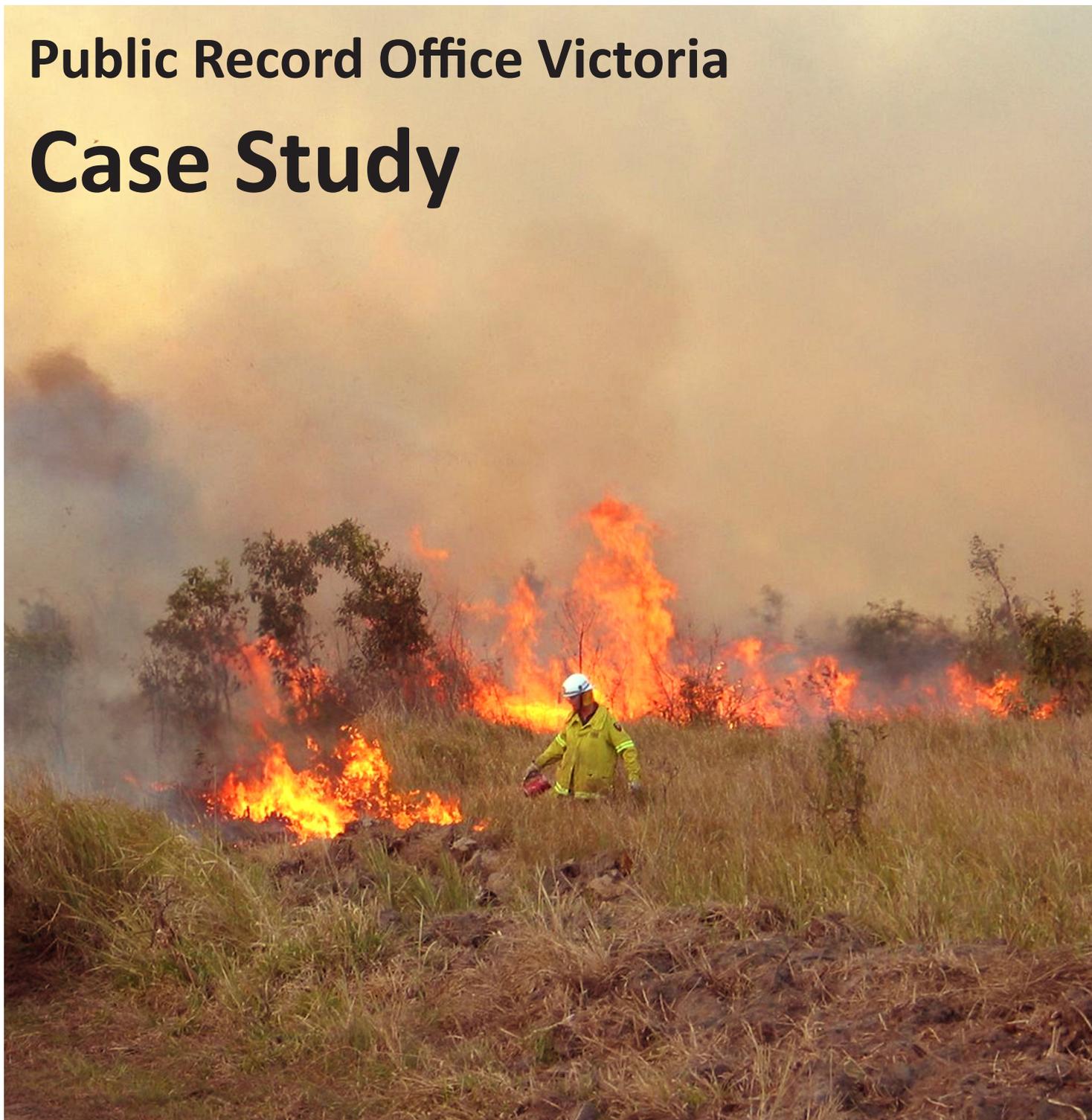


Public Record Office Victoria

# Case Study



## Bushfires Royal Commission

Transferring over 400,000 electronic documents to PROV's Digital Archive



Public Record  
Office Victoria



## Bushfires Royal Commission



How do you ensure 400,000 electronic documents are successfully transferred into Victoria's digital archive? With Agency commitment from day one, a close working relationship with PROV, experienced data professionals and careful planning and execution.

### Key Topics

Digital archiving, digital transfers, VERS Encapsulated Object (VEO), metadata.

### Key Discoveries

- Recordkeeping needs to be incorporated into the overall business strategy.
- Organisations must engage with PROV early; and then maintain ongoing engagement to ensure their systems and workflows align with the technical requirements of VERS.
- Effective recordkeeping and the successful transfer of electronic records requires involvement of senior stakeholders.
- Users must be trained and engaged to ensure high quality metadata is captured.
- The organisation's IT teams must be engaged to ensure the required IT processes fit within the existing IT and security environment.
- Standards provide a roadmap for transfers and are based on previous projects and should be continually reviewed to ensure they meet current needs.

### About the Commission

The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission was established to investigate the causes and responses to bushfires that swept through parts of Victoria in January and February of 2009. The final report was delivered by the Commission on 31 July 2010.

### The Challenge

Once the final report was delivered, the Commission and PROV needed to transfer more than 400,000 electronic documents, including large files and hours of audiovisual material. This required PROV to work with the Commission's specialist provider of electronic evidence management services to develop an effective and efficient transfer process.

*Once the final report was delivered, the Commission and PROV needed to transfer more than 400,000 electronic documents, including large files and hours of audiovisual material.*

**"Information was a critical part of the Royal Commission, and from the beginning we identified the long-term requirements. We worked closely with PROV to plan the final transfer to ensure it was smooth and successful."**

- Royal Commission  
Records Manager

“

Together, they faced a variety of technical limitations, including handling large files and maintaining high quality metadata throughout the process.

The transfer required careful orchestration with work continuing even though the Commission officially closed in July 2010.

Other technical and cultural challenges included changing parameters and the speed with which the Digital Archive could ingest the data.

# Summary of Transfer Preparation Process

**1** Recordkeeping built into business strategy

**2** PROV and agency begin discussions

**3** Agency begins discussions with IT department

**4** Systems and processes comply with VERS

**5** Info mapped to required metadata

**6** Transfer process begins

## Approach

From the beginning, the Commission focused on ensuring records were correctly collected and maintained, to ensure they could be transferred to PROV to form part of the State Archival Collection.

One of the most important steps was writing VERS requirements into the contract between the Commission and its specialist provider of electronic evidence management services. This was a result of the Records Manager at VBRC and PROV being involved in drafting the requirements and also involved identifying the level of technical expertise required. The contract stipulated that files were required in VERS-approved long-term preservation formats.

The Commission's dedicated Records Manager worked closely with PROV from an early stage. A specialist data and evidence provider was also engaged to develop systems to manage, collect, store and retrieve both hard copy and electronic records, and to manage the digital transfer process. Many of these records were of a sensitive or

confidential nature so it was crucial that efficient, secure and robust systems were developed, implemented and maintained.

*Many of these records were of a sensitive or confidential nature so it was crucial that efficient, secure and robust systems were developed, implemented and maintained.*

The core records were kept in an innovative evidence and case management system. It allowed all data from parties appearing before the Commission to be managed so the Commissioners and the Counsel assisting the Commission could access the material and add analysis electronically.

This was supported by an electronic court book, which contained all exhibits tendered to the court and marked as evidence, as well as transcript of the hearing and lists cross-referencing transcript and documentary exhibits.

**“Challenges on this project were the large data sets, the scale of the metadata mapping exercise and complex digital rich content. Implementing customised technology solutions were key to the delivery of the project.”**

– Rebecca Grant, IMSS Project Director

“

## Preparing the Records for Transfer

As the Commission entered its final months, the team began preparing records, which were reviewed to ensure they complied with the VERS standard (*PROS 99/007 Management of Electronic Records*).

This required them to be converted into a standardised format for transfer to PROV's Digital Archive as a VERS Encapsulated Object (VEO).



To make the contextual and descriptive information as meaningful as possible the specialist evidence provider, in collaboration with PROV, mapped metadata within the collection management system to the fields specified by VERS.

After the closure of the Commission, the successor agency retained a data and digital evidence consultancy for the digital transfer project. Each digital record was converted into a long-term preservation format. Then the contextual metadata was gathered and added along with the native file format where possible.

### **Each digital record was converted into a long-term preservation format.**

The digital records were then converted to VEOs where the record was given a digital signature to ensure it could not be altered without detection.

### **The Result**

Due to careful planning and execution of the digital transfer project and through the close working relationship between PROV and the 2009 Bushfires Royal

Commission, over 400,000 digital documents have successfully delivered to PROV.

Furthermore, by adhering to the requirements of the VERS Management of Electronic Records Standard, the Commission has ensured the long-term management, preservation and access of permanent value electronic records.

### **VEO - VERS Encapsulated Object**

A record which has been encapsulated using XML as outlined in *PROS 99/007 Specification 3*.

Conforms to the VERS metadata scheme as outlined in *PROS 99/007 Specification 2* and contains documents expressed in a long term preservation format.



### **PROV Digital Archive**

The PROV Digital Archive was developed for Victorian Government to manage, preserve, and enable online access to permanent value VEOs.

The access component to the PROV Digital Archive also provides user access to the physical collection at PROV. The PROV Digital Archive also includes a digital repository facility.



For further information about 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission please go to:  
<https://www.vic.gov.au/inquiries-and-royal-commissions>

For further information about the Victorian Electronic Records Strategy please go to:  
<https://prov.vic.gov.au/recordkeeping-government/vers>

Cover image source: "bushfire 25-06-2006" by bertnot / CC BY-SA 2.0 (image edited).

Last updated April 2020 (updated hyperlinks)

