SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S PORTFOLIO

Group: 2

Program: Other Agency

Question No. BE15/069

Senator Collins asked the following written question from the 27 and 28 May 2015 hearing:

1. Has the National Archives of Australia been accessing the services of a private sector firm to undertake records digitisation work? Which private sector firms are being used to undertake records digitisation work?
2. What is the cost per record for digitisation work undertaken by a private sector firm?
3. What is the total cost of digitisation work undertaken by a private sector firm in each of the last three financial years?
4. Has the quality of externally digitised records in all instances met the quality standards expected by the National Archives of Australia, without requiring correction or rescanning of substandard work?
5. How many record digitisation requests are currently waiting to be completed? How many individual records are currently waiting to be digitised in response to a request?
6. Have there been any instances where a record has not been available to a member of the public for viewing because the record had been sent to a private sector firm for digitisation?
7. Why has the National Archives of Australia outsourced the digitisation of records instead of undertaking this work using equipment owned by the agency?
8. How many document scanners are owned by the National Archives of Australia?
9. Are the document scanners owned by the National Archives of Australia used on a regular basis for record digitisation work?
10. How many National Archives of Australia staff are dedicated to undertaking records digitisation work? If no staff are dedicated to this work, what is the full time equivalent number of staff dedicated to records digitisation work? Is this smaller, greater or the same full time equivalent number of staff as was dedicated to this work for each year over the past three years?

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

1. Yes, the National Archives has been accessing the services of private sector firms to undertake records digitisation work. In 2014/15 the following private sector firms have been engaged to undertake the digitisation of records from the Archives' collection.

Converga Pty Ltd	more than 6 million passenger cards
W&F Pascoe	approximately 90 microfilm
Grace IRM	paper records
AMS Imaging	paper records
Pro-copy	audio tapes
Microcare CD Group	audio CDs

2. The cost per record for digitisation work undertaken by a private sector firm varies based on the format of record (paper, photographic, microfilm, audiovisual) being digitised and the specifications for digitisation. Factors affecting the cost include the fragility or technical complexity of the record, the duration or size of the content, the digitisation standards required, quality assurance levels, transport and processing requirements.

For example, 6 million passenger arrival cards have recently been digitised by a private sector firm for a cost of $0.022 per double sided card plus a set up cost. The digitisation of paper records by a private sector firm requested through the Archives' on-demand service in Melbourne cost $0.55 cents per page. The digitisation of a quantity of CD-R audio records by a private sector firm recently cost $3.18 per record.

3.   The total cost of digitisation work undertaken by private sector firms on behalf of the National Archives in each of the last three financial years is:

   2014/15 $74,347.46 (as at 22 June 2015)
   2013/14 $55,762.12
   2012/13 $513,577.37

4.   A statement of work required including quality specifications is supplied by the National Archives as part of all external digitisation work. Private sector firms are required to quality assure all records digitisation work undertaken for the Archives. The National Archives also quality assures externally digitised records.   Records digitisation work that does not meet the agreed statement of work is sent back for correction or rescanning unless the work required is minimal and then it may be done internally.

5.   As at 24 June 2015, the following digitisation requests received by the National Archives are waiting to be completed.

- 8057 requests for 9033 individual paper based records
- 64 photographic record requests
- 3 audiovisual record requests

6.   In 2014/15, there was one instance where a record was not available to a member of the public to view in the Canberra reading room within the Archives' standards of service because the record had been sent to a private sector firm for digitisation. A digital copy of the requested record was subsequently made available for access on the Archives' website.

Where appropriate, when engaging a private sector firm to undertake records digitisation work, the Archives puts in place arrangements for the timely return or scan of records that are subject to a request from a member of the public. In some instances in 2014/15 members of the public have been able to receive a digital copy of a record they had requested that had been sent to a private sector firm for digitisation within an hour.

7.   While the National Archives maintains equipment and expertise to digitise the most common record formats, the Archives does not have equipment to digitise all record formats in custody.

Since 2001, when the National Archives began digitising records to increase the accessibility of the collection, the Archives has undertaken a mix of in-house and outsourced records digitisation work. In-house digitisation principally services requests from members of the public for digitised paper records. Outsourced records digitisation is undertaken to augment in-house digitisation particularly in periods of peak demand, or where it is cost effective to have the digitisation undertaken externally, or where the Archives lacks the infrastructure or other resources to undertake records digitisation work internally.

8. Twenty-five Fujitsu document scanners are owned by the National Archives. Each office of the Archives holds at least one Fujitsu document scanner. The Archives also owns several large format scanners for maps and plans.

9. The Fujitsu document scanners are used on a daily basis for record digitisation work in the Archives' larger offices and as required to service demand in the smaller state offices

10. In 2014-15, the National Archives had 18 staff (head count) dedicated to undertaking records digitisation work.

   In 2013-14, the National Archives had 20 staff (head count) dedicated to undertaking records digitisation work.

   In 2012-13 the National Archives had 23 staff (head count) dedicated to undertaking records digitisation work.