



Mr Martyn Killion
A/Executive Director; and
Ms Laura Baldwin
Manager
State Records NSW

Via email: govrec@staterecords.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Killion and Ms Baldwin

Re: Building the Archives Review

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Building the Archives Review Consultation Paper (“**Consultation Paper**”).

The Aboriginal Languages Trust (“**ALT**”) is an Aboriginal-led New South Wales (“**NSW**”) Government agency established under the [Aboriginal Languages Act 2017](#) (“**the Act**”) to provide a focused, coordinated, and sustained effort in relation to Aboriginal Languages activities at local, regional and State levels.

The functions of the ALT are defined in the Act. They include:

- promoting Language activity
- identifying priorities for Language activity
- managing the funding of, and investment in, Language activity
- promoting education and employment opportunities in Language activities
- providing guidance to government on Aboriginal Languages
- promoting the wider use and appreciation of Aboriginal Languages

The ALT is also the lead NSW State Government agency for the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Target 16: By 2031, there is a sustained increase in number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages being spoken.

In 2022, the ALT launched its inaugural five-year [Strategic Plan](#), which was developed following consultation with around 400 stakeholders, 81% of which identified as Aboriginal. The Strategic Plan outlines the ALT’s vision and purpose:

All NSW Aboriginal Languages are strong and healthy.

We aid in the growth and nurturing of NSW Aboriginal Languages by responding to the aspirations of Communities and participating in their self-determining work to reclaim and reawaken their Languages.

The ALT has recently formed a partnership with Museums of History NSW for the *Supporting Aboriginal Community Access to Archives* project to improve First Nations People’s experience accessing archival materials about their families, history, Cultures and Languages. This initiative seeks to build the Aboriginal archivist workforce by employing a team of Aboriginal people and providing on the job training in archival and digitisation work. The project will see Aboriginal people reconnected with archival material pertaining to their Languages and Cultures to contribute to their revitalisation.

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This project not only supports the Trust’s Strategic Plan, but also Target 16 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and Priority Reform 4: Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level.

1. The Appraisal Objectives

The current five Objectives do not specifically refer to records held pertaining to Aboriginal Peoples and Communities in NSW. While Objective 4 refers more generally to “communities of NSW”, of which Aboriginal Communities could be included, the types of activities associated with this Objective are relatively limited (e.g. records pertaining to significant cultural events; celebrations and sites of conservation, cultural or heritage significance).

During consultation on the ALT’s draft Strategic Plan, NSW Aboriginal Language Communities highlighted the need for greater access to archives and Language materials held by collecting institutions¹. As all NSW Aboriginal Languages are currently in varying states of revival, records containing any Aboriginal Language and Culture information are critical to current revitalisation work being undertaken and must be recognised for the importance they hold.

The [Tandanya – Adelaide Declaration](#), made by the International Council on Archives Expert Matters Indigenous Group in 2019, recognises that “colonial states have created, in academia and government, a tremendous volume of records concerning Indigenous peoples. These records have been disseminated and stored without the input of the affiliated Indigenous community. There is a need for affiliated Indigenous peoples to gain a degree of control over the access to information created by state-directed governance and cultural authorities” (4a). Furthermore, it recognises that “access to records containing traditional Indigenous cultural expression, sacred belief, social and legal knowledge must recognize and apply the social, legal and cultural protocols of the affiliated communities. This should be done in consultation with the affiliated community.” (4c).

A separate and specific Objective should be included to recognise records pertaining to Aboriginal Peoples and Communities, including activities about their Languages and Cultures.

2. Aboriginal Community input to appraisal decisions

Decisions about whether records pertaining to Aboriginal Peoples and Communities are retained, disposed of or, where possible, repatriated to Communities need to be made in consultation with Aboriginal Peoples. Therefore, a specific appraisal method is required for the handling of these records, which includes a consultation process for determining whether records are retained or disposed of. Key to this appraisal method will be the development of Cultural protocols to determine how such decisions are made, and to ensure the Cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff when working with sensitive, offensive or distressing records.

Where records are retained, processes are required to ensure the accessibility of the records for Aboriginal Communities (see section 3 below). The Trust has previously called for a national approach to storing information to improve access, register, and record where and how information is kept, and ensure it is safe and accessible. To ensure the Cultural safety of access to documentation, protocols must be developed by Language Communities to control how archival information is accessed. These protocols should be built into any online access systems. Refer to [TK \(Traditional Knowledge\) Labels](#) which allow Communities to specify conditions for sharing of information.

¹ The Aboriginal Languages Trust Strategic Plan Consultation Outcomes Report is available at <https://www.alt.nsw.gov.au/learn/strategic-plan-2022-2027/>

Where records will no longer be held in State Records, consultation with Communities will determine whether the records can be handed over to Communities for their own record keeping.

3. Aboriginal Community access to archives

In our consultation with NSW Aboriginal Communities, the Trust has heard that local access to archives is needed to progress urgent Language revitalisation work, with some Communities wanting online access to digital materials (with Traditional Knowledge Protocols built in) while others want Aboriginal Community controlled archival and Keeping Places. Investment is required in both options, including developing Community capability for working with archives.

Recommendations

1. That a separate and specific Objective is included to recognise records pertaining to Aboriginal Peoples and Communities, including activities about their Languages and Cultures.
2. That Aboriginal Communities are consulted and have input to decisions about the retention of records that pertain to them.
3. That Cultural protocols are developed to determine how record appraisals are made.
4. The Aboriginal Community access to archives is prioritised, including investment in online access to digital materials and Aboriginal Community controlled Keeping Places.

The Trust is excited to embark on the *Supporting Aboriginal Community Access to Archives* project and hopes that it will inspire similar initiatives in other collecting institutions. Training and providing employment pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People to have careers in the archives sector will help to ensure that records are handled and appraised in a Culturally appropriate way.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments. Please reach out to Britt Jacobsen, A/Manager Policy & Research at britt.jacobsen@alt.nsw.gov.au for further information.

Sincerely



Clare McHugh
Executive Director
Aboriginal Languages Trust
Date: 26 June 2023