

# Territory Records Advisory Council Minutes

MEETING No.3 of 2012-13

12:30 – 2:00 21 February 2013

Darling Room  
Level 1, 221 London Circuit, CIVIC

## Present

TRAC: Steve Stuckey (Chair), Alyssa Blackburn, Anne Buttsworth, Michael Chisnall, Amanda Harris, David Headon, Rebecca Stubbs, Nicholas Swain, Dani Wickman (Director).

TRO: Rohan Clark (Minutes)

Meeting opened: 12:33pm

## Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. He congratulated Rebecca Stubbs on her appointment as Indigenous Projects Officer for the National Archives of Australia (NAA). Rebecca said she is very much enjoying her new role.

## Agenda Item 1. – Agenda and Apologies

The Agenda was accepted as distributed and there were no apologies.

## Agenda Item 2. – Minutes of previous meetings and business arising

The minutes were accepted after the correction of one typo. Business arising from the minutes was included in other agenda items.

**Resolution Number 1 of Meeting No. 3 2012-13:** Council approved the Minutes of Meeting No.2 2012-13.

## Agenda Item 3. – TRO Updates for Council information – Director's Update (no papers)

The Director reported that the two main topics of her update, a disposal freeze and progress with digital recordkeeping, are included under separate agenda items. There were some other matters:

### Projects arising from the celebration of Canberra's centenary

- TRO has sponsored one issue of the 2013 Canberra and District Historical Society Journal. All papers in that issue make use of the resources of ArchivesACT in some way. The intention is to alert researchers to the range of material that is available, including:
  - A paper by Council member Nick Swain on two bachelor Canberrans employed by Hotel Canberra between 1926 and 1931. The friends used their spare time to traipse over 1300 miles (over 2,000 kms) through ACT, and published their journal in three volumes.
  - A paper on the Duntroon School.
  - A paper on the more recent School Without Walls.
  - A paper by Ted Ling, who is presently producing a Guide to ACT Government Records, on archival research using ACT Government records.
- Ted Ling's Guide to ACT Government Records, which is to be published jointly with the National Library of Australia. It is proposed to launch this Guide at the National

Conference of the Australian Society of Archivists (ASA) to be held in Canberra in October 2013. Unlike the NAA, there is no publicly accessible single database of Territory records, so researchers rely on contact with ACTPS staff. The Guide will provide researchers with greater independence and knowledge of available material.

- Display of the Canberra Coat of Arms, which is presently held by the Commonwealth, in September or October 2013. Discussion with the NAA has suggested that, in addition to a display, the Commonwealth may be prepared to transfer custody of the Coat of Arms to the ACT, and a transfer of ownership may be considered at a later date. The Chair noted that the story of any Coat of Arms is a complex one. David Headon agreed and said that he was not aware of any intensive work on the history of the Canberra Coat of Arms. He will investigate what is available.

#### Projects not directly related to the celebration of Canberra's centenary

- The annual release of 10-year Cabinet records and 20-year general records will occur on Canberra Day, 12 March 2013. With so much already arranged as part of centenary celebrations, there will be little additional fanfare. However a significant service has been possible this year with many of the most interesting Cabinet documents becoming available digitally on the day of release. The Chair thanked Michael Chisnall for his efforts in bringing this initiative to fruition.
- It is desirable to bringing a more strategic focus to the interaction between TRO and ArchivesACT with the public and Government. The Director said she felt that interactions with the TRO and ArchivesACT were somewhat scattergun and opportunistic at present. Some form of "community engagement strategy", for want of a better term, is desirable to enable scarce resources to be concentrated on key groups. Dave Headon pointed out the desirability of promoting a raised awareness of ACT's heritage being distinct from that of the Commonwealth Government. The Chair noted that this was all consistent with initiatives of the ACT Government. Michael Chisnall agreed, referring to the desire, in conjunction with the NBN, to have greater real-time online access to events and services.

#### **Agenda Item 4. – TRO Updates for Council information – Report on ArchivesACT**

Council appreciated the Report on ArchivesACT and thanked the Reference Archivist for the very comprehensive information. Discussion continued from the last meeting about how this monthly report might be made most meaningful and useful for Council. The Director explained that many of the current statistics that are presented are collected for reporting to the Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities (CAARA). Council felt that analysis is the key to the numbers being useful. An indication of which numbers are unusual or any trend in the numbers over time would add meaning. Graphs are appreciated, but they also may need issues to be teased out.

The Director added that attempts to make material more meaningful and topical were underway in the area of the Find of the Month. Previously, the document selected has been allowed to speak for itself without interpretation by ArchivesACT. Now, more information is being added to tell a story associated with the document. Anne Buttsworth suggested selecting a document that was related to topical events that would be likely to attract public attention. The Director said they were moving in such a direction and the April Find would be related to flagpoles, relating these documents to Anzac Day ceremonies. Dani said she was working to re-establish a regular appearance on ABC local radio with the aim of maintaining a raised profile for Government records.

#### **Agenda Item 5. – TRO Updates for Council information – Report on Agency Records**

## Management

Council noted that this is the second of these reports that has been clustered by agency, and thanked the Director for the report. Anne Buttsworth observed that this is an even more difficult report than the report on ArchivesACT to establish meaning and significance from the material.

The Chair suggested it may be useful to record who initiated each meeting as an indication of whether the TRO was monitoring an agency or providing assistance. Council discussed the continuum between assistance and regulation and noted a gradual shift in emphasis in TRO's work. Amanda Harris suggested two break-ups, one by Directorate and another by activity, and noted that TRO provides practical help for agencies to meet their responsibilities. The Director agreed that the two were not mutually exclusive and TRO emphasised helping Directorates make the most of the recordkeeping tools that are provided.

Michael Chisnall referred to a significant gap between paper-based compliance in contrast with the volume of unstructured digital material on network drives.

### **Agenda Item 6.** – TRO Updates for Council information – Progress on Digital Recordkeeping

The Director discussed the next steps in advancing the management and preservation of Territory records following the Government's endorsement of the Digital Recordkeeping Pathway report, which was finalised in August 2011. The Director noted that this is not a project that TRO can develop or progress on its own. Ultimately all agencies must be involved, but in the initial stages, the active support of the Government Information Office and Shared Services ICT is vital. Dani noted the support of the Under Treasurer in achieving the two next steps.

First, the Director identified the need to establish a succinct policy statement supported by Government. By the end of June 2013, Dani hopes to have a strategic policy statement for digital recordkeeping supported by the ACT Public Service Strategic Board (of Directors-General). Michael Chisnall noted that the Head of the Public Service, Andrew Cappie-Wood, is creating a four-year framework of priorities. Michael said that digital recordkeeping sat within the concept of Canberra as a connected, wired, modern city. Digital records management is part of a digital city initiative, and is not simply nice to have, but an essential enabler.

The Chair and the Director agreed that TRO has the mandate to lead the way on digital recordkeeping, and has support for this role widely within the ACTPS. Michael said that he believed that people understood that good digital records management was essential and was one of the building blocks of creating a modern, digital, well-connected city. Rather, a problem lay in people not knowing how to implement it.

The Director agreed, and outlined the second necessary step of developing an overarching strategy for the development of digital recordkeeping systems in the ACT.

Council discussed the desirability of establishing a Standing Committee within the ACTPS to oversee digital recordkeeping. It was felt that a separate committee may be less well placed and it may be better to place the responsibility on an existing committee.

Council discussed the need to reinforce with the Strategic Board the strategic importance of digital recordkeeping in achieving the Government's broader goals of creating a connected Canberra.

### **Agenda Item 7.** – TRO Updates for Council information – The Australasian Digital Recordkeeping Initiative (ADRI)

The Director discussed the importance to the ACT of being a part of national developments in digital records management, despite ACT's limited resources to contribute.

The Chair noted that Australia was leading the way in creating an integrated nation-wide

recordkeeping framework. ACT is able to benefit greatly by picking up an accepted strategic framework.

**Agenda Item 8. – TRO Updates for Council information – Proposed ‘Age Cut-off’ Policy**

The Director discussed the important issue of an age cut-off, so that all records before the set date would be retained as Territory records without appraisal. Dani noted that it was not especially urgent. Council discussed the matter briefly. The Chair pointed to the difficulty of exponential increases in the number of records, the storage of which needed to be paid for by agencies. The Chair asked each Council member to bring to the next meeting a statement of less than two lines of a preferred method for dealing with the problem. The matter was adjourned.

**Agenda Item 9. –Records Disposal Schedules – Protection of Records relevant to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse**

The Chair congratulated the Director in moving so quickly, comprehensively and succinctly to establish a freeze on records that may be relevant to the Commission. Amanda Harris said that the very comprehensiveness of the freeze made it difficult for agencies to know which records should not be disposed of. She argued that further guidance was needed in the form of identification of classes of records whose disposal was frozen. At present not enough is known to “reasonably foresee” anything about which records the Commission will require. She suggested that the broader freeze could remain in place for perhaps 12 months, by which time some practical advice may be available as to which records will need to be retained until the conclusion of the Commission. The Director indicated that the TRO would continue to provide advice to agencies on the operation and implications of the freeze, and was exploring sources of external advice such as through the Government Solicitor’s Office or the Royal Commission itself.

Anne Buttsworth pointed out that we may be no wiser in a year’s time. The Chair said that it has been perhaps easier with some previous Commissions, which had a more distinct focus such as asbestos or the stolen generation. From the point of view of agencies, they are better to retain records if in doubt, because to have destroyed, after the date of the freeze, a relevant record is likely to be viewed most seriously.

The Chair asked that the topic remain on the agenda for the next meeting.

**Agenda Item 10. – Records Advice No. 71 – Free Text Titling**

This Records Advice had been redrafted following earlier comments from Council, to make the Advice more applicable to a lay reader. Alyssa Blackburn argued that the material was useful, but was more suited to training manual than a formal Advice. She and Amanda Harris argued that a list of acronyms, such as business unit names, would be a more useful exercise, although a different issue from free text titling. The Director also expressed doubts about the importance of this Advice, and agreed to set it aside until more work had been done on defining the TRO’s strategic communications with government.

**Next meetings**

9 May 2013

Meeting closed: 2:20 pm

Minutes confirmed on: 9 / 05 / 2013

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Steve Stuckey (Chair)