

## Public sector organisations criticised for poor record-keeping



*Chris Skelton*

*Internal Affairs Minister Peter Dunne says he supports concerns raised by Chief Archivist Marilyn Little about record-keeping at public sector organisations.*

Public sector organisations have come under fire for their poor record-keeping, with a report warning that important documents could be damaged, destroyed or inappropriately as a result.

In an [Archives New Zealand report](#), Chief Archivist Marilyn Little said it was "disappointing" that barely half of the public offices audited by Archives New Zealand in 2014/15 had an appropriate level of record-keeping maturity, 10 years after the Public Records Act came into force.

"Low levels of record-keeping maturity indicate that some public offices are not effectively managing business risks or ensuring that records are created and maintained to enable government accountability."

More than half of the public offices audited did not have regular monitoring or reporting on their record-keeping policies and procedures, while processes for disposing and transferring unimportant records were "underdeveloped" in nearly all of the audited offices.

"The [law] has now been in force for 10 years and most public offices are still not disposing of records appropriately...this is disappointing."

Little said over-retention of records could lead to higher storage costs, while records with long-term value were at risk of being accidentally destroyed or lost in systems "cluttered with lower-value records".

Public sector organisations that did not "systematically" manage how their records were created and maintained were more likely to leave important activities undocumented, accidentally damage or destroy records, and allow inappropriate access to records containing sensitive, confidential or private information.

Little said public offices needed to conduct routine evaluations of their records management, producing regular reports so office managers were aware of their performance, while many still had to develop and implement plans for disposing of records.

Internal Affairs Minister Peter Dunne said he agreed with Little's concerns and believed "a real message" had been sent to some organisations about the standard of their record-keeping.

"It's not a question of just throwing out those old files because we don't need them anymore, there is a public records factor that they've got to take much more seriously into account."

Dunne said there was a "declining recognition" of the importance of keeping records in the digital age, which needed to be addressed.

"That type of mentality, 'Let's just move with today', that doesn't wash I'm afraid - I think there's got to be a much more profound responsibility on organisations to make sure that the records are maintained, and maintained in a way that they can be accessed at some time in the future."

Organisations with poor record-keeping practices needed to get advice from Archives New Zealand and act on it as soon as possible, he said.

"I don't think there's any room for error here because, in a funny sort of way, the implications of those decisions don't occur today - it's 10, 20 years down the track when people seek to find out what happened and why and the records aren't available."

The 2014/15 audit covered 33 public organisations, including tertiary education providers, state-owned enterprises, and government departments.

*Submitted by Ruth Edge – Cardinia Shire Council*