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Media Release

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NZ to Open One of the World's Most Advanced Taonga Protection Facilities

New Zealand will open one of the world's most technologically advanced archive protection facilities this month, with the new $290 million Te Rua building designed to safeguard the nation's most important documentary heritage from natural disasters.

The facility is expected to position New Zealand at the forefront of global efforts to protect documentary heritage from climate change and environmental disruption, while demonstrating how advanced engineering and cultural design can be integrated into national infrastructure.

Te Rua forms part of Te Kahu, a new heritage campus in Wellington bringing together Archives New Zealand and the National Library in a shared environment designed to protect and connect the country's documentary heritage.

Archivists have already begun relocating more than 150,000 containers of historical material into the facility, including delicate items such as photographic glass plates and early negatives that require specialised handling and tightly controlled environmental conditions.

The facility will officially open to the public on March 25 at a ministerial event attended by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Hon Brooke van Velden, along with invited guests and heritage sector leaders.

Te Rua has been widely described by engineers as the most complex piece of civic infrastructure constructed in New Zealand to date. Purpose-built to house the nation's most important governmental records, cultural heritage collections and documentary history, the building was engineered to maintain extremely stable environmental conditions required to preserve fragile archival materials and taonga.

The facility was designed to help meet New Zealand's obligations under UNESCO's *Memory of the World* programme, which encourages countries to protect documentary heritage of global significance for future generations.

The archive building is linked to the National Library by a connecting structure known as Te Hono, forming a campus designed to strengthen collaboration between the country's documentary heritage institutions and safeguard the nation's memory for future generations.

Phill Stanley, Dexus portfolio manager for New Zealand, says the project required solving a series of complex engineering challenges to ensure the building could maintain stable archival conditions even during major disruptions.

He says archivists internationally are increasingly redesigning storage facilities to cope with climate change, natural disasters and ageing collections, challenges that have driven interest in the engineering solutions used at Te Rua.

"Archives place extremely demanding requirements on buildings because the materials they hold can deteriorate rapidly if temperature, humidity or air movement fluctuates," he says.

"The design and construction of Te Rua required developing solutions that ensure the collections remain protected even in the face of severe earthquakes, prolonged power loss or other natural disasters."

Stanley says one of the most critical elements is the building's façade, which forms the first layer of environmental protection for the archive collections.

"Engineers developed an ultra-airtight envelope designed to maintain stable internal conditions even if mechanical systems temporarily fail.

"Independent testing found the façade performs well beyond international archival benchmarks, outperforming facilities used by institutions including the Smithsonian Institution, the Library of Congress, the British Library and the US National Archives," he says

The façade has been engineered to maintain stable conditions inside the building for at least 48 hours following a power failure, keeping temperatures within ±1°C – a key threshold required to prevent deterioration of fragile documents and taonga.

More than 2,300 panels make up the building's exterior, finished in a bronze rainscreen that integrates cultural design elements developed with Manawhenua. At the entrance the façade incorporates a Poutama pattern,

reflecting the traditional stepped motif associated with the pursuit of knowledge and the human journey toward greater understanding.

Engineers also developed an innovative fixing system that eliminates thermal bridging and minimises air leakage, helping ensure the stable internal environment required for archival preservation.

The building will eventually house millions of photographs, films and records documenting the nation's political, cultural and social history, including documents that record the political, legal and cultural history of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Staff from Archives New Zealand, the National Library and Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision are now working together on the heritage campus for the first time, reflecting a wider effort to strengthen collaboration in protecting and sharing New Zealand's documentary heritage.

Stanley says the design and construction insights gained through the project are already attracting international attention from institutions facing similar challenges.

"Across the world, national archives are grappling with how to protect ageing collections from environmental change while maintaining access for researchers and the public," he says.

"The solutions developed for Te Rua demonstrate how advanced engineering, cultural design and archival science can work together to protect a nation's history."

As countries increasingly look for ways to safeguard archives against climate change, seismic risk and long-term environmental instability, Te Rua is expected to become a global case study in how modern archival facilities can combine engineering resilience with cultural design to protect a nation's memory.

The facility was delivered through a public-private partnership between the Department of Internal Affairs and Dexus, bringing together expertise in archival science, engineering and large-scale infrastructure delivery.

Stanley says the project demonstrates what can be achieved when government and private sector expertise are brought together around a shared national objective.

"Te Rua was delivered on time and on budget through a close partnership with the Department of Internal Affairs, bringing together advanced engineering, sustainability design and one of the most sophisticated digital twin models ever developed for a New Zealand building. Integrating cultural design with this level of technical innovation has created a facility capable of protecting the nation's documentary heritage for generations to come."

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High res images can be found **here.**

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