

18 December 2019

Alicia Cerreto MPHA
President
Professional Historians Association (Victoria and Tasmania)
PO Box 1223
Carlton VIC 3053

PO Box 2100,
North Melbourne,
Victoria 3051 Australia
or DX 210727

prov.vic.gov.au

Dear Ms Cerreto

Thank you for your letter of 16 December 2019 regarding the changes to records delivery in our North Melbourne Reading Room from January 2020.

We regret any inconvenience that these changes may cause to users of our service, especially those travelling long distances. However the changes are being implemented in order to provide the best service within available staffing levels while maintaining the provision of a free service for the public, including professional historians. Picking and returning records from the repository is a labour intensive exercise which brings with it a number of occupational health and safety risks which need to be mitigated in order to ensure staff are not exposed to any possibility of injury.

Your letter raises a number of specific issues:

- Our reference service is available to people through the online enquiry form on our website. Where practicable, enquiries are responded to by telephone. People without internet access may be required to leave a message for a call back; however, in our experience, this is rare.
- All records description lists removed from the Reading Room are available on our online catalogue.
- Staffing changes in the Reading Room result from staff leaving to take up other temporary or permanent internal or external roles, taking extended leave or retiring. You would appreciate that these changes are beyond our control.
- Previous online or hard copy guides have been replaced by Theme and Topic pages on our website. These provide finding aid information in a different style that is integrated with our search engine and helps first time users get to specific frequently -used records quickly, while still providing comprehensive information on navigating less well-trodden paths. In practice this has meant shorter guidance on more topics, navigated through a tree structure.
- PROV's opening hours have not been reduced. Further, we have been delighted this year to double the days that the Ballarat Archives Centre is open from two to four days per week.
- No decision on the reduction of the timeframe for holding records has been made but this is under consideration. Research on user behaviour indicates that the great majority of records are viewed within three days of ordering.

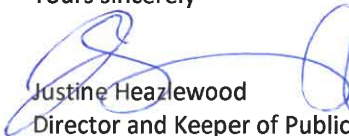
Our ongoing work program aims to make more records findable and orderable through our catalogue. This is an ongoing effort. For example, a majority of our approximately 150 active volunteers are currently listing records for inclusion on the catalogue. Also, an increasing number of volunteers are actively engaged in digitisation projects which are prioritised on the basis of popularity and appeal to the widest possible audience. We have consistently found that these projects result in an increase in records usage.

Finally, you have suggested that we increase the number of records available per user to 50. This would be a more than 100% increase on the current limit of 24 and is simply not achievable nor sustainable.

You would understand that we are required to operate with our current funding base. In doing so, a priority for me is ensuring that staff working in the Reading Room and the repository are not exposed to any occupational health and safety risks and that we use our resources in the most efficient way.

The impact of the revised service model will be reviewed during 2020.

Yours sincerely



Justine Heazlewood
Director and Keeper of Public Records

CC Belinda Ensor
Judy Maddigan