

Policy Statement on Archival Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

(adopted at the Annual General Meeting held on 23 May 1996)

Archives and archivists in Australia have a vital role to play in assisting the process of reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Many of the records for which archives and archivists in Australia are responsible have the potential, depending upon how they are used, to either greatly assist or greatly hinder the process of reconciliation. Most of these records were not created by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They may, however, contain information which is not known to Aboriginal people, which is regarded as secret/sacred by them, or which is presented in a manner which is offensive to them. Archives and archivists need to be sensitive to these issues and to institute access policies which take account of the concerns and moral rights of Aboriginal people.

Notwithstanding the insensitive or inappropriate manner in which many archival records relating to Aboriginal Australians were created or the offensive nature of many of the representations of Aboriginal people in these records, the network of Australian archives nevertheless contains an unparalleled storehouse of recorded knowledge relating to such matters as Aboriginal customs, traditions, genealogies and the experience of European invasion and the imposition of foreign laws and administrative systems. Much of this information which exists in written form amongst archival records has been lost to the oral tradition and memory of Aboriginal people or was deliberately kept from them. Archives have the opportunity and a responsibility to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to make maximum use of archival holdings and services and to facilitate Aboriginal access to records of their own cultural heritage and historical experience. To assist this process archives and archivists need to design and implement service environments, systems, routines, finding aids and promotional material which do not discomfort or embarrass Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander users, but which make appropriate access to records a culturally-sensitive, welcoming and relatively stress-free experience for Aboriginal Australians.

The ASA believes that none of this can be adequately achieved unless archives and archivists in Australia establish meaningful links with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This should be done not only by the use of appropriate consultative and liaison mechanisms but also by facilitating the active participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in archival planning and decision making processes and in the routine operation of archival institutions at various levels. In particular, archives and archivists in Australia should be encouraged to employ, train and educate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and to help them to pursue fulfilling careers in archives. Cross-cultural awareness programs should be implemented which promote an appreciation amongst non-Aboriginal staff of the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and cultures.

The ASA endorses the principles and guidelines set out in the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services* which were developed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library and Information Resource Network and published in 1995. ASA members are encouraged to become familiar with these Protocols and to support their implementation in the archives in which they are employed.