the *National Native Title Tribunal* using this new approach which will, I am certain, become the standard approach underpinning records management across the Australian Government.

We will help agencies make better use of tools and processes already in place to get rid of unnecessary records. Normal Administrative Practice (NAP) and General Disposal Authorities, including the whole-of-government Administrative Functions Disposal Authority - or AFDA - are approaches that can be used now to dispose of many records not required for future use.

We have developed a number of new, practical products to be used in information sessions for records managers starting next month (in September). Please take some of them with you today.

Check-up, our new interactive self-assessment tool to help assess the state of records management in your agency, is our most important new product. It has been trialled and developed in consultation with sixteen agencies across Australia. It will help identify high risk areas that need particular attention.

We have publications outlining the reasons for good records management, and the responsibilities of agencies and individuals. They provide practical guidance at the workplace level for all APS employees.

We plan more face-to-face contact with agencies through training and also our Forums and more regular visits.

More implementation assistance will be offered to help you tailor an approach to the specific circumstances in your agency.

Finally, I intend that the new approach will be less prescriptive and less intrusive; it will be more proactive, more positive, more useful and therefore, I hope, more appreciated. We will focus more on recognising, even congratulating, you when you have done the right thing - rather than correcting, even chastising, you when you perhaps haven't measured up - through an awards scheme acknowledging achievements in recordkeeping by Commonwealth agencies.

What else are we doing?

Many of the Archives products form the basis of international and national standards, such as our electronic document and records management

systems (EDRMS) and metadata standards. I understand that some are being used by the commercial sector for assessing their products.

Microsoft, for example, has recently used our electronic document and records management system (EDRMS) software specifications in an analysis of their Microsoft Office SharePoint (MOSS 2007) product which is being introduced by Commonwealth agencies.

We encourage other commercial providers to do the same thing, because we think it may assist agencies, and us, in making decisions and providing advice about different products. And it may assist the producers too in better tailoring their products to suit our needs.

Together with Australian standards bodies and Archives New Zealand we are working on recordkeeping metadata standards and implementation guidelines. This work is based on the standard previously prepared by the Archives and on our more recent development work.

Next month we are hosting a Digital Futures International Forum at Parliament House, featuring speakers from the US, UK, Sweden, Malaysia, Germany and NZ, as well as from around Australia. Speakers will discuss the future of electronic records – or e-records or digital records – and the

systems we require to manage them. The forum is fully booked, but materials from it will be made available later online.

This interaction with industry and internationally will, I believe, help us keep the Australian Government at the cutting edge of information and records management. But it has to do that while ensuring the most *efficient* and *manageable* solutions for you as Commonwealth agencies.

That needs to be the new lesson both *for* and *from* Australia. We have led in the development of the international records management standards. Now we have to lead in the most intelligent and efficient application of those standards in our offices.

Closing

Again, I welcome the release of this report, *Note for File*, from the Management Advisory Committee. The Archives is ready with a new approach and with new products and services to assist Australian Government agencies meet their recordkeeping obligations.

Thank you.

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