

The Editor  
Archives and Manuscripts

Dear Madam

Because of the position of the Advisory Council on Australian Archives under the Archives Act 1983, I am particularly concerned that any misunderstanding or misinformation about the propriety of the Australian Archives' relations and dealings with that body is clearly dealt with.

In his article "Australian Archives through a Looking Glass" Mr Colin Smith purveys a statement that Australian Archives "seeks to minimise contact of its Advisory Council with any source of archival advice other than itself". There is of course absolutely no truth to the claim. In any case, the Advisory Council has a mind of its own and the Australian Archives could not insulate it from outside archival advice even if it wanted to. Mr Smith may not be aware that the Council has in fact sought and obtained advice from ASA and other outside interests.

Were it not for the above, I would not be commenting on Mr Smith's article. It contains other prejudicial material, which I do not intend to debate point by point, nor will I engage in semantic arguments. There are, however, two other matters on which I shall comment.

Mr Smith refers to "a substantial refusal (by AA) even to communicate". The evidence given for this nonsense is alleged lack of AA support, especially at senior levels, for ASA proceedings. That is but one forum, but even there, the AA is supportive of staff membership of ASA and their active participation in its work. For example, there will be several senior Australian Archives staff at the Hobart ASA conference in receipt of varying degrees of official support. AA staff can and do make substantial contributions to the literature, (including, I believe, to this issue of "Archives and Manuscripts" as well as to the last). Their contributions are commonly based on developments within the Australian Archives with which they have been involved, and

deem worth sharing. Their contributions or their intentions to contribute are often discussed with senior staff. Beyond that, however, the Director-General or Acting Director-General has attended every meeting of the ACA executive and the Annual General Meetings. Australian Archives is perfectly willing to respond to inquiries, provide advice or to participate in working parties etc where it is appropriate and we feel we can contribute. And it does so.

Finally, a brief word on Mr Smith's argument about the responsibilities of the Australian Archives and what he sees as the role model - the National Archives of Canada. What any national archival institution does should be seen in its own historic and current context. The Canadian body has a longer history and a wider remit. It is differently perceived in the domestic scheme of things. Mr Smith is perfectly entitled to his view of what the Australian Archives should be doing. However, the program objective for the Australian Archives which he quotes from our 1987/88 Annual Report is a reflection of the dominant purpose of the Archives Act and what the Government expects of us. It is a clear point of reference as to where we must direct our resources and energies in order to provide the best possible services for the Government, its agencies and the public.

Yours faithfully



B COX  
Director-General  
Australian Archives

10 April 1989

Editor's note:

This letter has been treated as a graphic item - that is, it has not been typeset but appears exactly as it was received. This was necessary to insure its inclusion long after the due date for submissions.