

Australian Archives in Lamb's Clothing

by R.C. SHARMAN

For twenty-three years, from late in 1949 till December 1972, Australian federal politics were dominated by an alliance of conservative parties, the "Liberal" Party of Australia and the Australian Country Party. The Labor Party, which in the mid 1940s had seemed impregnable under leaders like wartime Prime Ministers John Curtin and J.B. Chifley, by the 1950s was in disarray. In 1961 the Australian Labor Party came within a hairsbreadth of gaining office, but it was not until 1972 that a Labor leader, E.G. Whitlam, emerged as one capable of bringing his party back into control of the Treasury benches. In the campaign for electoral support that preceded the December 1972 triumph, Whitlam promised that a federal Labor administration would introduce "Open Government".

One of the features of "Open Government" would surely have to be a more liberal approach to the question of access to the nation's archival resources. This was a problem that had bedevilled relations between the Commonwealth Archives Office and scholars ever since attempts were first made to use the public records of the national government for non-official research purposes.

When the Commonwealth Archives Office¹ first undertook a program of appraising, selecting, arranging and making available for use the public archives of the nation, the 50-year access rule was fairly generally applied in countries adopting British patterns and traditions of administration. In the 1940s this meant that, unless special exceptions were made, no records whatever compiled by agencies of the national government could be consulted, as the six federating Colonies of Australia had not finally come together to form the Commonwealth until 1901. Some older records, it is

¹ The Commonwealth Archives Office began its existence during the later years of the Second World War as the Archives Division of the Commonwealth National Library. Its separation from the National Library is mentioned later in this report. It is now usually referred to as the Australian Archives, and the two terms are used interchangeably in this paper.

true, came under the control of the federal government in 1901, or later, when the functions to which they related were transferred from the colonies (or, in post-1900 terms, the States) to the new government, so the Commonwealth Archives did have the custody even in the 1940s of some records more than 50 years old. These were, however, small in bulk and few in number compared with the vast quantities of post-1900 records with which the Archives Office had to contend.

The 1950s and 1960s, decades when the anti-Labor coalition government was in power in Canberra, saw a significant quickening of interest in research in such topics as Australian history, political science, economic history, government and politics, constitutional law, administration and sociology. For a good deal of this research, access to Australian government records was vital. Scholars were interested in such problems as the history of Australia's restrictive immigration policy, the importation of capital from overseas, the development of manufacturing industries, Imperial Preference, the Conscription referenda of the World War I period, and government policies in the economic depression of the 1930s. The Australian National University in Canberra developed strong post-graduate research schools, and in those devoted to social sciences and some of the humanities access to original documentary source material was essential, just as access to chromosomes is essential to a geneticist. The National University, impatient of the slowness of libraries and archives in collecting and making available business and trade union archives for scholarly research, established its own archives unit, which began to collect raw material for research on which its Ph.D. students and its own scholars could base their dissertations and other investigatory study and writing. No such unilateral action was possible with regard to Commonwealth government records, of course, for the government, though reluctant to provide proper access conditions in its own Archives Office for scholarly research, was even more reluctant (and understandably so) to allow records out of its custody and into the research collection of the University.

There were cases where academic researchers were permitted to consult records less than 50 years old, and a good deal of the professional expertise of the archivists was devoted to trying to circumvent the government's reluctance to make public archives more widely available. At this stage the decision as to whether or not government files might be used to support non-official research was made, not by the archivist, but by the officers of the departments which had created them. Even series of records which had in theory been approved for academic research still had to be individually vetted, that is, subjected to a page by page scrutiny, with papers not considered suitable for release being masked by the scrutinizing officers. This search for the supposedly dangerous document resulted in long delays before records could finally be delivered to the search-room table, and

historians suffered frustrations which were more infuriating to them than total closure of the archives would have been.

The problems which were encountered in implementing Commonwealth Government policy with respect to archives were referred to an inter-departmental committee which was in session from 1962 till 1964, and it identified one of the main difficulties as being the absence of one central authority to settle questions which relate to national archives—especially such questions as could not be resolved by a single department. As one (later) Commonwealth government paper expressed it “The Committee saw a need for the establishment of an authority to apply and regulate Government policy on questions of ownership of public records, disposal of records, transfer from one type of custody to another, and questions of access”.² The inter-departmental committee’s report was never presented to a Minister.

There were, however, changes on the way. In 1966 the 50-year access rule was replaced by one which said that records originating before 1923 could be made available at the discretion of the Archives Office, though there were still large classes of exceptions, including Cabinet Papers. Access to more recent records was still to be subject to departmental approval. Even for the pre-1923 records, clearance in terms of the government decision did not mean that records could automatically be released. Each individual item had to be perused, and the masking of documents on sensitive matters still continued.

On 31 December 1970 the government of Prime Minister John Gorton announced a liberalisation of access conditions.³ The earlier rule was replaced by a 30-year one, and as this would have placed some scholars, working on the history of Australia’s part in World War II, in a very awkward position, it was also announced that scholars working on a substantial piece of research involving use of wartime records, could have access to papers down to the year 1945 if they applied for this privilege, and if their case was thought acceptable. The substitution of a 30-year rule for the earlier access conditions was described by one historian as “a major breakthrough which should stimulate research on recent Australian history”.⁴

2 “A National archives system,” a background document issued to participants in the W. Kaye Lamb Seminar in Canberra, 1 September 1973 and later printed in *Archives and Manuscripts* 5 (5) November 1973, pp. 104-109.

3 Press release issued by Prime Minister 30 December 1970, published in most Australian metropolitan dailies, 1 January 1971.

4 C.B. Schedvin, “Commonwealth Archives and Cabinet: a user’s view,” in *Proceedings of the 16th Biennial Conference of the Library Association of Australia*, held in Sydney, August, 1971 (Sydney: the Conference Committee, 1972) pp. 233-238.

The Prime Minister also announced that custody and control of Commonwealth records was to be the responsibility of the Archives Office. For the first time in the history of the federation, there was to be one authority under Cabinet with power to control access to Commonwealth archives.

The embargo on Cabinet papers still applied. Historians meeting in the History Section of the Congress of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science, in Brisbane in May 1971, expressed their discontent at the continuing refusal of the Commonwealth government to make available Cabinet papers under the same conditions as other archival documents. At the 16th Biennial Conference of the Library Association of Australia in Sydney in August in that year, a historian enlarged on the problems caused by the masking of Cabinet papers—problems which were exacerbated by the difficulties encountered (even by Archives Office staff) in recognising a Cabinet paper even when it appeared on a file.⁵

When the federal government of William McMahon announced in February 1972 that Cabinet papers would no longer be excluded from the liberalised access conditions, the decision was greeted as a major concession.⁶ This decision also provided that the War Cabinet papers covering the years 1942 to 1945 should also be released for scholarly use. Australia had at last achieved an overall access policy for its national archives which was more liberal than that pertaining to British public records where the thirty-five year rule still applied. There were still difficulties, however. One of them was the onus of clearing papers for actual study still rested on officers of the Archives Office. Despite the fact that large resources of temporary staff were allotted to the task of clearing official papers, scholarly demand was so heavy that frustrating delays still ensued.

The beginning of 1972, then, had seen the liberalising of access conditions; the end of that year, as recounted above, had seen the election of a Labor Party administration pledged to ‘‘Open Government’’. Under the new administration, responsibility for the Commonwealth Archives passed to the Department of the Special Minister of State. In mid-1973, the incumbent of that office, Senator Don Willesee, invited Dr W. Kaye Lamb to visit Australia. The objective was presumably to receive advice from the distinguished Canadian archivist as to ways in which the Australian archival agency might develop, and possibly to gain the benefit of Dr Lamb’s wisdom on such specific matters as the wording of a national archives bill for presentation to the Parliament.

5 Schedvin, ‘‘Commonwealth Archives and Cabinet,’’ pp. 233-238.

6 *Archives and Manuscripts* 5 (2) February 1973, p. 42. Press release issued by Prime Minister 26 January 1972.

Dr Lamb's name was probably known as widely among Australian archivists as was that of any other living overseas archivist. There was every reason why his visit to Australia could have been marked as an event equally significant to that of the American archivist, the late Dr T.R. Schellenberg, some nineteen years earlier. It happened that Dr Lamb was going to be in Australia at the time of the 17th Biennial Conference of the Library Association of Australia. Even though that Conference was being held in Perth, on the other side of the continent from where most of the action takes place, it would have been appropriate to let the LAA know of Dr Lamb's impending visit, and allow him to use the forum provided by the Conference to inspire and instruct Australian archivists and librarians. The LAA has an Archives Section, whose meetings, held within the program of the Conference, certainly attracted a large percentage (though by no means all) of the leading archivists of Australia. Strangely enough, the Department of the Special Minister of State neglected to use this apparently golden opportunity to allow Lamb and a great number of the practising professional archivists to get together. Instead, it was decided to hold a Seminar in Canberra on 25 August, a date which would make it very difficult, if not impossible, for a Conference-attending archivist to be present at the Seminar. Invitations went out to historians, archivists, librarians, administrators and others with an interest in the preservation and use of documentary source materials.

The Department responsible for Dr Lamb's visit changed the date of the Seminar, in response to suggestions, to 1 September. Dr Lamb spoke to those present, but the function seemed to be organised, not so much to allow Australian archivists, administrators and others to hear him, as to give historians a chance to say what they wanted about the Australian Archives. It certainly was not the first time that people had criticised the government's archival policy, but it was certainly the first occasion on which that government had set the scene to enable them to do so, and paid an overseas visitor's costs so that he could listen! Several speakers, representing the users of archives, recounted the frustrations and disappointments they had suffered in attempting to use the national archival resource. The purpose of the seminar, on the face of it, was to acquaint Dr Lamb with the problems of the Australian Archives. Perhaps more important, there was the covert intention of providing a forum for senior administrators from government agencies other than the Archives to hear the sorts of complaints historians were making, and making justifiably, about delays in having records cleared for historical study.

After the Seminar, Dr Lamb visited Melbourne, Sydney and Perth, inspecting archives and allied institutions in those places as he had, of course, in Canberra. He had discussions with officers of the Australian

government on a national archives system⁷, and we are led to conjecture that he gave advice to that government on the form and content of archives legislation which, it was proposed, should be introduced into the Parliament to put the Australian Archives on a sound statutory footing. During the time that he was in Australia he compiled the Lamb Report (*Development of the National Archives*; Report [to the Hon. the Special Minister of State] September 1973, by W. Kaye Lamb. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1974. ISBN 0 642 00561 3).

Dr Lamb left Australia on 4 October, and the government issued a press release shortly after that date, indicating that it was studying his recommendations. By the time the next development took place, Mr Lionel Bowen, M.P., had succeeded Senator Willesee as Special Minister of State. In March 1974 Bowen released the Lamb report. In doing so, he told his fellow members of the House of Representatives (and thereby told the nation) that the Australian government planned to expand and upgrade the operations of the Archives Office "so as to develop a greater public interest in the wealth of historical material which forms part of our national heritage". Bowen hoped that, within the then current session of Parliament, an archives bill would be presented which would put the Australian Archives on a proper legal footing. There would be a Director-General of the Archives, and when he had been appointed Bowen said that a small task force would be set up to examine in detail the implications of the government's new policy initiatives and to report within three months. The task force's recommendations would refer to the building program of the Australian Archives, an assessment of staffing and organisational requirements, a survey of the needs and interests of users, a review of salary levels and a program for the recruitment and training of archivists.

Lamb's report was produced in near-print. Stocks available for distribution from the Special Minister of State's Office soon dwindled to nil, and the Department stated that no more would be produced. Fortunately for Australia's reputation overseas, Dr Lamb had been treated with a good deal more courtesy while he was in Australia than was his report once he had left our shores.

The report comes down firmly in favour of the Australian Archives being within the normal departmental structure, that is, that the archives agency should not be governed by a statutory board or council (which would have given the institution a measure of independence from the government) but that its officers should be responsible, in the normal manner of public servants, to a departmental head and thence to a minister of the Crown. The second part deals with the functions of the Australian Archives. There is a strong emphasis on the need for archivists to be involved in records management, and Lamb sets out to make some points perfectly clear as to what obligations should be placed on departments and what rights should be

enjoyed by the Archives Offices. Intermediate records should be in the custody, but not the ownership nor the control, of the Archives Office. Departments should have placed on them an obligation to make use of intermediate records accommodation. Disposal schedules should be drawn up, in co-operation with the Archives Office; and, in respect of records of operations (as distinct from housekeeping records) a date should be fixed by which departments should have completed this work. The Act should provide that no records could be destroyed without the consent of the Archives Office, and material ultimately transferred to the Archives for permanent preservation should be in the custody, ownership and control of the Archives Office. This transfer should be mandatory for records 30 years old or more.

The third part of the report relates specifically to the Archives Office's participation in records management. The Australian government in the 1950s had done important work in relation to the appointment and special training of registrars in government departments, and Lamb's recommendations in this part appear to be aimed at building on and improving the procedures established twenty years earlier.

In the fourth part Lamb deals with archives buildings. It is a national tragedy that in Canberra the main archives building for many years was a series of Nissen huts near Lake Burley Griffin, and even at the time of Lamb's visit the eyesore was still one of the Office's principal locations. A complete new building should be erected, Lamb recommended. In addition, the Office required new buildings in Canberra for the Australian Capital Territory regional office, and in some of the State capitals.

Professional staff is the subject of the fifth section of the report. Lamb recommended that the staff be up-graded in status, and left with the Department of the Special Minister of State a schedule of the establishment of the Public Archives of Canada. He had more to say about training than about establishment, however. There is an archives course in existence within the School of Librarianship at the University of New South Wales, and at the time Lamb wrote he was apparently anticipating the establishment of one within the University of Melbourne. He was distrustful of library schools, but said that they seemed to be the most appropriate places in which to conduct an educational program for archivists. He reminded his readers that in-service training is expensive, but he commented that it paid off well in the end. He may have thought there were dangers in placing in the hands of senior officers of the Commonwealth Archives Office (an agency which has shown itself to be remarkably inward looking and bureaucratic) responsibility for inculcating in archival novices the principles of Jenkinson *et al*, but he did not say so.

Lamb disturbed a hornet's nest when he commented, in the sixth section, that the Australian Archives should be allowed to collect private papers, as well as be the official repository for the public archives. He did not suggest that the National Library should be denied a place in the field, but he did anticipate that the Archives would enter the lists as well. Librarians, especially those in the National Library, threw up their hands in horror at the thought of a competitor in the field of collecting the papers of such figures as national political leaders, but as it seems most unlikely that the Australian Archives will be offering cash for the purchase of such papers it is doubtful if its entry into the arena will contribute to the inflation of the market.

Section seven of the report deals with the much debated question of public access. Lamb outlined some of the problems with which the Archives Office had been confronted, and spoke about the "equivalent of 20 full-time staff" who were employed on a temporary basis, searching through files in an attempt to identify the lurking Mata Hari. The use of these officers had speeded up clearances to some extent, but delays were still serious. Lamb recommended that, though the screening should still be done on Archives Office premises and in co-operation with archivists, it should be done by persons from those departments whose records were being screened, and if no currently-serving officer were available, it should be done by "recently-retired senior officers" performing the work by contract. Lamb also recommended that the government take a calculated risk and release all records more than 50 years old "without restriction". Another suggestion he made was that the onus for improper use of data extracted from public records should be placed on the researcher, rather than on the Archives Office. Just how this could possibly work in practice is not altogether clear.

In the eighth section of the report, Lamb dealt with the problem of access to more recent records, emphasising the need that scholars have for access to such records in order to carry out research in fields such as politics, economics, economic history, sociology, geography and ecology. He also put forward suggestions to help avoid the duplication of research and inquiry work in such situations as that in which a departmental, inter-departmental or parliamentary committee carries out an intense investigation of a particular topic, and a scholar, not knowing of the earlier government work on the question, repeats the investigation.

Section nine of the Lamb report suggests the institution of a public appeals tribunal for settling access questions. Lamb envisaged the tribunal would act only in cases where access to records had been denied to a scholar, and in such cases, when appealed to, it would have power to order the disclosure of records which the Archives Office or a department had ruled were closed. It would thus differ in the way in which it would deal with access questions from the method that would have been adopted by a statutory authority (a concept which, as we have noted, Lamb rejected). A

statutory authority might serve not to help the scholar obtain access to records, but to hinder access. If, as might well be expected, its decisions were final, the scholar would find that he had no appeal from the statutory authority's first negative decision. The idea of an appeals tribunal for access questions is quite an attractive one. It could never, if constituted as Lamb proposed it, say "No" in the first instance, for the decision in the first instance would be made by the Archives Office. It could of course say "No", but also it could very well say "Yes", when access had been denied to records in the first instance, and the scholar had appealed to the tribunal. And against that "Yes" Lamb suggested there should be no appeal.

In the concluding sections of the report, Lamb mentioned such concepts as a national register of archives, and a national register of research in progress; he referred to the production of finding aids and the making of microfilm copies; he commented on the need for the conservation laboratory to develop; and he canvassed the idea that the Director-General should be a qualified archivist. He did not rule out the possibility that the government should appoint an administrator, but he emphasised the fact that a qualified practising archivist, with administrative abilities, would combine in himself the best of both worlds. As he had a duty to chide, Lamb urged that the Archives Office should change its approach to scholars, abandoning the defensive attitudes it had frequently adopted in the past. Relations between the various levels in the staff had also been unsatisfactory, and Lamb recommended a greater delegation of authority. Finally, the Canadian visitor commented on the need for Australian archivists to have their own professional association, and suggested that staff of the Australian Archives should play their part in its formation and its development.

Shortly after the report appeared, the position of Director-General was advertised publicly. The level in the public service structure chosen for this position was Level 4 of the Second Division of the Australian Public Service—the level to which deputy heads of some departments, or heads of some divisions of departments, are appointed. As Michael Saclier pointed out:⁸

A reference to the Canadian Act⁹ shows that the Dominion Archivist has the 'rank and Salary' of a deputy head of a department and controls the Archives 'under the direction of the Minister'. Further reference to the *Public Service Employment Act*¹⁰ 1966-67 confirms that the Head of a Canadian Department is the Minister and the Deputy Head is equivalent to the Secretary of an Australian Department.

8 M. Saclier, "The Lamb Report and its environment," *Archives and Manuscripts* 5 (8) August 1974, p. 202.

9 Public Archives Act, 1952, chap. 222 S. 3 French text: *Archivum* Vol. XXI (1971) p. 47; English text: *The Revised Statutes of Canada* 1952, Ottawa, 1953, Vol. IV, p. 4455.

10 14-15-16 Elizabeth II, c. 71, S. 2 *Statutes of Canada* 1966-7, pp. 687-709. These two references come from Mr Saclier's article and the present author does not lay any claim to having consulted them.

In other words, the head of the Australian Archives is not to have access to the Minister, except through the Secretary of the Department, and the Archives is to remain as a division of a Department. Saclier believed that the decision to place the Director-Generalship in the second division of the public service was a departure from Dr Lamb's intentions.

There was an unconscionably long delay in the filling of the position. Rumour has it that a large number of people applied, and that not one of the people on an early "short list" was acceptable to the selection committee. Eighteen months after the position was first advertised the Department announced that the appointment had gone to Professor R.S. Neale, who at the time of his promotion was Editor of Historical Documents with the Department of Foreign Affairs, and had earlier been one of the Professors of History at the University of Queensland.

No archives legislation has yet been introduced into the Australian Parliament. It is understood that a group of archivists has been working on background documents for the proposed task force, but at the time of writing (autumn 1975) the composition of the task force has not been announced.

No area of concern in the Lamb report has caused quite so much discussion as the firm recommendation that the Australian Archives should be within the normal departmental structure. Archivists, librarians and the users of archives all expressed views one way or the other on this topic, but as an example it is probably sufficient to notice the resolutions of the Australian Advisory Council on Bibliographical Services, which is a sort of pressure group of Australian library interests. At a meeting of the Council (which is usually known as AACOBS) held in Canberra in August 1974, two series of resolutions were passed on the Lamb report, the second of which largely modifies the first. The first certainly needed modification, for the only two people on the Council with wide experience in actually managing an archives institution (Mr. Michael Saclier and the present writer) asked that their dissent from it be recorded. It urged the Australian government to establish a statutory archives authority, and to recognise that private papers are better housed in libraries than in archives institutions, and it suggested that, where a scholar wished to compare a public archival document with a manuscript from a collection of private papers, the institutions concerned should arrange to interchange the material.¹¹ On the following day, the Council reconsidered the matter. The majority of members still advanced the idea that a statutory authority should be established, but all agreed that the government should publish a green paper on the matter, allowing different views to be canvassed.

To understand the depth of feeling on the question of a statutory authority one must look at the development of Australian public archival

¹¹ Minutes of the 20th Meeting of AACOBS held in Canberra 15 and 16 August, 1974, pp. 10-12.

institutions, and their gradual breaking-away from library control. Up till 1960 the Commonwealth Archives was no more than a division of the Commonwealth National Library (the precursor of the National Library of Australia). Librarians had also controlled the governmental institution for archives in all six States. The year 1960 saw their empire begin to crumble. In that year, as a result of the report of the National Library Inquiry Committee¹², the Australian Government announced that it would separate the national archives from library control. Most State archivists in the 1960s made some sort of an attempt to achieve separation from their librarianly masters. In New South Wales, the most populous State, a separate Archives Authority was created, but by an administrative arrangement the Archives Office remained under the effective control of librarians. In Victoria, the second most populous State, the Public Records Act was passed in 1973, and the Library Council of Victoria effectively relinquished control of the State Archives.¹³ The librarians were thus somewhat sensitive to the question of the control of public archives. The establishment of a statutory authority to govern the Australian Archives—an authority on which librarians might well achieve some representation—would be an effective counter to the independence movement among archivists.

The librarians on AACOBS did not, however, talk about the statutory authority in these terms. They spoke of the need to ensure that the government would not close off access to public archives. The value of a statutory corporation was that it could guarantee the scholar's right of access. The present writer's experience suggests that such a corporation is more likely to prevent legitimate public use of archives than to facilitate it. Besides, the contention that the government does not have the right to determine what use should be made of its own records seems to be a perverse one. The librarians who argued this case would surely not suggest that the University of Sydney, for instance, or the directors of the Broken Hill Proprietary Company, do not have the right to determine use of the records of the University or of the Company. Yet for some reason rights of determining access cease altogether when one comes to the records of the national government.

The Chairman of AACOBS, Sir Peter Crisp, wrote to the Special Minister of State on 17 October, putting forward the view of the majority of the Council's members. On 28 November Mr Bowen replied. He gave an assurance that there was no intention to depart in any substantial way from the recommendations in the Lamb report. He assured Sir Peter that AACOBS would be able to make both oral and written submissions to the

¹² The National Library Inquiry Committee (the Paton Committee) was appointed in 1956 and its report was published in 1957.

¹³ R.C. Sharman, "Victory in Victoria. An outsider's comments on the Public Records Act, 1973, of that State". *Archives and Manuscripts* 5 (4) August 1973, pp. 85-90.

task force, which would be empowered to consider representations on any aspect of the proposed archives legislation. He could not, however, agree to the establishment of a statutory authority to control the national archives. He wrote that

the establishment of a National Archives as an independent statutory authority would be a departure from the practice adopted in virtually every other country and would pose a major issue of principle¹⁴

Late in 1974 the Standing Committee of AACOBS met to consider the various items of business that had accrued, amongst which was the reply from the Special Minister of State. The Secretary was commissioned to look into archival legislation from various parts of the world, to see to what extent it was true that “the establishment of a National Archives as an independent statutory authority would be a departure from the practice adopted in virtually every other country”. At its meeting in February 1975 the Standing Committee received the Secretary’s report. The search for a national archives with an autonomous governing body had taken her to Yugoslavia, of all places. In that country there is apparently a Council of Archives, which exists, in all probability, to sort out disputes between the Yugoslavian (federal) Archives, the Archives of the Republics, and provincial archives. To suggest that the Council of Archives would have power to gainsay a government order about the confidentiality of official files is to stretch the bounds of credulity excessively. In fact, the Secretary could find no country in any real way comparable to Australia wherein the national archives was controlled by an independent authority with power to override government decisions about the use that should be made of its own records.¹⁵

It is too early yet to say to what extent the Lamb report will usher in the new era for Australian archives that was anticipated by Lionel Bowen when he released the report. Progress has been disappointingly slow. Two years have passed since the report was written, and the only really substantial development has been the appointment of a Director-General. Undoubtedly, documents have been prepared for the task force and there have been some changes in the ways in which responsibilities have been delegated. But the legislation that was promised so long ago has still not appeared, and one has yet to hear enthusiastic reports from historians as to the Archives Office’s changed attitudes towards them. It is hoped that the next few years will see much greater progress than has happened in the first three years of the administration of a political party pledged to “Open Government”.

¹⁴ The Hon. the Special Minister of State to the Chairman of AACOBS 28 November 1974. Copies were widely circulated after the December 1974 meeting.

¹⁵ Minutes of the 58th meeting of the Standing Committee of AACOBS held in Melbourne 27 February 1975.

Résumé

Cet article retrace les principales étapes de la libéralisation de l'accès aux archives gouvernementales en Australie. L'adoption, en 1970, de la règle de restriction à l'accès de 30 ans contribua sensiblement à stimuler la recherche sur l'histoire australienne jusque-là rendue difficile par une restriction générale de 50 ans. En même temps, le *Archives Office* se voyait chargé de contrôler l'accessibilité aux documents historiques de la fédération australienne. Après avoir brièvement résumé le rapport que W.K. Lamb avait présenté au Ministre d'Etat spécial au terme d'une tournée des principales villes du pays, l'auteur en décrit l'impact sur le monde de l'archivistique en Australie, s'attardant surtout à décrire la principale controverse soulevée par la recommandation de Lamb que les archives australiennes soient intégrées dans les structures gouvernementales sous la responsabilité d'un ministre. En conclusion, l'auteur regrette que, malgré la rédaction et la publication du rapport Lamb, des progrès mineurs seulement aient été enregistrés et, surtout, que les modifications législatives promises n'aient pas encore été présentées.

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