

# Report of the Director of Territory Records

## Introduction

Section 33 (1)(f) of the *Territory Records Act 2002* (the Act) requires the Director of Territory Records to report annually to the Assembly on the application of the Act. The Act applies to every agency of the ACT Government and establishes a records regime that regulates the way that the records of government are created, managed and made available for public access.

During 2008–09, agencies continued to implement better records management practices and procedures to meet their obligations under the Act. Additional focus was provided in a report by the ACT Auditor-General into 'Records Management in ACT Government Agencies' (No. 3/2008). The Director supported the work of agencies in improving recordkeeping practices in response to the Auditor-General's review. He liaised with the Territory Records Advisory Council, government agencies and other organisations and individuals to facilitate greater understanding of records management practices, to identify better-practice procedures and to review legislation and codes as required.

The opening of older ACT Government records to public access, which commenced on 1 July 2008, continued to absorb agencies' efforts as the processes for access became firmly established.

At the launch of 'The Bush Capital' by Roger Pegrum in December 2008, the Chief Minister and Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Mr Jon Stanhope, MLA, noted that:

"All histories are mixed. All stories are complex. Ours is no exception. And by and large ours is an untold history. The ACT Government believes every Canberran should have opportunities to learn about our city's past and provenance."

Public awareness of the availability of ACT Government records is increasing and it is pleasing to observe the enthusiasm of local researchers in having this access.

## Roles and Responsibilities

### The Director of Territory Records

In carrying out the broad range of functions listed in Section 33 of the Act, the Director works closely with each agency's Chief Executive and nominated Records Manager. The Director's role includes:

- Providing advice on better records management practice
- Advising on the development of the agency's Records Management Program
- Reporting on the agency's compliance with their program
- Coordinating the locating of files to meet public requests for access.

### The Territory Records Advisory Council

The third Territory Records Advisory Council met four times during 2008–09. Chaired by Mr Steve Stuckey, other members are Ms Veronica Pumpa (Deputy Chair), Ms Jill Caldwell, Ms June Penny, Dr David Headon, Mr Greg Wood, Ms Rebecca Stubbs, Mr Andrew Kefford and Mr David Wardle.

The Council's role is to advise the Director. The Director benefits from the extensive records management

experience and deep commitment to the role of recordkeeping in good governance possessed by members of the Council, who represent a broad spectrum of stakeholder interests in our community. The wide-ranging advice of Council includes the development and review of standards and codes for records management, the disposal of government records and the preservation of records about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage in the ACT. Minutes of meetings are available on the Territory Records Office website.

### The Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities

The Director represents the ACT at the bi-annual meeting of Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities to ensure that ACT records management remains consistent with other Australian jurisdictions and Australian better practice. Recent issues discussed have included the adequate retention of records held on behalf of Governments by contractors and the provision of public access to records.

### The Territory Records Office

The Territory Records Office (TRO) carries out the work program of the Director of Territory Records. In addition to developing records management Standards, Guidelines and Advices, the TRO:

- Provides advice to agencies
- Maintains the whole-of-government records management thesaurus
- Provides support for the Territory Records Advisory Council
- Assists members of the public in finding records of interest to them.

## Issues for ACT Government Records Management

### Auditor-General's Report

On 26 June 2008, a Performance Audit Report (No.3/2008) by the ACT Auditor-General, 'Records Management in ACT Government Agencies', was tabled in the Legislative Assembly. The purpose of the audit was:

"to determine whether agencies' record keeping policies, systems and procedures are in accordance with relevant legislation, government policies and accepted record keeping standards and principles".

Audits were undertaken in a number of agencies, and included the role of the TRO in overall records management.

The Report provided a valuable, independent view of the significant progress made by all agencies since the passage of the *Territory Records Act 2002*. At the same time, the Report found that no agency consistently demonstrated better practice. The Government's response to the Committee made clear that continuing improvement in the management of Territory records is required. All agencies and the TRO are involved in upgrading recordkeeping processes.

### Compliance

The Director's role is to monitor agencies' levels of compliance with their own Records Management Programs. In the lead-up to the commencement of Part 3 of the Act on 1 July 2008, providing public access to records, the Director's compliance focus was on agency preparation for public access. This has continued in 2008–09.

As part of the agency Annual Report process, the Principal Officer of each Territory agency must report on their agency's compliance with the Act. This provides another assessment of the implementation and operation of the agency's Records Management Program and establishes the basis by which an agency makes and keeps full and accurate records of its activities.

To assist agencies with their records management practices, two new Standards for Records Management and their associated Guidelines were issued during the year. These relate to the 'Physical storage of records' and to 'Business continuity and records management'.

The consolidated ACT Government records management thesaurus, which ensures consistency of records titling across all agencies, was further expanded by the TRO. Agencies invested time and resources in developing new Records Disposal Schedules and those submitted by ACT Health, DET, JACS and ACTEW Corporation were approved.

The Director works closely with agencies' nominated Records Managers. A Records Managers Forum meets six times a year to provide updates from the Director and the sharing of information between agencies. In addition, the Director and TRO staff members are available to address queries that arise at other times.

### Review of the Standards for Records Management and the Act

Having been in operation for five years, it was considered important to review the first five Standards for Records Management to ensure they are still robust and fit-for-purpose. An evaluation was

conducted by an independent consultancy firm and input was obtained from all agencies, the Records Managers Forum and the Territory Records Advisory Council. To review the effectiveness of each Standard also required an assessment of the associated Guideline. The review also included the whole-of-government records management thesaurus and the Records Disposal Schedule for administrative records. The revised Standards have now been notified.

Section 58 of the *Territory Records Act 2002* requires the Minister to review the operation of the Act as soon as practicable after 1 July 2009 and report to the Assembly within a year. Preparations have now commenced for this Review.

### Public Access to Records

Since 1 July 2008, members of the public have maintained a right of access to government records that are over 20 years old. All records are open unless subject to a Section 28 Declaration under the Act.

In its first year of operation, Part 3 of the Act, giving public access to records, has operated successfully; with an increasing number of researchers requesting and arranging access to the records they require. The number of finding aids to ACT Government records was expanded during the year and a start was made in developing research guides to provide a greater level of information on a range of subjects.

The 'What's New' page of the TRO website lists new finding aids. It also provides a 'Find of the Month'; an interesting piece of information that has come to light in the course of identifying government records. Recent examples have focused on the 1962 compulsory chest x-ray program for tuberculosis,

a Ginninderra school teacher from the 1920s, car registration papers from the 13th Governor General of Australia, Sir William Slim, the Ethos statue in Civic Square and the coat of arms of the City of Canberra.

### 100th Anniversary Celebrations – 2013

The Director gave consideration to proposing an ACT Centenary Archives and Heritage Centre as a project to celebrate the centenary of Canberra in 2013. The Centre would provide the physical infrastructure to ensure the ongoing preservation of appropriate records and objects in the custody of ACT Government agencies.

It would also build on the initiatives of records legislation in 2002 and public access to older records in 2008, by ensuring the preservation and continued community access to government archival records.

### Future Directions

Two priorities must be addressed during 2009–10. The first is the legislative requirement to review the *Territory Records Act 2002* and the second is the continuing implementation of the Auditor-General's recommendations. Ongoing consultation with all stakeholders, including the Territory Records Advisory Council, will ensure the ongoing consistency, rigour and robustness of ACT's records regime.

For more information:

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