



GPO Box 1440 Canberra, ACT, 2601
Phone: 02 6295 2837
Email: fahs@jedav.net
Web: www.history.org.au
ABN: 89 217 386 291

Submission to Public Accounts and Audit Committee of the Australian Parliament

Inquiry into impact of "Efficiency Dividend" on small public sector agencies

The Federation of Australian Historical Societies Inc is the peak federal body representing the interests of approximately 950 historical societies across the nation, with around 100,000 members in all. It encourages the study and publication of Australian history, the preservation, interpretation and promotion of moveable and built heritage, public access to historical information and heritage collections, and advocates issues of concern to government.

The Federation is lodging a submission to the inquiry in order to bring to the government's attention the severe impact the "efficiency dividend" is having.

The Federation's constituency is a major user of cultural and educational services operated by the Commonwealth government viz. National Library of Australia and National Archives of Australia particularly through the excellent finding aids which they produce and publish online eg. Picture Australia, Catalogues, Archives Search. These cultural organisations provide services nationally and enable citizens in both metropolitan and regional Australia to access online services in their homes and offices. The Commonwealth government has supported policies of digitisation of records which is being taken up by the community. Whilst the headquarters of these agencies is in the national capital, it is their role on collection policy, document management, conservation of nationally recognised collections such as Parliamentary members' records and the Mabo Case documents, together with twenty-first century digital technology and meta data management which provides leadership to the whole nation.

The application of the "efficiency dividend" to small public sector agencies and especially the recent steep increase impacts severely on these bodies with comparatively small budgets. The Federation is concerned that the imposition and size of the "efficiency dividend" on public education organisations such as National Library of Australia and National Archives of Australia will result in reductions in core business such as the digitisation and innovation programs, cataloguing, external services to south east Asia and the Pacific, reductions in opening hours (the opposite of efficiency). In fact this result is in stark contrast to the publicly stated position on digitisation which current government members of the National Archives of Australia Advisory Council have popularised recently. Instead the Federation argues that these institutions are places of scholarship, with a role in society's self-understanding and sense of future direction.

The Federation noted that the 2020 Summit report contained no references to historic cultural heritage in Australia and is disappointed about the lack of vision by government in recognising the significant growth in participation by Australians in cultural heritage activities e.g. local and family history research, military and constitutional history, and heritage tourism in regional Australia. This demonstrates a lack of vision in addition to the further impost of an "efficiency dividend".

Organisations such as National Library of Australia and National Archives of Australia actually contribute to the innovation quotient of Australia and mental health of communities and these agencies require expanded funding to advance their digital collection programs.

Helen Henderson (Dr)
PRESIDENT

15 July 2008