

# TIME IN OUR HANDS

## *Time in our hands - Scorecard 2000*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

When the National Film and Sound Archive was established in April 1984, an Advisory Committee (predecessor of the present Interim Council) was appointed by the Government to “develop planning for the future development of the Archive.”

The Committee’s report titled **Time in our Hands** (TIOH) , was tabled in Parliament on November 1985. It sets out a vision for the growth of the new institution: it is, in effect, its foundation document.

The Council has asked me to prepare and circulate, out of session, a “Scorecard 2000” on TIOH, to assess just how far the original vision has been fulfilled, and whether the institution is achieving at a minimum its original milestones and targets.

The **Scorecard** is set out below in **two parts**: the first is a table dealing with the main **recommendations** of TIOH, and their outcome: the second picks up all the other major issues not dealt with in formal recommendations.

### 2 TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation Number	Topic	Status	Comments
1	Extension/refurbishment of HQ	Complete 1999	Recommended for completion in 1990. See separate note 5.1
2	Adopt 5 year plan beginning 86/87 leading to 260 staff and \$16.98m budget by 90/91	Not resourced as recommended	Growth has been slower: resource base still below recommended level in real terms, but changing technology and practices have also had an impact. See separate note
3	Establish NFSA as statutory authority	Not yet achieved.	Expected in 2000; repeatedly delayed by exigencies of government policy and priorities
4	Legislation to be consistent with charter and defined parameters	Not yet passed	Drafting to occur in coming months
5	NFSA not to be in statutory relationship with	Legislation not yet passed	APS environment has changed significantly since 1985

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	Public Service Board		
6	(Effective) legal deposit	Not yet achieved. Enabling legislation expected in near future	Accepted in principle by CLRC. Legislation timetable not known.
7	Legal deposit for certain printed materials	See #6.	Joint NLA/NFSA submission covered all legal deposit issues. Resolvable bilaterally if legislation passed.
8	Staus/Remuneration of Director comparable to other Commonwealth collecting bodies	Effectively achieved during 1980s	Director is currently SES Band 2 position, in common with most other collecting bodies in 1985. In recent years, other bodies have mostly moved to SES Band 3.
9	Establish permanent Interim Advisory Committee pending legislation and governing council	Established 1986	Has continued: subsequently renamed Interim Advisory Council
10	Government to adopt Charter (chapter 2) as basis for policies and activities	Legislation and formal adoption still pending	Charter has been observed in practice since 1985. See separate note 4
11	Policies as listed be adopted for functions and activities	Effectively adopted from 1985 onward	Used as basis in evolving subsequent, more detailed policies. See separate notes for Chapter 5.
12	Committee's view on general functions taken as a guide in developing other policies	Done from 1985 onwards	Some policy development still awaits
13	Establish Collections Policy Advisory Panel	Not done	Matters dealt with in other ways by Council and staff
14	Tasks of the Panel	see above	In practice, this work has been performed by relevant staff
15	Develop NFSA as national preservation centre etc.	Has happened progressively	Archive's role as a national coordinator and service centre continuing to evolve
16	National approach to cataloguing of audiovisual materials; NFSA as standard setter	Achieved to some degree	Archive's role as standard setter accepted: MAVIS database created; multiple external input still to be developed
17	Establish/maintain authoritative national record of production	Not achieved	Has remained lower priority than accessioning/ cataloguing existing collection
18	Role in non-commercial film exhibition recognised in AFC scheme	Overtaken by time	A then-current issue which did not have long term implications
19	Principles of structure recommended	Done.	Principles have continued to be observed. Medium-based structure changed to function-based around 1987, and remains so.
20	Develop relations with Asia/Pacific Countries	Done, from 1988 onwards	Rapid development 1995 onwards.
21	Open offices in every state capital	Done in Melbourne and Sydney only	Access centres maintained in other capitals, but permanent offices have not been a resource priority
22	Develop national roving presence	Partially achieved	Mobile programs such as Travelling Film and Sound Show, and field

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			trips for acquisition exemplify. However, there was no “sound search” to complement The Last Film Search.
23	Professional and structured approach to development of public profile	Done	Initially important to project identity separate from the National Library, a distinctive profile has been developed over time.
24	National Film Lending Collection to transfer to NFSA	Not done.	See separate note 6.12
25	Takeover of Mastertouch Piano Roll Company	Not done.	See separate note 6.13
26	Preservation/ accessibility of Cinesound and Movietone newsreels	Done	Operation Newsreel launched in 1988.
27	Escalate The Last Film Search and develop parallel project for sound recordings	Partially done	Last Film Search ran its course successfully. No comparable campaign for sound recordings was achieved.
28	Government celebrate 1986 as 50th anniversary of audiovisual archiving with appropriate events	Partially done	NFSA hosted first FIAF congress to be held in southern hemisphere
29	Adopt corporate planning approach, based on 5 year development plan	Done in appropriate way	5 year development plan was not resourced. Corporate planning has occurred continuously, with increasing sophistication
30	Develop special staff classification arrangements	Partially done	See separate note 7.3
31	Develop formalised training program	Done	See separate note 7.4

### 3 GENERAL ISSUES

Most topics were not the subject of formal recommendations. What follows is a resume of the substantive topics.

Where action on an issue is incomplete, this is indicated by an asterisk \*

Where an alternative course of action was pursued, this is indicated by a hash #

### 4 Chapter 2: THE CHARTER

\* This was presented as a foundational statement of the **purpose, role, functions and character** of the Archive. It was intended to be reflected in legislation establishing the

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Archive as a statutory authority. Though it has never been formally used as a public charter, it accurately describes now, as then, the nature of the institution and its values are reflected in current policy and other documents.

▲ **Comment:** It was later adopted, largely unchanged, as the charter of the **New Zealand Film Archive**. Its definition of the **moving image and recorded sound heritage**, suitably internationalised, has since been adopted by UNESCO.

### 5 Chapter 3: THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

5.1 The **headquarters building** has - finally! - been extended in accordance with the basic parameters of TIOH and is working much as TIOH envisaged. The main envisaged feature still missing from the complex is a theatre of reasonable size.

▲ **Comment:** The building of a large screen theatre on the Acton site would fill this need and be consistent with the TIOH vision.

\* 5.2 The purpose built **storage repository/technical facility**, seen to be needed around 1995 onward, has yet to be built. It is foreseen in the concept of a “greenfields site” where elements could be constructed progressively. Meanwhile, as TIOH envisaged, the nitrate vault has been extended, while other leased/owned premises at Mitchell have developed progressively to meet storage needs. The new technical facilities have been incorporated in the HQ extension.

\* 5.3 The **five year development plan** set out the gargantuan task facing the new institution. Following the release of TIOH, changes in the political climate removed all possibility of such significant and rapid resource growth.

\* 5.4 The achievement of **statutory authority status** was anticipated by 86/87, but has proved elusive because of constantly changing government stances, and bureaucratic circumstances, on the matter.

### 6 Chapter 5: FUNCTIONS

6.1 **Selection and acquisition (par. 4 - 24)** The rationale, philosophy and policy fundamentals enunciated in TIOH have continued.

6.2 **Preservation and technical (par. 25 - 38)** The philosophy and development vision set out here has been pursued and largely achieved: for example, the objectives set out in pars.

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28, 30, 31 and 32. Some aspects, such as commercial services (par 34) have come into focus fairly recently, and a **Technical Committee** of Council was foreseen (par. 38)

▲ **Comment** While advancing knowledge and technological change has not negated any of this, it has added to the agenda and changed priorities. For example, digitisation, the internet and vinegar syndrome were “unknowns” in 1985.

\*6.3 **Cataloguing (par. 39-58)** The strategy foreseen has been followed, including the development of what is now MAVIS, with the important exception of maintaining a national record of production (NRP): an omission on resource grounds. The NRP, in some form, remains an essential framework for knowing, quantitatively, how much the Archive is collecting relative to the total volume of material being created.

6.4 **Access (par. 59 - 77)** Encouragement of public access has remained a touchstone (par 59) and remote access to data, images and sounds was foreseen (par. 66): this is only now coming to fruition. Policy and service philosophy have continued.

\*6.5 **Research (par. 79-82)** Curatorial research has - as was feared - remained a low priority. We are only just beginning to look into the idea of research fellowships (par. 82)

\*6.6 **Library, documentation and artefacts (par. 90 - 95)** The philosophy has been pursued but the field has had a relatively low priority: this year the issue is being addressed.

\*6.7 **Education (par. 96 - 99)** The range of avenues (par. 99) has been addressed over time but it has been thinly resourced

\*6.8 **Exhibitions (par. 105 - 109)** The completion of the building extension at last allows implementation of the TIOH vision for exhibitions.

\*6.9 **Screenings (par. 110 - 116)** A regular (if still limited) screenings program is only a relatively recent addition to public activities, as is an activist approach to “packaging” material for commercial exhibitors. The full range of activities as envisaged in TIOH is yet to be achieved.

\*6.10 **Events, products and publications (par. 117 - 120)** While the generality of the TIOH vision has been embraced the range of possibilities has not been fully implemented. Development of a video/audio product range has been a particular strength.

6.11 **Marketing (par. 121 - 126)** The TIOH vision has been pursued intermittently, but is now gathering pace. It anticipates current APS budget reforms.

#6.12 **National Film Lending Collection (NFLC):** the phrasing of the Government decision creating NFSA was ambivalent about the future of the NFLC and, in the event, it did not leave the National Library in 1984 along with the archive functions. Around 1995, the National Library outsourced its operation to Cinemedia.

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#6.13 **Mastertouch Piano Roll Company:** protracted research and negotiation failed to produce a satisfactory solution to resourcing and integrating this activity. Finally, in 1999, the Archive decided to step out of this field and donated most of its piano roll collection to Music Roll Australia, a non-profit body associated with Mastertouch, which is working to preserve the piano roll heritage.

### 7 Chapter 6: STRUCTURE AND MANAGEMENT

**7.1 Corporate structure (par. 2 - 12)** Prophetically TIOH noted (par. 8) that “the Archive will be increasingly atypical of the Public Service, differing in both motivation and dynamics” with flexibility to attract and retain specialist staff and operate as an entrepreneurial organisation.

**7.2 Staffing (par. 32 - 36)** The character of the growing staff has proved to match the profile of emotional attachment and commitment anticipated in TIOH, as well as the desired mix of long-term and short-term tenures.

**\*7.3 Career structure (par. 37 - 40)** The TIOH assertion that the field of audiovisual archiving has its own integrity and is not a subset of other disciplines has been affirmed in recent years by its recognition at the tertiary level (including the UNSW course introduced in 1997). Recent changes in APS practice provide better opportunity for the flexible classification arrangements which TIOH recommended, but there is still some distance to go.

**\*7.4 Training (par. 41 - 42)** The Archive was slow to develop its training program. A formalised approach to the personal development of individual staff members was introduced in 1998, but the recommended pattern of professional training, while still valid for an isolated institution, has not been fully reached.

**7.5 Planning for growth (par. 43 - 45)** The phenomenon of unique expertise held in few hands remains a reality. As the Archive has grown, so has the range of skills and demands. There are individuals whose loss could seriously affect outputs and outcomes. There is still no detailed policy on volunteers.

**7.6 Professional ethic (par. 46 - 47)** A Code of Ethics was adopted by the Archive in 1990. On a larger canvas, the Archive was contracted by UNESCO to develop the publication text of “A Philosophy of Audiovisual Archiving” (1998) which advances an ethical base for the profession globally, although NFSA/SSA has so far taken no corporate stance on whether or not it aligns with the “Philosophy”.

**\*7.7 Relations with Commonwealth collecting bodies (par. 48 - 52)** These have evolved well over time, the Archive gradually earning its place as a fully fledged member of the “club” with a recognised national role and sphere of influence. It now participates fully in the various

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forums linking these bodies, in joint special events and exhibitions, in product creation and so on. Some issues of functional overlap and complementation are still to be resolved.

**7.8 Relations with Industry and trade (par. 53 - 56)** Still fundamental and vital, the relationships have become more multifarious over the years, and different sectors have been developed or maintained with varying degrees of vigour. They have been sometimes strained by circumstances - the "colour film crisis" and COMAT in the early 1990s tested them - and visibility at industry forums is still patchy.

**\*7.9 Relations with cultural and research bodies (par. 57 - 59)** These have developed to a degree but not to the extent envisaged.

**7.10 Relations with other film and sound archives (par. 60)** - within Australia. Over time here has been some encouragement and relationship-building among bodies at the local and state level, and recent work to activate the Archive's coordinating role within the Distributed National Collection.

**7.11 Overseas relations (par. 61 - 63)** have grown and broadened steadily, and the Archive has moved from "country cousin" status in 1985 to recognition as one of the world's major audiovisual archives today. In particular, the TIOH vision of the Archive's role in Asia/Pacific has very visibly developed over the last 5 years, as it has become the teacher and mentor for the region. At the same time, international relations have rested on a small base of mostly senior staff, with travel budgets declining significantly in recent years, and our isolation remains a significant problem in staff development.

**\*7.12 Geography/State capital offices (par. 64 - 75)** While access centres have developed in all state capitals (hosted by local institutions), staffed offices have remained limited to Sydney and Melbourne. The pressures and dynamics foreseen in par. 72 - 74 have been faced in practice.

**7.13 Public profile/name (par. 76 - 80)** Public profile got off to a good start with the Official Opening in October 1984, based on the fulfilment of years of activism and accumulated support. It has tended to be a function of the energy and imagination devoted to it since: regular bi-monthly newsletters, press releases, events and special projects (like "The Australian Image" TV series and "Operation Newsreel") made the NFSA name very familiar, though effort has not been consistent over the years. In preparing TIOH the Advisory Committee considered alternative names for the institution, recognising the name "National Film and Sound Archive" to be "an accurate but not sufficient description of its activities and role" and deciding they could not improve on it.

**#7.14 Guide to the Archive (par. 80):** The guide was never produced. The current website to a large extent now fulfils that role.

**7.15 Sponsorship (par. 82 - 86)** has been pursued with varying degrees of energy since 1985, but the rationale has been observed and there have been major successes, the largest being the \$3 million support from News Corporation for "Operation Newsreel".

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**\*7.16 Business aspects (par. 86 - 87)** have begun to come into focus in recent years, with the growth of product marketing and technical services. Larger potential remains.

### 8 SUMMARY

8.1 As a foundation document, TIOH has proved to be accurate in its projection of a strategic vision, and the growing Archive has stuck remarkably closely to that vision. While the passage of 14 years has seen the emergence of new factors - such as technological change, the internet, e-commerce and vinegar syndrome - that could never have been foreseen at the time, these do not affect the fundamentals of TIOH or the soundness of its approach. I cannot discern any directions or areas of activity which NFSA/ ScreenSound has so far ventured into which lay fundamentally outside the TIOH vision.

8.2 Where there is non-achievement, it is mostly due either to external and non-controllable circumstances, or decisions about resourcing priorities. Whether those priorities have always been correct is an area for legitimate debate, but these “pending” issues are still important - virtually none have passed into irrelevance. There is, therefore, still a good deal of “unfinished business”.

8.3 It is worth noting that TIOH has received wide international circulation and been acknowledged as a model foundation document for an audiovisual archive - other organisations have used it as a reference point. At the same time, the NFSA itself used it as a conscious reference point only for the first few years after publication: so the concurrence of its vision with the subsequent evolution of the institution is interesting!

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