

Territory Records Advisory Council Minutes

MEETING No.4 of 2012-13

9 May 2013

Darling Room
Level 1, 221 London Circuit, CIVIC

Present

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

TRO: Rohan Clark (Minutes)

Meeting opened: 12:40

Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Agenda Item 1. – Agenda and Apologies

The Agenda was accepted. Apologies were accepted from Alyssa Blackburn and Amanda Harris.

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

Resolution Number 1 of Meeting No. 4 2012-13: Council approved the Minutes of Meeting No.3 2012-13.

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

The Director reported on a number of matters that have occurred since the last Council meeting.

TRO had received its first ever questions at Annual Report Estimates hearings. Brendan Smyth MLA asked about:

- A permanent building for ACT archives. It is not included in the present Budget, but the Minister did not rule out such a development in later years.
- Progress with a guide to Territory records. The Director was able to inform Council that Ted Ling's Guide to Commonwealth Records of the ACT is scheduled to be launched at 6pm on 16 October 2013 at a conference of the Australian Society of Archivists. It is hoped the Minister will be able to attend.
- Updating the records regime. The revised Standard 1 is now available on the TRO website.

The Director attended a meeting of the Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities (CAARA) in Hobart on 14-15 March 2013. The meeting was the first to include a half-day joint session with the Heads of Australian public libraries, where the focus was on sharing of knowledge for the benefit of both types of organisation. As the previous Director had found, CAARA operates in a highly collegial way with an emphasis on sharing information and working to raise the standards of government recordkeeping. The Australian Digital Records Initiative (ADRI) was a clear example of this, and the help provided to the ACT in establishing its Standard No.9 – Records Digitisation and Conversion was another.

Both the TRO and ArchivesACT websites have been updated in line with the "Single Public

Face” of the ACT Government. The websites now comply with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2.0 (WCAG2.0) to assist people with disabilities to more easily access web content. Council expressed its thanks to Mark Dawson for his considerable efforts in achieving the upgrades.

The annual release of Territory records associated with Canberra Day was relatively low key, given the range of other events in the Centennial year. Regrettably, the hoped-for digital release of some records at the time of the paper-based release did not eventuate. It is hoped to have this in place for the 2014 release. Even so, the records release achieved coverage in The Canberra Times and on ABC television.

The Director reported that one staff member is undertaking a two-month exchange with the Community Services Directorate while the CSD Records Manager is on leave. This has benefits to both agencies as CSD will have greater access to TRO expertise and TRO will gain first-hand experience of working with the regulatory regime it has created. It is hoped that other such opportunities may arise.

TRO is working with JACS, and the Parliamentary Counsel’s Office in particular, on a work management tool based on adaptation of a system developed by State Records of NSW. The Director acknowledged this cooperation. Discussions with JACS have also focused on revising the security classification of emails.

The April [?] 2013 issue of the Journal of the Canberra and District Historical Society was sponsored by TRO as a Centenary initiative. All papers in this edition make use of Territory records as source material. The Director acknowledged the work of David Wardle in this proposal. Nick Swain thanked TRO on behalf of the Society, saying that the higher quality paper and printing did justice to some of the maps and other documents reproduced. Greater community awareness following the publication has led to increased inquiries about archives.

Finally, the May Find of the Month was medallions issued to students on ACT self-Government. The find received acknowledgement in an article by Ian Warden.

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

Council thanked the ACT archivist for the report and noted changes in its content, which benefit both TRO and users. There was discussion of the new and useful functional classification of enquiries. The Director said she was happy to receive further feedback from Council.

Agenda Item 5. – TRO Updates for Council information – Proposed ‘Age Cut-off’ policy

Despite the absence of Alyssa and Amanda, Council energetically discussed the merits of the proposal. It was quickly agreed that consideration should continue and that a final resolution was not urgent.

The Chairman opened a discussion about an appropriate date with a proposal that any record created before 1 January 1966 may be retained without further sentencing. However, if large quantities of records are discovered that do not appear to be of value, their disposal could be discussed with TRO. He explained that there were fewer records prior to 1966 as (a) the growth in Government functions of the Public Service in Canberra prior to 1966 was not great, and (b) records duplication technology was not advanced (e.g. photocopiers).

There was discussion of other dates, including 1974 with the establishment of a fully elected ACT Legislative Assembly, 1959 with the commencement of the NCDC, 1940 as in NSW, 1939 with the start of WW2, and 1938 with the adoption of the name of Australian Capital Territory.

The Director pointed out that the selection of a date was also related to perceptions of how well the process of records management was carried out. Council recognised the significant cost of subsequent sentencing of records that had not been filtered at all on creation, as sometimes

happened with older records. There was also a view that an age cut-off may sit more easily with the community if there is some symbolism in the date, so the 1959 establishment of the NCDC may be preferable to 1966. The apocryphal story was re-told of one Government agency whose head had determined that, for the move to Canberra, there would be a maximum of five truckloads of files; anything above that arbitrary limit was destroyed.

Mick Chisnall raised the case for keeping it all. Councillors did not endorse this view on the basis that it (a) encourages laziness in filtering useful material that should be retained, (b) imposes greater costs and risks, both with storage and with updating and transferring between digital media, and (c) swamps later generations with details that obscure items of importance. The collecting and using community cannot cope with the zillions of terabytes of data that we are able to collect. Council recognised that it is impossible to get the balance completely right as society's priorities change so there will always be regrets about what was not saved, and it is a lottery as to which material will survive for millennia. The question is how to maintain the authenticity and integrity of what is retained within time and monetary costs that are acceptable.

Council asked the Director to raise the matter of an age cut-off with Records Managers and to return to the next meeting with a report of their issues and concerns.

Agenda Item 6. – TRO Updates for Council information – Report on Agency Records Management

Council thanked the Director for the Report on Agency Records Management, which was noted. There was a brief discussion of common software platforms in use for records management.

Agenda Item 7. – TRO Updates for Council information – Draft Policy on Digital Recordkeeping for the ACTPS

Council noted the draft Digital Recordkeeping Policy of the ACTPS and thanked the Director. Council appreciated the brevity of the Policy, recognising the range of supporting documentation that is available. The Director explained that acceptance of this high-level Policy would be a precursor to the development of a whole of government recordkeeping framework, which would involve more detailed negotiations with agencies and would address preferred technological approaches to achieving the required policy outcomes.

Mick Chisnall said he welcomed the development of such a policy, and the necessity for greater digital focus is recognised at political and Senior Executive level. He spoke of the big cultural change that is required, and noted that there is not currently a unified and funded approach despite it no longer being a “nice to have” add-on, but rather is now business critical.

Council expressed the view that funding will follow acceptance of the necessity to create, manage and preserve records digitally. Young staff members now expect all data “from the year dot” to be immediately available digitally, and this is becoming the norm. Council expressed the hope that complete digital records (ie creation to disposal) will be preserved in the near future.

The Director told Council that the draft Policy was working its way up the approval chain, ultimately asking all Directorates to accept the policy. Council asked to be kept informed.

Agenda Item 8. – TRO Updates for Council information – Annual Report Directions

The Director reported that in this Centenary year, the Annual Report Directions, to which all agencies must adhere, have been little changed. The only change in terms of Territory Records is to require each agency to provide details of how a member of the public could inspect its Records Management Program. Dani said that there had not been a comprehensive review since the access provisions came into effect on 1 July 2008. She is hoping to undertake a wider review for next year's Directions.

Council discussed possible changes in light of the different audiences for Annual Reports and asked to be kept informed. Council urged the Director to work closely with Chief Minister's Directorate to ensure that adequate records management compliance indicators were included.

Agenda Item 9. – Records Disposal Schedule – Health Treatment and Care

Agenda Item 10. – Records Disposal Schedule – Property Management

Agenda Item 11. – Records Disposal Schedule – Student Services

Agenda Item 12. – Records Disposal Schedule – Teacher Quality

The Director introduced four draft Records Disposal Schedules (RDSs) explaining that she was continuing with the two stage endorsement process that Council is familiar with. So Council sees a draft RDS and has time to comment and liaise with TRO out of session if necessary before endorsement is sought at a later Council meeting.

Of the four RDSs, Property Management and Student Services are amended RDSs, while Health Treatment and Care and Teacher Quality RDSs are new. Council expressed the view that RDSs are a major emphasis in its work and should not be rushed. Some RDSs had been presented to Council on three occasions and on all occasions a better RDS had resulted, which benefits Council, TRO and the agency. In some instances agency representatives had been given an opportunity to address Council's concerns in person in what is an iterative improvement process.

Council commended Health on the production of the RDS on Health Treatment and Care, recognising the extended development period that has already been required. Council members will provide comments out of session to the Director on all four RDSs.

Agenda Item 13. – Notifiable Instruments Amendment List

Council noted the Notifiable Instruments Amendment List.

Next meetings

4 July 2013

Meeting closed: 2:35pm

Minutes confirmed on 04/07/2013

_____ Steve Stuckey (Chair)