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State Records  
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# Introduction to Electronic Records Management

Standard

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## Introduction

Electronic records are a critical element in the conduct of the business of the Government of South Australia, both for accountability, and in the ongoing documentary heritage of the State. However, that future heritage depends on steps being taken now to ensure that electronic records are properly created and captured, survive without alteration or degradation, and remain accessible for as long as they are required. Such steps need to be taken in the context of a long-term strategy embracing all of the Government's information and communication.

Electronic records can include e-mail, Internet content, documents, spreadsheets, drawings, databases, and digitally recorded images.

Because of their volatility, the management of electronic records requires special consideration. Without active management throughout their existence, electronic records are not likely to remain accessible or to be complete and reliable, even over short periods.

## Scope of this standard

This standard applies to all 'agencies' as defined in section 3 of the *State Records Act 1997*. It is principally aimed at senior management within government and provides a general introduction to the management of electronic records within a South Australian Government context.

This document is issued in accordance with sections 7(h) and 14 of the State Records Act.

## Related documents

This document provides a high level overarching statement for previously developed documents relating to electronic records management issues and other documents currently under development by State Records.

The principal documents in this suite currently include:

- *Document and Records Systems Standard* which outlines six broad principles for selecting and evaluating electronic document and records management systems (June 2001)
- *Management of E-mail as Official Records: Policy, Guidelines and Technical Considerations* (April 2002)

A series of guidelines looking at the issues of system/functional requirements for managing electronic records, online service delivery, recordkeeping metadata standards, cross-jurisdictional databases and digitising/imaging are currently being prepared by State Records.

While specific papers will be released on electronic records issues, it is generally considered that electronic records, like their paper-based counterparts, will be managed in accordance with the Adequate Records Management Framework.

The Adequate Records Management Framework is described in:

- *Adequate Records Management: Meeting the Standard* which includes ten related outcomes and provides associated benchmarks which agencies need to satisfy if their records management programs are to be considered adequate in accordance with section 16 of the State Records Act.

*Meeting the Standard* is complemented by two guidelines:

- *Improvement Matrix* – a guideline for assessing the adequacy of agencies' existing records management systems, programs and practices
- *Implementation Plan* – a guideline that provides a generic plan for implementing an adequate records management program.

The development of Whole-of-Government records management documents by State Records complements broader Government planning frameworks such as the *Government Management Framework* (GMF), and the Information and Communication Services Strategic Plan (*ICS Directions*).

## **Variation to this standard**

This standard was approved by the Minister for Administrative Services on 03 May 2002. State Records may update or alter this standard from time to time as authorised by the Manager [Director] of State Records, in consultation with the State Records Council. All South Australian agencies shall be informed of any such alterations or updates.

## What is an electronic record?

An electronic record, like its paper counterpart, is the documentation of a transaction that happens as a result of someone taking a particular action at a particular time—it is the evidence of what has happened, of who was involved and when.

Records provide the evidence of deliberations, decisions and transactions. Their continuing integrity is crucial for as long as they have value for government or the community.

## Successful management of electronic records

The successful management of electronic records, particularly those that have ongoing value to the community and the government, requires a systematic approach through each phase of the life of a record including:

- creation & capture
- control (including classification, registration & indexing)
- maintenance and use
- storage
- disposal
- access.

The Government needs to strategically manage its electronic records, which can include e-mail messages, electronic documents, websites, spatial information, online forms, and so on. It also needs to develop and implement electronic recordkeeping systems that capture, maintain and provide access to these records over time.

Without active management throughout their existence, electronic records are unlikely to remain accessible or be complete and reliable, even over short periods of time. The pace of technological change and the highly flexible environment in which electronic records are generated and stored makes them far more volatile and vulnerable than paper records. The current technological environment tends to generate a very large volume of records and also allows records to be easily altered and manipulated. This creates a number of challenges when it comes to maintaining adequate evidence of the business of government.

## Records, Information and Data

Data, information and documents, whether digital or paper-based, become records when they are created or received in the conduct of South Australian Government business. They therefore need to be managed in accordance with the State Records Act.

The difference between records and other forms of information is their purpose and context. Records are kept to provide evidence of business activity. To be considered evidence, they have to demonstrate not only structure and content but also context - the who, what, where, when and why surrounding a business transaction. This is what separates records from other forms of information.

South Australian Government records, unlike other forms of information, can only be disposed of in accordance with an approved disposal determination approved by the State Records Council. Disposal Schedules set out the minimum period for which records need to be kept in accordance with their values to the agency, to the Government as a whole and to the wider community.

Current international best practice for managing electronic data and information as records is for each agency to establish identifiable corporate records management systems. Such systems need to be able to maintain the integrity of digital data as electronic records over time.

Furthermore, electronic data and information that are records may have value beyond any current administrative needs. Agencies have a responsibility to ensure that such electronic records, along with their content, structure and context, remain accessible and readable for as long as they are required.

## Records management, information management & knowledge management

Records management, information management and knowledge management are inter-related, with records and information management being the cornerstones for knowledge management. The three essential components of each are:

- information
- people
- organisational culture and processes.

Records management and information management are both concerned with the processes of planning, managing and controlling the creation, flow and distribution of information within an organisation. Within a government context records management differs in that the disposal of records, and of determining whether they are permanent or temporary, is governed by legislation.

Knowledge management can be distinguished from records and information management in that it aims to deal with both explicit and tacit information.

## Legislative & Standards Context

There are various legal requirements applying to electronic records management. South Australian agencies (both state and local) are required to comply with relevant provisions of their enabling legislation and of the following Acts & Principles:

- *State Records Act 1997*
- *Freedom of Information Act 1991*
- *Information Privacy Principles* (issued as Cabinet Administrative Instruction No. 1 of 1989 & reissued 30 July 1992)
- *Electronic Transactions Act*
- *Evidence Act 1929*
- *Public Sector Management Act 1995*
- *Local Government Act 1999*

All digital data and information created or received in the conduct of state or local government business constitute official records under the State Records Act. The Act aims to ensure that agencies observe best practices with regard to the management of official records.

The *Freedom of Information Act 1991* defines the rights of the public to obtain access to information held by the Government and to ensure that records held by the Government concerning the personal affairs of members of the public are not incomplete, incorrect, out-of-date or misleading.

The *Information Privacy Principles* relate to the collection, storage, access, correction, use, and disclosure of personal information contained within records. Chief Executives are responsible for ensuring that the principles are observed for all personal information for which their agency is responsible. The principles apply to the whole of the public sector as defined in section 4(1) of the *Government Management & Employment Act 1985* (repealed by the *Public Sector Management Act 1995*).

The *Evidence Act 1929* makes provisions (in part VIA) for admitting computer evidence in civil or criminal proceedings, but these provisions contain strict requirements to prove the integrity of the computer system from its outset before the evidence from the system is admissible. However, the overall purpose of part VIA is to make admissible in legal proceedings the output of a computer in circumstances in which it would not otherwise be admissible.

The *Electronic Transactions Act*<sup>1</sup>, which mirrors the Commonwealth Electronic Transactions Act, operates as an interpretation law. This means that where a law of the state has a 'requirement' or 'permission' for writing, signature, production of a document, or retention of a document, that requirement can be met, or permission exercised, by the use of an electronic communication that satisfies the criteria specified in the Act.

The *Public Sector Management Act 1995* makes provision for certain public sector management matters, matters include:

- providing responsive, effective, and efficient services to the community and the government

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<sup>1</sup> At time of publication the SA Electronic Transactions Act is yet to be proclaimed.

- managing all resources effectively, prudently and in a fully accountable manner
- continuous improvement in service delivery performance.

The Chief Executive of an Agency is responsible to the Minister of their administrative unit for ensuring these aims and standards are met.

The *Local Government Act 1999* places a direct responsibility on Chief Executives to ensure that records required by legislation are properly kept and maintained.

In addition to legislation there are national and international standards that agencies should be aware of if they are to pursue best practice. These include:

- *AS ISO15489 Records Management*
- *ISO9000 Quality Assurance*
- *AS/NZ4360 Risk Management.*

*Australian Standard Records Management AS ISO 15489-2002* is a code of practice for the management of records of both public and private organisations. The standard applies to the management of records, in all formats or media, created or received in the conduct of an organisation's activities. It provides guidance on records management in support of a quality process framework to comply with *ISO 9000* and *ISO 14000*, and on the design and implementation of a records system.

*ISO 9000* is an international standard specifying quality system requirements. This standard has a records management component with which organisations seeking quality endorsement need to comply.

The Australian/New Zealand standard *AS/NZ4360:1999 Risk Management* provides a generic framework for managing risk. Like *ISO 9000* it has a records management component.

In addition to these international and national standards, State Records has issued two standards that directly relate to the management of electronic records:

- The *Whole-of-Government Document and Records Systems Standard* provides six key principles and the related minimum compliance requirements for adequate document and records systems in South Australian state and local government agencies. The standard is designed for use by those involved in the assessment and acquisition of document and records systems. Document and records management systems purchased by state and local government agencies need to comply with at least the requirements of this standard. Agencies will be expected to select systems based on evaluation against these and other business-specific requirements, or provide a business case for another framework of specifications.
- *Adequate Records Management: Meeting the Standard* contains the outcomes for a records management program and associated benchmarks which agencies are required to meet if their records management programs are to be considered adequate in accordance with section 16 of the State Records Act. Meeting the Standard applies to both paper-based and electronic records.

## The Business Case for Good Records Management

Good records management will have a number of benefits over and above simply meeting legislative requirements, including:

- informed policy making, decision making and planning for the delivery of services
  - good risk management
  - good corporate governance
  - enhanced operational effectiveness
  - realised client and stakeholder expectations
  - improved management and delivery of services
  - increased productivity
  - increased accountability
  - improved access to and sharing of corporate information
  - continuity in the event of a disaster
  - increased client/customer satisfaction.

Conversely, poor records management may have a number of effects including:

- a lack of available information necessary to conduct business
- poor decision making as a result of incomplete or mis-information
- time inefficiencies
- wasted financial resources for the storage of records
- potentially severe legal liabilities.

## Role of State Records of South Australia

State Records has a statutory obligation to assist agencies in the effective management of their official records, and to report inadequate practice to the Minister.

State Records is required to develop, communicate and promote the implementation of what it sees as being best practice issues concerning the management of electronic records, both in the short and long term.

The State Records Act requires that all official records over fifteen years old will normally be delivered into the custody of State Records. Preserving electronic records in the longer term and ensuring their continued retrieval depends on a secure migration strategy. There is a clear imperative on State Records (in collaboration with agencies) to set the standard for this.

## Glossary

State Records has produced an extensive Glossary of Records Management Terms. This can be accessed and downloaded from the Adequate Records Management, publications section of the State Records website, <http://www.archives.sa.gov.au>