

*Professional Historians Association
(Victoria and Tasmania) Inc*

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Dear Ms Heazlewood

The Professional Historians Association (Victoria & Tasmania) is the representative body for over 200 academically-trained members across the history, heritage, museum, and creative industries sectors. We work hard to support our members, advocate for the place of history and promote the work of professional historians. There are similar organisations across Australia and we are all part of our parent body, Professional Historians Australia.

Professional historians are champions for the archives, but on behalf of our membership, we must register our concern for PROV's intention to reduce the number of record retrieval deliveries from twice to once per day at the Victorian Archives Centre.

The reduction in retrievals will impact users in a range of ways:

Firstly, this causes a significant challenge for those who are regional or travel long distances to get to the Victorian Archives Centre. Researchers plan assiduously for these trips, and rely on the ability to maximise their time in the archives. It would be a costly exercise if they were unable to order a second lot of records on one day, if the morning's selections did not meet their needs. In most cases, having to return the following day would incur a cost for the researcher, or force them to delay their project.

Secondly, those who are undertaking short urgent projects (such as heritage assessments) will be disadvantaged under this system. This is particularly relevant when accessing items such as Rate Books, or when using indexes that lead on to another series. Under this system a researcher may find the key to the next series at 10.30am, but not be able to gain access until the following day.

Thirdly, these issues are relevant for professional historians who ascribe to efficient work practices, regardless of the length of project they are undertaking, or where they live. We also note the environmental impact of being forced to make multiple trips to PROV.

We urge PROV to reconsider this limiting of services, and the reduction of access to public records. This increasing difficulty of accessing the physical collection, goes alongside other concerns observed by our members, such as:

- The removal of a phone reference service
- The removal of many records description lists from the reading room

- The gradual reduction of technical expertise of reading room staff
- The removal of guides from the PROV website and reading room without being replaced with equivalent information
- The reduction of PROV opening hours
- The possible reduction of the timeframe for holding records

If PROV continues with this proposed alteration to record retrieval times, we want to understand what moves will be made to offset this significant disadvantage for all researchers.

We suggest that PROV move to digitise all indexes, with the aim of making record ordering more accurate and reliable. We do note the ongoing digitisation projects being undertaken, but consider that these seem to focus more on the interests of family history researchers rather than reflecting the broader range of topics that professional historians undertake.

In addition, we also urge PROV to drastically increase the number of records available per user, up to 50 items. This will at least enable some efficiency of work for our professional members, even though it will not solve the problem of a record leading on to another item that cannot be ordered on the same day.

This is a case of access and equity for all researchers and not just professional historians, though it will make the work of historians who use PROV a lot more difficult. I would like to understand what long term outcome is being sought by PROV from these reduced services. I look forward to your response on these matters, and trust that PROV will continue to respond to users' demand for records, and desire to utilise the collection.

Yours sincerely,



Alicia Cerreto MPHA
President
Professional Historians Association (Victoria and Tasmania)

cc. Belinda Ensor, Public Record Advisory Council and MPHA (Vic & Tas)