

# State of public sector recordkeeping 2006-07

State Records' statutory responsibility to promote effective and efficient recordkeeping across the NSW public sector commenced in 1999 with the *State Records Act 1998*. We undertake this responsibility by setting standards, providing guidance, promoting good practice, and monitoring public office performance and compliance.

The state of public sector recordkeeping is an indicator of our performance, although it is mostly outside our direct control. We have limited power to enforce compliance, preferring in any case to promote and encourage the benefits of good recordkeeping.

State Records started conducting records management surveys in 1996. Our last survey, which looked at public sector compliance with core records management obligations, was conducted in late 2004 and is reported in our *Annual report 2004-05*.

In this report we:

- describe the drivers behind our new strategy for improving digital recordkeeping and comment on key issues
- comment on the number of public offices with comprehensive records retention policies
- look at some case studies of good practice
- describe how we identify cases of less than good practice, and note some cases that were addressed.

# Digital recordkeeping in the NSW Government

**The 2006 review of State Records by the Council on the Cost and Quality of Government (COCQG) recognised the crucial importance of digital recordkeeping to efficient and effective public administration and government service delivery. While the value of the framework for the management of digital records developed for the sector over the past ten years was acknowledged, the review concluded that more practical guidance to operationalise the framework was needed - for example with recommended long term preservation formats for digital records, or specifications for digital recordkeeping systems. The review also found that the current lack of facilities to preserve and provide access to digital records required for the long term, including as State archives, was a critical sector-wide issue. The Government supported the review's recommendations and State Records is currently implementing a strategy designed to deliver more practical guidance on digital recordkeeping and on developing the State's first digital archiving solution.**

Another key issue in digital recordkeeping in 2006-07 has been the increasing convergence between digital records management and information management. Integrated information management encompassing paper and digital content in all their forms is a goal for many public offices at present. Recently State Records has seen an increasing number of organisations work to bring information 'silos' together as single, searchable sources of knowledge and evidence, regardless of the

applications used to create them. To better assist public offices in these efforts, State Records is working closely with the Government Chief Information Office on tools to help public offices to make appropriate procurement decisions about the technologies they use to manage their information assets. These tools will form part of a more practical suite of guidance to help public offices to make, keep and use better digital records and information.

# Records retention policies

**State Records rigorously analysed records retention policy coverage of the public sector during the year. The analysis was undertaken to determine whether each public office was ready, through coverage of its records by retention policies, to move forward with its records management systems and practices.**

## Analysis of retention policy coverage

A total of 438 public offices were analysed. Of these, 210 public offices (48%) are covered by general retention policies which cover all or most records they create and hold.

Three ratings were applied to the remaining 228 public offices:

- Green light (47 %) – these public offices have comprehensive coverage of their functional records by records retention policies.
- Amber light (12%) – these public offices have some functional records covered by records retention policies.
- Red light (41%) – these public offices have no or few functional records covered by records retention policies.

Comprehensive retention policies were approved and issued during the year to:

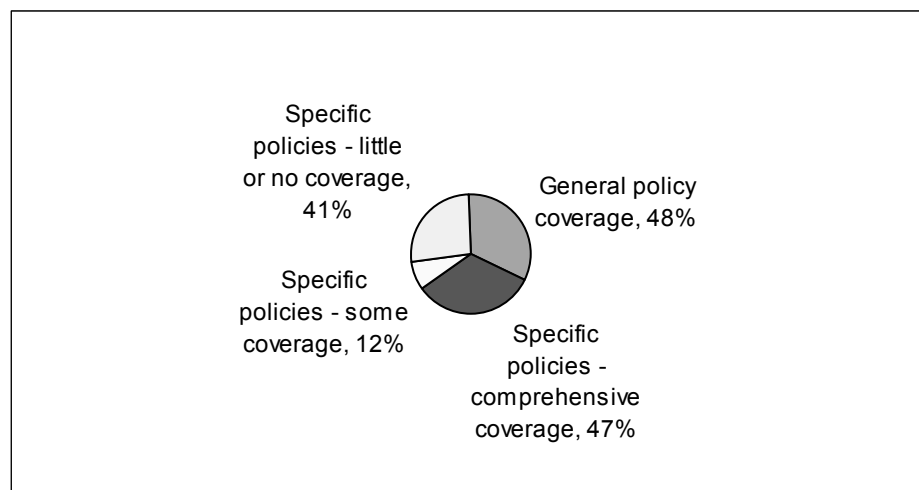
- Eraring Energy
- State Records Authority of NSW
- Building and Construction Industry Long Services Payments Corporation
- Land and Environment Court
- NSW Public Trustee
- Natural Resources Advisory Council
- Lake Illawarra Authority
- Chipping Norton Lake Authority
- Mental Health Review Tribunal
- NSW Maritime
- State Library of New South Wales
- Catchment Management Authorities (13)

In addition, the following organisations achieved comprehensive coverage through the approval of partial policies that complimented existing policies or provided coverage to business units that are statutory entities in their own right:

- NSW Police
- Department of the Arts, Sport and Recreation
- Geographical Names Board
- Board of Surveying and Spatial Information
- Liquor Administration Board

The list of records retention policies approved since 1999 is found on our website (look under 'Disposing of records'). In addition, the full text of most current policies is available on the website.

## Retention policy coverage



# Records management programs, systems and practices

## Examples of Good practice

There are many examples of NSW public offices making real improvements in the management of their official records. Two case studies are presented below.

### **Case study Building and Construction Industry Long Services Payments Corporation**

The regular review of records retention and disposal authorities is part of good records management practice. During the year, the Building and Construction Industry Long Services Payments Corporation undertook a review of its earlier authority and submitted a new proposed authority for approval. The review was undertaken for a number of reasons: the existing authorisation was close to 10 years old; to better enable the implementation of digital imaging processes on high volume paper records; and to enable the continuing routine destruction of scanned paper records. The new authority provides the Corporation with an up-to-date document which meets current business needs and practices and enables it to continue to implement sound records management and disposal practices.

### **Case study Case Study: Health Care Complaints Commission**

The Health Care Complaints Commission is a medium sized Government statutory body. During 2006-07 the Commission undertook a number of projects to improve records management and compliance with the State Records Act. Resources were committed to key projects including a review and overhaul of the agency's records management program, the development of new policies and procedures for records management and the management of sensitive information, and training for all staff in new procedures.

The major achievement of the year was the development of user requirements for the purchase of an electronic recordkeeping system (EDRMS) and the selection of a vendor and service provider to work with the Commission in implementing a system in 2007-08. Ongoing work includes the development of a Business Classification Scheme and review of the retention and disposal authority for Commission records. These measures will help the Commission to increase efficiencies in managing and accessing records and mitigate records related risks.

## Identifying performance issues

State Records monitors reports published by the NSW Audit Office, Ombudsman and Independent Commission Against Corruption to identify recordkeeping performance issues. We also take note of media reports and issues raised with us by members of the public. We take action on select instances, usually writing to the public office and following up with a meeting or assessment of recordkeeping systems.

We acted on six instances of reported poor performance. One of the cases is described below.

### University records

State Records investigated a possible recordkeeping issue at a university after the matter was referred by the Independent Commission Against Corruption (this matter had been also dealt with by the NSW Ombudsman). The matter involved a complaint from a student regarding, amongst other matters, the keeping of records of attendance, assessment and marking of works of honour students. State Records sought confirmation from the university that it had made improvements to recordkeeping in this area (based on its earlier undertakings to the NSW Ombudsman to make various improvements). The university's response indicated that rectification action was being taken to ensure that records of the attendance, assessment and marking of Honours students are created.

### Other action taken

In reviewing reports and publications issued by the Independent Commission Against Corruption two broad recordkeeping issues were brought to our attention during the year.

The first was raised in a number of reports and related to the failure in a number of instances of officials to create minutes of meetings. Partly as a result of these findings we developed and issued guidance on recordkeeping and committees. This practical guidance reinforces the message that public officials need to create and keep records of the business conducted through committees and meetings.

The second issue related to management of identity information and the issuing by the Commission of a guideline *Protecting identity information and documents*. We highlighted this guideline in an article in our publication *For the Record* and advised that some of the risk treatment options identified in the guideline can be implemented or met through an organisation's records management program and good records management practices.