

2008

*The Chief Archivist's
Annual Report on the*

**State of Government
Recordkeeping 2008**



Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwanatanga

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State of Government Recordkeeping 2008



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Contents

Introduction	3
Executive Summary	4
Why Records and Information Management Matter	5
The State of Public Sector Recordkeeping: Key Issues and Opportunities	6
The digital revolution	6
Information overload	6
Recordkeeping culture	7
Recordkeeping capability	7
Key Areas of Concern	8
Informal recordkeeping programmes	8
Implementation of recordkeeping technology	8
Disposal coverage	9
Solutions and Initiatives	10
Standards	10
Audits	11
Digital continuity	12
Disposal	12
Legacy records programme	13
Training and forums	14
Advice and Support	14
Summary of Recommendations for Public Offices	15

Introduction

I am pleased to present my fourth annual report on recordkeeping in public offices under section 32 of the Public Records Act 2005 (Act).

This report identifies some of the key issues and opportunities for improving recordkeeping in public offices, and identifies several areas of concern.¹ It discusses Archives New Zealand's key initiatives in this area, and makes recommendations for how public offices should respond.

This report summarises information from a variety of sources, including the annual government recordkeeping survey. The survey is a comprehensive census of the public offices subject to the Act, excluding state schools. In 2008, 197 public offices were surveyed. Out of these, 196 responded.²



Dianne Macaskill
Chief Archivist and Chief Executive, Archives New Zealand

1 Public offices are those state sector organisations which are subject to the Public Records Act 2005. This includes departments, offices of parliament, Crown entities such as district health boards and tertiary education institutions, Crown companies, state enterprises and state schools. A list of public offices is available at <http://continuum.archives.govt.nz/list-public-offices.html>

2 The survey uses the 'direction to report' power available to me under section 31 of the Act. A full report on the survey is available at <http://continuum.archives.govt.nz/government-recordkeeping-surveys.html>

Executive Summary

This report summarises the state of government recordkeeping and makes recommendations for action by public offices including departments, offices of parliament, Crown entities, and state enterprises. It is issued as required under section 32 of the Public Records Act 2005.

The report is based on information from a variety of sources, including the annual government recordkeeping survey.

In this report I highlight a number of opportunities for improving records and information management in public offices. Current issues include:

- the transforming effect of digital technologies
- the need for robust systems to dispose of low value digital information
- the importance of supporting technology solutions with comprehensive records management programmes
- a shortage of records and information management capability throughout the public sector.

I have identified three areas of general concern in government recordkeeping, and made three major recommendations as a result. These recommendations reflect the requirements of the Public Records Act 2005 and the mandatory standards issued under it. The recommendations are:

- all public offices must define basic policies and responsibilities for recordkeeping. Those organisations which have not begun this work must urgently address it
- public offices must ensure that the implementation of recordkeeping technology such as an electronic document and records management system is supported by a comprehensive records management programme which includes policies, processes, guidelines, training, and communications. Without this framework such projects are unlikely to deliver value
- public offices must ensure that they have comprehensive disposal coverage under the Public Records Act 2005, including ongoing disposal schedules for their core business records.

Archives New Zealand will continue to follow-up with public offices which have not yet addressed these recommendations to encourage action.

Why Records and Information Management Matter

Adequate records and information management is essential to support transparent and accountable government.

Effective information management helps an organisation to meet its accountabilities. Citizens and governments expect that proper records will be kept of decisions and actions, and that information will be available when requested under the Official Information Act 1982, Privacy Act 1993, or Public Records Act 2005. If records are not created, or are not available when needed, trust in government will be compromised.

Effective information management also supports productivity because it reduces the time spent finding or recreating information, reduces storage costs through timely destruction of low-value information, and provides reliable and accurate information to inform decisions. Information which has been created and managed properly from day one is more accessible and useable.

The Public Records Act 2005 (Act) establishes a framework for monitoring and improving records and information management across public offices and local authorities. Core elements of this framework include:

- a broad and format-neutral definition of a record, which includes digital information of all kinds
- the requirement to create and maintain full and accurate records in accordance with normal prudent business practice
- the requirement to obtain authorisation from the Chief Archivist before disposing of records. Under the Act 'disposal' includes alteration, sale, destruction, discharge, or transfer to Archives New Zealand
- the authority for the Chief Archivist to set mandatory standards
- the authority for the Chief Archivist to inspect records, to require reports, and to conduct independent audits of recordkeeping practices. The first audits will occur in 2010, five years after the passing of the Act.

The State of Public Sector Recordkeeping: Key Issues and Opportunities

The digital revolution

Digital technologies are fundamentally changing the nature of government records and information. Most government records are now born digital as emails, spreadsheets, word processing documents, database entries, or text messages. New information and communications technologies, and therefore new kinds of government records, are constantly emerging.

This rapidly changing environment presents many exciting opportunities to improve government services and productivity. However, it also presents challenges for recordkeeping. Digital information cannot be managed in the same way we have managed paper documents. New strategies are needed to ensure this information remains accessible and retains its integrity as a record over time.

In the 2008 government recordkeeping survey, many government agencies identified problems with their management of digital records. For example, 53 percent of responding public offices reported having digital records they can no longer access. Most commonly this was because documents had been saved without appropriate titles or metadata; because records required computer software that was no longer available, or because records had been stored on obsolete storage media.

Information overload

The amount of information created and received by government agencies is increasing exponentially, and may do so for the foreseeable future. Most of this information is subject to the Act and cannot be disposed of without the authority of the Chief Archivist. It is therefore essential that public offices have robust processes in place to prioritise their information management resources, destroy low value information, and focus their efforts on information which is of high value. Retention and ongoing management of low value records such as routine financial information, administrative records and duplicates for longer than is required is costly and inefficient.

In the 2008 government recordkeeping survey, many public offices indicated that they do not yet have such processes in place. Only 33 percent of responding public offices reported having an ongoing disposal authority which covers the records of their core functions. Only 49 percent reported disposing of any records in the last year.

A majority of public offices also hold records from legacy systems – paper-based or digital systems which are no longer in active use. These systems may contain valuable information. Information in such systems should be appraised, in order to identify what may be of value for ongoing business or as national archives. If such records have been in existence for 25 years, public offices have specific obligations to preserve the records and provide access under the Act.

The proportion of public offices reporting that they hold records over 25 years old has increased over the last two years. In 2007, 56 percent of responding public offices reported holding records over 25 years old. In 2008 this had risen to 61 percent.

Recordkeeping culture

As the nature of government information management changes, new systems and practices are required. For instance, many public offices are investing in electronic document and records management systems (EDRMS). These systems allow staff to save, share, and control digital documents such as emails, word processing documents, and spreadsheets.

However, in order for technology solutions such as an EDRMS to be successful, implementation needs to be well planned and managed. In particular, change management is an essential and major component of such projects. This is because no matter how good the technology is, the public office will see no returns or benefits unless staff buy into and use the system. Such technological solutions should be supported by a comprehensive records management programme which includes policies and processes, guidelines and training for staff and regular planned communication activities.

Responses to the 2008 government recordkeeping survey indicate that although most public offices have digital recordkeeping systems, many do not have the recordkeeping fundamentals in place to support them. For example, only 49 percent of responding public offices reported they had procedures in place for creating and filing electronic documents. Only 51 percent of responding public offices reported that staff receive training in recordkeeping practices and procedures.

Recordkeeping capability

To operate a comprehensive records management programme, public offices also need skilled and knowledgeable records staff. These staff need to understand records and information processes in the digital world. They also need skills in other areas such as systems and business analysis, database management, communication and relationship management, project management, and change management. Being a records manager is a demanding and skilled job.

Over the past few years, many public offices have recruited new records and information staff. Salaries for records managers and records advisors have increased significantly, which has attracted new people into the profession. However, many public offices are still having difficulty attracting suitable candidates for records management positions. In the 2008 government recordkeeping survey, only 52 percent of responding public offices reported they had specialised staff who were responsible for records management. More digital recordkeeping education opportunities are needed to address these skill shortages.

“THE INABILITY OF PUBLIC SECTOR AGENCIES TO MAKE AVAILABLE INFORMATION WITHOUT SUBSTANTIAL COLLATION AND RESEARCH SOMETIMES BEGS THE QUESTION OF WHY THIS IS SO.

AS A MATTER OF GOOD ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICE, PUBLIC SECTOR AGENCIES SHOULD TAKE REASONABLE STEPS TO RECORD ADEQUATELY THE PROCESSES BY WHICH IMPORTANT DECISIONS OR RECOMMENDATIONS OR POLICY OUTCOMES ARE REACHED.

AGENCIES ALSO NEED TO ESTABLISH SENSIBLE PROCEDURES COVERING THE GENERATION AND RETENTION OF ‘SOURCE DATA’ IN A MANNER THAT FACILITATES GOOD RECORD KEEPING.”

*John Belgrave,
Chief Ombudsman, 2006.*

Key Areas of Concern

The annual government recordkeeping survey and other monitoring by Archives New Zealand has highlighted three areas of particular concern.

Informal recordkeeping programmes

In 2006, 18 percent of public offices responding to the government recordkeeping survey stated they had an informal recordkeeping programme – that is, recordkeeping is carried out without there being specific policies or staff responsible for records management. Three years later, in the 2008 survey, 15 percent of public offices – 29 organisations – still stated that they have an informal recordkeeping programme.

It is now more than three years since the Act was passed, and it is no longer acceptable for a public office to have an informal recordkeeping programme. All public offices must define basic policies and responsibilities for recordkeeping. Those organisations which have not begun this work must urgently address it.

Recommendation:

All public offices must define basic policies and responsibilities for recordkeeping. Those organisations which have not begun this work must urgently address it.

“THERE ARE VERY FEW IT-ONLY PROJECTS. MOST ARE BUSINESS PROJECTS AND IT IS JUST ONE FACET”

*CIO Magazine,
October 2008*

Implementation of recordkeeping technology

Over the past few years, many public offices have implemented technological solutions for management of records outside business systems, such as EDRMS. Properly implemented, such systems can improve business efficiency and effectiveness, and ensure government information assets remain accessible and usable over time.

However, public offices must ensure the implementation of recordkeeping technology such as an EDRMS is supported by a comprehensive records management programme which includes policies, processes, guidelines, training, and communications. Without this framework such projects are unlikely to deliver value.

Recommendation:

Public offices must ensure the implementation of recordkeeping technology such as an EDRMS is supported by a comprehensive records management programme which includes policies, processes, guidelines, training, and communications.

Disposal coverage

In the 2008 Government Recordkeeping Survey, only 33 percent of responding public offices reported having an ongoing disposal authority which covers the records of their core functions. Another 22 percent reported that they were developing such a disposal authority. However, this still leaves 36 percent – or 71 public offices – which have not started work to put such disposal authorities in place.

This is of concern. It is important that public offices appraise the ongoing value of their information, identify the classes of information that must be retained and actively managed over time, and obtain disposal authority for these decisions.

Recommendation:

Public offices must ensure that they have comprehensive disposal coverage under the Public Records Act 2005, including ongoing disposal schedules for their core business records.

Solutions and Initiatives

Archives New Zealand is developing solutions to support effective records and information management across government. These initiatives are outlined below, with recommendations about how public offices should respond to this work.

Standards

Under the Act the Chief Archivist can set mandatory and discretionary standards for recordkeeping. These standards present a consistent, whole of government approach to the management of records. Discretionary standards have been issued in the areas of appraisal, access to archives, electronic recordkeeping systems, and digitisation. The Chief Archivist has also issued three mandatory standards:

- the *Create and Maintain Recordkeeping Standard* supports section 17 of the Act and sets out the minimum requirements for the creation and maintenance of full and accurate records
- the *Electronic Recordkeeping Metadata Standard* assists public offices and local authorities with the management of records in electronic systems. It sets out a framework for creating, managing and using recordkeeping metadata and outlines the minimum metadata elements required to manage electronic records within the New Zealand government context
- the *Storage Standard* sets the minimum requirements for storage of physical records and archives.

Archives New Zealand also participates in collaborative standards development and working groups at a national and international level. This includes membership of the Standards Australia/Standards New Zealand subcommittee on records management (IT-21), the International Standards Organisation subcommittee TC46 SC11, the International Council on Archives, the Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities, and one of its projects – the Australasian Digital Recordkeeping Initiative. Participation in wider standards development leads to the establishment of common outcomes for recordkeeping and information management and enables exchange of expertise and current practices and thinking. It also ensures a consistent approach to standards setting across jurisdictions.

It is pleasing to see that in the 2008 government recordkeeping survey, 38 percent of responding public offices had already assessed their storage conditions against the mandatory storage standard. I encourage all public offices to use the mandatory standards to assess their current recordkeeping systems, identify risks to the integrity, security, or accessibility of their records, and develop plans for addressing these risks.

Recommendation:

Public offices should use the three mandatory standards issued under the Public Records Act 2005 to assess their current recordkeeping systems, identify risks to the integrity, security, or accessibility of their records, and develop plans for addressing these risks.

Audits

Under the Act the Chief Archivist is required to undertake independent audits of recordkeeping in public offices and report on the findings. These reports must be tabled in Parliament. All public offices including government departments, Crown entities, Crown research institutes, state enterprises, district health boards, tertiary institutions and state schools must be audited from 2010 on a 5-10 year cycle.

The purpose of the audits is to ensure good recordkeeping across government to support accountability and good business practice. Archives New Zealand is currently developing an audit programme based on the following high level principles:

- audit compliance will be measured from a continuous improvement perspective rather than a strict pass/fail approach
- the audits will focus on risk analysis
- the audits will focus on the achievement of outcomes.

A key element of the programme will be an audit tool. The tool will provide a pathway to good recordkeeping practice and will allow self assessment to support public offices in managing their own recordkeeping capability. The tool will be based on the major requirements of the Act, the requirements of the mandatory standards, and good business practice.

During October-December 2008 a wide variety of public offices participated in development workshops for the audit tool. I encourage all public offices to continue to engage with the development of the Public Records Act 2005 Audit Programme over the coming year, particularly by conducting self-assessments.

Recommendation:

Public offices should continue to engage with the development of the Public Records Act 2005 Audit Programme over the coming year. In particular, public offices should conduct self assessments so that they are aware of where improvements are needed.

“ AT 281 BILLION GIGABYTES (281 EXABYTES), THE DIGITAL UNIVERSE IN 2007 WAS 10 PERCENT BIGGER THAN ORIGINALLY ESTIMATED ”

The Information Management Journal, Sept/Oct 2008

Digital continuity

Digital continuity is the ability to ensure digital information is accessible and usable by those that need it for as long as it is needed. This is an increasingly important issue throughout government and around the world. Digital information is created, stored, and accessed using complex and rapidly changing technologies. Software rapidly becomes obsolete and storage solutions for information also change and deteriorate rapidly. Migration from one software platform or storage medium to another over time increases the risk that records and information will become inaccessible or lose their authenticity.

Archives New Zealand is developing a Digital Continuity Action Plan which articulates the key high level public sector digital continuity issues and details tactical approaches for managing them. This plan is needed in order to enable on-going effective digital public sector service delivery. The objective of the action plan is to ensure that public sector digital information is trusted and accessible when it is needed now and in the future. I encourage all public offices to address digital continuity issues by identifying information that is at risk and taking action to address those risks.

“IT WILL TAKE ALL COMPETENT HANDS IN AN ORGANISATION TO DEAL WITH INFORMATION CREATION, STORAGE, MANAGEMENT, SECURITY, RETENTION, AND DISPOSAL. IT IS NOT A TECHNICAL PROBLEM ALONE.”

The Information Management Journal, Sept / Oct 2008

Recommendation:

Public offices should address digital continuity issues by identifying information that is at risk and taking action to address those risks.

Disposal

Archives New Zealand provides advice and support on the disposal of government records. We have developed a set of General Disposal Authorities which cover classes of records that are common across government. These include human resource and personnel records, financial and accounting records, general housekeeping records, administration and corporate service records, and digitised source records. All public offices should be using these authorities to dispose of records on a routine basis.

Archives New Zealand has also collaborated with sector groups to develop disposal authorities for particular kinds of public offices. Disposal authorities are now in place for all schools, district health boards, and universities. A further project has recently begun involving polytechnics and institutes of technology. I encourage other sectors to pursue such collaborative approaches.

Recommendation:

Public offices must ensure they have robust processes in place for disposing of their records. This should include implementation of the General Disposal Authorities and of authorised disposal schedules for core business records. Those agencies which do not yet have such systems in place need to do so with urgency.

Legacy records programme

Archives New Zealand has been actively working with public offices to help them to manage the records they hold which are over 25 years old. It ensures that the interests of public offices, Archives New Zealand and the public are taken into account when making decisions about the access classification, disposal and transfer of these records.

The Act includes a number of requirements relating to records over 25 years old. These include mandatory transfer and access classification. The Legacy Records Programme has been developed to implement the Act in regard to these requirements and to ensure that public offices are able to comply. The programme also assists public offices to manage their legacy records, and facilitates legal disposal in order to relieve storage pressures.

Archives New Zealand is currently making initial contact with public offices to determine if they have legacy records. If a public office has legacy records a plan will be put in place to manage those records with the eventual outcome being a transfer to Archives New Zealand or the authorised destruction of records that do not have ongoing archival value. I encourage all public offices which hold records over 25 years old to participate in the legacy programme.

Recommendation:

Public offices which hold records over 25 years old should participate in the legacy records programme in order to manage these records more effectively and efficiently.

Training and forums

During 2008 Archives New Zealand introduced a programme of recordkeeping training. These short courses are aimed at information managers, their staff, and other staff who have responsibility for recordkeeping systems. They seek to develop recordkeeping skills and knowledge, raise awareness of obligations under the Act, and of Archives New Zealand's products and services. The courses have been very successful, with excellent feedback received. Over the coming year we will be developing further training to support digital recordkeeping, including a course on recordkeeping metadata.

Archives New Zealand holds regular government recordkeeping forums in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. These are attended by records managers, their staff, consultants and vendors, and others with an interest in public sector records. They provide an invaluable learning and networking opportunity for those responsible for recordkeeping in government.

Archives New Zealand is also working to influence records and information management education providers to include more digital recordkeeping content in their course offerings.

I encourage all public offices to continue to develop the capability of their recordkeeping staff through investment in education, training, and professional development.

Recommendation:

Public offices should continue to invest in the education, training, and professional development of their recordkeeping staff.

Advice and Support

Archives New Zealand can provide advice and support to public offices to help them implement the recommendations in this report. These services include:

- the *Continuum Recordkeeping Resource Kit* and website. This valuable information resource includes almost 40 recordkeeping standards, guides, and factsheets
- an advice service. Records and information staff throughout government can obtain advice from the Government Recordkeeping Programme via phone, email, or in person
- presentations and talks to promote recordkeeping and provide information about the Act, Archives New Zealand's services and initiatives.

Contact the Government Recordkeeping team on (04) 499 5595 or rkadvice@archives.govt.nz for more information.

Summary of Recommendations for Public Offices

- All public offices must define basic policies and responsibilities for recordkeeping. Those organisations which have not begun this work must urgently address it.
- Public offices must ensure that the implementation of recordkeeping technology such as an EDRMS is supported by a comprehensive records management programme which includes policies, processes, guidelines, training, and communications.
- Public offices must ensure they have comprehensive disposal coverage under the Public Records Act 2005, including ongoing disposal schedules for their core business records.
- Public offices should use the three mandatory standards issued under the Public Records Act 2005 to assess their current recordkeeping systems, identify risks to the integrity, security, or accessibility of their records, and develop plans for addressing these risks.
- Public offices should continue to engage with the development of the Public Records Act 2005 Audit Programme over the coming year. In particular, public offices should conduct self assessments so that they are aware of where improvements are needed.
- Public offices should address digital continuity issues by identifying information that is at risk and taking action to address those risks.
- Public offices must ensure they have robust processes in place for disposing of their records. This should include implementation of the General Disposal Authorities and of authorised disposal schedules for core business records. Those agencies which do not yet have such systems in place need to do so with urgency.
- Public offices which hold records over 25 years old should participate in the legacy records programme in order to manage these records more effectively and efficiently.
- Public offices should continue to invest in the education, training, and professional development of their recordkeeping staff.

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