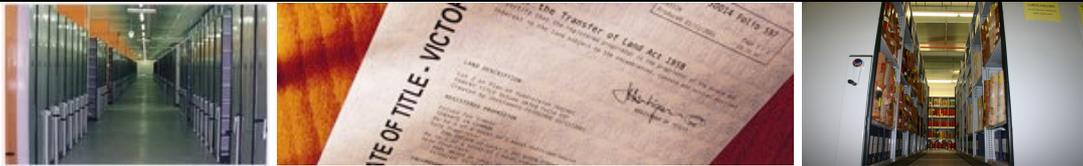


## On the record:

### 2013 Sir Rupert Hamer Award case studies



## A most valuable transfer of land (records)

With more than 3.8 million paper land titles ready to transfer to Public Record Office Victoria, Land Victoria needed a solid recordkeeping approach to ensure the long-term preservation and accessibility of this valuable public information. The end result of a close collaboration between Land Victoria and Public Record Office Victoria was the long-term preservation of records, which will have value for decades to come.

### The Category: Most Valuable Transfer to PROV

- Largest transfer to Public Record Office Victoria to date
- The result will be 2.5 kilometres of physical storage space
- Planning and collaboration key to the program's success

### About Land Victoria

Land Victoria collects, maintains and disseminates land-related information for the State of Victoria. For more than 150 years, the organisation has been using a method of recording and registering land ownership and interests called the Torrens Title System after South Australian Sir Robert Richard Torrens, who is largely credited with designing and implementing it.

### The Challenge:

How do you transfer more than 3.8 million paper-based land titles to Public Record Office Victoria, including mining leases, crown leases and freehold titles dating from 1863 to 2002? Land Victoria faced this challenge when it began investigating the largest physical transfer in Public Record Office Victoria's history. Once the final phase of the transfer is completed, the records will occupy approximately 2.5 kilometres of Public Record Office Victoria's storage space.

Due to the scale of the transfer, it has been managed in three stages over a three-year period and, in October 2012, a third of the records, nearly 647 linear metres, were transferred across to Public Record Office Victoria. The first transfer on 2 October 2012 coincided with Victoria's celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Torrens Title System, while the remaining records will be transferred

into Public Record Office Victoria's custody in 2014. In preparation for the subsequent transfers, Land Victoria has been able to draw upon key learnings from the first transfer.

## **The Solution:**

The key to this successful transfer was the partnership formed between Land Victoria and Public Record Office Victoria. Before, during and after the transfer was undertaken, Land Victoria was extremely cooperative and proactive in their dealings with Public Record Office Victoria, ensuring the smooth running of this project and efficient use of resources.

There has been an incredible amount of planning undertaken in all facets of the project, including around the processing, listing and boxing of such a large volume of valuable records. The methodology used to manage this transfer project could be re-used for future, large-scale transfers.

They key elements of the methodology are:

- Research Retention and Disposal Authorities drawn from the Public Record Office Victoria's website.
- Consultation and support by Public Record Office Victoria of the proposed transfer before commencement.
- Establishment of relationships with 'key people' from Public Record Office Victoria on the transfer.
- Approval and support from the Registrar of Titles.
- Preparation and submission of required transfer documentation to Public Record Office Victoria.
- Project planning to stage the transfer over three years.
- Assessment and identification tasks to ensure the integrity of the record set.
- Staffing resources as well as support and commitment from staff.
- Management of working conditions and the working environment.
- Research appropriate replacement archival box material for the long-term storage of the file.
- Design appropriate archival boxes to maintain volume sets, format sizes and different materials.
- Indexing archival boxes for transfer and the recording of Record Description Lists.

## **Approach:**

Planning for this transfer began as soon as Land Victoria had determined that the administrative use of the paper-based records had concluded. As part of the Titles Automation Project carried out by Land Victoria between 1999 and 2002, the paper titles were converted into a digital format, which were then used to create the computerised title known as a Folio.

With the introduction of Victorian Online Title System (VOTS) in 2002, the updating of the hardcopy land titles ceased and the computerised Folios became the official record of the business and continued to be used to update information on a land title. Through a series of meetings and discussions, Land Victoria and Public Record Office Victoria identified the resources, processes and systems required to handover the records from one organisation to the other.

This involved careful assessment of the records that needed to be transferred, identification of requirements from both organisations and establishment of clear lines of responsibility. Throughout the process Public Record Office Victoria and Land Victoria worked together to ensure each party was undertaking their key responsibilities and that critical processes were being followed and systems being used.

The preparation of the file for the first stage transfer took 12 months and the physical transfer of 5,679 archived Title boxes to the Public Record Office Victoria took three days and involved

numerous representatives of both organisations, specialised records transporters and a methodical approach.

## **The Result:**

The first transfer has provided records to fill significant gaps in Public Record Office Victoria's State Archival Collection, ensuring that a much fuller story of events, decisions and activities is captured for future use. The transferred documents unlock 150 years of historical land ownership information that will be significant to the Victorian people in researching historical land ownership or in the search of family history. This information covers a significant area of Government activity, which was under-represented in the State Archival Collection, and has great value due to age and other factors. At the same time, the transfer gave significant opportunities for innovation and knowledge development which can be re-used for other projects. It was managed very effectively by the agency, with great attention paid to meeting Public Record Office Victoria's specifications and requirements.

The transfer has provided a solid foundation for the second and third stages of this massive records transfer. It will also allow other organisations with similar volumes of paper-based records (and digital records) to undertake transfers to Public Record Office Victoria. Future challenges identified by Land Victoria and Public Record Office Victoria include unlocking the information contained in the 3.8 million paper titles. To assist with this challenge, future transfers will include numerous indexes and registers held by Land Victoria, which can be used to access the historical information contained in 3.8 million paper land titles.

## **Key Discoveries:**

- Whether it's a large transfer of records or a small transfer, planning is critical.
- It's important that each organisation understands its key responsibilities and is aware of the processes, systems and recourses involved.
- Planning by both organisations needs to involve assessment of the state of the records and the physical transfer requirements.
- It's important to engage and supervise a third party to the transfer, particularly the services of specialised records transporters.
- Information is available in regards to all aspects of good recordkeeping and record management from Public Record Office Victoria's website.
- Key contact people from Public Record Office Victoria are available to government agencies for preliminary and ongoing advice guidance and information.

## **Benefits of Entering**

Producing the award entry highlighted to Land Victoria the importance of good record management and the need for the long-term preservation of public records for the Victorian community. It has also highlighted the historical value of the information contained in the records and the value it has to the Victorian community. The award provided an avenue to promote the achievements and recognise staff commitment and contributions in the transfer through a series of internal articles and nomination for a departmental award.

It also supports recognition and promotion of good recordkeeping and record management to the wider government departments. The awards are a means of communicating achievements to the Victorian public and government sector.