



# 1999 Records Survey of Local Government Authorities

Survey

August 1999

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## Introduction

This is the first survey of local government authorities conducted under the *State Records Act 1997*. It provides a snapshot of records management practices across local councils, is a key planning tool for State Records and will assist local councils in their own strategic planning for Records Management. A similar survey will be conducted in 2001.

The response rate exceeded 85%, which is a clear demonstration of the commitment in the vast majority of councils to records management. What the survey reveals, however, is that the recognition of records management within the corporate planning strategy of councils is not widespread. The survey suggests the need for a stronger development of records management policies and closer integration with IT. There are real benefits to be secured from applying new records management software; there are real risks with electronic records, which pose quite different issues from paper-based records in terms of long-term survival, integrity and accessibility.

One of the aspects of records management explored in the survey is the way in which disposal is managed. The *State Records Act 1997* provides that agencies (which includes local councils) must not dispose of official records except in accordance with a determination made by the Manager of State Records with the approval of the State Records Council. The responses in this survey show a need to improve the understanding of this requirement and in particular, the Local Government General Disposal Schedule, which is the instrument authorising most disposal of official records by local councils.

Another aspect explored is the volume of official records held by local councils. One prompt for this is to assist State Records in its forward planning, because of its statutory role as the usual repository for official records fifteen years old or no longer in current administrative use. Even more importantly, the retention by local councils of official records can be costly and inefficient.

During the next two years, State Records will look to work with local councils in a number of ways to further improve records management, both paper and electronic. A key aspect of this will be the development of standards and tools to enable individual councils to assess the adequacy of their own policies and practices.

The success of this exercise is fundamentally due to the co-operation received from local councils. Within State Records, the project team comprised Michelle Brown, Simon Froude, Kylie Kerrigan and Fran Wharton, with useful assistance from Samantha Farnsworth (Records Policy Advisor) by drawing on her work with comparable surveys across State Government. The thinking through the implications of this survey has benefited much from discussions with the Local Government Association, particularly Chris Russell, Director, Policy & Public Affairs.

Michael Hodder

MANAGER OF STATE RECORDS

10 August 1999

## Conduct of the Survey

In November 1998, 71 copies of the 1998 South Australian Local Government Records Survey questionnaire were distributed to records managers/officers or key personnel within local government Councils. The recipients of the survey had previously been identified via telephone contact within each Council.

Councils were asked to complete and return the Survey questionnaire by 21 December 1998. With the distribution of the Survey, Councils were provided contact details of the Survey Project Team in the event that they required any assistance interpreting the questionnaire or completing a response.

During the first two weeks of December the Survey Project Team contacted Councils to confirm receipt of the questionnaire and enquired whether the respondent perceived any problems or issues. Further follow-up calls were made to Councils, which had not returned the Survey by the 21 December 1998.

Responses to the Survey and telephone enquiries or follow-ups were tracked and collated using an Excel spreadsheet. Raw data was checked to ensure consistent interpretation of questions.

## Response

71 copies of the 1998 South Australian Local Government Records Survey were sent to local government Councils. The overall rate of return of the Survey was 86%.

Councils, which participated in the survey, included:

City of Adelaide	District Council of Mount Barker
Adelaide Hills Council	City of Mount Gambier
Alexandrina Council	District Council of Mount Remarkable
Barossa Council	Rural City of Murray Bridge
District Council of Barunga West	District Council of Naracoorte
Berri Barmera Council	Northern Areas Council
City of Campbelltown	City of Onkaparina
District Council of Ceduna	District Council of Orroroo/Carrieton
City of Charles Sturt	District Council of Peterborough
Clare & Gilbert Valleys	City of Playford
District Council of Cleve	City of Port Adelaide Enfield
District Council of Coober Pedy	City of Port Augusta
Coorong District Council	City of Port Lincoln
District Council of Elliston	Port Pirie City & Districts

Flinders Ranges Council	City of Prospect
District Council of Franklin Harbor	District Council of Renmark Paringa
Corporation of the Town of Gawler	District Council of Robe
Goyder Council	City of Salisbury
District council of Grant	District Council of Southern Mallee
City of Holdfast Bay	District Council of Streaky Bay
Kangaroo Island Council	District Council of Tatiara
Council of Kapunda and Light	City of Tea Tree Gully
Council of Karoonda/East Murray	District Council of Tumby Bay
District Council of Kimba	District Council of Victor Harbor
District Council of Lacedpede	Corporation of Town of Walkerville
District Council of Le Hunte	Wattle Range Council
District Council of Mallala	City of West Torrens
City of Marion	City of Whyalla
Mid Murray Council	District Council of Yankalilla
City of Mitcham	District Council of Yorke Peninsula
Outback Areas Community Development Trust	

## SECTION 1: GENERAL

### Question 1.1

*Please provide a copy of your Council's most current organisational chart.*

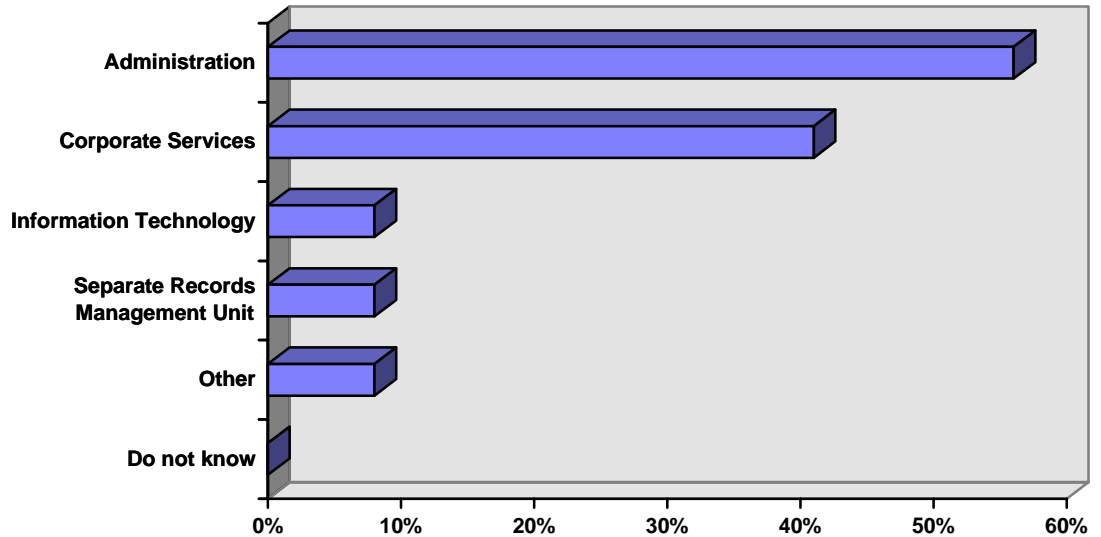
56% of participants provided a copy of their Council's current organisational structure.

This is a low response rate, considering all Councils would have some form of organisational chart.

### Question 1.2

*What area of your Council is primarily responsible for records management?*

<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Administration	56%
Corporate Services	41%
Information Technology	8%
Separate Records Management Unit	8%
Other	8%
Do not know	0%



The above responses indicate that the administration and corporate services sections of local government Councils are mostly responsible for records management activities.

A number of Councils responded with more than one option for this question indicating that in some cases up to 2 or 3 sections held records management responsibilities.

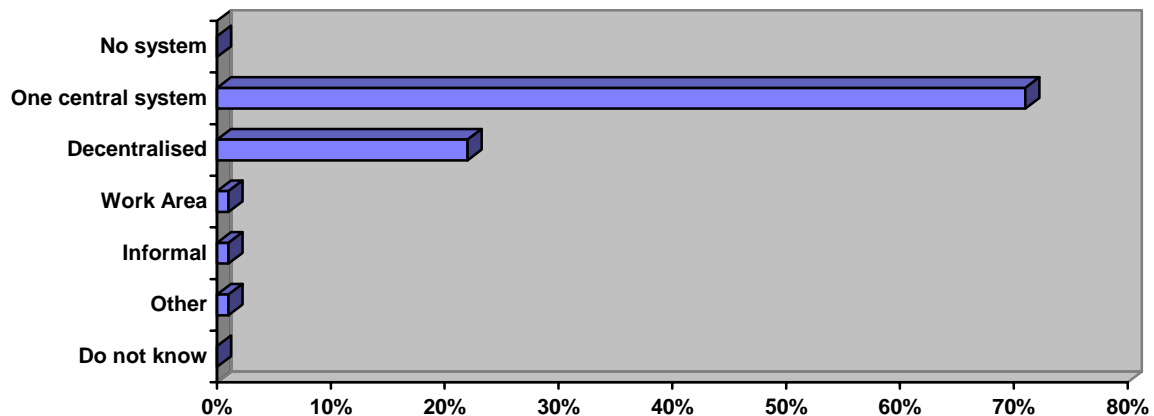
Where participants responded “other”, details given included: development unit, business services, city support unit, executive services, environment & planning and infrastructure.

### Question 1.3

*How do you perceive the record keeping system/s within your Council?*

Response	Percentage
No system	0%
One central system	71%

Decentralised	22%
Work Area	1%
Informal	1%
Other	1%
Do not know	0%



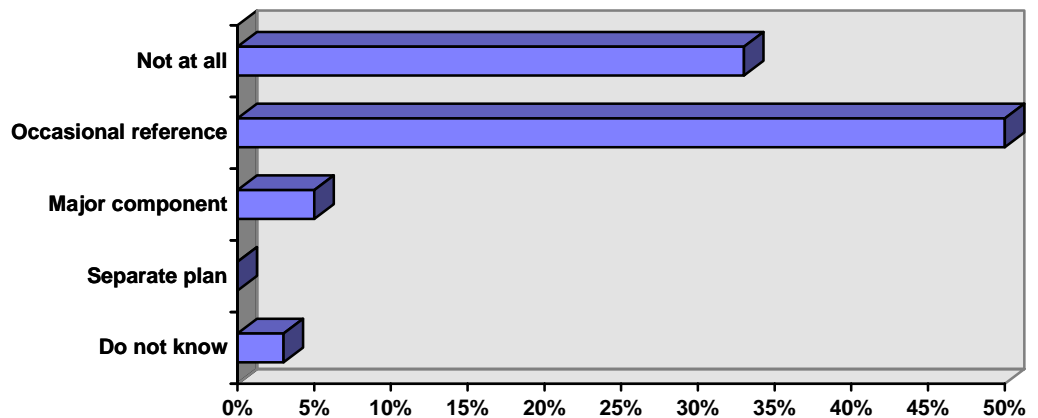
13% of participants selected more than one option. In half of these cases participants had selected one central system and decentralised. This may be because of particular sections within a Council having their own work group record-keeping systems as well as the corporate centralised record-keeping system. The other half of respondents who selected more than one option indicated one central system and work area.

Examples of more than one area being responsible for records management included; accounts, payroll and human resources, which suggests that these areas maintain their own financial and human resource records separately. There were a small number of Councils which indicated that development files were maintained by the development section. However the correspondence records were received through the central records office and forwarded on.

## Question 1.4

*How does records management relate to your Council's overall strategic and business plans?*

Response	Percentage
Not at all	33%
Occasional reference	50%
Major component	5%
Separate plan	0%
Do not know	3%

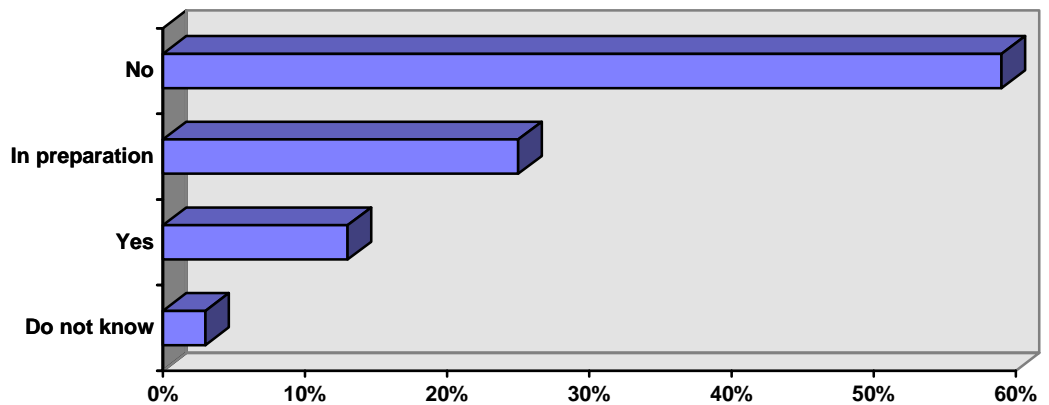


7% of participants did not respond to this question. Although 50% indicated there was occasional reference to records management, there was very little detail provided to expand on this. One Council indicated that the records management wasn't considered to be at a "high level" although "information management" had a very high profile with organisation-wide policies and procedures in place.

## Question 1.5

Are there documented policy statements for your Council's records management, paper or electronic?

Response	Percentage
No	59%
In preparation	25%
Yes	13%
Do not know	3%

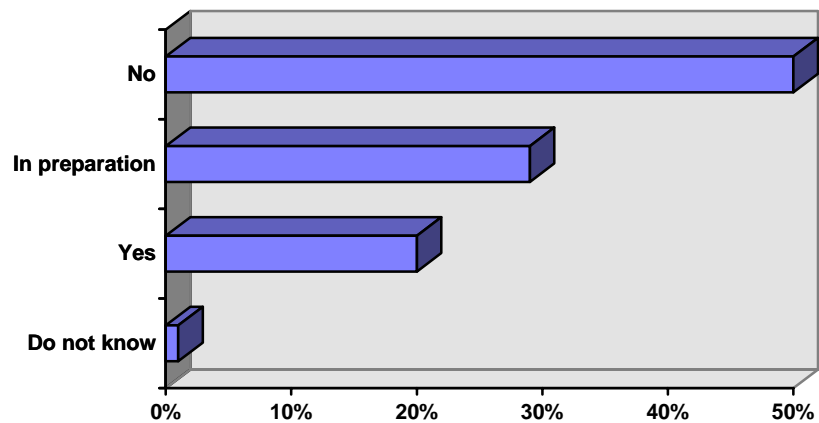


A high percentage of Councils have no policy statement for records management, although a couple of Councils indicated they proposed to issue policy statements along the lines of records management practices to be carried out in accordance with the Australian Standard AS4390 and the State Records Policy and Practice Manual.

### Question 1.6

*Are there documented records management user procedures or guidelines for your Council?*

Response	Percentage
No	50%
In preparation	29%
Yes	20%
Do not know	1%

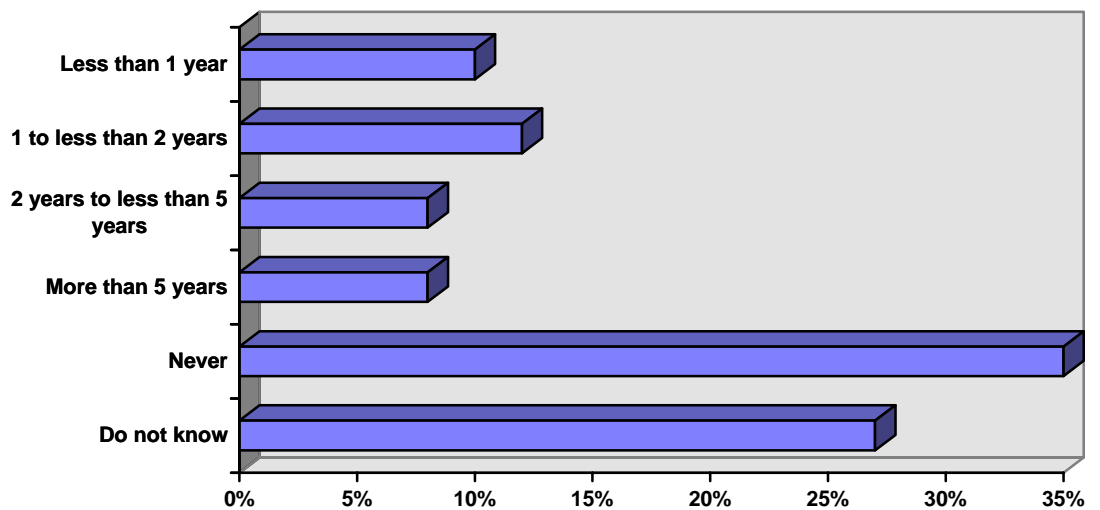


The majority of Councils have no documented records management user procedures or guidelines. Of those participants who responded “yes” to this question, a number of them referred to manuals and procedures for records management software packages. Almost one third of respondents indicated that they are in the process of preparing such documentation for their records management processes.

## Question 1.7

*When was a review last undertaken to measure your Council's level and performance of records management, either paper and/or electronic?*

Response	Percentage
Less than 1 year	10%
1 to less than 2 years	12%
2 years to less than 5 years	8%
More than 5 years	8%
Never	35%
Do not know	27%



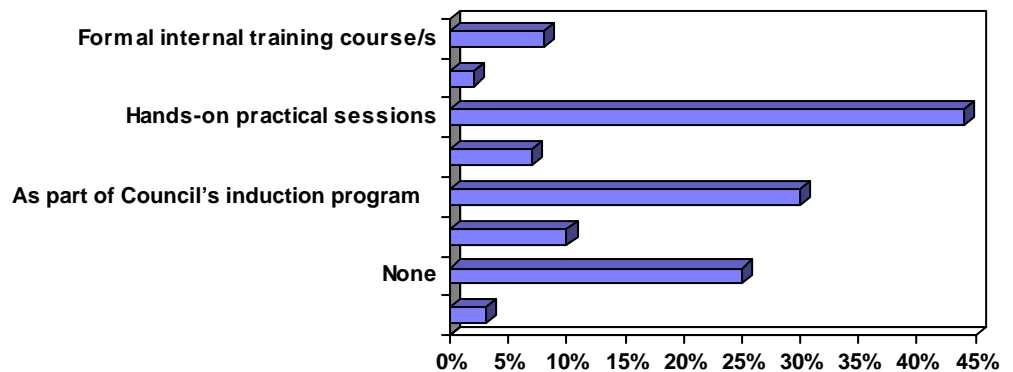
The responses to this question are indicative of the level of awareness and priority of records management across local government. A small number of participants indicated that a review had been planned or was being considered due to amalgamation with other councils.

One third of Councils have performed some sort of review of their records management in the last five years. This result correlates with the proportion of Councils which have records management policies in place, or are preparing them (38%).

## Question 1.8

What training in record keeping practices and procedures is provided to all Council staff?

Response	Percentage
Formal internal training course/s	8%
Formal external training course/s	2%
Hands-on practical sessions	44%
Internally produced publications and leaflets	7%
As part of Council's induction program	30%
Other	10%
None	25%
Do not know	3%

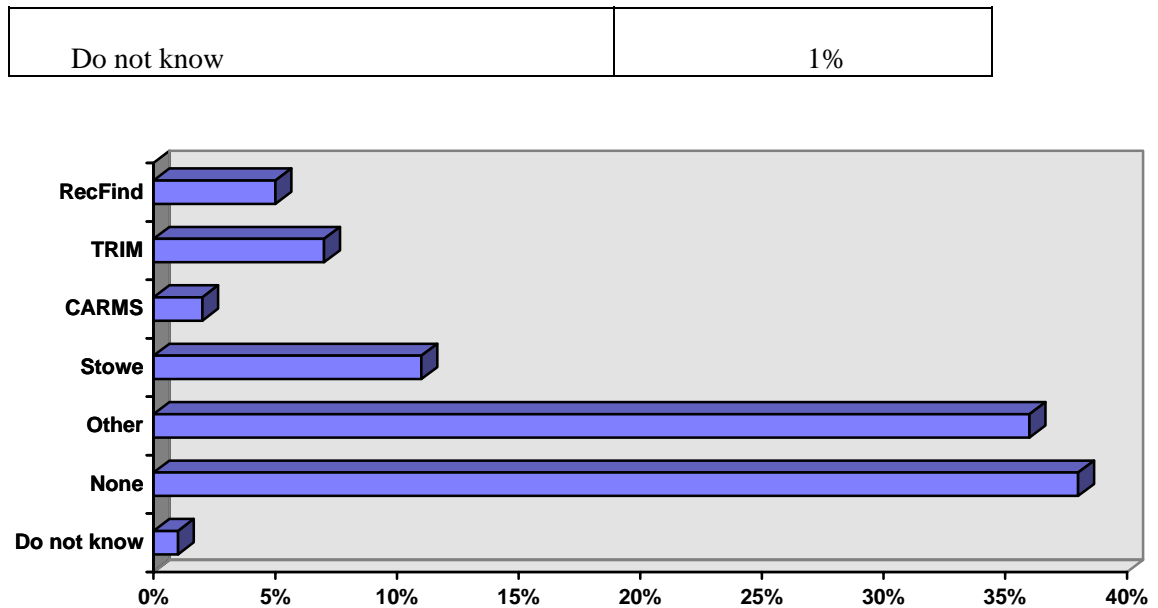


Predominantly training is covered in “hands-on practical sessions. However, a number of Councils have included some form of records management training as part of their induction programs. A quarter of Councils have no training.

## Question 1.9

*What records management product/s does your Council use?*

Response	Percentage
RecFind	5%
TRIM	7%
CARMS	2%
Stowe	11%
Other	36%
None	38%



This demonstrates that Councils have significant opportunity to benefit from implementing records management software.

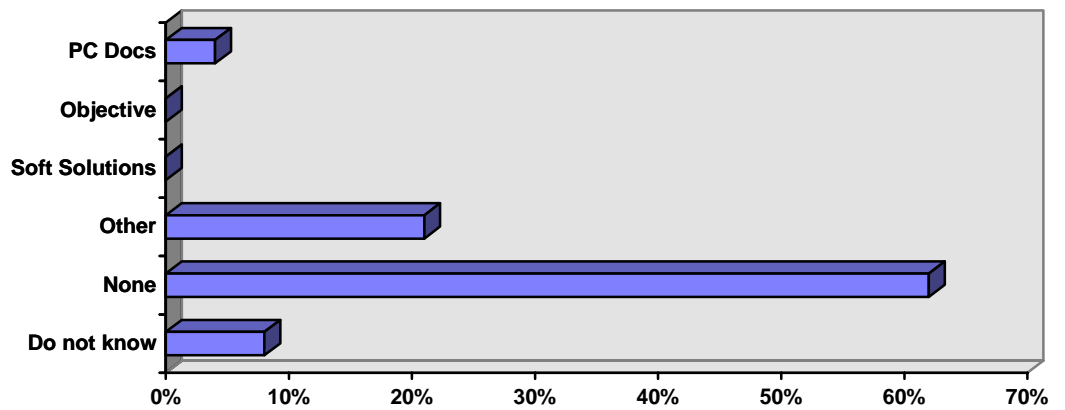
There is no mandated records management system for local government as with state government Agencies. This may be a contributing factor to the high percentage of Councils with no records management products. A reasonably high percentage of participants responded with “other”. This mainly covered in-house built systems or spreadsheets, although a number of participants added they were in the process of evaluating a number of different products.

### Question 1.10

*What document management product/s does your Council use?*

Response	Percentage
PC Docs	4%
Objective	0%

Soft Solutions	0%
Other	21%
None	62%
Do not know	8%



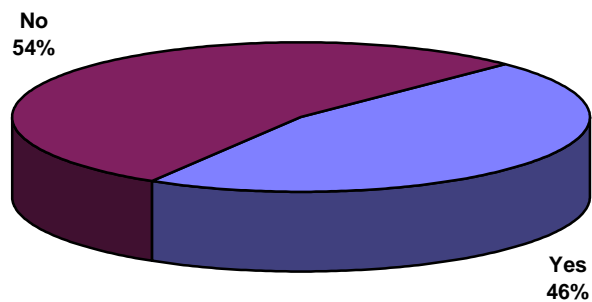
This result depicts the development opportunity noted in Question 1.9.

## SECTION 2: AMALGAMATION

### Question 2.1

*Has your Council recently amalgamated?*

Response	Percentage
Yes	46%
No	54%



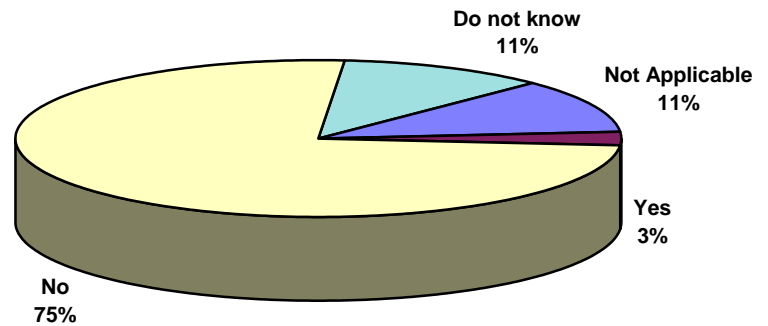
This result implies that there may have been integration of record-keeping systems, practices and policies within the local government sector.

### Question 2.2

*If your Council has not amalgamated, is it likely to do so in the future?*

Response	Percentage
Not Applicable	11%
Yes	3%

No	75%
Do not know	11%

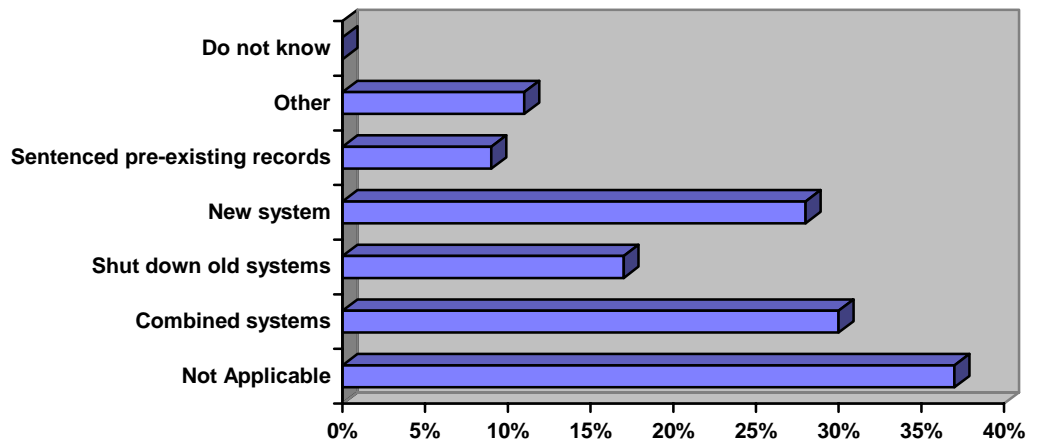


57% of participants responded to this question. It suggests a greater stability in the near future.

### Question 2.3

*What approach did your council take in regards to records management?*

Response	Percentage
Not Applicable	37%
Combined systems	30%
Shut down old systems	17%
New system	28%
Sentenced pre-existing records	9%
Other	11%
Do not know	0%



46% of participants responded to this question, which correlates with the proportion reporting amalgamation. A number of participants ticked more than one option indicating that in some cases, Councils went through a process of either shutting down or combining systems prior to implementing new records management systems.

Several Councils which combined systems did so on computerised records management systems, particularly where both councils used the same software packages. In some instances, where Councils ran different systems, both were closed down and a new system started after the amalgamation date.

## SECTION 3: PAPER RECORDS

### Question 3.1

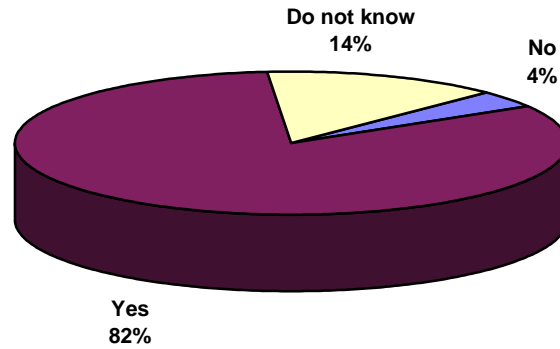
*Please provide an approximate metreage of all your Council's official paper-based records.*

Only 43% of participants responded to question 3.1. Of these participants the total figure reported was only 13,355 metres. This looks to be a substantial underestimate, particularly as Councils have indicated further in the survey that they consider the majority of their records to be of permanent value and that the majority of paper-based records are stored inhouse/onsite.

### Question 3.2

*Do you consider any of the paper-based records created by your Council to be of permanent value?*

Response	Percentage
No	4%
Yes	82%
Do not know	14%

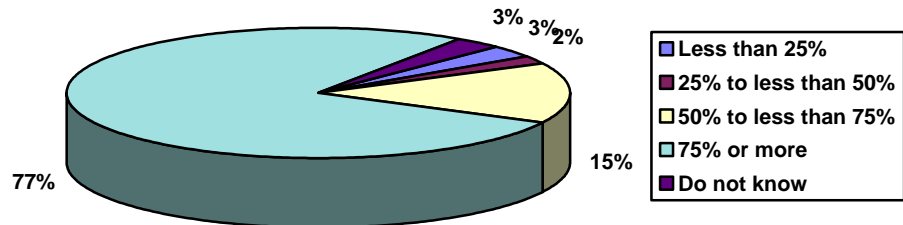


Most Councils understand that some of the records they create do have permanent (or archival) value.

### Question 3.3

*What percentage of all your Council's official paper-based records are stored inhouse/onsite?*

Response	Percentage
Less than 25%	3%
25% to less than 50%	2%
50% to less than 75%	15%
75% or more	77%
Do not know	3%



The level of Councils storing the majority of their official paper-based records inhouse/onsite is high. However, outside the metropolitan area, using State Records (or private sector storage companies based in Adelaide) will not be an appropriate option.

Inefficiencies in storage will occur if Councils maintain inactive or over-due for destruction records within office space.

The result does have implications on projected accommodation requirements for State Records to provide storage.

### Question 3.4

*What percentage of all your Council's official paper-based records are stored off-site?*

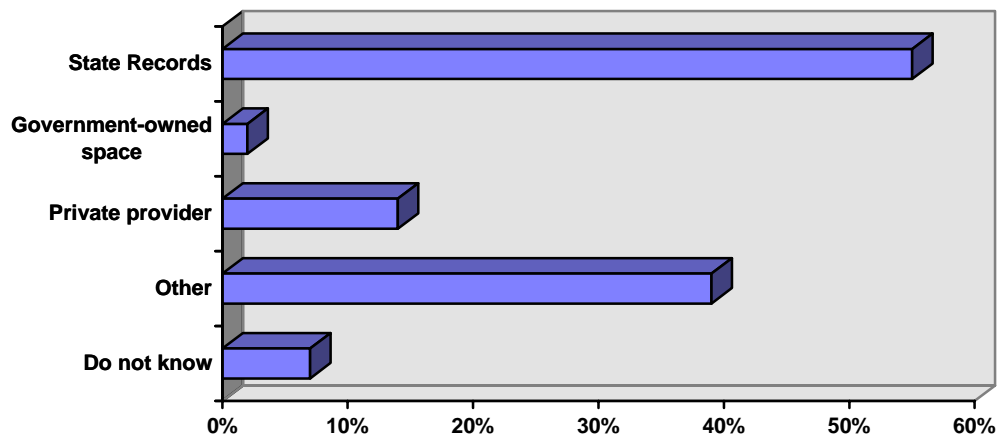
Response	Percentage
Less than 25%	76%
25% to less than 50%	16%
50% to less than 75%	0%
75% or more	2%
Do not know	6%

This correlates with the previous question.

### Question 3.5

*If you store official paper-based records off-site, which of the following do you use?*

Response	Percentage
State Records	55%
Government-owned space	2%
Private provider	14%
Other	39%
Do not know	7%

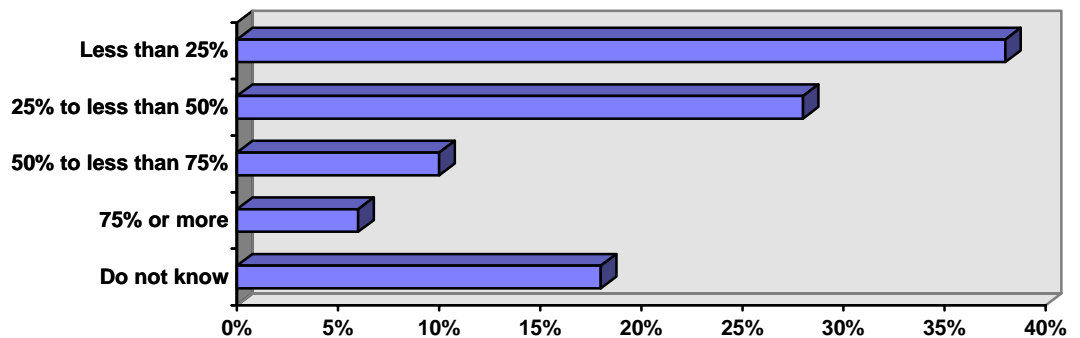


72% of participants responded to this question. A number of councils use more than one provider for records stored off-site. In these instances the providers are State Records and council depots or council-owned property.

### Question 3.6

*What percentage of all your Council's official paper-based records are inactive and/or older than fifteen (15) years?*

Response	Percentage
Less than 25%	38%
25% to less than 50%	28%
50% to less than 75%	10%
75% or more	6%
Do not know	18%

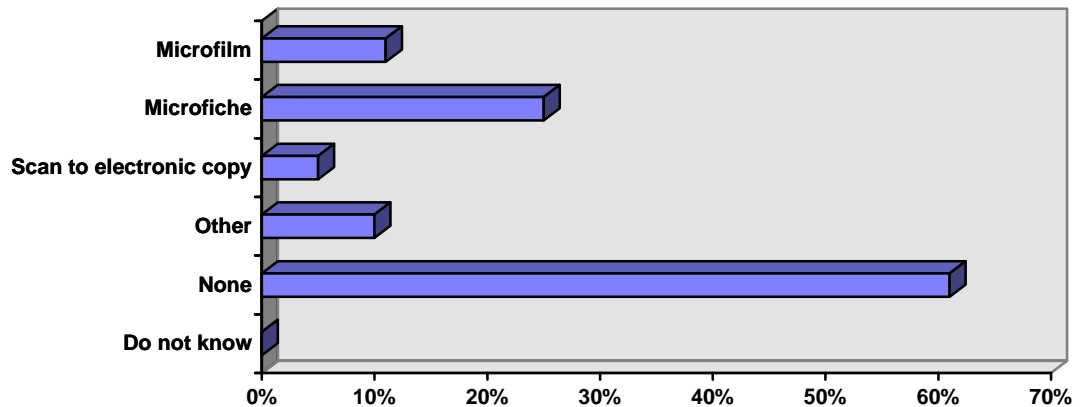


The majority of participants indicated that less than half of their official paper-based records are inactive and/or older than fifteen years. Earlier in this survey the majority of participants indicated that they consider their paper-based records to be of permanent value and that the majority of Councils store these records in-house or onsite, which taken together, form an expectation that the percentage of records which were inactive and/or older than fifteen years would be higher than the responses given in this question. Such a gap, if it exists, would raise a question about the authority and practices used in disposing of older records.

### Question 3.7

*What preservation techniques does your Council use for its paper-based records?*

Response	Percentage
Microfilm	11%
Microfiche	25%
Scan to electronic copy	5%
Other	10%
None	61%
Do not know	0%



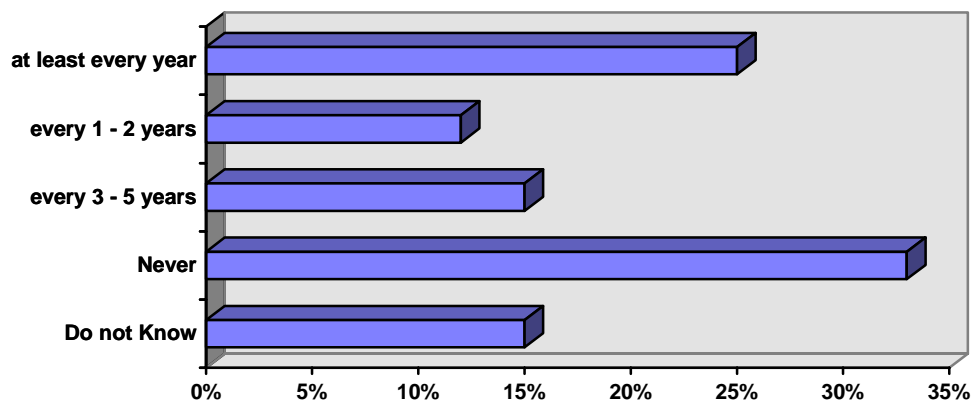
Very few Councils indicated more than one technique used for preservation for paper-based records. A high percentage of Councils use no preservation techniques, even though a large number of Councils consider the majority of their records to be permanent.

Participants who responded with “other” gave the following details of techniques used: photocopying, storage, records archived in archive boxes, fire-proof rooms, purpose built climate controlled strong room. A reasonably high percentage of participants indicated microfiche as a technique used for preservation, however it is not known how or in what circumstances this is used.

### Question 3.8

*How often are the Local Government General Disposal Schedules (LG GDSs) applied to your Council’s housekeeping/common records?*

Response	Percentage
at least every year	25%
every 1 - 2 years	12%
every 3 - 5 years	15%
Never	33%
Do not Know	15%



These figures indicate that only half of local government records are sentenced according to the Local Government General Disposal Schedule. There are a number of possible reasons for this. The LGGDS is outdated in that many records are not covered and Councils have reported it to be inadequate for a number of their records. Councils which have amalgamated may have deferred applying the GDS to their records or may not know when they will be applying the GDS in the future. Whatever the reasons, there are two very significant implications. Firstly, Councils may be unknowingly disposing of records illegally with serious accountability and liability implications. Secondly Councils may not be disposing of records at all. This may be the case in a number of Councils considering the high percentage of records considered to be permanent. However, it may also have implications in terms of effective and efficient access to records and the costs involved in storage.

### Question 3.9

*What Records Disposal Schedules (RDSs) currently exist for your council? Please provide RDS number and/or date when RDS was approved by the Libraries Board.*

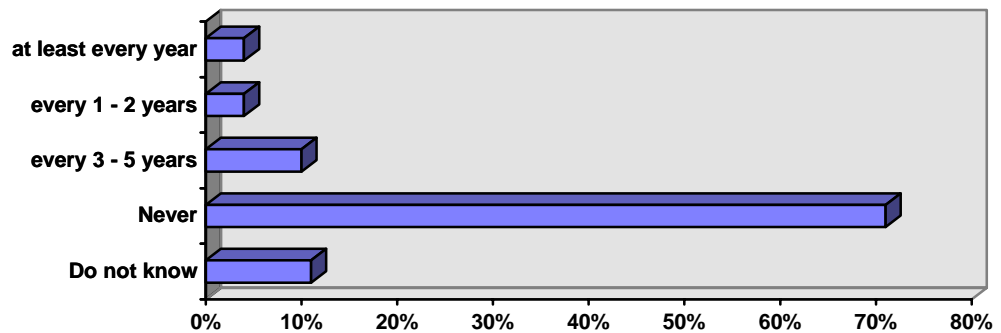
No Councils reported that any Records Disposal Schedules exist, confirming State Records view that there are officially no Records Disposal Schedules in place for local government.

### Question 3.10

*How often are Records Disposal Schedules (RDSs) applied to your Council's operational/functional records?*

Response	Percentage
at least every year	4%
every 1 - 2 years	4%

every 3 - 5 years	10%
Never	71%
Do not know	11%

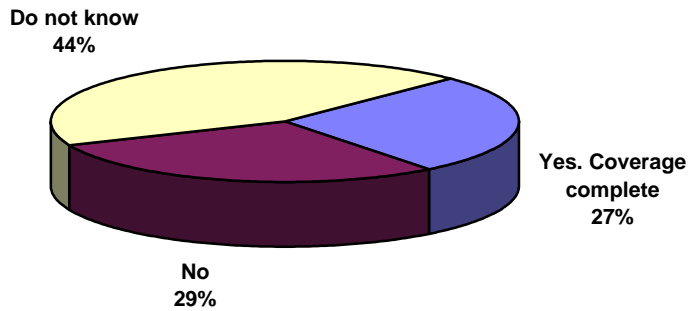


There was a 79% response rate to this question. There is probably some confusion as to what Records Disposal Schedules are (compared with the General Disposal Schedule).

### Question 3.11

*Do you think existing LG GDSs fully cover your Council's official records?*

Response	Percentage
Yes. Coverage complete	27%
No	29%
Do not know	44%



This correlates strongly with question 3.8, with those using the existing GDS almost evenly divided as to the adequacy of the coverage of their Council's records.

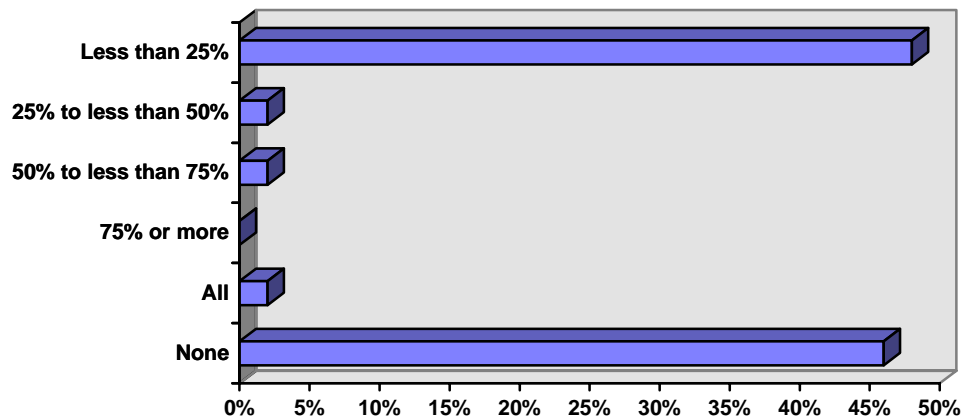
44% of participants responded that they do not know whether the existing GDS fully covers their Council's official records. This confirms that the profile of the GDS is low and that there is an urgent need for Councils to understand as to what the GDS is and how to apply it to their records. Participants responding that the coverage was not adequate gave the following reasons: does no more than indicate how to deal with correspondence files, some items not located in the manual, changes in legislation not accounted for, rural SA not covered, parts are too vague, modification to the index is required.

### Question 3.12

*How many staff have been provided training formal or informal, in the use of the LG GDSs?*

Response	Percentage
Less than 25%	48%
25% to less than 50%	2%
50% to less than 75%	2%

75% or more	0%
All	2%
None	46%



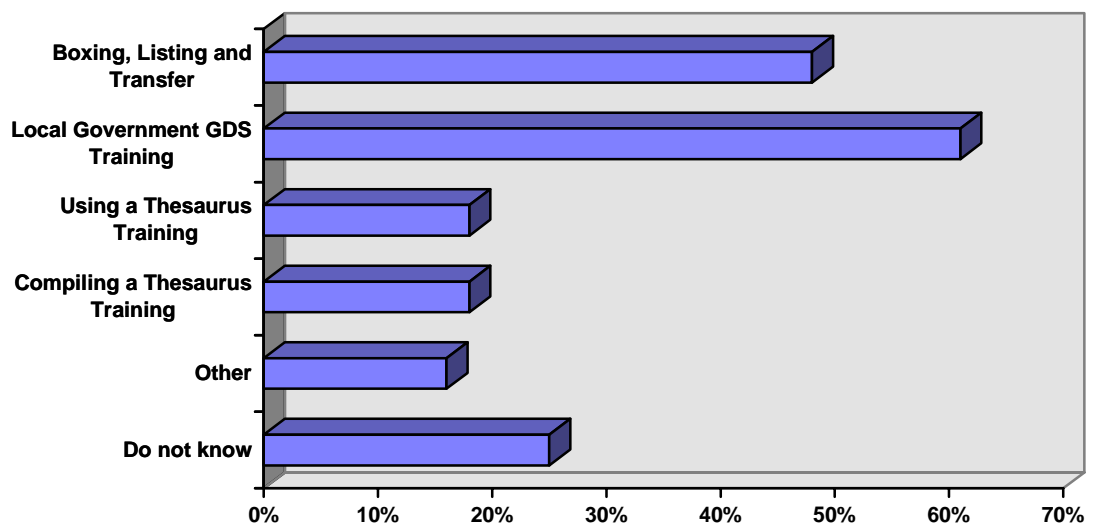
The response to this question reflects the low awareness and application of the GDS. However, the provision of training in the GDS seems generally confined to a small proportion of Council staff. There are some issues here which warrant consideration. Councils may be avoiding applying the GDS or running the risk of sentencing records inappropriately.

### Question 3.13

*What type of training would you like to see State Records provide to Local Governments?*

Response	Percentage
Boxing, Listing and Transfer	48%
Local Government GDS Training	61%

Using a Thesaurus Training	18%
Compiling a Thesaurus Training	18%
Other	16%
Do not know	25%



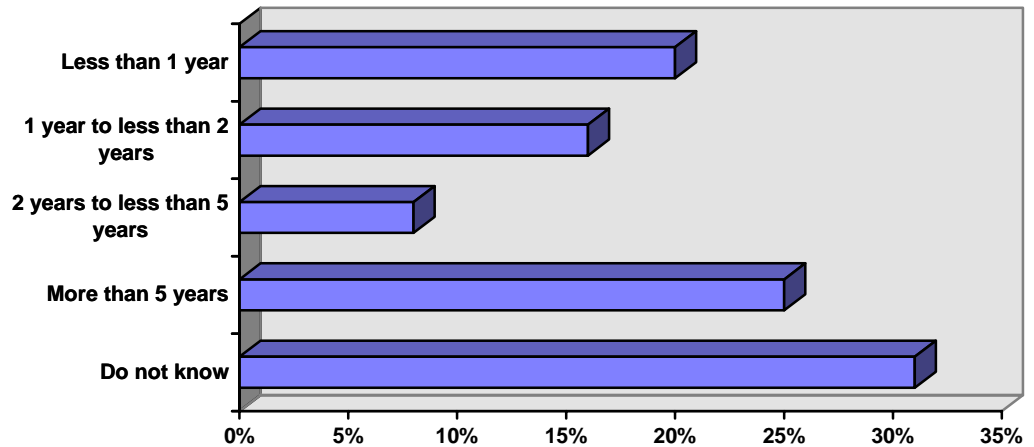
25% of participants indicated that they did not know what type of training they would like to see State Records provide to Local Government. Participants responding with “Other” gave the following examples of training they would like to see State Records provide: managing electronic records, developing policies & procedures for records management, disaster planning and disaster recovery plans, e-mail records, training for non records management staff, basic records management, legal aspects of record-keeping and Records Officers’ responsibilities.

## SECTION 4: ELECTRONIC RECORDS

### Question 4.1

*How long has your Council been registering or applying records management to official records created electronically?*

Response	Percentage
Less than 1 year	20%
1 year to less than 2 years	16%
2 years to less than 5 years	8%
More than 5 years	25%
Do not know	31%

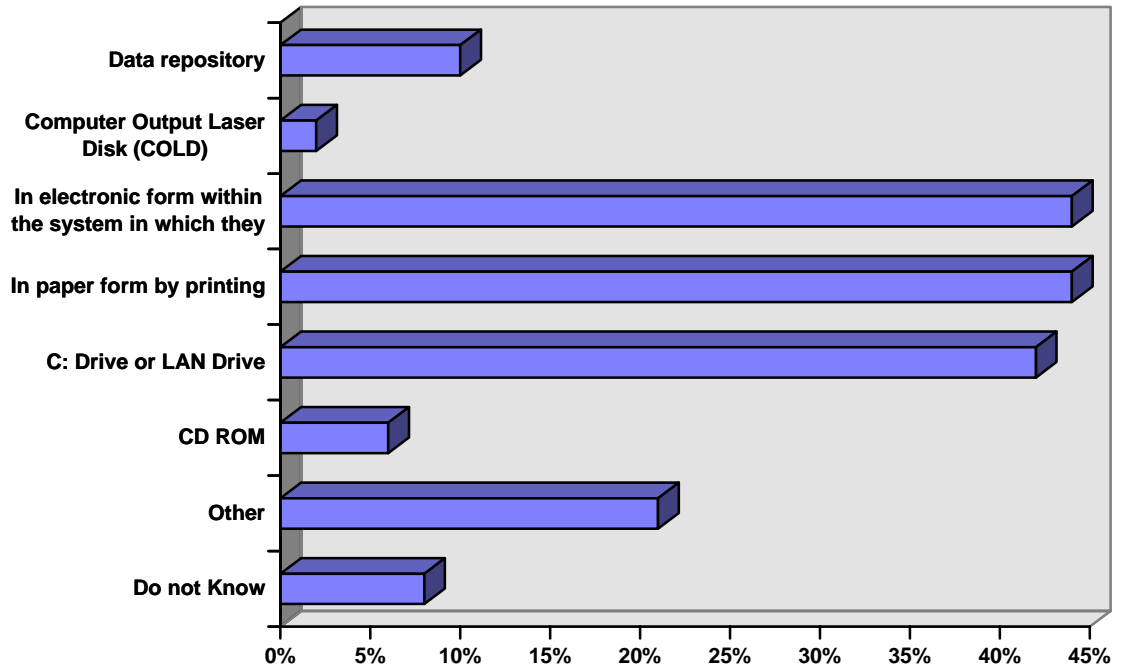


There was a 75% response rate to this question. In particular, 25% of participants indicated that their Council had been registering or applying records management to official electronic records for more than 5 years. This raises an issue of the likely accumulation of electronic records and the implications of migration of the data of those records. There was also a high percentage of participants who did not know how long their Council had been registering or applying records management to official electronic records.

## Question 4.2

*How does your Council store its electronic records?*

Response	Percentage
Data repository	10%
Computer Output Laser Disk (COLD)	2%
In electronic form within the system in which they were created	44%
In paper form by printing	44%
C: Drive or LAN Drive	42%
CD ROM	6%
Other	21%
Do not Know	8%



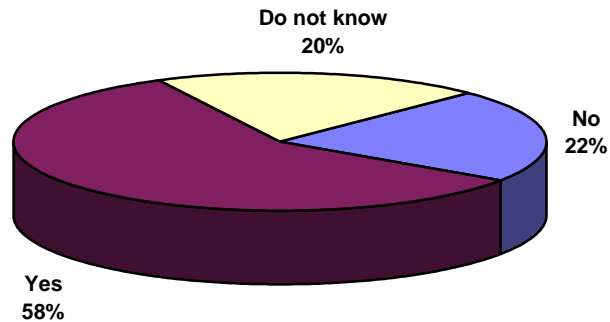
There was an unexpectedly high percentage of participants indicating that they use data repositories to store electronic records. However, the most predictable result was that of the highest percentages of participants indicating that they store electronic records in the system in which they were created and/or in paper form by printing.

### Question 4.3

Do you consider any of the electronic records created by your Council to be vital records?

Response	Percentage
No	22%

Yes	58%
Do not know	20%



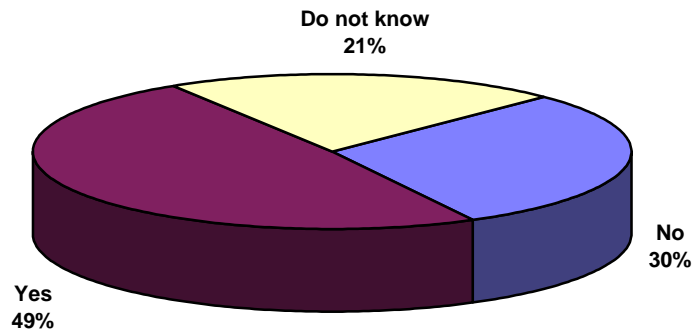
Examples of electronic records created within agencies which are considered to be vital include: financial data, rate notices, correspondence, payroll and financial records, minutes and agendas, property files, assessment books, meeting minutes, indexes of files, personnel records, animal control regs, immunisation, planning, asset files, and general ledger records.

The responses from participants shows a large range of records which are created electronically, giving an indication that the understanding of “vital” may be too broad.

#### Question 4.4

*Do you consider any of the electronic records created by your Council to be of permanent value?*

Response	Percentage
No	29%
Yes	48%
Do not know	21%

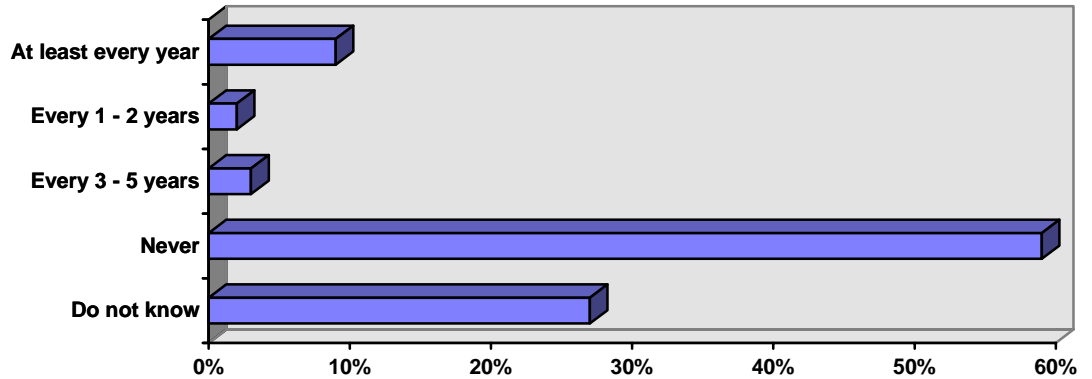


Examples of electronic records created by Councils and considered to be of permanent value were the same as in the previous question. This possibly indicates that agencies consider permanent and vital to be one in the same. This may be a consequence of not having a regular records disposal program linked to the GDS.

### Question 4.5

*How often are Local Government General Disposal Schedules (LG GDSs) applied to your Council's electronic records?*

Response	Percentage
At least every year	9%
Every 1 - 2 years	2%
Every 3 - 5 years	3%
Never	59%
Do not know	27%

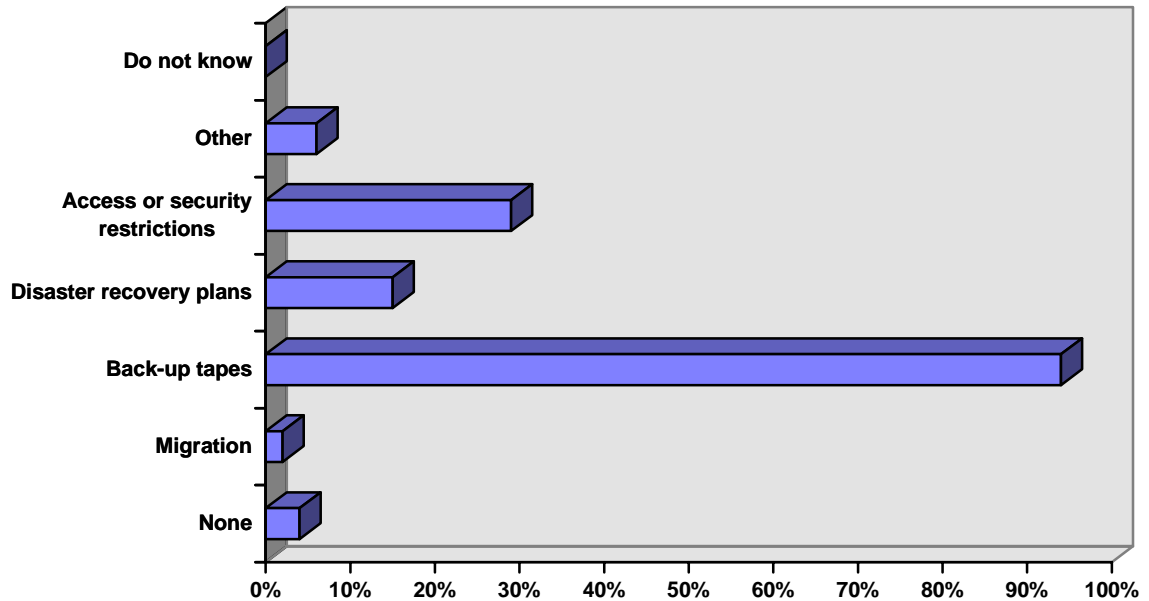


The proportion of Councils which have indicated that they never apply the disposal schedule to their records is high. However, the participants in this survey indicated that Councils consider the majority of their records to be of permanent value. Therefore, this result points to accumulation rather than destruction of records.

## Question 4.6

*What measures are taken by your Council to protect and maintain its electronic records?*

Response	Percentage
None	4%
Migration	2%
Back-up tapes	94%
Disaster recovery plans	15%
Access or security restrictions	29%
Other	6%
Do not know	0%

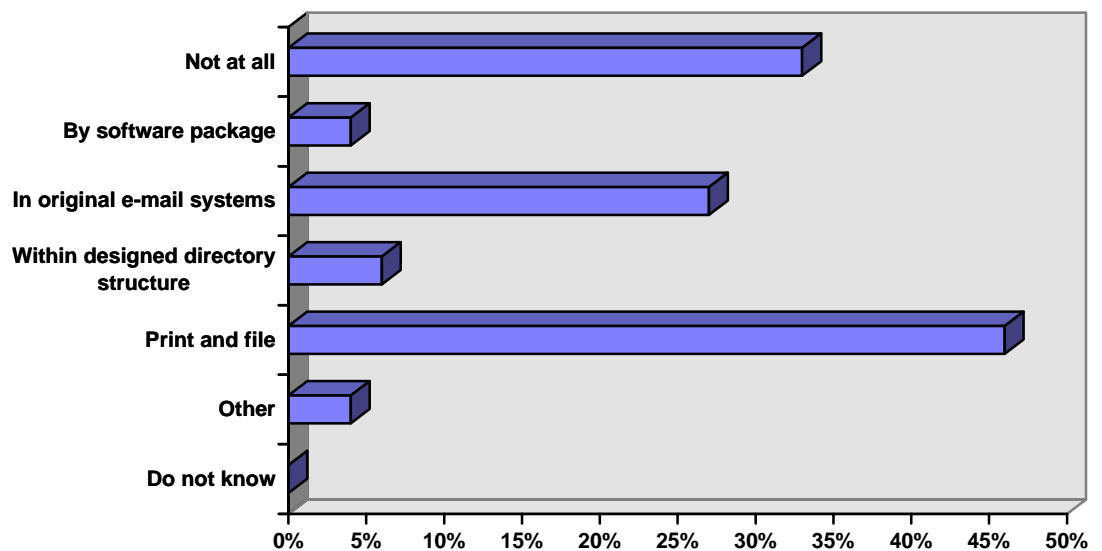


Considering the majority of participants indicated they felt that electronic records were vital and of permanent value, the above responses suggest considerable risk attaches to current practices in protecting and maintaining electronic records. Almost all Councils use back-up tapes meaning they have an immediate disaster recovery capability. However migration is extremely low. If electronic records are to be accessible over time, migration of electronic records must be a much higher priority with Councils.

## Question 4.7

*How does your Council manage its e-mail as records?*

Response	Percentage
Not at all	33%
By software package	4%
In original e-mail systems	27%
Within designed directory structure	6%
Print and file	46%
Other	4%
Do not know	0%

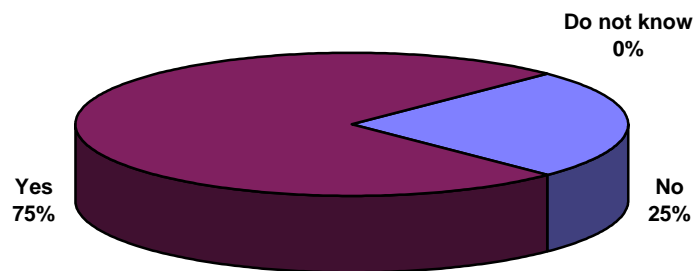


Printing and filing is predominantly the way in which Councils are managing their e-mail records. However a third of respondents indicated that e-mail records are not managed at all, and the use of the e-mail systems themselves may not be an appropriate management strategy. Councils will need help in securing adequate overall management of their e-mail records.

## Question 4.8

*Has training been provided to staff in the creation and maintenance of official electronic records?*

Response	Percentage
No	25%
Yes	75%
Do not know	0%

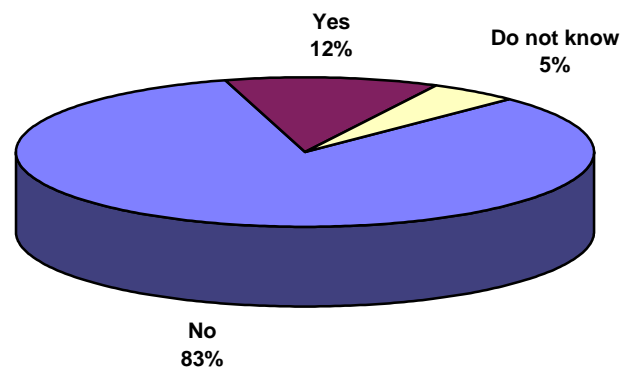


A high percentage of participants responded that staff have been provided with training. However, this seems more likely to be primary package training eg databases, wordprocessing, spreadsheets etc. given the lower number of Councils responded earlier in this survey which have implemented policies, procedures and guidelines for records management. (particularly electronic records)

## Question 4.9

*Have joint arrangements been made with your Council's IT area regarding the management and maintenance of electronic records?*

Response	Percentage
No	83%
Yes	12%
Do not know	5%



This is an aspect where some Councils have started to recognise the linkages between records management and IT.

The response to this question reflects the very small group of Councils which have indicated in Section 1 of this survey that records management doesn't feature highly in the overall strategic and business plans of their organisation although "information management" has a high profile within the organisation.

## Conclusion

This report presents State-wide data. As a supplementary exercise, the results were further analysed by region and size to see whether there were significant variations which might target the work which Councils and State Records might do. However, this closer analysis did not reveal useful information for such an approach. In effect, the variation between Councils evident in this report is much more a matter of how individual Councils are addressing records management issues.

Records management functions are managed predominantly by the administration and corporate services sections within Councils. However, records management does not feature highly in overall strategic/business plans, with few Councils having policy statements, procedures or guidelines for records management.

There is much opportunity for Local Government Councils and State Records to work together to develop policies and standards for records management within Councils. This will depend on raising the profile of records management sufficiently so that it is included in the strategic and corporate plans of all Councils.

Electronic records are rapidly outstripping paper-based records in all corporate activity. Local Councils in South Australia are part of this global trend. With the majority of Councils having no records management or document management products, there is a very real risk over electronic records (and the ability to make paper-based records management more efficient is lost). It will be critical for Records Managers and IT Units within Councils to work increasingly closely to develop policies in partnership. It is such shared policies which will assure the effective management of the maintenance, migration and disposal of electronic records, along with assuring their continued integrity and accessibility..

Responses to the section relating to records disposal indicates there is some way to go in a demonstrable wide awareness and understanding of the *State Records Act* across the local government sector, in particular the way in which Councils manage disposal of records. The use of the Local Government General Disposal Schedule is not widespread, confirming that there is a need for a wide-ranging revision so that it covers local government records more adequately, for the delivery of training to improve competency in using the Schedule, and for greater promotion of the Schedule's existence.