



Records Management Policy 1

Policy on Electronic Recordkeeping

Issued 1998

Table of contents

[Introduction](#)

[Definitions](#)

[Policy](#)

1. [Agencies' electronic records are official records](#)
2. [Electronic recordkeeping should comply with recognised best practice](#)
3. [Electronic recordkeeping should be built into business processes and tools](#)
4. [Business conducted by electronic means should be adequately documented to meet identified recordkeeping requirements](#)
5. [Electronic records should be maintained in electronic form](#)
6. [Electronic records should be maintained in reliable recordkeeping systems](#)
7. [Electronic records should be managed effectively as part of a comprehensive records management program](#)
8. [Maintaining and providing access to electronic records over time is a shared responsibility](#)

[Further information](#)

Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this statement is to establish Government-wide policy on the keeping of records in the electronic environment.

Scope

This policy applies across the whole of the NSW public sector. It should be applied in conjunction with the [Policy on Electronic Messages as Records](#) and the standards, codes of best practice and guidelines on recordkeeping noted as referenced documents below.

Background

The Government is committed to improving the quality and keeping of official records so that they facilitate the transaction, monitoring and auditing of official business. Public offices subject to the *State Records Act 1998* are required to make and keep such records as may be necessary to fully and adequately record their functions and operations. Agencies need to comply with standards and codes of best practice on recordkeeping issued under the Act.

At the same time the Government is committed to delivering responsive and accessible government services to the community through improved use of information technology. The Government's vision and comprehensive strategies for planning, management and use of information management and technology are set out in the [Information Management and Technology Blueprint for NSW](#). Business conducted in the electronic environment needs to be documented appropriately to meet a variety of operational, accountability and community requirements. This involves electronic recordkeeping: making and keeping records in the electronic environment. Improved electronic recordkeeping is essential to the success of the Government's goals for information management and technology.

This policy establishes principles which agencies should follow in developing practices and systems for recordkeeping in the electronic environment. State Records is developing a range of more detailed guidelines, manuals, training and other support to help agencies implement this policy.

The policy was issued as an exposure draft in April 1996 and revised to take account of agencies' comments. It was then submitted for endorsement by the Chief Executives' Committee and the board of the Archives Authority of New South Wales (now State Records). The final policy was issued in April 1998. In June 1998 the policy was circulated to Government agencies under Premier's Memorandum No. 98-16. This established a clear policy direction for NSW agencies to implement effective strategies for the management of records in the electronic environment.

Further background to this policy is available in the Archives Authority's 1995 discussion paper, [Documenting the Future: Policy and Strategies for Electronic Recordkeeping in the New South Wales Public Sector](#) and in the standards on [Full and Accurate Records](#) and [Records Management Programs](#).

This policy conforms to [Corporate Memory in the Electronic Age: Statement of a Common Position on Electronic Recordkeeping](#), issued by the Australian Council of Archives, the peak body of archives institutions, in May 1996 and endorsed by State Records as the basis for policy and strategies for electronic recordkeeping in the NSW Government.

Definitions

For the purposes of this standard the following definitions apply. The definitions are taken from Australian Standard AS 4390, *Records Management, Part 1, General*.

Appraisal

The process of evaluating business activities to determine which records need to be captured and how long the records need to be kept, to meet business needs, the requirements of organisational accountability and community expectations.

Electronic records

Records communicated and maintained by means of electronic equipment.

Record

Recorded information, in any form, including data in computer systems, created or received and maintained by an organisation or person in the transaction of business or the conduct of affairs and kept as evidence of such activity.

Recordkeeping

Making and maintaining complete, accurate and reliable evidence of business transactions in the form of recorded information.

[Thus it is an umbrella term encompassing:

- the creation of records in the course of business, and including the use of means to ensure the creation of adequate records
- the design, establishment and operation of recordkeeping systems, and
- the management of records through recordkeeping systems in their business context (traditionally regarded as the domain of records management) and as archives (traditionally regarded as the domain of archives administration).]

Recordkeeping systems

Information systems which capture, maintain and provide access to records over time.

Policy

1 Agencies' electronic records are official records

1.1 Electronic records generated or received by an agency or a government employee in the course of official duties are to be treated as *official records*. For public offices subject to the State Records Act these are *State records* as governed by the Act.

1.2 As records of government agencies, electronic records, like records in other formats, are subject to legislation such as the Freedom of Information Act and to legal processes such as discovery and subpoenas. The records may also be required by Royal Commissions, the Courts, auditors and other people or bodies to whom or which they may be subject.

2 Electronic recordkeeping should comply with recognised best practice

2.1 Agencies should keep and manage their electronic records in compliance with standards approved under the State Records Act and with Australian Standard AS ISO 15489, *Records Management* issued as a code of best practice under the Act. The Government expects the same standards of recordkeeping to apply in the electronic environment as in the paper environment.

2.2 Electronic recordkeeping should comply with recognised authority sources influencing recordkeeping that are relevant to an agency's business environment, such as the AS/NZS ISO 9000 series of quality systems standards.

3 Electronic recordkeeping should be built into business processes and tools

3.1 Agencies should make recordkeeping a routine part of business in the electronic environment by building it into business processes and tools.

3.2 Agencies should make use of the opportunities afforded by business process re-engineering exercises, the replacement or upgrading of information systems and quality systems certification to help ensure that this occurs.

4 Business conducted by electronic means should be adequately documented to meet identified recordkeeping requirements

4.1 Agencies should ensure that they adequately and properly document those aspects of their business that are conducted in the electronic environment by making and keeping electronic records.

4.2 Agencies should ensure that these records satisfy identified business needs, accountability requirements and community expectations.

5 Electronic records should be maintained in electronic form

5.1 The Government's objectives for using information management and technology to deliver government services to the people of NSW will be supported by maintaining electronic records in electronic form where it is appropriate to do so. Electronic records are more accessible and generally have greater value than printed versions of them. Some kinds of electronic records, such as compound documents, cannot be maintained in hard copy form without loss of content or meaning.

5.2 As agencies make more use of information management and technology to deliver services, conduct business and manage their information resources, they should establish ways of maintaining records generated in the electronic environment, and their associated metadata, in electronic form.

6 Electronic records should be maintained in reliable recordkeeping systems

6.1 Agencies should systematise electronic recordkeeping practices through the design and operation of reliable electronic recordkeeping systems. These may be dedicated recordkeeping systems or business systems and processes which incorporate recordkeeping and, thereby, function as recordkeeping systems. Only reliable recordkeeping systems produce authentic and trustworthy records.

6.2 This principle requires that agencies establish policies, business rules, formal methodologies and procedures incorporating sound recordkeeping practices for recordkeeping in the electronic environment. These should conform to Government-wide standards, formats and models.

6.3 Agencies should identify all their electronic recordkeeping systems, document them, including changes made over time, and assign responsibilities and delegations regarding their development, modification, operation and use.

7 Electronic records should be managed effectively as part of a comprehensive records management program

7.1 Agencies should ensure that policies, practices and systems for the management of electronic records are fully integrated into their records management programs. While electronic records should be regarded as a mainstream part of records management, compliance with this principle is likely to require specific and systematic attention.

7.2 Where electronic records and records in other forms document the same business activities or matters, agencies should manage these records in such a way that all relevant records can be easily retrieved and the relationships between the records are clear.

8 Maintaining and providing access to electronic records over time is a shared responsibility

8.1 Maintaining electronic records and providing official and public access to them over time, including as State archives, involves shared responsibilities between agencies and State Records. Agencies should cooperate with State Records to establish arrangements for the long-term management of electronic records and for providing access to them.

8.2 Establishing and operating effective electronic recordkeeping systems and practices within agencies requires a multidisciplinary approach. Agencies should make effective use of the necessary range of expertise available in the agency and elsewhere. This includes expertise in records management, information management and technology, business systems analysis and design, risk assessment, auditing and the law.

Further information

Referenced documents

[*Policy on Electronic Messages as Records*](#)

[*Standard on Full and Accurate Records*](#)

[*Standard on Managing a Records Management Program*](#)

[*Australian Standard AS ISO 15489, Records Management*](#)

[*Documenting the Future: Policy and Strategies for Electronic Recordkeeping in the New South Wales Public Sector*](#), discussion paper issued by the Archives Authority of New South Wales in July 1995

[*Corporate Memory in the Electronic Age: Statement of a Common Position on Electronic Recordkeeping*](#), Australian Council of Archives, May 1996

[*Information Management and Technology Blueprint for NSW: A Well-Connected Future*](#), Department of Public Works and Services, February 1997

Exemptions

There are no general exemptions from this policy.

Exclusions

There are no general exclusions from this policy.

Funding

No special conditions for funding exist for implementing this policy.

Enquiries

Enquiries regarding this policy should, in the first instance, be directed to [State Records](#).

**State Records Authority of New South Wales
Sydney, Australia**

April 1998

This online version of the policy has been amended to reflect the introduction of the *State Records Act 1998* from 1 January 1999.

© Copyright reserved by the Government of NSW, 1988. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced by any method without the prior written consent of the State Records Authority of NSW.

[Terms and conditions](#) of use of on-line versions of our publications.

ISBN 0-7313-8802-X