

The ongoing campaign for NAA and the dreaded Efficiency Dividend

The NAA Adelaide Consultative Group met on Tuesday 2 March 2010. It is unclear what the future status of NAA offices in the states and territories is.

NAA management is still meeting with Minister Ludwig's staff and we await further information from these meetings.

Minister Ludwig's media release of 23 February [http://www.smos.gov.au/media/2010/mr_062010_joint.html] is only a small victory in the campaign to maintain a National Archives presence outside Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne. A victory in so far as the Adelaide, Hobart and Darwin offices have won a reprieve - but in twelve months time we will have a new budget and could have a new government.

The enemy here is the 'Efficiency Dividend' introduced in the 1987/88 budget requiring a 1.25% reduction of agencies' departmental funding.

"In 2008, the new Government applied a one-off 2% efficiency dividend on top of the ongoing efficiency dividend. This was part of its election commitment to responsible economic management. ... After 20 years of the efficiency dividend, however, many small agencies report that they are no longer able to find genuine efficiency savings. To meet the efficiency dividend requirement, many small agencies have resorted to reducing or discontinuing activities that they consider to be lower priority or discretionary. For some agencies, their ability to deliver on core functions has been restricted."

[<http://www.aph.gov.au/HOUSE/committee/jpaa/efficdiv/report/chapter1.pdf>]

So the time for self congratulation has passed.

The need now is for Australian archivists to join with other small agencies - particularly those in the small states - to argue against the impacts of the 'efficiency dividend' on small agencies, states, and territories. These are the agencies and the populations that are most likely to feel the greatest negative impacts of 'efficiency dividend' budgets in the near future.

The Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit Inquiry into the effects of the ongoing efficiency dividend on smaller public sector agencies provides the best basis from which to begin the campaign against the effects of the efficiency dividend.

"Therefore, the Committee concludes that there is a definable group of agencies that are being placed in financial difficulty by the combined effect of the efficiency dividend, the indexation measures and the NPP process. This group is defined by their smaller size and their technical, well-defined roles."

[<http://www.aph.gov.au/HOUSE/committee/jpaa/efficdiv/report.htm>]

I recognise that there is probably a feeling of campaign exhaustion in the community and after an initial victory there is often a desire to sit back and take breath - but the reality is any sense of victory is likely to be short-lived unless we as a profession and community get behind NAA keep pushing the point that their presence is important to the people in the small states and Northern Territory.

I notice people are already dropping off the 'Save NAA Offices in Adelaide, Hobart and Darwin' cause on Facebook - probably believing the war is won - it isn't.

In the belief that all the good work of recent months could be for nought I suggest a renewed campaign to politicians and media highlighting the issues identified by the Joint Committee , affected agencies and populations, until we get a commitment to amend the process of efficiency dividend budget cuts as it negatively affects small agencies, particularly our National Archives .

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