AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BERNARD O'NEIL WITH MR RICHARD DOWNWARD OF O'HALLORAN HILL, SOUTH AUSTRALIA, FOR THE PROJECT ON THE HISTORY OF THE ANIMAL AND PLANT CONTROL COMMISSION, CONDUCTED BETWEEN 27 NOVEMBER AND 4 DECEMBER 2008. [Square brackets include comments and corrections provided by Mr Downward in July 2009, and additional notes in August 2009 are appended on last pages.]

Disk 1 of 8

An interview conducted by Bernard O'Neil with Mr Richard Downward of O'Halloran Hill, South Australia, for the project on the history of the Animal and Plant Control Commission, and the interview is conducted on 27th November 2008.

Richard, thanks very much for agreeing to be involved in the little project to record some of the Commission history.

That's fine, yes.

Obviously with your extensive involvement in the area we're only going to capture some of the aspects, but we'll see how we go.

Yes, sure.

Perhaps we need to begin with a little bit of context of who is Richard Downward, a bit of background, if you don't mind.

That's fair enough. I was born at Naracoorte on 7th July 1938, lived at Lucindale and went to primary school there, and then high school at Naracoorte. Highlight of that was a membership of the *Sun–Advertiser* Youth Travel in 1953 to go and see the Coronation in England. That gave me quite a wider appreciation of the world than otherwise would have been the case.

A very young fellow to be doing that, in those days.

Yes, I was 14. The interesting thing, from just a family, personal history, was my father came to Australia as a 15-year-old by himself.

And you made the return journey.

Yes, yes, and met some of his relations there during that trip. But after secondary school I won a scholarship to Roseworthy College and did the RDA[1] there and graduated in 1959. Then I had 12 months at Adelaide Teachers' College – there was a five-day gap between the courses – so I did my teacher training in 1959.

What led you to Roseworthy College in the first place? What were your interests?

I had hoped that I could do a degree in Agricultural Science at Adelaide, but financial considerations for the family and so on I needed to get a scholarship or a cadetship, missed out on a cadetship with the Department of Agriculture. My father was a friend of Cecil Hincks, who was the Minister of Lands at that time. He went to see him. He was trying to find out whether I'd been successful for the cadetship. He was able to give him advance notice because they'd just (laughs) been doing the interviews at that particular time and he said, 'It just

[1] RDA – Roseworthy Diploma in Agriculture.

happens Bob McCulloch, who's the Principal at Roseworthy, he's in my office right now'. He said he was on the interview panel. He said, 'There's a scholarship exam at Roseworthy next week, and so Bob might be able to slip you in there and you can do that'. I subsequently had the offer of that scholarship or a scholarship based on my Leaving results as well, so I had a double-barrelled thing to say that was what I was going to do. But initially I'd always wanted to be a schoolteacher. That was my earliest things.

Was Roseworthy a way to get into teaching?

It wasn't actually. It was just getting the education and it turned out to be a good career move, because I got a network of people in primary industry as a result of that that served me extremely well for all of my professional life, because I've had contacts with people throughout South Australia and it was predicated – and not just South Australia – but predicated on the friendships that I made at Roseworthy in that period. It was pretty interesting there.

The teaching was a Grad. Dip. for a year?

It was just teacher training. I didn't get a formal qualification there, but I passed all of the necessary things and starred in the Phys. Ed. and that sort of thing, I was better at that than I probably was [academically] … I was more interested in that than academia. I worked out when I was at Roseworthy that you didn't have to keep your head down in your books all the time, that there were lots of other interesting things like girls and football and so on. (laughter)

Sports and stuff, yes.

Yes, that was the situation. But I subsequently went to Glossop as an Ag. Science teacher up there, young [and full of steam]. Yes, that was pretty terrific because it gave me an entrée into a community that I had never, ever experienced up there. In fact, my mother had said to me, 'Now, you just be careful those German girls don't catch you while you're up there'. I got a good grounding for two years at Glossop, and then I subsequently had been trying to get back to the South East because we'd been allotted 3000 acres of land in the last government-sponsored land development, was part of what had been taken up for the Soldier Settlement Scheme but it had been rejected by the Federal Government, and so the Playford Government had decided to develop it. It was at Woolumbool north of Lucindale, and so I wanted to be down there a bit closer to be able to help my father. I made myself available for transfer to another school. Two days before the end of school in '61, the boss called me in and said, 'You've been given a transfer, but I don't know whether you're going to enjoy it all that much because you've been transferred 11 miles – from Glossop to Loxton'. (laughter) They transferred the guy there to Glossop because he'd been given the task of establishing Ag. Science at Loxton, which was the new high school, and he hadn't handled it all that well; they'd obviously decided that perhaps I'd make a better fist of it, and they sent me over there. I

did reasonably well in that. Played footy for Loxton as well (was in two premierships over there), so that was pretty good. Coached the Senior Colts over there, including people like Rexy Voigt and Phil Nelson and Russell Ebert and Kerry Hamilton were all blokes that I coached. I got married while I was there as well ... (laughter)

So your interests were expanding, in a sense.

Yes. From there I then decided to leave the Education Department and go with my new wife to the new farm down at Lucindale in 1964, so we went down there to establish an operation that was pretty basic. There was a tin shed, about 1000 acres of established pasture and that was pretty well it. We took it from very basic, you'd have to say, and that went along pretty well until 1967, and the bad drought caused major problems for us because of its effect on the financial aspect of things. We thought we had lines of credit and when we came to exercise them they'd gone! I was walking around the paddock, we had a new daughter, and I realised that we weren't going to make it there and I was thinking about going back to see if I could get a job with the Education Department. The *Naracoorte Herald* had a front page item about a dispute between the Lucindale Council's weeds officer and the council's deputy chairman – Ralph James – and the upshot of it was that he'd resigned on the spot, and so this made headlines here, and I looked at it and thought, 'I could do that job. I've got the qualifications. I'd walk into that'. I rang the chairman of the council up, Horrie Mason, and said, 'See you've got a job vacancy. I reckon I could do that'. I, at that stage, was the leading ruckman down there and I said, 'I'd like to continue to play for Lucindale, but we're thinking of going teaching or something like that'. Anyway, he said, 'Droop, it doesn't work that way'. He said, 'I'm the chairman of the council but the clerk, he makes those appointments and so on'. He said, 'I'll let him know'. He did, and I got a telephone call from Wally Richards, who was the district clerk down there, and he said, 'Hear you're interested in a job'. He said, 'Council meeting next Wednesday. Would you be available to come along and meet the council?'. I said, 'I suppose I could'. So, 13th February it was, 1968. I can remember saying to my mother, 'I'm a bit worried here. It's the 13th'. She said, 'Good things have happened to our family on the 13th'. She said, 'I think you'll do all right'. I had the meeting with the council and they asked quite a few questions, but the main ones were whether I was prepared to accept direction from senior staff in the council, and that didn't cause too many problems. One of the biggest concerns that they had was did I think that I'd be able to, if necessary, rip members of my wider family [into gear] – because our family's quite an old family in Lucindale. I said, 'I think I'll be able to. They're all pretty law abiding'. (laughs) It turned out I was there for four years.

During that time – initially it was for weeds, but it was for rabbits as well. The Department of Lands was in the process of trying to introduce a scheme for controlling rabbits, which were

becoming quite a serious problem after the myxomatosis that had been introduced back in the 1950s. Their scheme involved training local government people, and so that was a training exercise that involved me as one student with two demonstrators – John Bromell, who was the leader of the Vermin Control Group – the rabbits part of vermin control – in the Department of Lands, and Dean Smith, who'd worked for the Tatiara Council in a pretty similar role to the one that I was starting at Lucindale. I got an extremely good grounding in the biology and behaviour of rabbits – the training school ran for a fortnight, and it was theory in the morning and then practical work in the afternoon, and we'd go out, because they were training me to poison rabbits with the 1080 poisoning scheme, which runs over a period of 10 days. We'd go out and we did that and we did some fumigation and handling poisons and so on – I got the full, undivided attention of these two blokes that were extremely good, and they were dedicated to their work.

Bromell, he'd been employed by the Lands Department in about 1962 or 3 as the first scientist that was dealing with rabbit control in South Australia. Before that, the councils used to declare a simultaneous destruction period, and so they used to put an ad in the paper that sort of said, 'Everybody go out and destroy all the rabbits'. Then they'd send a return in to the Lands Department and that was virtually rabbit control in those days. (laughs) It was done by fiat. They brought him in, he'd been with CSIRO[2] and he'd been doing research work on the dingo; but he'd also been working with Francis Radcliffe, who was an English zoologist who had been with CSIRO in the early stages of myxomatosis, and so he'd drilled Bromell in all of the good things which he drilled *us* in from there on: observation and keeping things simple, but keeping it recorded in notebooks and getting out and doing fieldwork and talking to people. He'd worked as a rabbit control operator for the Tatiara Council in about 1966, I think it was. That was the sort of thing. The government paid for him to work for the Tatiara Council for a period of over six months, or something like that, just proving up the system to them, and they'd adopted the practices that he espoused.

My council was a bit critical of some of those things, and Ralph James, who was the instigator (laughs) of me being employed, was particularly critical about some of the aspects. He was subsequently invited to join the Vermin Control Advisory Committee, which was a pretty brave thing in some respects, by Bromell to bring this guy who was quite critical of some of the things that the Lands Department were trying to do that they decided that it was a lot better to have your enemies in with you than outside trying to knock the fence down.

This is Ralph James?

[2] CSIRO – Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation.

Yes, so that was Ralph James. He was a major contributor to a lot of the things that happened, his ideas and so on, because if you could convince him of your side of the argument, then he would become an extremely strong ally, because at that stage he was the chairman of the South Australian Stockowners, I think, and subsequently was very much involved with the United Farmers and Graziers in the establishment of a new organisation, the Stockowners and UF&G together – he was the second chairman of that organisation [South Australian Farmers' Federation]. We're talking about people that were at a fairly high level.

Had some clout, yes. If I can just backtrack slightly, Richard –
Yes.

– and we'll come back to here. You described how you had the 'interview' for the job.
Yes.

Was the job itself advertised, or was it just placed ...
No, no, no. That was it. As a result of that interview, they obviously talked about it after I'd left – I'd joined them for afternoon tea, they'd invited me to come in and be interviewed, had afternoon tea and a bit of a chat. I knew all of them pretty well, some better than others. They obviously decided that that'd be fair enough. The salary wasn't particularly brilliant: it was under $3000 or something like that ... (laughs)

We can check the records on that one.
Yes.

Were you going to keep your farm going? To clarify that as well, was the farm yours or your father's.
It was a partnership, my brother was involved as well. We had a small farm which my father had established and developed from a complete scrub block.

That's the war settler one?
No, no, no, it wasn't war settlement. He had tried three times to volunteer for the armed forces, because of his background as an English youth, and he thought he should be there doing his bit. He was rejected each time, so he was left to his own devices. He'd bought this land – before he married my mother – in about 1937. He bought it for 2 shillings an acre, for 270 acres or thereabouts; it turned out the 'thereabouts' was about another 50 acres. (laughs) He'd subsequently moved there, he'd been a share farmer during the war, and we'd established this. That was another reason why I'd gone to get some tertiary education, because there wasn't enough there for me and we'd had a family conference at the end of my schooling and I'd been told that there wasn't enough there for me as well. I was going to have to do for myself. The sensible thing would be to look for some academic excellence, because I'd done quite well at school – when I applied myself. (laughs) There was that sort of thing.

Then I worked for the Lucindale Council for four years, from '68 to '72. We won a couple of premierships in that period of time, so the Council investment in me probably paid off reasonably well. (laughter) They haven't won a premiership since! (laughter)

You've got a reasonable track record there, then.

Yes. So that was fine.

OK. Now, you described about learning about the rabbits; but again backtracking, you're coming in as the Weeds Officer, that's your appointment. What was your background in the weeds area? I know obviously through Roseworthy you'd learnt a bit, but ...

Yes, I'd taken a reasonable interest – not a hell of a lot, but my Ag. Science teaching, there was a component in that of weeds and I'd made a weed collection (laughs) while I was at Roseworthy and all those sorts of things. I had the basics, and then I had to get some grounding in relation to that. Some of that grounding was provided by the Department of Agriculture's Weed Unit. That was headed up by the late Max O'Neil. He used to come out and talk. There was a little red-headed fellow at Naracoorte who was their regional agronomist, weeds adviser – John Dawes. He subsequently fell out with the Department over the move of the Department of Ag's offices from Naracoorte out to Struan, which was 11 miles out of the town. That posed some problems there. He went off with the Commonwealth Development Bank and he's still there. (laughs) I see him from time to time at Adelaide Oval at the cricket. He was a mentor, and helping to encourage a more professional approach to weed control.

The South East was pretty well placed with the councils, because weed control at the local level was the province of the councils, and they appointed an authorised officer. Most of the southeastern councils had a full-time weeds officer, they were big enough and affluent enough to employ somebody that was either a full-time weeds officer or, like me, a weeds and rabbit control officer. The rabbit control aspect was expected to be handled more in the summer, and because it was promoted as a contract scheme for landholders that was paying for itself, it wasn't a draw, on the ratepayers, because we were recovering the cost from the individuals that contracted the council to do the 1080 poisoning. The rabbit problem at that stage was huge, it was absolutely monumental problem.

Not just in the South East, but statewide.

It was more of a problem in the South East than it was, or perceived to be, in other parts of the State. There were parts of the South East where they didn't think they had much of a problem, either, as far as rabbits were concerned. But the larger councils down there that were involved were Tatiara, Robe, Kingston, Beachport, Coonalpyn in the Upper South East and Meningie. Lucindale had just come into the scheme with Pat Kelly, who'd had this altercation with Ralph

James, who didn't think that he was doing enough work. They'd had a difference of opinion there.

That was the weeds aspect. Max O'Neil and John Dawes. Then subsequently we used to have regional conferences from time to time, which I was the chairman of (laughs) down there – a young and enthusiastic young fellow, and some of these old wiser heads who didn't want to get lumbered with some of these things said, 'This young fellow will, we'll give him plenty to do'.

Well, you had the energy and the enthusiasm too.

I guess that's right. Obviously made a bit of an impression, because old Max thought that I wasn't too bad.

The regional conferences, they'd bring together officers from other councils?

From a lot of the councils, yes, and so we'd have a meeting – generally it was in Naracoorte, because the people from down Penola, they had an officer there – and the Mount and Millicent, they were all there. We had a pretty good group down there at that stage. They, with some justification, thought that they were ahead of everybody else in the State as far as the administration of weed control was concerned. But there were some major concerns about how things were going, and that obviously wasn't just at the local level but I subsequently found out that it was at the State level as well, and so that there was a move to have a more effective and professional operation throughout the State. Max O'Neil was a prime mover in working on the legislation. It probably – I guess they were talking about it before 1972 because in 1972 I was employed by the Department of Lands and was interviewed by the Director, and that was an ad. The Director of Lands (laughs) did the interviewing, old Granite Jack.

So you are looking there to leave Lucindale?

Yes. By that stage we had two kids, two daughters, and it had become quite apparent to me that the farm was going to be battling. Eventually we managed to get through the depression, I suppose it was – I don't know whether it was a depression, but it was a bloody nasty spot – but we eventually managed to sell the farm with enough left over to pay for all of our debts and set my parents up in Naracoorte in retirement, and there was nothing left for us. We got bugger all out of it except five years' experience, and the entrée to this new life.

In '71 I'd applied for my job and, as I say, the interview ... It was an interview panel of two, Jack Dunsford (the Director of Lands) was the major inquisitor, with Ron Wright from the Public Service Board in the background, who was there to answer questions about the ins and outs, but he didn't take much involvement in the interview at all. (laughs) One of the things that I'd asked was could they help us with accommodation to come down. Ron nearly swallowed his chewy (laughs) – 'We don't usually do those sort of things!'. Anyway, old Jack Dunsford

said ‘Would you be able to make a bit of an exception in this case?’. Ron did. The State Government had quite a heap of houses that they’d acquired for the MATS[3] Plan. They offered us rental of one of those at Darlington, and I nearly stepped back at that stage because we’d been paying $4 a week to the Council for a brand new house that they’d built us in Lucindale and we were suddenly going to be – we were going to get a slightly higher salary but the rental was $25 a week, which (laughs) was six times as much as we’d been paying. Anyway, we thought about it for a while and my wife said, ‘Realistically there’s more chance for advancement if we go to Adelaide, and it’s education for our kids and all that sort of thing’. That was a major incentive for us.

So is that personal or career advancement?

Yes, it was a career advancement, yes.

What was the job that you were being interviewed for, what was the actual job?

It was adviser for the – vermin control adviser – and at that stage …

It’s a statewide ...?

… Yes. It was in the Lands Department, in the Vermin Control Branch, but the Vermin Control Advisory Committee, which I mentioned before, was directly responsible to Jack Dunsford, and that caused a few frictions as far as the rest of the department was concerned because Bromell and his little group were not responsible to all of the (laughs) lower orders of the …

The hierarchy and so on.

… of the hierarchy. They were directly responsible to Jack Dunsford, who was the chairman of the Vermin Control Advisory Committee, and it had several landholders: a bloke called Frank Heaslip from Carrieton, who was the chairman of the District Council of Carrieton and a pastoralist and also a successful businessman, he or his family owned the Grosvenor Hotel in Adelaide, and he was also instrumental in the establishment of Westminster School, he put up the money that helped to establish Westminster in 1960; and Richard Harvey, who was a landholder from Narrung down at Meningie, and who had been the youngest chairman of a council, he’d been the chairman of the Tatiara Council, and he’d taken up Brookman land at Narrung, it was part of the Brookman family, and that had had a major rabbit problem on there, He’d come to the – he came to the Department of Agriculture to ask for advice on establishing lucerne at Narrung and they’d directed him to the agronomists and so on and so he was dealing with Newton Tiver. He said, ‘That’s pretty good’. Newton gave him advice on how to grow lucerne and so on. He said, ‘Now, there’s major problems with rabbits down there. What do I do with them?’. Newton says, ‘I don’t know, but there’s a bloke over in the Lands Department that might be able to help you there’. He hadn’t had a lot to do with Bromell when he’d been

[3] MATS – Metropolitan Adelaide Transport Study.

doing the work at Tatiara, but he did know of him. He went and saw him, and Bromell and his team of blokes went down and they established what they were going to do on Narrung. Narrung was used as a trial area, a demonstration area, for the 1080 baiting works, but also was used to look quite extensively at the behaviour of rabbits and so on down in that area. A lot of the work that was done down there underpins all of the recommendations that are currently still in vogue for the control of rabbits. They looked at the best way of poisoning rabbits.

Initially Bromell was influenced by the work that had been done by Ian Rowley in CSIRO Wildlife, because Rowley had done quite a lot of work on bait preferences and so on, and the indications were that carrots were preferred bait to anything else, oats; but South Australia had always used 1080-treated oats here, and that was largely because it was easier to do. There were a couple of companies here in South Australia that were producing commercial 1080 oats, Houghton and Byrne and Rentokil were the firms that were making it, and it was commercially available, but it was very expensive.

You could use it unrestricted?

Yes. Farmers could just go in there and buy it. Because it was a registered chemical, they'd just take it and they'd do it. But they didn't have good guidelines as to how they'd use it, so they'd just chuck it out and …

Hope for the best.

… and it didn't work all that well. Anyway, the work that Bromell did down at Narrung was influenced by arguments from South Australian people that carrots were messy, and wasn't there something that was easier and that you didn't have to use straight away? He looked or he compared carrots and oats and free feeding both lots and so on. They looked at preferences and so on. The trials indicated – and they've always indicated – that rabbits do prefer carrots to oats and so on, but that's if you give them a choice. If you give them just carrots or just oats and they don't have anything else to eat, we discovered that it doesn't matter. He was able to get equally comparable results using carrots or oats, with a proviso that you put in an extra free feed for oats, but still over the same period, two free feeds with carrots or three free feeds with the oats.

The more important thing was the timing of when you did the poisoning. If you poisoned during the breeding season you got a much poorer result than you did during the non-breeding season, and rabbits are very seasonal-controlled as far as their breeding's concerned. That was fundamental to everything that we've talked about. As well as that they were able to demonstrate that rabbits are very territorial and so you can deal with them in an area and it's not just going to be flooded in there. That was the work that was involved there.

Frank Heaslip, up at Carrieton, he'd been to New Zealand and seen what the New Zealanders had been doing with dealing with their rabbit problem over there. They'd never had myxomatosis, so their rabbit problem was much, much worse than the Australian problem at the time when he was over there. He'd come back to South Australia and put into practice – in a pretty big way, because his property Glenroy at Carrieton, it's about 20 000 acres or something like that, (laughs) it's not small – and so he'd been able to do quite a lot of work up there which Bromell was able to capitalise on later on, because Frank had kept all of his information about his activities on his properties – as lots of farmers do, the old Cooper's notebook – and he'd kept his Cooper's notebooks, so he's a bit like me with that box of books down there. (laughs).

Yes, had a box or two of them.

But he was able to get information about the effectiveness and the costs and so on, so there was a lot of that stuff.

As well as that, at about the same time as some of this was going on … For Bromell this was several steps back – Bromell had worked out how to work the system, he was a very, very good student of the public service system, a long time ago, how you worked it and so on. But as well as that he was also able to work out how to get external funding, and that's been extremely valuable as far as the vertebrate pest control side of things has been concerned, because they appointed another research officer in 1966, and that was Brian Cooke.

And through external funding.

That was all by the Australian Wool Research funding. They got funding for him. They also got funding for extension when I was employed: I was being paid by the Australian Wool Research funding, not by the State government. But there was a proviso in the contract that the State government would make us permanent staff when the external funding was finished. Nick Newland was appointed as the extension officer before me. He decided that he wanted to broaden his fields and so he got a job elsewhere in the Lands Department. One of the reasons – he didn't get on all that well with Bromell. But now he recognises just how good Bromell was, as we all did. All of us have benefited just so much from the mentoring of a man who was brilliant in his field but didn't have grandiose ideas about his field. He didn't like being called the boss. He preferred to think of us all as colleagues and we were equal colleagues. It was quite an extraordinary little group.

Because you've got a mix there of researchers, you mentioned, and you've got your admin. people, your public servants proper, so to speak.

Yes. The whole thing. Because there were so few of us we didn't have this silo mentality, and so we overlapped and worked together. I'd work with Cooky, with his people. Then he'd come

and help me with extension and so on. We all worked with our very small amount of administrators.

Your prime focus, your extension work there, is in the weeds area, was it?

Yes, it was when I was with the council.

No, but when you joined the Department of Lands?

No, I was purely rabbit control. Yes, vertebrate pest control or, in those days, vermin control – vermin control, rabbits – and there was a bit of interest in dingos, but the Pastoral Board had a finger in the pie there as well, we only got involved because we controlled the 1080 and it was not available to anybody else except people who'd been trained with the handling of it. Bromell very jealously said, 'No, you blokes, you've got good contacts with the pastoralists up there but you know nothing about this. One of our blokes will do the mixing and handling of the stuff'. Subsequently I got involved with that when Dean Smith had a heart attack in 1975 and got sent out into the pastoral areas, so that opened things up. But initially, at this stage, when I was employed by the Lands Department in 1972, the moves were on for legislative change.

In Agriculture, Max O'Neil and Arthur Tideman was involved at this stage and Grant Baldwin, but Baldy was weeds research and so on. There was a bit of a problem for quite a while there because the establishment of the Pest Plants Commission, which O'Neil was working towards from – well, before 1972 because he was telling us about what the proposals were, because there were state conferences for weeds for all the local government people. We used to meet in the Highways Department's lecture rooms, and so I went to the first one of those conferences back in '68 or something like that – and some of the agenda was about controlling weeds and all this jazz and there were all sorts of other interesting things, like plague locusts were on the go in about 1970 or something like that, and so we got a bit of a grounding on it from the research people that were involved in that.

End of Disk 1
Disk 2 – 27.11.2008

Richard, thanks for just clarifying that aspect about when you joined the Department, because you'd been talking about weeds in the local context and now you are coming in talking about vermin and I wasn't quite sure what you expected to be doing. That's good.

That's fair enough because at that stage, and Max was a bit jealous, perhaps, that Bromell had [more clout] ... But they were discussing things together, O'Neil and Bromell, because there'd been some quite significant changes to the *Vermin Act* in 1967 which had incorporated the sorts of things that Bromell wanted in his scheme and so on. But there were problems, and some of those problems were there was a concern that councils weren't prepared to take the tough line against landholders that weren't doing the right thing. So that there needed to be a big stick, but

as a last resort. That was a philosophy that was espoused particularly by people like Ralph James and so on, who were good landholders and couldn't see why if somebody didn't do the right thing you wouldn't give them a thump. But it's difficult at the local level sometimes to take action against people who (laughs) in most other regards are pretty law-abiding. In fact, I've run into quite a few people subsequently who were horrified; they'd never been (laughs) near a court before in their lives, even for driving offences or something like that, and suddenly they're hauled off to the courts to be dealt with quite severely.

That's interesting, Richard, because you've been talking about the '60s and then getting into the '70s. As we know, that era of the '60s there's a lot of questioning of authority and challenges to authority.

Yes, yes.

So on one hand you've got someone wanting to wield a big stick and on the other hand we've got even conservative landowners, perhaps, who are resenting authority.

Yes. That's right. But there was a need and they needed somebody to deal with it. I think that we handled it pretty well, and I will get to that in a while. But the thing in relation to the development of this legislation was that both fields, both that of the pests, which was the new name that we worked around – 'What are we going to call it?', 'Vermin?', 'No, there's all sorts of things and fleas and all sorts that'd come in amongst it as well'. 'Vertebrate pests' was the thing that was chosen.

Who ended up choosing it? Did anyone put their foot down and say, 'It's got to be this'?

It was a general consensus, but it was animals. Initially it was 'pest animal control' and that wasn't definitive enough because there were other semantics: 'animals' covers a whole range of things, including grasshoppers and so on. We didn't want to be involved in that. We were aiming to be pretty specific. There was the discussion within the group, discussion with the members of the Vermin Control Advisory Committee; and Bunny Fennessey was a representative of the CSIRO Wildlife. He wasn't – he was a member of the Vermin Control Advisory Committee – and interestingly, when they'd gotten off, they'd done a tour around a fair bit of South Australia to have a look at the problems and talk to people. They'd gone out in the Lands Department's black Buick, which had only ever been used for ceremonial occasions, (laughs) but it was a big enough car to get them all in, if they left the driver behind, because in those days senior staff didn't drive themselves. They had drivers. In fact, Bromell himself, he had to stand up on his hind legs and say, 'I'm quite capable of driving myself. I don't need a driver. If you want to give us money for a driver, we'll take the money for vermin control and you can find something else for him to do, because we're quite capable of driving ourselves'. Off they went around South Australia calling on all the councils and so on. The Director of Lands, Jack Dunsford, and there were about five of them altogether or something like that, and off they'd gone.

The important thing that both disciplines had worked on was that there needed to be short lines of communication with people who knew what the problems were and had remedies for it. They had landholders, and they were almost directly responsible to the minister. That did cause some problems with bureaucracies, and it always caused problems, because we were always trying to explain to people in other parts of departments how we worked.

You're part of the system, but you're outside the system in a sense.

Yes. We subsequently were in a situation where we were trying to [integrate] – This was vertebrate pest people, because we got transferred to the responsibility of the Minister for Agriculture. We were in there trying to say that, 'Yes, we're part of the Department of Agriculture', the Pest Plants Commission people were distancing themselves from the Department for [of] Agriculture, (laughs) and so they were away out on the outer, there were some differences there.

But the two pieces of legislation were eventually proclaimed in 1975, and so there was that. There was a period of hiatus in the time that that was being done, because the senior people were concentrating on getting this into law, and so they had to be dealing with the ministers and so on. At that stage I didn't realise just how difficult that was; I found out later on.

You were still on the learning curve.

Yes, it was a major learning curve. But in retrospect it was only about a three-year period or something like that for this legislation to get right through and be proclaimed, and the *Vertebrate Pests Act* was brought in with a financial year that's the normal July–June, and so it was proclaimed and it was operational in the middle of 1975. The *Pest Plants Act* came in then but it didn't get operational until 1976, because, to make it different from everybody else, they had a financial year that was a calendar year and so they started on 1st January.

The thing was that weeds and rabbits don't work on the same timeframe as politicians and everybody else. That's why there needed to be this close liaison and close control – close liaison with the ministers. But the government was convinced that this was a good idea, and at the time statutory organisations were the vogue. The Lands Department went for a statutory authority, which was the Vertebrate Pest Control Authority, and the Minister for Agriculture went for a commission, which was the Pest Plants Commission. So they were off there. We had some liaison, but it wasn't particularly close at that stage, as far as I was concerned.

The other thing in relation to what I was doing now that I was employed, my initial introduction to the Vermin Control Branch – I had a desk in with Bromell and his desk was covered in files and Christ knows what, much like mine was later on (laughs) – but my task, to give me some clues and so on, was to organise all of the folders and get everything into box files and index

them, get all these sorts of things and devise a card index so that we might be able to find some of these things, which we did. That gave me the opportunity to just organise things a bit and find out where all the paperwork was.

Then Bromell said, 'There's a few things that we want to do some more testing about', because at that stage the scheme – this was the rabbit poisoning scheme – had changed from the recommended scheme that had been developed at Narrung with free feeding and so on, which was spread over a period of 10 days, which was very effective in killing rabbits and so on, but it was time-consuming and it was also expensive. There was quite a bit of criticism by landholders that perhaps you could do something that was a bit cheaper. The Western Australians had developed a scheme which had incorporated the oats situation, where you had a free-feeding situation and poison combined together, and it was called 'One-shot 1080'. Now, the old conventional 1080 – and this is 1080, just the numbers, 1000 and 80, which relate to sodium monofluoroacetate, and it just happened that it was 1080 on a list of poisons during the Second World War that were being tested for rodenticides, but also obviously could be used for other things as well – but the major problem was that the normal rodenticides before the war had been sourced from the Axis countries. The boffins had to go out and test a whole lot of other stuff, and they also were finding out the properties of some of the things, and 1080 is a particularly effective poison, not so much for mice and rats, although it kills them too, but it's particularly good for canids – dogs and coyotes and dingoes and those sorts of things, they are particularly susceptible to it – and rabbits. So the West Australians, they'd developed this method where instead of the poison bait being a very low toxicity – 0.08% or something like that, it's a very diluted amount; 1 kg does several tonnes of oats or something like that, it's quite extraordinary – they changed it, because to poison a rabbit the rabbit needs to ingest the best part of three-quarters of a metre of the bait in a trail. Every grain. They have to eat that within 15 minutes, because there's a delayed action. The monofluoroacetate is metabolised in the Krebs cycle, particularly in the heart cells, and it takes 15 minutes for it to act, so that you've got this delay period of 15 minutes for the animal to take in enough, and then there's no antidote for it, it's slam the bag on it.

Rowley from CSIRO had been able to demonstrate that rabbits will eat more than four times as much as ¾ m of oats in 15 minutes, if they're fully hungry. That's what the free feeding was all about, because you free feed them and, once they are conditioned to it, they just hone in on it. I've seen them, because I used to do quite a lot of observation when I was doing poisoning work: you'd be coming along through particularly scrubby areas and the rabbits'd be sitting out under a bush or something like that waiting for you. (laughs) By the fourth time that you came around they were just sitting there waiting for you and would just dive on it.

The West Australians changed [that]. They said, 'OK. If we load up one oat grain so that it's got as much 1080 in it' – and it's 10% 1080, they do it by a vacuum destruction process of the structure of the oat grain inside so it's 10% 1080 – 'it doesn't matter if the rabbit eats that grain at the beginning of eating oats or 10 days later or whatever'. Theoretically that's good; but then if it rains you've got some problems. There's other factors as well as just whether the rain washes the 1080 off. There's definitely a disincentive. Dean Smith used to explain it's a bit like if you're eating a chop and you drop it on the ground and it gets sand in it. (laughs) If there's nothing else to eat you'll shake all the sand off and you'll eat it, but it's pretty grindy on the teeth. It's a bit like that for rabbits, and so that just reduces their interest in eating it. If they don't get a full dose in the 15-minute period then they'll start to feel crook and, like everybody else, (laughs) 'Bugger this', and they just won't eat it. The rain-damaged, particularly rain-damaged, conventional oats is just avoided, they just won't eat it. But if you put out a new trail with fresh-treated oats, they'll get stuck into it and you'll poison them, because they'll go into it and there's no taste to it.

They don't learn to avoid the poison; they just come back and ...

Yes. They just say, 'Oh, no, no, there's that lot there', and so they just won't eat it. Anyway, this was – back to me – he said, 'We need to do some work to compare the conventional oats with the one-shot to see what the differences are'. I was given the task and a minder, who was one of our [field staff] … Brian Cooke, he had two research assistants, field assistants, – Dave Chinner and Brian Sutton – they were doing all of the looking at all his study sites while Brian was at the Adelaide University, so they were there. One of the study sites was on Heaslip's property – not at the Glenroy property at Carrieton but further out, on a station called Witchitie. It's an important component of the story; I'll get to that later on.

Back to the task that I'd been set. Dave Chinner was my minder to show me how you set out a study area and monitor the population. The major thing to do was to set transects through the areas that we were looking at, and then you'd drive around – particularly at night, you can do it with early-morning walks as well but we were doing major observations, about 20 km or something like that, that we set out down at Lucindale. We went somewhere that I knew, (laughs) the people and so on. We went down there and set up this first study. We also wanted to do some up in the Upper South East, initially that was in Coonalpyn on another Heaslip property called Day Spring. Off we went down there and set ourselves up in the shearers' quarters at Redbank at Lucindale that belonged to George Copping, and he was quite amenable to having us on his property and quite happy for us to be there. He was a member of the Lucindale Council, so that was (laughs) maintaining close liaison there and so on. We went out and set to with the work, a lot of it being done at night after we'd decided on the paddocks that

we were going to use and what we were using them for and put out the transects. Then we went out at night and just followed these (laughs) white, reflective posts – some of the time it was easy because they were out in the paddock, but some of it was into fairly scrubby areas and so on – and we were in short-wheelbase Toyotas that were specifically designed for the needs of our research people so that they had a turret in the roof that an observer could stand up in and his hips were protected by a padded ring that fitted into the turret but it was made out of hessian bags that were sewn together and stuffed with straw so that, when you're bumping around out in the paddock over some bumpy stuff or something like that, you didn't end up (laughs) with a smashed hip or [bad bruises] ...

Bit of padding and stop the bruising and stuff like that, yes.

Yes. It was good. Off we went, it was about 20 km from memory in the thing, plus travel because some of the paddocks were spread around. We'd be going out spotlighting half-past nine at night or something like that. You had to wait until it was dark so that it was effective. We estimated the populations that were out there and counted the numbers of rabbits. There were quite large numbers; compared to what you'd see these days it was still quite effective numbers around.

Approximate, but reliable numbers?

We could get the definite numbers of what we saw.

But I mean in terms of overall population, you're seeing a fairly good ...?

You're seeing a pretty representative sample, yes. Then afterwards you're looking to see what the effect of the treatments were. You'd say there's been a 98–99% reduction in what you saw. You can then translate that to the overall numbers. But yes, there are formulas that you can use, but you need in that situation to have known animals that you see them before and after, and then the ratio of what you see, then you can relate that. But we weren't doing that; Brian was doing that sort of stuff up at Witchitie, where he virtually knew every bloody rabbit: they were all tagged. Those observations and so on were fundamental in our categoric statements that the majority of rabbits don't move from their territorial or their home-range areas. A movement of about 200 m or something like that. From a point direction that's still quite a [lot] … They could move around; but generally rabbits don't move. We've been able to demonstrate that quite clearly, and I might talk about some other things, but not only just from observations but in behavioural and changes to insect populations as well, we're able to relate the two things together. Down at Lucindale off we went, so that was all pretty good. There were a couple of interesting little anecdotes there.

Just to put a time frame on, that was getting towards the mid '70s there ...?

This was 1972.

When you started.

I'd been employed in January, January 4 1972. By mid-March it would be I'd been doing the paperwork and that was something that I could do when I was in the office, so it wasn't something that Bromell said, 'You've got to get this all fixed up now, young fellow, because ...'. He wasn't too fussed about it, anyway. We'd organised things, so we would have been out there by mid-March or something like that.

[31:58] A bit curious that you've made that transition, you've come up to town presumably ... in Darlington and suddenly back out in the field.

Yes, that's right. My wife was not tremendously [impressed] … She still talks about it. Because I was away a lot, as we all were, and that's one of the major problems in this field was we were out into the field, and it's a major problem. You're working … We did a lot of our work at night, so we used to skive off a bit in the daytime when we had some free time and we'd go out and we'd be [tourists] … But we're still looking at things and we'd run into people and talk to them. You're living the bloody thing, there's not much else to do except tell stories or something like that. These were some of the stories.

[33:12] Dave Chinner told a story against himself that some of the other blokes expanded on later on. He was interested in catching bees, and so he used to keep bees as a bit of a sideline. He lived up at Blackwood. There was this hive of bees – this was down at Narrung earlier on before I'd been employed – and the general thing for catching a hive of bees was to put them in a chaff bag or a wheat bag or something like that. There they were, hanging from a bush. 'Ah, I'll have these', and so out he went. He grabbed a bag out of the back of the Toyota – and he was with another bloke who was doing the driving at that stage – and over he went and he bagged the bees in there and (claps hands) closed the top of the bag and shook them down a bit. Bad luck, there was no bloody bottom in the bag! (laughter) Suddenly he was enveloped with bees. The other fellow, he didn't want to have bees in the bus with him, so he locked the doors. Here's Dave with a swarm of bloody bees that were not very happy, flying all around him. He didn't have any veil or anything like that to protect him. He might have got a few stings there.

[35:05] There were a couple of other things that did happen on that Lucindale trip. After we'd put out some of the baits and so on we were touring around out on the thing and we encountered a huge tiger snake asleep out in the middle of a paddock, he was just lying down there like a bloody great big stick. Dave decided that he'd like to have a photograph of him. OK, that's fine. We stopped and wound the window down and he's got the Nikon out and he's 'Oh, yeah' and I'm 'Oh, it's not particularly interesting', because it just looks like a stick, a big, black stick on the ground. I said, 'I'll just stir him up a bit for you so that you can get a bit of an action shot'. I jumped out of the bus and picked up an old, dry cowpat and tried to throw it –

there was a bit of a breeze blowing, cowpat blew away. Then I picked up a small heath root from the land clearing that was still around the place and I just lobbed it over and it landed about a foot away from the snake. That got his attention. He just came up, and he was about – he would have been about 5 feet long or something like that – and up he came, half of him up off the ground and behind his head flattened out as big as my hand. It was pretty impressive, sort of round. Dave got his photograph all right. But the old snake obviously looked around and he must have blamed the Toyota, because the next thing he's down, and Dave got another photograph of him well on the move – not going away; heading straight for the front wheel of the Toyota. And *me*. I'm round the front, and he was coming pretty fast. I thought, 'I don't know whether I'm going to be able to get back to the door and fight this out. He's going to be here with me'. I jumped up on the bonnet. I'm looking down over the Toyota and this snake gives the front wheel a whack and then off he trundled. So that was an interesting insight into the ...

And Dave got a couple of photos.

Yes, he did. Couple of beauties, which are lodged in the APC's archives there somewhere.

I'm going to look for them.

[38:10] Then the other one, and there's no photograph of this. One night when we were out doing the spotlight counts, we saw a couple of magnificent wedge-tailed eagles. They were just out on the ground and they were feeding on a rabbit that had been poisoned, but it must have been well on through the thing; anyway, it was there. We were doing the post-poisoning counts. We shone the light on and, 'Oh, God! Look at that! Fantastic!'. 'Aren't they terrific!'. Anyway, they took off. Up they went, into the dark, and you expect they were just going to fly away. They didn't. (laughter) Bloody great big eagles, and they just flew *straight* down the beam of the light, and at the last minute Dave realised what was happening and he cut the light, hit the top of the deck and these eagles went straight on; and we were right alongside a patch of scrub – there was crashing and banging and so on. They didn't know where they were, they just went straight into the scrub. They didn't do themselves any damage, apparently, because they weren't there when we went back to have a look next day. But it was pretty scary.

They weren't happy about their food ... end like this.

They weren't very impressed. They just flew straight down. I'd never heard of it before, and I've never seen a bird fly down the beam of a spotlight before. So that was a bit of action there.

[40:12] When the rabbits are poisoned, where do you find the dead ones? You've got the ... on them.

You don't find very many. You find some. [Carrion eaters get many of them.]

Do they go back to the burrow or somewhere?

A lot of them do, because there's no action for 15 minutes and then it takes them a while. Because what the poison does is block the Krebs cycle, so they just run out of energy, because the Krebs cycle provides the cell energy. They obviously feel a bit crook. Quite often you'll find them just at the mouth of the warren. Sometimes they'll still be … I've seen them occasionally where they've still been alive, I've picked one up by the ears – he was just sitting in there – and said, 'Boo!', and he was dead. Just the extra stress and he died. You find some, but not lots.

As far as the risk to off-targets is concerned, it's reasonably minimal, particularly for eagles and those scavenging carrion and so on, because they are very much more tolerant to the 1080. I daresay if there was enough in one place that it might do them an injury. The sorts of animals that are likely to be affected by it are dogs – they are particularly susceptible – so the important thing for people to make sure that they don't take any of their prize sheepdogs out into an area that's just been treated. If they do go anywhere near that it's pretty smart to put some sort of a muzzle on so that they can't eat it.

That's taking the bait; but would … it probably applies more to a dingo than a domestic dog, would eating the dead rabbit …

It will, yes.

– would it affect them, still?

There's enough in there – yes, there is enough in there to kill a domestic dog. It's not as serious a risk as the one-shot oats. One-shot oats, because you've got this very, very high concentration in there, there's a lot more risk to dogs. When I was working for the Lucindale Council I hadn't had any reports of farmers losing dogs in poisoned areas, but with one-shot it was a different matter. We managed to poison quite a few dogs, and so people were a bit unhappy. There was one bloke that I'd specifically gone and told him, because I'd been poisoning along the road near his place, and I said, 'Now, there's a risk'. He said, 'Ah, this bloody useless dog', and so it wouldn't matter if he'd get poisoned anyway. Anyway, of course, the inevitable happened and the bloody dog *did* get poisoned. He complained to his councillor. At the council meeting there was a question that come up and the councillor, he was a bit accusative of me not being careful. I said, 'Now, just hold on for a minute. I went and saw that bloke and told him, and he told me that his dog wasn't worth anything'. (telephone rings, break in recording)

The other, (laughs) which was a major problem at the time as far as this first trial work that I did, was that we'd been out and we'd put the one-shot out so that was fine, that was OK. We'd used some 1080 solution that was in the poison compound down at Thebarton, the Lands Department.

[The west parklands] ... there, yes.

We'd taken that down. We went out the next morning to have a look and see if there were any dead rabbits around. I'm expecting – because the rabbits had been enjoying the oats – we'll find *heaps* of them. Out we go, and we go into the paddock: well, the fucking rabbit's jumped out from behind a bush there and another one over there. 'Oh, God! What have we done?' Just at that stage there'd been some reports from Western Australia that 1080 in solution lost some of its toxicity. Turned out that it was just very minor, if in fact it did happen; but anyway, that was there. We're, 'Oh, Christ. Perhaps we should have made up a new solution. We've made a balls-up here', because the bloody rabbits, they were everywhere, and we didn't find any dead ones. So, 'How are we going to retrieve the situation?'. 'I know the Lucindale Council's got some 1080 powder in their poison store, because I got it and it's still there'. Off we went, into the town to see the District Clerk to start with and we told him what the problem was, and then down to the council depot and everyone gave me a razz down there because that's where my office had been down there. So we mixed up some 1080, got all the gear on and took care – because you're always extremely careful about handling this poison because it's pretty dangerous in its concentrated form, you use respirators and the whole box and dice – off we went, went out and we mixed up all of the bait material again and off we went. I finished running the trail in the bloody dark. We got it all out to get everything done. I still had good eyesight in those days, because I could see – you'd just follow the furrow and you'd have to just keep on the go, and you can drop the next furrow on the same furrow. Sometimes you drive through and it looks as if there's only been one furrow, but there's four furrows there. We went out the next morning and there were dead rabbits everywhere, so we were pretty happy with that.

It wasn't until some time later that the reason that our failure was explained. I was telling Dean Smith afterwards, back in the office – and he had a very expressive face, old Dean. Suddenly the penny dropped. 'Oh, no! It *couldn't* be!'. I said, 'What have you done, Dean? You tell me what's this?'. He said, 'It couldn't be. Nah, no, no. No, I wouldn't have done that. We had to do a training course for some local government blokes and we didn't want to mix up any 1080 and so. I made up a dummy batch with bicarbonate of soda and some nigrosine dye mixed into it so that it just looked like 1080 and it was in a 1080 tin and we went through the whole thing and I was very careful and all the rest of it. But the blokes were there, so I couldn't just pour the solution away afterwards, and I must have forgotten'. (laughter) So, 'Thanks', we just fixed up the digestion of a paddockful of rabbits ...

That was a good trial run for you.

Yes. Anyway, the results were brilliant afterwards. We got in excess of 98% of the population out of there.

[51:53] But the comparison with the one-shot trials were slightly less than 90%. Initially that sounds pretty good; but when you compare it you've got about 1% left or you've got 10% of a population left, so you've got quite a big remnant population. There were various other things. As a result of that I did some trial works at other locations and was testing other methods of application as well.

We took one-shot out of the equation in South Australia – not at that stage; they continued to use it until 1975. The reason that we took it out was that in 1975, with the establishment of the Vertebrate Pest Control Authority, and very much as a result of criticism from Ralph James and so on, instead of having a contracting service that did the work, that landholders should be able to bring their own oats to the council offices or the council works area and have their bait material treated; and they would agree to do the necessary free feeding and being very generous with where they put the bait out, and that they would agree to do warren destruction, which we believed was important. The trade-off was that we went back to the conventional oats and did away with the one-shot treatment, which I'd shown was very considerably less effective than the conventional treatment. Our argument was that, even with under-qualified workmen, they'd still get a pretty good result and we'd get the necessary warren destruction and stuff done. That worked very well.

You had to rely, therefore, on the landowner doing the job properly, or as well as they could.

Yes. That's right. But that's where we – at this stage the *Vertebrate Pests Act* had come in and one of the big innovations in that was that the organisation that did any prosecutions was the Vertebrate Pest Control Authority, so that the local council – and in the early stages it was just councils – would handle the negotiations with their landholders and supply them with the treated bait and so on, but if they ran into a landholder who they couldn't encourage to do the work voluntarily and they'd been through the whole thing and they'd explained that, 'If you don't, then I'll pull the mop on you and give you a warning notice, which brings the Vertebrate Pest Control Authority's regional adviser' – because at that stage we employed new staff that were located out in the regions, and they would then come and do inspections, talk to the landholder as well and see why he wasn't doing it, but then if the work hadn't been done satisfactorily in the interim, and still there was a period from the warning notice to when the regional adviser got there, but he could do enough work to satisfy the regional adviser – he would get a notice that required him to do the work that was written out on the notice, and if he didn't do it he would be prosecuted.

Initially, the Vertebrate Pest Control Authority made it mandatory that if the work wasn't done that we would prosecute first, to ensure that there was an infringement of the law, that the person was guilty of an offence, and then, if the work still hadn't been done, we'd send in a

contractor (who would be the local council) and they could go in there, they could do the work. The Vertebrate Pest Authority would pay them as the contractor, so there was no problems about having to recover their money or anything like that – they didn't have to gain the opprobrium of their landholders – and, if there was a debt incurred, then it was the State government that would be recovering it.

We're up in 1975. We've jumped a long way ahead in relation to that; but in that situation I was the pioneer of that scheme. I trained all of the local government people – we had to do it over a period of several two-week training schools – and got them going. I'd already trained the regional advisers that we'd employed prior to 1975 so that we had them on the go; but from '75 through till about '77, that the blokes were able ...

End of Disk 2
Disk 3, 27 November 2008

Richard, [after the disc finished] you finished off the previous little bit talking about the number of prosecutions against landholders, and you mentioned in '75/76 it was about 57 and then it dropped to three in '76/77, so that sort of rounds out that particular aspect of enforcement you were talking about.

Yes.

Then you started to mention Brian Cooke's return to the Department and a little bit of a change in your work now that Brian was back from his university study. Perhaps we'll pick up there.

Yes, that's fair enough. He'd been involved with the release of the European rabbit flea, *Spilopsyllus*, at Witchitie in about 1969, I think it was.

And that's a property in the north?

Yes, this is Heaslip's other property, further out onto the eastern slopes of the Flinders Ranges. It had been selected because it was Heaslip's rather than for the intrinsic scientific merit.

Ease of access kind of thing.

Yes. The interesting thing was that subsequently it turned out that it's right on the edge of where the European rabbit flea can survive, so that was interesting and it led to further research and, in some respects, it probably led to the rabbit haemorrhagic disease a long time down the track, but that's a way off. But this flea was being explored for the possibility of an alternative and more stable vector for myxomatosis than the three major mosquito species that had been so successful with the earlier spread of myxomatosis. These fleas had been introduced in one spot at Witchitie. Then there'd been some monitoring that had been going on that they were established and so on. When Brian came back from his university studies it was one of the things that he thought we should assess – how far they'd spread and what the rate of spread was. As well as that, he was in the process of establishing some work on roadsides at Pinnaroo. Subsequently, he and his team of blokes – I was involved in that, too – used various forms of

warren destruction on mallee roadsides at Pinnaroo, it was about 29 km or something like that. It's a very extensive study up there.

But up to Witchitie. We went up with a group – we had six blokes, we had three groups of shooters who were equipped with shotguns, because we wanted to shoot every rabbit that we saw. It was essential that we got every rabbit that we saw so that we'd be able to check them for the presence of this European rabbit flea. We set out with maps of the location – they were photocopies of ordnance maps that we had – and some of the blokes knew the area extremely well and they could tell where we were at night, something that was a bit beyond me at that stage. We then set out to work and the shooting parties worked from – it was in the dark from about half-past nine, 10 o'clock through until up to 3 o'clock in the morning before we got to bed in the shearers' quarters at Witchitie. Then we'd get a bit of sleep and organise some breakfast in the morning, because we were just camping. Then we'd process the rabbits that had been [collected]. Each rabbit that we shot was put into an individual plastic bag and the mouth tied off securely so that none of the fleas could get out. We'd spend quite a bit of the – from about 9 o'clock until, I don't know, 1 o'clock or something like that, whatever it took – on our knees on white sheets, checking to see what parasites were on the dead rabbits. We were looking for fleas. We had little hand-held microscopes, plus we had the major microscopes so that we could identify, because there's three different fleas that we were likely to be encountering. There was the native stickfast flea; it's not very good for spreading myxomatosis because it just stays on its host and it doesn't move around. There's dog or cat flea, and that's a lot bigger than either of these. The other one that we were looking for was this mobile *Spilopsyllus*, which had been introduced in about '69 or something like that, so we're looking at '73. We were able to map the extent of the spread out from the spot source. It was starting to get a little bit extensive. We were able to find the boundary in every direction, so we were up and down the creeks and on and across the hills. We were able to see where these fleas had spread to.

One of the interesting things from that, as well as discovering how they'd spread, we were able to find that the rate of spread was greatest where the rabbit numbers were fewest: on the slopes, where you'd think would be a bit peculiar. You would have thought lots of rabbits they'd spread more quickly. Brian's rationale in relation to it – and it's pretty good – is that we were seeing a result of the territoriality of rabbits. The bigger territories up on the hill slopes and so on, where there was fewer rabbits and they're ranging further so that there's less boundaries to cross. That was an interesting aspect of that, that he had – he'd worked extensively in this area up there, and he had his major study area, he'd tagged all of the rabbits in the vicinity. There was an interesting sideline to that, an indication that local rabbit trappers don't believe that

rabbits don't move, because the local rabbit trapper shot a whole swag of these tagged rabbits and told Brian that he got them all over the place. Brian took – the good thing was that he gave him the tags – he was able to plot where all of these animals had been released. They all came from one watering hole, one watering point. None of them were more than 100 m from this watering point. That was an interesting demonstration, once again, in relation to it.

[11:05] There was another funny story in relation to those tagged rabbits. You could say, 'There you go, it's all rubbish; rabbits move 250 km'. Somebody at Blackwood rang up, and they'd captured a rabbit in their back garden or something like that, and it had one of these swivel tags in its ear. (laughs) So 250 km or more away from the study area. But the field assistant, Dave Chinner, had to put his hand up and say that he'd taken a couple of these rabbits home for his kids, and this was one of them that had got away –

Escaped.

– and the property was next door to where he lived. That was just a little sidelight there. But the interesting thing was just identifying all of these fleas and capturing them. There was the opportunity as well, when I was up there, of seeing what the research team did on their periodic – they used to go up there every six weeks and shoot a sample of rabbits for Brian and take various measurements and so on, which were just archived in the laboratory until some of them got used years later. They took things like blood samples on filter papers – blotting paper – and the animals were there. They took an eye, so that they could – they'd take the eye lens and put that in a drying oven, dry it to a constant weight. You can work out the age of rabbits just from the eye lens' weights.

If you know what you're doing.

Yes. That's right. There were all sorts of other things that they did. They'd look at the breeding records and so on. Dave Chinner, he was quite extraordinary. They told a story about when, earlier on, they'd been out and they were capturing and handling the rabbits, weighing them and so on and letting them go. They were palpating them to see whether they were pregnant and how pregnant and all the rest of it. Frank Heaslip, the landholder from up there, had been out with them. He was most impressed because they'd been out on a Monday night and they'd captured this animal and she was pregnant with half-a-dozen youngsters or something like that. They caught it again on the Thursday night, the last Thursday that they were there on this particular trip. Somebody said, 'Yeah, we've got this one on Monday'. Dave palpates it and he says, 'Six kittens' or something, and he said, 'She's 18 days pregnant'. They looked back at the records and he'd said, when they'd caught it on the Monday, that she was 14 days or something like that. Old Frank, he was pretty impressed, this joker: very, very sensitive fingers and knew his – these blokes, they knew their stuff. It was quite extraordinary. That's my involvement …

There are various things at Witchitie. We were looking at vegetation, the effects of rabbits and so on on the vegetation up there. This was the forerunner to a lot of work that we did in lots of places and were able to make recommendations about the effects of rabbits on native vegetation and so on.

[16:03] Then we subsequently had the fortune of a very good season in 1974, out into the pastoral areas. We went to a property called Quinyambie, which is north of the dog fence. That's spelt Q-U-I-N-Y-A-M-B-I-E, Quinyambie, but everyone calls it 'Quinnaby'. It's a Kidman property. Anyway, we were able to make arrangements that we were going to go up there and take a team of four of us. We headed off and it'd been – there was huge amounts of rain. They had 36 inches of rain up there, 1974.

That northeast area, yes.

Yes. It was amazing. It took us three days to get there – you can usually do it in less than a day (laughs) but because we went to – we headed off, we had all our supplies and all the rest of it. We had a trailer and God knows what, and two Toyotas, and off we went. We were going to go out through Frome Downs, up. We went up towards Arkaroola from Yunta, and we called at Frome Downs Station: there wasn't anybody there except the station cook. He'd been a jockey – little, short jockey – he was full of fire and steam, that sort of ... We said, 'What's the situation? Can we keep on, because we want to go to Quinyambie'. He said, 'The best thing you blokes can do' – because there was water everywhere – 'turn around, go back to the tar, go back to the black road at Yunta, go up to Broken Hill and you might go around, get in up the Poison Bore, you might get through that way'. 'Poison Bore', that's just a local name. OK, so off we trundled. We didn't go all that far because by the time we were up there it was night time. We parked off the side of the road: we went up the dog fence and camped for the night. We had a camp there, and then the next day off we trundled. We headed back to Yunta and then up to Cockburn and we thought, 'We haven't got permission to go into New South Wales so perhaps we ought to just check to see, with the local constabulary, if we might be able to go up the border, up the border fence'. We went in and saw the local cop. He said, 'Yes'. He had a look to see what we had, two Toyotas and a trailer on the back. He said, 'You'd probably be able to. There's a creek just north of the town. If you can get through that I reckon you'll be all right'. OK, off we went. This is all pretty slow going. He said, 'I'll come out with you and see that you get through the thing or if you get stuck we'll be able to pull you out'. We got out, and we got to this creek and it wasn't too bad. It had a nasty little duck hook through it, but we got through so we were fine, and off we went.

We're well up through Mulyungarie, and we're going up through there and we're relying very heavily on our ordnance map as to where we are, because initially we were going to get to the

border fence and we'd just go up the border fence. We sort of did that and that wasn't too brilliant there. It started to rain, and so we sort of, 'Arggh ...'. We were at a place called Lake Mundi Mundi, it's a big, big, dry pan most of the time; anyway, it was pretty slippery and damp. We got to a gate, Cookey and I got through. I said to him, 'I don't like the look of this too much. This is pretty clayey sort of stuff. We're going to get stuck here. Perhaps we ought to ...'. We'd been looking – I said, 'I reckon if we duck back and we'll go up here to a place called Relief Dam ...'. 'OK'. '… because that looks a bit sandier and we'll be fine'. Around we turn and along we go. We're going pretty slowly. We didn't see Relief Dam. We didn't see anything for quite a long time so we're getting fairly concerned – and it's about half-past four in the afternoon, and we'd been driving through water all the way. The track was a sandy track, so it wasn't too bad. We came to a bit of a rise. 'We might call this ... Going to stay here the night'. We put the two Toyotas up-tail to the wind and we had a fly tarp over the thing and down the back so that we were pretty snug. That was all right, so there we are. 'OK, we'll have our tea', which we're going to have to prepare, and so out comes all the stuff!

One of the field assistants, he was a bit of an old woman, old Brian. Brian Sutton was his name. He liked to do for himself and didn't share with everybody else. It's a situation ... they'd handled it. Cookey and I were sharing. Dave, he was quite happy to share with us as well. There were two lots of preparation. Brian's there and he puts his kettle on his Primus and he pours some fluid into it, switches the old thing on. It wasn't very long before the kettle starts to start to fart and crackle. It was amazing. It sounded for all the world like a kettle that's boiled dry and somebody's tipped some water in there (mimics fizzing, hissing sounds), all this sort of thing. Anyway, the lid was jumping a bit. 'Shit. You've got your water boiling pretty quickly, Brian. You've run out'. He didn't think it was right. He took the lid off and suddenly there's bloody flames everywhere. Fortunately, he dropped the lid back onto the [hole] – and it dropped down onto the kettle [socket]. There's a great big gout of flame out the spout, about this far from the end of the spout, and there's a gout of flame about a foot, 18 inches long or something like that. It was pretty impressive. By this stage it must have been about half-past five, quarter to six or something like that, it was getting dark. Anyway, we spirited his kettle off the stove with the fire still flaming away from it. Fortunately, got it outside. Then he looked to have a look and see the so-called water that he'd put in there and he'd poured kerosene in there. He's boiling kerosene, and she caught on fire. You're horrified. If we hadn't ... We'd have burnt – we'd have probably burnt ourselves; we certainly would have burnt the two Toyotas and the whole [shebang] ...

Yes, what might have been.

Anyway, we overcame that problem and the next morning off we went.

[26:23] We found this dam a bit further up, so that was a relief. I wrote in my notebook, or something like that, 'Relief Dam: what a relief. We're there, our navigation's not too bad after all'. Then we headed back to the border fence. We were pretty proficient in driving through water by that stage. We'd bypassed the boggy part near Lake Mundi Mundi. Off we went. We'd been driving for quite a while – must have been just about midday – and we met a vehicle coming the other way, just one vehicle by itself, with a whole shearing team. They were hanging all over it. 'Oh, shit!'. They had been stranded for a week. We were the first vehicle to get up through there for a week.

We kept on going and we eventually got to the gate through the border fence that went into [Quinyambie] … We found out afterwards that it went into the homestead, but we couldn't quite find out where it was. We ended up tracking through a fairly muddy patch and we found a shed that we cleaned out by a windmill and we stayed there for a while. The next morning we had a – because we hadn't had a wash or anything for about three days – so we had a bath, more or less, with buckets, at the tank or at the trough. Brian Sutton, who was the fellow that had just about burnt us out before, he cleaned up this little shed and he was quite happy he was going to stay there. We decided that we wouldn't stay there; we'd seen an interesting location back on the fence just south of the gate that we'd been to, and we went back there, after nearly having a mutiny from the two field assistants, because they'd decided that they were going to establish in the shed. We went back to the [border] … It was a swamp, just a big depression that was full of water: we called it 'Lake Friday Friday' [as a play on Lake Mundi Mundi] because we got there on Friday. We set up our tarpaulin, little tarpaulin, and then we set to to work out what we were going to do there.

[29:59] There were huge numbers of rabbits. We subsequently established that there were 34 rabbits to the hectare on there: it was just huge numbers. We did an amazing amount of work in the fortnight – we were away for a fortnight, taken us three days to get there, so 11 days we were there. We set out transects at right angles to the border fence, on both sides of the fence, at intervals I've forgotten – kilometre or something like that – for 3 km [out] on either side of the fence. We ended up, we must have had seven of these things, we had 42 km of transects that we traversed at night looking at the numbers and working out the numbers of rabbits.

It was interesting because there was a drop-off. There were very high numbers near the border fence. Then, by 3 km out, it had dropped away. The interesting thing was that on the other side, the South Australian side, was cattle. The New South Wales side was sheep. Although there were far fewer rabbits on the New South Wales side, exactly the same configuration of populations were on each side so that there was a high number of rabbits in the vicinity of the

fence and then it went [down]. It wasn't the fence that was holding them so much, because there was something like – there was something like 110 holes [per kilometre] through the fence, transport holes for rabbits to go through, so the fence was no barrier as far as the rabbits were concerned. But the difference was an ecotone thing, there was a difference in the thing. It was quite fascinating. We got some very interesting stuff from those observations.

We also captured, by running them down with long-handled nets and shooting over their heads and so on encapturing rabbits. We captured them and processed them, weighed them and all the rest of it, sexed them and tagged them, released them where they'd been. We also put cage traps out so that we trapped rabbits on various locations as well.

We handled, in that period, something like nearly 300 rabbits – 250 or 300 rabbits or something like that. We were capturing and recapturing them. As well as that, we captured others and injected them with tritiated water that we'd brought with us. Then we recaptured those several days later, or some of them. We went out and we were only interested at that stage in capturing rabbits with blue tags in their ears, or something like that, and from that and taking blood samples … We took blood samples before and afterwards. That was interesting, trying to take blood samples from rabbits in the middle of the night. We put them in chaff bags and kept them by a fire so that they warmed their ears up (laughs) so they'd bleed. Then you had to stop them bleeding. We did that by the simple expedient of a paperclip: public service remedies – a paperclip and a piece of paper clipped to where the thing had been taken. Brian was then able to take all this back to the labs and work out the water use of the rabbits. From that he was able to then work out the amount of green saltbush that a rabbit consumes per day: a pound to a pound and a half, depending on whether it's a lactating female or just an ordinary [rabbit] …

A rabbit.

… just a rabbit, a buck rabbit or something like that. Between a pound and a pound and a half. We'd taken green saltbush, we kept that in the refrigerator, so that we were able to say how much green saltbush a rabbit was eating and work out what the effect of these rabbits was on the saltbush in the area and just how long they'd last. That was in '74 when there were heaps of rabbits.

[36:33] Brian and I, because he couldn't afford his field assistants for the next time, we went back in February, I think it was, in '75, just the two of us, for the same period. It only took us a day to get up there. We did a few other things, as we drove up to Cameron's Corner on one stage. But we, just the two of us, did all of the [observations] – we traversed all of the 42 km transects. We handled a heap of rabbits. We were able to pick up rabbits that had been tagged and we knew where they'd been released from, so that we were able to confirm our earlier

assessment of 34 rabbits to the hectare. There'd been this huge reduction when we were there, because they were all dying out. Not one rabbit that had been tagged had moved more than 600 m from where it had been tagged six months previously. That exercise was one of the most productive pieces of research that I have ever been involved with. That's probably a good place for us to stop.

We'll probably stop there and we can read about that because there'll be a report on it and there'll be a publication of an article or something like that, so we'll follow that one through.

Yes. There's a lot of stuff that came through. The other thing – I didn't mention it with Witchitie before – was that we subsequently were able to – because there were two study areas: there was one at Witchitie; there was another one that was about 15 km away back towards Carrieton, I've forgotten the name of it. But the fleas didn't get there for five years after the establishment at Witchitie. Brian was able to make comparisons between mortalities and myxomatosis at the two locations. That's all written up somewhere, too.

Excellent, thanks for that. We're going to have to follow a bit more through in due course.

Yes, OK.

End of Disk 3
Disk 4, 4 December 2008

An interview conducted by Bernard O'Neil with Mr Richard Downward of O'Halloran Hill, South Australia, on 4 December 2008, continuing the interview session in regards to the history of the Animal and Plant Control Commission. This is disk 1 of today's date.

Richard, we'll pick up from where we left off last Thursday …

Yes.

… we were sitting outside there with a bit of noise from some of the local wildlife, so to speak.

(laughs) Yes.

Inside today, so see how we go. Over to you to pick up some of the stories you'd like to talk about.

Yes. Probably the logical place would be to move on to *The last rabbit?* – with a question mark – which was a documentary that the ABC[4] did in late 1975.

That was the title of the documentary?

Yes, yes. It ended up being about a 40-minute documentary of the *Landline* program. … It started as a result of me seeing one of the earlier parts of this particular series, but it was about mulesing [(with Brian Jeffries)]. I'd looked at the thing and thought, 'I reckon that we've got a story that's as good as that'. I happened to know the director of the program, John Evans, so I rang him up and amazingly got put through to him – he was in the office – suggested to him that I had this possible story and outlined it so that he was a bit interested in it. He said, 'Just as

[4] ABC – Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

a matter of interest, Droop, we've got a slot in this program. Could we just do a bit of a quick whip around and have a look and see what the visuals and the talent is?'. He and I headed off on about a 3-day trip around South Australia (laughs) that took us up to Broken Hill, which was a little bit outside of the South Australian boundaries. The ABC paid for the petrol there, because I was a bit dubious about whether one of our audits would be ending up ... (laughs)

Just as a sidetrack then, Richard – we'll come back to the story. But the Commission's work – could you go beyond the borders? In that case where Broken Hill is identified with South Australia in lots of cases?

In some respects. We'd done it with Quinyambie, because that was virtually the only way to get there. But there was a bit of an 'executive decision'; and this trip that Evans and I did took us down to Robe in the South East and back around through Lucindale. There were some quite good stories, I thought, that'd be useful. He'd been contacted by a bloke up at Olary with what he thought was quite a story and a concern about rabbits in the pastoral areas – Kym Afford, who's been quite a regular writer to the editor in *The Advertiser* over the years; but at that stage they had Eringa Park at Olary – so Evans wanted to include that in and we looked around. Then we kicked the ideas around and I'd told him how *I* thought it ought to go, and he was more interested in the entertainment side rather than straight-out extension. At the time he said to me, 'Droop, what you're proposing's a pretty good extension exercise there. But you've got to realise that people, a lot of people, are just interested in what they see, so it's got to be infotainment'. He wanted to bring in horse-and-cart and a swaggie under a coolabah tree or something like that to add interest. Anyway, most of what he wanted to do didn't make it into the thing, and some of the things that I wanted didn't as well; but we ended up getting a particularly good documentary which covered virtually the whole rabbit story in South Australia, including the new legislation that was just going through, the [*Vertebrate*] *Pest Act, 1975*. One of the properties that was involved was Yalkurie down at Narrung, which belonged to Richard Harvey. He was a member of the Vermin Control Advisory Committee and he became one of the members on the Vertebrate Pest Control Authority. They interviewed him and he talked about what being an Australian was as a landholder and so on. There was some pretty good stuff in there.

But that documentary ended up … We got a copy of it. It cost us … From memory the ABC gave it to us for $400 or something like that, which, if you looked at it these days and you went out as a purely commercial thing to do, would probably cost you $150 000 or something like that. We got it for $400, and used that for all of our training schools for local government officers and so on. It was a component part of the [training schools] thing. As far as I know the Department's probably still got a copy of it somewhere.

Presumably it was shown on TV?

Yes, it was shown on TV and it was well received. Obviously the ABC thought it was pretty good because they replayed it on several occasions over the years when they reprised some of the programs that they'd used on *Landline*. It was pretty good. There was some good footage of rabbit activity. The cameraman, Bill Munn, walked around in the saltbush up at Olary and he got some extraordinary footage of rabbits standing on their hind legs and they were eating thistles and other things, but they were reaching about 60 to 70 cm. It was classic footage of what the rabbits were doing [– damage to native plants.]

There were some other nice little stories. There was Mrs Edkins down at Narrung: it was completely unscripted, the thing, and Evans was interviewing her about her exercise down there where her objective was to eliminate rabbits from about a 7-mile stretch along the Coorong shores. She was terrific, and she was telling him how the little dog that she used to put – she used to put this little dog down the burrows (laughs) to chase rabbits out. Evans asked her, 'Did he ever get stuck down there?'. She said, 'Oh, he did once and we didn't get him out until 10 o'clock at night' or something. She said, 'Hope it won't happen like that today', (laughs) because the little dog was down there; and the next thing, would you believe, the little dog comes backing out of a hole – fuck me, he's got a rabbit in his mouth ... (laughs) it was absolutely terrific. We didn't get her reactions on camera because Munn was focused in on the little dog, this little dog backing out of the thing [burrow]. (laughs) It was a good exercise.

A bit of PR and education role and so on.

Yes, yes, it was good, because we covered the whole gamut of the thing. What we were trying to achieve at that stage was the new legislation … It had just been passed by Parliament at that particular stage, so we moved into that.

[11:11] Then we had to work on building a network with local government and that was one of the major roles that I had in relation to that, all over the State, going around and coaxing local government to take up the programs that we were advocating. The legislation had changed things quite a bit. The *Pest Plants Act* had been introduced at the same time, it came in; and so in some respects we ended up piggybacking on *their* objective, because Pest Plant Commission adopted as their major objective the establishment of local boards throughout the local government area of South Australia, whereas the Vertebrate Pest Control Authority had been a bit more flexible, or it wasn't so out of it that it wanted boards. The legislation had the mechanism in there to establish boards, but the Vertebrate Pest Control Authority was quite happy to work with local councils, and the local councils that we'd been working most closely with were the southeastern councils. They had reasonably well-established people. But we did have to train officers from every council in South Australia, because there was about 120

councils at that stage. They had to send their blokes along to training schools, which I ran, with a little bit of help from some of the other blokes, but I was the ... (laughs)

So that was your job.

I was the major man. I was running most of the lectures and all of the afternoon practical sessions. We ran them for 2-week stints down at Murray Bridge on the Monarto lands, because that was the big go at that stage. The Monarto Development Commission, they had all this land down there, so they were quite happy for us to have prac. work on some of the properties down there.

A couple of things come out of your comments there, Richard. Firstly, the necessity for you with the Authority to go round to local government or to bring local government people into the training school, that education-type aspect.

Yes.

It's interesting you were doing that, given local government were aware of things like they had their weeds control officers, for example; they knew about State government/local government relations and so on.

Yes.

But was this exercise – here you're talking about the new Act – is it partly to do with that new Act and explaining new situations, or …

Yes, yes, it was ...

… I'm sort of asking why was there a greater emphasis on local government at this time.

The reason – from the vertebrate pest control point of view – was that they were very strongly of the opinion that these issues should be dealt with by the local authorities because they had the best contact with their landholders and so on, and they were responsible to them, and they benefited, and they were funding it. But there were provisions in the legislation for the State government to assist because the government obviously accepted that there was a community benefit as well and so they picked up the tab. But, particularly with the weeds side of things, apart from the councils in the South East, most of the other councils – and it was the same with rabbits as well – that they tended to get lost in other responsibilities. Local government would appoint somebody as an authorised officer but some of them had responsibilities for up to 13 different local aspects, including dog catcher and parking inspector and goodness knows whatever. There were just so many things, and people tended not to do it. The other thing was, as far as the vertebrate pest control aspect was concerned, that the State picked up the responsibility for any court action, any imposition as far as landholders not doing the right thing. That was a major thing that we had to explain and get accepted as well. That did involve us. I said last week we ended up with something like 57 prosecutions in the first year. I was the main leader in relation to those prosecutions in relation to going out and doing the field

inspections and so on and then preparing briefs for the Crown Solicitor to handle. I had my work cut out (laughs) in relation to that. But it all worked out pretty well. We built that network.

[18:47] Then in part of that we ended up with a training exercise at Karoonda, which we needed for some field training for our new regional officers. Vertebrate Pest Control Authority had approval to employ 10 regional officers or something like that. We trained them over a period of a couple of years, because we started off and we had three, and they were trained at Karoonda. We did a field exercise up there which stemmed out of one of my visits to the local council up there. I'd called in to see the CEO at Karoonda and they had a rather delicate problem because they had a landholder who was also a council member who had a very serious rabbit problem on the roadside adjoining his property, and the council had a policy that landholders weren't allowed to damage the (or they weren't allowed to clear) native vegetation on the roads. They couldn't see any way that they could deal with his problem without giving him permission to just completely level the vegetation on this roadside up near Borrika. Full marks for quick thinking as far as the CEO was concerned: he said, 'Ah, we'll get this State government bloke to say yeah, there's no other way. Then we'll be able to give Steve Wood the OK to go ahead'. Off we went. They asked me whether I had time to go out and have a look at the problem. I said, 'I'm on my way to Loxton but I guess we could have a bit of a look at it on the way'. Off we trundled. He rang this bloke and said, 'Got this fella coming out to have a look and see the rabbits'. We met him at his front gate (laughs) and off we went. Oh! I don't think I've ever seen a more dense infestation of rabbits, it was quite extraordinary. We discovered later on that there was something like 1000 warrens to the kilometre or something like that. It was just honeycombed. Anyway, out we went and had a look. We're there and we wandered around, and the ground was like a mine. I'd looked at it and I thought, 'Yeah, I reckon that they can do it'. Here I am wandering along and suddenly the ground caved in and I'm down to my crotch in the ground (laughter) in a warren. I looked up at this bloke and said, 'I think we can get rid of the rabbits here without getting rid of the scrub, the live vegetation'. I can still remember him looking down at me – because here I am with one leg about a metre down in the ground – and he said, 'I'd like to see you bloody well try'. I said, 'I can't give you a – off the top, but I think we can, because I'm looking for a project somewhere to train these blokes and if I can convince my superiors in Adelaide that we can go ahead with it, would you be prepared to provide us with the [necessary materials] … We'll need a tractor and a ripper and we'll need quite a lot of oats. We'll provide the bait layer and the Toyota that pulls it and so on, and all of the labour'. He said, 'That sounds like a pretty good idea to me, pretty good deal'. That was fair enough.

Then, when I got back to town, I spoke to Bromell and Brian Cooke about it. Brian, he'd been doing all this work down at Pinnaroo, 29 km of roadside down at Pinnaroo, where we'd been testing various methods of control. That was why I was quite confident that we could control the rabbits without knocking the vegetation, because we were concerned about remnant vegetation on roadsides. I said to them, 'Look, I reckon this is a goer. Can we do it?'. We had these three new regional officers that were appointed, one for Loxton, one was going to be in Adelaide somewhere and the other bloke was down in the South East. They needed to be trained straight away; they'd had some theoretical training but they needed some on-the-ground work. 'OK', Bromell said, 'Yeah, you can do that. Off you go and get everything'. We got everything together and off we trundled.

We went down to Karoonda and took up residence in the pub down there and everyone had a look at us, this group of blokes in government vehicles and so on. We got talking and they wanted to know what we were doing and so there were lots of stories about rabbits and one thing and another. One thing led to another. We did the work and got all of the information, and then we said … I said to Bromell, 'Look, so often State government blokes go out into an area and they do all sorts of things and the locals look and they don't know what's happening. A lot of conjecture and all of this. But why don't we have a field day down there when we've finished it and we'll explain the whole thing to them?'. 'Yes', he said, 'that sounds like a good idea'. We organised that as well. We arranged a field day and everybody in the Mallee, just about, turned up. I reckon there were 150 or more people at the field day. It was a beauty at Pilchera Bore [near Borrika].

With a total focus on the rabbit control?

Yes – rabbit control and roadsides. That you could control rabbits without further destruction of native vegetation, that was a big move.

Something like that, Richard, would you have thought about involving the Pest Plants Commission? You talk about native vegetation, was there ...?

No, not at that stage, because they were only just getting off the ground. But we did involve Basil Newland, who was the chairman of the Native Roadside Vegetation Committee. He was involved there. [He opened the field day.]

[28:10] Interesting that you make that comment because we subsequently had another field day down at Tintinara and we did involve the Pest Plants Commission. We had Ray Alcock involved in it. That's where we started to work quite closely together, but that wasn't for another 18 months or something like that. We were moving towards that thing. The Karoonda Field Day established our credentials with landholders in the Mallee, because people came from

all over, because they didn't believe us. They didn't believe us, that we could eliminate the rabbits and keep the vegetation there.

In our clearing work we took out a lot of dead timber in there. That was put out into Steve Wood's paddock. We subsequently burnt that so that we eliminated a whole lot of cover as far as rabbits were concerned. But as far as the bush and all that was concerned it was still there. The interesting thing was that old Steve himself, at the end of the field day, came up to me and said, 'You know I didn't think you'd be able to do what you reckoned you could do. But I watched from a way off. I had some other patches of scrub out on sand hills out the back, they weren't on the road. They were on sand hills in my property, but they just had as much of a problem. I went out there and I did the same sorts of things that you blokes had done here, running all these bloody trails all over the place' – because it's 6 miles to the 100 acres was the amount of trail that you put out; it looks as if it's a madwoman running around all over the bloody place or something like that, but it's going all of the places where rabbits feed. Anyway, he said, 'Bugger me if same thing. It was like magic. There was bloody no rabbits left there'. [There are a considerable number of photographs of this exercise in the APCC photo library.]

The other terrific thing in relation to that – and having a bloke who was on the council – a big man, Steve: not big physically, but a big man that could publicly say, 'I was wrong and that bloke was spot on with what he could do', and at many public functions he was a ram for us. That established our credentials. Subsequently we were able to form quite a large Vertebrate Pest Control Board up there that was congruent with the Pest Plants Board up at Murraylands. Subsequently that all became an Animal and Plant Control Board, down the track.

So it helped to have an ally like that.

Yes. It wasn't just him. Alan Arbon, who's now the mayor of Murray Bridge, but in those days he was the chairman – quite a young chairman – of the Karoonda Council, because there was another council a bit further up, they had quite a few there. I'd been out to see him and tell him what we were doing and invited him to come out to meet Brian Cooke and all of the other blokes. He used to – he still does whenever I see him, sometimes – he said, 'You know, it was amazing the first time I met that Dr Brian Cooke. I had a completely different idea about scientists and all the rest of it. This bloke staggered out of the scrub in blue denims and a big beard and all the rest of it and you introduced me to him as "Dr Brian Cooke"'. He said, 'Made a big impression on blokes like that that here were scientists who did know what they were talking about and that they were able to go out and do things practically, they were practical people and not just theoreticians. Pretty important, I think.

With the field day itself, I'm just curious as to what you were demonstrating in terms of techniques versus if you'd had some success on the property, there were fewer rabbits around to say, 'Here's a rabbit and here's how we bait it', and so on.

Oh, well, it's sort of a – yes.

So had you had that sort of success on the property, firstly, to eliminate or reduce the rabbits …

Yes.

… and then secondly what were you demonstrating?

We did all of that. But we eliminated all of the rabbits. We were using this as a demonstration so that ...

So it was really demonstrating the techniques.

Yes, yes.

OK.

We did the whole thing, the poisoning with free feeding – we weren't comparing any other methods; we were just doing the recommended technique for effectively controlling the rabbits, so that we did poisoning; then we did habitat modification, taking away fallen timber and stuff and opening it up so that we could then get in and, with the Fordson tractor and a ripper, which is what Steve Wood had provided us with, we were able to rip the warrens and the ones that we couldn't get at with the tractor we got in with the Phostoxin tablets, which was the recommended fumigation technique that we preferred. If you could get in, and we fumigated and then tidied up, went back. We had all of the details about what we'd done, what had been there beforehand – because you're right, when you eliminate it there's bugger all to see, and that's a problem.

[36:12] Down the track, since then, of course – and it's not only just in that particular location but right through the Mallee – there's been a major change in the composition of the vegetation on the roadsides down through there. There's quite a lot of the shrubby understorey and so on of the native grasses and so on that have re-established in there, where before it was just completely bare ground because the rabbit population was just so extraordinary, there wasn't anything else. The only thing that was left there that was alive, just about, were the tops of the mallee trees.

You're in a fortunate position – and it's a bit of a sidetrack, I realise – but you're in a fortunate position of being able to see the landscape change over time through the impact of soil conservation work, pest plant, vertebrate pest work and so on.

Yes.

So the landscape, are you able to comment on – and obviously it varies from region to region in the State …

Yes, yes.

… but has it improved?

It has, in areas where people have been working to do it. There's locations that we've dealt with that Vertebrate Pest Control Authority provided funding for the re-establishment of native vegetation in some areas. We did that in conjunction with the Pest Plants Commission and the Animal and Plant Control Commission carried it on. You drive down that Dukes Highway now and you're not aware of it because there's good vegetation that's 25 years or 30 years old; but I go down through there and just the Adelaide side of Yumali, I look at that, the vegetation as we go down through there, and proudly say, 'That's ours. We put that in'. The great thing was that the Coorong Council saw the value of it and they've done a whole lot more on vegetation through there. We promoted it on Eyre Peninsula and so on. I had regional officers over on Eyre Peninsula that worked on the development of seeding machines for reseeding denuded roadsides over there. Murray Whitehead was the major mover, but Andy Bates was involved as well. We were able to fully establish shrubbery on roadsides down in the Port Lincoln–Tumby Bay area there for about 20 cents a shrub, fully established up to about two years old or something like that, whereas the other techniques that some people were using where they were taking out tube stocks and those sorts of things where it's very much more expensive and a lot slower. Andy and I presented a paper in relation to that to a local government conference, in '96 or something like that, so that's jumping ahead 20 years, but you might like to see that, perhaps. [Local Government Week, 11–15 March 1996]

I will, because it's one of the interesting things about this project is we're dealing with something that's temporal, you see it at a certain time.

Yes.

That's why I was asking you the question, because you can see it over a 50-year, 60-year span.

Yes.

[41:22] Without a visual record of film or photograph, then we rely on the human memory – or are there other determinants for improvements in that land? I'm not talking about roadside, but Steve and his property: is he getting better productivity, for example?

Yes, yes, yes, it was. Because there were a lot of people who were arguing that the rabbits on the roadside, for instance, were just completely taking their wheat and barley crops out. The interesting thing in relation to that was that we came to a situation in about 1978 or something like that – '78, '79 – where Ray Alcock and I again were involved with other people in a court case where Jack Tynan, who was the chairman of his local council – nice bloke, old Jack – he was the test case for compensation for roadside vegetation – and his property was at Yumali or there somewhere – when the Dukes Highway was being improved and the Highways Department were looking to acquire land and relocate some of the roads. It worked out for land against the roadsides from virtually Tailem Bend to the border, this court case, and it was against the Crown, the landholders versus the Crown, and the case was Tynan v R. As I say,

we've got a document of it somewhere and I think it's a '79 VPCA docket. That their valuation expert – this is Tynan's valuation expert – was claiming that there was a benefit – and this was for scrub that wasn't on Tynan's land, and they were moving the road out onto Tynan's property and he was claiming a $50 000 per kilometre benefit from the roadside vegetation that was there. It was quite good roadside vegetation with some weeds and there were some rabbits in there. Ray and I went down there and we did a field survey of what was there. Then we subsequently had to put *our* story to the judge – I've forgotten which judge it was – and there were various other government experts who gave their views about whether it was a responsibility or not and whatever. The Highways, they were offering, from memory, a scratch under $5000 a kilometre. The judge found in his findings in between. He put a value of $12 500 per kilometre. The landholders were pretty happy, because what the Highways Department had been offering was less than half of what the courts would have found for them. Ray and I weren't particularly helpful for their case, in that as far as the *Vertebrate Pests Act* was concerned the total responsibility for the control of rabbits rested on the adjoining landholder. They were, under that legislation, legally responsible for the control of rabbits on the half width of the roadside adjoining their property. This was the argument that I made, that there shouldn't be any rabbits there so there shouldn't be any benefit; but obviously there was a benefit for it being cleaned up. Old Ray said under the *Pest Plants Act* the responsibility for the control of proclaimed plants was the board's. That was fine. But – there's always a 'but' in these sorts of things – if the board expended any moneys in controlling the proclaimed plants along there, then the board had to recover the money (laughs) from the adjoining landholder.

So in those terms ...

But there was a difference – that was pretty much the same as it still is under the new legislation. But one of the things that we encouraged, particularly with the plant side of things, was to encourage landholders to control proclaimed plants on their roadside because they could do it at the most effective time and they'd do it more cheaply than if the board sent out contractors or did it itself. There was always issues in relation to how you'd deal with that. But we worked it out pretty well.

[48:59] Going back to the 1976/77 when we were establishing the legalities to things and so on, we wanted the landholders to help with the dealing with the problem and so that it was a communal response to the thing and getting the work done in the most effective way. Generally we've done that pretty well, because I've been involved with the Rotary's – Rotary International has a scheme which they call 'ACRE', which is the Australian Campaign for Rabbit Eradication. They've been promoting that for about 15 or 20 years or something like that. I'm still associated with that as an adviser to Rotary even though I'm not a Rotarian. They

have promoted this rabbit control with Animal and Plant Control Boards by supporting the ACRE Award, which has been made to an Animal and Plant Control Board with the most exemplary rabbit control scheme in its area. They've provided quite a lot of financial support to boards and so on through their schemes. In that regard I've been able to see the benefits that have accrued from what we've been recommending. I've seen it from several different points of view.

There might have been some confusion perhaps, Richard, for some of these landholders, if I've understood you correctly from what you were saying about the roadside vegetation: under the Authority's Act the landholder's going to be paying 50% of the cost but under the Commission's Act the landholder would effectively pay 100% because the board could get the money back from the landholder. Is that ...?

Yes, well, under the *Vertebrate Pests Act* the landholder's responsible for all of it so that it costs him the same.

OK. I thought you said he had [part] of the land.

Yes, but there's a landholder on each side.

OK.

It's to the middle of the road reserve, and so the landholders are responsible and it's how you split it up whether you're (laughs) legally responsible for it. It's a very difficult situation to explain to a landholder that he's not responsible for the work, which is the pest plant thing, but he's responsible for paying for it; whereas with the vertebrate pest side of things not only was he responsible for paying for it but he was legally responsible for it as well and so if he didn't control the rabbits on that part of the roadside he could be taken to court and fined quite substantial amounts of money.

Generally, we weren't prosecuting people for just roadside stuff; it was on properties. In those sorts of circumstances prosecutions didn't happen until after the landholder had had every opportunity to do what his local board officer had been asking him to do, because the local board officer would go along and say, 'You've got a problem here, you've got to do something about it. This is what you need to do. We're quite happy to provide a contract service to do it'. Some landholders thought that was a good idea and some landholders didn't like being told. So, initially, because they'd been able to get away with it when it was a council responsibility, it took them a while. But landholders are not silly. (laughs) When there were a few of them paying out quite substantial sums of money – it was not all that much, but it was hundreds of dollars, which we'd say to them, 'Look, you're going to pay this fine and you still have to do the work. Or you do the work and the money that you would be paying in fine you can expend that on satisfying the local officer'. Because if the local officer's happy with it, then everybody's happy.

If you went to court, it had to be to what was reasonably achievable, which left a little bit to be desired. I can remember my colleague, John Bromell, who was responsible for getting the legislation drafted and so on, having an extremely torrid telephone conversation with the Parliamentary Counsel over that, because what he and we had wanted was that the control should be done to the satisfaction of the local authorised officers. Now, the Parliamentary Counsel reckoned that was a bit draconian. Bromell reckoned it was the only way that you could go because it was what was reasonably possible – open the things up to argument. He got very red around the ears. When Bromell got cross he used to go (laughs) red in the face and his ears were crimson.

So it was evident.

He had to concede to the Parliamentary Counsel because the Parliamentary Counsel said to him, after they'd been arguing the toss for about an hour on the telephone – it was a fair while; I was in the office next door (laughs) so I heard most of it – the Parliamentary Counsel apparently said, 'Those are the directions from the Attorney General. If you want to argue the toss, we'll have to go and see the Attorney General'– that would have been Peter Duncan was the Attorney General at the time. Bromell said, 'There's no point, I know when I'm beaten'.

In that case, Richard, just to round this out …

Yes.

… are you referring only to the roadside vegetation situation?

No. No, no, that was overall.

Overall.

Yes. It was in the legislation that the level had to be to reasonable, but we did – and I developed standards that we believed were reasonable to achieve.

OK, because I wasn't sure whether you were just talking about roadside there.

No, no, this was overall.

So perhaps we'll pick up on it in a moment, then.

Yes.

End of Disk 4
Disk 5, 4 December 2008

Yes, Richard, we were just talking about various matters there and the early days of the VPCA. You mentioned a court case and so on and we were talking about roadside vegetation and getting money back. A couple of times you touched on some legal action to recoup money and prosecute people.

Yes.

A little bit about the coercion, then, of enforcing ...

The coercive parts of it, that is the nub of any legislation, that there has to be some enforcement. We liked to look at it as the steel hand in a velvet glove: in other words, that we encouraged people to pick up their responsibilities if they can; if they can't, then there has to be a consequence. I've seen it in a few situations. Under the *Vertebrate Pests Act* the first action was against a couple of brothers down at Tintinara, the Tapley brothers down there. I got involved after the local officer [Alan Dearman] hadn't been able to convince them to do what needed to be done. I went down there and saw them, talked to them about the consequences and so on. One of them seemed to be reasonably responsive; the other one wasn't too much. But the upshot of it was that they virtually ignored the requirement. They'd had a notice directing them to do something. I went down there and subsequently decided that they'd failed to comply with the notice. The next step in relation to what the Vertebrate Pest Control Authority had decided – at our recommendations – was that we'd prove in court, before we did anything else, that there was an offence had been committed. Then after that we'd be back to the landholder and we'd send in contractors if we needed to and then recover the costs from there. This was what happened with the Tapleys.

It was some years ago. Anecdote in relation to the issuing of the summons to appear in court. I'd rocked along to the place. One of the brothers, he'd been involved in a car accident some time before and so there's been a bit of problems for him and so he perhaps didn't understand things as well as he might have. But I handed him the summons and ... (break in recording)

OK, Richard, after a small pause there – we were talking about the Tapley brothers.

Yes. I'd handed – I've forgotten his first name – but I gave him the summons, which was in a pocket, and then headed off towards his brother, who was working on a vehicle over the other side of their farmyard, and – Dean, I think it was, Tapley – he came charging along behind me and was making a fair bit of noise, wanting me to take the summons back because he'd opened it up and found out what it was, which was telling him to appear in the Murray Bridge Court or something or other.

Once you've given it you can't take it back.

That's right. His brother came out from underneath the ute that he was greasing and he said, 'What's the problem?'. I said, 'I've just given him one of these and I've got one for you, too', (laughs) and just sort of dropped it down onto his tummy and didn't enter into any argument. I said, 'Right, you'll have to work your way through that. We'll see you in court'. So that was there. They pleaded guilty and we subsequently got the council – Alan Dearman was the officer there – to do the necessary work and they were satisfied with it, the Tapleys paid and so that was fine. That was the very first prosecution.

[05:57] There was another one a little bit later on that was much more difficult and that was with a bloke called Eric Anderson at Meningie. He defended his action, he defended the case. He hadn't done the work. It was quite obvious from all of the paperwork which had been done. I wasn't the regional officer that was handling that, Dean Smith had handled that, but I was the coordinator in the background, I'd coordinated the whole thing. We prepared a very, very detailed prosecution. Brian Cooke was involved as a witness to prove the validity of our recommendations and all the rest of it. We had the local authorised officer and our regional officer, whose evidence was pretty sound, extremely sound. We had a couple of initial hearings where they just came on for plea or mention. Then there was three days set aside for us to have the matter dealt with at Murray Bridge. [This was the first defended action to be prosecuted.]

It had been going on for quite a while, and the work had been satisfactorily done [in the interim]. We had a day in court and then the second day we went down to Meningie and we had a view of the whole stuff down there. It was quite obvious that the landholder, he'd done all of the work that had needed to be done. If he'd done it in the first place it wouldn't have been a problem. We trundled back to court on the third day and the magistrate at the outset, in the morning, had said, 'In view of what we saw yesterday and the fact that this has gone on for a while and it's obvious' – because he asked how much more evidence there was and we still had more to lead – 'it's obvious to me that it's going to become increasingly irrelevant, this case, because the work's all been done and I'm not going to be able to have this listed again for' – another six weeks or two months or something like that – 'because my list's pretty full' and all the rest of it. 'Is there any possibility of the parties getting together?'. We got together, to-ing and fro-ing, the prosecutor [who] was Kym Boxall, who's a magistrate these days, and the defence lawyer. They went away and talked for a considerable amount of time. I and my witnesses went and (laughs) had a cup of coffee in the hotel around the corner from the courthouse or something like that. We came back and Boxall said, 'Their man wants to talk to you about what their defence is going to be', and all the rest of it. 'Pretty hard to get there'. So we sat down and we went through the whole box and dice. There were a couple of concerning factors about the local authorised officer because there'd apparently been conflict between him and the landholder that was quite detailed and there were some other factors that were involved there.

Personalities and that sort of thing.

Yes. There were some other factors that were involved too that were likely to pose difficulties about his credibility. But I'd said to the bloke, 'OK, we can completely discount him because there's other aspects here and the main case is our regional officer. He's the man, and you haven't discounted anything in relation to that'. We talked and I didn't know whether I'd …

His client was the person who was apparently difficult to convince to plead guilty, it was a matter of principle.

It was lunchtime so we went and had some lunch. We were talking. I couldn't say that we'd step out of this, 'We'll press on'. We had enough evidence to go for the rest of the day. 'I'll get some more advice from the chairman of the Authority and Bromell and so on as to what they think we ought to do'. We came back after lunch and we were standing outside the court before we go in. Just before we went into the court the defence attorney came over to Boxall – 'I'd like to see you for a minute'. They talked for a bit more than a minute, they were talking for quite a while, and then Boxall came back and he said, 'He might change his plea'. Then a bit more to-ing and fro-ing: 'If we do this, will you do that?'. I said, 'Yeah, we're quite happy; if he pleads guilty we won't seek a conviction' – because it was a criminal conviction – 'and we'll carry the cost'. Then he went and spoke to his client again. Eventually we get into the court, and it must have been about 3 o'clock by this stage, (laughs) time's passing by. The magistrate, he comes flying in from wherever he was, because they'd obviously dealt with anything else that was on the list for that day because it was obvious he was just dealing with this case. Then they read the charge out again and, 'How do you plead?'. It was a major, major effort for Eric Anderson to say, 'Guilty' ... But he pleaded guilty. Then we went through the procedures that we didn't want to have a conviction against him and all the rest of it because the work had been done and la-di-da-di-da. But that had cost him, we worked out afterwards, nearly $3000 to get there; plus the work had been done. We used to say to people, 'If you want to go that way, you're still going to be guilty but it's going to cost you a lot of money'. That was the case.

[14:20] We subsequently did have an action that went through to its full conclusion, the Morton brothers down at Bordertown. That went through to conclusion. They were found guilty. We were quite happy at that stage that the legislation had been fully proved. As a result of those actions – and some of the others where, as I said, there were 57 where people pleaded guilty – that after that there were very few that had to be taken to court because they did what was asked without having to involve the Vertebrate Pest Control Authority very much in relation to that. [First defended case through to conviction.]

So you used the legislation as a bit of a big stick.

Yes, yes. It was there. It was the whole thing. But it was written in a very simple manner and it was pretty easy to understand and it was very effective, so we carried it on from there. Then it was not that long after those sorts of periods, and the decisions were made at the very highest political levels, that the administration decided that they wanted to have the two legislations brought together. You had the *Pest Plants Act*, which was under the responsibility of the Minister for Agriculture, and the *Vertebrate Pests Act*, which had been under the responsibility

of the Minister of Lands, and they were put in together so the Pest Plants Commission – and it was establishing itself as divorced from the Department of Agriculture. The Vertebrate Pests [Control] Authority came in under the aegis of the Minister for Agriculture, and so it was trying to demonstrate that it was becoming a part of the Department of Agriculture, (laughs) so that it was quite interesting. You had the Pest Plants people saying, 'We're not part of the Department of Agriculture', because they needed – and there was no doubt about it, it was very effective in having the short lines of communication between the Commission and the Authority with the minister, they were directly responsible to the minister so that you had the policymakers, who were completely responsible for the policies that were being implemented, responsible to the minister. The minister's responsibility was just in relation to, if there was a problem, directing them to do something, and so they reported, and so we had annual reports from both organisations to then, so that by 19.. – I'm not sure the years, but it was probably about '78, '78 or '79, that we were together. Then the negotiations had to start about developing new legislation which would cover both things, for plants and the animals.

[19:08] Before we look at that, Richard, perhaps if we can just backtrack slightly to the legislation in the mid '70s, where we create an authority and we create a commission.

A commission, yes.

Why the two different bodies, the two different structures?

It was very similar, but it was in the naming. It was largely the advice from different Parliamentary Counsel. Perhaps there were some other philosophies from the two Departments – Lands and Agriculture: Agriculture with a commission, Lands with an authority. But apart from that they were virtually the same thing. You had commissioners and deputy commissioners. They were never ever called – they didn't want to be called 'commissioners'. It was a funny situation. On occasion they were referred to as commissioners and they would say, 'We're members of the Commission'. There was no argument with the Authority, that they were members.

There was interesting arguments about presidents and presiding officers and [that] terminology, but there was more … From my memory with the pests, there was more argument about vertebrate pests or pest animals or whatever. The interesting thing as it is now, that I always believe that 'land protection' would have been a more generic term for the things, As it's turned out now, we've got 'natural resource management' (laughs) which has got the other thing. But at that stage we weren't involved with the soil, although we did have some involvement. There was a property down at Meningie where the old Soil Board resumed land on Narrung Peninsula. It belonged to somebody called Potter. It was seriously affected by rabbits and there were weeds on there as well. I'd been quite aware of the situation there and we used to discuss

the fact that when the Soil Board resumed that land that it had demonstrated that the State had a residing interest in the land. Because Potter's property, it was freehold land, but the Crown had demonstrated that it had a residual interest in the welfare of the land and that it should – if somebody disregarded their responsibilities for it that it could be taken away from them, which is what happened there.

But we'd had quite a bit of involvement with rabbit control that had gone on there. We'd seen regeneration of some of the scrub through there, because Potter's was just a bit further south than Richard Harvey's property at Narrung that I mentioned in *The last rabbit?*, so yes.

It's interesting, Richard, that we've got the Authority and the Commission developing, legislation's coming in, so it's more or less simultaneous and so on …

Yes.

… yet they're developing different structures and, as you say, different terminologies and so on. Was there much liaison between – or any liaison between – vermin, vertebrate pests and the pest plant/weed people?

Yes. There was ...

I mean here in terms of developing things.

At the local level there was a lot because ...

I mean here in terms of developing the way forward now with legislation and so on. Or were you more or less in separate empires, or parts of empires?

Yes. But the movement was there. Then once we were together ... There'd been some discussion, and I'd been to … There'd been a couple of weeds state conferences so I'd gone, they'd invited me along to those. There was some liaison; but not a lot. Once we were together, then we were starting to work much more closely together. Max O'Neil retired – I'm not quite sure when he did that, but he was the leader of the Pest Plants Commission's people. Bromell was given the responsibility for the two groups, so that although we had a Commission and an Authority the staff were in Adelaide being brought together. The next step was to make me a senior adviser who was responsible to both organisations. That was lifting me above the ruck.

What time frame are you thinking of there?

It was probably about four years, because what happened was that Brian Chatterton was the minister in the Dunstan/Corcoran Government.

So it's about four years into the VPCA.

Yes, it would have been about that. Then we were together. Then there was this very, very definite move to get legislation that was going to cover the [two disciplines] … It was bringing the two lots of legislation together without changing anything else much, other than the fact that there was just going to be the one organisation with local government boards as well. I'd been

involved with them, and I'd been pretty successful in establishing quite a few congruent boards. There was a lot of work done going and seeing people and then writing it up and negotiating and trying to encourage the local government people to see that there was a good deal for them. I was also having to negotiate with my public service superiors that we were going to kick in a bit more money, because otherwise local government were being asked to carry the can and there was criticism that the State was welching on its responsibilities. Anyway, that was there.

The minister that was initially convinced of the thing was Brian Chatterton. Bromell and Max would have been involved together, probably with Bob Christiansen, because Bob, he was the brains as to how the Pest Plants Commission [worked] … He was an extremely astute public servant. He'd had experience in New Guinea – used to tell some stories of his times up there ...

A very almost self-effacing character, Bob, from having a chat to him.

Yes. But whimsical things like he told a story about a thing that obviously used to happen, this was in New Guinea, and it was [TIFI] ... on a file, it was sort of 'Tell'im, fuck'im'. (laughs) Apparently a minister saw that one time and wanted to know what it was. Was not amused.

Spell it out.

There was another one where it was the boys up there, they were always running their vehicles out of bloody petrol. He followed it down and the fuel gauge would go down to 'E' and they didn't read it as 'Empty', they thought that 'E' was 'Enough'. You can understand (laughs) why they'd run out of petrol. There were those sorts of things.

But they were able to convince [the government] … Chatterton wanted it to happen, but so then they were talking about the things and they got the go-ahead, talked to the Parliamentary Draftsman and so on. That would have probably still been when Dunstan was the premier, that time frame. Then Des Corcoran became premier and (laughs) decided that he wanted to be elected in his own right, which was a bit silly of him because he didn't need to go to the people, but he talked to Carmel [his wife?] about it and they went to the people and got kicked out. So 'Honky Tonk'[5] became the premier, and Ted Chapman was the minister: he was very supportive of the idea. The Libs[6], they were supportive of the idea of bringing the two things together, doing away with statutory bodies and making the bureaucracy easier to understand.

But did they have any preference, therefore, for any particular model?

They were reasonably happy with the same model that Chatterton had pretty well agreed with. But they needed things to be rewritten and changed a bit. They were happier to put more State money in than the Labor Party, and so that they agreed to a subsidy for local government of

[5] Dr David Oliver Tonkin AO, Premier of South Australia 1979–82.
[6] Liberal Party.

dollar-for-dollar, whereas the Labor Party's subsidy arrangement had been the same as it had been under … the pest plants legislation, which was 50c in the dollar, so for every dollar that local government put in the State kicked in 50c. That was a statutory, obligatory amount. Then the pest plants legislation had what we termed 'support subsidy', which was assistance for local government where there was extreme [hardship] … They had major problems and they didn't have much in the way of resources. In some of those circumstances the State was virtually paying the whole lot. Overall it worked out at around about 50/50, so the local government was putting in – say they were putting in $1 000 000 or something like that, so that the State was pretty well matching it. You had this very flexible arrangement, which the [VPCA] had been able to use without having it written into their legislation; they just had provisions in there for subsidies to be paid by the State, so we worked our way through some of that.

A bit more free, perhaps, in a sense, that way?

Yes. It was pretty good. It was also you could have said that it was open to [abuse] … It wasn't laid down exactly. Anyway, the new legislation was drafted, and it was in the minister's safe, the draft bill was in Ted Chapman's safe, when the Tonkin Government went to the polls in '81 or whenever it was.

Late '82.

Was it? Yes, yes, OK. That's right, yes. They got beaten – which was a bit of a surprise; because it had been a surprise that Tonkin had gotten in, they'd generally done – from my point of view, they seemed to have done a pretty fair job. At that stage I was deputy mayor of the local council here so that I had the opportunity of seeing how things worked from a completely different angle.

So it was an extracurricular activity for you.

Yes, it was. Occasionally there were suggestions that there might be a conflict of interest or something like that. I'd pursued that with the Crown Solicitor's people to make sure that there wasn't, or what circumstances I needed to declare an interest. Anyway, that was there. Because I was, because of my involvement with weeds and rabbits, I'd been made the chairman of the Meadows Pest Plants Board and I'd been negotiating for the establishment of (laughs) the Mid Hills [Vertebrate Pests Control] Board as well. You could have argued that there was a conflict of interest. But there wasn't. There was a confluence of interests. We were interested in getting the same result, which was to control pests.

Just that your hobby in this case is also your work.

Yes, that's right, exactly was. Exactly. Which concerned my wife a bit from time to time because she reckoned that I didn't pay enough attention to the home front. (laughs) Anyway.

Then we had a new government and we're back to square one. Brian Chatterton was the minister again. They had to trundle off, at this stage, it was Bromell trundled off – with representatives from the two organisations, I'd have to say. It wasn't just public servants. This was the real strength of the system, was that your members were completely independent, fully focused on the problems and so on. Also pretty sound people that were involved. By that stage Des Ross was probably involved. He was high in local government, very sound. You had people like Ralph [James] and Richard Harvey, who had their heads screwed on particularly well. Roger Brockhoff was another one that was involved with the Pest Plants Commission. All very much involved in the political scene as well. They could go along and talk to the ministers as equals. It was pretty profound in relation to some of that sort of thing.

Chatterton said, 'What have you been doing for the last three years?' or whatever it was. Then he had a look at it. 'Oh! I don't like this financial [arrangement]'. We had to backtrack in relation to that, because Labor, they weren't as generous as the Libs in relation to the thing there. Nevertheless, at that stage it was about 50/50, although later on, as the financial crunches came on, the State government did step away and they were able to step back because of those provisions in the legislation. They just [said], 'You can't have as much money and you make those bloody local government people pay some more'.

So from that point of view he was a bit cunning or cagey?

Yes, whatever.

Or doing the right thing?

It was probably a lesser understanding of the problems than the Liberals had. I don't know. But it comes back to bean counters, if you like. You've got to make changes somewhere.

Of course, the other thing that we got more drawn into, the bigger departmental things. Once again you come to your priorities. Your director-generals and so on have been told to make cuts, and they want everybody to share the cuts. Because both the Commission and the Authority dealt directly with Treasury in relation to funding. That changed later on, towards the end, before I retired, so that we didn't directly deal with Treasury later on.

But that changes after the merger.

Yes. That's well down the track, about another nearly 10 years or something like that. Chatterton said, 'OK, make these changes and go back and talk to the Parliamentary Counsel and all the rest of it'. That was fine. Then he racked off, got into a huff with Labor or whatever it was, I don't know, but he racked off anyway, completely out of [the scene] – he just departed.

Then we had the word up ... We're still trundling along and everything's coming closer and closer together as far as the administration and everything's concerned.

But it's a slow process.

Yes, to get the whole thing into the deal. The next minister probably was Frank Blevins. He was a good minister – really sound. He accepted and supported staff. If you made good submissions, then you got his full support. I never, ever got in a position where we made a bad submission so I'm not sure how he would have treated you, but I'm sure that if you buggered him up you would have paid a serious penalty for it. But yes, he was pretty sound. Things came along.

Just to reflect on those two or three ministers: you've got Chatterton, Chapman, Blevins. Did you have much to deal with them directly ...?

Yes. I didn't with Brian Chatterton but I had direct involvement with Ted Chapman, because a friend of mine, Leon Murray, he was his adviser in the office and we'd gone to school together, so I had a few sessions in Ted's office, just talking about policies and so on.

That's what I was interested in, whether these ministers had any feel for the area of the Authority's work or the Commission's work.

Yes, they pretty well did. There were occasions where there were problems that were brought up for complaints or whatever, and so the ministers had this responsibility to be able to direct. Bromell worked hard to make sure that the ministers were conversant with what we were doing, so that there was involvement more with the Minister's Office, rather than the ministers themselves. Yes, I had some involvement with Ted. I also had direct involvement with Frank Blevins, and that was over a dingo or an alleged dingo.

I'd had to follow up and had decided, on the balance of probabilities, that the particular animal wasn't a dingo. It certainly looked like, it had a lot of characteristic, but it barked like buggery and so on, which is pretty uncharacteristic of dingoes. It was being kept in somebody's backyard. The background to it – because there was a bloke that had dobbed them in, the people that had this dog – and the problem, from this dobbing-in bloke's point of view was that the fellow that owned the bloody dog was having it off with his wife or his ex-wife or whatever it was. Anyway, there was …

Another sub-plot.

… there were some domestic problems there, and so this bloke reckoned ... But he wouldn't leave it alone, because he reckoned it was a dingo. We'd looked at it, and Bromell had been out – because I'd been out and said it wasn't a dingo and this other bloke had been out; so he wouldn't leave it alone and he wanted a meeting with the minister, and he got a meeting with the minister. But we'd given him a bit of background as to what had gone on as well. When this

fellow came along Blevins listened to him, all the way through and all the rest of it, and then he said, 'My staff have looked at it. They've decided that it's not a dingo'. He said, 'I don't care what your domestic bloody situation is, but we're not getting it involved in here. You've had your hearing, that's it. It's not a dingo'. The bloke, he's been clued up that he has to register it as a bloody dog. It's not a dingo, he's registering it with the Mitcham Council. They were happy to have it registered as a domestic dog. That was the situation. That was my involvement, and that's why I say that he was very supportive of staff that were able to give him the full box and dice, because the dingo question was something that was quite involved and emotive, was all sorts of bloody things involved with it.

Dingoes in suburban areas and things like that.

Yes. There was all sorts of aspects in relation to it.

I was asking you about the minister, because … So you've got Blevins, and it's just a question of ultimately it's got to be pushed through politically …

Yes.

… and whether these ministers were on top of the way the two bodies were developing.

Yes. He moved on to other things from Agriculture. He subsequently became deputy premier and so on, so he was obviously very, very, very good value.

Was he the one handling it politically in Parliament to get the merger ...?

Initially. But Kym Mayes, he was the one who ended up taking it through to the establishment of the *Animal and Plant Control Act* – it was during '85, and then it came into place in '86.

Perhaps – we've got a few minutes here – we could just explore how that finally came to fruition, the merger and the Act.

Yes. It came through, and Bromell was obviously a major driver in the thing. There was a lot of just clue-ing Kym Mayes up so that he was able to carry it through the House. Then after that it was the establishment of the new Commission. There was some heartache there because there were the members of both organisations. There wasn't enough room. The staff were OK, we were all brought together. There was a certain amount of re-education on both sides: the Pest Plant staff had to be given some training in animal and plant control and the Animal and Plant Control people had to be brought up to speed as far as the weeds were concerned. There were some problems in relation to some of that because there were quite experienced local government people who looked particularly at some of my regional advisers, who didn't have a lot of experience in plants, and they'd look at them and say, 'What do *you* know?'. They would put people under pressure to just check out their [abilities] ... The boys came through pretty well, but it was tough for a time.

Was there any loss in staff number? I'm thinking mainly administration in the two main organisations, not at the local level.

Yes. There wasn't, because – and this was one of the things … The Pest Plants Commission did pretty well because they didn't have as many advisers and they didn't have any regional advisers at that stage. All of their blokes were here in Adelaide. My regional blokes, who'd been doing 100%, just about 100%, on rabbits, suddenly found themselves having to deal with plants as well. There was a much heavier load on them. Eventually it involved some reclassification of people. There were those sorts of aspects, and we had to handle appeals, which we were able to sustain the appeals, but it wasn't a lay down *misere*. These blokes, they had to do more, and they were doing more with less. There were a few – particularly on the pest plant side of things – blokes who decided that they didn't want to go on any further and so they retired. They tended not to be replaced. There was some staff cutting there. People like Les Hoff and Ray Alcock.

In a sense was there some resistance to this? People get a little bit territorial, as you've hinted, about their own preserve.

Yes, yes, there was some of that. So that there was a need to try to get people to accept it and to broaden it. Some people didn't. Dale Manson, for instance – he's still in the Department in a senior position in the animal husbandry side of things – came to me and said, 'I joined the [VPCA] because it was just dealing with animals. Now we're going to be involved with plants as well. I don't want to be'. He was with vertebrate pests. He said, 'I'm going to go somewhere else', and so he did. There was that aspect of it.

But, by and large, a greater acceptance rather than ...?

Yes, there was, pretty well. I remember Les Hoff coming back from a lunch when we were getting pretty well together. I'd stepped over everybody else in relation to the lower staff levels, because Bromell had been slotted in there. He'd been out to luncheon so he was a bit full of fire and steam. He said, 'We've developed a fucking good show here, so don't you fuck it up'. (laughter) I sent that to Kev [Kevin Gogler]– because Les died last week – and so it was a reminiscence in relation to it, and [Kev] said, 'I don't think you fucked it up'. (laughter)

It's managed to kick on.

Yes.

We might kick on on another disk, perhaps.

OK, that's fine.

End of Disk 5
Disk 6, 4 December 2008

Richard, perhaps if we could just explore a little bit more about that 1986 merger of the Authority and the Commission. We were just touching there on some of the staff reaction.

Yes, yes.

There's also out in the regions and local government and your broader public service domain, if we just ...

Yes. As far as the amalgamation, it was reasonably straightforward, but there were alternatives that were considered. I remember being asked, as we all were, to write our thoughts about what or where an amalgamated organisation should go. Should it be in Lands? Or should it be in Agriculture? Or should it be in the Department for the Environment? That was interesting because each of those areas had a bit of a claim to it. Lands in those days was responsible for the administration of all of the lands and so on – the *Vermin Control Act* had been there, and we worked closely with the Pastoral Board in relation to dingoes, so they were there. Agriculture: the Pest Plants Commission had sort of been taken out of Agriculture but it was still interested in agricultural problems, and so most of the weeds that we were looking at were agricultural problems, although there was a component in there that was called 'community pest plants', which were looking at the brooms and some of those things that are more environmental problems rather than a problem as far as a farmer in the Mallee or up in the Mid North or something like that. Some of those things they'd look at them and say, 'They're not a real problem because we just put the sheep in there and they get chewed down', or whatever. All of that was put through. At the stage where we ended up we believed that our core interests were with farmers or primary industry – it was more primary industry than the other aspects – although the objects of the Act related to primary industries, the environment and community health as well, particularly with pest plants. There are some plants that are serious health problems. There were those issues there. But it seemed to us, and it obviously struck a chord with the politicians as well, that our prime clients were primary industry. Back in those days – and this is 30 years ago, nearly – the epithet 'greenie' in country areas was not a particularly nice one, so that it was important to have your clients onside. This was local government as well as just the individual landowners, so that's where we went there. Yes, there was that aspect.

Then, as far as the staff were concerned, there were things that people had to come to terms with. As I said before, some of them came to terms with it by deciding that they'd retire. That's fair enough. They'd done a bloody good job. They went off and enjoyed their retirement. Some of the others, some of the younger blokes like Dale ..., he said, 'I'm not in the least interested in plants', and so he opted to go into that sort of area there.

Then it was a matter of dealing with local government. Local government, they were pretty straightforward, because we'd established these congruent boards so that we'd been working together and in many respects they were saying, 'Why don't you get this fixed up so that we're

just dealing with one piece of legislation rather than two?'. Because at the board level we'd have representatives from the Commission and there'd be representatives from the Authority; we'd sit in on the things. Most of it would be a Pest Plant Control Board and then they'd close that meeting, same people sitting there, they'd open the Vertebrate Pest Control Board and we'd handle the business there. Then we'd finish and go and have a few jars afterwards or something like that. It was pretty straightforward as far as local government was concerned, so they were there.

But then at the public service level, because the pest plants people had been trying to say, 'We're not part of the Department of Agriculture; we're outside', and the Vertebrate Pest Control Authority people had been saying, 'We're part of the Department of Agriculture, we're there, but we're different because we're responsible directly to the minister', and all this bloody [change] ... At about that stage, the Department of Agriculture had gone out on its regionalisation. They had regions all over the place, and they had chief regional officers. They'd look at these fellows and say, 'Where do you fit?', or something like that. I used to go and visit the chief regional officers – what's-his-name Ron Webber at Naracoorte and Geoff Robinson at Port Lincoln, there were blokes up in the Mid North and so on. But they weren't particularly interested in these blokes who were in an organisation at that stage that looked as if it was pretty together. They were being controlled by me – well, they were being controlled by the people in Adelaide, but basically it was me with a telephone and all the rest of it; didn't have mobile phones (laughs) in those days, but spent a lot of time on the telephone. They were quite happy as long as these regional officers fitted in with the local affairs in wherever they were, part of the thing, took their turn at being part of the local team. That's pretty well how we worked that.

[09:58] At that stage Peter Barrow was the chairman of the organisations. He went and saw Jim McColl to talk about fitting in with things. Pete, in many respects he'd been sidelined. He was a director, but he didn't have responsibility for anything else other than the Pest Plants Commission and the Vertebrate Pest Control Authority, he was the chairman of both of those. He was exploring with McColl whether things should be formalised so that people in the regional offices and so on would see where they were. McColl's advice was, 'If it's working pretty well, you're better off not to put too much down there', because as soon as you put things on paper there's some bastard that's going to spend his bloody time trying to see what's in it for him, or whatever.

That was pretty much the situation for quite a long time, so that we floated along there in some respects. But we were doing some pretty sound things. That was the situation and we were kicking goals.

[11:44] I asked before, Richard, about that Authority/Commission formation and structure. Do you recall any suggestion or attempt to hive off the two bodies into one separate from a department? I'm thinking in a way of a Pipelines Authority of South Australia …

Yes.

… was not involved with other departments in a formal sense? It's stand-alone.

Yes. There was some aspects of looking at that. When Max O'Neil was still there I know that he went off to get some advice from probably the Attorney-General's Department or somewhere, as to where they were, because he was trying to establish their autonomy. There were some more senior people in the Department of Agriculture that were probably trying to pull them back. But it wasn't in the Vertebrate Pest Control Authority's area, because we'd accepted that we'd been transferred over from Lands, and so the assurances were that it worked well that way. One of the other things – this comes back to Bromell's experience with the public service area and particularly the fact that Jack Dunsford, who was the Director for Lands, had been the Public Service Board Commissioner. I reckon that before he was the Director of Lands ... Bromell probably got quite some useful advice from him from a long time ago that there was more benefit in being loosely affiliated with the public service, because you had the opportunity to use the benefits from the wider service, than if you went out and set up an organisation that would end up having to have its own administration. You'd end up with more boundaries and so on. That's as far as I know, because I didn't get involved too much in that aspect.

I was more interested in dealing with the field problems and the local government people. That's probably my background because I'd been employed by a council for four years, so I'd seen some of the values there, and then I was in local government as an elected member for six years and saw the change from a district council, which was the Meadows District Council, through to the establishment of the City of Happy Valley. There was a fair bit there.

Hands-on stuff. Perhaps we'll look back now at a couple of nuts-and-bolts issues. You mentioned local government.

I was just wondering about the Dingo Control ...

Just before that, your local government experience.

Yes.

[15:59] In training up the local government officers, you did refer off the recording at one stage about your Roseworthy experience.

Right.

And you ran a unit up there or a ...?

It was accepted as a unit of the Natural Resource Management degree.

Was it called, that degree, was that the title at the time?

It started off it was a diploma in Natural Resource Management when they established it in it must have been '76 or something like that. I disremember exactly when they established that diploma. Then it subsequently was an advanced diploma or something, whatever. But it subsequently became the degree in Natural Resource Management. We specifically looked at whether we would continue with Roseworthy or with Salisbury, because initially we'd been providing training for people from Salisbury who generally ended up as National Parks rangers or in that sort of area, and they were very disappointed when we had to make a decision as to which way we were going to go because there were just so many students coming from the two organisations that (laughs) we were being a bit overwhelmed. The CAEs[7], they were doing very nicely because they were getting all of our expertise and all the rest of it for nothing and so on, and they were providing the students for a fortnight. But it was good because we eventually had quite a significant influence on those young undergraduates as to where they were going. They certainly told us that they enjoyed it and our analysis of their responses and so on – because we formalised the assessment of the benefits, asking them what they got out of it, how we could improve the course and all the rest of it – indicated that they thought it was one of the more interesting aspects of their degree. That was nice. Some of those guys – and girls – have gone on into that natural resource field, not only in South Australia but right throughout Australia. Some of those graduates are doing pretty nicely, so that's ...

When you were teaching in those courses, were they something that was arranged as a block, in the way you train local government officers, or was it more regular lecture?

It was a block. It was a fortnight block. The other benefit was that there was a smattering of local government blokes that were being employed directly by boards who hadn't been through the course, because we were encouraging the boards to employ graduates where they could, but they employed people who came from elsewhere, so there were always some of those and generally they would be a bit older than the undergraduates from Roseworthy. But that was one of the good things about the course, because you had this collection of people with life experiences, some of them diverse life experiences, all together. The local government fellows, they were geed up by some of these enthusiastic, young undergraduates. (laughs) It was a really dynamic course and – we enjoyed it and I think *they* enjoyed it as well.

Did you still run training schools outside of Adelaide or did people have to come in?

[7] CAE – College of Advanced Education.

No. Initially, we ran them at Murray Bridge and we organised the accommodation. There were various levels of accommodation depending on what people could afford or what their board was prepared to afford. We subsequently moved down to Salt Creek. We used to go down to Salt Creek earlier on when we were at Murray Bridge for a couple of [days (overnight)]. We'd be down there for a couple of days to look at aspects of work that Brian Cooke was doing along the Coorong. That had stemmed from my very early field studies back in 1972 and '73 along the Coorong, so we were in the same area. We had some pretty good knowledge of the area down there. We moved down there because we'd removed the rabbit problem at Monarto, which is where we'd been doing our practical work, and there just wasn't anything much for practical there. We found more practical areas down there near Salt Creek, and so we stayed at the Gemini Downs Resort down there and found that was quite useful because we were able to use the facilities that they had down there, was quite handy to handle 25 or more students in a classroom situation. Then we'd go out into the field. That kept us on the go there.

But you had a training school over at Port Lincoln at one stage?

Yes, we did. That was reasonably early on in the scheme of things. We needed to train the local government blokes on Eyre Peninsula and we decided that it would be better to go over there rather than to have them come to us, because we'd be able to find some practical areas over there, which we did. I had a new batch of young regional advisers that had to be trained up at about the same time, so that we had a good-sized group of people over there. We had five National Parks rangers – reasonably senior blokes – who tended to be quite critical of people going out killing animals (laughs) and so on. They weren't convinced of some of the things, initially. The interesting thing was that, because of that criticism, they looked very, very closely at some of the practical aspects, particularly the use of the 1080 bait, 1080 poisoning, and a couple of them spent the intervening weekend searching to see whether there was any evidence of damage to the native animals and so on. There were quite a lot of kangaroos and so on out there ... (break in recording)

OK, we're back again, Richard, just after a short stop.

Yes. Just in relation to that, so when we went out to do the [business] – we did the poisoning, and then the last day of that training course there one of the things that we always do at a training course is to go out and scour the area that's been poisoned so you can see the effectiveness on the rabbits, because you find some dead ones, and also the lack of poisoned birds or other animals. That particular training school gave me tremendous confidence as far as kangaroos and wallabies were concerned, because there were a lot of kangaroos in the area that had been feeding and so ... I was quite confident, because of my experience, but it's always nice to just get it demonstrated. We went out there – and there hadn't been a high rabbit density population but there'd been rabbits all over the area – we went searching and we found quite a

surprising number of dead rabbits scattered throughout the area; we saw live kangaroos hopping around through the area and there were birds; and in relation to particularly poisoned oats is that there's a whole lot of birds that don't come at risk at all because they just don't eat grain at all. The majority of the grain-eaters husk oats, and so they avoid the 1080 because it's on the husk of the oat. It was a good exercise that we had over there. It provided much closer rapport for us with some pretty significant National Parks officers – from memory there were five of them – and, as I say, there were a couple of them that spent a lot of their own time after the poisoning had been done, and they told me afterwards that they'd been out there and they were quite sure that they were bound to find some dead native animals and they never did. That was good.

It's an interesting aspect – we talk about vertebrate pests and pest animals and that transition from when the native animal becomes a pest. It probably applies less with native weeds – native flora, I should say, becoming weeds; but when does the animal become a pest? You've got the dog fence to keep dingoes north and wombats going under the fence.

That's right. We have arguments in relation to wombats. There was a bloke called Bob Ashby that lived at Nundroo and I had a tremendous lot of discussions with him at various times because he wanted wombats to be declared vertebrate pests or vermin or whatever. It was very difficult to convince him that they shouldn't be proclaimed, because if they were proclaimed then you had an obligation to go and destroy all of them – which didn't worry him too much. But we did have quite a bit of involvement in relation to … You mentioned the fence; the wombats caused quite a bit of problems over on the West Coast digging under the fences and so on. One of my regional advisers, Tony Adams, put in quite a big investment of time and effort out there looking at how we could use an electric fence as an outrigger to the netting fence to stop wombats from travelling through the fence. We were effective with that. It was a funny little [fence] … Only about a three-wire fence that was only about 60 cm or less high, but it was sufficient to deflect wombats away from the [Dog] Fence – eventually; it took them a while. We handled that.

The other thing – and this follows on with what you were saying before about the native … There's arguments about the dingo, for instance, as to whether it's a native animal or not. I presented a paper at an international conference in Sacramento back in 1990 in relation to the development of the South Australian policy in relation to dingoes ... (phone: break in recording)

The dingo's been in Australia for about 10 000 years or something like that. It had always been considered to be a pest animal because of its effect particularly on sheep. It was one of the first things to be legislated against here in South Australia in 1857 or something like that, along with the forerunner to the weeds, the *Thistle Act* or something like that, *No.5* I think was the 1857 [Act]. We were involved with the development of a policy that recognised the dingo as a native

or an animal that could be conserved outside of the dog fence and not tolerated at all inside of the dog fence. That's been the policy that's been in place pretty well for the last 30 years. As far as I know – I'd hope that it's still there.

It was developed in conjunction or liaison with the three ministers: Lands, Agriculture and Environment. They all agreed to the policy. It was a particularly valuable tool in being able to handle the management of dingoes.

What period is this when you – three ministers, you've got 1970s ...
It was in the late '70s.

Late '70s, OK, that's fine.
Yes. It probably … In some respects it might have been under the Liberals, but I'm not sure. I just have an idea that it was because I'm pretty sure that David Wotton was the Minister for the Environment. But it could have been over two different governments.

...
Labor and Liberal. I met David Wotton when he was first campaigning to become a Member [of Parliament] at one of our early training schools at Murray Bridge.

And ironically he ends up working in the NRM[8] area.
Yes, that's right. That was the situation in relation to that. That policy was the first recognition in Australia of the dingo in a situation other than just being complete vermin that had to be destroyed, and a lot of the northern part of South Australia you've got a situation where you do have pure dingoes, regardless of what some other people might want to argue that they're there. We subsequently had a considerable amount of research – Ron Sinclair and Peter Bird were employed by the Animal and Plant Control Commission to work on that aspect, improving the baiting and trapping and all that situation. There were some major spinoffs from their work into environmental aspects. They found a whole lot of little animals that had never been described before. That was good.

My part of it was to present this paper in the United States. I think I impressed them pretty well there at Sacramento. I showed a photograph of the Collinsville ram – at that stage our wool industry was doing a lot better than it is these days – and even the Yanks were pretty impressed to see a photograph of one sheep that was worth $1 000 000, and to be able to say, 'This is what we're protecting is there'. At Collinsville is closely ... (interruption: break in recording)

OK, Richard, we're back now after a bit of a break to recharge and so on. We finished off talking about the dingo control policy and how that was developed, which leads me to ask a bit about your

[8] NRM – natural resource management.

involvement and the Authority's involvement with the Dog Fence Board and any overlaps there in activities.

Yes, there was a bit, Bernie. The Dog Fence Board, they handled the dingo because it was up in their area, because initially the Vermin Control Branch handled dingoes as well. Bromell, he'd hived off the dingoes when he was employed to look at rabbits, so the Vermin Control Branch handled that. The Dog Fence Board – or the Pastoral Board, because there was the Pastoral Board and the Dog Fence Board were pretty much the same thing although they'd diverged – but the vermin control, vertebrate pest control, became more involved in the late '60s, because the pastoralists wanted 1080 for controlling dingoes. Bromell was particularly opposed to relinquishing the handling of 1080 because it was such an effective tool against rabbits and [he] didn't want it to be used for other ancillary things. We tended to oppose its use for poisoning anything else. But there was a major push, particularly because the other States were using 1080 against dingoes in their areas.

There was a bit of a trade-off, that the vertebrate pest control people handled the 1080, because they were trained in its handling and its use, and so one of our people travelled with – the Pastoral Board, it was more the Pastoral Board rather than the Dog Fence Board – and they handled the 1080 and did the poisoning and so on. I was involved reasonably closely in 1975, because Dean Smith, who'd been our bloke that was handling that aspect, had a heart attack just at the stage that he was supposed to be going up there for a 3-week trip, I think it was, with Donald Byrne, who was the dog fence boundary rider, the inspector for the Pastoral Board, and that was the Dog Fence Board as well. You see, they were virtually the same people. I got a good introduction to the pastoralists, the pastoral area, at that time with Donald, because he'd been employed in the pastoral industry from the time that he was 14 and he looked after a station in the northwest at a very early age [(Mt Willoughby)] – he was only about 15 or something like that – and he and a blackfella brought a mob of stock about 300 miles or something like that. He was also involved with the solving of the Sundown murders; because of his close association with the Aborigines and so on and as a very young youngster he had a very good ability to track, so he was able to help the police a lot with that instance of the Sundown murders up [on] the Oodnadatta Track. Anyway, he took me under his wing and we had a very pleasant three weeks, I reckon it was, touring around. He introduced me to all the pastoralists along the fence. So we did that.

I subsequently was pretty much involved with introducing new regional officers – Greg Mutze was one – to the pastoralists up there. Brian Cooke and I did an extensive tour in 1982: we took some time, just to get a real feel of all of the pastoral area. We'd been up to Quinyambie earlier on back in the '70s. That was our involvement. Our interest was the dog or the dingo rather than the fence. The Dog Fence Board, their responsibility was to make sure that the dog fence

was kept in sound order. They worked in close liaison with the pastoralists. They provided us with a bit of advice and guidance as to sometimes if there was a problem. We worked in negotiation with them before they moved into the Department of Agriculture's field.

Was there ever any attempt that you know of to say bring the Dog Fence Board into the Authority, given they've got one very specific task that could be almost a sub-branch sort of thing?

Yes, it was talked about a bit. But because it was such a specific thing they wanted to keep it pretty tight. I reckon that Rod Everett, who became the chairman of the Dog Fence Board, worked on keeping it pretty solitary. He'd been a member of the Pastoral Board and then things changed in Lands and there was a lot more science that was introduced into their activities and Rod, he was hived off out to the side somewhere so that he was there. We weren't particularly interested in getting involved with the administration of the dog fence. There's an interesting historical background to how the fence grew into what is the dog fence now. We had some involvement with them; we had involvement in relation to the fence itself, because the dingo-proof fence, or the dog fence, was described in our legislation. The regulations are set down as to what is a dog fence and it relates to the *Fences Act*, so that there's aspects there about money being involved. We were involved there and we were aware of how it worked, so there was the two bits of administration.

Then Andrew McTaggart, he ended up being the chairman of the Dog Fence Board, and he was a member of the Authority and then the Commission. There was close liaison between the groups. Jim Vickery, when he was the chairman of the Pastoral Board and the chairman of the Dog Fence Board, used to sit in on the Vertebrate Pest Control Authority's meetings as a liaison person; he wasn't a member of the Authority but he used to attend all of the Authority meetings.

Observer, sort of thing?

Yes – just an adviser as to how things were going out in the area and if there was concern about what needed to be done. He was involved in the development of the dingo control policy that we talked about before. He, from his experience up in the pastoral areas, didn't believe that there needed to be a lot of poisoning done out in the cattle parts north of the fence. There was virtually no sheep outside of the dog fence except for the small property Copper Hills northeast of Coober Pedy, that's just outside the fence. I astounded the Americans when there was a question that was asked at Sacramento whether there were any sheep outside. I said, 'Not, except for a hobby farm of 100 square miles outside the fence', (laughter) which rather they were a bit taken aback that anyone would consider that they should call a property of 100 square miles a 'hobby farm'; but it was. Hughie Frahn, who was an artist as well, was able to

protect his sheep out in that area by selectively using 1080 baits that we used to provide out there.

Did he fence them?

No, as far as the sheep were concerned. He was able to control the dingoes in that area by strategic poisoning. He told me at the time when I visited out there that by that strategic use of 1080 he'd been able to breed sheep so that he was able to breed replacements without having to buy them in. Prior to that he hadn't been able to. He'd been there for, I don't know … It's probably a good story ... This is years ago. He'd been there for 25 years or something at that stage.

All right. That's the dog fence side of things.

Yes, pretty well.

It's interesting to see they've carried on, they've been able to maintain a bit of a separate identity to the present.

Yes. I'd had involvement with Brian Lock, who was the officer for them. I met Brian when he was the manager of a station out in the Gawler Ranges, that was the first time that I met him, and he was shearing a few sheep when I called in. Then Michael Balharry I'd met when he was running Ralph James's property out near Nundroo somewhere, because Michael was Ralph James's stepson. I knew him before he was employed by the Dog Fence Board.

The other thing just in relation to dingoes and fenced areas was the Box Flat Dingo Control Committee, which was down at – takes in land in the three council areas, Pinnaroo, Lameroo, Coonalpyn and Tatiara. It was a little location where there's dingoes that caused a problem across the two States in South Australia and Victoria. It was included in the *Vermin Control Act*, and when the *Vermin Control Act* was abolished and the *Vertebrate Pests Act* was brought in, the provision for vermin fenced districts, which was in the old *Vermin Act*, were abolished because they were outside – they were all outside the dog fence except for Box Flat. At the very last instance when the legislation was being brought down somebody suddenly (laughs) remembered Box Flat and they had to do something about it. There was the provision in the *Vertebrate Pests Act*, and it was just one section, but it said that there was a provision to establish prescribed control bodies. That's all that section said, that prescribed control bodies could be established under the regulations. The Box Flat Dingo Control Committee became a prescribed body and that particular piece of the legislation was retained in the *Animal and Plant Control Act* so that we could continue to maintain Box Flat. It subsequently was used for the establishment of the Soil Boards outside of the incorporated areas so that they could be incorporated into some of the aspects of animal and plant control, so that the Soil Boards out in

the pastoral areas could handle some of the things – which is a bit of a forerunner of the move to the Natural Resource Management Boards later on.

The Soil Boards in those cases weren't covered by the *Soil Conservation Act*?

They were covered by the *Soil Conservation Act*, but they weren't able to handle – well, particularly proclaimed plants and those sorts of things. They needed to be able to handle some of those things, and so by this simple little piece of [legislation] – it was almost a loophole in the legislation, that you could proclaim a prescribed control body. I'd been involved – before I retired and since I've retired – with the Purple Peril Woody Weed Management Program in the Adelaide Mount Lofty Ranges area, and we used that same facility to bring that under the umbrella of the legislation, which was quite a neat way to run things.

You get around it a bit.

Yes. Instead of having to set something up under some different legislation it was incorporated in the legislation that we're in that was covered in that situation.

A quick one to round out the …

The time there.

… the dingo there is Box Flat. Is it feasible, or is it a feasible option, to eradicate the dingo there? Or just to control?

It was pretty difficult. They tried … in different degrees of being able to deal with it; and to a large extent they were successful. One of the other problems is that the problems runs across into Victoria, and so we established – because I liaised with them and was a member of the Box Flat committee, used to go to their meetings and so on. We used to meet with the Victorian authorities. That was a bit of an exercise, too, because the people who controlled it in Victoria were located at Mildura and Horsham. We used to meet at Ouyen or somewhere like that and all these high-powered people (laughs) used to come in and have a bit of a talk so that we could arrange for the doggers on both sides of the border to handle it. It's an interesting thing in itself, because the border is covered by a file that's about that thick – I don't know, there's a fair bit of stuff in there – because it takes in the history of the boundary between South Australia and Victoria, which the Victorians cribbed about a mile and a half of South Australia (laughs) or something like that.

That territorial dispute, yes.

Yes.

OK. Thanks for that one, Richard.

End of Disk 6
Disk 7, 4 December 2008

OK, Richard, we'll just turn to a few other issues that crop up in the story …

Yes.

… leading towards your retirement and the NRM days. So back over to you.

Yes. Everything came together as far as the amalgamation of the Commission and the Authority after '83 and the staffs were amalgamated at that stage. It was another three years before the legislation was adopted, 1986 the *Animal and Plant Control Act* legislation came in, but our staffs were amalgamated then and, as I think I said before, Bromell was the leader of the show and I was seen as the senior adviser. We started then to work very much with the plants and the animals and there was a major shift as far as our regional staff were concerned. There was a lot more responsibility and workload on those blokes, who were in a position that you'd say was a bit difficult sometimes for people to grasp. But I always like to think of them as catalysts that made things happen, that they were the go-between between us in the administration in the central area and the operations at the local board level. It was sometimes difficult to just explain to people exactly what they are doing, because they're seen to be driving around in what people think of as flash cars or something like that; but there's a lot of quite delicate negotiations and so on that go between the boards and the staff of each organisation, so that you're there.

It's important probably to stress just how valuable those boards were. There was about 300 board members who were all volunteers, when you think about it. They didn't cost the State government a cracker. Their time was given because they were appointed by the local council as the representative on the board. It was up to the council as to whether they paid any expenses for travel, and that was all that they got, the board members.

Some would have to travel a fair way, too, in some of the regions.

Yes, quite a lot. There were some fairly heavy negotiations at times, particularly with landholders who perhaps didn't want to do what they needed to do, so that they worked, some of them, quite long hours for not very much recognition at all. They got some verbal recognition later on by Rob Kerin's comment in Hansard that animal and plant control is not as sexy as Soil Boards and some other things, but they're a very important aspect of natural resource management.

As a more recent minister and also with his rural background he's a bit more cognisant of the work.

Yes. The other ministers, they were pretty recognised as well. We had some pretty good ones after Kym Mayes. We had Terry Groom, who we might talk about at some extra length in a while, because he was very important in the mouse plague; and we had … As well as Rob Kerin, who became premier, we had – what's his name? Big, tall minister.

Lynn Arnold?

Yes, Lynn Arnold. He became premier as well. A very voracious reader of all literature, Lynn. We had involvement with him as well. But we're jumping a bit ahead there.

[06:41] But once I became the senior adviser it was about the same time that the CSIRO implemented an action against the apiarists. There was an injunction that had been taken out by apiarists here in South Australia against the use of biological control agents for Salvation Jane. The arguments had been that CSIRO didn't have a legal responsibility to control Salvation Jane. It was a proclaimed plant. It seemed to me that the South Australian Government *did* have a responsibility under the legislation, under the *Pest Plants Act* there was a requirement that we controlled Salvation Jane on Crown lands – unoccupied Crown lands – and on roadsides and so on. So that if there was a cheaper, effective way of dealing with it, then we should have access to it. It seemed to me, from what I knew about the biological control agents, that this would be a very effective thing, because on the animal side we'd had a lot of involvement with biological control with myxomatosis and we'd also been using fleas to spread myxomatosis as well, so that we had a good grounding and a good understanding in that aspect of things.

I was able to convince people that this was an important thing and so that I got in touch with the Attorney-General's people and got hold of a lawyer – I can't remember his name now – and talked to them about the possibilities of it. The upshot of it was that we ended up briefing somebody and that John Doyle QC was briefed to appear for the South Australian government in attempting to have the injunction lifted in the Supreme Court. That was a pretty interesting exercise and experience, to go along to the Supreme Court and sit in there and see – initially, there was just one judge that was dealing with it, and he had his helpers there; but subsequently it went to the Full Court, so there were three justices, including Justice Len King, who was the Chief Justice of South Australia at the time, and their associates, so you had all of these legal eagles there; you had the apiarists with their legal people; and CSIRO, they had a solicitor and a QC; the State government with a solicitor and a QC and me in tow – so there was a mob of people in the Supreme Court. It went on for a considerable period, I just can't remember now but it wasn't something that just happened in five minutes or a couple of hours or something like that. I can remember looking and thinking, 'There's a lot of money arranged here that would have been, to my mind, better spent on getting on with controlling Salvation Jane'.

With the job.

But in the final analysis Len King came down with a finding that the injunction should be lifted, and it was. At about the same time the Federal government brought in *their* legislation in relation to biological control, and interestingly it was all aimed at Salvation Jane at that stage. This is '84, '85 or something like that. Subsequently been used in lots of other aspects. But that

was a – it was a turning point in the introduction of biological control agents. We subsequently were able to release the *Dialectica*, which was the first biological agent, and it spread widely; didn't seem to have all that great an immediate impact. But biological control agents of plants particularly are something that tends to be rather slow and steady. Then after a while you look and things have changed quite significantly. But with Salvation Jane there's a whole handful of different agents that are now available, but there's a lot of scientific work and quarantine work and so on that's quite expensive before you get to the stage that you want to be at.

Was there perhaps greater concern over bio-control for plants/weeds versus the controls over animals, in that I'm thinking perhaps maybe there's a fear that the bio-control can spread more readily in the plant/weed area?

No, I don't think so, because there's a whole lot of things that are still not fully understood in both areas. The major thing, there's always a major concern that somebody's going to introduce something like the cane toad, we come back always to things like the cane toad. But there's been some good achievements as well. There's a lot of study, there's a hell of a lot of work that's done before there's an introduction of an agent.

I visited the CSIRO station at Montpelier in France which was quite an interesting thing. I met [Jim Cullen and] there was a French scientist there who was fully employed by CSIRO, never been in Australia but he's employed by CSIRO looking at Salvation Jane. But there's various other things as well, so that you get all of that research, fieldwork and so on, looking at things, looking for the possibility. Then you have lucky breaks or people who have a mind flash – which is the thing that happened with the calicivirus. Brian Cooke was in Spain, looking for other fleas to spread myxomatosis or the possibility for other fleas to spread myxomatosis, when he and a Spanish colleague encountered the first wild infestation of calicivirus in wild rabbits in Spain. Brian, he saw the possibilities of a 'new myxomatosis', if you like, for the control of rabbits in Australia, came back here and convinced the people who mattered that we should explore this.

There's very similar situations in both plants and animals in relation to the thing, and the very stringent requirements of looking at these things before there's any move to release them as to what they'll affect, how they might spread and all that sort of thing, so that there's some quite significant quarantine facilities. We had quarantine facilities here [in Adelaide] for the fleas that we had, the Spanish fleas that we had – that was at Northfield; but in Victoria there's a major quarantine facility at the Keith Turnbull Research Institute down on the Mornington Peninsula and they've worked at assessing the plant biological agents and so on; and then there's the major Australian Animal Health Laboratories at Geelong, and they deal with looking at animal biological things and so on. I've been to both of those places. It's quite fascinating. To get into

them you have to go through very strict procedures and protocols and change your clothes, and once you're in there you're in there for the day ... (laughs)

Safety measures and preventative measures ...

Yes, all those, all of those sorts of things. Particularly at AAHL at Geelong, it's a huge facility. It's got about five floors or something like that, from memory. They have negative atmosphere there so that if there's a breach the air is going to come in rather than …

Dispersing?

… anything being dispersed, so that if you get nasty agents they're kept in-house. That's quite interesting in relation to that.

[19:51] In period where we'd amalgamated everything we're still working to establish boards that covered all of the councils, right across the incorporated areas, because the Pest Plants Commission at the time that I'm talking – 1983 and through to '85 – still hadn't been able to convince some of the southeastern councils to amalgamate into Pest Plant Control Boards. At that stage we were still operating with three different Acts. We had the *Vertebrate Pests Act*, the *Pest Plants Act*, and these councils that hadn't embraced the pest plants legislation were operating under the *Weeds Act, 1956*, and that got a bit archaic at times. There were a few problems there. We were trying to encourage them to join up, because they felt that they were doing all right, so some of it came back to a matter of money: 'What's in it for us?'. Generally there was a little bit, for some of them, and for some it was quite significant. Later on there was a bit of reorganisation, 10 or 12 years down the track when things had changed, new people were there, it all had to go around.

I guess you would have had to be on your ...

We were working on all of that, those negotiations, and I was involved in those.

Ralph James was a major player in convincing some of the southeastern councils, some of the last ones, to form up into congruent boards. He was regarded a little bit askance by some of the others that reckoned that – these are his colleagues down in the South East – that he'd sold them out (laughs) because he'd been opposed, initially, to the formation of Pest Plant Boards because he reckoned that most of the southeastern councils were big enough to handle the situation by themselves. But there were benefits, and there's always benefits of removing some of the boundaries.

The other thing, and this was an important factor, of getting slightly bigger area boards and a few more staff involved, that you get the interaction between people. There's more professionalism in the staff. The boards tend to employ better-qualified personnel. But it's a bit

difficult sometimes to say whether it's just that or whether it would have happened anyway, because as you come along the people that are available become better qualified, they've been to training courses and so on. I don't know, it's interesting in relation to that.

[23:46] Then we moved – one of the other areas that we were working at at that stage, which had been around for a long time, that people had wanted – stock sales inspections throughout the whole area, to minimise the risk of spreading seeds around, and we'd been talking about it for yonks and some areas had been doing inspections and lots hadn't. We devised a stock sales inspection policy that covered the whole of South Australia. That was a major achievement but it was also a major pain in the bum getting it adopted right through, because we had tried to do something that was practical as well as being theoretical, that it had to be something that everybody would accept. We had five stages of the policy from absolute prohibition of anything that had weeds on it in areas where it's pretty clean through to stage one where you were just bringing it in but at least people were able – because the inspections were being done, people were able to be warned if they were buying contaminated stock and that they wouldn't be able to take them to some areas, which was pretty important because they had the knowledge, so that you couldn't take them say to the South East, if you'd bought some at Gepps Cross or something like that you couldn't just take them down there and then say, 'We didn't know that they had innocent weed or Noogoora burr' – or something like that – 'in them'. We were able to stop stock coming to Gepps Cross from New South Wales with Noogoora burr in their tails and so on. It was a policy that worked pretty well.

We had to implement that through our boards, and so once again Muggins is on his treadlie all around the country and not making too many friends at times. In fact, I can remember some of my regional officers being told, 'You're our friend. We don't want that grey-headed old bastard to come anywhere near us because he tells us things that we don't want to hear!'.

You're well-enough known.

There were all of those sorts of factors. We also were negotiating with the stock agents as well because we had to get them onside, too. We were talking with the industry in every part of it. It worked very well and it was ...

It's something that's maintained?

Yes, as far as I know it is. How well – I believe that it should still be there.

Could you have tapped into … I'm presuming stock for sale, for example, is going to be inspected for diseases, if you're talking about ...

Yes. We talked to the animal health people as well. No, it's too difficult, it's too diverse. You need to have the two lots of people. I had negotiations with people in the animal production

side of the Department and the representatives from SAFF[9] and so on talking about the whole thing. We had quite a few discussions in relation to it and they agreed that it was something that you could say would be nice, but once again if you lumber somebody with too many responsibilities they end up not being able to handle any of them. That was the case.

There were problems from time to time, but there was a lot of inter-board assistance as well, because we'd identified areas where there were major sales and so on, and it became very difficult for an officer or a couple of officers from one board to handle the thing. My regional officers came back to help in with this, to organise rosters and so on so that there was helping from some of the more outlying boards where the blokes didn't have to do it. We also helped them to improve their ability in being able to do those inspections. The regional officers helped as well, so that it was all hands to the pump, sometimes. There were those sorts of situations.

[30:26] Then we moved – it was around about the same time, probably, that we moved to more cooperative works – this is on the plant side of things – with identifying areas where there were major problems, like the dodder infestations up in the Riverland. We got volunteers from various boards to come along and help with the inspections in there: bloody hard country to deal with. This is right along the river. Because a lot of the dodder was associated very much with the edges of the river and the river flats and so on. Initially the blokes went out there and did that. People like Hoffy [Les Hoff], it was before he'd retired, but he was involved with that. Ray Alcock – Ray was a major mover in relation to the dodder problem.

Yes, it seemed to be one of his pet interests.

Initially dodder was identified as being not golden dodder but something similar to it. He didn't agree with that identification. He subsequently took samples to Kew [in London] to have identified and so then he (laughs) jumped up and down and it was there taken to major extremes. But it was important because of the risk to our small seeds industry, down in the South East particularly.

The blokes, they scoured the whole of the Riverland area and Jack Jones managed to tip a Toyota over and didn't endear himself to some of the things. Poor old Jack, he was a bit of a disaster going somewhere to happen in a motor vehicle or a boat. He sank a boat. You heard about that, have you?

Yes, yes, up at the conference – they've talked about that, yes.

Right, yes. (laughs)

2005 conference, yes.

[9] SAFF – South Australian Farmers' Federation.

Right. Yes, well, he managed to sink a boat with cameras and Christ knows what, lost the lot. Couple of vehicles that he managed to bend a bit. But anyway, that was the cooperative approach in relation to that.

While we're talking about dodder and Ray Alcock we need to just round that out, because we had a problem with some dodder down in the South East. There was a definite location on the bottom end of what's the Coorong Council now. Nobody that I know of ever got to the bottom of how it got there. There was some suggestion that it came in contaminated seed, came in in a small packet of small seed – I don't know, out of seed or some bloody thing – in somebody's pocket, a fairly high official in the government somewhere. I won't say anything more than that because the people are dead and I don't know, I've never been able to get to the bottom of how it happened or whatever ...

Inadvertently, presumably.

Yes, but there must have been some, somewhere, agreement in relation to it as to how to handle it, because all of the costs were picked up by the – this was in the monitoring of it and so on – were picked up by the government. But for a long time we were monitoring this bloody patch down south of Tintinara. It's still being monitored, as far as I know, or it was; but there hasn't been anything there for some years, or hadn't been the last time I spoke to somebody about it.

But because it was there, and it definitely was dodder, there was great concern about the possibility of dodder in the lucerne down in the Upper and the Lower South East, particularly in the Upper South East. We were getting samples of lucerne and stuff that was being tested by the Department's seed analysis laboratories. They identified dodder seed in samples. All hell broke loose down there for some time. There was all sorts of problems in relation to it. It had been checked and rechecked several times. The landholders – because there were several of them that were involved – they … This particular landholder – because they couldn't find any dodder plants but they kept on getting it in the seed – he queried on several occasions, 'Could it be something else? Was it tomato weed?'. They said it wasn't tomato weed, but it was a thing: 'No, no, it wouldn't be because that's a *Solanum* and the seeds are quite different from dodder', and all the rest of it.

Anyway, he brought in a sample, and it was checked out: was it dodder? It went to the people that checked it: yes, it was. But it wasn't. He'd collected it from this bloody – it was some sort of *Solanum*. The alarm bells were ringing in relation to it, so we said, 'OK, send it' – because the Department was quite adamant that it was dodder seed – so we sent a sample to CSIRO labs in Canberra and initially they came back and said, 'Yes, it was dodder'. But they persisted because we'd asked them to. They did destructive tests of the thing – which they don't

normally do because they're quite confident in their analysis and so on. They were stone cells, which are produced by this plant, which are identical to dodder seed until you do the destructive analysis and discover that it's not a bloody seed. (Mimics scream) I reckon it was Ray Alcock, he called me out and, 'Just got this thing back', it was a Pest Plant Commission meeting, and so I trundled in with the results and threw a hand grenade into the meeting that we had this major problem that had to be resolved, which we managed to resolve. But there were some side effects in relation to – one landholder down there had totally destroyed 120 acres of lucerne that he'd planted. He'd put a soil sterilant over the whole area, so it had taken the land out. I've forgotten now, but there was some compensation for that because of the misdiagnosis in relation to it. Yes, that was a major bit of ...

Not everything's a success.

It was in the final analysis, but it was because this bloke [Ryan] had kept on saying, 'Are you sure? Are you sure?'. We said, 'Yeah, we're sure, but we'll go the extra step'. We did, and so that handled that pretty well.

Ray's told me a bit about his dodder experiences, so we've got another perspective there, that's good.

Yes, so that covers those points there and the organisation in relation to it. We subsequently got a report of yellow burr weed being discovered on Eyre Peninsula that had been introduced by some uncertified seed over there. It might have been certified seed – yes, it was certified seed. But it had been in a couple of locations. But because it was certified seed we'd been able to get advice about where it had all gone to. Then we needed a major exercise – it was beyond what the Eyre Peninsula blokes were able to do. We called for volunteers from all of the boards. Various boards, from everywhere, all over the State, down the South East and up the Riverland and so on, volunteered their blokes and their vehicles and their boards paid for the things and we paid accommodation and fuel, and did all the organisation of who went where to. It was a good exercise all around. We got quite a lot of publicity from the ABC with all of those things.

The rural radio?

Yes, yes – Leigh Radford and those sorts of people and various people. They were looking for that stuff. But it's all part and parcel of the thing. The best way to get stories across to farmers back in those days was to make sure that you got a segment on the breakfast show, 7 o'clock in the morning, quarter to seven. Got to be bloody up early to talk to somebody, but ... (laughter)

Farmers and so on would be up early, so you'd get to catch them.

Yes, yes, they're listening to it. But it's getting it across. You do it on the telephone: 'Give us a few words. You're ready to go?'. You'd do an interview on the telephone. Didn't always work out too well. That was the situation in relation to that. We were effective in being able to

identify areas and the locations. Then they were able to be followed up by their own authorised officers and so on.

The *APC Act* came in 1986, and we did tours – the new Commission, which had some women on it, first time, so the Commission ... The South East wanted to be represented, and I said to them, 'If you want to make absolutely sure that you get a representative, nominate a woman', and they nominated Christine Johnson, the chairman of the Lucindale Council.

She's been on more or less ever since.

Yes, she has. Yes, yes. But that was how she became involved, that it was a suggestion through me to David Hogarth that he just lobby a few influential people down there, because they wanted to be represented. I said, 'Well ...'. Because at that stage that was the policy, that women be represented on boards and so on. There's been quite a few since then.

We did tours all around the State. Interestingly, one of them was out into the pastoral areas – none of the Commission members had had much to do with that. Brian Cooke and I, we did a swing around to see what we could find to show them. We did a massive drive: we did 1500 km in a day or something like that. It was an amazing ... Probably occupational health and safety would say that that's not a good way to go. Anyway, we did that. Took us, a part of it, was to a place called Manunda, which is up in the Olary [area], up that way, where we'd been 10 years before – this was post '86 so it was about 10 years – where we'd done some of the training of some of our regional blokes, and we'd done rabbit control up there. We hadn't been there for about 10 years; we were just a bit interested to see what had happened. We went back there expecting that the rabbits probably had taken over, come back over the area – we'd had a field day up there at the time that we'd done it – and we were suitably surprised that our work had been extremely effective. The area that had been treated was still free of rabbits and all the rest of it. There was blue bush and stuff growing in some of the areas where it had all been ripped and so on. That subsequently ended up being the stimulus for a lot of the work that Greg Mutze's done since, further up on Gum Creek and so on. You might like to incorporate that in there. That was how we got back to having a look at Manunda, and so that was there.

The new legislation had the same sorts of provisions for treating landholder appeals, where the Commission was in a position to handle appeals if a board had imposed a notice or some other action and the landholder didn't feel that it was appropriate. Then those hearings were heard by one of either a Commission member or a deputy. There were various – it depended; if it was in a particular area it might be the commissioner who lived in that area, but quite often Roger Brockhoff, he was [a] deputy commissioner, he was used quite extensively in that regard so that we'd go and hear the Board's point of view, hear the landholder's point of view, do an

inspection of the whole area and then have a conference and arrive at [a decision] – we'd either confirm the notice or vary it or set it aside. They were the provisions. Generally we'd come to a reasonable agreement. The commissioner was assisted by usually me, or another senior officer, but quite often it was me. The regional officer would be involved as well, but he'd been involved in the negotiations and so on, so that we're looking at having a completely impartial review by people that have got pretty good practical experience of the problem and dealing with the problems. Roger Brockhoff and Des Ross was another one ... They were pretty pragmatic blokes as well. I was there to just make sure that we kept pretty well to the legal side of it as well. I had direct contact with the Crown Prosecutor's area: they allocated solicitors to us to ask for advice about points of law and so on. I'd check – as far as I could – all of the ins and outs before we went and if necessary I'd check afterwards to make sure that we'd dotted the i's and crossed the t's. Most times we'd come to a solution which satisfied everybody. Roger Brockhoff would say – because the fellow would say, 'I can't afford it', or something like that, so we'd get him to say, 'I've got a bloody problem. It's going to cost me an arm and three legs'. We'd say, 'OK. How much *can* you do over what time?'. This has led us to the development and the implementation of property plans. There are other people doing property plans, but we were doing them as well, and setting them up. There were all those sorts of things.

[54:15] We had a bloke on Kangaroo Island, Charlie Thomas was a soldier settler over there, that he used to regularly appeal against the [notice] – because he had a thing against the local officer over there. We went over – Mark Williams went over with him a couple of times, with Roger Brockhoff, to check it out and resolve it. The next year there'd be another appeal. After we'd sorted it out a second time ... I said to the Commission, 'We don't need to send a commissioner over there. We know the ins and outs of it. We can dismiss the appeal and just tell him to get on with [it]'. That was fair enough. He was comfortable with that, and they managed to control it.

Then the most interesting appeal was down at Robe. We rocked off – there were several, we had three appeals that day, so we were pretty busy. The last one, they'd kept it to last because the board members and the board officer were very dubious about this landholder. (laughs) He was bloody hard to get on with. He was allegedly very deaf. That was fine. We rocked up to visit him. We went to his place and there didn't seem to be anybody around. We rocked up to the front door and I hammered on the door in my best authoritarian thing and this little bloke comes around from the back somewhere. I introduced myself, speaking quite loudly. The chairman of the Board and his officer about 50 yards down the track, they were well away. I said, 'I'm Richard Downward', and who we were from, 'and this is Roger Brockhoff'.

Anyway, fairly loud voice. He couldn't hear – he *said* he couldn't hear – anyway, so I went through the thing again, shouting at the top of my voice. Then he looked at Roger and said, 'You'd have to be Uncle Davy's lad'. Roger said, 'My father was named David. David Brockhoff'. This bloke's name was Brook. It transpired that his father and Roger Brockhoff['s father] were brothers. They'd changed their name way back after the First World War. Roger was his bloody cousin. After that, he could hear, we sorted the appeal out in about quarter of an hour and it was all fixed.

How could the appeals be seen to be impartial, given that the Board's made a decision, the appeal goes to the Commission which is overriding that as in overseeing the Board?

Yes, but it's the same as the minister. I mean you could go to the minister after that.

Yes.

In fact this did happen. I mean the other alternative, you go to the law.

[58:19] The only instance that I can remember where we weren't able to amicably achieve things, where the bloke had been asked to do $1500 dollars' worth of work, he'd been given notice and so on, it ended up costing him $120 000 that he lost and had to sell the property as well. But he had appeals and all sorts of things – he was a lawyer – and he'd written letters to the minister and the premier and God knows what, and so they were all ministerials to answer. Yes, that was the only time that we went ... But we proved that the legislation was sound.

But as far as your suggestion you're appealing to yourself, they're not because they're appealing against the Board, which is one set of people, it's a statutory organisation. The appeal goes to the State body that's coordinating and dealing with the whole thing. If you didn't like that, then you could go to the minister ...

End of Disk 7
Disk 8, 4 December 2008

OK, Richard, we're underway again.

OK. There's a few areas, notes. Briefly, I mentioned the international pest conference that I went to in Sacramento in 1990, which was beneficial from my point of view and interesting from theirs. My contact with people in the UK as well as over there that I've maintained for a long time afterwards. It was interesting to make some comparisons between the areas over there. I was able to follow up on the dodder aspects while I was there as well, so that I was able to get quite a beneficial amount of information which, interestingly, I nearly [lost on the way home].

I made notes while I was there, and when I got back to Australia after I'd had a trip around the world on the thing I'd made a telephone call in the airport at Tullamarine. Then I subsequently

had to wait to fly back here and I'd been outside to have a bit of a smell of the eucalypts and so on. Then I came back and I looked to my notebook, because I wanted to jot a few things down, and it was gone. It wasn't just my notebook; I had everything in a handbag that was usually on my wrist. I suddenly had a mental image of it – I'd put it in the telephone call box where I'd been in the airport: 'Christ, I left it there'. I raced back and it was gone. It was a problem, because it had my ticket and it had everything, but also it had all of the relevant notes that I'd taken – and $1500 worth of the Commission's money or something like that (which was in travellers' cheques so it would have been all right). Anyway, I thought, 'Don't panic' – panicking like hell – 'Better go and tell the airline that we've got a problem'. Ansett Airlines, I think. I raced to their desk and they were all busy – about three girls there or something like that. I'm there jumping up and down on one foot and then the other. One of the girls could see that I was obviously a bit concerned: 'It's all right, sir, it's all right. What's your problem?'. I was just starting to launch into my explanation of what our problem was, and the girl two down waved this handbag around and said, 'Whose is this handbag?'. (laughs) I said, (shouts) 'It's mine! It's mine!'. They said, 'It's all right, sir, we can see it's yours'. Anyway, so that was fine. I said, 'Who handed it in?'. They said, 'Don't know. It was just there on the [counter]'. Somebody had just dropped it on the desk and didn't say anything about it. I was nice and lucky. (laughs) I'd have been happy to give them $100 or so, because, 'Wow!', it was all of the notes. I'd been away for the fortnight or something like that, so there was a fair bit in there. [Included notes on 350 photos.]

You're lucky.

Yes, yes. So that's that thing there.

[04:57] There's a couple of major things that we haven't spoken about. The mouse plague in 1993, which was a major, major problem, which initially we'd underplayed it. Greg Mutze had been put on to do mouse research after the major plague back in 1979/80. He'd been transferred from what he'd been – because he'd been the dingo adviser, so he'd been seconded into doing some research into mice. This '93 plague was even worse than the '79/80 plague. It was a major, major problem. We were looking at how we could deal with it. What could we do?

There was a possibility of using strychnine, because that had always been the recommended technique, which had been available to landholders before. They could get a permit through us and be supplied with strychnine. There was a recipe that had been devised 20 years before or something like that. Usually that's how the mouse plagues had been dealt with. But this one was such a major problem.

You had the authority to issue the permits to use it?

Yes, yes, we had.

How did you fit in then with someone like the Health Department or another ...?

We liaised with them. McCarthy was the bloke that had originally been involved, and his offsider had been Keith McKellar who took over. They handled the dangerous drugs, S7 poisons and so on. We'd always worked in close liaison with them because of 1080, that was all linked in there, so we were involved in relation to that. Some of our local authorised officers at Pinnaroo, where the problem had been major fairly early on, they'd been helping their landholders down there in the preparation of baits and so on. We'd been able to say that the landholder could get strychnine and the officer could do the mixing and so on, so that's how it had worked.

But then we … There'd been a lot of political pressure and so on. The minister, who was Terry Groom, looked at the possibility of us having a statewide exercise to help people. There was a fair amount of organisation and negotiation in relation to it. The agricultural chemicals people, Nick Brooks was involved, and the minister had to get the Cabinet approval, the whole thing. He was able to do that, very largely because of the research work that Greg Mutze had done. We had all of this information that was available, and so it was just [fortuitous]. This was 13 years after we'd put Greg into doing the research; it was just one of those – it was a lucky thing.

I've forgotten the actual date but it was a Thursday that I was taken up with meetings and so on. But it was pretty likely that the decision was going to go, so she was all going to be on the go and it meant that we were going to have to train all of the blokes up. This was, once again, building on what we'd done with the volunteers for dodder and for yellow burr weed. We were going to bring all these blokes together for a quick training session, we had to get everybody organised. I delegated Mark Williams and Dave Creeper to contact all of the boards that we wanted to be involved and I organised with the Pinnaroo people that we could have a training exercise down there on the Sunday. This was Thursday we're organising for all of these blokes from all over the State and we still haven't got the go-ahead from the minister, but we were getting all organised. The boards are there and we're gab-festing with – I don't know; Nick Brooks was there and Trevor Dillon would have been there, and who else? I don't know. But it was mainly me, because there wasn't anyone else. Kevin Heinrich, he was on leave – anyway, he wasn't there. He was the senior officer. So off we went.

The minister, he got the nod from the Cabinet. They had a special Cabinet meeting for it. Got the nod, so we're away, we're going to do this. The other thing was that there was a young bloke who'd been a little bit entrepreneurial in relation to it – [Brenton Wilhelm,] he was a mate of Nick Brooks – and he'd organised, that he'd just bought on spec, 100 kg of strychnine

that he had that was going to be available so that we were in a position to get things, and so he had lines of supply.

You couldn't buy that readily, could you?

No, it comes from India or somewhere. That's an extra part of the story that I'll tell you in a while.

OK.

So he – what the hell was his name? Doesn't matter, it'll probably come to me in a while. Ron Sinclair'll tell you what it is. Anyway, she's all systems go. So we laid off – we're having this meeting at Pinnaroo with authorised officers, aerial contractors as well – Bob McCabe from Tintinara and another aerial contractor, there was a couple of them. They rocked along as well. They were going to be there on the Sunday … I had to be at Loxton on the Saturday night for a dinner farewelling the local mayor, who was leaving politics: Peter Jackson was his name, he's dead now. We hadn't always seen eye-to-eye but I quite liked him. (laughs) I went along and spoke on behalf of the Commission and so on at a dinner that was attended by about 200 people or something like that. A bloody roomful of people at the Loxton Hotel.

That's fine, fixed all that up. Then went into my room in the Loxton Hotel and wrote out what we were going to be doing at Pinnaroo the next day and headed for Pinnaroo first thing in the morning. All these blokes rocked up down there so that we had – there was us, and there were people from the bloody Health Department that were telling us what we could do and what we couldn't do, and there was everybody. Another bloke from the Department. We got it all set out and then we had a demonstration of how to mix bait using the recipe – which we later modified because it was easier to do it with grain ... we did that, pioneered that over on the West Coast. Away we went. I'd been in touch with *The Advertiser*, their journalists there, and told them that this was likely to be on the go; when it was all go I'd send them a fax about the deals. I'd had to write all this bloody stuff to send it off. The journalist had given me the name of the chief of staff at *The Advertiser* and 'Send it to him', so that was fine. And the ABC. That was fine. She's all systems go.

[17:09] Monday morning at half-past six was a telephone call from the ABC. They wanted to have an in-depth conversation about the thing. I filled them in. Hadn't had any clearance – I must have had some clearance but not much. The minister wasn't very impressed, because he was quite happy with all of the things, how it was going to go. But I'd said that we didn't want to have people running around like headless chooks, so we wanted it to be all organised. The minister didn't like the (laughs) saying 'headless chooks', so he decided that I shouldn't be the media man. Ron Sinclair ended up with the job as the media man. I just ran the show from

there. It was pretty full-on, and just sorting out the glitches was pretty hairy at times. At one stage, because we distributed over a tonne of strychnine to treat that plague, the amounts are very small. We subsequently had more media down at Pinnaroo to demonstrate what we were doing. They were spreading the bait at that stage with air seeders down there. Initially the media were a bit askance that we were going to be throwing poison out and so on, but when they saw – they were expecting to see heaps of grain being spread out, but the amount that was going out was so fine that when the air seeder goes along you couldn't even see the grain. Because one of the journalists said to Ron Sinclair, 'When are they going to switch the grain on?'. He said, 'It's going'. The woman said, 'Ah! There's hardly anything there'. There was about one poison grain per square metre or something like that, which is pretty light, but it was very effective.

We were organising – landholders, they had to pay full tote odds, because that was how we were running the rabbit baiting, that was how it was. It was subsequently changed, and the minister changed things without consultation: said, 'We'll halve the price', (laughs) and all this sort of bloody thing. When we started off we had this bloody program going, there was no money in the fund. We eventually got money in the fund and we got other money so that we did quite well out of it – well, the government did; *we* didn't, because none of our guys got paid overtime, not at all. Some of the board officers got paid overtime, but that was at the discretion of their boards, but none of the State government blokes got a cracker other than their [normal salary].

Did you get time off or something like that?

Yes, time off in lieu, that was the thing. But with a lot of those things … I certainly never, ever took anywhere near the time that I accrued. It just accrued and so it went out the back.

But the independent estimates of the benefits of that scheme of '93 was a benefit of over $40 000 000 to the South Australian grain industry, and the best estimates that we had for how much it cost was $1 000 000. We reckon that was –

A reasonable return.

– it was a pretty good cost–benefit return. Yes. Ron Sinclair, he did a hell of a lot of extra research work in relation to it as well as talking on the media. We wouldn't have been able to do anything if Greg Mutze hadn't had the background information of the research and so on ... That was a real highlight of my whole career.

Emergency response situation.

Absolutely, and it was good.

[22:45] At one stage we were down to – we had no strychnine, or virtually, just very, very – just about down to what we had, and the supplies were in India, held up by some bureaucratic bloody bungle. It was on the tarmac in India and they couldn't get it into an aeroplane. There were problems there as well, as you can imagine, big amounts of strychnine. But eventually it rocked up here, it landed, and the guy [Wilhelm] rocked up with a ute-load of strychnine for Eyre Peninsula, which I told him where he had to go with it. He rocked up here [at my home] on a Sunday. He'd picked it up from Adelaide Airport, I told him who to give it to, and away he went with a ute-load full of strychnine.

In the meantime we'd tried to track down some alternative supplies of strychnine and it was very, very difficult. We eventually managed to get some antique strychnine in Queensland, and it was in 1-ounce bottles or some bloody thing, these little brown bottles – I'll show you a photograph of it. It's sort of in a coffin, was explained to me, about the size – (laughs) the blokes called it a 'coffin', this bloody great big wooden box. I'd sourced the strychnine that was going to tide us over, and do you think I could get it here? None of the airlines would fly it because it was strychnine. I tried the Air Force. I rang Gordon Bilney up to see if I could use his influence; and we came pretty close, but the Air Force, they wanted to charge us a heap of money to shift it. I had a brainwave that one of our field assistants, he'd gone out on his own in a carrying business, had a truck that he used to travel between Brisbane and Perth. Bob Henzell had his telephone number, his mobile number. I'd been equipped with a mobile phone so that the people could get in touch with me, one of those old bag phones – which was pretty amazing because it meant that wherever I was, I was available. He gave me this telephone number. I said, 'Nothing ventured, nothing gained'. Rang – (mimics pressing numbers) and ring-ring, ring-ring. It only went about twice and this voice answered: 'Hello, it's Phil'. 'Phil! It's Richard Downward. Whereabouts are you?'. He said, 'I'm driving down the main street into Brisbane'. I said, 'That's pretty fantastic, son, because I've got a parcel that I'd like you to pick up. Is it possible?'. I said it was, I don't know, about a 150 kg or something like that of strychnine, more than that because there were all these bloody glass bottles. 'Yes', he said. I told him where he had to go and so on and that he had to deliver it to – because he didn't have to go out [of his way] – I'd said, 'You're going to Perth?'. He said, 'Yeah, that's right'. I said, 'You'd be going through Port Augusta?'. 'Yeah, I'll be in Port Augusta day after tomorrow' or something like that. I said, 'Can you bring the stuff and drop it off at the Department of Ag's place in Port Augusta?', 'Yeah', he said, 'I can organise that for you'. So that rocked through. Then after that the Indian consignment got through so we ended up with this bloody coffin of strychnine (laughs) that we didn't …

More than you ...

… that we didn't use for a long time. We kept it because it was useful for the fox bait[ing] later on, but it was extremely difficult because we were using large quantities of strychnine and the boys had to tip the individual ounce-lots of strychnine out of the bloody thing, so it was ...

Difficult and dangerous stuff.

Yes, but they were all well covered up and so on. (shows photographs) That's them in there, so you can see they're ...

Yes, couple of photos there.

Yes, yes. They're all pretty well ...

[28:42] Then we moved on from that and then we had the 'Operation Garter' in 1995, which was designed to counteract the possible accidental release of the rabbit haemorrhagic disease, which was going to be tested on Wardang Island. We'd put this emergency into place and so 'Operation Garter', we were going to quarantine the top end of Yorke Peninsula, which looked like a lady's leg (laughs) or something like that, sort of a garter around it. That came to fruition when the disease broke out from Wardang Island.

It was a pretty amazing exercise. It was just as hectic as 'Operation Mouse', because it kicked off – once again, I was in charge of the show, I was the acting boss of the Commission because Peter Allen was the boss at that stage and he was on leave or something like that so I was filling in for him. I had a telephone call from Brian Cooke late one [night]. Once again, it was 6 o'clock or some bloody thing. I had to head back to the office to get there and that we kicked everything into gear with the [animal] quarantine people as well if they had an exotic disease outbreak. We were working in liaison with them. We had to put all of our blokes into the field and so we were in that for – must have been on for about 10 days or something like that, because initially it was on the go and it looked as if we were containing it – might have even been longer than that – that we were containing it in the vicinity of Port Victoria. Then there was the report of a mass of dead rabbits up on the road to Broken Hill, and William Morgan from the Rabbit Free Australia Foundation, he flew up there for us and brought the dead rabbits back to here and then they were ferried across to Geelong to be tested to see if these rabbits had died from the virus. They had. At that stage we said, 'That's gone. It's too far now'. We just said, 'OK, it's gone'. Then it ran its course.

What was the point in trying to contain it?

Initially we thought we'd be able to contain it within – even when it got onto the mainland, that we'd be able to contain it in the area just at Port Victoria. Based on all of the scientific studies about how the disease spread and so on, it didn't look as if it'd spread very far.

But why would you want to contain it when the disease is going to kill the rabbit?

Because it hadn't been given the go-ahead. It was interesting from an operational viewpoint that 'Operation Mouse' got terrific support from the media. We were right onside all the way, whereas 'Operation Garter' with RCD,[10] because it hadn't been projected that it was going to happen and all the rest of it, that it was portrayed as the mad scientists not knowing how it worked. Brian Cooke knew precisely all about the thing and that the virus was starting to move around on Wardang Island, but they still thought that they were going to be able to contain it on Wardang Island. Then when it turned up on the mainland – it turned up in a rabbit that had been run over, or they thought had been run over, by a car. It had been picked up by an Aborigine at Port Victoria and he'd brought it in a trailer to a friend's place at Mount Barker or somewhere, and then thought perhaps he should report it to somebody. We had thought that perhaps it wouldn't be – that it was suddenly run over by a car or something like that. But it was sent off to Geelong and tested out and that was when the first positive was there.

Brian had been in touch with me to see if I knew of any young graduates that the CSIRO might be able to employ to do some observation work in the area, so that was the first stage. When we discovered that we had this problem on the mainland, then we put our full efforts in there. When we heard that – the bloke's name was Vic Breeding, was the fellow up at Yunta who'd discovered (laughs) the thing – that it was a Friday and I was at the Animal Health place on Flemington Road up behind Glenside …

Glenside, yes.

… because my headquarters were there. I was in with them. The chief vet and all the rest of it was there. I'd been busily beavering away, explaining how many people we were going to have over at Port Victoria the following week, extra people, accommodation and the whole bloody box and dice. I got called in to Geoff [Neuman], Chief Vet. He said, 'You'd better sit down. Look, we've just had the results back from the Yunta rabbits and it's positive. They died of RCD'. 'We'll go around and tell all those fellas that they don't need to rock up, because if it's up there she's gone and so she's history.'

Coming back to your question about why did we want to kill the rabbits or why didn't we, why did we want to stop it: that's because it was an exotic disease outbreak and so initially we had to try and stop it. Then the decision was made, everything else indicates that it's not a problem for anything else other than rabbits, and it was tested, the virus had been tested on 35, I think it was, domestic and native animals and so on and none of them had been affected.

So it hadn't been fully tested for Australian conditions or South Australian conditions.

[10] RCD – rabbit calicivirus disease.

It virtually had been. The other thing was that we were pretty confident that it wouldn't be transferred off there, because … The interesting thing was that myxomatosis was originally tested on Wardang Island in 1937–38, and it wouldn't spread, didn't spread. It wasn't until 1950–51 that it eventually went like wildfire. It broke out of quarantine as well at that stage, but that's another story.

[40:07] Then we had the reorganisation of all of the boards, 1996/97, and that brings me up just about to my retirement.

That's your last big exercise.

Yes, it was. It was a major undertaking because initially we didn't think that we were going to have to – that we needed to change anything; but I obtained a Crown Law opinion that councils had to make their contributions just to one board; they couldn't make a contribution to a couple of boards or three boards. That meant that we had to reorganise every board to fit into the configuration of the new council areas. In some situations you had something like 15 boards. It was bloody frustrating because we had a whole lot of people that were ready to go and we couldn't proclaim them because we hadn't been able to get the others to agree to reorganise and be part of a new system. The biggest one was the boards from Renmark right across to just about Yorke Peninsula, and certainly down to the Fleurieu. We couldn't move with any of them because the Yankalilla Council didn't want to be a part of the bigger board area down there that included their neighbours. They were digging their feet in and just wouldn't do anything. At one stage we were threatening that we were going to go ahead and leave them out in limbo and that they wouldn't even be covered by any legislation at all; that concentrated their mind a bit. Nevertheless, it's whether it would have happened or not, because the same sorts of threats had been made to the southeastern councils that wouldn't join up to a pest plant board. That was 1975–85, and various governments had piked – because we'd made recommendations that they be forcibly included in a board somewhere. Various ministers had piked on it (laughs) because there was enough political clout around the place to bugger them up. We managed to reorganise all that. Roger Wickes gave me a certificate recognising the effort that I'd (laughs) put in to achieve that, so that was good.

It's a fair bit of effort; but how did you have to go about it?

Meetings with boards and so on …

Meetings.

… all around, and organising the chairman of the Commission or representatives and ...

There's a lot of face-to-face and meetings and so on.

Yes. Yes. We were there, and talking and showing them what the situation was. Then we'd have a meeting and Peter Allen would be involved at that stage; it wasn't just me ...

Reassured them they won't be any worse off and that sort of thing.

Yes, there were all those sorts of things. Kevin Gogler was involved. Kevin and I were the major movers in relation to it, because he's so good as far as the actual administration and the organisation of the funding and all that sort of thing. I was the one that just gladhanded people.

So he has to know – both past and present sense, he has to know the legislation, he has to know the administration ...

Yes, yes. I knew more about the legislation than just about anybody at that stage. But yes, he had to as well, so that we're there. He'd been seconded off at various times because his abilities had been recognised. He'd go off and do something else and then he'd come back and we'd have him for a while. Because he wasn't involved at all with the mouse plague; we had Phil somebody was our secretary at that stage. He subsequently went to work in the Northern Territory, in the government up there. Phil Blumberg, I think his name was, Blumberg I reckon it was.

I can always find out.

Yes. Anyway, and he was ...

This is your last big task before retirement.

Yes, yes, it was.

[46:00] Then there were various other things, and so I bowed out, made the decision that this was the time for me to go, and it was at that stage that there were noises about the NRM, the Natural Resource Management Boards and so on, but I was well out of it by the time that anything fundamental happened there, so I didn't have a lot with that.

When did you retire, Richard?

'98.

'98, yes.

Yes, must have been about September or something like that. There's a thing over there that's got the actual day.

We'll get the fine detail later. But '98, so the NRM stuff is about to kick off.

Yes, yes. People were talking about it, the possibilities, and had been for a while; but the advice was that it was – 'overarching' was the word that Roger Wickes used to use a lot. We were looking at having overarching legislation that would coordinate the Soil Boards, the soil control and the animal and plant control. There was some suggestion about water, but at that stage it was a very minor suggestion. It was the Soil Boards and the animal and plant control. There

had been some papers that had been presented and developed. I'd been to Commission meetings, but I was not tremendously enthused. I'd decided that this was a good time for me to step back and I thought that I'd done a pretty good job.

In a sense, you'd probably seen it before. How much longer could you have gone on? You retired early?

No, I was 60.

60.

Yes, I was 60. It was a conscious decision that I'd read somewhere that people who retired at that level had a better life expectancy than people that went on till they were 65 or so on. It seemed to me that perhaps I'd like to just smell the roses a bit. I've still been involved, because until quite recently I was the deputy chairman of the Purple Peril Woody Weed Management Committee, which was, as I've said, a prescribed control body. That's been subsumed by the NRMs now. They decided that we didn't need to be involved in that anymore, so that's fine.

[49:23] Some of the other things are the State conferences, we had them every two years, and they were an excellent way of promoting cooperation with board members, because we had them along, the authorised officers from the boards, they were all encouraged to attend and present papers and so on and hear experts in various fields talking about their activities and so on. Generally, pretty full-on exercises, up to 150 or so people. We used to have them around at various regional locations. That was another one of the things that I organised.

And you kept going to them after you retired?

Yes, I still did, yes.

Up till 2005.

They invited me along.

The Animal and Plant Control Commission's Award for Excellence was something that I suggested might be a nice recognition of the efforts of some of the staff of the regional boards and so on, local boards, The blokes that won those awards have treasured them. They got a bit of money and their name on a plaque.

As well as that we incorporated Rotary's ACRE Award as well for the boards. The chairman of ACRE and another representative would come along to the State conference dinners. That was a good way to organise things there as well.

Recognising people's contributions and so on.

Yes.

I suppose, in just the few minutes we've got left here on the disk, you've brought us through a very long period of time, and a very long and important involvement in APCC's area for yourself.

Yes.

You've touched on a lot of things; there are probably also a heap more that we haven't touched on – there's always more!

Yes.

But we've just got a couple of minutes left and maybe it's a chance for you to, off the top of your head, offer a reflection on your long career in the area.

Yes ...

You wouldn't have stayed with it if you didn't enjoy it, and you did enjoy it.

I did, and so it was good to see – it's nice, and it's still nice – my family laugh at me at times because I still count roadkills when we go to Queensland and so on. It's something that I've been doing for a long time just as an index of the populations of animals that die on the roads (laughs) and so on. So it's there. You also look at … roadside vegetation and all those things and think, 'I've had quite a significant influence in retaining some of that'. It's pretty satisfying in relation to that. I mentioned Jack Jones once before, but it epitomises the fact that the guys perhaps saw me as a bit of a father figure and somebody that they could come to if there was a problem. Jack had a serious road accident on the road between Lameroo and Alawoona, just before you get to the Billiat National Park there. Who knows how he managed to do it, but he managed to take a Sigma front end over back end for several pitches. Didn't do himself anything of an injury that time, thank goodness. But then he gathered himself together – and it was before mobile phones much, he didn't have a mobile phone – but there was a vacant farmhouse not far away from where he'd crashed. He went there and there wasn't anybody in there but their telephone was operational. The only telephone number that he could remember was mine. I got a telephone call here at home at … Because I'd only just got home from work, it must have been about half-past six or something like that at night ... (break in recording)

[55:11] ... rang me up and I organised his rescue, rang the people up at Lameroo and said, 'One of our blokes has got a problem'. John Price went out and retrieved him. I'd rang the hospital up there to let them know that we had a bloke that needed to be checked out. There were those sorts of things. Dave Creeper's first wife was killed in a car accident on Yorke Peninsula. I was the first person that he rang before he rang his parents. In that regard the guys held me in quite high esteem. I hope they did, anyway.

So you'd got a good rapport with the people.

Yes, yes.

But, as you said, if you're just driving around and you see the vegetation, for example, it gives you a good feeling …

It does, it does, yes.

… you know that you've made a contribution and it's a contribution in an area that's going to live on.

Yes, I think so ... In both fields, because the biological control agents for a whole lot of things is reducing the need for chemical control measures. That's beneficial for the environment and so on. What we've done with rabbits and so on, the benefits as I understand it now – I was at an RFA[11] meeting this week and Greg Mutze said the benefits for South Australia are now suggested annual benefits of $212 000 000 a year or something like that, in relation to the control of rabbits. That's not bad. The one-off with the mouse plague, that was pretty good.

The emphasis in the title, 'Animal and Plant Control', was on control because it's unrealistic to expect total eradication.

Eradication, yes.

But control, and yes, keeping everything in balance.

Yes.

We've probably gone as far as we're allowed to go today, from the sound of it …

Yes.

… so we might have to call it quits, and you fill in any details another time, perhaps.

That's right. OK.

Richard, thanks very much for your very extensive contribution to our little recording of oral history on the Animal and Plant Control [Commission].

That's good.

It's much appreciated.

OK. Thanks, Bernie.

End of interview.

[11] RFA – Foundation for a Rabbit-Free Australia.

Additional notes provided by Richard Downward, August 2009

Tarbaby, c. 1972

Tarbaby was a treatment devised by CSIRO Wildlife to use the rabbit's grooming habits against it. The method used a 10% mixture of 1080 with grease applied by five small nozzles on a T-piece at the end of 1 m-long tube on a grease gun. The grease was applied inside each burrow with the intention of contaminating the rabbits' feet as they entered the warren. Off-target risks would be greatly reduced.

Brian Cooke and his technical assistants tested the proposal in South Australia in several locations and decided that the process was not sufficiently successful to warrant further investigation. There was a reduction in the number of burrows used, but population estimates suggested that there was not a great mortality of rabbits in an area. There was also great concern for the possible safety of operators who would be less well trained than Cooke and his men. Dave Chinner told me that he was extremely apprehensive of the process and very glad when they had a bonfire to destroy work clothes, boots, grease and utensils.

On reflection the technique which was named after the incident in the Uncle Remus *Just So* stories in which Brer Fox fashions a Tarbaby to capture Brer Rabbit was about as effective.

Establishment of the Australian Vertebrate Pests Committee

I was given the task of recording the discussions of about 12 scientists and administrators from the States and CSIRO in the old Cabinet Room in the Treasury Building, Adelaide in 1973 which led to the establishment of the Australian Vertebrate Pests Committee which provided advice to the Australian Agricultural Council. The proceedings were recorded and the tapes retained in the VPCA archives. The written report should also be in a Vermin Control or VPCA docket.

From memory the participants were: Dick Tomlinson and Des Gooding (WA); John Bromell (SA); Gordon Wood (Western Lands Commission) and Geoff Ryan (NSW); Rob Borbridge (Chairman, Vermin & Noxious Weeds), John Gibb, 'Punch' a landholder who was chairman of their rabbit control organisation) and Geoff Douglas (Vic.); Queensland Stock Routes and John Wright (Qld), 'Bunny' Fennessy and Harry Frith CSIRO and a Tasmanian.

The meeting, which lasted three days, was opened by Frank Kneebone (Minister of Lands) accompanied by Jack Dunsford (Director of Lands) who was the chairman of the Vermin Control Advisory Committee and the first chairman of the Vertebrate Pests Control Authority.

Douglas had been a colleague of Bromell's at Melbourne University where they shared a flat together after World War II.

Landholder appeals

Keith McBride was a landholder who had done some work but had not complied with the Board's requirements. His appeal was dismissed and he was directed to do some more work in accordance with the Board's policy. Roger Brockhoff resolved the matter amicably by obtaining an agreement to have our regional adviser, David Hogarth, carry out some demonstration trials on McBride's property at the VPCA's expense in the next season and having the Board modify its policy in areas of extensive infestations.

McBride's property was also used as a trial area later for one of the first releases of biological control agents for Salvation Jane control in the South East.

Le Poidevin was a landholder near Owen who appealed against a notice to control horehound. The appeal was dismissed and Le Poidevin was directed to carry out the necessary work which would have cost about $1500. He failed to do this and the Board subsequently had the work satisfactorily done. Court recovery proceedings had to be instigated for failure to pay the costs. The resulting action

cost over $120 000 with the provisions of the *Animal and Plant Control Act* being thoroughly tested in court and shown to be effective and the property sold to recover the costs.

Aboriginal Training

Our regional adviser, Murray Whitehead, undertook a comprehensive training scheme funded by the Commonwealth Government to train a group of aboriginal youths at Pt Lincoln in pest plant and vertebrate pest control.

There should be a comprehensive report of this project in the Commission's files.

There is also an allied report on the restoration of roadside vegetation regeneration which Andy Bates and I presented to the Local Government Association Conference in Adelaide in March 1996 (this was published in their proceedings)

Weed Warriors

Weed Warriors was a very effective extension program established by the Purple Peril Woody Weed Control Committee with a group of primary schools in the Mount Lofty Ranges. Phil Cramond was the chairman and driving force of the committee. Catherine Austin is still running the program under the auspices of the NRM Board.

Mantung Project

The Mantung Project was an exemplary project devised and implemented by the late Jack Jones (regional adviser at Loxton) and the local board officer (John Garvie) as an integrated control program against foxes and rabbits. It was embraced by 136 private landholders and the National Parks and Wildlife Service and provided significant benefits for mallee fowl, native vegetation and primary industries in the area near Mantung-Maggea.