

Ms Kirsten Livermore MP
Chair
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Submission No. 01.5



(NAA Mitchell)

Date: 25/02/13

Dear Ms Livermore

Proposed new National Archives Preservation Facility (NAPF)

I refer to questions raised at the hearing of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works (the Committee) on 15 February 2013 in relation to the NAPF project.

After discussions with the Department of Finance and Deregulation (Finance) following the hearing I can advise that there is agreement that the Net Present Value for leasing the fitout/shelving or buying it upfront is the same, using assumptions consistent with the original business case, when the comparison is done on a consistent base year and consistent treatment of project costs. I understand Finance has written to you separately with regard to this matter.

In response to the Committee's question with regard to the 'cost downsides' of doing nothing or not proceeding with the NAPF, I can advise that at the time of the business case preparation the Archives expected its Canberra facilities to be full by 2015. Current calculations are that the existing Mitchell facility may now be full earlier than 2015, possibly a year earlier in 2014, if we do not slow down the expected rate of transfers from agencies to the Archives.

If the Archives is unable to secure the NAPF and refurbishment of its Mitchell facility it will not be able to continue to accept records in the ACT. This will mean that either the agencies continue to store the records on their own premises at a cost to the agency or for the records to be moved to the Archives' State repositories that still have some limited space available in Sydney, Perth, and Brisbane. Clearly such dispersed storage arrangements will increase the cost either to the Archives or the agencies for transporting records interstate; this cost will be compounded by the backlog of significant paper records continuing to grow at 5.5 shelf km of records per year.

The Archives collection is significant and was valued at \$1.4 billion as at 30 June 2012. The ongoing value of the Commonwealth's archival collection is premised on the records of national significance being identified, transferred, and available for preservation so that they can be made available for future Australians. In 2011-12, 2.4 million records were accessed by the public either online, in our reading rooms or via the national reference service. There were some 6 million unique visits to the Archives' websites during 2011-12. The continued storage of records of national significance by agencies may put the records at risk as they are

likely to not be stored in optimal environmental conditions or necessarily available for preservation. In addition, the inefficient transfer of Commonwealth records will complicate the timely access of records to the public. This will become more acute as the access regime is phased from 30 years to 20 years between 2011 and 2021.

To demonstrate the above in dollar terms the Archives 2010 and 2011 surveys of agencies identified a backlog of records being held in agencies of 1,364 shelf kms of records (with 165 shelf kms of records of national significance) estimated by agencies at a cost of some \$200 million per annum. As stated above, the records of national significance are growing at an expected rate of 5.5 shelf kms per year. If the Archives is unable to commence to take the 165 shelf kms of records of national significance agencies would have to continue to pay the associated cost for storing the records, estimated at \$24.2m per annum, compounded by \$800,000 per annum for the estimated 5.5 shelf kms growth per annum.

The Government's Digital Transition Strategy recognises that it is no longer sustainable for the taxpayer or the Commonwealth for agencies to continue to create paper records. The Archives, in consultation with key stakeholders has developed a Digital Continuity Plan to provide practical guidance to agencies on the management of digital information for as long as it is needed. To better manage the Commonwealth's digital information the Archives will need to expand its digital archive capability, and storage and handling capacity. The NAPF will provide the Archives with the opportunity to design and build a preservation facility with the necessary infrastructure to meet this capability.

Unfortunately, delays in the NAPF project will delay the Archives' ability to further assist Agencies in achieving savings through the better management of significant Commonwealth paper records and the delivery of a scalable digital archive to ingest Commonwealth digital records.

I thank the Committee for its further consideration of the NAPF project.

Yours sincerely

Cheryl Watson
Assistant Director-General
Corporate Services

25 February 2013