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ACCESS TO COMMONWEALTH ARCHIVES

Statement by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

Commonwealth records that are 30 years old or more will, as from 1 January 1971, be available for scrutiny by the public. This policy will replace the "50 year access rule" that has operated in the past.

The 50 year rule was varied in 1966 to accelerate the release of World War I records. Currently, records originating prior to 1923 are available publicly and records originating between then and 1939 may be made available for preparation of important works of scholarship.

To facilitate study of the World War II period, the Government will also, as from 1 January 1971, allow accelerated release of records originating between 1 January 1941 and 31 December 1945 where they are required for preparation of important works of scholarship.

Some categories of records are regarded as not available for public access under current rules and will still be restricted under the new rules. Personal papers, such as those relating to pensions, will not be released; nor will there be any release of taxation or census returns. Access to records relating to Australia's national security or affecting the Commonwealth's legal interests may also be restricted. Specific approvals will be required for release of Cabinet records.

Custody of Commonwealth records and control over access to them is the responsibility of the Commonwealth Archives Office, which has headquarters in Canberra and branch offices in the mainland State capitals. In Canberra, the Office occupies temporary buildings adjacent to Kings Avenue Bridge. The Government has decided in principle to erect a new National Archives building in Canberra which will be the headquarters of the Commonwealth Archives Office and to which important Commonwealth records will be transferred for preservation, public study and display. The design and siting of the building will be a matter for subsequent consideration.

CANBERRA
30 December 1970