

Disposal of public records

What is disposal?

Disposal under the *Public Records Act 2023* (PR Act) is the approved process of handling public records that are no longer needed by a public authority for business, legal, or historical reasons. This can include destruction of the public records, transferring them to Queensland State Archives (QSA) for permanent storage, or using other approved methods. Disposing of public records without a disposal authorisation issued by the Queensland State Archivist may be unlawful disposal under the PR Act. Unlawful disposal of public records can have serious consequences.

Why does it matter?

Regular disposal offers a range of benefits, including:

- reduction of storage costs
- reduction risk of loss or damage to public records
- making it easier to find relevant information
- reduction of risk of outdated records being used or accessed
- protection of sensitive information from improper use or access.

What do I need to know?

Retention and disposal schedules

Retention and disposal schedules guide the management of public records. These schedules are format-neutral and provide information on minimum retention periods, disposal triggers and disposal authorisation numbers.

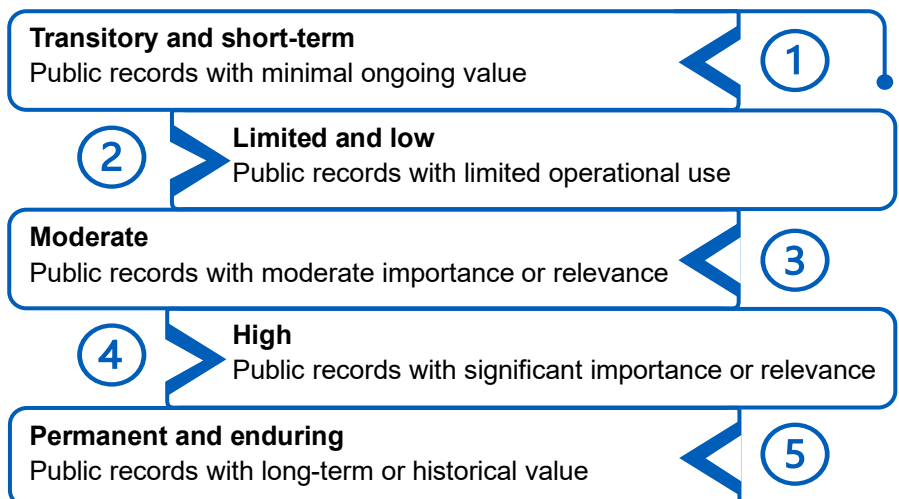


Understanding disposal authorisations

Disposal of public records is managed through approved **disposal authorisations** issued by the Queensland State Archivist. Disposal authorisations may be issued individually, or within a retention and disposal schedule.

The value of public records

All public records have value and this value decides the minimum length of time they need to be kept. QSA's [Appraisal Statement](#) explains how to identify permanent value public records like those that show the main roles of government or represent Queensland's society and culture.



Disposal of public records within a planned disposal project

To ensure compliance with record management requirements, regular disposal of public records is essential. This includes both regular disposal activities (e.g. annual disposal) and the transfer of permanent public records to QSA.

Key steps for regular disposal:

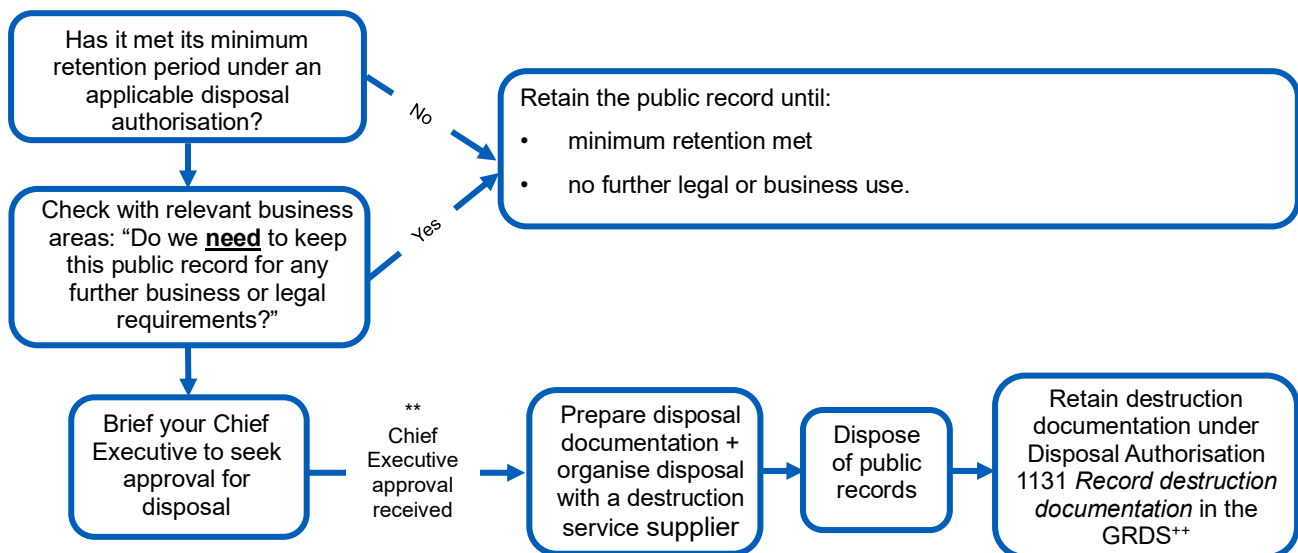
1. **Sentence public records:** Classify public records according to approved disposal authorisations.
2. **Check minimum retention periods:** Identify public records that have met their minimum retention period and are not required to be kept longer to meet any other legal or business need.
3. **Conduct routine disposal activities:** Regularly dispose of public records that have met their minimum retention period and are no longer need to be kept by your public authority.

TIP: Develop a disposal plan

A disposal plan will ensure your public authority has proper planning in place and can document the disposal of your public records. A disposal plan will, at a minimum, detail approvals, destruction methods you will use, and frequency of disposal. Refer to [QSA' Records Government Policy Implementation advice \(6.2\)](#) for guidance of what to include in your disposal plan.

Should I dispose of this public record?

Have you checked if your public records are ready for disposal? Use the workflow below to find out!



** Chief Executive or authorised delegate

++ [General Retention and Disposal Schedule \(GRDS\)](#)

Disposal of public records outside of a planned disposal project

Sometimes, you might think about disposing of public records earlier than planned. While this can happen, it's rare and must be treated with care, as it's not the usual or recommended approach. If you or your public authority are considering disposing of public records that:

have not met their minimum retention period

are not currently covered by an approved retention and disposal schedule

you must consult the Queensland State Archivist for approval. Without this approval, the disposal could be unlawful. Keep in mind that approval isn't guaranteed. Each request is carefully reviewed and includes input from relevant stakeholders to ensure it complies with legal and policy requirements while protecting accountability and public trust.

What about lost or damaged public records?

	Lost	Damaged
Accessibility 	Completely inaccessible or missing from all systems	Still exists but is partially or fully unreadable or unusable
Status 	May have been destroyed, misplaced, or permanently lost	Physically or digitally compromised but still present
Recovery 	Recovery is not possible	May be repairable with appropriate methods e.g. conservation or data recovery
Cause 	Misplacement, theft, poor practices, disasters (if fully lost)	Damage from moisture, fire, pests, hardware failure, or disasters
	A paper register permanently lost in a fire	A registry book that survived a fire but sustained scorch marks and missing pages
	A digital public record is irretrievable due to obsolete technology	A digital public record is corrupted but can be repaired or recovered

Seek advice from QSA before undertaking non-standard disposal, or disposal of lost or damaged public records, to make sure that an applicable disposal authorisation covers these public records.

Public records affected by water, smoke, mould, or pests can often be saved. You must take **reasonable steps** to salvage the public records before seeking permission to dispose of them.

The steps include:

1. **Attempting remediation:** Wherever possible, repair or salvage the damaged public records.
2. **Prioritising permanent records:** Focus on salvaging public records of permanent value first.
3. **Using backups:** Your public authority should have one or more backups of your systems that can be used to restore the impacted public records.

Public authorities have obligations for the safe keeping of public records. If a permanent value public record is at risk of loss or damage, the public authority must notify QSA immediately (s.21(b) of the PR Act. Email us at rkqueries@archives.qld.gov.au for advice about lost or damaged public records.

How can I find out more information about disposal?

Refer to the [Disposal advice for records managers](#) page from QSA's website for additional guidance, advice and resources.