Finance and Public Administration References Committee
Inquiry into digital delivery of government services – 14 March 2018

Question on Notice

Response to Question on Notice from **Teressa Ward, Assistant Director-General, National Archives of Australia.**

Q14: Senator Singh

You talk about the importance of information being managed as a strategic asset of government, and if it's not then it's more likely to be fragmented and out of date. Are there any specific examples you can share with the committee of where it has ended up being fragmented?

I don't mind you taking that on notice, if there is a specific example.

Response

A number of Government reports over the past few years have demonstrated cases where fragmented information management leads to poor administration and decision making.

For example, in the Australian National Audit Office report, Records Management in Health - 2015: https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/records-management-health, the following findings were established:

> 13. Prior to implementing TRIM EDRMS, Health did not undertake any analysis of which of its business systems potentially stored official records, and the department continues to use a number of other recordkeeping systems such as the common shared drive. This situation continues notwithstanding Health's decision to make TRIM EDRMS the only recognised records management system within the department.
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> Creation, storage and destruction of records
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> 21. The ANAO observed numerous instances of duplicated documents created and stored within the TRIM EDRMS, including drafts and different versions of the same document. Without any clear indicators or titling, this makes locating and identifying the final versions of documents difficult. Further, Health had not issued guidance to staff on the sentencing of digital records, to facilitate the authorised deletion of documents stored on TRIM EDRMS.

A further example may be found in the comprehensive audit by the Australian National Audit Office across then then Departments of Customs, Immigration and Treasury. It's relevant to note that the fragmentation of the information made the Machine of Government changes on the way to what is now Home Affairs a little more difficult. Records Management in – 2012 https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/records-management-australian-public-service

The finding established was:

> 16. The large majority of the agencies' records were created, captured and/or managed in the agencies' records management and other systems. This included paper and electronic

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systems. Each agency maintained a core records management system which supported the management and destruction or transfer of records captured in the system, although there was scope to improve the use and performance of these systems. Many other electronic business systems that were not identified and functioning as 'records management systems' were also used by the agencies to create, capture and manage records. These systems did not generally meet legal requirements relating to the management, and destruction or transfer of records. **The use of such systems also created a risk that inaccurate or incomplete information could be accessed and used when making decisions, and acquitting legal and policy requirements, such as responding to freedom of information requests.**

The Report of the Royal Commission into the Home Insulation Program in 2014 also noted the consequences of inadequate record keeping, especially for digital records. It noted that emails and other documentation of decisions should have been recorded securely. The Report (section 14.16.12) stated that:

> (the)…deficiencies (in record keeping)…are very likely exacerbated by the Machinery of Government changes that have occurred since 2010, as well as the lack of compatibility between the various records management systems used by different departments. In conclusion, I suggest that there would be merit in efforts to move towards a whole-of-Government record-keeping system.

http://www.homeinsulationroyalcommission.gov.au/documentation/documents/reportoftheroyalcommissionintothehomeinsulationprogram.pdf

While all of these findings are from previous years it is apparent through the Archives' *Check-up Digital* annual survey that a number of agencies are still dealing with the legacy of these practices. The survey enables the agencies to self-assess against a series of questions on their level of digital maturity. The most recent survey shows that almost 40 per cent (down from 46 per cent in 2015) of agencies stating they have not implemented a program for assessing, keeping, migrating or destroying their digital information. Additionally, over half (52.4 per cent) of agencies reported in 2016 that they lacked the business processes and systems to enable the migration (transfer) of relevant digital information to the Archives. Also of concern is the low number of agencies which have not identified the cost-benefits of managing information digitally, with just 2.4% doing so in 2016.