After WikiLeaks, is it all over for The Archives?

WikiLeaks and the future of recordkeeping in a connected world

Presented by The Recordkeeping Roundtable in conjunction with the NSW Branch of the Australian Society of Archivists
1980 revealed through Cabinet records

On 1 January 2011, the National Archives of Australia released the 30-year-old documents of the 1980 Fraser Cabinet. Archives historian Dr Jim Stokes discusses some of the key issues of that year.

International relations

Internationally, 1980 was a year of tension and foreboding about the future. The previous year had seen the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea, the Iranian revolution, the taking of US hostages in Teheran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Some feared that this invasion was the first stage of a major Soviet push into the Middle East that could end in a third world war. In September 1980 Iraq invaded Iran. In addition, the election of Ronald Reagan as President of the United States in November 1980 emphasised the transition from the post-Vietnam détente of the late 1970s to confrontation with what Reagan branded ‘the evil empire’.

Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser took a strong anti-Soviet position and urged the Australian Olympic Federation to support the United States' boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games. While the hockey, shooting, yachting and equestrian teams withdrew from the Games, the Federation did send a smaller team to Moscow to compete in 17 sports. The Australians brought home two gold, two silver and five bronze medals.
Climate data, angry scientists and metadata

The Sydney Morning Herald, on page 1 of its December 5-6 2009 edition, ran a story called ‘Climate email mess hits Australia’. The story provides further detail from climate change records hacked from East Anglia University in the UK.

The story focusses on the hacked records of a programmer at the university who was trying to use a range of historical Australian climate data from meteorological stations. In trying to use this data the programmer encountered a range of problems which led him to complain about the information he was working with: ‘Getting seriously fed up with the state of the Australian data...so many false references...so many changes...bewildering.’ In another email he says there is ‘no information integrity’ and concludes at one point, ‘What a bloody mess’.

If you’re very honest, would an external researcher or even a client from your own organisation make similar complaints if they had to try and find meaningful information in some of your business systems? In the East Anglia story, the key criticisms according to the Herald article relate to the poor quality of database construction and not to the integrity or validity of the actual information. The
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-- Summary --

1. (SBU) On March 24, the Kanazawa District Court ordered the Hokuriku Electric Power Company (Rikuden) to shut down operations at Unit Two of its Shika Nuclear Power Plant due to safety concerns over its ability to withstand powerful earthquakes. The court ruled that there was a real possibility that the plaintiffs might be exposed to radiation if there was an accident at the plant. The operator called the ruling "unreasonable" and said it would immediately file an appeal to a higher court. The Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) believes the reactor is safe and that all safety analyses were appropriately conducted. As a result, the GOJ sees no reason why Rikuden should shut down the unit. Though not legally obligated to cease operations in this case since this is a civil suit, Rikuden will face an uphill battle to regain the support of local citizens for operating a nuclear facility in their backyards. End summary.

-- The Case --

2. (U) On March 24, the Kanazawa District Court ordered the Hokuriku Electric Power Company (Rikuden) to shut down operations at Unit Two of its Shika Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) due to safety concerns over its ability to withstand powerful earthquakes. A group of 135 plaintiffs from across the country filed the suit against Rikuden in May 2005, after the operator began trial operations, arguing that its anti-seismic design was insufficient and the advanced boiling water reactor (ABWR) design was inherently dangerous. The suit followed up on an earlier unsuccessful attempt to halt the construction of the new reactor. The plaintiffs pointed to a study commissioned by the GOJ's Earthquake Research Committee that concluded there was a two percent chance that an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.0 or greater would hit the area.
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