

AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BERNARD O'NEIL WITH JIM McCOLL OF UNLEY PARK, SOUTH AUSTRALIA ON THE 9TH OF OCTOBER 2003 FOR THE PROJECT ON THE HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

(Note: interviewees first 2:30 minutes of recording are at low volume due to microphone malfunctioning)

[Square brackets incorporate corrections supplied by Jim McColl in April 2005.]

[0:20] Thanks for agreeing to be involved Jim. Perhaps we'll start with a little bit of personal background.

Perhaps there is no better place to start than the time I was born which was 1933 of course. I was born in Carlton, Melbourne. My family residence actually was in Strathmore which was originally North Essendon. So I am essentially an Essendon boy. My early schooling ... Perhaps I'd better cut back a bit. My father was a businessman in Melbourne, in the rag trade as they call it ... I had two sisters – one older and one younger. I went to school at Essendon Grammar School until I was 12 and from there I went to Geelong College as a boarder and finished my schooling at Geelong College. My father was the oldest son, coming off the land. There was a property called Burnside at Acheron which is near Alexander in central Victoria. He went into business rather than run the property and his younger brother ran the property. That was after the war. During the war I spent all my holidays on the farm, which is really relevant to where I finished up. (laughs) I loved that lifestyle: it was a practical life farming sheep and a few cattle.

A small farm?

Relatively a small farm in retrospect. I wasn't conscious of whether it was a big or a small one in those days. It was quite fascinating because there was no electricity and I could go into the whole hurricane lamp-type experiences but I was very keen and really enjoyed the holidays I spent during those years.

OK? (microphones reversed between interviewer and interviewee)

[2:45] Yes, fine.

The holidays on the farm is relevant in terms of the decisions that one has to make when secondary education is finished. I went through the process; because of the diversity of subjects I had at matriculation I could have done law or medicine. I thought about those but also looked fairly carefully at veterinary science, forestry and agricultural science. Of course, I eventually settled for agricultural science which I commenced in 1952 at Melbourne University and completed four years later, graduating early in 1956.

[3:35] Jim you mentioned that you went off to boarding school. Was that unusual to go from Melbourne to boarding school in Geelong?

Yes, a bit unusual, there were a few that were boarding for various reasons. I never had an opportunity to pursue it completely with my father but I was the only boy in amongst, basically other than him, a house of women and I think he reckoned it would do me good. (laughs) I

think it did. I quite enjoyed it. I was very much into the sport as well as did reasonably well academically. I was the opening fast bowler in the cricket and captain of football and captain of athletics and that sort of thing so I really enjoyed it.

So sporting interests.

Yes, sporting interests and they sort of kicked on.

Did you have any interests at boarding school with the land? You mentioned the farm connection.

Only that not only did I continue holidays on the farm but I actually towards the later years I had some friends – one who came from Western District, a grazing property, and another one just outside of Wagga, two particular friends, so I spent some holiday vacations on those types of properties. That probably also supported and guided my eventual decision to do agricultural science. I suppose in a sense I didn't have the money to go farming so agricultural science was a second best! (laughs)

How long did the farm remain in family hands?

Actually it was sold in the late 1950s, early 1960s by my uncle and then he bought another property which was a dairy farm closer to Alexander on the Goulburn River Flats. He died in his 60s so that's when the family virtually pulled out of ownership of land, out of the farm.

During the university period did you go back to the farm during the holidays or had you grown out of that?

No. I'd probably grown out of that. And, of course, the second year (you asked about Roseworthy) well the second year of the Melbourne four-year agricultural science course was spent at Dookie Agricultural College so I got quite a bit of experience in fieldwork and so on and farm work during that period. In 1953 was the first year of what was called the Commonwealth Extension Services Grant. The Australian economy really needed to boost its export performance and [tackle] its severe balance of payments problem and the government was looking very strongly towards agriculture to expand and develop its production and economic output. The Commonwealth government decided they would provide significant funding for the State Departments of Agriculture to expand their extension services in particular. They provided some scholarships to the Victorian Department and I was one of the first recipients in the first year [of the scheme (1954)] in the Victorian Department of Agriculture. That meant I was bound to them [the Victorian Department] for a few years. OK.

Perhaps I could mention that the agriculture science degree at Melbourne, like pretty well all the agricultural science degrees around Australia was very strong in science and [included] virtually no economics or none of the social sciences of any consequence. For instance, it majored in botany for instance [with] sub-majors in biochemistry, so it was a pretty science-orientated degree.

[8.15] Was there an expectation that the graduates would come out and work on farms?

[Not really.] In extension advisory services, they were looking to expand the services in the various States. I can't remember if it was three or five years, bonding with the Victorian Department.

That tied you to the Department. I was thinking more generally, people who may have gone through doing a Bachelor course when you started. What sort of expectations would you have had then? Were you going to come out and get a job as a farmer or work in administration, did you have any ...

I hadn't really thought about it because before I started to think about it these scholarships came up and I applied for one and got one and that sort of resolved the immediate few years. The other important thing was I met Wendy when I was at Dookie College ... We were both 19. In fact, we got married in 1956 in the first year that I was working for the Department of Agriculture. I was told by the Director of Agriculture at the time that it was a bit inconvenient that I was getting married and really he thought that I was too young to get married. (laughs)

You'd already made your decision!

We had made the decision so we got married at the end on 1956. In 1956 I was posted to a little town called Numurkah, 20 miles north of Shepparton. There was a guy by the name of Murray Martin in charge of a small unit there – Irrigation Research and Extension. He was in charge of establishing and managing a certain number of little experimental areas, particularly in the Murray Valley Irrigation Area because that was about half-way through being developed for soldier settlement – diary farms and horticultural farms. So my first year up there was with Murray. 1956 was an extraordinarily wet year. If you look at the records, there were huge floods down the Murray. In fact, the Goulburn Valley and the Murray Valley spent a lot of the time under water. (laughs)

Was that east coast New South Wales and Victoria or more generally throughout Australia, that wet conditions?

The wet weather was right through Australia but [mainly in] areas such as southern New South Wales and Victoria and might have been further north but boy it was a huge flood and came right through to South Australia. A lot of towns were flooded on the way. The Goulburn River and the Murray River virtually joined. I used to travel down [to Shepparton] because I was playing football with City United in the Goulburn Valley League. I used to travel down to training: for 20 miles I would say at least half of it I had go through water.

That was by the by. At the end of that year we got married and decided that I had to go back to Essendon because I had been playing with Essendon in 1954 and 1955 on their [senior] list. Because I was posted up north [to Numurkah], they let me go to City United on the basis I would be cleared back to Essendon in 1957, which I was. I arranged to go back to Melbourne and worked that year at the State Research Farm at Werribee with the Irrigation Branch. The

important thing is that I started off with a strong focus on irrigation, both research and extension in those early years. That was my last year at Essendon, not that it's terribly relevant but I was nineteenth man in the Grand Final in '57 which was the last sequence of three wins – Melbourne won three!

[13:10] I think it is relevant ... just for the Australian Rules Football ... *(talking over each other)*
Anyway I gave up. Our first child was born that year and so I gave up VFL football as such and went back up to Numurkah with Murray Martin and continued to work with him there. As far as my football went, I captain-coached [with City United (Goulburn Valley League) and Strathmerton (Murray League)] until I retired in 1963.

It [football] was part and parcel of the lifestyle in a country town.

Very much. Very, very influential in being known in the area and particularly in relation to departmental extension and advisory services. I took charge of the area in the late '50s. Murray Martin was appointed Director of the new Kyabram Irrigation Research Centre and I took charge of the unit operating out of Numurkah. I also ... Interesting little aside: the television station started in 1960 out of Shepparton, GMV-6, and I was asked and took on a live presentation of an agricultural-focused TV show (it was one of the early ones in Australia) called 'Science on the Farm – The Way Ahead'. (laughs) Sounds funny now doesn't it?!

Would there be some rare archival footage there somewhere?

Could be. I did that for nearly two years and for the majority of that time it was a really good spot at half past six before the 7 o'clock news, so it was roughly a half-hour program of interviews and film clips and various things. So it gave me quite good experience in upfront TV activity.

TV was a very new ...

It was very new and even the guys at the stations were learning how to handle things. They had some funny experiences of things sort of going a little haywire, which is hard to deal with when it is live! (laughs)

You can't control ... *(talking over each other)*

They had displays falling over and various things like that – but you can generally talk your way out of it.

[16:15] Was this something that was sponsored by the Victorian Department?

Well the Victorian Department – I was asked directly and my Senior Officer (I can't remember who it was now) [supported it] but I got formal approval through the Department and it became part of my function. Of course, that helped to be known too ... I was with the Department for eight years and resigned in late 1963. From about 1960 onwards I started to become very interested in farm management. It became clear to me that I felt that there was plenty of good

information around. One of the main problems was to get it used effectively from a management point of view. To some extent I started to get sick of being asked the same old questions, which were largely technical questions when it was fairly obvious that there was some fairly fundamental management issues that probably needed to be addressed.

So I started to look around for possibilities of going out as a private farm management consultant. There was very few around in those days, it was very much the early period. I spoke to one or two that had gone out a year or two earlier. I nearly went to Wagga to what was called a Farm Club over there but I didn't like the Farm Club idea and I decided that if I was going to go out as a private consultant I wanted to go out as an independent professional and not be employed by a specified group of farmers which was the Farm Club arrangement.

[18:30] Did your experience in the Victorian Department give you a broad base expertise?

Yes and no. It was pretty brave in the sense that I knew the technology very well of irrigation and soils. I knew the soils very well. The response to irrigation and pasture species and fertilizers. I knew all that and I knew a certain amount on the livestock side but I had no training in economics, no formal training in economics: the last few years I did a few short courses before I went out privately and I read a fair bit but really those were challenging and brave times, let me put it that way. Can I stop there?

You're going to be doing a little bit of learning on the job?

Well, obviously we were going to learn on the job. I will talk a bit about that in a moment.

[19:40] Jim, after that short break there perhaps we can just return to some aspects of your career, particularly in the stage of being independent.

Yes. I was talking about running up to the time that I went out as a private independent consultant. I had been looking around for a while and I got the opportunity – I got an offer – to take up a partnership with Paul McGowan who had been an established consultant for two or three years. He was over near Albury that was his base. He had worked up a potential group of clients over the border in Berrigan and Finley area in particular. That was about half a practice and he agreed that I would, independently, establish my own practice on the Victorian side. So during the term – that was a terminating partnership – during the next 3½ years Paul and I operated as a partnership. I effectively, in a sense, bought those clients out and took them over and so ultimately J.C. McColl & Associates had clients on both sides of the river – Berrigan and Finley and [eventually across the] northern Victorian irrigation area.

There were no barriers in that sort of ...

No. In fact, the fascinating thing that always struck me was that I resigned at six minutes past five on Friday and by half past eight or nine o'clock I was on a property outside Berrigan with my first client – Max Pyle. That just shows you what could happen! One of the interesting

things I also found during that change over was that it opened up a lot of opportunities that were a bit constrained in terms of being in the Department because you were a bit constrained in the sense of approved recommendations and so on that you could make. You could be a bit more adventurous when you were independent. Also in those days, particularly in Victoria, there was quite a bit of rivalry between the Victorian Department of Agriculture and CSIRO. That's always been a bit of a problem but at that time it was a fairly important rivalry shall I say. As soon as I went out privately all those contacts that I sort of knew of I was able to explore. Also I was able to interact more effectively with industry sources of information as well. I did get approached fairly early as to whether I would take on agencies by some companies and decided that there was no way I would do that. I wanted to be entirely independent and that the advice that I was going to give would be independent of any potential commercial interests and away I went.

Just to clarify that Jim. You were going out to give advice on certain aspects of running a farm, operating ...?

It was a complete whole-farm advisory service. It included advice on technical aspects, but it also included financial analysis, performance analysis and forward budgeting, assistance with re-negotiating or applying for development loans, say through the Commonwealth Development Bank which was a pretty important source of development finance in those days. I had a pretty good technical base in particular having had eight years in that general area and lot of the information and knowledge I had based on my Victorian experience was quite relevant over the border in Finley and Berrigan.

So it was more operating a farm as a business rather than saying 'This is how you must shear a sheep or milk a cow?' ... *(talking over each other)*

You've hit it on the head. It was actually farm business management. It was very much focused on making sure that the farm operated as a successful business and fully utilised it's resources. Of course, your approach to that was determined by each individual's circumstances and the desires and objectives of the particular family or the farmer. But, of course, I got involved with family issues as well in terms of son's and other properties and all sorts of things like that. Very interesting but quite demanding. I used to travel about 60 000 to 70 000 miles a year. I was using a car virtually every day.

Where were you based?

I did it out of Numurkah. Stayed in Numurkah. We built a house there and I operated, for a little while, an office out of my home but found with young children that didn't work terribly well so I arranged an office down the street and the business expanded. I took on another consultant about the rate of one a year so I grew the business quite significantly over the years.

Were you employing them or were they sort of sub-contractors?

They came in on the basis of a clientele, essentially a base clientele, that I made available and there was a share basis of the revenue because we also provided – I provided – central office services and we had newsletters and all those sorts of things. Some were partners and some were associates so it got quite complex and, in fact, converted to a company in the late '60s.

[26.45] Were you off doing modern management courses?

There weren't too many modern management courses around in those days but what we did was use some [other] consultants because ... during the '60s, from about 1962 onwards, there were a number of consultants who went out both in Victoria and southern and New South Wales as a whole. We formed what was initially the Consultants Sub-section of the Farm Management Section of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science. We used to hold little workshops but we also held a week's conference up with the University of New England and we had series of lectures and presentations during that week. The University of New England was, as far as the eastern States were concerned, the real focal point for farm management. John Dillon had been appointed the first Professor of Farm Management in Australia in about 1964 and there were some really top people. Many of them went on the World Bank. So we helped each other a lot, pulled ourselves up by our bootlaces, as they say, but we also got some very good intellectual support from the University of New England during that period.

I called it 'modern' management deliberately Jim because I thought this is all very heady stuff for the 1960s and ...

We were pathfinding in those days.

And also it sounds a little bit different to from what we expect was happening in South Australia.

There was a bit of action in South Australia in that period. [For example,] there is David Price down towards Murray Bridge who has been in practice ever since then but the relationship, of course, with the Departments of Agriculture and consultants was quite an interesting relationship. Departments were substantially giving technical advice and not management advice during that period. I found actually again because of inter-departmental rivalries that I was employed on a short-term contract consultancies with what was then the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission, because they preferred to use me as an independent expert than rely on the Department of Agriculture people. (laughs) So being independent had some advantages in that respect but it was very valuable experience in that whole scene during that period. I was also starting to get asked – I suppose it might have started in about 1966 – to do some benefit–cost feasibility studies of proposed irrigation dam developments in both Victoria and Tasmania. Now benefit–cost analysis as a technique was really only just starting to roll in those days. I had good personal contact with [the late] Professor Alan Lloyd, Professor of Ag. Economics, at Melbourne University. He [was] a personal friend and so he helped me in terms of some of the

conceptual economic benefit–cost analysis-type issues that came up and one or two others who were on the staff there [also helped] to the point where Alan said, ‘Why don’t you come down and do a Masters degree in Ag. Economics? I can organise a Reserve Bank scholarship for you’. (laughs) It just so happened at the same time that I’d been going for about five years at this stage so it would have been about 1968 and the firm was expanding and I was wondering, ‘Am I going to do this the rest of my life or not?’. It was also clear that if we were going to expand, if the whole consultancy area was going to expand, that it would have to expand beyond just farm management consulting on individual farms. So I had a difficult choice to make because I got an offer for a overseas project job at the same time as Alan was suggesting I do a Masters. This job was with a project in Thailand; Australian Colombo Plan it was before the ADAB (Australian Development Assistance Bureau) [ADAA: Australian Development Assistance Agency] was formed [by the Whitlam Government] ...

**[32:48] End Side A, Tape 1
Tape 1, Side B**

[0:20] Jim, when the tape ran out you were about to explain a bit the Thailand Colombo option versus the Masters degree.

Yes, well obviously I wanted to have my cake and eat it but we decided to go to Thailand [in 1969] and I took my whole family. First I time we’d been out of Australia. I would have been about 36. Really the purpose was, one of the main thrusts was, to get experience in an entirely different developing country cultural context of life on a project and the problems of a project in these sorts of circumstances because if we were going to expand into that area then I felt that we needed to have some real on-ground experience. Without going into detail, I can say I sure got it. It was extremely valuable. One of the most difficult periods in my life, but nevertheless extremely valuable. Could write a book about it, but I’ll put that aside for the moment.

This might spur you along!

I had at the same time kept the option open for doing a Masters. So in 1969 we went to Thailand and then I came back with the family to Melbourne and I commenced the Masters. I was supposed to be a full-time student but I was chairman and managing director of JC McColl & Associates Pty Ltd with about eight or ten consultants. That was quite OK with Alan Lloyd.

[2.25] Had you left someone in charge while you were in Thailand?

Yes.

You didn’t come back at all or ...?

I brought in a new consultant who I had been after for a few years to actually take over my part of the practice. But I came [back to] Melbourne ... There was two [three new business] avenues that, apart from the general management as chairman and managing director of the business, we wished to develop. In fact it became three. One was economic policy consulting. The second

was overseas work. The third was really into the early days of resource management and conservation because Victoria was one of the leading States, one of the first ones off the blocks in terms of conservation and environmental issues. In fact, in 1969–70 there was a huge battle in Victoria over whether the little desert in western Victoria was to be developed for farming or not. It was very similar country to the AMP project around Keith developed in South Australia.

The Ninety-Mile Desert.

The Ninety-Mile Desert. There was a huge [political] battle in Victoria and it was won by [those opposing development]. In fact, the little desert became a national park and was not developed. So there were wider areas of independent sort of agricultural and resource management type consulting as well as overseas work. One of the groups that I came in contact with when I was overseas was a Dutch group at another project not far away from where we were. We got quite friendly with them. They were the big Dutch international consulting firm called Nedeco. It became clear that, if we were going to move into overseas consulting on any scale, to compete with these sorts of organisations we had to have a greater critical mass. So when I came back, in conjunction with one or two others we formed a company called Agricultural Consultants Incorporated Ltd which was the vehicle through which we did overseas consulting but maintained our own [domestic] practices. We combined a number of domestic firms together – McColl was the biggest group but there were others of two singles or two's or three's – and so we got involved in overseas work. I got involved in a project during 1973–74 with Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation in central Java, the Serayu River Project: it was a hydro-irrigation development project. We got involved in a number of other projects: one was with the State Rivers and Waters Supply Commission in Ethiopia. So overseas experience and understanding in terms of what little experience I had was quite important in that early '70s period. I also did my Masters degree [work].

[6:50] Were you doing that full-time?

I was supposed to be, but no I didn't do it full-time. But, anyway, when I finished that I was asked if I would join the staff because during that period I gave a few lectures, both to a postgraduate diploma of agricultural extension on the farm management side and I also gave a few undergraduate lectures in irrigation, economics and benefit–cost analysis. I was asked if I would go on staff, as an academic, and I succeeded in negotiating a four-fifths full-time senior lectureship in farm management economics at Melbourne. The fifth was very valuable because that allowed me to do as much consulting as I liked, completely free of the university, except that there was certain [academic] commitments that I undertook to fulfil, and which I did, in relation to the expectations of what was the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry at the University of Melbourne. I took on some economic consulting: in particular, I was Economic

Consultant to the Victorian Tobacco Leaf Marketing Board before tobacco really became on the nose! (laughs)

On the nose in different ways.

We also became McColl Partners [The firm restructured as McColl Partners Pty Ltd]. We amalgamated with one or two [consultants] operating out of Melbourne. McColl Partners was growing even more so. We were getting involved in overseas work. We took on a director who was a forester and moved into some of the conservation environmental areas.

[9.07] You mentioned the overseas work.

Yes.

We haven't touched on what was happening in Australia. Were you expanding beyond Victoria and New South Wales?

We weren't expanding beyond Victoria and New South Wales. We weren't, in other words, expanding geographically in Australia. We were expanding in terms of the nature of the components of the business.

Taking on more diverse activities ...

More diverse activities, yes.

I just wondered whether you were looking to go, rather than go overseas looking to move into Queensland or Tasmania or ...

No. One could have gone the route but we decided we would diversify into other areas.

By the time of the early '70s, with this extra overseas work, were you getting work out of people or companies working within Australia doing the same thing as McColl ... developing ...?

Yes, the general consulting area was expanding.

Were you in touch with the people in other places?

Yes. The consultants formed a specific private, effectively a private consultants section of the Institute of Ag. Science so we had our own professional group. There was a bit of rivalry between the Western Australians [and eastern States' consultants] ... They reckoned they had the right recipe over there, but that's another story. But certainly the eastern States substantially were university graduate independent consultants in the consultants section of the Institute of Agricultural Science. That was getting into place and expanding and life was pretty challenging. The academic interactions I had during that period were extremely valuable; both at Melbourne University but also with other universities in Victoria and in Australia and even internationally [with visiting academics] that had come to Australia. The academic framework allowed me to build up quite a good network in that area. It was getting to a stage where it looked as though I might have to make a decision as to whether I was going to go academic or whether I was going to stay consulting, pull out of the university and put all my effort into the

consultancy, because the opportunities for growth and the management requirement was increasing. On a personal basis I had this conflict that I was grappling with.

[12.25] Whether you really wanted to be an academic or ...

Yes. But I'd already concluded that I didn't want to be an academic. It would have driven me mad actually. While I sort of enjoyed my period there and it certainly gave me the opportunity to build up what I call intellectual capital, which I very effectively did, I really didn't see it as a long-term career pathway. I was just in that sort of frame [of mind]. It was early in 1976 I was chairman and managing director of McColl Partners, Consultants in Agriculture and Resource Management (that's what we called ourselves); we had a Melbourne office; and we still had an office in Numurkah and consultants overseas in projects; and I was four-fifths Senior Lecturer in Farm Management Economics at the School of Agriculture and Forestry in Melbourne.

I received a call from South Australia in early 1976, phone call, from a contact from someone that I knew. He said to me, 'There is a job over here that I think you might be interested in'. I said, 'Oh, I'm very happy where I am. Thanks very much'. He said, 'Well I think you might well be interested in the challenge'. So I said, 'Well, what is it?'. He said, 'It's Director of Agriculture and Fisheries. It's been publicly advertised, open'. I said, 'Baloney, they don't do that'. I said, 'These appointments are always in the system, always have been'. He said, 'No, there is a new Minister that has come in in the last 12 months (referring to Chatterton). The government has agreed to throw it open and it's a genuine thing' he believed. I said, 'I don't know. Look, on Saturday I am heading off with Stuart Hawkins, who is a Senior Lecturer in Ag. Extension', because we were running a program for Indonesian academics and bureaucrats in livestock extension. We were doing it at the University of Udayana in Bali, a terrible place to do it (lovely place actually). I said, 'We are heading off on Saturday to organise it to make sure everything's in place. It's going to be held in May'. He said, 'How long are you going to be away'. I said, 'Probably only 10 days'. He said, 'Well, there is time. This will be open and you can think about it perhaps when you come back. In the meantime I will urgently send some material over for you to take with you so you can read it', which he did and I put it in my bag and promptly proceeded to forget about it while I was away.

I did actually mention to Wendy, my wife, in passing that I'd had this contact about this job and so on and that was about all. Off I went. We were about to come back and we were actually leaving the hotel and the staff came running out and saying that the flight has been cancelled (Qantas flight out of Denpasar). There was an air traffic controller strike in Sydney. Back to the hotel we went. We obviously wanted to get onto the first flight home and we worked pretty hard at that during the Thursday and on the Friday we managed to get on the first flight out, which was flying out on Saturday night. I rang Wendy from the Denpasar Post Office, which is

a bit of an achievement in its own right, and got an extraordinary reception. She said, 'All hell has broken loose over here'. I said, 'What about?'. 'Oh', she said, 'You know that job in South Australia'. I said, 'Yeah, what about it?'. She said, 'Oh, they've decided to close it early. I have had people on my back all over the place, including Alan Lloyd and Al Watson'. (They're both university staff.) I said, 'Well, what happened?'. She said, 'Well, what I have done is I've sent a telegram (because it was the good old days of telegrams) to the Minister and a telegram to the Chairman of the Public Service Board which was "Foreshadowing an application. Signed McColl"'. (laughs) I said, 'God!'. (laughs)

[18.38] She dobbed you in!

She said, 'I didn't want to drop the opportunity'. So that was it. I said, 'I'll sort it out when I get back'. So I got back and ...

Had you read the material by this stage?

I started to read it then! (laughs) No I hadn't, no! (laughs) I got back and then I talked to Wendy and I said, 'Oh well ...', because we had only bought the house we were in in fashionable Moonee Ponds, a very nice sort of place with renovating opportunities and we had spent the last two or three years getting it right and she was very happy with it and I had a daughter at first-year university and a middle one son doing matriculation and other two or three years behind and, anyway the decision was 'OK, seeing I am sort of semi in I may as well go in properly'. So I went into the university on the Monday and Stuart Hawkins typed the formal application for me and I got two or three good referees that were prepared to [support the application] and in it went. Within a week or so I was asked to skip over to Adelaide to meet with the Minister, which I duly did and had a good chat about what he had in mind [including policy directions] and that was pretty good. Then shortly after I got an invitation to go over and be interviewed by the full Public Service Board, which included the chairman of the Public Service Board and I think two or three other commissioners. Then I didn't hear anything for quite some considerable time. The Minister kept a bit in contact with me. Lynne Chatterton, well she was Lynne Arnold in those days, was his research assistant and she obviously was playing a very significant role even at that time ...

That's not to be confused with the person who came in later as minister, the Labor premier.

No, no. But her first husband (she was divorced from him at this stage, but she retained the name Arnold) was in fact the brother of Peter Arnold who became the Minister of Water Resources in the Tonkin Government. Alright.

Not to be confused with Lynn Arnold who was in the Labor Party.

As far as I know there's no family connection there. I know what you mean, you've got to get all that in the right spot.

At one stage I was almost to the point of saying, in fact I might have even said it, 'Look, what's going on? Why bother?'. I was a bit suspicious when it had been closed early by the Public Service Board. Anyway, suddenly, early in June word came through Cabinet had approved and I was the Director of Agriculture and Fisheries! (laughs)

Had you warmed to the idea by this stage? ... (*talking over each other*)

I'd never thought of that as a career option. When I was in the Department of Agriculture originally out in the region, maybe I in a sense had some sort of ambition of climbing my way through the system over time, but I really left because I found it wasn't giving me what I wanted in a career. Interestingly enough though, I was quite keen on a regional structure in the Victorian department and there was a bit of a debate about whether they would go regional structure for the delivery of services and they decided not to. That became relevant a little bit later in the South Australian department because one of the things that the government wanted to embark upon and they, as Cabinet, had approved of the Callaghan Report [which recommended a regional structure], which I read and became familiar with. They wanted the Department to implement it, but it just wasn't getting off the ground at all.

Here I was, an entirely new challenge, one I hadn't expected, came out of left field as you might say, but I have always liked a challenge. Wendy knew that. I mean when I first went out as a farm management consultant and left the government I had a wife, three children and the youngest was less than one year old, so we were used to taking on some challenges. (laughs)

You like living on the edge, just for a bit of ...

Yes, so anyway, this obviously was a big challenge because I had not been through the public service system, which in a way was what the government was looking for and what the Minister was looking for, somebody whose mind wasn't completely developed through the whole public service system.

In your chat with the Minister did he explain that sort of ...

Basically, yes. They wanted a fresh approach, a new approach. He obviously wanted the Department to restructure along the lines of regionalisation – the Callaghan Report. The other interesting thing, and this applies to the background of what was happening in agriculture, if you go back to about 1970 or '71, that was when Britain went into the European Community, Common Market. That changed very dramatically the whole market situation in Australia in that a hell of a lot of our exports were virtually into the UK market and there had been a whole lot of statutory marketing authorities focused on what might be called essentially captive markets. Now there was a whole new marketing thrust needed and the Minister was pretty focused on that, so economics and marketing were something that he was really looking for and

farm management because there had to be some significant changes of management at the farm level to cope with new markets. You could see what needed to be done and that was very much in tune with my thinking.

During my years at Melbourne, at the university and getting involved in the economics network, you realise this was at the time the Whitlam Government came in in 1972. The Whitlam Government established the Industries Assistance Commission [IAC] and some of the first enquiries that that commission did were in the agricultural, in the rural, sector. They were pretty contentious issues of whether we should continue the subsidy on superphosphate for instance (fertiliser subsidies) and so there was a whole lot of both tariffs and subsidy marketing type enquiries that were being generated in the rural sector.

So this is a pretty exciting, dynamic thing which I was generally aware of before I went into this job. I mean one of the early issues I had to try and resolve was that there was an [IAC] enquiry, it was actually to do with the bounty on superphosphate if I remember correctly, and within the Department of Agriculture there were two [approaches to a submission] ... The Minister was very frustrated because there were two reports coming through: one coming from the small economics group, and another coming from the Soils people and there was no [agreement] ... Quite diverse recommendations. The decision was almost made that they weren't going to put a submission in. My attitude was that the Department of Agriculture would always put a submission in to these enquiries. I set up a combined taskforce and got stuck into it a bit myself and we put a submission in. That just was systematic of the sort of problems. We were breaking away from the straight-out production technology focus, which had been the previous focus in agriculture. We were now moving into what I tended to call the marketing/management phase. Subsequently, that moved to the next phase built on top of that – what I would call the conservation/environment/resource management phase. We are well and truly in that now. So I think the rationale behind appointing me was to get, apart from my undoubted virtues, was to get a different focus, a different route.

So getting someone from completely outside rather than a public servant from another department or in Adelaide or in South Australia ...

I suppose in a way I had certain advantages and certain disadvantages. In Victoria I had been President of the Victorian Branch of the Australian Institute of Ag. Science. The dominant membership in that institute, of course, was public servants, Department of Agriculture people and so on. I also had been president of the Australian Agricultural Economics Society, the Victorian Branch. In the year 1976 this critical year when I took the job, or got the job, I was Chairman of the Consultants Section of the Institute of Ag. Science. I was an ag. scientist but I was also an agricultural economist at postgraduate level. The downside was that I was a

Victorian (laughs) but there were a number of people in the Department who knew me: some of them I had lectured in the postgraduate Diploma of Agricultural Extension in the early '70s before any thought of my coming this way was on the horizon.

Had they done the course in Melbourne and then come over here?

Well they'd done the course, been sent over from this department to do the course. There were a few officers that had met me and been involved in that sort of scene.

Just to sidetrack slightly, Jim. You've mentioned numerous times about extension services: what was that?

In the Department ... in terms of key functions of departments and Departments of Agriculture there was obviously the regulatory function, there's also the research function [and the extension function] ...

End of Side B, Tape 1
Tape 2, Side A

[0:17] Jim, you were just at the end of that other tape we were talking about what comprised an extension service ...

... I explained regulatory research and extension were three main functions of Departments of Agriculture and effectively extension service was technology transfer, advisory type service, strong in those days, a fairly strong production technology focus. For instance, a pattern of district agronomists around the State and there'd be livestock officers and so on. So that's what's meant by extension services.

Lots of advice and assistance.

Actually in terms of production and technology transfer, and stimulating and supporting production, as was required through those years, and forming a link if you like between research and application. Overall, I think they were quite successful.

The origin of the term 'extension services'?

I believe it came from the US. I think associated with what they call the Land Grant Colleges, the universities and Land Grant Colleges, and associated with an adult education type approach. So the extension service wasn't just individual, one-to-one. In fact, it became increasingly important in the future that a good Extension Officer had to be able to handle meetings and groups and workshops, and not just individual one-to-one type service. Media and TV and radio, writing, newspaper articles and so on.

Pretty broad.

Pretty broad.

Broad in their expertise more than other ...

Broaden the tools that maybe you used, but departmental extension officers tended to be [fairly specialised] ... I suppose now in the sense of a district agronomist as distinct from a livestock [production] officer as distinct from an animal health officer, you've got some specialisation.

Well thanks for explaining that because it's a term that sort of every time I've heard of it I've wondered what an extension is!

Largely now, the Department of Agriculture or Primary Industries have substantially pulled out of that. Partly have been substituted by the private sector, but that's happened over the last 10, 15 years.

[3:55] I was talking about ... I got to the point where I'd taken a job. A couple of things I'd like to say is that the South Australian aspirant for that job was Peter Trumble. Peter had, what I would consider, reasonable expectations of getting it.

He was already with the Department?

He'd been acting [Director] in the Department. He'd been acting for about 18 months. But let me say that very early, Peter and I clicked. It was very open and honest between the two of us. In fact, Peter became my deputy and we worked together very closely until Peter retired. I think that was, how many years would have that been? Probably six years I suppose, six or seven years if I remember rightly.

A bit of fine detail [talking over each other]

You can clarify that. Peter was a tremendous help to me because he knew how the wheels worked. He provided the understanding of how to massage our way through the system. I always said to him, 'Once I understand that then I'm finished!'. (laughs) So I can't speak highly enough of the support Peter gave me in those years. In fact, I really, with very few exceptions I didn't feel any great problem at all in terms of being accepted within the Department. I had to make some hard decisions and affected, I suppose, a few people's career aspects, particularly as [we] restructured into a regional system from a dominant industry branch type system. That ruined the career pathways of, or changed career pathways for, a number of people.

You came in with a few burdens. I mean one is this notion of regionalisation and rebuilding or reshaping the Department. Another is you're not from South Australia's Department, not come up through the ranks. Indeed, you're a Victorian. So you've got all these impediments.

I had to take Fisheries on as well! I'd had absolutely no experience of Fisheries, but found it quite fascinating. That's a story in it's own right but, we'll stick to Agriculture. I was glad I was young! (laughs)

You came over here and you had a wife and family stay ...

I actually negotiated with the Minister that I'd start in July and that I would return home every weekend. I had some commitments with the university and he agreed for me to finish the

minimal commitments, particularly in relation to a course I was running in farm management economics to see it through the exams and what have you. So I actually was over here for three, about four months I suppose. I brought the family over in early December. They all came, including my daughter who was 19. She could have stayed back in Victoria. It was very hard on her but she decided to come.

[8.00] That's the daughter at university ...

She had finished first-year Arts at La Trobe so she finished Arts here at Adelaide. Then son Shaun, he finished his matric. that year, while I was going backwards and forwards and he came over and he did Science. He eventually did his Ph.D. and now he's Prof. of Immunology at Adelaide. Then Damien, the young fellow, who went to Scotch for about the last three years, matriculated there and did Economics. Anyway, we made Adelaide and South Australia our family base.

That's how it's turned out but what was your expectation when you came over? Were you on a contract ...?

No. A couple of interesting things about it was that Well I had the option of whether I'd take on a ministerial contract because the Public Service wasn't organised on a contract base. Now I understand I think I could have taken on a ministerial contract, but really the expectation was that I would become a proper public servant. I took that on. I must admit I didn't really know what was going to happen in the longer term. I thought in terms of my usual six or seven years and I'd look for something else. I certainly wasn't going to go through to 65, even if I would have been allowed to. I mean I was 42, turned 43 in that June when I was appointed. So I mean that's 22 years, no way! (laughs) So I thought that the future can look after itself in that sense.

Presumably you had to resign from Melbourne ...

I had to resign from Melbourne University. I lost my second lot of super, because I'd dived my first lot after eight years at the Victorian Department.

And the consultancy?

The consultancy I sold out of. I didn't make a great deal of dough because in those days it was not a terribly well-established practice, consultancy and so on. But I pulled right out of that because I couldn't have a conflict of interest in that area. If I was going to be in the government and advise in government I had to be as I said right in it.

[11.05] So you couldn't really leave that in limbo could you?

No, I decided I couldn't. To do a job properly, you've got to cut it. One of the interesting things was though that the Minister never, ever discussed politics, whether I was a member of any party or what have you – of course I wasn't. As far as I'm concerned, my attitude has always

been, I'm a professional and I don't agree with some of these guys that obviously decide to grab hold of the one party of the other and they sort of rise to the top when one party's in power then they float off somewhere when they're not. I would never agree to that. I've served both Liberal and Labor, both Commonwealth and State.

[12:15] Was there a similarity, or convergence of views and ideas between you and the Minister?
Yes. I ...

You knew what he wanted it, and he wanted you to do it and that sort of thing?

Well it wasn't so directive as that. There's no doubt that our ideas [converged on] what were the pressures that needed to be addressed, what were the direction of changes that needed to be made, both in policy and in organisational approaches to delivery of services. There was never really any conflict domestically, in terms of domestic policy, in my view. The main point of departure, which I'll deal with later, came over in relation to the overseas work. At that stage, of course, as I said, Lynne Arnold was his research assistant. Jon Lamb was his Press Secretary. They were the two key people. Obviously playing quite important roles in terms of supporting and advising the Minister. [Break in interview]

[13:55] OK Jim, well perhaps if we could just focus a little bit on that early period of you joining the Department and coming in as the new bloke and so on. I'm just wondering what sort of plans and expectations you had for running the Department and how you were going to fit in and how it needed to change and those sorts of thing. Very general sort of stuff at this stage.

There were certain things that in discussion with the Minister, the Minister supported and wanted to happen and probably the commencement of the regionalisation program to flow on from the Callaghan Report was a very important early one. The other ...

The Callaghan Report would have been about '73 or ...

'73 or '74. There had been a lot of committee meetings: the pile of committee papers was about that high. Part of the problem was that every time it got to a key decision-making point, the main resistance in the Department was at the industry branch head level. They would ask questions about, 'How we were going to handle this problem?', 'What's the detail, the nuts of bolts if this happens' and so on and so forth. 'Oh we better have a report on that'. So you would finish up reading through this material and feeling quite desperate that nothing would ever start because they were trying to resolve all the likely outcomes before they'd even happened!

[15:45] So you had people ...

It was clear that there needed to be a circuit breaker, but before I did anything on the regionalisation side I actually embarked on a trip right around every region, which took some weeks to do, particularly keeping in mind I was travelling backwards and forwards to Melbourne at the same time. I spoke to as many officers out in the field as I could, in groups or

individually, and just talked about the Department and regionalisation and so on, and to get a feel to how they felt out there.

And they could get to know you a bit.

They got to know me. I was on a steep learning curve in general anyway, but it was a very valuable way of at least initially interacting with them. I went to research stations and found out what they were doing and talked to them and again in the context of how they felt about regionalisation and so on. I also went out to Northfield and I also talked to, and had interaction with, the people in head office, the industry [branch] people. Of course, it was fairly clear that many of the industry [branch] people felt they were going to lose influence if regional structures were set in place. The people out in the regions were quite keen on regionalisation as a way of delivering better services and taking more responsibility out there. So I got an introduction to people but also a good gauge on the general feeling across the Department about moving into regionalisation. My overall conclusion was yes, there was certainly sufficient support to move on it. The fact of the matter is that the government had made a decision to do it anyway and that decision was about 18 months back and nothing had really happened.

[18:15] It might have required jumping to another area if that decision had gone back to the Callaghan Report and Peter Trumble had been acting, but was Peter in some sort of hamstrung position?

Peter was ... of course being an acting position in Public Service can be quite difficult. Peter found it hard to handle the branch head problem because he knew them very well. It needed a circuit breaker really.

[18:50] The other thing that's ironical I suppose Jim, is that it's Callaghan who set up the branches I think in the 1950s when he came along.

Yes I think the basic structure probably goes back as far as then.

And then 20 years later his report would have overturned them.

Of course, organisational structures are imperfect things. However, they need to make sense in relation to what they're supposed to be doing and what sort of services they're delivering and responsibilities that they had. There undoubtedly had been a significant change in what governments and the public were requiring of Departments of Agriculture in the '50s compared with the early '70s, particularly, as I described, what was happening in markets and a whole lot of other things and the shift from the distinct production technology era into management and marketing. So it was quite consistent to come up with a different structural approach to the best way of delivering your responsibilities.

[20:25] The Department at that time was still very much in a hierarchical mode?

Very much hierarchical industry, up the ladder type of expectations and so on. So the circuit breaker. One of the issues was what level the Chief Regional Officer, what level he was going to be appointed at. Was the head of the industry branch, say the Livestock Branch, was he

going to be at a higher level than a Chief Regional Officer? This was a very important one. So anyway I decided, and I think I'm right in saying I here ... The Minister was ready for it, I'd cleared it more or less with him. I wrote a minute, which I don't think was much more than a page if it was a page, might have been a page and a half, about commencing regionalisation. I gave the background what I'd done and so on and so forth and just recommended that the position for Chief Regional Officer of the South East Region because I said we're not going to re-organise the whole department all at once. We're going to put a region in place each year. South East Region the first year, which I think was '77.

We can fine-tune that.

The Murraylands Region which was the Riverland and so on, '78. The Central Region ... No, what did we call it – the Eyre Region?

The West Coast Region?

The West Coast Region, whatever it was. I've forgotten the name. I think it was the third one. Then we were going to do the other regions in the one year, but that wasn't entirely clear at that stage. But the first one was going to be established ... This was the basis on which it was going to be established. The Chief Regional Officer was going to be ... I asked for the appointment of an EO1 [Executive Officer level 1] which is the same as the industry branch [heads] and the Minister signed off. That was it because the branch heads knew they'd lost the power battle in that sense. I'd say within six months two of the older branch heads had decided to hang their boots up! (laughs)

Time for a change.

Time for a change. Things sort of went from there. Ron Webber was appointed the first Chief Regional Officer and he was number two in Horticulture Branch. Tom Miller was head of the Horticulture Branch. Tom was one of the ones who decided he'd hang his boots up.

As a result of the appointment or ...?

No. No, as a result of ... he was getting on anyway and he decided to give it away. Ron just happened to be 2IC and a very, very good officer. Unfortunately, he got cancer some years later. He did a tremendous job as the first Chief Regional Officer.

I know this ... was Ron appointed over Tom?

No. No, Ron was appointed as Chief Regional Officer of the South East Region, which was ... another unit. Tom was still Chief Horticulturalist I think it was called.

That brought Ron up to Tom's level?

Yes. Tom, I think, decided, 'Nah, things were getting too complicated', but only Tom can answer that one.

Yes I'm having a chat with him as you know.
You'll have a chat with him

... he'll give me some pointers

Because some of those old branch heads, they didn't particularly like regionalisation.

[24.40] The regions, like you mentioned the South East coming in, that's replacing the District Officers?

That was one of the interesting things, as to what do we mean by regionalisation? Does that mean that we're going to have a big, administrative framework at the regional level? I felt that the regional framework and the regional level of management and administration was in fact just that. That it was, in a sense, regional policy and in charge of the overall regional budget and, if you like, the overall dispersion of resources. But the main source of delivery of services was in fact through the district office and we created a position called Senior District Officer. We increased the number of District Officers and built up the district offices – officers and offices. That was a pretty important thing that I had to explain and support, that we weren't building up huge regional, head office type things.

Little empires.

Yes, little empires. There was a small regional administration supporting the Chief Regional Officer and there were a few specialists appointed as regional economists that provided a service to the region as a whole and supported the District Officers. That was the basic approach that we took.

These people, at the senior level, did they had a certain level of responsibility? Did they have to report back to head office?

I created a position [of Director of Regions. The organisational structure was a] Director of Animal Industry, Director of Plant Industry, Director Regions, Director of Resources and Administration – that was Barry Greer, I brought him in, I think I mentioned that – and while Fisheries were there, we were working towards a Director of Fisheries. That group formed essentially the executive committee. The focal point for regions and the Chief Regional Officers related to the Director Regions.

They gained a level of autonomy in the regions?

A fair degree of autonomy. We wanted to give them as much as possible. We also, it was rather interesting to see the development of their capacity to deal with a certain amount of policy or policy advice I suppose you could say in relation to what was happening in the region rather than everything having to come to head office and through the cumbersome bureaucracy. In fact, I remember Ron Webber ringing me up two or three months after things started and he said, 'Oh gee. I'm getting a lot of questions about departmental policy. Is that OK?'. I said, 'Oh it's working!'. (laughs)

Now you've got to train him up answer the questions.

'Beauty', I said, 'We'll just make sure you're on top of the types of policies you're likely to get asked about, but that's terrific'. I said, 'That means you can handle those sort of things at that level. You'll have to use your judgement as to when it's getting a bit outside the framework as you understand it'. So that's the regional program. In '79 when the government changed and Ted Chapman became Minister, word sort of came through like what's going to happen to regionalisation? I think that's when I said, 'We'll do the last three all at once'. (laughs)

You were more or less half-way through.

We were half-way through. Of course, when a government changes like that, even though I don't think there was a clear position by the Liberal Government on regionalisation one way or the other that I can remember, but there was a high degree of uncertainty because a lot of those things when governments change, everybody says 'What's going to happen now?'. However, my attitude was we're certainly going to finish it. I just said, 'Look, we'll do the last three regions in the one year'. So I think actually, in retrospect, that we did the South East region and then the next year we did the Murraylands region and then the government changed and we did Central, Northern and West Coast, or whatever we call it, all in one day! (laughs)

[30.17] What is involved in that sort of change? I mean you have to set up a structure, employ people, come up with the funds? ...

All of it had to be done through the Public Service Board to approve of structures and positions, so all that had to be done. So when I say I embarked on regionalisation, there's a hell of a lot of work behind it by a lot of people to get all the nuts and bolts and everything in place. Budgets and allocation of finance.

By the time you had the change of government you had two up and running ...

Yes. My attitude to the question, 'Well what are we going to do if this happens?'. My attitude always was 'Well, first of all we don't know whether it's going to happen or if it's going to happen that way and we'll deal with it, whatever happens!'. 'Alright. OK'.

It's a matter of adaptation.

I suppose, in a way, I found it rather interesting being in the Public Service and relating to people that have been in there all the time. In fact, the whole atmosphere and context of work is, they like things that are fairly well organised, predictable and so on. If you've been in there for a long time, you find it very difficult to deal with something which is fluid and dynamic and so on. That makes them very nervous.

[32.50] **Tape 2, Side A**

Side B, Tape 2

[0:05] We were talking about implementing some changes in the Department. Maybe a comment or two on your attitude towards change?

Of course it became clear that nothing was going to be more constant than change. I can remember being asked several times, 'When are we going to stabilise?' because change seemed to be happening all the time! Not only through regionalisation but there were some significant changes in government processes, in funds being made available to departments like the Agriculture Department. We were going to have to spend a lot greater focus on allocation of progressively more limited resources. I used to be asked, 'When is going to stop?'. I said, 'You just better accept it. We're going to be in change all the time'. But the key thing is to try and manage change. Manage it yourself in-so-far as possible. Don't leave it such that you get forced to do things. Maybe it's not the best way because you haven't actually really focused on what's happening and decided in the direction you were going to try and nudge it.

So I suppose my approach was to manage change, taking into account all the forces that were starting to bear upon the organisation and the nature of the services that were being required by government and the nature of the resources and the more limited extent of resources that were being provided to, say, Departments of Agriculture. We just had to cope with that.

You're coming in at a time when the stereotype and perhaps your own view of the Public Service bureaucracy is resistance to change, it's too big to change till you break it down into, in your case, the Department of Ag. and Fisheries where you can change within the organisation and there's always this concept of the public servant being so slow to respond and so on. ...

During this period also there was a lot of change going on in the Public Service as a whole because there were, during the '70s, new departments being formed and old departments actually being disbanded. I mean the Department of Lands disappeared. The Department of Local Government disappeared. Departments of the Environment were created [and] of, I'm not sure what it was called, Community Services or something.

Community Welfare.

Community Welfare.

DCW.

So governments were creating new departments in new areas of service expectations by the community. Old departments like Agriculture and so on, were obviously under pressure and under pressure in terms of trying to deliver services in a traditional way they always had. So we had to face up to that. As I said, my approach was, to this sort of issue, we've got to be positive and manage the process to the best advantage and not let it be forced upon us.

[3.53] One of those signs of change was, of course, the fact that the Department became Agriculture and Fisheries. Then after you had been around for a while, it became Agriculture.

What really happened there was the Tonkin Government, the Liberal policy was that they were going to separate them again because there was a group in the fishing industry that wanted their own special little department like they used to have. But the interesting thing was, of course, the Tonkin Government wasn't really expected to get in! (laughs) Some of the reactions of some of the key fisheries industry people was that they really didn't particularly want it but it had sort of gone too far. In fact, the Liberal Government moved very quickly to separate the departments and create a separate Fisheries Department again. But, of course, the long-term logic of a Department of Primary Industry, including Fisheries and Forestry, you could see it coming even then. Of course, that happened maybe a decade later anyway.

We'll pick up on that of course. The merger of the two departments before you came to South Australia as Ag. and Fisheries?

I'm not sure exactly the rationale behind that as to whether there was any deep and meaningful natural resource management type focus. There might well have been by the Minister. It occurred at least 12 months before I arrived on the scene. It was probably substantially driven by an administrative decision.

What about ... The amalgamation is not so difficult to come to grips with. You've got pooled resources; you've got two accountants so you cut it back to one and pool positions. But when you come to separate the Department again, how did it work?

It was not entirely painless but there's always problems when you parcelling up the budget again. The people, probably, can be identified reasonably easily. But yes they've got to set up their core services, administrative services, again and that generally means the overheads increase. Basically the amalgamation was starting to work quite well. The Fisheries people were starting to feel quite comfortable. It was not easy, not easy at all. It was still pretty difficult when I first came. The cultures were somewhat different.

You have to go through the learning curve and then, of course, ...

Then bingo, its gone. That's the way it goes.

One of the interesting things about today's situation, if that happened, it would be more likely that the core services you mentioned, admin. and accounting and so on, would be retained by one department and contracted out to the other. That's an ethos ... we're going to have to come back to another time.

That wasn't considered at that time, no.

Now departments are contracting out services and making profits. Well that's now 20 years, I think a lot's changed.

In a sense when you say making a profit, you're actually robbing Peter to pay Paul. You're still playing with the same grains of sand! (laughs)

It's all out of the one bucket!
That's right! (laughs)

[7:50] Although that might be something to return to in a subsequent ...

One of the interesting things, of course, with the pressure on resources was that we then started to talk about and user pays in certain areas. That's something we could perhaps talk about a bit further down the track. Because the whole issue of what services should be provided by government, what services should be provided by a Department of Agriculture as a public service funded by the public, and what services perhaps are better provided for either by the private sector or by the public sector on a user-pay basis. That raises quite a complex area and during my time, particularly the last few years, that was coming to the fore.

I'd definitely like to return to that. I think you summarised that pretty well there. That's one of the things we need to look at.

As I said before, with the external changes and roles and expectations about a Department of Agriculture, this was in the context of a lot of questions about the role of government as a whole in the 80s in particular, this really started.

[9.25] I think that, for what we're doing here, we don't have to be so insular as to look at just the Department alone. Those sorts of issues of the ... the Public Service are ... where the Department fits within the framework. Those things we'll come back to. We've probably covered a fair bit of ground today.

I've probably exhausted myself today! (laughs)

Is there anything sticking out of ... today ... of attitude to you becoming director?

Obviously there was a bit of Fisheries stuff I had to get involved in reasonably quickly. That plus starting the regional program, apart from all the other general stuff that passed over my desk that I had to understand and put a signature to, kept me pretty occupied. So perhaps we could talk about maybe the early stages of Fisheries.

We'll have one or two subjects for next time. All we have to do is find another time! (laughs)

Let me emphasise the overseas activities of the Department and, ultimately, Sagric International are a pretty important component as I'm sure you'll understand.

Oh yes, I think we might be doing a couple of sessions actually, subject to your availability.

Yes, OK.

Thanks very much, Jim. I think we'll pause for today.

[11.07] **End of session on Side B, Tape 2**

Tape 3, Side A

AN INTERVIEW WITH JIM McCOLL OF UNLEY PARK, SOUTH AUSTRALIA ON THE 7TH OF JANUARY 2004 CONDUCTED BY BERNARD O'NEIL, CONTINUING THE INTERVIEW OF THE 9TH OF OCTOBER 2003 IN REGARDS TO THE PROJECT ON THE HISTORY OF THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.

(Recording volume, and clarity, was lost quite dramatically for both interviewee and interviewer on Tape 3, Side A)

[0:30] Jim, what we talked about last time, very briefly was the relationship between yourself and the Ministers. That's the theme we'll start with now. We did touch on some of your expectations ... interview with the Minister at the time, Chatterton was in office then. If we can pick up there with Brian Chatterton as Minister. Your involvement and relations with him?

Yes. As I said previously, it was quite evident that our general views and directions in which agriculture should go, and the services and contribution that the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, as it was then, (the position actually was the Director of Agriculture and Fisheries at that stage) [were in line]. Brian Chatterton was, of course, university trained at Reading University in the UK. He was a very intelligent, somewhat shy sort of guy and very well focused on policy and the development of policy and so on. We had, I believe, a pretty good interaction and a pretty good understanding of the development of policy.

The directions in which the Department was to go, I've already covered the regionalisation program. The fact [was] that the government, [which] some 18 months or two years earlier accepted Callaghan's Report, had asked the Department to implement the regionalisation at the stage I was appointed. There had been a lot of talk and a lot of committee meetings and so on. That obviously was an important activity to get underway. Also, there was the general thrust of change in culture and approach in the Department and being required in the Department was more towards management, farm management and economics and marketing issues.

I mentioned earlier that this was very much my focus, coming from a consultancy, agricultural economics type background anyway. Very much a sensible focus in relation to the fact that the UK, which was a substantial commodity market for agricultural commodity exports, had gone into the EU (the European Community) and there really needed to be a major thrust at marketing right through the agriculture sector.

At the same time the Whitlam Government had established the Industries Assistance Commission. There were a lot of policy inquires going on in terms of agricultural industries at the time, with the view to opening up the more competitive framework, looking very carefully at subsidies and barrier protection and so on. So that's the sort of scene we're in and certainly I wanted and the Minister wanted very good submissions from the Department to go into these Industry Assistance Commission inquiries.

When I arrived, an example of a problem that had arisen was that there was an inquiry going on by the Industries Assistance Commission. It was into superphosphate arrangements: it was a subsidy or bounty on superphosphate. The economists in the Department (there was a small group of economists in the Department) and the technical soils-oriented people in the Department couldn't agree. That was one of the first tasks. I had to bring those two together and actually get a submission in. I can't remember whether we did get one in because the opportunity had just about past by the time I was appointed. [This] illustrated the problem and from then on I put a system in place whereby we didn't get into that position and produced the unified approach which obviously had to go through the Minister for approval in terms of the suggested policy options that the IAC could consider and the government ultimately could consider.

Just as an aside there, Jim. Had each State been putting it's own submissions in?

Yes. Each State had put it's own submission in place to particular inquiries or particular industries. It was important at the same time that you were putting a submission in that you also had good interaction with the industry's representative people. The position I always used to take with it (and we had a pretty good relationship as it developed) is I used to say, 'Well 90% of the time we'll agree on what we'll be putting forward. [There] will be no problems in terms of support that you would give ... to the industry. There might be 5 or 10% of the time when we've got to agree to disagree'. But that was the sort of relationship that we developed. We didn't do it in isolation from industry.

They were mainly aware where we were coming from; we understood where they were coming from. So that was in that major policy area. One of the things I became very aware of pretty early was the very close involvement of Lynne Arnold, as she was at that stage, as a Research Assistant and to some extent, Jon Lamb as the Press Secretary. There were a few people in the Department, Colin Hunt, the Chief Economist, who was also pretty influential. I knew him anyway even before I came to South Australia.

One of the problems the Minister had and I have to say the Minister and Lynne (I call them [that] for convenience), they had difficulty in getting the balance right between ministerial areas and responsibility in departmental work. I didn't feel it terribly intrusive but one of the problems that developed over the next two or three years was that they had a certain number (that had developed over the years) of particular contacts in the Department that they tapped into on a very personal basis. This is I suppose in a sense is very nice and convenient for the Minister but it can be very difficult to manage within a departmental framework.

Eventually I managed to get a reasonable system going whereby I knew what was going (not interfering in it, but I knew who had been tapped into. In fact, in a vast majority of cases they personally let me know anyway! But I had to be very careful to avoid conflict in positions within the Department on the one hand and what the Minister might think we wanted to do as fed to him by a particular officer in the Department. This is not an uncommon problem, by the way, through Ministerial and departmental systems. When the system is working well, you don't have a serious problem in that area. I found that was something that needed to be managed fairly carefully.

This is something that Brian Chatterton would have had in place before you joined?

Substantially before I actually came into the game at all. He had this network that he had established over probably two, three or four years (since he moved into Parliament and had expressed an interest in agriculture). He was in the Parliament and [aiming for] Minister of Agriculture during Tom Casey's period. I think there were political machinations that ultimately resulted in Brian Chatterton getting the portfolio.

As we moved through two or three years, Lynne and Brian got married. I'm not exactly sure which year it was, whether it was '77 or maybe '78.

As we moved into '79 running up to the election – the last six months or nine months – again I'm drawing on my memory but it became fairly clear to me that there was a power play within the Minister's Office going on. Jon Lamb departed. There was a breakdown in relationship between Colin Hunt and the Chattertons. I'm not exactly clear but the competition for influence on the Minister in relation to his policy and direction he was going was getting fairly tense.

I was having a meeting with Brian, a regular meeting on, I think, Thursday afternoons on where we were and policy and what next to pursue, any new initiatives to pursue and so on and so forth. They were, as far as I was concerned, quite constructive. Being the sort of guy that I am I didn't waste any time in getting things moving on a Friday. There might be half-a-dozen things I got moving which involved contacting somebody or writing an instruction into the Department and things were starting to move, things were starting to happen or certainly things were put in place to really push something along.

Then I started to get a letter from the Minister on the desk Monday morning which changed things quite appreciably to my embarrassment. This happened a number of times.

The election came. Don Dunstan had resigned through ill health. It was during this period after he'd resigned that Des Corcoran was actually the premier. This had been all happening and then there was an election. Lo and behold, the Tonkin Government won, which was quite

unexpected. Lynne and Brian Chatterton were no longer in the Ministerial position. They were in the Opposition. Also, lo and behold, Fisheries was separated. This was a policy that had been in place for a number of years. The industry had never been terribly happy with Fisheries being joined with Agriculture, which had happened some years earlier before I came. After the 3½ years running up to '79, things were running along fairly smoothly but it was still in the Liberal Party policy and it was something that they could implement fairly quickly. Alan Rodda was appointed Minister of Fisheries and Fisheries was separated. That's when I was appointed the Director-General of Agriculture from Director of Agriculture and Fisheries.

The new Minister was Ted Chapman. Kangaroo Island, ex-shearer, ex-farmer. Quite a different character and person with a lot of what I would call personal and political strengths. I have to say no idea of policy in the formal sense and of policy development. He was largely instinctive in positions he'd take in relation to certain things as they cropped up. (laughs) At one stage he was getting into possibly suggesting what tractors we were going to buy on research stations and things like that. (laughs) We were pretty basic and we had to sort things out.

[comparing Chapman and Chatterton on] ... policy area?

Definitely. He [Brian Chatterton] was definitely very policy focused and had a good mind. He was course trained, a trained mind as you tend to get when you do a university degree. Ted Chapman didn't have that educational background: he was a different sort of guy and he had a different sort of approach. In many ways it was quite a challenge to manage these two distinctly contrasting styles! (laughs) Ted Chapman didn't have a clue about the overseas area. In fact, the Liberal Government policy at the time or the thrust of the Liberal Government when it changed was that they were going to abolish or more or less cut right back the overseas projects, the marketing and the transfer of technology and so on of [mainly dryland] agriculture to the Middle East and the African countries. So Sagric International, which had been formally established in late '78 or into '79, was going to get the chop. That was a very, very difficult period actually to hold the position [of chairman and managing director] in relation to Sagric International with a Minister that really first of all didn't understand what it was all about. He instinctively formed the view that we ought to get out of that. The Chattertons, of course, given their very intense interest in the overseas area (I didn't perhaps cover that, I can cover that in another way perhaps later), [considered] that was very much an important interest or thrust. A very personal one, which raises it's own set of problems – the overseas area. They proceeded to put on a lot of parliamentary and political pressure in the media and so on to the Minister, largely in the overseas area where he was extremely vulnerable. I found my position [in Sagric International] and my duty actually as the Minister's head of Department was to, in so far as was possible, give the Minister the support and the means to handle this. So over the period of time of the Tonkin Government ... this was rough and tough quite frankly. I gave the Minister

as much support and the Department gave him as much support as was our duty and responsibility anyway, both in the overseas area and domestically.

I can't remember domestic issues being a big problem in relation to Brian and Lynne Chatterton's activities. They tended to really focus on the overseas activities and also tried to criticise the way Sagric International was operating, the way it was managing things. Managing overseas projects is not an easy thing to do. It's an area where there's almost bound to be some criticism. I won't deal with the detail of that but one of the problems of managing during that period ... Ted Chapman understood and had a reasonable balance between ministerial responsibilities and the management of the Department. He substantially recognised that that was my responsibility. I had a very direct relationship with him. Ted was not terribly good at administration and things tended to pile up on his desk. Some of them were getting pretty urgent and it would have been rather embarrassing if they hadn't been signed by the Minister. I was fairly direct in my approach, sometimes fairly direct in my language, which he understood quite well and he put his signature. (both laugh) He wasn't tuned in terribly to administrative processes. Again that's not unusual for Ministers. They come from all sorts of walks of life.

The Chattertons had some sense of understanding ... policy ... Chapman ...

Chapman didn't have a place in his mind for policy options, policy development. He would go more substantially with what they were saying around the traps ought to be done. If you liked the political 'sniffing the wind'. You need that political 'sniffing the wind' but if you are doing some policy development and developing options and the effectiveness of those (how cost effective they'd be and so on and so forth), in conjunction with sniffing the wind, that'd be ideal. Sniffing the wind might determine which ones the Minister might pick because there isn't that much between them all in a number of other aspects. Ted was a very tuned-in political animal. Very tuned in, that was the way he operated.

The Chattertons, they were very much hands-on the way, very involved?

They were very involved in certain aspects that they were interested in but not in a sense very involved in what the Department was doing or even in a sense of the overall direction it was going, only in a more general sense. They had particular areas of specific interest that they really got into. They also were very involved in Fisheries. I had absolutely no background in Fisheries before but I found coming from a management and economic framework, I felt quite comfortable fairly rapidly in it. They were quite progressive in terms of what they wanted to do in Fisheries ... Both Western Australia and South Australia, they were the two States that were leading Australia in introducing more modern and progressive management approaches to Fisheries, shifting it into a properly managed framework and so on. They did a lot of work, a lot of good policy and presentation in that area and ... on that.

They didn't mind giving you a hand if you did not want to cop it whereas Chapman was a bit more stand back and let the Department have it's scene or ...?

Yes, up to a point. His political sniffing at the wind would be over the lot. I mean he wouldn't accept what the Department wanted to happen if he had any political sniff that told him that you'd better think carefully about that one or what have you. He had a pretty good instinct in that area. So that when you're developing what you might be putting forward to a Minister that's like that, of course you've got to be pretty good on sniffing the wind as well.

So you'd actually take that into account?

You take that into account in terms of how he might react to certain things.

Any particular example comes to mind? If not at the moment ...

Nothing really comes into mind specifically at the moment. He progressively got more involved in the overseas area. I went overseas with him and my deputy went overseas with him [subsequently]. He did a few overseas trips. He did quite well actually because he had the sort of personality that got on pretty well with people in these different countries. It was quite interesting to see how he coped with it. Of course, Sagric International went on. He accepted it and, ultimately, could see the general thrust of what Sagric International was there for and what it was trying to do.

[30:00] Was Sagric part of the Department or had it been hived off?

The overseas area initially was within the Department. When I took over I set up an Overseas Projects Branch or something like that, which reported directly to me. I made one or two specific appointments to that branch. That built up a little bit and the number of officers who were in that branch, including Bob Hogarth (who we appointed just before the government changed). We appointed him as General Manager of Sagric International when we set Sagric International up. Bob had a Public Service position but he was seconded as General Manager of Sagric International. There were a number of public servants who went to Sagric International, a company under the *Companies Act* [owned by] the government [with shareholders on behalf of the government being] ... at the time but initially the Minister of Agriculture and might have been the premier or the Minister for Trade and Development or something like that, as being the two shareholders of behalf of the government. Any reporting or the annual report went to those shareholders. It was established under the *Companies Act* and subject to the management requirements and the usual responsibilities just like any other company. They had a board. I was chairman and managing director of the board. So you're chairman of the board and managing director and Bob Hogarth was the general manager who attended board meetings but he wasn't a board member at that stage initially.

There was quite a number of people who went to Sagric International from [other] government departments, from the Agriculture Department who actually were seconded and they maintained their Public Service position. Sagric International became a mix of seconded public servants and contract private sector people.

It's interesting the way it was set up. I mentioned before that the South Australian Oil and Gas Corporation had a similar sort of need to develop a private arm so to speak.

Mind you, just going back a little bit, I don't know whether I mentioned it, but I'll get to it because Chatterton came back as a Minister again after the election in 1982, late 1982. It was November if I remember rightly. The Bannon Government came in and Brian Chatterton was appointed ...

**[33:33] End Tape 3, Side A
Side B, Tape 3**

[0:08] He was by himself and it probably was one of the most unpleasant meetings I've had over my career. He really was not so much directly having a go at me but he made it quite clear there was a number of officers who he had in his sights and he wanted them sort of shifted and so on and so forth. Some of them were involved in the overseas area. He was obviously very critical of how things had gone the last three years. Some of it may have been justified from his particular point of view but I felt he was being quite unfair in relation to what he was [proposing] ...

I also told him I thought he was being quite unfair and unreasonable in relation to what he was saying about some of these officers. If he had evidence and could put a proper case, there was a proper way to do it through the Public Service Board chairman and a proper process to pursue. What I was basically saying was I was not prepared to use my powers for shifting [those] people and so on, that he'd have to do it himself and properly through a formal process as well. Of course, he didn't appreciate that and obviously wasn't prepared to do that.

So off he went overseas with Lynne Chatterton to visit some of the countries where we had projects clearly with the intent of being able to come home and say it was all a shambles and he'd better take it over. In fact, what happened was during the course of the Liberal Government period Sagric International's board had been strengthened, not only wider than the Department in terms of board members but strengthened by the head of Trade and Development (the Director) and also [with] at least two and possibly three private sector people on the board. It meant that the nature of the board [had changed], particularly as it was responsible under the *Companies Act*, had private sector members on that board. The decision-making responsibility and the capability were very important to the directors. It was quite clear that Brian Chatterton and Lynne Chatterton, who was sort of around all the time at this stage,

wanted to personally more or less direct and take over the overseas area. They didn't agree with Sagric International's structure and the board and what have you. There was always a bit of a problem with their approach to the overseas area. It was a very personal approach. The relationship of Sagric International with the Commonwealth, through Sagric International, [and] the South Australian government with the Commonwealth, in relation to Sagric International's powers to sign direct contracts on behalf of the South Australian government with overseas governments [was sensitive]. The Commonwealth was tending to take the position that that's the Commonwealth's responsibility and certainly if there's any element of aid about it, if it's not a proper commercial contract, then that's the responsibility of the Commonwealth through what was then the Australian Development Assistance Agency or Assistance Bureau (I'm not sure what it was at that stage).

ADAB, right.

So the whole way in which the Chattertons were operating of proposing projects which obviously were non-commercial that we were going to devote significant resources to pursuing these sorts of projects. In fact, they put forward a proposal [for a project in] Algeria. We already were implementing a project, a rangeland project in Algeria and it was funded by the World Bank and the Algerian Government. That had a long history to it but I won't get into that. This [project] was in another area [of Algeria] and it was more closely related to dryland farming technology. They sent a letter through to me as probably DG, because they didn't really see much difference. That was a real problem I had being Director-General of Agriculture on the one hand and chairman and managing director of Sagric International with this sort of environment going on. I indicated I had to take it to the board, which I duly did. The board said we need more information about this [and there were] a series of questions the board [proposed] ... Seeing a Minister was putting it forward, it was his personal thing that he'd investigated while he was overseas, he thought it was a good idea and he had spoken to a few people over there. If we were going to put resources into it, we wanted to know a bit more about it. So I had to write a letter as chairman of Sagric Board to the Minister. [Break in recording]

After the short pause Jim, you were just writing a letter as chairman.

I was writing a letter as chairman to the Minister, in short asking for a bit more information, that the board required a bit more information in relation to the proposal and so on and so forth. This didn't go down very well at all. That was just one instance of a very difficult situation that arose, particularly in relation to the overseas area but also in relation to what the Minister wanted to do in relation to a few of the personnel of the Department. From then on it was one of the most difficult periods, certainly in my time in that position.

When you say that position you mean in terms of Sagric or overall?

The position of both Director-General of Agriculture in relation to the Department and my responsibilities as Director-General, and in relation to Sagric International and my responsibilities as chairman and managing director. It might be instructive actually to have a look at some of the press articles in the *Advertiser* and maybe even in the *Stock Journal*, I'm not sure, during that period from December [1982], January [1983], right through until about April. It's extremely difficult to work with a Minister under those circumstances. Personal interaction was extremely difficult.

That was a very difficult period. I had to attend one Agricultural Council Ministerial meeting, I think it was in Sydney, the Standing Committee on Agriculture as it was then. That was extremely difficult. I took certain positions in Standing Committee. Normally if you've got a good interaction with your Minister then when material and recommendations come through from Standing Committee, you've got a bit of an idea as to whether your Minister will go with it or not. If you're sure he won't, you say so in Standing Committee and perhaps modify or change what's coming through. I found myself high and dry. Very difficult. It could be seen by other Ministers.

Everyone knew.

Everybody who knew me and had something to do with me over the last three years in the same forum. So this went on and the Department and Sagric International and myself were caught up and attacked in the media by the Minister.

[13:00] I had to manage this very carefully. I had very strong support close to me at the highest level in the Department. We obviously decided we were going to manage it tightly and continue as normal as much as possible for the rest of the Department's activities and so on and so forth. We managed to do that. The media were trying to penetrate the Department and get the lowdown on what was going on but they really were unable to do that which was fortunate. There were several times when I was very close to resigning. I had other things to do. How old was I then? About 50. In my prime as you might say. I was very close to [resigning] two or three times. [Break]

I was at the point where I mentioned that I was close to resigning. This happened two or three times. There was one or two people in the government that I, not Ministers or anything, but in the bureaucracy but in key positions that were keeping a tag on where I was in this. The word got through that I was very close to resigning.

[23:55] So the very difficult circumstances [between the Minister and myself] went on through March. The interesting thing was that I had been appointed as a Associate Commissioner to the

Industries Assistance Commission looking at dairy marketing. That was a national inquiry. One day in April I happened to be in Sydney at that inquiry and without going into detail I got a phone call from the highest level in the bureaucracy to inform me that the Minister had resigned. That came out of the blue. I didn't expect anything. I didn't know what was going to happen.

What had been going on, apparently, [was] that politically [there had been a lot of difficulties] ... (and I think Brian refers to that in his book). They were rapidly losing political support. In those circumstances what generally happens is that somebody else is targeted to be Minister and 'We've got to do something about this'. That decision might have been made several months earlier [but] Brian Chatterton just provided that opportunity in Cabinet, and the government accepted it because he then went. Sometimes they'll shift people out of portfolios and Ministers into another portfolio. But he was out of the Cabinet. He was finished. Politically, he was finished. He was [still] in the Legislative Council.

It all happened very suddenly in the sense that you've got a November election, the bushfires are in February and about March/April ...

It was April.

April, he was gone. That's effectively six months, just a touch over ...

[29.48] I wanted to ask you earlier, how did you manage to keep the Department tight? Given that earlier term as Minister, Chatterton had his contacts.

I don't know exactly how that happened. Over the three years the Liberal Government, maybe the Department became a bit more cohesive and there wasn't this you know ... There'd been a bit of change in personnel, sort of natural [re-direction?] I suppose. But, actually, what was going on, the detail of what was going on which the media were really after, we managed it very tightly at the time. I just carried on. I got an odd letter or two from officers afterwards just expressing amazement at what apparently had been going and they had not been aware of. One or two of them said I started to look a bit older! (both laugh) I just tried to carry on normally as much as possible, everybody did.

I was thinking in terms of like media management and so on. These days you would get an instruction saying officers are not supposed to talk to the press. Did you have to issue anything?

Well the media never approached me directly.

But did you tell your staff that they shouldn't be talking to them?

I never sent any instructions not to, no I didn't.

Maybe there are other people in the Department who ...

There might have been.

Other people in the Department not liking the Minister's style?

I like to think that there was the cohesion and loyalty in a Department that was the glue. There wasn't that much information and detail about it but people knew there was something wrong. They didn't really know the detail or the basis of it, which is really what the media was interested in.

Well seeing these reports to the media ...

I didn't keep the cuttings and everything because Frank Blevins was appointed Minister so that's the next Minister I can talk about it.

Well we'd better ...

Let me say at the start ...

We're nearly out on this one, so.

We're nearly out.

I'll put another tape in if you want to talk about Frank.

Well I do 'cause he was ...

And what happened to Brian and Lynne? They just ...

They, as I said stayed in the Parliament for a certain period. I can't remember when they actually pulled out. It might have been maybe the next election I don't know ...

**[33:39] End of Tape 3, Side B
Tape 4, Side A**

[0:15] Jim, perhaps we can turn now to the third Minister in your time as Director-General and you mentioned it was Frank Blevins.

Frank Blevins, yes. Frank had been in the Parliament for some time. Again he was in the Legislative Council. Whyalla. Seaman's Union. A Manchester lad: still spoke with his Manchester accent. Again a very different person from both Brian Chatterton and Ted Chapman. Let's describe the first meeting because the announcement was made of a new Minister and you wait for the Minister to give you a phone call or the Minister's Office to give you a phone call saying the Minister would like to see you. So you go and have your first meeting with a new Minister. When I walked in ... I'd never met Frank Blevins before, we were strangers in that sense. We'd probably seen each other but had never met. He was standing behind his desk and he had *The Advertiser* (that was the only thing on his desk). I walked in and he came out from behind the desk and held his hand out and said, 'Hello Jim. I recognise you by your photo'. My photo was on the front page with a bit of a story. I remember it took me back a little bit and I said 'Not one of my better ones I think!'. Anyway, he came around and we sat down with the coffee table. He obviously was a bit uptight and so was I. We chatted along for a while and he said, 'Look don't take this the wrong way', he said, 'What I

would like to know, I've heard that you might be pulling out'. He said, 'What I would like to know is if you are going to stay on'. He said, 'I've checked you out, both sides of Parliament and so don't take it [the wrong way] ... but I just want to know from my own point of view'. I said, 'Can I perhaps think about it and talk to my wife and come back to you say next Monday?'. This was I think Wednesday or Thursday. 'Come back to you on Monday'. He said, 'Yeah that's OK'. So we chatted on and talked a bit about agriculture and politics. He hadn't had much to do with agriculture but he'd kept his eye on it. His sense of humour was good because he said, 'You know about that ...', (first commenting on the papers) he said, 'Your photo is on page 1. [Bob Hogarth's] is on page 7. Mine on page 23 didn't seem to me to be quite right'. (both laugh) I suppose we had been going about three-quarters of an hour or something and I said to him, 'Minister. Previously in relation to my continuing or not or what have you, coming back on Monday. I think I can give you an answer now'. He said, 'What is it, OK what is it?'. I said, 'I would like to keep going. For exactly how long I'm not too sure but enough to settle things down and so on'. He said, 'Good. What I want is a smooth-running machine behind me. I'll look after the politics and you look after the management' and that was it. (laughs) He was the best minister that I knew that knew the balance and worked to that balance. He was last into the Cabinet. He was also the Minister responsible for Correctional Services, apart from Forestry as well (a separate portfolio). Within a very short time he was Minister Assisting the Treasurer and then he was Deputy Premier. I mean he had real ability. The first meeting I remember with industry, and I can't remember what industry it was, but he asked them to send him a letter listing the sorts of issues they wish to raise and all the requests they had, which is a good idea for a Minister to do so they just don't come in for a chat. It was the first meeting so we sat down and it was two or three of them who came in and he said, 'Nice to see you' and so on and so forth. He had the letter there. 'Thanks very much for the letter', he said. 'Now I'll run through this with you. Number one (da da da) – good. Number two (da da da da) – That's against policy so I can't support that. Number three, yes. Number four (da da da) – You'll need to convince me on that one. Come back to me on that one. Do a bit of homework and another opportunity will come up'. He went through them, bang, bang, bang and asked, 'Is there any other things you might want to just raise with me in a preliminary way?'. And there mouths were wide open! 'Well thanks very much. Lovely to see you. Cheerio! Jim will show you [out] ...' and off they went. [They said, 'You'd go and see Ted Chapman you never knew where you were. This guy, he had said 'Yes, yes, yes, no, maybe'. They really had something to work on! (laughs) Again I went fairly soon [afterwards] ... within a week or so I was at the South Australian Dairy Farmer's Association dinner. They were coming up to me saying, 'God, Frank Blevins, trade union and da da da'. I said to them, 'Don't you underestimate this guy. You just wait'. That was about three weeks after he'd started if I remember right. We had worked on a number of things and ... He was easy to brief, could get

on to the key things very quickly. Once he made his mind up, what he was running with – even if it was contentious – he'd take the slack; he wouldn't shove it on the Department. He was good.

He had a good reputation from other portfolios.

I talked to other heads of departments subsequently after I left and went elsewhere. A number of them I had continuing contact with that he'd been Minister to. We all agreed that this guy is really good. It's interesting you comment that's what others ...

I've heard it from a different level to the one you're describing.

Agriculture was really his first major portfolio ... He did say to me ... probably at my farewell. Anyway I said to him, 'Minister, Frank, these last two years have been the most enjoyable two years of the almost 10 years that I've had'. He grinned at me and he said, 'Yeah that's because I let you do what you wanted to do!'. (both laugh) Which wasn't true! I can tell you if he reckoned you were heading in the wrong direction he'd tell you pretty damn quickly.

He didn't come from an agricultural background so how much training up of the Minister did you have to do?

Not that much, not that much because you see you don't have to have an agricultural background to be a good agricultural minister. As long as you are sufficiently on the ball to understand what the issues are and what it's about. The decisions that the Minister makes aren't really closely associated with technical aspects. No, no trouble.

[10:55] So it's good in that sense when he says 'I'll handle the policy, politics and you handle the management'.

As a matter of fact I was actually ... still on the dairy IAC inquiry and the industry contacted the Minister (the Minister told me this) about how can a Director-General of Agriculture be in this inquiry, making recommendations to the Industries Assistance Commission when he's Director-General of Agriculture South Australia and is responsible for the dairy industry. Frank told me that he said, 'I think it's most appropriate. In any case, I don't have to take any notice of the recommendations. (both laugh) That's up to government. This is advice coming forward. We'll make our mind up about it'.

He was pretty astute.

We always get this sort of advice. That's right. He wouldn't run it down. He'd say these are particular issues and things being raised that are relevant but [I'll] make [my] mind up.

[12.20] Was your working relationships with Blevins therefore much different to Chapman and Chatterton in terms of meetings and going out on tours?

Yes, it was very ... we were out around the traps together as required. I had an arrangement with him that if any issue that might get into the media, any problem or agricultural issue that was just likely to erupt or something like that, to ring him any time, which I did a few times.

He'd just ask one or two questions and I'd explain what we were doing. He wouldn't say much: 'OK thanks, Jim'. I'd see him on the media the next day, absolutely full bottle (laughs). Right on top of it. It was the ideal relationship I felt. He wasn't a guy to trifle with though. You would have to play it [straight] ... Well you play it straight anyway ... but he's the sort of guy that if you [tried] playing funny buggers he'd know very rapidly. He was very astute. He wasn't such a powerful trade union guy without being pretty astute! (laughs)

You mentioned earlier, the advisors and the press secretary and so on that Chatterton had. Did that follow through with Chapman and Blevins?

No way near to the same level. He had one research assistant on his personal staff but he also put a [departmental] arrangement in place, or agreed to put an arrangement in place. I think it was with him first, I don't think I instituted it with Ted Chapman. Some of the up-and-coming young officers in the Department [were] put in the Minister's Office as Departmental Liaison Officer for six months to 12 months as training for these young guys who had the potential to go up in the senior ranks. And some of them [are there] now.

That sort of thing was happening in other departments too I think.

It wasn't an original idea. The Chattertons, they had their personal assistants and they had their methods on a personal basis. They didn't really see that as being a way of interacting with the Department.

What about with Chapman? Did he have advisors?

No. [No specialist advisers apart from the Secretary to the Minister and a Press Officer.]

Not really?

Not much at all. I think it might have been during the Chapman time that I introduced this to get a little bit closer access to somebody in the Department.

We can follow that through.

I've got a feeling it might have been introduced then and we carried it through with Frank Blevins. So that's the Ministers. They were all very different.

[16:00] Well you outlasted Blevins, or did Blevins outlast you?

Blevins outlasted me. What happened was that I did it very much in conjunction with him. He knew [my plans] exactly. I stayed in office for another two years. I resigned in September 1985. He came in April of 1983 so it was two and a bit years. That was roughly two months, two or three months into my tenth year. That was twice as long as I intended, longer than I really intended to stay [as departmental head when I first took the job in 1976].

It was rather interesting what I did in terms of my future and the Minister was fully conversant with what I was trying to do. I looked around and let it be known quietly in various places of

[my interest in] other jobs. At one stage there was a suggestion that the Bannon Government set up something they called SA International which was going to build on Sagric International into a bigger operation. That was being floated around and I wasn't terribly keen on that. In fact, I thought it was inappropriate for me to move into that anyway. The government decided not to pursue that any further. At one stage I had an offer from the Victorian government. I would have been appointed but John Bannon wasn't prepared to [let me go to Victoria]. Because what I was looking for was resigning from Director-General of Agriculture but staying within the South Australian Public Service. Taking leave of absence for a period to get out from under my successor and so on but having the capacity to come back into the South Australian Public Service. John Bannon wasn't prepared to release me to another State but he was prepared to release me to the Commonwealth. One of the offers I had was as a full-time Commissioner to the Industries Commission. I also had a particularly attractive offer on the table from the Australian Development Assistance Bureau.

All in all, I decided to go down the route of the full-time commissioner with the Industries Commission in Canberra. We kept the house here and Wendy and I left the kids. They reckon that was the wrong way around! (both laugh) So that was that. I took three years leave of absence then came back in '88. I didn't have any specific job but I was on staff and salary and I would have had an office and what have you. Basically I [then] decided I was going to go back consulting again. That's history.

So it was leave of absence to go to Canberra?

Leave of absence. Then I was given ... Sorry, I had two lots of leave of absence actually. Leave of absence from the South Australian government to be Commissioner for the Industries Commission and then I got leave of absence from the Industries Commission to be the Royal Commissioner. I did the Royal Commission into grain storage, handling and transport in Australia from '86 through to '88! So I worked my way back again [to Adelaide].

We might be able to pick up those threads another time.

That's not a direct relationship to the Department of Agriculture.

But more in terms of agricultural matters generally.

I was doing inquiries and consultancies and so on. Some for South Australian government, some for the Commonwealth. I probably finished up working a fair bit overall for the Commonwealth [and] Commonwealth agencies in that last period from my mid 50s until now.

Would you have been interested in heading up another department in South Australia?

What was happening at that time (and this is what's happened to, maybe to the detriment of the Public Service) was that they were working towards what I would call administrators/managers across departments. I'm sure if I hung around I would have got an offer. I would have either got

a retrenchment (laughs) or I would have got an offer for another department! There wasn't really any department I particularly [liked]. My first love was agriculture and fisheries and water and natural resources and that sort of thing. Really, I might have been offered Community Welfare or Correctional Services or God knows. Although I'd like to think I was a reasonable manager/administrator when required to be, that's not really my first love. I would have had to forsake the whole area that I was very happy with.

Just coming back to your decision to take leave and to step down as DG.

Well a lot of them thought I was crazy.

Well I was going to say, 'Why?'. You got on well with the Minister, you survived all this rocky road. A lot of people did say to me 'Why, why?'. But I said, 'I don't believe you should stay in these positions for much longer than frankly seven years'. I said, 'I've got, hopefully, another career in front of me and I don't want to leave it too long in any case'. In your 50s, early 50s to 55 you're still seen as having some capacity to have another big one.

You're not just riding out your time, you're doing something.

I would just be seeing my time out to go through to 60 and retire ... No way! (laughs)

Given your passion for agriculture in particular ...

Well, it would have betrayed all that I had stood for. (both laugh)

[23:57] It's interesting that the seven year sort of time frame, the five to seven years you had in mind, coincides coming in with pretty well when Chatterton came back the second time.

Yeah that's right.

It must have been very tempting to actually resign then. You say you had ideas and you thought about it ... You must have been pretty close.

I was close, but I was close because of the pressure on not only myself but on my family and I thought well I'm still relatively young, I can't let this wear me down. But, underneath it all, what I considered was the unfairness and the injustice of it and what I tried to do and the changes and the upsets that I battled my way through with the Department. I didn't want to leave them so vulnerable. That's why I wanted to stay for a couple of years to settle things down and get through that so that they weren't vulnerable. If I had gone and Brian Chatterton had've kept going, God knows what would have happened to the Department at that stage. That's how I felt anyway. I would have felt that I was like a rat leaving a sinking ship in a sense. Not quite like that but I wouldn't have felt happy about it at all. Whereas when I did leave I felt happy about it.

[25:40] I can understand that. Did you have a chance to have a say in who might follow you as DG.

Yes, but I never believed that [one should take a position]. You asked me whether I had a chance. There were two obvious guys who were being groomed in a sense. One was John

Radcliffe and the other was Pat Harvey. John was the Director of Policy and Planning, and Pat Harvey was my Deputy. Both of them very capable. Different but very capable. I wouldn't have gone on any selection panel as a matter of principle but Frank asked me who would I suggest. I told him that I was not prepared to give my view on either of them. I said, 'They're both very competent in their own way and there was no way I was going to favour one against the other'. He said, 'OK', and he picked John. He had his reasons for picking John – that's what he did.

I was just interested in whether you'd get involved in that process.

Interestingly enough, I did get involved in the process of picking the new Director of Fisheries when Fisheries was taken away. I felt that was alright because the Fisheries was going to be a separate department. I've been on selection panels for heads of departments and others subsequently anyway. This was a selection panel for what had been my Department. It was going to continue as that entity. The Fisheries one was a little bit different. I wasn't going to have anything to do with Fisheries.

In this instance you've got a natural successor and you've got a deputy who even up to this time (mid '80s) you would assume that the deputy is going to become the head. It wouldn't happen now necessarily.

By then it was more open than that ... John was at the next level down. Three or four at that level – Director, Regions; Director, Animal Industry; Director, Plant Industry; and Director, Policy and Planning; the Deputy; and myself. Now of that group, John Radcliffe was the clear [choice]. He had a big advantage John, in the sense that John had been prior to being ... I created the position of Director, Policy and Planning for John. He had been prior to that ... When he first came into the scene, I think I mentioned I was getting the process going of reviewing the research area, the research management area. John came in and I created a new position – Principle Officer, Research Management. He had been in charge of dairy research out at Northfield. He came into that position, that would have been in the late '70s. Then Viv Lohmeyer who was the Executive Officer and the one who went with me to support me at Standing Committee on Agriculture and then doubled up into the Ministerial meetings, Viv retired. I appointed John to that position. He effectively took over that role. Subsequently, he got involved in our planning and strategic planning which we were implementing actually during Ted Chapman's period believe it or not. Chatterton was a bit critical about all that, which I found rather interesting. So we created Director, Policy and Planning. That meant he went with me to Standing Committees and interacted with the Minister at the time. So he had a closer interaction [with the Ministers] on a personal basis by virtue of his position than Pat Harvey did as Deputy.

That's the sort of thing I'll ask Frank Blevins or John Radcliffe when I get to talk to them! (laughs)

I put a very neutral position on that. This is a bit of an aside but one of the problems in being head of department and having those jobs, that's why I think you've got to think in terms of about seven years. You've got to stay long enough to allow the churning that you might have to do settle down. So many guys come into the system now and they're like hatchet men. They go in there and they wield the broadsword all over the place and within two years or something they've gone on to something else. So there's no responsibility for what they've done. No dealing with the problems that have arisen from what they've done. No personal dealing or personal responsibility even for those jobs. To me, you've got to stay long enough to take on the chin some of the problems that arise and deal with them and so on. That means that it's got to be at least five years if you've gone through any significant change – like regionalisation was. So five to seven ... From my point of view, [when] I came in [first] I really had no baggage. But [over time] you form personal relationships, and in many cases close personal relationships, with people that you're dealing with a fair bit. You get into a position where you've got to make some hard decisions sometimes. You get to a point where a balance between friendship and hard-nosed decision-making gets a bit hard to strike. That's another reason why you got to leave – when you get too much personal baggage, personal ...

[33:23] End of Tape 4, Side A
Side B, Tape 4 – 15 January 2004

[0:05] ... you were involved with and so on. Since then I've had a bit of a look at Brian Chatterton's story about his life and times, including his role as Minister. I thought we might kick off today with one aspect of his book where he talks a little bit about you without mentioning you by name, which is in itself curious, on page 220 he's got a paragraph about the decline of the Economics and Marketing Branch after he had lost office as Minister. I just wondered if you might be able to give your perspective on that little tale there.

Yes. There was an element of timing to do with it. That was fairly well through the regionalisation program. In fact, if my memory is correct, probably three regions had been established at that time. One of the problems of Economics and Marketing is its role as a separate unit, entirely as a separate unit, was the integration, the mutual cooperation and understanding between the regional people and the industry people and the Economics and Marketing people. When you have a separate unit quite often there's a problem of communication there. One of the main reasons why a number of economists were transferred out of Economics and Marketing, was to go to regions so that there was some regional economics expertise available to the new chiefs of regions.

In the nature of what we expected the regions to do and what responsibilities we accepted them to take, I considered it was important that [the regions] had access to this discipline and expertise, rather than have it all on whatever floor it was that the government was tenant. Minister Chatterton made the comment that I did it to please the marketing boards. The fact

was that I couldn't have cared less about the marketing boards. My general attitude stands on record in relation to that. I had no reason at all why I wished to do that!

The other point that the Minister made was that I did it to (using my term) curry favour with the new Minister. The new Minister wouldn't have had any views, as I remember, on that particular issue. That was quite irrelevant. Never-the-less, that's the way Minister Chatterton saw it! There was in my view a reasonable and sensible rationale of trying to get better integration with the rest of the Department and giving the industry people and the regional people greater and easier access to economics expertise.

Had the problems with the marketing side been long standing?

We were in the process, this is late '70s and early '80s, of trying to reform of marketing arrangements nationally actually. In fact, [with] my involvement with the Industries Assistance Commission as an Associate Commissioner (my subsequent involvement) and I was also a member of what was called the Balderstone Committee (which was a national review of agriculture and policy) in 1982, and this was the time of the Liberal Tonkin Government, my position on that was definitely to encourage further reform and in some cases removal of marketing boards as such. Threw the system up. (laughs) So I had absolutely no reason to curry favour with marketing boards as such!

Was it a big group?

Not a very big group. I can't remember exact numbers. There might have been maybe 15 or something, 10 to 15. I can't remember posting any specifically to industry groups, industry organisations, industry parts of the Department but I certainly did to regions. It wouldn't have affected that many ... there was still quite a reasonable core of economists left in the system.

Did they remain as ...

I didn't abolish the Economics Branch as such.

So they remained as a ...

There was still a core, a central core of economists, yes.

Thank you for your comments on that.

I might add just a rider to that is that the central core of economists were primarily focused as what we rightly call policy economists whereas the economists say that went out to the regions were focussing perhaps somewhat not only on policy and perhaps aspects of marketing but also on farm management economics.

Thanks for that Jim. Didn't want to go through the former Minister's book point by point but that was a useful follow-on from last week's session. As I said at the start, it's curious that he doesn't mention you by name.

I don't think he may have mentioned many names at all in the book as I remember.

That wasn't his style when he was Minister?

No I don't think so. I think he chose to do it this way in his book for some reason or the other.

Maybe he thought he might have been vulnerable! (both laugh)

Protective perhaps? Not just with him, but to start with him, we were talking about relations with Ministers last week but were you on first name basis and friendly cordial situations, apart from the friction that you did talk about.

I mean the way it operated as head of the Department is the way I probably operated. I mean it was fairly general. You called the Minister, 'Minister' when you were in the presence of other people and so on but in most cases you'd be on first name terms when you're together, when you're by yourselves or in an environment where being called Minister isn't of any great significance. [This was the usual approach by Directors.]

Across the range of ministers did you see each other on social occasions? Obviously conference dinners or something like that. Formal dinners. Were there any less formal sort of ...

Yes. Occasionally we went out to dinner. I had dinner at the Chatterton's place in Adelaide. My wife and I were guests at their wedding. That wasn't a big wedding. It was pretty small. We went out to dinner in restaurants in Adelaide a few times. The same with Ted Chapman. I dined occasionally with he and his wife. I didn't go overseas with Brian Chatterton but I went overseas with Ted Chapman and his wife. Frank Blevins – yes, once or twice I think. Not quite on the same level as either Chatterton and Chapman but certainly.

Were they primarily social sorts of occasions or did you use them for you know background briefings and informal ...

Social occasions generally. They're not particularly ... not when you've got your wives there! (both laugh) You don't want to talk too much about the important things of the day.

But these would have been a handful of occasions rather than ...

I didn't make a big thing of it. It was quite right and proper to do it a bit but not too much because the reality is that ministers are ministers. They're politicians and you're in a different sort of situation. There should be some limits as to how close you get on a personal basis.

[9:25] Going further down the chain, how did that work with the members of your staff? Did you socialise much?

As head of the Department?

Yes.

Yes. We used to have dinners as a whole [Executive Management] group with our wives. I, in fact, insisted that the wives be present. I've had them [at home for] barbecues, so there was a reasonable amount of socialising yes.

What about with the staff more generally? Christmas function or social ...

There was a Social Club, social functions, Social Club functions. My wife [and I] used to make a point of going to as many as those as possible. There was always ... fairly big Christmas parties through the system the last day before Christmas or so. I happened to work my way around the parties! (laughs)

Would the Minister come along to those Christmas do's?

He generally had one on his floor but he wouldn't necessarily go through the whole system as I did. I generally did Grenfell Centre. We had several floors in those days, six or seven floors or something like that. The other directors, for instance the ones in the animal area say Pat Harvey in charge of the animal area, would make sure he went out to some of the animal places that were outside the Grenfell Centre. The same with plants. The Director of Plant Industry did the same thing. Peter Trumble had his little trick that he used to go around to a few places. He used to go out and see the fruit fly people. We each took a bit of responsibility to go out during that particular period and make sure we were interacting with as much as the Department as possible. I think I did mention to you that I used to make a point of going around to each of the regions by myself and there was always a social aspect to that too. We used to get into the pub afterwards, you know that sort of thing.

And relations with staff generally? I asked about you and the Minister, but were you on a first name basis with people?

Yeah.

That informality, in a sense, had crept in with ...

I believed I was reasonably informal. One thing I wanted to make sure of was that officers got proper recognition of their expertise and contribution. There's two ways that that initially manifested itself. One was that I found when the Minister asked for a report on something, a report had been prepared by the section or branch where the expertise was and it had come through to the Director. What was happening was that that report was then rewritten in some way and then it went forward under the signature of the Director. I changed that system that the report went forward with a little covering note from the Director-General or Director maybe offering a comment or two but it was clearly the report of the person who wrote it. I wanted to make sure that the person who did, and the area from whence it came, got proper recognition.

[13:35] The other thing was in the press releases. I found that the Director was making press releases about areas that he absolutely knew nothing about so I changed that. I tried to not to be heavy handed on press releases but there needed to be a little bit of care, I suppose you could say, that as far as possible the officer who knew all about it was named in it and the contact was in fact with that officer for further information and that sort of thing. These are only little things, but I tried to do that and I think I did do it.

I think they are important things though in terms of your staff and staff morale. I mean the modern situation now is there'd be a media or press officer in the organisation and everything goes to that section and the staff are told not to speak with the media.

I didn't find that any real problems arose. It did seem to work pretty well and the staff accepted the overall responsibility that went with that. So, as far as I know, my relationships with staff were quite good. I never held any grudges. There were some occasions, of course, when you had to be pretty hard with people that had stepped out of line. There were a few that I had to read the Riot Act to and some of them I suggested resign and they did so. Some changes I had to make when trouble erupted in certain areas, like it does always in organisations, and I lost a couple of friends over things I felt I had to do for the organisation. Fortunately, there weren't too many of those situations.

Every organisation has, whether it be small or large. There's always a ...

When you run into trouble within organisations, in particular private organisations, it's very difficult to sort out and apportion blame and responsibility for problems that arise and say, 'Oh well, 'A' is all in the right and 'B' is in the wrong and therefore if we just get rid of 'B' and everything should be right'. I found that unfortunately it's a lot more complicated than that. Quite often one inevitably has to get rid of both 'A' and 'B'. Unfortunately that's been pretty tough sometimes. I've had to do that a few times.

Did you have cases of people appealing those sorts of decisions? Going off to the Public Service Board or ...?

No. When I had problems like that actually I used to, before I really moved, I kept both the Public Service Board and the Public Service Association up with what was happening and kept them up with the steps that I was taking so that when it came to crunch time they pretty much knew what was going to happen and why and it didn't come out of the blue. So I have no recollection of having any appeal or any sort of fall out.

Do you recall any cases of someone's poor behaviour or poor work, whatever would be entrenched in the system? They were repeat offenders so to speak, before you took action?

There was a few. One other principle that I tried to get right through the Department was that I wanted to hear about problems with individuals or problems more broadly within the organisation as early as possible because my principle was that all big problems actually start as small problems and it's much better to deal with them when they're small. So I tried to promulgate that to all the managers and if they had a problem like that to bring it up and we'd sit down and try to sort out how to handle it.

Some of it was cases where somebody outside might have seen [something]. I remember there was a guy driving around Sundays with his government plate and so on. He had his wife with him etc., etc. It was a complaint from the public came in. So I asked if it had to be investigated.

It turned out the guy was a fruit fly chap and he was working on Sunday. He was going around inspecting the fruit fly traps and he just happened to be taking his wife with him. That's pretty rough! I said, 'That's it'. This explanation went back to the person and I chose not to go any further. I just said I thought that he was effectively doing it outside his normal hours and he was doing important tasks and I thought it was good that he took his wife with him! End of story.

But then there were some where word came out that there was slacking going on and so and so was spending a lot of time in the pub etc., etc. Again I'd say, 'Right-oh, I'd like a report on it. Get me a story on that'. I'd have a talk to the manager and then say, 'Right-oh, well we'll put a strategy in place and have a talk to him and say "We're aware what's going on and that you better pull your socks up and we're going to review the situation perhaps in a month's time. This is what we expect you to do. This is what we expect you not to do". We notified the Public Service Association that we're having a bit of a problem out there, we might be able to resolve it but we might not be able to and this is what we've got in place and so on and so forth. You work through that and ultimately some of us have to take action.

Those are the things you've got to do occasionally. But, on the other hand, if you pick up those and you take action and it's deemed to be processes proper and you've made the hard decisions when you've had to, the staff in an organisation respect that. I tried to do that. You can't pass judgement about how you're seen. You can think you're the greatest thing since sliced bread (laughs) but other people wouldn't necessarily agree!

One of the other principles that I always worked to is ... In fact, we've had this saying stuck up on our wall for some time – 'Don't fix the blame, fix the problem'. In other words, when a problem arises and there's been a bit of a blow up and in the media publicly and politically, the first thing to do is to fix the problem and then sit down with the people concerned and just work your way through as to how it happened and what you need to do to try and minimise the chance of it happening again rather than blowing up and blaming somebody straight away etc., etc. which never gets you anywhere. So that's the way I tried to operate. I didn't blow my top.

Did you have trouble shooters in the organisation? People that could let you know, keep their finger on the pulse?

I wouldn't call that trouble shooting. I like the information flows in terms of where the problems were rather. The Executive Directors used to keep their eyes out. By and large, I found out when there [were] problems. I found out reasonably quickly. I had at director level a couple of directors in particular that were pretty good at fixing things up depending on the nature. One was Barry Greer who had a very good personal interactive communication style and that was very suitable under certain circumstance. The other was Pat Harvey who if you needed a tough guy to do the job he would do it very effectively! (laughs) So you knew your

troops and you picked your players for the circumstances. We had to do one of those in the overseas area: perhaps I might mention that if I get on to overseas.

[24:20] Actually, we've got a little bit on to the managerial side. Perhaps we can pursue that theme for a while.

If you wish to pursue that a bit further or have any other questions on that. One of the other things that became fairly obvious through the Department was that one of the important criterion for being appointed to senior positions was your managerial capabilities which included communication and personal relations and all the package of managerial abilities and not just seniority and scientific or formal qualifications. So we had a Management Services Section and one of the important things we got going were training programs, in particular management. We sent people away for management training; some of them went to Mount Eliza and to other management training exercises. [We] also held internal management ones as well.

The Mount Eliza course, given that the Department had been on that earlier in the '60s and before you came in, so you were just maintaining that connection?

I maintained that but I think in many cases they were just going through the motions. The point I'm trying to make is that it became very clear in our appointments in the way we went [about] appointing people that not only management training and what they've done and experienced in management training but also their demonstrated ability as managers and so on are taken strongly into account. This included an understanding of objectives and outcomes and resources available and so on. That was very important because it became pretty clear by the end of the '70s that resources were decreasing and the expansionary phase was over well and truly. In fact, we went into a strategic planning. The Tonkin Government introduced program planning right across the whole Public Service and so this whole issue of allocation of resources, achievement of objectives and so on were right to the fore. So you needed your managers at middle level and pretty well right through to be focused in on that and to fully understand that there had to be hard decisions made. If there needed to be some down-sizing in certain areas or rearrangement of expertise in relation to changed roles and objectives then they had to be capable of coping with that. So this is a far removal from the expansion days and the production science type of approach within the organisation, we're into the managerial era.

Did you find you had to learn a 'new language' to some extent?

To some extent yes. You're still getting the same principles ... there but the language keeps changing! (laughs) It's all the same thing, different names.

Well you're dealing with something that doesn't change and that's humans! (both laugh)

Yes. So, also the change took place at that time of the way we presented the Department's operations in the Estimates Committee from line budget to program budgeting, when you

appeared with the Minister. That's the only occasion really that I finished up with headaches regularly after the sessions in the Parliament's Estimate Committee. One of the most frustrating exercises I've ever struck. You put so much effort into developing your program and planning so that everything the Department does is within terms of programs and projects and outcomes and objectives. All the parliamentarians had a great deal of difficulty in coping with what this really meant and they kept falling back on answering line budget questions. (laughs)

You're talking here about the early '80s with the Tonkin Government?

The Tonkin Government introduced it. In fact, South Australia ... my understanding is that the South Australian public sector, because we had people come over from Victoria and New South Wales to talk to us, the Department of Agriculture was one of the departments that was up in the front of doing that. John Radcliffe was quite involved in all that of course. As I said, he became the Policy and Planning Director but he was involved a lot of that in the early '80s.

Early on when you started, were you flying by the seat of your pants in this management stuff?

Yes, yes. I'd never ... I mean I'd been involved in management in various ways, both at farm level but also in terms of my own business, consulting business, but never been involved, certainly at that level in management at the departmental level. The Department of Agriculture in those days was one of the ... not the biggest department group but next level, nowhere near as big as say E&WS or perhaps Highways and so on because they had a lot of employees doing [construction] anyway but it was one of the reasonable sized departments.

[31:00] You were coming in and working with people who had been entrenched ... they had been in the system for a while. Some of them had been there since the '50s and had gone up the ranks.

In a way it was an advantage, certainly an advantage coming in. I mean I'd been out in the private sector for 13 or 14 years. I left the Victorian Department of Agriculture and I was out in a regional situation in those days in '63. So what we're talking about is '76 so 13 or 14 years. I was certainly not imbued with the public service system. I think that was a great advantage.

Once you found your feet in the Department, were there things that you wanted to introduce and change using that different perspective?

Some of them I've already discussed. There were a lot of things going on in the Department that might have been put in place 30 years ago and the rationale for having them in place now was very questionable. So there was a fair bit of that going on, trying to tidy up what was going on. [Still recording] certain things which were recorded for a good reason 30 years ago but for some reason or other just sort of continued.

But you've got that big picture stuff of regionalisation that's happening when you're in the chair and so on, so there's a lot of change.

A lot of change going on. I found it absolutely fascinating and quite challenging but I think the timing was just so right in terms of changes that were occurring from my point of view and hopefully from the Department's point of view at that time.

What sort of training did you go through? I asked before what the learning ... flying by the seat of your pants, learning on the job. Did you go off and ...

I didn't have time at that stage to head off. I did go later on in the early '80s.

**[33.32] End of Tape 4, Side B
Tape 5, Side A – 15 January 2004**

[0:15] You went off to America, you just ...

That was in '83 or '84.

What was the name of the place you went to?

Aspen Institute. It was high-level executive training. The guys were vice-presidents of some of the big American companies. There was the ex-chief of the general staff from Israel. It was international. I was the only Australian there. It was really great.

Intense sort of ...?

Yes, it was about 10 days of intense elements. There was some discussion of the big issues. I [also] did a few, I can't remember the details, short-course management things. Even some of my own officers were doing some of the courses we set up. Might be involved in those, but hopefully I'd say most of it was reading and talking to people that have a fair bit of expertise and learning by doing it. The point was, I was so flat out that I really didn't have much time to build up a lot of intellectual capital in management theory and so on and so forth. I was actually right in the middle of doing it.

When doing it, did you have assistance from people like the Public Service Commissioner or ...?

Various Public Service people got involved with various things we were doing, of course. The changes and the organisational changes basically had to be negotiated and approved with the Public Service Board. The rationale behind that, all appointments and the rationale behind appointments had to be negotiated with the Public Service Board. We had as, I said, our own Management Services Unit and some pretty good people in that so there was a lot of management input going into the system. I was flat out on so much else that I think I did it by absorption!

The Management Services Unit – is that what we now call human resources or the old personnel section or are they separate?

It had those functions.

But did it have the personnel function as well in it?

The personnel as I remember, assessment of performance, training in management systems and so on. That's basically it, as I remember, so human resources probably covers it now.

As they now call it.

There was always conflict about how much departments should have their own management services people and how much of the processes should be done within departments and how much should be done within the Public Service Board. There was that continuous [issue]. (Both laugh)

[3.49] You can't have too many empires! (Both laugh) Did you liaise on these sorts of issues of managerial matters? Did you liaise with Directors, Director-Generals from other departments?

Yes. That was one of the good things about the size of the public sector in South Australia is that it was possible to [get to know] a few of your counterparts, not only through being associated with them in interdepartmental committee situations but the chairman of the board at the time, David Mercer, used to hold luncheons and have a guest speaker reasonably regularly so you would meet them at that level. There were obviously ones that you had a lot of interaction with, just by the nature of the boundary issues. I had what I would consider a very close and successful relationship with Keith Lewis who was head of E&WS. During my period Keith – they called him the Silver Fox, he was a very smooth operator was Keith. I went overseas with him. I think I mentioned that with Peter Arnold, the Minister of Water Resources in the Tonkin Government, we went overseas together. E&WS up until a year or two say before then it had nothing to do with the irrigation side, that was handled by the old Lands Department. Then I think the Lands Department was abolished, the responsibility of not only urban water and sewerage and so on which was the E&WS, they also picked up the responsibility of looking after the government irrigation districts in the Riverland and so on. So the issue of respective responsibility needed to be sorted out really between E&WS and the Department of Agriculture. Keith and I had negotiated this quite amicably in that anything up to the farm boundary was primarily their responsibility and anything that happened on the farms and so on was Department of Agriculture responsibility. That might seem a simple and sensible boundary, but nevertheless there were some things that needed to be sorted out within that context. We had a very close personal and professional relationship.

I knew quite a few of the others quite well that were in that general area because of the membership of heads of departments on the Water Resources Council. That picked up Department of Health, Department of Environment, Department of Local Government; so there were quite a few department heads in that group. We met reasonably regularly. It was a very good council. It worked very effectively and so I got to know them quite well through that mechanism as well as others.

So there was a good opportunity for interaction on a personal level between heads of department. That's a very important thing because you'd find sometimes the officers down the line tend to flex their muscles a bit on territorial issues and so on. They're looking after the Department's interests etc., etc. It's important for heads of departments to be able on a personal basis say, 'Hey, we've got a bit of a problem' and get on the phone or 'Let's go and have lunch and sort it out'. You've got to have that sort of relationship otherwise you can get [some] things [not working] very well at all. So yes that was an important part of the exercise.

[8.03] Talking about the people in your organisation. How did they relate to some of the managerial changes that were being imposed by government or being introduced by you? Upper echelon, lower level?

Some of them didn't particularly, quite a few perhaps initially, like the regionalisation idea because it did interfere with the hierarchical ladder system of promotions and career pathways. So, in a sense, putting regions in cut across the ambitions of some players in the Department. That wasn't terribly popular[, especially with the] industry-orientated people – that's how the Department basically had been structured. I was changing it to a regional base with some industry but there was a strong regional operation. In a sense it was shifting from single-industry research and extension to a regional delivered service which is delivered more within a [farm management] framework. That was the purpose of the exercise, recognising that in most cases farms actually had a mix of so-called industries or enterprises. Some of them were single enterprise, like some of the horticultural ones were single enterprise – although it depends on what you call an enterprise, growing oranges and growing grapes and if you ended up on the same property you had two enterprises and two industries! One of the thrusts of regionalisation was actually to get a better appreciation of managerial and marketing issues within the context of a real farm business as distinct from just providing a technical, production-focus industry-type service. The industry-focused people and some of the technical and science-based people didn't really [like it]. That's the way it had been and this was a different way of delivering departmental services. It wasn't accepted with wide-open arms initially and that's why it took so long to get it [started]. As I said, it was about 18 months of to-ing and fro-ing and discussions before it got there.

There's that natural human resistance to change

Oh yeah.

But, on the other hand, some people would see you as the evil agent of change so to speak and other people would see you as this is all good, positive stuff.

Well there were great opportunities open for a lot of officers. It allowed them actually to get through faster, the good ones. It shook the system up in the sense that there was greater

opportunity for good young ones to get through faster than they otherwise would into senior positions. That was the idea anyway.

It leads to the question, by and large did they grab those opportunities? Do you think it was successful?

By and large. [But] I know that in some cases for them to progress they would have had to go to the region and they weren't prepared to do that for personal reasons and that upset their run. That was not desirable but that's inevitably the outcome of these types of changes. But after a few years when it was realised that that's the way we were going, that was generally accepted.

[12.31] Well one of the purposes of change is, not just change for change's sake but to improve things and to do things better or to do things more efficiently and all those sorts of reasons. That probably leads on to one of the other subjects we were going to look at today – the rationale for the Public Service. What's the rationale for the Department? The notion of Public Service and where the Department of Agriculture fitted in that. The role of the Department in the public service (using lower 'p' and lower 's' there). Would you like to make some comments on that area?

I mentioned earlier that in fact the whole role and rationale for the existence of the Department of Agriculture was asked of the Department in the early '70s by the Dunstan Government and that caused considerable stir and upset. The Department of Agriculture had by far the most efficient and effective extension service and presence in the rural areas. There's no doubt about that. Of course, the rationale in what I call the production era (the expansion of agriculture and so on that went on in the earlier years of Australia's economic development), the rationale for that and providing free advisory services to agriculture was based on the isolation, lack of communication and the need for technology transfer means through an extension service and so on. I won't go into the detail of that but the point was from about the '70s on that was changing. The Australian economy was changing. The Australian community was changing. It was clear that similar approaches to a certain extent were being taken across other industry type areas and real questions were arising in terms of what is the real role of government? What's the balance between public service sectors, on the one hand, and what can be done in the private sector. There's efficiency arguments associated with that, which most people are familiar with. There was also at that time, through the '70s, quite dramatic increase in the ... What will I call them? The transfer activities of government, significant expansion in welfare/social welfare and quite significant resource allocation moving in those directions in health, welfare and, to some extent, education. They were the real big ticket items and they were expanding quite rapidly. New departments were being formed. Departments of environment and so on. There was interesting reshaping going on during that period. Some of it was resources. Of the total public resources that were available, the allocations were shifting away from departments like Departments of Agriculture where you could argue that a lot of the benefit of the public expenditure in a Department of Agriculture was actually being captured by the private sector, both in research and extension in particular. It was necessary on the regulatory side perhaps for a fairly strong

rationale for public funding to go into some of the areas of regulation for the total public benefit.

So we were going through that period, late '70s, early '80s as I think I mentioned in terms of resources, reducing and removing, and getting into strategic planning and making sure that we were prioritising what we were doing and allocating resources in that direction, decreasing resources in [some areas and reallocating to other areas] and so on. All that was occurring in the early '80s. Of course, at that time the issue of ... [Some] services that we were providing were very focused on an area such that really the benefit of it was being completely captured by an industry. The 'user pays' principle started to be talked about. Of course, one of the reasons for the drive for 'user pay' was actually just to get a bit more budget money for finance! When you're losing through appropriation then if you can get some 'user pay' in certain areas, well you can maintain your employment and service in that area.

If the revenue comes back to the Department or whether ...

Yes. You would have to have appropriate arrangement that the revenue comes back to the Department while you were providing that service. Whether you fully charged or how you calculated a full charge was always an interesting question because if you were in fact a monopoly provider and you were coming from a Public Service framework, it was terribly difficult to cost those things out in any real resource or commercial-cost basis. Anyway, we went like a lot of departments into 'user pay'-type activities. Then I always reckoned (I suppose coming from an old consulting background) that sooner or later governments would realise there's a limit to how far they can go on 'user pay' before the question is asked, 'Should this service be provided by the public sector? Why can't it be provided by the private sector because it is likely that it will be more efficiently provided anyway out in the private sector, particularly if there was a little bit of competition in it, rather than monopoly provision'.

So then we subsequently had moved in to the real question of the role of government and what should be in the public sector and what should be in the private sector. Probably after my time we moved – it was starting late '80s and into the '90s – into this outsourcing [the] provider, the whole scene of trying to deliver some services from government, government-funded services, but actually contracting [the provision] by the private sector sometimes through some competitive tender basis. In a sense that's what we're in, still in, although there are certain services that the government had been providing and the government has virtually withdrawn from providing. This is provided, or allowed for, in the agriculture sector [by] the increase and provision of consultancy services which has significantly substituted for the old extension service. It's not the same service but both the provision of extension-type advisory services

from the private sector companies that are involved in providing inputs or providing services to the rural sector on the one hand and straight-out independent consultants providing specialised consultancy services on the other. That's expanded quite dramatically. So all of that has occurred. Some of it was occurring during my time. I was foreshadowing that it was going to occur [to an increasing extent], maybe because I still had an understanding of consultancy and had been through that process myself anyway.

[22:02] I was wondering how comfortable you would have felt about 'user pays' notions given that your background had differed from 'I'm a public servant providing a public service for the community'.

It was part of the political and public view. It wasn't just me talking about it. It was coming in as a more general type policy. Obviously, there were areas of the Department's services where it was deemed to be appropriate. So we started to move into some of those areas. It was quite clear as this progressed that the whole issue of provision of what part of the economy is going to be by public sector and what part of it was going to be private was obviously going to be an important issue.

[23:05] It's an ongoing issue in that we always have had in Australia this line between government and private and the crossover. Any study of public administration in Australia would show that.

Yes. It's a bit of a to and fro. I don't know. There's a real mix up at the moment. Some of these so called conservative Liberal type governments, you're always under the impression that they were for restricting the size of public sector and public expenditure on the one hand and the Labor governments that were expanding the public sector. There seemed to be a few Liberal-conservative governments that actually [went the other way]. Although our economy was expanding, so you've got to be careful of what one says here, but the level of public expenditure is still probably quite high. The difference, perhaps, is a lot of that expenditure is associated with buying services and contracts from the private sector. If you're looking at people who were employed you've probably got a significant shift in the public sector versus the private sector, a significant downsizing of the public sector, say in a Liberal-conservative type government. You get more of that intermediate picked up in public sector employment with the Labor government perhaps. I don't know. The thing is so complex at the moment that it's hard to know.

Well, at any rate, you've got international forces and so on.

International forces. Globalisation.

But if you look at the Ag. Department and you're thinking of the '50s and into the '60s well, you've got a Playford Liberal Government, Liberal-Country led government, in South Australia. You've got the Menzies Liberal-Country Party government in Canberra. So you've got national and State conservative governments and yet the Federal Government is putting money into extension services which the State can grab hold of and expand the Department and expand its role in Agriculture and so on.

That was actually policy and that was what we required: extension services were built up quite deliberately.

There is the '50s notion that this is for the community benefit.

The '50s and '60s balance of payments problem was seen as getting the agricultural sector really going well and adopting the latest technology and getting significant increases in productivity and [exports], to some extent, expansion was deemed to be the best ... strategy in relation to Australia's economic development at that time. I'm talking about the '50s and '60s. It started to change through the '70s. By the end of the '70s that's when ... I became South Australian ...

Were there any areas in the Department's operations that you thought were sacrosanct? 'User pays' didn't apply?

Yes. There obviously were at that time. Don't ask me the detail but we picked those that were the most obvious to move into some form of 'user pay'. This had to be negotiated pretty carefully. It wasn't that they were switching from no charge to a full charge situation. You moved through a partial situation.

[26.58] It's a progressive thing but I was just thinking there might be some things, cases where 'We can charge for this bulletin we used to give out, but information sheets for nothing and we're now going to charge 20 cents'.

Yes, but that's minor.

Yes. I was using a lower level example to say 'We're going to charge for this' but there might have been things where you said 'Look that is, in the modern language, that's a core activity of the Department and we just have to do it'. Testing services. Quarantine services. Anything of that type?

Of course, it's still important to [do these activities]. At the end of the day you've got to decide what is really the core activity that could only and should only be done by the public sector and by the people that are actually employed in the public sector. That's the real issue. There are other functions that could be performed by people in the private sector under contract to the government. The only argument for doing it that way is possibly an efficiency argument but the responsibility for the delivery [of] that service is deemed to be necessary in the public interest, even though it's not provided by the public service as such. Then there are services – again weighing up public benefit and private benefit – services that the Department is delivering where the benefit is substantially private. Those are the ones that we tried to identify as potential 'user pay' or [even] withdraw. Allow the private sector, create a vacuum and allow the private sector to move in. A lot of this had to be explained and negotiated with the farm organisations.

Were there any instances in your time where you decided to withdraw services?

I can't remember.

If you do we can add them later. I remember those times being 'user pays' coming in gradually.

We were mainly in the phase of introducing 'user pays' in certain areas gradually. The issue of withdrawing services was something that politically was pretty hard to negotiate. Obviously, withdrawing services would be easier to negotiate if you'd been in 'user pay' for some time and you had been increasing your 'user pay'. The circumstances you'd created where withdrawing would have been much easier. But withdrawing from a client service which was seen to be useful and important by industry – bang, withdrawing from it politically was unacceptable, just like that. So there had to be a transition process anyway.

One might have thought in some cases industry would have been happy to pick up on some of these things. They were better off without the government being involved. 'We'll run it'.

Industry were quite happy to get things that were working alright and governments providing if it's not costing them anything. That's a perfectly rational position. If things aren't being provided properly and appropriately as they would like it as an industry and there's something about public provision and constraints of the way it should be provided then what you say is a rationale for industry taking that position. In my experience most people don't mind if they get a good service provided for nothing. They don't seem to object to that.

That in one way comes back to those earlier notions of that's the role of government is to provide these things. This sort of discussion, Jim, on this whole concept actually puts a slightly different flavour to that Dunstan memo of the rationale for the Department. In one way, it's perhaps actually saying what is the core role of the Department?

Well part of the rationale was, of course, that the services were research and extension and the regulatory function was important. Research and extension was focused on getting as high a performance as possible out of the agriculture sector. Of course, one was able to argue from the structure of the economy of South Australia, that that actually was very significant from South Australia's point of view, even though they didn't like to admit it and it still is. You only need to see how things [tighten up] when there's a drought on. So that the agricultural sector in terms of its contribution to the gross domestic product of South Australia is quite significant. That argument was supported. We won through on that one. If this is appropriate, this gives us a bit of a linkage to the overseas work because it was also seen that the Department of Agriculture was the repository of a very marketable technology management system and technology in dry land farming which ...

[33:30] End of Side A, Tape 5
Tape 5, Side B – 15 January 2004

... Department was already involved in an international overseas project in Libya, ??? at El Marj. That had been in place for about 18 months. That had been put in place during Minister Casey's time, before Minister Chatterton's time. I think I also mentioned previously that the Waite Institute and some of the people at the Waite Institute had also been involved, and some

departmental people by the way had been involved, in activities in the Middle East and North Africa previously. Some of them had been gathering [plant] material and so on which was relevant to South Australia coming from those areas. So there was this project at El Marj in Libya and it was being handled within the Public Service framework. When I travelled overseas with Don Dunstan, I think it was '77 or '7?, I just can't quite remember – it might have been '78. I had the opportunity ... I went to Libya twice. I went to Libya with Don Dunstan. I came back subsequently. After we'd been to Algeria, I went back to Rome and then I came into Libya again because I wanted to have a good talk to [the project staff]. We had a few farmers as well as departmental people on the project and this was very interesting using experienced farmers in these projects. Actually, they were very good.

Are you meaning farmers locally or South Australian farmers?

Yes, South Australian farmers. There was obviously a real problem with [employment] terms and conditions and so on and so forth. I had quite a long, difficult session with them. We finished up pretty right but it became clear to me that really if we were going to operate in this overseas area we needed a commercial vehicle. So when I came back ... I decided I needed two things. One was a small unit, one person released initially, but an overseas project officer interacting with me to keep our finger on what was going on. Secondly, a commercial vehicle was going to be necessary. The opportunity came during '79. I broached this to Don Dunstan as I remember ... and the opportunity came in '79 when the government had a consortium of consultants of which AACM (Australian Agricultural Consultants and Management) were involved in Algeria, the Ksar Chellala Project, World Bank–Algerian Government [funded]. The negotiations had been going on and on and AACM were going to be the project managers. For some reason or other they got sick of it and pulled out. Then the word came through via the Minister, 'Would the Department of Agriculture take over the management of this project?'. I took the opportunity of saying, 'Yes, but we would want a commercial vehicle to do it properly a la previous discussions'. The upshot of that was the formation of what was initially called Salger Pty Ltd, which was under the *Companies Act*. I think I've been through some of this before.

[4:24] I don't think you mentioned that before though.

Salger, which is South Australia and Algeria, because that was the project, the initial project, which generated ... we decided to call it Salger Pty Ltd. This was set up as a company with a board and I became the chairman and managing director. Pat Harvey was one of the directors and the two shareholders were the Premier and the Minister of Agriculture at that time. We had somebody else, an outside senior public servant probably in Trade or the Department of Trade or whatever it was, Industry?, also on the board.

Now we [also] picked up the management of, the overview of the management of the Libyan project. We were also negotiating a range of projects in Jordan and Iraq. The upshot was that just before the government changed in '79 and the Tonkin Government came in, we publicly advertised a position for General Manager, Overseas Projects. We appointed Bob Hogarth to that. Now there's an interesting story that. He [was] a Lieutenant-Colonel. Economics degree. An interesting fellow and we were looking for real management input into this system because there's a lot of difficult management and logistic challenges in properly handling an overseas project as you'd probably appreciate. I was generally aware of this because in the consulting game I'd been involved [in a number of projects]. I worked in Thailand for 12 months [(Colombo Plan)] and I'd been involved in projects in Indonesia and that sort of thing. So I had a pretty good feel for what the problems were and what type of management inputs were necessary.

This did raise (because it was just before the government changed) a difficult situation with the Chattertons which might have flowed over into, and I'm fairly certain it did flow over into, relationships when the government changed and Ted Chapman came in. Bob Hogarth had been in charge of the last Australian [infantry] company in Vietnam. He had done two tours in Vietnam. He was one of the top infantry officers. Most unmilitary like in terms of personality! (laughs) He was obviously very good. [The Chattertons] interviewed Pat Harvey and I and Bob Hogarth. We had a session with Brian Chatterton and Lynne Chatterton. It was an extremely difficult session as you could imagine. That took place just before the election. We appointed Bob Hogarth and the government changed. Bob was a good manager and pulled the whole business together and we expanded the operation.

Now the Liberal Government when they came in (and I think I also mentioned this), really my understanding was that they were going to abolish the whole [overseas] business. Brian Chatterton didn't recognise that in his book but I had some very hard battles to fight to actually retain the overseas projects activity and Salger. [Subsequently,] we changed it to Sagric International Pty Ltd. We changed the structure of the board to bring in some private sector people. I had to work really hard at convincing the Liberal Government, the Tonkin Government, that this overseas project work, the transfer of this technology and working with these countries, was in fact building up commercial linkages. And it was, through our seed industry and through our machinery industries. There were, in fact, commercial benefits coming back to the South Australian economy through our activities and we were running it on a commercial basis. We were running it on a proper commercial basis through this organisation.

So that it could make money?

So that it didn't lose money. It, ideally, could make money. That eventually was accepted. There was also through the years a fair bit of work to convince industry, particularly the South Australian Farmers Federation or the United Farmers and Stockowners it might have been at that stage I can't remember, that this was a good thing because we were taking officers away [overseas]. Some of our district agronomists and some of our specialist people, we were taking them away from providing services to South Australia.

They were going overseas for ...

They were going overseas. Some of them were going overseas on secondment for maybe even two years. [Some] were managing the projects. Occasionally it would only be three months for a specialised input. But some of them were going overseas for a reasonable period. However, again I argued that this was to the overall benefit of the South Australian economy. Also, [the Department] came to an arrangement with Sagric International that we were generating enough income ... to pay for the salaries and so on of two agronomists that were fed back into the departmental system. So we did that and that helped allay these sorts of concerns.

[11:53] Was Sagric International always part of the Department?

No, it wasn't really part of the Department. It was a separate company.

But the money came back into it?

The money came back. Well the earnings from projects and so on went directly into Sagric International. It had an entirely separate accounting system. It had its own accounts. We fed money back into the Department to employ a couple of agronomists.

So Sagric paid?

Sagric paid back. One other important thing which I put in place, because I knew this was the only way it would work, is that we had to come to a reasonable arrangement with our own officers in particular and this applied over into the other public sector organisations and officers that we might have used – I'll talk about that a little bit later, the wily use of public sector resources. Just seconding them [was] inadequate. There needed to be an incentive provided because they were leaving their family. In some cases they were taking their families with them if they were going overseas to manage a project and were going to be away for say two years but if they were going for three months they were leaving the family behind. So we provided extra incentive, bonus if you like. Now we had trouble [with] AACM and I can understand that being an ex-consultant. AACM had been actually drawing upon departmental staff before I arrived. They were more or less getting them seconded across and just paying the Department marginal cost and, of course, charging them out at top consultancy rates. All that's good business, but I made it clear that this was not the way it was going to work in the future. If they wanted our resources they were going to have to pay a bit more than that let me put it bluntly.

[Break] We're away again.

I was talking about AACM, our relationship with AACM. It went through a pretty bad period. I'm pretty certain that AACM were working pretty hard on the Liberal Government when the government changed to see if they could buy the Sagric/Salger/Sagric International – see if they could buy it out. However, we to some extent got through that [problem] because we ultimately combined on a number of projects. Some of their key people did projects for Sagric International and Sagric International also drew resources across the other parts of the public sector because not only did we deal with agricultural projects when we started, we had at one stage projects in Iraq, Jordan, probably Libya and maybe Algeria all operating at some time together but on different time schedules.

We also moved into land administration and had land administration projects – one in Tunisia I remember and also into [Technical and Further] education in Indonesia. Sagric International developed the skills of project management. We put teams together of mixes between the public and private sector and we pulled the expertise from where it [was available], sometimes even interstate. We could have interstate people on some of our projects. So Sagric International became a overseas projects management organisation. That's what its real skill was. It set up its systems and logistical processes and management processes to support that. Obviously, that stood it in good stead in the future. But when I pulled out in '85 it had already [covered] a number of areas, not just agricultural projects. I was always a bit disappointed that what appeared to happen after I left was that the relationship with the Department of Agriculture broke down. I don't think John was particularly interested in the overseas project work, certainly not at the level I was.

[17:18] That's John Radcliffe?

That's John Radcliffe. I think the relationship broke down.

Did John replace you on the Sagric board?

I don't know quite what happened there. Pat Harvey ... I don't think John was particularly interested and Pat Harvey became chairman after me, not managing director but chairman. I'm not sure quite what happened to the structure subsequently. Bob Hogarth left and Glen Simpson took over. He was one of the project officers that came in [earlier]. He was very good and he's done very well.

We had to fight some battles during my period to retain [Sagric's] existence [and independence]. I can remember we decided in Iraq actually to use Fiat tractors. There was interaction between the premiers from Western Australia where Chamberlain tractors was based and 'Why weren't we using Chamberlain?' with our premier. Down it came to us and we

took the view very strongly that we, in any of our overseas projects, would use what we considered was the most cost-effective means of achieving what we were supposed to achieve, irrespective of where it came from. So we had that battle and we won that battle!

It almost sounds like an early globalisation battle.

We were contracted by the Iraqis to do the job and that was it. The thing about Fiat was that they already had a distribution system and maintenance system through Iraq at that stage. So there were good, sound reasons as to why we moved to Fiat. I've driven Fiat tractors before anyway and they were good tractors. I've also dealt [aspects of] with overseas projects within the context of the Chattertons previously when I was talking about Ministers. Getting good project managers on the ground was extremely difficult. We had a lot of trouble in the Algerian project. We had to change leaders a few times.

[20:00] Did you have trouble finding people locally?

Trying to find people in Australia even that were capable of managing the thing properly. We finished up [using] Glynn Webber, one of our own officers, who had done a certain amount of overseas project work and was very interested and took it over at one stage and that tended to stabilise things down a bit. He would be a guy ... that I don't know whether he's on your list ... You've probably spoken to Arthur Tideman a fair bit.

Yes.

Glynn Webber's pretty good too.

Glynn's on the list.

Because I ran into him actually at the supermarket last week and we were talking about it. I thought that he would be a good guy to have a talk to. Getting good people who are project managers is a real problem ... Sagric International developed a good relationship with ADAB at the time, now AusAid and became a very well-accepted contractor for ADAB and AusAid. That has developed into a fairly substantial part of our activities.

[21:23] Was South Australia the only State undertaking this sort of work?

No. Western Australia was doing some work and they set up an overseas project operation that didn't go too well and Victoria also did. Sagric International was by far the most successful of ... the government set-up type operation[s].

Were Victoria and Western Australia working in the same area, of the Mediterranean and the Middle East?

Western Australia was but Victoria were working wider. Western Australia and South Australia being the two Mediterranean climate-focused States. One of the problems was, if I remember correctly with the Western Australian one and to some extent the Victorian one, they were set up as statutory authorities. They ran into trouble. Let me put it another way. The company

arrangement in retrospect gave a degree of independence to Sagric International which allowed it to survive. It would have collapsed if it hadn't done the job properly, made big losses. In fact, if it made big losses that would have been it. It couldn't make big losses ... That model was better than the statutory authority model because if my memory is correct, the government interfered a bit too much in the statutory authority arrangement.

Under the set-up arrangement here with Sagric board, you've got yourself as chairman.
I was chairman.

Obviously, being a company it couldn't be a legislative arrangement. Was it some sort of constitutional requirement that the Ag. Department be represented on the board?

No, I don't believe there was any particular need for that. The government just decided to set up this company and I was appointed the first chairman and managing director and the members of the board were appointed and away we went. It was set up under the *Companies Act*. I'm not sure the exact way it was set up but governments can set up companies if they want.

I'm thinking if the government is setting up the company, I mean a statutory authority, you'd legislate to have ...

Oh, there's an Act. There's no Act associated with Sagric, sorry. Setting up a statutory authority has to be set up under an Act.

And the government could then impose its way by saying 'We've got to have the Director of Agriculture on the board'. It's a private company and that's just good politics in that sense. It's politic to have the Ag. Department on it.

Basically, the shareholders had to approve of the make-up of the board so through that mechanism they had control.

[24.55] Western Australian and Victoria didn't operate that way ...

That's [not to answer your] question, just giving you my view there. That was my impression of some of the problems. The relative independence of the company structure was an advantage.

At the other end, geographically speaking, in other countries. Were there other countries doing the same sort of work as SA and WA were doing? Was there American involvement or ...?

Yes, although the American involvement wasn't terribly strong through North Africa and the Middle East. In fact, it's fascinating thinking about the situation at the moment. The general attitude of countries in Middle East and North Africa to the Americans is very similar to what it is now. We had the big advantage, and we still have, of being a country that isn't seen as having any great [threat]. We're not big enough or ugly enough to have that much influence you could say, but we're seen as a country that's got the technology and the expertise and they were very happy to use our expertise. Not just in dryland farming by the way. Our irrigation technology which we worked out, I think I explained, [reflected] a lot of the Israeli developments. They

could get access to all that through us. We're much better at dryland agriculture in the Mediterranean environment than the Americans anyway. We were just as good, if not better than them, in irrigation and irrigation technology.

[26:45] A better example might have been France, another country, because of the French connection. The French connection back into Algeria and Tunisia. Yes. There was still that influence there but they had a different approach to agriculture than we had anyway. The European approach is somewhat different. Well anyway that's the overseas area.

[27:30] What sort of benefits came out of it for South Australia and, following on, for the Department? How did we benefit from it?

I don't know of any report which actually attempted to evaluate the benefits. Of course, in terms of the Middle East/North African activities, that went into a little bit of a black hole. After the Iraqi project had finished, I'm not quite sure after I left what happened, but our agricultural activities in proportion to what was being undertaken in other areas decreased appreciably, particularly when the nexus and close relationship between the Agriculture Department and Sagric International faded away substantially. But, obviously, there was a generation of revenue income coming in and Sagric International became a multimillion dollar operation reasonably rapidly. So there was revenue coming in quite significantly paying salaries and other elements. Exactly what the benefits were and how one would quantify them in relation to the economy as a whole through assistance and support of the commercial side (the industry input and so on), I'm not sure, I wouldn't like to pass comment on that. To the best of my knowledge there was no independent economic analysis done of the benefits from extra sales of seed, extra sales of farm machinery or irrigation equipment and so on. I don't know. I can't say. As far as the Department was concerned, I'd been a great believer that widening your expertise and experience is of great benefit. Certainly a lot of officers in the Department had those sorts of experiences. That's made them better in terms of better professionals, so there's grounds to say there's been benefits from that point of view. Operating in different cultures. Managing logistics into overseas countries. All of that is good stuff. That's wonderful experience that is much better than just sitting at home.

It's hard to quantify?

It's hard to quantify.

I suppose it will sound like a negative questions but did some people in the Department see this as a junket?

I don't think anybody saw it as a junket quite frankly! Certainly not being involved in the projects because they were pretty damned difficult. Under some circumstances you could almost say dangerous. In Iraq, for instance, even way back then in the early '80s, 20 years ago, we had to evacuate the women and children from the project up near Erbil in the Kurdish

country because there'd been bullets flying around in the compound. So there were times when things were pretty dicey. Whenever our people went out to the field, if there was some work in cultivation or doing various things out in the field, our guards had to go out [also]. So this was no junket.

It was very much hands on. People had to go out there and, as you say, had to go out and work in the field and direct.

If you had to go out with armed guards, that's no joke. At one stage, the Iraqi counterpart to our project manager in the field over there was assassinated. This was no junket! (laughs)

But people were still signing up to go! (laughs)

It says something. That's one of the reasons, not that it was a big incentive but they were the sort of reasons for saying well you need a little bit of incentive here to do this sort of thing. Barry, I'm not sure if he went overseas (I don't think it was one of the Sagric International projects), Barry Windle went over to a project in the Middle East in the Gulf countries. He might have been away for a couple of years.

I'll ask him in due course.

I just can't quite remember. I always supported anybody who came and said, 'Look, the FAO want me to go and do this'. I always supported that. I believed in personal development.

Did you get people from those countries coming to investigate the South Australian situation?

**[33:37] End of Side B, Tape 5
Tape 6, Side A – 15 January 2004**

Jim, I was just asking you, when the tape ran out, the involvement of the overseas countries coming to South Australia – delegations or for work or investigations.

The one that I remember ... I might have mentioned before. We had this exchange arrangement with Israel for the irrigation technology. They came to work for six months if I remember correctly. We had an exchange arrangement whereby some of our officers worked in Israel.

During this time there were delegations coming out from a number of countries – the Middle East, North Africa and also from China. They were also looking into agricultural development. So there was a fair degree of international interaction which was being generated through the Department of Agriculture and Sagric International, which helped in terms of agriculture's position in the government view.

The Ministers were playing an important role because there were overseas trips by Ministers. I did a few too, in terms of maintaining contacts and negotiations. It's particularly important in many of these countries, that you just don't walk in and say, 'I'm Joe Blow from Timbuktu and boy have I got something that you really need'. That would go down like a lead balloon. The

fact is that you have to go in a number of times. If you can get them to come out so much the better as well, and build up the feeling that they are comfortable with you and your organisation. They feel you understand them and their circumstances and that it might take several visits and several years before you get to the point of really sitting down and saying, 'Now let's have a look at how best we can help' and get through the process of negotiating some sort of contract and getting that project going. It took us several years in Iraq to get something on the ground in Iraq. But when we got it, it was a \$US10 000 000 project over five years in 1982. Now \$US10 000 000 in 1982 was fairly important dough.

Now the Chinese one triggered me because we didn't have a project in China but, nevertheless, they were interested in coming out. One thing the Chattertons did, amongst other things, that was interesting was that they [initiated] very good, high-class publications on farming systems and livestock in South Australia and so on. Very high quality production material. Glynn Webber had a fair bit to do with that. They also had quite a few copies translated into certainly Chinese [and Arabic].

[3:48] These publications, were they things by the Chattertons themselves or were they ...?
Departmental officers had a fair bit of input into the content but it had happened before I arrived. The Chattertons had instituted it within the Department and it was well on the way when I arrived and developed over two or three years before the government changed.

When you say publications, were they reports sorts of things or were they actually printed ...?
They were really printed, glossy, colour describing the dryland farming system. They were actually quite high quality publications. I can't speak as to how well accepted they were though and how effective it was in terms of supporting the transfer of the technology, that's another issue. Be interesting to talk, to raise that if you remember if you're interviewing Glynn, have a chat to him about that ...

Talking about the Chinese, they were coming here from a certain province?
Yes, the lower rainfall cropping and arable type areas. They were looking at farm machinery and agricultural dryland farming technology, which was not Mediterranean-climate focused but more of the system and technology-type focus. So that never really got going with Sagric International during my time but I'm not sure what happened subsequently. But when you mentioned China, it triggered these publications being translated into Chinese.

Someone's doing that for the Department or for Sagric, I presume? I mean the Department wasn't getting into translation services! (laughs)
That was contracted outside, of course.

Yes. I was just starting to think you've got a publications/editorial area and having to get into languages as well! (laughs)

They were good quality as I remember rightly. [Glynn] had a fair bit to do with some of them if not all of them. He's a good officer you should talk to.

He's on the list. Coming back to your comment about giving officers the opportunity to develop and progress. Obviously overseas experience is very valuable. Were there people you encouraged to move up the ranks in the Department? Not necessarily as a result of overseas but just talking generally about people you targeted to take some steps forward?

Yes. In particular, again I might have mentioned it in a ministerial context, that we identified what we considered young and up-and-coming officers. We encouraged them in terms of management training but also gave them opportunities to work as liaison officers in the Minister's Office. Barry Windle was one of those, but there was a number of them during my time. It wasn't an original idea but that was just one of the ways to encourage the younger guys to build up their knowledge and expertise and so on.

They'd do a few months or so in the Minister's Office? Six months or ...?

Up to 12 months. Quite often it was 12 months. I don't know whether I picked certain individuals and personally mentored them against others. I can't remember that. John Radcliffe I was interested in; obviously, assisting in his development by appointing him Principal Officer of Research Management initially and then he became Executive Officer and then Director, Policy and Planning. So John was obviously targeted in that sense.

[8:39] I think we talked about that last time too. Well when we started out today Jim, we were talking about some of the negatives and having to deal with some problem people and getting them to resign from the Department. In a more positive sense did you find any individuals who you, say, encouraged to move on for their career prospects? Maybe go to university for academic teaching or research work or into a company? Was there anyone like that?

We had a program of training and postgraduate training, so there was a number of people who went on to do PhDs and so on in the research area. Some of them did extension courses. But, again, it's a matter of what level can one operate in that way. I would expect my executive directors to look in their areas to identify guys that needed further experience. Some of them, as I said, went overseas on overseas projects. I always encouraged that. If there was a training course or a further Masters or PhD that was deemed to be appropriate in an area the Department was really focused on and we had a young guy, we would certainly go through a process of supporting that. But as far as identifying particular individuals personally and giving them personal leverage, I didn't do much of that at all really I don't think.

Perhaps, not to personalise it so much, but you or the Directors of the branches, the divisions, would you have encouraged them to encourage people to move on if they?

We had a positive approach to developing young officers and so on yes.

Not to hold them back in their career.

Not to hold them back. To some extent, I think I mentioned before, the regional program opened things up a bit and gave opportunity to put younger officers into reasonably responsibly positions fairly quickly and that's one way of developing pretty fast.

[11:25] Well things like the overseas and Sagric, which we've just been talking about, there's some opportunities there. But if you end up with three or four people all at the same level and if they haven't embraced and managed the change that management's been directing and they're hanging on to the old notion of hierarchical, then you've suddenly got that tension and conflict.

The system, because of all the changes that were going on and those wider opportunities (as I said the management approach in training and the positive approach to training and the overseas experience and so on), there was greater opportunities for being a young officer in terms of developing your career prospects than there was perhaps previously when things were much more stable and much more traditional. In fact, I'm positive that's the case.

[12:20] What about recruiting people? You were talking before about resources contracting and so on. The late '70s you've got federal Public Service cutbacks, you've got South Australian Public Service cutbacks. How did you go about recruiting or were you able to recruit?

Yes. We were still able to recruit ... Even though we were perhaps losing appropriation, South Australian government resources, there were still funds coming in from federal sources and so on. We were reorganising the way we were going about doing things and we were still creating new opportunities and developing new services and new possible positions that we needed. Of course, I always encouraged pretty open advertising and competition for positions and minimum sort of 'pat the boy on the back' internally. So even reasonably low down there were competitive opportunities. So we'd pinch people from interstate (laughs) and some came in from industry and academia. So we had a pretty active recruitment process going on.

[14:03] Were there opportunities for younger people? I remember in the late '70s there were Youth Employment Schemes and so on.

Not much of that floating around. One of the troubles with reducing resources is that, and this applied right across all public services as I understand it, the number of positions available for so-called trainee graduates in fact decreased. That was a bit of a problem but even then, depending on the position, some of the people who came in were relatively inexperienced. Some of them came in on some of the Commonwealth[-funded] projects, initially on project money, and then found their way into a more permanent situation. Then were some guys who ... one doing private industry now, Keith Watson as I remember in irrigation, and Phil Cole who's quite a senior guy now in the Department of Land, Water and Biodiversity Conservation. They came in under what was called the River Murray Salinity Investigation Program in the [early] '80s. They were just young guys, fairly recent graduates. They have developed right through the whole system. So there were opportunities there for the young ones coming in and

developing but just to employ people as trainee graduates was fairly rare. I can't remember us having much of a program on that.

The cadetship system had passed by ...?

It had passed, that was the expansion stage of things.

Did that cadetship system finish when you joined the Department when you came in? '75, '76?

There was one or two doing economics up at the University of New England. It might have been during my time that we actually ceased it. There were one or two who finished up in New England.

That's something I'll follow through. That probably rounds out ...

I'm just trying to remember those guys. They might have been officers who actually wanted to do a Diploma of Agricultural Economics. They already perhaps had a diploma or a degree and that was sort of further studies. I can't quite remember. I don't think they were cadets in the sense I was with the Victorian Department. I don't think so. I'm just a bit vague on all of that area now.

We'll follow it through ... things like young people coming through as apprentices and young cadets and young graduates and so on ...

That certainly was part of the Public Service many years ago but it's pretty well disappeared.

Well we've probably covered a couple of the issues we had on our list. We've still got a few more to get through yet! (laughs)

Let's get into it.

[17:25] OK Jim, well perhaps if we turn to look at other issues and there is a discreet story in the merger and the de-merger of the Department of Fisheries and Agriculture. I know we've touched on it in a couple of early sessions just in passing but as a discreet story perhaps we could look at that issue?

As you said, there is more than that that has been discussed within the context of the Ministers.

With Minister Chatterton, in particular, it was an area that the Chattertons were pretty interested in. I believe they were quite progressive in their approach. The departments were merged back in 1974 perhaps or '75, about 12 months or more before I arrived in mid '76. The head of the [Fisheries] Department, Mick Olsen, was (the proper phrase would be) shunted to be Chief Research Officer of Fisheries, and Fisheries was absorbed within the Department. It wasn't a popular move from either the industry or the Fisheries Department. It was a relatively small department. [A] number of industry branches in the Department were bigger than Fisheries in terms of the number of staff I believe. The responsibility for managing Fisheries during that period, in fact I'm sure it was the case, was taken over by Peter Trumble when he was Acting Director. He was Acting Director of Agriculture and Fisheries. When I came I'd had absolutely no experience of Fisheries. For the first few months, for the late part of '76, I got into the

regional (I've explained all that), regionalisation, travelled around and concentrated on Agriculture and Peter still looked after the Fisheries area.

I got into Fisheries rather dramatically in early '77 when there was a process to select from over 100 applicants, two new licenses to be allocated into the St Vincent's Gulf prawn fishery. That became a huge political blow-up ... I made the decision that I was going to get into it! So there is a story associated with getting into that. Did I tell you about it at all?

No, I think you ...

The point was that the industry were holding quite a big protest meeting. This is the South Australian Fishing Industry Council in Adelaide. I was invited to go along and attend their meeting. There had been all sorts of things flying around, political to-ings and fro-ings. So I went along and it was about say 10 o'clock when I arrived and obviously they had been discussing this whole issue. The place was full of angry fisherman. I was invited up to sit with the members of the council up the front, which I did. Then I listened to half-an-hour of fisherman getting up and having a go at the government, the Minister, the director and God knows what else, making certain statements. I'd done my homework before I went. So I knew I was going to have to get up and have a go. But I'd identified a few guys who were speaking up ... to correct what they were saying. It got to the stage where I was just about to ask the president who was chairing the meeting for permission to respond when one of the fisherman got up and colourfully said, 'I think it's about bloody time the director had a chance to say something'. (laughs) So I got up and got stuck into it a bit and said, 'Some of that's quite incorrect. What's the story of this?'. So I handed back a reasonable amount without going over the top. Things settled down and we had an interactive to and fro and I said, 'Thank you very much' and I sat down. Then a draft letter started to float around which was a letter of no confidence in the Minister to go to the premier. I was passed a copy and I read it and thought, 'Oh God'. I thought to myself, 'What am I going to do?'. (laughs) I'd only been in the job for about six months at this time. 'What am I going to do with this?'. So I took the matter in my hands after a while they had been discussing. I said, 'Mr President, I wonder if I might be able to help in the wording of this letter. There are some things in there that are [inappropriate]'. He said, 'Yes. Right. OK the director is going to help us with the wording of the letter'. So I ...

[23:46] How big was this meeting?

Oh, 50 or 60.

A crowd.

Yes. So I said well ...

At 60 to one! (both laugh)

Yes! I said, 'Well, my suggestion is you're right in saying this and saying that and so on and so forth etc., etc.'. A bit of to and fro and then 'OK, that's very good'. So after that I said, 'Well I'm meant to get back to ????. Thank you very much' and off I went. The environment was reasonable compared to what it was when I first came in! (laughs) I went straight over to Minister Chatterton and indicated to him, told him a little bit about the meeting and I said, 'I need to tell you also that I just helped to draft a letter of no confidence in you!'. (both laugh)

Went down well?

[He was almost speechless.] I said, 'Well you've should have seen it before!'. (both laugh) I just said, 'I thought I'd better mention that'. Anyway, [the issue] worked it's way through. It took a while subsequently for the politics of it to resolve. The premier got involved.

Did the letter turn up?

Oh yes.

It did. More or less as you'd ...

More or less. I did my best. Anyway that was my first real tangle in the industry. From then on I got fairly involved. I took over, more or less, the management [of fisheries] at that level, the director level, and [with] Ian Kirkegaard. I forget what position he came to initially, he took over the next level management to me and ultimately became Executive Director, Fisheries. I was working through Ian Kirkegaard during the period. We had some quite exciting times because the Chattertons were very progressive and very keen to get good management of the Fisheries, modern management – limited entry and we were constantly working at getting control of effort in relation to what was available from the resource. I find it interesting that I've been involved with four other Directors of Fisheries (going back to Mick Olsen's time) in the court case in the Supreme Court, which relates to some of the decisions that were taken during this period.

Fisheries was very volatile and very exciting. In the political arena and public arena pretty well all the time. There was ??? involved and all very good experience. I became very interested in Fisheries. My training in economics [was useful], particularly as there was a strong economic management focus in Fisheries, [in] modern fisheries management. In fact, Professor Copes from [Simon Frazer University, Canada] did a couple of reports for the Minister. So we were, with Western Australia, South Australia was leading the management approach in Australia. We were, frankly, quite right at the margin of what was allowed within the Act because the Act was a 1952 Act, it was fairly old. That's part of the heart of the problem in the Supreme Court.

[28:08] This, just for the record, this court case is ongoing in 2004?

It's under appeal. The key appellant ... It's under appeal for permission to go to the High Court. The advice I have is that the High Court is unlikely to give it permission. The appeal is being rejected at the full Supreme Court of South Australia. So, we'll see. [Note in 2005: The High Court refused permission.]

That's for the sake of the record.

Just for the sake of the record! (both laugh) It's been very interesting and of course I've appeared in the box for quite some time in association with that. Trying to deal with decisions and issues from over 20 years ago is a bit of a challenge. But that was interesting.

[29:06] When it came to the change of government in '79, as I mentioned, the Liberal Party's policy, one of their clear-cut policies, was to separate them back again. They duly did that pretty quickly and Allan Rodda was appointed as the Minister and Ian Kirkegaard acted as head until Richard Stevens was appointed. I'm not sure how long that was for. That's the end of the Fisheries story. Quite frankly I felt both the industry and even the ex-Fisheries Department people, the arrangement seemed to have been working pretty well by the time 3½ years had passed. There was some indications of disappointment in the industry I'm pleased to say! Of course, I had nothing to do with Fisheries from then on until I got involved with the Australian Fisheries Management Authority in 1991.

What led to that involvement?

I was asked by the then Minister of Primary Industry, John Kerin. They had what was called the Australian Fisheries Services as part of the Department of Primary Industries. They wanted to change. I won't go into the history. It hadn't been working too well and they decided to move to a statutory authority arrangement and establish the Australian Fisheries Management Authority [AFMA]. That legislation was expected to go through in mid 1991 so the upshot of that was in March (when I said, 'Yes, I was interested') I was appointed as chairman designate by Federal Cabinet and expected to start in July of '91 but it actually didn't start until February '92. That gave me an opportunity to do a lot of work around the traps, talking to the industry and agencies, and going to New Zealand and so on. Actually, I was much better equipped and ready to go by the time [AFMA] was formally commenced in early February '92. So I was back into Fisheries again but very pleased to do it because it was a very interesting area.

[31:45] When you were the Director of Agriculture and looking after Fisheries, how much time would you have spent on it? Was it big in your ...

I might have spent ... Well at one stage there I probably spent 20 or 30% of the time for a short period until Ian Kirkegaard got into position because I was fairly directly working with Fisheries for a while. That took me a couple of years, 18 months or 2 years. Ian Kirkegaard picked it up and that took a fair bit of weight. I would have gone back to say 15% or something.

Were you trying to amalgamate? It had been merged before you arrived but were you trying to amalgamate in any ... or shape it in any way?

We tried to amalgamate the administrative type services and get some efficiencies, scale efficiencies. We tried to bring it together as much as possible. It was working quite well. It was becoming much the sort of same structure – we were dealing with it in much the same way as any of the other industries. It was strongly regulatory focused, a bit like the animal health area where the dominant service is a regulatory type/management-regulatory type service.

**[33:35] End of Tape 6, Side A
Side B, Tape 6**

... to try to put some sort of time frame on some of these issues that we're talking about.

On regionalisation, we covered the issues. The importance of Callaghan with the proposal. Certainly the decision to regionalise depended on the Callaghan Report. The Callaghan Report wasn't implemented exactly as Callaghan had recommended. It was certainly the political will to implement regionalisation. It was implemented in other State departments. I don't think Callaghan followed any other department. South Australia was more positive about regionalisation than any other Ag. Department. The work was followed by the interstate departments though they didn't actually transfer research responsibility into the regions as we did in South Australia. This wasn't really contentious here in South Australia but when we set up, say the Riverland or Murraylands, the research centres and research people that were out in that defined area actually came under the administrative management responsibility of the Chief Regional Officer. So we completely regionalised the staff in the regions into regional management and control more than any other department did.

The relationship to the Corbett Report? I can remember the Corbett Report but I can't remember the exact thrust of the Corbett Report. Can you trigger me with that?

I haven't seen any information on it. I've got a copy of the report and it goes through the various departments.

It's a public service type, a general public service type.

He goes through each department and he comments on how it could be improved and so on.

I can remember the report and I knew David Corbett – it was David I think – quite well at the time but I can't really remember the linkage.

Monarto we've covered.

Northfield we've covered.

The relationship with the Stockowners Association and Farmers Federation and other industry-based groups, that always has been a very important part of the Department of Agriculture. We spent a lot of effort in developing good relationships with all those organisations. In most cases the relationships were pretty good. I did mention to you earlier that occasionally I had to say, 'Well we agree 95% of the time but there might be 5% of the time where we won't'. We tried to work closely with them in terms of what we were doing.

Were you involved personally in going to meetings or receiving delegations from them?

I took a pretty personal, particularly with again the presidents and the executive officers, particularly the Stockowners or what was the United Farmers and [Stockowners] (ultimately became the South Australian Farmers Federation) and some other industry-based groups largely through receiving delegations but I viewed it as important that I personally was known at that level, so I would go to meetings. If they had a dinner I would be invited to the dinner and I'd make sure I'd go so that they would know me as a person. Sometimes I was asked to be the guest speaker and I would take those opportunities.

[4:00] One other group that's not mentioned here is the Advisory Board of Agriculture and the Agricultural Bureau system and also the Women's Agricultural Bureau system. They were separate but sort of related. That triggers me that one of the things that Lynne Chatterton wanted to do was to make them merge. I advised her not to use their political capital up doing that (laughs) because, frankly, the women didn't want to be merged! It wasn't the men. The women didn't want to.

[4:35] Rural Youth?

Rural Youth. Yes. That's where I first met John Olsen actually because he was involved with Rural Youth at that time. Neil Andrews was involved also. He, of course, is the Speaker in the House of Representatives, the Commonwealth Parliament.

A fair bit of Departmental input went into the Royal Show. We always had our exhibit. Royal Shows and field days. I frequently was asked to open rural shows and, of course, field days were important also. So as much as possible I tried to be seen and be out and mixing in those sorts of activities.

[5:20] For the Department, were they essentially PR exercises? Feeding information to the public, putting on a good ...

At the Royal Show, our exhibit there, our stand or what have you was substantially informational. We got involved sometimes in judging, helping with judging certain competitive components. The same with rural shows, the local Agricultural Officers would be involved assisting in the show. So it was a very important activity really in terms of interacting and being accepted as part of the rural community.

We've covered Department relationships with other departments and agencies. That was pretty important at all levels in the Department but it was very important at the top level because if there were any problems you could resolve it. If anybody needed to get kicked in the behind you could arrange for that to be done and straighten things out. That was important.

You mentioned when we were talking earlier today about the Water Resources Council.
Water Resources Council yes.

Were there other committees or councils?

There was quite a few. I generally used my Executive Directors to represent the Department in a lot those. The Water Resources Council I never did because I viewed it as a very important one, as did the heads of other departments. It was one of the most fruitful and good councils that I've ever been involved on. But you used your Executive Directors for a lot of the other sort of inter-departmental type committees.

Of course, I had a very active role with, particularly every six months in the Standing Committee on Agriculture as it was, and Agricultural Council (the Ministerial Council) as well and I had to be involved in that. So that was a pretty important activity as well.

Stability in the South Australian governments over the time? I don't think that was that important. They weren't grossly unstable! (laughs)

[7:48] In your case you had Dunstan, Tonkin and Bannon as premiers and then you only had the three Ministers. So in that sense you had a fair degree of stability.

Reasonable. Of course, forward planning and political support was important for the Department's work. I was a bit lucky here in that because I got out and around so much, particularly in the first 3, 3½ years before the Tonkin Government came in. I had met a lot of the Liberal politicians who substantially had the rural seats and interacted with them quite effectively on a personal basis. When the government changed that was a distinct benefit because they knew me. I'd been at field days or what have you and that was pretty important. That again provided for political support for the Department, particularly during the Tonkin era.

The question I should have asked you last week, Jim, just talking about the politicians, did you have anything to do with Tom Casey the former Minister, the Minister before Chatterton?

No.

He was still a Minister when you came into the Department but in other areas, tourism or sport.

I met him personally but I didn't have any interaction with him in the Agriculture.

Federal government? We have pretty good relations with the Federal government in agriculture and other State departments. South Australia in its interaction with the Commonwealth was

pretty positive and sensible. Victoria and New South Wales tended to be the usual big State versus the Commonwealth government type attitude. South Australia didn't have the muscle to do that. We worked on the basis that we would get as much out of the relationship as we possibly could. So we would cooperate and negotiate the best, sensible outcomes. We were always very sensible in relation to our interaction with the Federal government.

Western Australia was similar in their approach. Queensland were just like Queensland. So often in Standing Committee and Ministerial Council, all States would agree except Queensland. They're still no different. They, of course, blame Canberra for everything. So what changes? So we had good interaction with the Federal department and with the Federal government, irrespective of what particular party was in either State or the Federal scene.

You mentioned, Jim, a perception there of what Queensland was like. Just to throw it back on South Australia. Do you have any feel for how the South Australian Department was regarded by other departments, by the Commonwealth?

Pretty positively, fairly positively. We were always constructive and we had a well thought through policy position as well, which is important particularly in terms of relationships with the Federal government. In Standing Committee ... I haven't talked much about that but I was a bit of a maverick early because I was a young fellow, probably a bit raw and green and abrasive. The department heads were a generation older than me, most of them, and long experienced. I came in and had a fair bit to say. I asked awkward questions about certain decisions that were being proposed. Some basis they had of some project and as long as the Commonwealth put 50% in then the States would share up the other 50% in some way. I kept asking well, 'What's the use of the project anyway? Has anybody done a bit of an analysis of what benefits are going to be achieved?'. I was asking all these sorts of questions and I can remember Roy Watts who was the older, experienced [Director] from New South Wales taking me aside at coffee one morning and saying to me, 'If you go on like this you're going to destroy the whole system'. (both laugh) I didn't know it was as bad as that ... That all settled down. After a while they all brought their economists along anyway so the whole basis of the arguments and discussions changed where there was a fair analytical and economic input into the debate, which hadn't been there before. So that's one thing I contributed.

So in a sense you trained them up rather than they trained you up!

They knew I was going to compete in the argument and they would have to have that expertise and that approach. Actually Noel Fitzpatrick and I, we're still very friendly actually. He's from Western Australia. Noel had been [Director] for about 18 months or 2 years. Everybody used to sit back and watch if we didn't agree but when we did agree that was the end of the story! (laughs) We used to have some interesting little tussles.

Relations with the CSIRO. That was quite good but there was always a bit of a problem, particularly in the research area, between the CSIRO research on the one hand and the Department of Agriculture research on the other. Not so much in South Australia but certainly in my experience in Victoria and to some extent in New South Wales. There was a lot of competition if you like between research in Departments of Agriculture and CSIRO.

[15:15] Here you've got the other situation of the Waite Institute.

The Waite Institute also was an interesting one. Relations with the Waite Institute were a bit difficult in my time. To some extent that was contributed by me. There was a director there, Jim Quirke, who rubbed me up the wrong way fairly early and that was the end of it. He was a bit abrasive. But there were interesting relationships with the Waite. It was alright at the general level but Jim Quirke and I didn't get on terribly well.

So what did you do there? Did you delegate to someone?

I pulled back a bit and did my best to smooth things out.

Commonwealth Extension Services funded [some of] the Department's work. That was certainly important as it was to all departments largely through the Commonwealth Extension Services Grant, which I think was abolished in the early '80s. But it went for at least 30 years.

Cadetships, you've raised that one.

Law enforcement role, enforcement of the law and regulations. I was [always] feeling a bit of pressure on how the regulations were actually implemented. I was never by nature terribly tuned into regulations. I was looking for sensible flexibilities and so on.

Were there differences across the divisions, some being more heavy handed and some being able to stand back?

There were. Some of the most difficult areas I found were in the animal health area.

What about quarantine, plant quarantine and so on? You see the signs up, you see the literature about it but ...

We had some problems in that area ... Rip Van Velsen. Have you heard that name?

Yes.

Rip and I had to sort a few things out together. Not between Rip and I but with industry over some of these areas because he was responsible for plant health in the State and there was somebody ... responsible for animal health.

In regards to legislation, did you have to re-write any Acts or introduce any Acts?

There was always work going on in legislation, changes in legislation, modification to Acts, removal of old regulations and so on, particularly during Ted Chapman's time. Brian

Chatterton worked on a new *Seeds Act* during his time. Quite rightly a fair bit of the legislative drive should come from the Minister and the Minister's Office, so there was a continuing activity, but without being hugely active but was a fairly continuing process.

Would you be involved personally or delegate that?

I wouldn't be involved in the detail personally. I'd be involved, but in most of the industry areas, in fact in all of the industry areas, there were officers that were on top of the Acts that area was responsible for supporting. At the end of the day, other than where there was a statutory responsible appointment of one of my officers under the Act, I was responsible for about 40 or more Acts! (laughs) Within that context we had expertise in the relevant areas who kept their eyes on Acts and regulations and industry re-proclamations. Fisheries, of course, was very important, but animal health and quarantine and all those areas were important. So that and the interaction with them with Crown Law were particularly important in developing any new regulations, modifications to existing regulations or new legislation. So I wasn't heavily involved in the detail of that but I was certainly involved as we went through the process.

Research and development role of the Department. Well 40% of our resources actually were in research and development. Reports publications, information, compilation of annual reports. Well you pointed out that the annual report went down the tube before I started and I certainly never brought it back.

Did that ever strike you as being odd or it ever occur to you that
I don't know.

The Minister not asking for a report?

The Ministers didn't ask. Brian Chatterton ... It was discontinued in, did you say in '72? That was before Brian Chatterton's time and he never showed any signs of wanting to re-introduce it. There was so much going on that I certainly wasn't going to. There were plenty of reports in specific areas and what have you flying around and reviews being undertaken. I certainly had no intention of putting an annual report down. We did an annual report, of course, under the company's requirement for Sagric International, so there's a whole series of annual reports. [The Department's annual reports were forward-looking corporate planning documents.]

So you were aware of annual reports. You were getting them from other departments as courtesy copies. It may have just gone passed you?

I'm not sure. I just have a feeling there may have been some annual reporting coming in my later years.

[23:00] But within the organisation ...?

Is there any way of checking that? It might have been within the organisation.

I'll certainly be looking for.

I might actually have a copy of one. I wonder if I can find it?

There's a little bit of homework for you! (laughs)

One of the interesting points is that departments aren't established under legislation. They're just administrative vehicles if you like. Statutory authorities have their own legislation and reporting and accountability requirements are specified, including annual reports. Annual reporting and specific annual reports really was at the whim and fancy of the Minister. Whether it wasn't required or an annual report was not required from the Department of Agriculture under legislation or under parliamentary requirement.

It stands out because you were of the very few, if not the only one.

Is that so?

Yes, which makes it even more amazing.

That we didn't do it?

That you didn't do it.

Or that we were the only one that wasn't required to do it.

That you didn't do it. I haven't checked the requirement yet but you go to any parliamentary paper for an annual consolidation – Highways, Mines, Education, they're all there, Railways. Annual report should be there.

Did they have annual reports for Environment?

Yes. They even had the printed reports, which up until recently you could present the printed report and have that tabled and so on. I find very few gaps, which is most interesting! (laughs) If I ever get the answer, Jim, I'll let you know.

Well, as I said it was not part of the process when I arrived and I certainly didn't reintroduce it.

There's plenty of other things to do. (both laugh) Technology?

[25:15] Things like technology, I suppose in your case you've got things like the introduction of computing technology and so on.

Fax and early computing was just starting to come in.

Was it something you were interested in? I don't mean personally hands-on, but something you could see a need for?

I was interested in it in terms of improving efficiency and particularly in terms of limited resources.

Environmental issues. I can assure you that certainly drought and grasshoppers came several times during my time. In fact, I arrived when there was both a drought on and a serious plague of locusts. We were in the second year of drought. I might have mentioned that and there were some changes to drought approaches that we undertook over time so I won't go into that.

Grasshoppers, I can remember being called over by the late Des Corcoran (who was Deputy Premier), if I wouldn't mind coming out and having a chat about the plague of locusts that were chewing the North Adelaide bowling greens and tennis courts. The fact was that the Department of Agriculture was seen as being the department to deal with that problem and the Department was not dealing with that problem adequately. So after that I got a taskforce together and we actually developed a whole plan coordinated with the Army for communication and were all ready for the next one. They set up the Australian Plague Locust Commission by the way, the Commonwealth did, so we worked with them to monitor the grasshopper [swarms?] up in the pastoral zone on the basis we were going to hit it before it actually could get out at the pastoral zone. So we were monitoring all the time on a regular basis, on the ground, the state of the egg beds because at the appropriate stage they'd start hatching and you've got a relatively short time, perhaps two or three days, before they swarm and then take off. As soon as that started to happen we'd come into action. We had stashes of appropriate spray and so on and we'd arrange contract sprayers – all on standby. We worked it out of the Jamestown office, that was where the headquarters of operation was. We successfully controlled them by bringing the spray in as soon as they hatched and before they could actually swarm. In most cases we knocked them off. Subsequent ones were largely held in the pastoral zone. They really barely got into the agricultural, settled zones.

A bit of a military-style operation.

A military-style operation yes.

Was it aerial spraying?

Aerial spraying, basic air with spray planes. We really got ourselves organised for that. It was the only way to do it.

There were ongoing programs like fruit fly eradication around the metropolitan area and so on.

It's done on a highly organised basis and it's been in place for a long time, even before my time. We tried to improve it, of course, progressively over time, but basically the system was in place.

Economic conditions and working conditions. I can't comment on that.

Overseas travel and conferences. There was always an element of that.

Some of these don't apply to you because you didn't have a typical day at the office!

Everyday was different.

Bad experiences – I won't tell you about those!

... joined a professional organisation. I was a member of the PSA by the way. I was a member of both the Australian Institute of Agriculture Science as it was then and the Australian Agricultural Economics Society. Those were the two and I'm still a Fellow of the Institute, which is now the Institute of Ag. Science and Technology. The economics [one now] is Australian Agriculture and Resource Economics [Society]. I'm still associated with those.

[30:20] Were you a member of the PSA by choice?

That I can't remember but it was something that I deemed to be very useful in terms of my interaction with the PSA and handling some of those difficult situations. I was also lucky to have a guy in the Department who was president of the PSA for a while, John Feagan. He was very constructive and useful in that whole situation quite frankly.

Did you have any run-ins with the PSA in terms of Ag. Department?

Not that I can remember. Somebody else might remember but I can't. [Comment on jobs in the private sector or swapping to another government agency is unclear.]

In your case that's more after ...

There wasn't a great deal of activity of secondment to private sector at that stage. There were some swaps to other government agencies and particularly Commonwealth. Some of our officers maybe worked with the Commonwealth for a while and then came back. Basically that's what I did when I pulled out as DG was to do that.

Retired Officers ... We're involved in that.

Did you go along to the dinners?

That's it.

You reckon that's it? There are probably a few other things over time. I can always get back to you with the transcript and with questions.

I presume that finishes the formal interviewing?

Well just about.

Have you got any other questions?

I'll pop them in the post or give you a ring about other matters as we go along. Thank you very much, Jim, for spending the time, getting a start on your memoirs by getting a transcript!

There's a bit of a benefit coming my way for that.

Getting an interview and a transcript will be a start, but I'll follow up other matters in due course. Thanks very much Jim for your involvement.

The outcome is going to be fascinating! (laughs)

[33:08] **End of interview**