



## Developing a Retention and Disposal Authority

### Introduction

Under s.16 of the *State Records Act 2000* all government organisations must have a record keeping plan (RKP) which among other matters must set out-

- those government records that will be State archives
- the retention period for those government records that are not State archives

These details are managed in an organisation's retention and disposal authority (RDA).

### Retention and disposal authorities

An organisation's RDA:

- identifies all the information held by an organisation, in any format
- specifies the minimum time the information must be retained before it can be legally destroyed
- identifies which records must be kept as State archives.

An RDA is structured according to function, activity, and record class. Each class has a disposal action and a trigger. The RDA also includes reference numbers that legally authorise the disposal of records.

For example:

Ref	Function/Activity	Description	Disposal Action	Custody
14	<b>MAINTENANCE</b>	Maintenance or repairs carried out on infrastructure, land, buildings, equipment and vehicles.		
14.1		Records of significant maintenance, repairs or restoration	Archive	Required as State archives
14.2		Records of the maintenance of land, buildings and operational facilities, plant or equipment, containing asbestos or hazardous materials	Destroy	Retain 75 years after maintenance carried out then Destroy
14.3		Records of routine maintenance carried out on land, buildings and operational facilities	Destroy	Retain 7 years after action completed, then Destroy.

### Developing a retention and disposal authority

When developing an RDA it is important to identify all the information your organisation creates or receives in the conduct of its business. Examine the main functions of your

organisation, the regulatory environment, relationships with other organisations, the main stakeholders, and interactions with the community.

It helps if your organisation has an information asset register which contains a listing of all the organisation’s business information in a single source.

The next step is to look at the State Records Office’s General Retention and Disposal Authority (GRDA). The GRDA covers all administrative records that are common across government organisations. Note what functions and activities are already covered in the GRDA as these **should not** be repeated in your organisation’s RDA. Determine what business functions your organisation provides that are unique to your organisation. These functions will form the basis of your RDA.

Once you have identified all the unique information your organisation creates or receives, you can then determine how long that information needs to be retained.

**Identify retention periods**

The minimum retention period for records of information is based on the:

- administrative,
- regulatory requirements and
- consideration of the historical and community value of the information.

**Regulatory**

Your organisation’s legislation and/or accompanying regulations may contain requirements for the keeping of records; what should be kept, how it should be kept, and for how long.

For example:

- the *Cemeteries Act 1986* states that the Board must keep a register of the location of all burials and that the register must remain in its original format.
- Under the *Work Health and Safety General Regulations 2022*, health monitoring records must be kept for 30 years after the record is made. They must also be kept confidential.

When you develop your RDA it is useful to include information about any legislative requirement for retention in the description filed. This makes it easier when the RDA is reviewed at a later date.

For example:

Ref	Function/Activity	Description	Disposal Action	Custody
8.3	LIVESTOCK	Stock movement permits.  <i>Biosecurity and Agriculture Management (Identification and Movement of Stock and Apiaries) Regulations 2013 s. 196</i>	Destroy	Retain 7 years after action completed then Destroy.

Check your Annual Report or previous RKP to see which legislation affects your organisation.

### **Administrative**

Administrative information is used in the day-to-day operations of your organisation. Consulting with the individual business units will provide you with an understanding of what records are collected or created and how they are used.

For example: A licence to keep animals on a property. This may be collected by the finance section along with a payment. The licence may be of no further use to finance once the payment has been processed. However, that same licence may then be useful to inspectors for the purpose of regular compliance inspections or accessed by customer service if a complaint is made about unsanitary conditions or noise.

The use of the information will help determine what retention period would be appropriate.

### **Historical and community**

Historical records are generally of interest to a wider audience than the original creating organisation, including future generations. These records are generally archival in nature.

### **Retentions**

A good start to working out retention periods is to divide your information into the following categories.

- Archival - Permanent
- Temporary - records that can be destroyed once they have met their legislative, business or community requirements.

For ease of developing an RDA, temporary records may be further subdivided into 4 categories:

- Long term (20 years +)
- Medium term (7-20 years)
- Short term (<7 years)
- Transitory / Ephemeral

### **State archives**

Information that is of enduring value must be identified. State archives are based on the SRO's 6 justification statements.

- Records that provide evidence of the source of authority, foundation and machinery of government. Includes state records that define the function of government, such as the nature and extent of government jurisdiction, obligations and powers.
- Records that provide concise evidence of the deliberations, decisions and actions of Western Australian government relating to key functions and programs and significant issues faced in governing the State

- Records that provide evidence of the legal status and fundamental rights and entitlements of individuals and groups essential for ongoing functions of the State.
- Records with a special capacity to illustrate the condition and status of Western Australia and its people, the impact of government activities and the interaction of people with the government.
- Records containing information that is considered essential for the protection and future well-being of Western Australians and their environment.
- Records that have a substantial capacity to enrich the knowledge and understanding of aspects of the State's history, society, culture, and people.

When in ORDA simply select **Retain as State archives**.

### **Temporary records**

All temporary records must be maintained for a period of time. This may be required by legislation, including regulations and standards, or specific agency directives. It is important to remember that the retention period for temporary records should be the minimum period only. Organisations may choose to keep records for longer than the minimum period if it is considered necessary for business requirements.

### **Long term (20 years +)**

These records may relate to long-term or ongoing rights, obligations and entitlements. The records generally need to be retained for the life of the individual or asset they relate to.

In some cases, the records may document events or activities where the impact of the event may be unknown for some time,

Long term records can include:

- health monitoring
- records that have the potential to be used in future child sexual abuse cases.

### **Medium term (7-20 years)**

The category generally consists of records required to meet statutory limitations or audit purposes.

Medium term records can include:

- licensing and applications
- accreditation
- minor contracts.

### **Short term (<7 years)**

These records are normally only needed for a short period of time where the decision or action they relate to can be appealed, questioned, or reviewed. They may also only need to be kept until superseded or revoked.

Short term records can include:

- advice which has no legal significance
- applications which are refused or not proceeded with.

## Transitory or ephemeral records

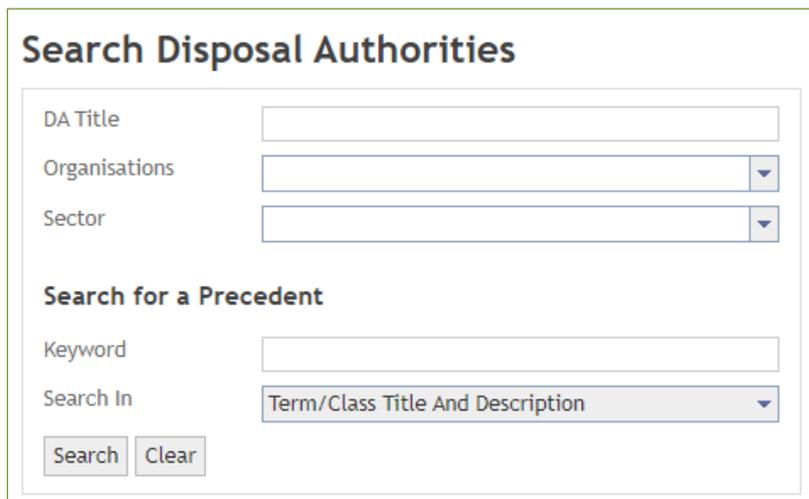
These are records that are only needed for a few days or hours and have no ongoing administrative, legal, evidential, fiscal, cultural or historic value.

Ephemeral records can include:

- duplicates
- reference sets of documents
- unsolicited or promotional materials from external sources
- rough drafts containing no significant changes
- circulars from external sources

These do not need to be listed in your RDA.

The SRO's Online Recordkeeping and Disposal Application (ORDA) holds most organisation's RDAs and allows users to search for precedents within the system. If you are unsure about a retention period, you can do a search and see if any other organisations hold similar information and what retention has been used.



The screenshot shows a web interface titled "Search Disposal Authorities". It contains several input fields and dropdown menus. At the top, there is a text input field for "DA Title". Below it are two dropdown menus for "Organisations" and "Sector". A section titled "Search for a Precedent" contains a "Keyword" text input field and a "Search In" dropdown menu currently set to "Term/Class Title And Description". At the bottom of this section are two buttons: "Search" and "Clear".

## Disposal triggers

A trigger is an event that must occur before the retention time starts. The most common triggers include

- date record created
- date action completed
- date asset decommissioned or disposed of
- after superseded.

When creating your RDA in ORDA you can choose a disposal trigger from a drop-down list.

**Note:** If your organisation is using SharePoint to manage information it is useful to have as few retention periods as possible and triggers will be limited.

## Legacy records

Legacy records are those for functions which are no longer carried out by the organisation, or which the organisation has custody of from a preceding organisation.

Unless already covered in an approved ad hoc disposal authority, legacy records still in the custody of the organisation should be included in the RDA.

## Databases

Do not list your databases in the RDA, these should be listed in your RKP under Information Systems.

If you wish to note that certain information is held within a specific system you can add the name/s of the systems to the Description field.

For example:

Ref	Function/Activity	Description	Disposal Action	Custody
6.2	<b>Cargo Management</b>	Cargo or vessel manifests. <i>All records stored in Cargo-Ship Tracker (CST)</i>	Destroy	Retain 7 years after action completed then Destroy.

## Websites

Information on your website should be filed under the main subject or functional area to which the information relates and not listed under a separate function 'websites'.

### Further information or advice:

Email: [sro@sro.wa.gov.au](mailto:sro@sro.wa.gov.au)

### Related documents

General Retention and Disposal Authority for State Government Information

### Active date

January 2024

### Review date

January 2026

### References

<https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/information-and-communication-technology/recordkeeping-and-information-management/recordkeeping/retention-disposal-and-destruction-of-records/about-retention-and-disposal-schedules>