

# General Disposal Schedule 21: Guidance

## Overview

### Purpose

This document provides guidance to State and Local Government agencies (agencies) wishing to destroy hardcopy source records following their digitisation, as authorised through version 5 (and subsequent versions) of General Disposal Schedule (GDS) 21.

### What is General Disposal Schedule 21

GDS21 v5 provides agencies with the ability to destroy hardcopy source records following their digitisation, once the conditions outlined in the schedule and this document are met.

The conditions outlined in GDS21 v5, and expanded on in this guidance, form the basis of the process agencies must follow to certify that their systems, policies and processes meet the requirements of GDS21 v5.

### What does GDS21 v5 authorise

GDS21 v5 provides the legal authority, once certain conditions are met, to:

- » treat a digital rendition of a hardcopy record as the official record, and
- » dispose of the hardcopy source record after it has been rendered into digital format by the process of digitising and their subsequent capture into an electronic document and records management system or line of business system.

### Scope of GDS21

Once an agency certifies that they meet the conditions established in GDS21 v5, that agency may render hardcopy records in to digital format and destroy:

- » any hardcopy source document with a temporary retention period approved by the State Records Council
- » any hardcopy source document created on or from 1 January 2005 with a permanent retention period approved by the State Records Council.

**Note:** GDS21 v5 certification does not need to be obtained if an agency does not wish to destroy the hardcopy source record following a digitisation process.

**Note:** If an agency has digitised hardcopy records prior to obtaining GDS21 v5 certification and subsequently obtains certification, this cannot be retrospectively applied to the digital images previously created unless a quality assurance process ensures the conditions of GDS21 v5 and this advice are met and the images are confirmed as fit for purpose.

## Exclusions

GDS21 v5 does not authorise the destruction of hardcopy source records, once digitised, in all circumstances. In some instances there may be records in hardcopy format that cannot be destroyed, even where the agency has implemented GDS21. These include records:

- » that do not have coverage under a current records disposal schedule (RDS), general disposal schedule (GDS) or other disposal determination
- » where the physical form of the original record possesses some evidence that cannot be reproduced in the digital form
- » where the physical form of the record has intrinsic value (eg a document with a seal)
- » restricted or excluded through the *Electronic Communications Act 2000* and Regulations.

Additionally, following digitisation, and prior to the destruction of the hardcopy source record, agencies should determine whether any of the records are part of or likely to be part of a legal discovery process. If this is the case State Records suggests seeking legal advice prior to the destruction of the hardcopy source record.

Agencies should obtain legal advice if there is any possibility that destruction of the hardcopy source record could be prejudicial to the interest of the agency, its clients or the Crown.

**Note:** If an agency has obtained certification under GDS21 v4 (or earlier) this certification continues to apply to the system version and records specified. However the scope of GDS21 v5 cannot be applied to those systems or records until the agency has re-certified through the GDS21 v 5 process. This means that certification under GDS21 v4 (or previous) does not authorise the destruction of hardcopy source documents created on or from 1 January 2005 with a permanent retention period approved by the State Records Council.

Re-certification should occur at the earliest opportunity or, at the latest, when the system undergoes its next major upgrade.

## Certification Conditions and Process

### Self-certification

The ability of an agency to implement GDS21 v5 is based on a self-certification process.

State Records does not need to approve agency certification under GDS21 v5.

Confirmation that their systems, policies and processes meet the conditions of GDS21 v5 must be approved by the agency Chief Executive or executive delegate. The approval must be retained by the agency as a record evidencing that the conditions have been met.

## Conditions of certification

Certification, through the conditions outlined below, ensures the ability of the:

- » system to manage the digitised counterparts in a way that ensures the record's ongoing authenticity and reliability, and
- » agency to manage the digitisation process in a way that ensures a true and accurate record is retained as evidence of a business activity or transaction.

The following conditions must be evident for an agency to certify that they meet the requirements of GDS21 v5:

» *Disposal schedule coverage*

In accordance with the *State Records Act 1997*, State Records issues disposal determinations with the approval of the State Records Council. These determinations, in the form of disposal schedules, form the legal basis on which official records can be destroyed. For an agency to comply with GDS21 v5 the records that the agency wishes to render from hardcopy to digital format must be covered by a current and approved disposal schedule. This ensures that the digital record can be disposed of at the appropriate time in line with the agency's disposal program.

» *Accurate and complete rendition*

The rendition process must ensure that the digital record can be relied upon as evidence. This means that the digital record must be an accurate rendition of the original hardcopy source document and that it must be complete, ie no information or distinguishing material is missing from the digital rendition. To achieve this agencies must ensure that their digitisation process (including resolution) is appropriate to the record being digitised and that the value and risks associated with the record have been taken in to account. Agencies must also ensure that the process incorporates a quality assurance step, where digital records are checked against the original document to ensure they are accurate and complete.

The process to digitise a record and ensure its quality must be documented.

» *Fit for purpose*

The rendering of a hardcopy record to a digital format enables the agency to manage the digital record as the official record which creates efficiencies for the agency and its stakeholders. Different record types attract different values and risks, depending on what information they contain and their purpose. Agencies must ensure that the digital record meets the need of the agency, its customers and potential future purposes. Considerations include the resolution and format of the digital image.

» *Managed in a recordkeeping or line-of-business system*

Once a record is rendered in to a digital format the agency must capture that record in to an electronic document and records management system or line-of-business system, which complies with State Records' standards. Storage of the digital record in a network file is not appropriate. Should digitised images be stored in this manner GDS21 v5 certification cannot be obtained for those records.

If not already completed the agency must evaluate their system(s) against the standards and, should they not comply, develop technical or manual solutions. System evaluations must be completed after every major upgrade to ensure continued compliance. This ensures that the appropriate metadata is created and

maintained, digital records can be relied upon as evidence, records cannot be altered and that appropriate controls are in place governing security, access and disposal.

» *Maintained and readily accessible*

Agencies must ensure that all official records, including digital records, are managed in a way that enables appropriate access. Not only must agencies consider who within the organisation should have access, and establish appropriate security controls, they must also ensure that digital records are searchable and identifiable for discovery purposes. Digital records must be maintained and accessible for the minimum retention periods applicable to that record.

» *Managed in accordance with agency policy*

Once digitised agencies have an obligation to continue to manage the hardcopy source document. How those hardcopy records are managed and for how long they are kept must be documented in an agency policy and procedure.

Regardless of whether an agency is seeking GDS21 v5 certification for a backlog digitisation project or for ongoing daily operations, the conditions outlined above must be met.

Re-certification must occur where a system undergoes a major upgrade or significant function change.

## Process Steps

The process to certify through GDS21 v5 must be undertaken by, or in conjunction with, the agency records manager.

<b>Step 1</b>	Identify the records to be digitised, whether as part of a routine business process or a scanning project.
<b>Step 2</b>	<p>Ensure those records are covered by a current and approved RDS or GDS – if not one will need to be developed and submitted to State Records for review and to the State Records Council for approval.</p> <p>Agencies cannot dispose of the hardcopy source records following digitisation without the records being covered by a current and approved disposal schedule.</p>
<b>Step 3</b>	Identify which system(s) the digital images are to be captured and managed in. This might be an electronic document and records management system or line of business system.
<b>Step 4</b>	<p>Ensure those systems comply with the relevant <u>standards</u> and meet the conditions set out in GDS21 v5. The relevant standards are the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» <u>Managing Digital Records in Systems Standard</u></li> <li>» <u>Minimum Recordkeeping Metadata Requirements Standard</u></li> </ul> <p>System compliance is based on the ability of that system to manage a record in a manner that ensures the ongoing integrity and reliability of that record, as well as to apply the appropriate metadata, security and access controls. Systems must also be able to support the appropriate disposal of records and enable auditing and reporting.</p>

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<b>Step 5</b>	<p>Develop a policy and procedure that outlines the requirements of agency staff in undertaking the digitisation, capture and destruction processes.</p> <p>This should include aspects such as the scope of records covered, what resolution documents are to be scanned at, how the digitised images will be verified as an accurate and complete rendition, how and when destruction of the source records will occur (eg how long will the various source records be retained for after digitisation) and how destruction of the digitised record will be managed. The process should also include a quality assurance or validation check to ensure that images are an accurate rendition.</p> <p><i><b>Note:</b> Information on the digitisation of records can be found in advice published by State Records</i></p>
<b>Step 6</b>	<p>Test that the systems, policies and processes support the digitisation of source material and the destruction of that material once the digital image is captured in to the system.</p> <p>This includes ensuring that the systems, policies and processes meet all of the conditions set out in GDS21 v5 and that the digitised image is an accurate and complete rendition of the original.</p>
<b>Step 7</b>	<p>Obtain approval of the approach through sign-off by the Chief Executive or executive delegate (this may include seeking legal advice or approval from internal audit and risk committees).</p> <p>This approval must be retained as a record.</p>

Agencies are encouraged to contact State Records when commencing the GDS21 v5 self-certification process. State Records will assist agencies progress through the steps and advise on how the standards and conditions set out in GDS21 v5 may apply to an agency's particular circumstances.

## Disposal of records

### Digital records

Through GDS21 v5 the digital renditions are treated as the official record for the purposes of the *State Records Act 1997*. These digital records must only be disposed of in accordance with the retention periods set out in a disposal determination (schedule) made by State Records with the approval of the State Records Council.

If sentenced as temporary under a current approved disposal schedule, the digitised records may, after the specified retention period has lapsed, be destroyed in an appropriate manner.

If the digital records are sentenced as permanent under a current approved disposal schedule, they must be retained by the agency until State Records has the capability to accept transfers of digital records.

### Source records

Source records that have been digitised through the GDS21 v5 process can be destroyed once the agency has no further requirement for them. How long the source record is

retained after digitisation is a matter for the agency to determine and may differ for different types of record. The length of time the records will be retained for after digitisation should be expressly identified in the agency policy and procedure.

### Need further assistance?

#### Contact State Records at:

Level 15, GPO Exchange, 10 Franklin Street  
ADELAIDE SA 5000  
GPO Box 464  
ADELAIDE SA 5001  
**Tel** (+61 8) 8204 8786  
**Email** [staterecords@sa.gov.au](mailto:staterecords@sa.gov.au)  
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