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**Submission to the APS Review**

***­The Australian Government***

***Independent Review of the APS: Priorities for Change***

7th May 2019

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# **About the National Archives of Australia**

The **National Archives of Australia** is an Executive Agency in the Attorney-General’s portfolio, established under the *Archives Act 1983*. It is deemed a non-corporate entity under the Public *Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013.*

The National Archives is the Commonwealth Institution in Australia's representative democracy that sets the records management policy and standards that must be met by Commonwealth Government agencies in the creation, retention, maintaining, preservation and disposal of government records. This is to ensure the authentic and essential records – including data in digital form – are created, received, secured and maintained, and preserved as the authentic evidence and memory of Government activity and decisions, remaining accessible and re-usable, now and in the future.

The definition of ‘Commonwealth records’ in the Archives Act covers all information in digital and non-digital formats that is created, used or received as part of Government business. As a result, all data, including email, social media content, datasets, geospatial information, audio-visual and business-related information in any other format constitutes the records of the Commonwealth.

The National Archives is a recognised and respected leader in the international archival community. It works, collaborates, learns from and shares archival knowledge and experience with the national, regional and international archival community, including with Australian state and territory government archives, to evolve the role and capability of archives, and developing digital information management capability in agencies in the digital age.

The National Archives of Australia is the largest archival institution in Australia. It is the only integrity and cultural institution with a national footprint, with public access and storage facilities in every state and territory capital city. It is the memory of our nation. The records of the Commonwealth, collected since Federation, tell the story of Australia and its people. The collection is the authentic and essential evidence of Australian Government activities and decisions that shaped our nation and the lives of its citizens. The National Archives receives, secures, keeps, maintains, preserves and makes accessible priceless records for the benefit of current and future generations.

Australia, as a member state of UNESCO, supports the implementation of the Universal Declaration on Archives, adopted in September 2010. The Declaration states:

*Archives record decisions, actions and memories. Archives are a unique and irreplaceable heritage passed from one generation to another. Archives are managed from creation to preserve their value and meaning. They are authoritative sources of information underpinning accountable and transparent administrative actions. They play an essential role in the development of societies by safeguarding and contributing to individual and community memory. Open access to archives enriches our knowledge of human society, promotes democracy, protects citizens' rights and enhances the quality of life.*

The preservation and accessibility of authentic government records is necessary for the administrative accountability, integrity and transparency of our representative democracy. It supports better decision making, it upholds the fundamental rights and entitlements of individuals, and provides all Australians with a connection to the nation's, as well to their personal history and identity.

The National Archives functions are foundational to the work of the Australian Public Service, ensuring that information created or received across the Commonwealth Government is appropriately managed to meet contemporary business needs, ensure transparency and accountability and is available and accessible into the future.

The National Archives is a trusted source of government information.

**Functions**

The functions of the National Archives, as summarised in brief below, are set out in full in section 5(2) of the *Archives Act 1983*, include:

* overseeing Australian Government record-keeping by determining standards and providing advice to Australian Government agencies for management of government information
* imposing recordkeeping obligations in respect of Australian Government records, which covers all Australian Government data and information, in all formats (digital and non-digital), made or used in the course of government activity
* determining the material that constitutes the archival resources of the Commonwealth
* ensuring the conservation and preservation of the existing and future archival resources of the Commonwealth
* encouraging, facilitating, publicising and sponsoring the use of archival material; and
* making Commonwealth records available for public access.

**National Archives Vision**

To be one of the world's leading archives in the digital age, democratising access to the authentic and essential evidence of the actions and decisions of the Commonwealth Government.

**National Archives Mission**

To connect Australians with their identity and history through our stewardship of Australian Government records.

**Submission**

The **National Archives of Australia** (the National Archives) is pleased to provide a submission to the *Independent Review: Priorities for Change* with respect to specific key functions it performs across government, under the *Archives Act 1983*.

The National Archives supports strategic and essential change across the public service to better manage business, government and community needs and expectations with respect to the creation, management, preservation and access to government information.

The responses below address priorities where the National Archives believes it can best assist to strengthen the proposals.

# **Priority: Strengthen the culture, governance and leadership model**

### Common purpose and vision that unites and inspires the APS

### How can we strengthen the proposal / what is missing?

Systemic information and data management problems affecting rights and entitlements of citizens and potentially damaging trust in government are repeatedly identified in Government inquiries and audits. The Australian National Audit Office identified a number of opportunities for improvements in information management through three audits undertaken in one quarter alone[[1]](#footnote-1).

The proposal could be strengthened by highlighting information and data governance as a key enabler for the APS to deliver successful outcomes. After people, information and data is an agency’s most valuable asset. An APS vision must inspire all APS staff, including leaders to value and manage their information and data assets.

### How do we ensure lasting change?

For lasting change to occur the APS needs a shared vision that includes a clear statement about the need for trusted information and data with a clear link to contemporary information and data management principles.

### Secretaries Board driving outcomes across Government

### How can we strengthen this proposal / what is missing?

Information and data management capability is a common challenge across all Government agencies. It is fundamental to their accountability and transparency of decisions, and delivery on legislated responsibilities. In a complex information and data policy environment that extends across multiple agencies – there is a need for more a more integrated approach to solving common problems.

The National Archives is currently engaging with a number of key information policy related agencies to develop a whole-of-Government information policy from 2021. It is an opportunity to create a more holistic information and data policy environment that will build upon the success of previous National Archives policies, including the [Digital Continuity 2020 Policy](http://www.naa.gov.au/information-management/digital-transition-and-digital-continuity/digital-continuity-2020/index.aspx) (2015) and the [Digital Transition Policy](http://www.naa.gov.au/information-management/digital-transition-and-digital-continuity/digital-transition-policy/index.aspx) (2011).

We recognise that the Secretaries Board already has broad oversight over digital transformation and public data agendas – we propose this could be extended to consider the broader information and data policy landscape, so as to optimise performance and productivity outcomes across the APS.

### How do we ensure lasting change?

* **Leading by example demonstrating that** that professionals working across agencies must collaborate to achieve a common vision.
* **A unified strategy** that supports the above.
* **Clarity on who leads areas of digital transformation** at both agency and initiative level (who does what and how it all fits together).

# **Priority: Build a flexible APS operating model**

### Networked enabling systems and common processes across the service

### How can we strengthen the proposal / what is missing?

*Relates to: A stable spine of common digital platforms and policy frameworks that can operate across the APS for core enabling services, including human resources, finance, ICT and data sharing.*

This proposal would be strengthened with the explicit inclusion of information and data related policy frameworks. It is critical for the APS to build an [interoperable environment](http://www.naa.gov.au/information-management/Building-interoperability/interoperabilitykeythemes/index.aspx) that spans across **business, security, legal, semantic** and **technical capabilities. The potential for the loss of government information is real – as result of poor or non-interoperability and obsolescence of software or hardware – this represents a critical threat to future access to government information.**

The National Archives’ Digital Continuity 2020 Policy calls for information, systems and processes to be interoperable by 31 December 2020. The Archives provides guidance and supporting tools and advice to help enable interoperability of Australian government data and information.

### How do we ensure lasting change?

**Strengthen requirements for** information and data standards (e.g. the Information Management Standard, metadata standards, controlled vocabularies and system requirements). Information and data standards are also critical to ensure that evidence is adequate to support genuine transparency and accountability (this supports the Priority for *Genuine transparency and accountability for delivering outcomes for Australians*).

# **Priority: Invest in capability and talent development**

### Professionalised functions across the service to deepen expertise

### How can we strengthen this proposal / what is missing?

*Relates to: The Professions Model*

Information and data management should be identified as a key enabling function and must be as high a priority as the management of our people and budget. The National Archives champions information and data management capability in the APS.

All staff and leaders responsible for its management must be as well informed and professionally skilled as those in any other professional role.

### How do we ensure lasting change?

The pace of change makes this a challenge and requires the adoption of new collaborative approaches that extend beyond the confines of the APS to support today’s information and data professionals. Further collaboration with the tertiary and VET sectors is needed to develop sustainable study options that deliver flexible learning opportunities for the public sector.

Professional associations also need to play a significant role as they often already provide certification through continuing professional development programs. These use contemporary and internationally relevant material which can be quickly adapted to build awareness of important trends, new legislation and advances in technology that represent possible risks and opportunities for government business and service delivery.

In recognition of the importance of strong leadership and decision making driving digital transformation in Government, the National Archives seeks to raise the exposure of Chief Information Governance Officers to contemporary information and data management practice and innovative technologies through membership with professional associations.

1. [Australian National Audit Office. Insights from reports tabled October to December 2017: Recordkeeping](https://www.anao.gov.au/work/audit-insights/insights-reports-tabled-october-december-2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)