



The Hon. Gabrielle Williams  
Minister for Government Services  
Minister for Consumer Affairs  
Minister for Public and Active Transport  
Level 3, 1 Treasury Place  
East Melbourne VIC 3002

29 February 2024

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Australian Historical Association (AHA), the peak national organisation that has represented historians working in all fields of history since 1973.

I write to express our serious concerns about the amendment to the *Public Records Act 1973* that is currently before the Victorian Parliament (in the form of the *Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment [Funding] Bill*). The proposal to abolish the Public Records Advisory Council and to disestablish the roles of current office holders appears to have been taken with scarcely any consultation with those working in the Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums sector, nor with the people who most often use public records, namely historians. The rationale for the decision has been articulated in only vague terms in the explanatory memorandum (which promises 'alternative avenues to consult'), and also in your second reading speech to the Legislative Assembly (in which you have promised a 'more informal, flexible' approach to community involvement in public records management).

The AHA does not support the abolition of any Advisory Council involved in the governance of important archival collections and public records such as those held by the Public Record Office Victoria (PROV). Indeed, PROV's website currently makes the important point that members of the Advisory Council '[bring a wealth of knowledge and experience](#)' to public records management in Victoria. Bodies such as these are important in ensuring the good governance of important record-keeping authorities. As recent events here and overseas should remind us, compliance in public record management cannot be taken for granted. PRAC provides an important measure of assurance that the voices of historians, archivists, heritage consultants and wider community representatives can be brought to bear on the management of the records that document Victoria's past. A third of our members live and work in Victoria and will be negatively impacted by this proposal

Last June, the AHA wrote to your predecessor, the Hon. Danny Pearson, in respect of cuts to PROV programs such as the Local History Grants Program that the Victorian Government had foreshadowed in its 2023-24 budget statement. We urged the then-Minister to consult more widely with community stakeholders before making decisions with little fiscal impact but significant consequences for the vitality of the Victorian community's culture and heritage. In writing to you today, I repeat our request that the Victorian Government consult meaningfully



with the relevant community partners and stakeholders before making decisions that have a bearing on the capacity for access to records and historical inquiry in your state.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Frank Bongiorno AM  
President, Australian Historical Association

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Frank Bongiorno'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping 'F' and 'B'.