

Review, Restructure, and Reform: Recordkeeping Standards in the New Zealand State Sector

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RÉSUMÉ L'article examine la théorie et la pratique de la gestion publique telle qu'elle a évolué en Nouvelle-Zélande et aborde le rôle de la normalisation telle qu'elle s'applique à la gestion des documents dans cet environnement. Il aborde le développement de la gestion des documents comme profession ainsi que la création des Archives nationales de la Nouvelle-Zélande et les récents changements qui les ont affectées. Constatant la culture limitée des gestionnaires de documents néo-zélandais en matière de normalisation, l'article montre qu'un groupe intéressé à la normalisation s'est formé au cours de la restructuration des Archives nationales et comment les normes évoluent pour devenir des outils réglementaires et opérationnels pour les Archives. De plus, l'article présente les grandes lignes d'une initiative pan-gouvernementale mettant l'accent sur un cadre de gestion de l'information et les besoins de normalisation destinés à en soutenir les principes. On présente aussi un sommaire des leçons tirées lors de l'élaboration de normes spécifiques à la gestion des documents. Une partie de cet article a été présentée au congrès organisé conjointement par l'Association of Canadian Archivists et l'Association des archives de l'Ontario en 1999.

ABSTRACT This paper examines public management theory and practice as it evolved in New Zealand and considers the role of standard setting as it applies to recordkeeping in this environment. It outlines the development of the recordkeeping profession and establishment of the National Archives in New Zealand as well as the recent reviews and restructuring of the Archives. It discusses the limited culture of standards setting within the New Zealand recordkeeping profession, how a standard-setting group emerged during the restructure of National Archives, and how standards are evolving into regulatory and operational tools for the Archives. In addition, an outline is given of a government-wide initiative focusing on an information management framework and the need for standards to support its principles, as well as a summary of lessons learned in the development of specific recordkeeping standards. Parts of this paper were originally presented at the 1999 Association of Canadian Archivists/Archives Association of Ontario Conference.

Introduction

This paper¹ examines how recordkeeping standards are being set and managed in the restructured New Zealand state sector. After providing background on

the New Zealand records and archives scene, it explores public management theory and the major structural reforms that have occurred in New Zealand. It then examines how these reforms have impacted on recordkeeping in the public sector and on the work of the National Archives, contributing to the establishment of a standard-setting body within the Archives. Finally, the paper will outline the role of standard setting as it applies to records and archives in the current New Zealand public sector environment, and consider lessons learned and the future direction for standards produced by the National Archives.

The Development of Records and Archives in New Zealand

New Zealand is a small country of some 3.8 million people located in the southern Pacific Ocean. Its records and archives community is not large. Essentially, the development of archives in New Zealand has followed Terry Eastwood's three-stage pattern:

1. the rescue of historical documents, usually seen to be at risk and as valuable as cultural artefacts;
2. the establishment of the legal authority and institutional infrastructure of archives;
3. the maintenance, management, and perfecting of that infrastructure.²

Although the history of the National Archives dates back to the 1920s, as an institution it did not come into its own until the 1950s. It did so partly through the accidental destruction of government records in a large fire which galvanized opinion regarding the protection of archives, and more significantly, through the passing of the *Archives Act* (1957).³

Unlike Canada, New Zealand does not have a "total archives" concept; instead there has been a separation of government and non-government archives. The result is that non-government records, archives, and manuscripts are collected by libraries, museums, small historical societies, and archives institutions. In addition, some private-sector organizations have their own corporate archives. The management of government records and archives is governed by the *Archives Act* and is the responsibility of the National Archives.

The National Archives is by far the largest archival institution in the country; one of its roles is to be a leader in terms of archives thinking and practice in New Zealand. As an institution it has been influenced by overseas archival thinkers such as T.R. Schellenberg, who visited New Zealand briefly in 1954 during a more extensive trip to Australia. This visit convinced New Zealand archivists of the importance of "the records management side of archives."⁴ Separate records centres were established in 1962 to house semi-current records. In 1987 these storage centres were transformed into a Records Management Branch which also conducted records training for agencies. Until the

late 1980s much of the National Archives' emphasis was placed on establishing archival management systems, building up holdings, finding a permanent home for its headquarters in Wellington, and expanding its regional network, first to Auckland and Christchurch, and then in 1993 to Dunedin.

Today the National Archives employs approximately seventy-five staff, has a budget of about \$10 million, and holds roughly sixty-five kilometres of records. It performs functions common to many archival institutions worldwide, including appraisal, arrangement and description, reference, outreach, repository management, and preservation.

New Zealand does not have its own strong theoretical traditions in the records and archives fields; it has borrowed overseas methodologies and adapted these to the local environment. Although geographically isolated, New Zealand is not intellectually out of touch, and records managers and archivists have been exposed to a range of ideas and practices relating to their work. Today North American and Australian records professionals have the most influence on the New Zealand records and archives scene. Australia has had a particular impact in recent times, with National Archives staff training at universities there, and more recently completing distance education qualifications offered through the Internet. This influence is probably clearest in the introduction of the Australian series system, which was adapted for local purposes in the 1980s with the intention of replacing the record group. The current local debates surrounding alternative methodologies to appraisal and how best to manage electronic records (particularly the relative merits of the custodial and distributed custody options) largely reflect international discussion in these areas.

The extensive contact with Australia has introduced New Zealand to the continuum approach to recordkeeping, although it has not yet taken hold. This approach is described as "a consistent and coherent regime of management processes from the time of the creation of records (and before creation in the design of recordkeeping systems), through to the preservation and use of records as archives."⁵ This contrasts with the more traditional life cycle approach which, as Sue McKemmish observes, "implies that there are recurring features over the generations of records that can be described as specific stages." While there are many versions of the life cycle model, McKemmish notes that all "share a demarcated view of the work of records managers and archivists ... [I]t is this world view that is fundamentally challenged by records continuum thinking and practice."⁶ To date, however, there has been little debate on the records continuum in New Zealand and as a consequence the model is not widely understood. Some view the concept with suspicion, largely because they view the role of records managers and archivists as intrinsically separate. Others, meanwhile, believe that as we move into a digital world the division will necessarily decrease, if not disappear altogether.

The records and archives professions began to mature with the establish-

ment of the Archives and Records Association of New Zealand (ARANZ) in 1976. ARANZ's membership ranges from those interested in using records for research purposes, to practising archivists. Consequently its focus is wide, covering a broad range of issues pertaining to records and archives. In 1988, chapters of the Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA) were founded in Wellington and Auckland. These have tended to cater to records managers, consultants, and those working in the commercial storage fields. In 1990 a split occurred within ARANZ, and a separate New Zealand Society of Archivists was established to meet a perceived need for a distinct professional group for archivists. As can be seen from all this activity, the records and archives professions in New Zealand are well served in terms of associations. However, the continued existence of separate bodies for archivists and records managers reflects the current continuing dominance of the life cycle philosophy. Moreover, while there is considerable overlap in the membership of these bodies, the proliferation of organizations has tended to lead to fragmentation. Because several of the groups are small, there have been some difficulties in co-ordinating projects, developing positions on broad policy issues, and setting an agenda and future direction for the records professions.

Another key issue facing the New Zealand records and archives field is the lack of professional training available within the country. The resulting shortage of professionally qualified recordkeepers is widely held to have contributed to the decline in recordkeeping across government in the face of administrative and technological change. While there have been several attempts to establish training at both professional and paraprofessional levels, these have floundered for a variety of reasons. At present the best available training remains the elective subjects in archives and records management which are offered as part of a library qualification at Victoria University of Wellington. In 1993 the New Zealand Qualifications Authority began work to establish unit standards for archives, records, and libraries. These standards take the life cycle approach to records and archives work, and (unsurprisingly) see records managers and archivists as taking different roles in the cycle.

Reformed New Zealand

Many New Zealanders are proud of their country's recent economic and public sector reforms. Although influenced by theories and models developed in North America and Europe, these have been implemented in the local environment in unique ways. This process of economic and structural reform is found not only in New Zealand. Other countries have also pursued radical change in order to gain more efficient management and transform the performance of their economies. However, New Zealand has done more in this direction than many other nations and has been considered a "world leader."

In 1984, under a newly elected Labour government, New Zealand embarked on a journey of unprecedented economic and structural transformation that was to touch the lives of all citizens. The pace picked up in 1988 with extensive changes to the size and management of the public sector. Government restructuring continued following the election in 1990 of a National Party administration which implemented further changes to the management of the economy. While reform has perhaps slowed in recent years – possibly as a result of the introduction of a new electoral system known as mixed member proportional (MMP) – the country has essentially been transformed from an insular, sleepy social democratic “cradle to grave” society with rules, regulations, and market controls on most business activities, into a dynamic, competitive nation. Indeed, economists, bureaucrats, and politicians from around the world have flocked to study what has been dubbed the New Zealand “experiment,” with its “market forces revolution.”

While the “nanny state” is not entirely dead, the public sector has been dramatically reduced in size, and small government exercising minimal interference in the market is very much the order of the day. Deregulation and the removal of “red tape” saw an explosion of freewheeling enterprise. In the rush to compete, many government-owned businesses were sold, including the Bank of New Zealand, Telecom, Air New Zealand, and the railways. Other government functions have become “state-owned enterprises” in preparation for eventual sale; these include New Zealand Post and Television New Zealand. In the public sector, the *State Sector Act* and *Public Finance Act* has created new accountability and management mechanisms, while the *Employment Contracts Act* has changed the industrial relations landscape for all New Zealanders.

The reforms follow the seven key principles for a well-run government agency that were identified by the New Zealand Treasury. Such an agency should:

1. have clear objectives that inform managers of what is expected and enable their performance to be monitored;
2. be transparent in explicating these objectives and the means by which they are to be pursued;
3. be structured so as to minimise the scope for capture of policy by service providers;
4. give managers and others incentives to achieve government’s goals rather than their own;
5. ensure the efficient use of information;
6. have incentives and information that enhance accountability of agents to principals; and
7. promote contestability of both policy advice and service delivery [that is, be

open to competition from other potential providers in the public and private sectors].⁷

These form the ideological basis for the public sector reforms, which Jonathan Boston, Associate Professor of Public Policy at Victoria University of Wellington, has categorized into three key areas:

1. the contracting out and tendering to the private sector of a wide range of public services;
2. the development of “agency theory,” which separates those who seek a particular good or service (“purchasers”) from those whom they contract as “providers;”
3. the emphasis on contractual relationships as evidenced by contracts of employment or contracts between different public agencies, the aim being to specify as precisely as possible the requirements of the purchasers and to ensure that providers are accountable for the quality of their performance or service.⁸

Government agencies have become largely autonomous organizations which are run loosely along business lines. Each chief executive negotiates a contract with their minister for the purchase of outputs, which when carried out, lead to specified outcomes. Although contracts are monitored by the State Services Commission, and departments have to meet the certain legal requirements, for example the *Public Finance Act*, there is little cross-government interference in how agencies manage their inputs (such as information technology requirements, human resources functions, and records functions). Agencies are free to manage these as they see fit (i.e., either through internal delivery or by outsourcing) as long as the cost remains within baseline funding.

While there have been many positive features of these reforms, one side effect is that agencies operate as individual “silos.” Co-ordination can be difficult, and whole-of-government approaches are sometimes viewed with suspicion as manifestations of outdated centralized planning and bureaucratic control. Occasionally, collaboration is viewed as something that must be argued for and should only occur when it is *cost-effective* from a whole-of-government perspective.⁹ In this environment, the creation of best practice standards for use by agencies may be a more effective tool than formal regulation.

It would be easy to be cynical or negative about these reforms. Indeed New Zealanders remain divided over the impact of the reforms and in certain sectors (for example, education and health) there remains significant concern about the outcomes. It has been argued that while they have been much studied they have been little emulated by countries outside New Zealand, and that

the silo mentality has become dominant, with chief executives pursuing higher profits through cost-cutting rather than lateral thinking.¹⁰ While there is always room for improvement, there is evidence, however, that many government agencies have become better focused in both service delivery and policy development as a result of the reforms.

In November 1999 the New Zealand people elected a new government and a coalition was formed between the centre left Labour party and the left Alliance Party. This is a minority government, with the Green Party holding the balance of power in Parliament. While it is unlikely that the government intends to roll back all the reforms of the recent past, it has flagged significant changes in a number of areas including industrial relations, health services, and the privatization of state assets. In addition it has signaled a willingness to have a more “hands on” approach to the management of both the public sector and the economy.

What Does All This Mean in Terms of Standard Setting?

New Zealand’s public sector reforms have created an environment in which regulatory, accountability, and auditing functions have been set at arm’s length from service providers. This has been conducive to establishing broad principle-based standards which, when applied, can be monitored to ensure the best results in terms of meeting objectives and outcomes. In addition, the separation of functions has seen a division between the “steering” and “rowing” roles of organizations which prevents capture of the policy (steering) through subordination to the practicalities of implementation (rowing). A standards-based approach has similarities with the process of contract specification where services are provided commercially.

The government prefers to reduce or even pull out of service delivery activities when private providers can perform the function. An example of this can be seen in the closure of the National Archives records centres, which were seen as being in direct competition with private storage operators. These providers, however, are still required to follow standards when storing government records. The development of standards is thus a key underpinning of the government’s aspirations for the public sector.

Records and Archives in the Reforms

The sale of state assets, reorganization of government departments along the lines of agency theory, outsourcing of services, and establishment of contractual relationships between government agencies have had a significant impact on records and archives, be they in electronic or traditional paper form. In the late 1980s the National Archives had to cope with a deluge of records from

agencies that were being corporatized, privatized, or disestablished. The National Archives is still processing a large backlog as a result of this flood of material. In many cases the status of records was not considered during the change process, and complications have arisen regarding the custody and ownership of, and access to, these records. Some of these difficulties have been compounded because the *Archives Act* dates back to 1957. For example, the records created by corporatized agencies – state-owned enterprises – are now no longer considered to be covered by the *Act*.¹¹

Further exacerbating these difficulties has been the fact that despite the importance of efficient information management in the Treasury reform principles, records management functions in public agencies were frequently decentralized and seen as having a low priority. Indeed in some agencies they disappeared altogether, resulting in poor access to information and in extreme cases a loss of corporate memory. The development of electronic systems in this environment further complicates these issues.

The National Archives and the Reform Process

The National Archives has not escaped the reform process. In the early 1990s charges for various services were introduced, as was a system for valuing the holdings of the Archives. Monopolies are viewed with suspicion, and any agency in such a situation is watched with particular interest by a government that views competition as producing the best results in terms of efficient service provision. The National Archives was required to make some of its services contestable; for example, appraisal can now be performed by any number of service providers, including private sector consultants and agencies' own staff, although they must conform to appraisal standards established by the Archives.

Following a major review in 1994 which recommended that the National Archives become a separate crown entity, a revised structure under the Department of Internal Affairs was proposed and agreed to by Cabinet in 1995. This structure followed the traditional agency theory model: the National Archives would be split, with high-level policy being developed by the Department of Internal Affairs through its Policy Unit, and a separate Office of the Chief Archivist purchasing archives services from records and archives service providers as well as setting standards, providing advice, and developing broad operational policy. Traditional archival activities would be turned into a *business* headed by a General Manager who would not be under the control of the Chief Archivist but report to the Secretary of Internal Affairs, who would be advised by a Board. The Chief Archivist's influence on services delivered by the National Archives would be through a purchase agreement and accountability document signed with the General Manager (see **Figure One**).¹²

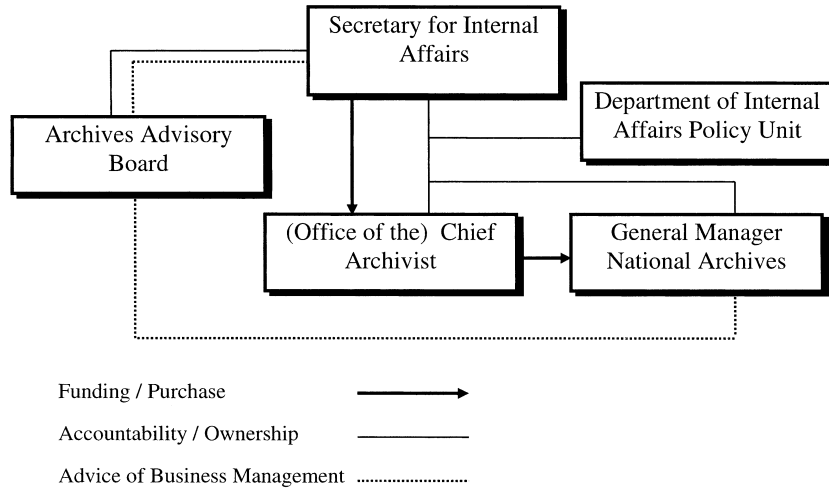


Figure One 1995 Proposed Structure

This initial structure generated considerable debate amongst the record-keeping, genealogical, and historical communities. MPs raised the issue in Parliament, comment appeared in the media, and there was even an unprecedented demonstration in front of the National Archives to protest against the proposal. Following the threat of court action by various stakeholder groups, the Department sought advice regarding the legality of the proposed structure under the *Archives Act*. Partly as a result of this advice, and after due consideration, a second revised structure was developed in 1996. This revision was seen as a significant victory by recordkeeping and other stakeholder groups.

Essentially, a modified version of agency theory now applies to the National Archives. Its core business remains the identification, selection, preservation, and storage of significant non-current central government records, and the provision of access to these records. The National Archives continues to have statutory responsibilities relating to the management of public records. The National Archives contains three organizational components: the Chief Archivist, the Statutory Regulatory Group, and the National Archives Business. While the Archives remains a part of the Department of Internal Affairs, the area of nation-wide archives policy advice (for example, legislative development) became the responsibility of the Department (and since then has been transferred to the Ministry for Culture and Heritage). *Purchaser* functions are the role of the Chief Archivist. The statutory and regulatory functions relating to these, the development of operational policy, and standard setting are the responsibility of a Statutory Regulatory Group. The National Archives Business is the *provider* of core archives activities. In addition an Advisory Board

was established to report to the Secretary of Internal Affairs on matters pertaining to the National Archives Business, and an Advisory Committee was set up to advise the Chief Archivist on professional archival matters (see **Figure Two**).

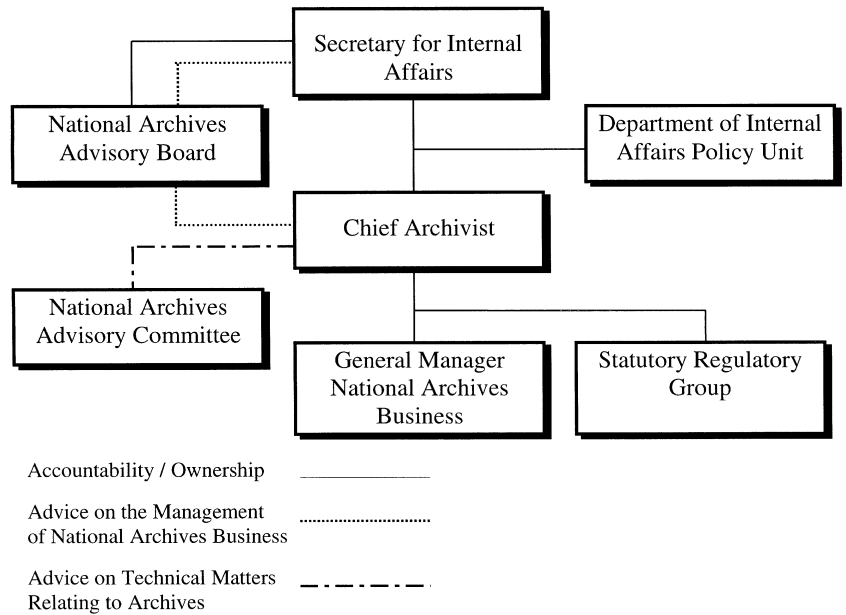


Figure Two 1996 Revised Structure

Following a separate, but contemporaneous review of the National Archives’ records centres by outside consultants in 1996/97, Cabinet took the decision previously noted to close these storage facilities. The records centres had been loss-making ventures for some years, and much of the National Archives’ records management advice function had already ceased. Agencies were now required to place their semi-current records with commercial storage providers.

Before the National Archives could fully implement its new division of functions, it was swept in 1997 into another major restructuring, this time within the Department of Internal Affairs, where it was placed within a heritage grouping (see **Figure Three**). Again controversy erupted over what was perceived to be a downgrading of the Archives and the impact of the proposed new structure on the ability of the Chief Archivist to carry out his or her statutory duties.

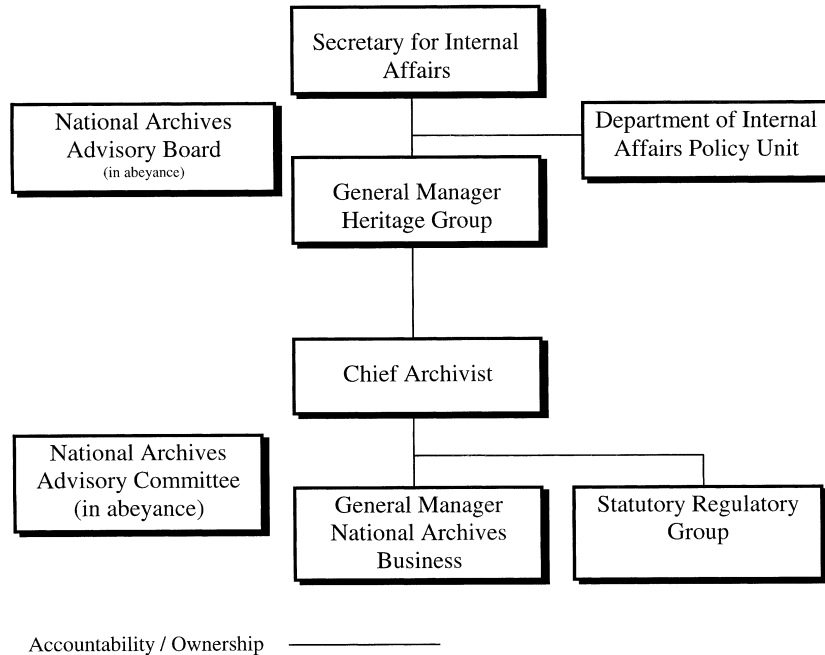


Figure Three Correct Structure

This time legal action followed, with ARANZ and the New Zealand Society of Genealogists taking the new structure and related matters to the High Court. The matter was originally heard in 1998, and the judge subsequently indicated that “there is wise counsel in some of the plaintiffs’ evidence and important principles are at issue.”¹³ However, he was not “on the evidence to date prepared to say the Secretary has gone too far,” and commented that “it would be premature to do more than make a general finding on the legality of the proposals.” He noted finally that “only when final proposals are in place can criticism be pointed and accurate.” This decision was appealed by the ARANZ and Society of Genealogists. A side issue related to the legality of financial practices under the *Public Finance Act*. Following a second hearing last year relating specifically to this issue, the Secretary of Internal Affairs was found to have committed a technical breach of that Act. This decision was appealed by the Secretary for Internal Affairs. In December 1999 the Court of Appeal dismissed the ARANZ and Society of Genealogists’ appeal while upholding that from Internal Affairs. Although the judges expressed an appreciation of the plaintiffs’ concerns they again concluded that “in the end we cannot say that the plaintiffs have demonstrated that the reorganization and related actions ... have breached the law.”¹⁴

In the midst of all this legal manoeuvring the contract of the Chief Archivist was not renewed, resulting in a drop in morale at the National Archives and a loss of organizational direction. In addition, partly as a result of uncertainties surrounding the restructuring, both the Advisory Board and the Advisory Committee are currently in abeyance.¹⁵

In the latter half of 1999 the possibility of further restructuring arose. The then government decided to investigate the future of the cultural heritage sector, establish an enhanced Ministry for Culture and Heritage, and review the structure and placement within government of the National Archives and other institutions such as the National Library. An examination of whether the Archives and Library should become one crown entity or two was placed on the agenda. This review process was managed by the State Services Commission and brought together representatives of the National Archives, the National Library, Internal Affairs, and the Ministry for Culture and Heritage. Terms of Reference for review were not, however, finalized at time of the election.

The direction in which the newly elected government will take the National Archives is unclear. The restructuring of both the Archives and the National Library was a minor election issue and the government has signaled it wishes to “strengthen” both institutions.¹⁶

Standard Setting and the *Archives Act*

It has been argued that the *Archives Act* does not extend the role of the National Archives as far as determining standards and guidelines for the care and management of records held by agencies. This argument holds that the *Act* is primarily concerned with prescribing the custodial arrangements for public archives, and is locked into an end-of-life-cycle approach (that is, it pertains to records only once they have become archives) rather than encompassing the broad management of records from creation to ultimate disposal.¹⁵ That the legal mandate is certainly weak highlights the dated nature of the current act and supports the need for new records and archives legislation.

There is, however, an alternative view, that those sections of the *Act* that do refer to the Chief Archivist’s involvement in the management of current records are so broad that they provide an opportunity to set standards. Although standards are not specifically mentioned, the Chief Archivist is entitled under s.12(1) to give “advice as to [the] efficient and economical administration and management [of public records]” and under s.23b “to provide records management services, including advice on the management of records.”

In addition, it is arguable that standards could be given statutory force by issuing them as regulations. Current New Zealand Government practice, however, requires the consideration of alternatives to formal regulation-making for

achieving policy outcomes, and significant administrative hurdles have to be overcome when pursuing this approach.

The Statutory Regulatory Group

As noted above, the Statutory Regulatory Group was formed in 1996. The Group, which became operational with three staff in January 1997, supports the Chief Archivist in her or his statutory role. The aim is to ensure that the requirements of the *Archives Act* (and the archives provisions of the *Local Government Act [1974]*) are met by both the departments and agencies of central and local government, and by organizations which have custody of archives. These requirements primarily relate to the disposal of public records and their transfer to the National Archives or an approved repository.

The Statutory Regulatory Group is accountable for the delivery of two outputs in the output class, National Archival Services:

- Output 382 – the provision of advice on archives, records, and information management issues, the intention of this output being to ensure that the aims and provisions of the *Archives Act* are upheld; and
- Output 383 – the provision of operational policy including *standard setting*, the aim behind this second output being to develop professional archives, records, and information management policies and standards for the creation, selection, custody, control, and preservation of records in order to make them accessible as archives.

Standards and Recordkeeping

Why do we want to have standards for recordkeeping? What are their advantages? The Archives Authority of New South Wales¹⁷ recently noted:

In an era of devolution and of letting the managers manage, standards are seen as providing a means of promoting best practice without the problems of old fashioned regulation. At the broader level, they are part of the search for best practice and for benchmarks that has been a feature of most industries in recent years.¹⁸

Consultation with New Zealand Government agencies would tend to endorse this view with, for example, one major agency commenting that they “support the National Archives role to provide guidelines and standards across recordkeeping practice.” This approach is contrasted in their comments with “a big stick approach ... [that] would do [the] National Archives’ profile no good and would not gain any commitment or efficiencies across government in recordkeeping practices.”¹⁹

In its recent paper, *Standards and Recordkeeping in the New Zealand Public Sector*,²⁰ the National Archives noted that standards ensure:

- quality – a benchmark against which to assess products and practices;
- consistency – a set of guidelines applicable across many organizations;
- interoperability – products and processes can work together;
- efficiency – key issues are addressed once rather than repeatedly.

If recordkeeping standards facilitate quality, consistency, interoperability, and efficiency, both the Archives' and agencies' recordkeeping needs will be met. Standards will help to ensure that records are created in the first place, and that they are described, maintained in a recordkeeping system, stored and preserved, and made accessible.

Standards will assist recordkeepers by setting out clear expectations and requirements. This will facilitate certainty, and help in the planning and effective management of these activities. Standards will also enable the dissemination of proven best practice strategies across different organizations. The articulation of a common framework maximizes opportunities for collaborative work leading to improved efficiencies. Interoperability is particularly facilitated by standardized documentation and metadata standards. The use of standards as benchmarks for quality assessment provides a valuable mechanism for improving the overall level of government recordkeeping practices.

As we move into electronic environments, standards need to be set so that records meet clear functional requirements, and are captured into a recordkeeping system which allows for migration so that they will survive as reliable evidence over time. Overseas experience suggests that software developers have taken a particular interest in standards for records, and indeed have built functionality enabling ready capture of records into their products. Standards should be developed with this in mind.

In 1998 the National Archives conducted a "Survey of Records in Government Offices" which provided some support for anecdotal reports from agencies and records professionals regarding the poor standard of recordkeeping in New Zealand government agencies.²¹ It is clear that standards need to be developed to address these issues directly and provide guidance to agencies in terms of compliance with the *Archives Act*. Without standards for recordkeeping, agencies are at risk of not properly protecting their financial, legal, and other rights, and those of their clients and others affected by their actions and decisions.²² Standards for recordkeeping will reduce costs both directly and indirectly for agencies in many areas, including:

- research, since where agencies are unable to locate information already held, or accurately assess its reliability, duplication of research effort can be necessary;

- quality of advice, as advice to government is of lower quality when the records used in its formulation are incomplete, inaccurate, or untrustworthy;
- customer service, as records of citizens' interactions with government agencies are essential to the provision of high-quality services to the public.

Poor recordkeeping exposes the Crown to increased risk of litigation and increased cost in the conduct of any legal matters. Efficient reporting to government, and the demonstration of accountability in financial and operational performance, is reliant on good recordkeeping practice. Thus a good recordkeeping system enhances government's ownership interests by reducing these risks and their associated costs.

The Policy Framework for Government Held Information

In 1996/97, the State Services Commission in conjunction with public sector chief executives and the Treasury developed a high-level *Policy Framework for Government Held Information* in order to provide common understandings and a broadly consistent approach to government information management. The *Framework* utilizes the widest possible definition of information and includes records and archives as a subset within it.

The principles within the *Framework* are based on existing legislation and assume that government information is a strategic resource which requires good management by the Crown, acting on behalf of the public of New Zealand – this management extending throughout the entire information life cycle, from design, creation, and collection, to processing, maintenance, distribution, retrieval, retention, and disposal. Agencies are viewed as “stewards” of government information; it is their responsibility to implement good information management. Standards should contribute to the outcomes identified in the *Policy Framework for Government Held Information*. These outcomes include:

- contributing to the effective participation of the people of New Zealand in the making and administration of laws and policies;
- providing for clear accountability of ministers and officials for good government;
- giving confidence in the integrity of government and public decision-making;
- reducing the cost of government processes; and
- supporting the efficient and effective management of government operations.²³

In terms of the principles for the *Policy Framework*, standards for recordkeeping can assist in ensuring *availability, coverage, collection, preservation, and quality*.

In one sense, the *Policy Framework* can itself be considered as a high-level standard insofar as it describes best practice in managing information. It is

necessary to support this high-level articulation with more specific standards such as the Australian Records Management Standard AS 4390.

Australian Records Management Standard AS 4390

The Statutory Regulatory Group has had input into a committee working to develop a national records management standard and examining the applicability of the Australian standard AS 4390 to the local environment. A number of New Zealand recordkeeping professionals are using AS 4390 as a guide to best practice. While it had been hoped that a New Zealand records management standard would be developed (probably in line with AS 4390), difficulties have arisen in terms of financing the project through Standards New Zealand. As a result, at this stage, efforts are restricted to preparing a New Zealand guide to AS 4390. Nevertheless, more recently, in a paper prepared for the New Zealand government's Chief Executives Group on Information Management, heads of government agencies have been urged to sponsor the development of a New Zealand records management standard.

Meanwhile it is likely that an international standard will play a role in the future. The National Archives, amongst others, has provided support for some New Zealand participation in the development of such a standard. A draft of ISO/TC 46/SC11, *Records Management*, has been released for comment and is starting to gain exposure in New Zealand.

National Archives Standards Activities

In 1997 the Statutory Regulatory Group attempted to issue a number of standards which, it was felt, would support the core activities of the National Archives, government agencies, and the wider New Zealand recordkeeping community. Drafts on appraisal and transfer standards were distributed for comment to a range of stakeholders including the National Archives Business, the Advisory Committee, agency clients, and consultants. It quickly became clear, however, that the concept of standards had different meanings for different people. This was not entirely surprising, given the lack of any real culture of standard setting in the New Zealand records context. Within this environment there was a plethora of understandings of terms and definitions. This is, of course, another argument for standardization. Difficulties with the standards in terms of both content as well as the methodology used in their development probably reflected the National Archives' inexperience in standard setting.

A methodology has now been developed for standards' preparation and promulgation. Appraisal and transfer standards have been issued following a consultation process. In addition, work on a storage standard is progressing with the input of a working party representing stakeholder groups. All of this activity has been welcomed by agencies and other interested parties.

There has also been considerable work done on standards overseas, many of which may be applicable to the New Zealand situation. As the National Archives is a small organization with limited resources, it would thus seem prudent to investigate overseas standards in terms of their applicability to the New Zealand environment. As noted above, this approach has been taken with AS 4390. There may be situations where a formal agreement could be negotiated with an overseas institution to adopt one or more of their standards, perhaps in a modified form.

Individual standards must be consistent and work together to achieve common aims. A broad framework integrating a full suite of solutions tailored to the New Zealand environment needs to be put in place. This would provide a more detailed articulation of good practice in terms of recordkeeping and the expectations placed on government agencies in relation to the creation and management of records in the course of business activity. An example of such a framework is the State Records New South Wales' *Standard on Full and Accurate Records*.²⁴ It should be noted, however, that any such framework cannot be developed in isolation from its environment – in this case, government business activity and processes. While whole-of-government responses are difficult in the current New Zealand public sector environment, clearly we are not the only player when it comes to government information policies. For example, there is the already mentioned relationship between the State Services Commission's *Policy Framework For Government Held Information* and the recordkeeping initiatives and standard-setting activities of the National Archives. The relationship between the needs of other public sector oversight bodies and those of the National Archives should be clearly defined before responsibilities are determined.

Despite the clear case for standards (argued above), they may not be appropriate in all situations. A case-by-case analysis must be undertaken to determine whether a standard should be developed or whether some other mechanism (for example, policies, advisory notices, leaflets) may better meet needs and requirements. A "Model for a Recordkeeping Standards Regime in the New Zealand Public Sector" has been developed to aid further discussion.²⁴ This attempts to graphically represent the various tools and processes that are required as part of a standard-setting program (see **Figure Four**).

Conclusion

In the reformed world of the New Zealand public sector, the National Archives can play a significant role in setting standards for recordkeeping. Standards will ensure that records are properly managed not only within the National Archives but across the New Zealand government. For the National Archives, the implementation of public sector reforms has been a long and difficult process. The creation of a separate group to examine standards and act as a regu-

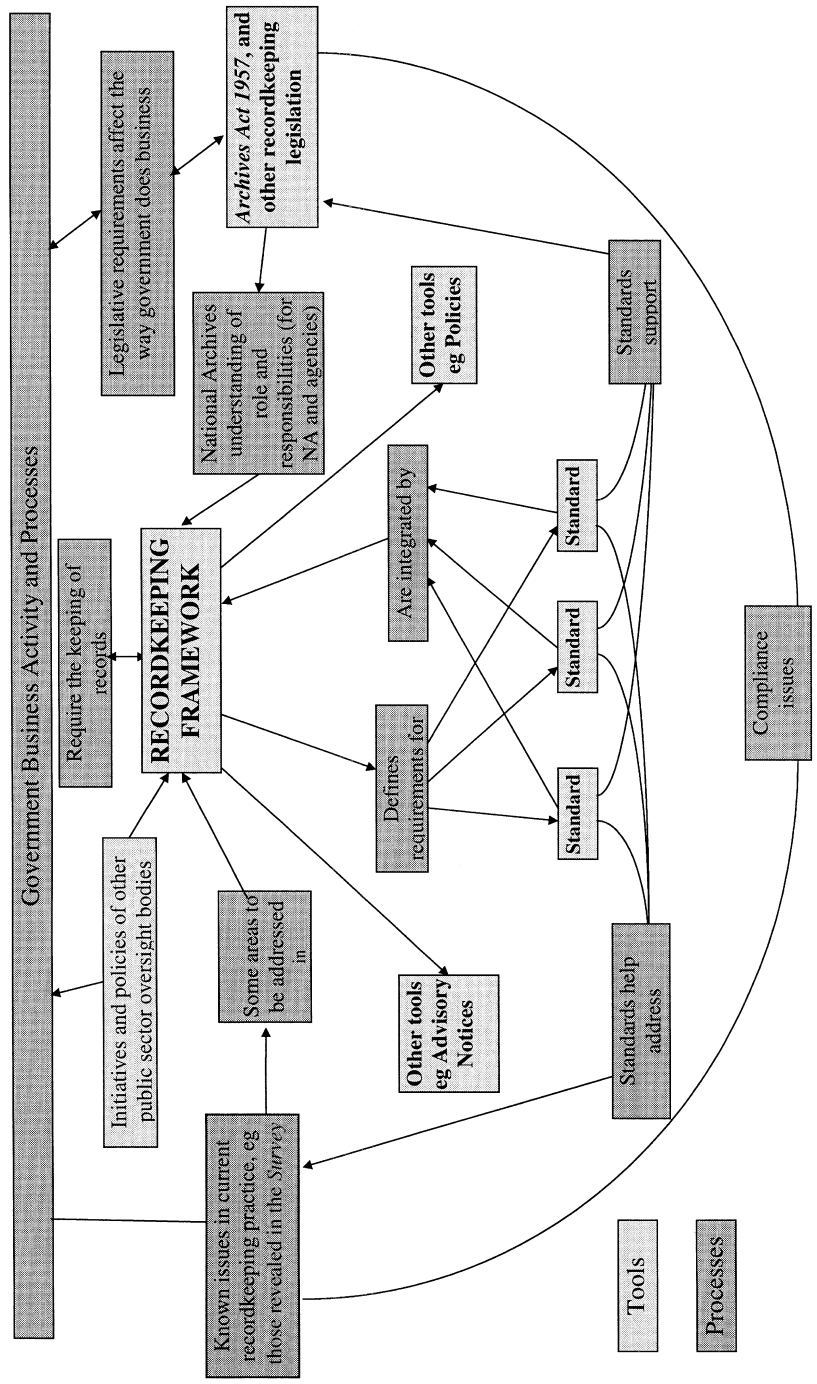


Figure Four Model for the Recordkeeping Regime in the New Zealand Public Sector

lator is a step in the right direction and one which is line with the current philosophy of public sector management.

As a result of the cultural heritage sector review, the future of the Statutory Regulatory Group is unclear. While it is felt that it would be preferable for this standard-setting activity to remain part of the National Archives, it has also been suggested that the Group should be a separate entity from the Archives, not (as outlined earlier) by being part of an Office of the Chief Archivist (playing a purchaser role), but either as part of the State Services Commission or as an autonomous body responsible for setting standards, monitoring compliance, and ensuring that good recordkeeping is a fundamental part of government processes. In this scenario, it is assumed that electronic records will predominate and a distributed custody approach to recordkeeping will be normal practice. The traditional National Archives will play mainly a cultural heritage role, making older paper-based records available for historical research. This model represents a significant departure from the realities of current practice. Before it can be realized, should it be pursued, considerable discussion and debate will be required, particularly surrounding the management of electronic records in the New Zealand context. We are, however, living in a fast-moving world, and a regime such as this may become reality sooner than we expect.

Notes

- 1 My thanks to John Roberts, Senior Archives Analyst, and Evelyn Wareham, Archives Analyst, Statutory Regulatory Group, National Archives of New Zealand, for comments and assistance in the preparation of this article. The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the National Archives of New Zealand.
- 2 T. Eastwood, "Reflections on the Development of Archives in Canada and Australia," in Sue McKemmish and Frank Upward, eds., *Archival Documents: Providing Accountability Through Recordkeeping* (Melbourne, 1993), p. 35. Rachel Lilburn notes the applicability of Eastwood's model to the New Zealand context in "Public Archives: Heritage Happiness or Horror Story," *Government Information Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (1998), p. 183.
- 3 D. Retter, "A Chronology of Archives Keeping in New Zealand to 1996," *New Zealand Archivist* 7, no. 2 (Winter 1996).
- 4 J. Hornabrook, "The Development of Archives in New Zealand," in R.S. Hill and M.D.W. Hodder, eds., *Archives and Manuscripts: A New Zealand Seminar* (Wellington, 1977), p. 5.
- 5 AS 4390, *Records Management Standard* (Homebush, 1996). Part 1: General Definitions.
- 6 S. McKemmish, "Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: A Continuum of Responsibility," <http://www.sims.monash.edu.au/rcrg/publications/recordscontinuum/smckp2.html>.
- 7 Quoted from A. Schick, *The Spirit of Reform: Managing the New Zealand State Sector in a Time of Change*, a report prepared for the State Services Commission and the Treasury (Wellington, 1996), pp. 18–19.
- 8 J. Boston, ed., *The State Under Contract* (Wellington, 1995), pp. x–xi.
- 9 An example can be found in a paper prepared for the Chief Executives Forum, *An Agenda for Collaboration in the Use of Public Service Information and Technology Resources* (Wellington, 1999).

- 10 C. James, *The State Ten Years on from the Reforms*, State Services Commission, Occasional Paper no. 6 (Wellington, 1998), p. 6.
- 11 A new Archives Bill has been in the pipeline in various forms since 1984, but for diverse reasons has not yet been enacted.
- 12 R. Lilburn, "The Restructuring of the National Archives of New Zealand: An Ideological Experiment?" *Government Information Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (1996), p. 293.
- 13 Judgement of Ellis J., CP226/97, 31 July 1998, In the High Court of New Zealand, Wellington Registry, Archives and Records Association, and the New Zealand Society of Genealogists vs Roger William Blakely and the Attorney General of New Zealand.
- 14 "Archives Challenge Rejected," *Dominion* (18 December 1999).
- 15 For detailed analysis of the restructuring of National Archives see the above noted articles by R. Lilburn "The Restructuring of the National Archives of New Zealand: An Ideological Experiment?" *Government Information Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (1996), and "Public Archives: Heritage Happiness or Horror Story," *Government Information Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (1998).
- 16 Speech from the Throne, Opening of Parliament, 21 December 1999.
- 17 Renamed State Records New South Wales on 1 January 1999.
- 18 D. Roberts, "Developing Australian Standards for Records Management: Developments in Australian Recordkeeping Standards," http://www.records.nsw.gov.au/publicsector/rk/ausstand/ausstd_1.htm.
- 19 *Review of Appraisal 1998/99*, National Archives of New Zealand file 15/2/3.
- 20 *Standards and Recordkeeping in the New Zealand Public Sector* (Wellington, 1999); http://www.archives.govt.nz/national_archives/statutory_regulatory/standards/record_keeping/contents_frame.html.
- 21 *Survey of Records in Government Offices* (Wellington, 1998), p. 24.
- 22 See AS 4390, *Records Management Standard*, Part 1, "General," and Part 2, "Responsibilities" (Homebush, 1996).
- 23 State Services Commission, *Policy Framework for Government Held Information* (Wellington, 1997); http://www.ssc.govt.nz/Documents/policy_framework_for_Government_.htm.
- 24 Developed in the Statutory Regulatory Group by John Roberts and Michael Hoyle. It is expected that the model will evolve as further experience is gained in standard setting.