

Northern Territory Archives Service Cabinet Submissions and Decisions

In 1978 the Commonwealth passed *The Northern Territory (Self Government) Act 1978* establishing the Northern Territory as a distinct political entity under the Crown, with limited state-like powers, effective on the 1st July 1978. The Act gave the Northern Territory self-government, extending local autonomy to the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory, and providing power to the Administrator to grant or deny assent to proposed law. Following this, the first Ministry of the new Northern Territory Government was appointed and the Legislative Assembly was given authority and responsibility for the finances of the government of the Northern Territory.

The Cabinet

The Cabinet consists of those elected members of the Legislative Assembly who have been appointed as Ministers by the Administrator. The Cabinet meets on a weekly basis to make decisions on matters such as major policy issues, proposals with significant expenditure or employment implications, matters which involve important initiatives or departures from previous arrangements, proposals with implications for Australian, state and local government relations, legislation, and high level government appointments.

The records of Cabinet meetings and decisions are held in the strictest confidence until they are released 30 years after their creation.

Access to Cabinet Records

On the 1st January each year the records of the Northern Territory Government's Cabinet are released for public access, having reached 30 years since their creation.

The Northern Territory Archives Service is responsible for managing, preserving and providing access to Territory Archives. Archives Advices nos.1-6 relating to access may be downloaded as PDF documents from: <http://www.nt.gov.au/nreta/ntas/records/archive/index.html>

In accordance with the *Information Act* government agencies transfer permanent value records of their business and activity to the archives service for inclusion in the Territory Archives. An access agreement is negotiated by the responsible agency and the archives service when the records are transferred. Public access to government archives is restricted for a minimum of 30 years, unless it is in the public interest for the records to be restricted for longer.

The Cabinet Office in the Department of the Chief Minister provides secretariat services to Cabinet and the Executive Council, and is the agency responsible for the records of Cabinet. An access agreement negotiated between the Northern Territory Archives Service and the Department of the Chief Minister provides for an annual opening of Cabinet submissions and decisions and of the Executive Council meeting papers, at the 1st of January each year after the records become 30 years old (some items may be restricted for longer periods where sensitive information has been identified).

Understanding Cabinet Submissions and Decisions

Most business comes before Cabinet by way of formal Cabinet submissions, identified by a consecutive number. Cabinet submissions generally follow a set format. This includes a cover sheet which provides brief details of the submission (e.g. title, purpose, sponsoring Minister,

relationship of the proposal to existing policy, timing considerations, staffing implications, costs) followed by the body of the submission which includes recommendations, background materials, options, budget implications, timing issues and other key topics. There may also be attachments to the submission. Submissions are usually prepared by Government agencies at the direction of, or with the agreement of, the Minister responsible for that agency. Submissions may also include comments from other Northern Territory Government agencies which were consulted during the development of the submission.

Each decision made by Cabinet is formally recorded in a separate document known as a Cabinet decision. Like Cabinet submissions, each Cabinet decision is given a consecutive number. Most Cabinet decisions will have a corresponding Cabinet submission, but Cabinet may also issue a Cabinet decision without a submission. Note that the decision number is not the same as the corresponding submission number (apart from a small number of very early submissions and decisions in a new Government's term when the numbers may coincidentally align).

Ministers may from time to time present memoranda to Cabinet, or table a document at a Cabinet meeting. These documents will generally be incorporated in the formal records of the Cabinet meeting. Such documents will usually result in a Cabinet decision, but not in every case.

The Cabinet submissions and decisions are kept in bound volumes (NTRS 2575).

The 1978 Cabinet submissions and decisions show the challenges and opportunities the first Cabinet of a newly self-governed Northern Territory had to meet in order to establish a governance framework. Deliberations ranged over such matters as the introduction of new legislation following the transfer of powers from the Commonwealth, the establishment of various Northern Territory Public Service functions, approval of the 1978-79 budget, establishment of Government supply and tender boards, policy on regionalisation of government operations, civil works programs, law and order, motor vehicle registration charges, setting rates of stamp duty, and government advisory committees.

The submissions received by the Cabinet in that year include:

- establishing the administration of the Northern Territory Government after self-government;
- local government for Katherine, Tennant Creek and "small and isolated communities", Aboriginal health programs;
- the construction of community health centres;
- the development of the Ayers Rock Resort at Yulara;
- establishment of casinos in Darwin and Alice Springs;
- major project developments for the reconstruction of Darwin, including the Museum and Art Gallery at Bullocky Point;
- the development of the Araluen Cultural Complex in Alice Springs; and
- the McArthur River Project in the Gulf of Carpentaria region and the Ranger Uranium Project in the Alligator Rivers region.

The table below lists the records of Cabinet, and other significant related series, available for public access from 1st January 2009,

Main Series

Series	Title	Description	Series Date Range
NTRS 2575	Cabinet submissions and decisions	Cabinet submissions, decisions, and associated papers including budget information Volumes 5-17, Meeting number 28 on the 7 December 1977 to Meeting number 64 on the 22 December 1978, are open from 1 January 2009	1971-2003
NTRS 3353	Index to Cabinet submissions and decisions	Annual indexes, created by the Cabinet Office to assist with accessing the volumes. The index provides details of the meeting number, meeting date, decision number, and title of submission	1977-1978

Related Series

Series	Title	Description	Series Date Range
NTRS 3351	Executive Council meeting papers	Agenda and business papers with related attachments 12 Volumes are open from 1 January 2009	1969-1979
NTRS 3352	Index to Executive Council meeting papers	An index created by the Cabinet Office in 2008 to assist with accessing the meeting papers. The index lists business papers submitted to each meeting Index 1977-1978 is open from 1 January 2009	1977-1979
NTRS 3354	Copyprints relating to members of the Northern Territory Cabinet	Copyprints taken from original photographs of the first Ministry. Image number 1 is open for access from the 1 January 2009	ca 1978- ca 1979

Further information

These series can be accessed by appointment in the Search Room of the Northern Territory Archives Service, Darwin, open from 9.00am-12 noon, 1.00pm-4.00pm weekdays.

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