This is George Lewkowicz for the Don Dunstan History Project for the Don Dunstan Foundation, today being the 6th March 2009, interviewing Mr Andrew Strickland, who worked in the Premier’s Department and later on the Department of Environment and Conservation. The location is Mr Strickland’s home in Adelaide.

Andrew, thanks very much for doing this interview for the Don Dunstan Foundation. Can you just talk a bit about yourself, your educational background and employment background and how you got into the Premier’s Department?

Yes, sure, George. Well, going back I suppose the fact that I was born in Adelaide and have a direct family relationship with the place situates me to a certain extent. But I went to Adelaide University and did an honours degree in History at Adelaide University, and while there was quite involved in student politics, and at that time it was the first time actually I met Don Dunstan, back in those times. The ALP Club at the University of Adelaide had been rather withering on the vine –

This was the early 1960s, was it?

– yes, would have been 1960, ’61, I think – and a group of us, which included David Combe and Gordon Bilney and Margaret Penny as she was then – Margaret Lehman – oh, and many others, actually, decided we’d try and revive this and, given the field of our studies, we were interested in questions of social democracy and mixed economies. At that stage, Don was a leading figure in the Fabian Society, which of course was the intellectual powerhouse – – –. (telephone rings, break in recording) At that stage, Don was a leading figure in the Opposition in South Australia but wasn’t actually Leader of the Opposition, but he was very interested in the fact that we were interested in the ideas, and we had several meetings where he came down and addressed students and developed his ideas for us about what was essentially then very much a program of social democracy. But even then his interest in things like human rights and in particular the White Australia Policy was a very big

1 ALP – Australian Labor Party.
influence on us, too, and later when involved in National Union of Australian University Students things this little group of us were the first to push for NUAUS to adopt an opposition stance to the White Australia Policy, which Don had been fighting very hard for and having some troubles (laughs) in his own party. So we had quite a lot to do with each other in that early time, even to the extent of I remember even doing some babysitting and things like that.

For him?

For Don and Gretel, yes.

What were he and Gretel doing, campaigning or going out?

I really can’t remember, George. No, I think it was just that we were available and over there in Norwood.

How did he strike you then: as somebody who knew what he was talking about?

Oh, very much so. I mean he really was very good at putting ideas over, and that’s what impressed us all very much. I must stress, while we talk about things that might have at the time seemed terribly radical, Don was very, very much a middle-way man, if you like, someone who was saying social democracy is about empowering people and getting them into situations where they can improve their lives, and the role of government is to help them do that. He was very firm about State intervention in a number of different areas. He was always open to coming down and talking to us and he was just very accessible, and totally unlike – I remember we tried and tried to get Downer, who at that stage was Minister of Immigration – that’s of course Alexander’s father, not Alexander – what was his name? I’m having trouble remembering what his name was now. But we never met him because he always refused, he wouldn’t come and talk to the students.

So this was an unaligned group at that stage?

Well, that was the History and Politics Society when I was President of it, yes, and we were trying to engage with politicians of the day. Anyway, this is all rather
ancient history, but background to the fact that, even before I applied for a job with the South Australian Government, I knew Don, I knew his ideas and found them very appealing and attractive.

Having completed my honours degree at Adelaide University I then won a scholarship to the Australian National University and did a master’s degree in Sociology, and then went on and taught at various universities: the University of New South Wales in Sydney; Brandeis University in Boston, USA; and the University of Birmingham, where I was for four years, in the UK. On returning, my wife and I – my wife also had been a student at Adelaide University and knew Don, too – when I returned to Australia in 1973 after the birth of our first child, I applied for several academic jobs but was actually in Canberra, looking at an academic job in Canberra – at the ANU, actually – but I was approached by someone who was involved in setting up a new Federal Government department called the Department of Urban and Regional Development [DURD] and would I be interested in applying for a job with them? And I said yes, and I applied for it and was lucky enough to be appointed to it.

This was a job in the strategy area, which was really in a sense the overall policy directions of urban and regional development and the role of the Commonwealth Government in it, and I worked there for two years.

What years were they?

That would have been from 1974 to 1976. I actually took the job up about February, 1974. And that job again brought me into contact with South Australia, although not exclusively South Australia, and with the Dunstan Government.

In 1975 they advertised a job, it was called ‘Senior Coordination Officer’, to set up the function of inter-government relations, and I got appointed to that and hence came back to Adelaide. So that’s the brief background, and then from then on worked in – that job was in the Policy Division in the Premier’s Department and I worked on that and in relation to that had considerable interactions with the Premier, Don Dunstan. So that’s the overall picture, if you like, George.
Good, thank you. Just going back to your two years in DURD, what sort of interactions did you have with the South Australian people?

As I was explaining earlier, Strategy Division, what we fundamentally did was draw up an overall national strategic plan for urban development in Australia and within that specific attention was paid particularly to cities and growth centres, hence Adelaide – and Adelaide was one of my personal responsibilities, together with Sydney – and growth centres looked at Bathurst Orange in the New South Wales context and Monarto in the South Australian context.

The strategy papers were actually developed to, as I say, guide the various programs and activities of the Commonwealth, which meant that we had significant interactions with other Commonwealth Government departments, so in a sense it was a sort of a policy development/coordination role right from the beginning.

The Whitlam Government, of course, had a large number of very ambitious programs but they were having great trouble in delivering them on the ground because most of the state governments were in the hands of the Coalition, particularly Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, and were significant blockers, although from time to time significant progress was made in particular areas. And South Australia was interesting, (a) because it wasn’t, it was a Labor Government and there was a degree of sympathy between the objectives and indeed the philosophies – I think it’d be fair to say that Whitlam’s aims in terms of social democracy were very similar to Don’s and, while perhaps they didn’t have the closest of personal relationships, they certainly had a lot of respect for each other and, of course, significant interaction. South Australia became, in a sense, a trial seeding ground for quite a number of programs across a whole raft of areas, not just urban and regional development, but urban and regional development was important and significant because of its emphasis on planning, and land use planning was an all-embracing and important way of trying to coordinate government activity and get better results on the ground. The Land Commission program in South Australia received significant Commonwealth funding; although it was initially very much an initiative of the South Australian Government. So here we had a situation of the
state level influencing the federal level, the federal level then influencing a state level back again in quite complex ways as far as that was concerned because, as you’re only too well aware, George, the Land Commission was really set up to stabilise land prices and develop a land bank on the outer development fringes of Adelaide.

The water area was very interesting because of course a very major program of DURD was the provision of sewerage to suburbs where there had never been any sewerage, particularly the east of Melbourne and the west of Sydney. (break in recording) Of course, Adelaide had been very well-served by the E&WS\(^2\) Department, which in many ways was the sort of surrogate planning authority for South Australia, anyway. Of course, no suburban development was allowed where there was not water and sewerage put on, unlike Western Sydney and Eastern Melbourne. The problem, you could always hold up Adelaide and say what a wonderful example, but that wasn’t going to convince anybody in the Eastern States of anything very much, but on the other hand the South Australian Government of course was feeling rather left out because they’d actually done the right thing in the first place. So we developed, together with a bloke called John Franklin, who was a most interesting man – he was the Assistant Secretary Water in the Department of Urban and Regional Development – well, what was South Australia’s problem was the quality of water; it wasn’t that there wasn’t water, and the pipeline had been put into the Murray so for the size of Adelaide at that time water supply was guaranteed; but the quality was pretty dreadful. And he had been involved in setting up water purification and treatment plants in Africa and all around the place, so John came up with the idea that we should include in the – wait for it – ‘National Sewerage Program’ (laughs) water purification or water, setting up water treatment plants for Adelaide.

Now, there was a serious health problem here. It sounds like just a typical political deal, but there was a serious problem. The serious problem is that it had

\(^2\) E&WS – Engineering and Water Supply.
tiny little specks of colloidal clay held in suspension and onto these would be attracted bugs, and these bugs could actually be quite a health hazard – not life-threatening, but certainly not something that you’d want to be supplying. So there was a serious health reason for doing this as well as some degree of equity with other states receiving huge funding under this program. And that, of course, was the derivation of the water treatment program, which set up water treatment plants at various strategic points in metropolitan Adelaide and indeed I think in the Riverland as well.

From DURD’s end, what was, apart from wanting to develop positive links using SA as an area that it could be demonstrated that things would work, what did the DURD people and the Minister there – Tom Uren, wasn’t it? –

Yes.

– think of the Adelaide people?

Oh, Tom was very positive and had a great deal of respect for Don and for the South Australian Government. I mean the relationships were pretty good except on Monarto. When we started to do this strategic work I was talking about earlier and developing – the Growth Centres program nationally had been based on Professor Borrie – B-O-double-R-I-E, Mick Borrie – he was Professor of Demography at the ANU, and he had put out a report on population in I think it was 1971, it might have been 1972, memory’s a bit hazy on the exact date, but it had very, very significant increases in population for all Australian cities. By 1974 it was fairly obvious that these were going to be way short of the mark. The Growth Centres programs had been predicated upon this enormous growth in population which meant that you would theoretically be able to syphon off significant population growth from the major cities to Bathurst–Orange; Albury–Wodonga; Macarthur, south-west of Sydney; Gosford, north of Sydney; Monarto in South Australia. There was one north of Perth, can’t think of what it was called now. I didn’t have much to [do with it].

Was it Sun City or something?
Yes, something like that, but I didn’t have very much to do with WA. And we really started raising questions about whether South Australia’s population increase was going to be sufficient to justify a new city called Monarto. And by that stage, of course, there was a Monarto organisation set up, it was putting in huge plans with very large dollar amounts attached to it to Canberra, and we were getting rather sceptical about this. We started raising this in the context of an initiative to bring all the urban and regional development programs together into a single agreement and I was quite involved in that process, for both South Australia and for New South Wales.

But the Monarto thing was a great difficulty, and that tended to sour a little bit the relationship. And I think it was really something that Don personally was very committed to. He’d been convinced it was the way to go and he really didn’t want to pull back from it. Some of the other South Australian ministers were starting to have a few doubts, I think in particular Hugh Hudson, and perhaps that’s a theme we can take up a little later because that involves the period when I was back working here, but it follows through in a sense.

So I was involved, since I was doing this work on South Australia, with Bruce Guerin in the Premier’s Department, with Alex Ramsay in the Housing Trust, with various people in State Planning but it was probably more Doug Speechley but also Stuart Hart from time to time. Met Bob Bakewell briefly but didn’t really have much to do with him; in fact, I think the meeting with Bob Bakewell was more because of the City of Adelaide Development Commission, because we also of course were very interested in the specific plans that local government authorities had for their areas, and especially the capital city ones, and Adelaide City Council had just had the City of Adelaide Plan done, and we had a few worries about the fact that it was completely concerned with plot ratios and utterly unconcerned with social and human impacts, and we were expressing our doubts about this. This tended to dovetail with work I was doing on Woolloomooloo and Glebe, which was very much a hobby of the then Minister, Tom Uren. He’d persuaded the Commonwealth to buy
the Glebe Estate, which was the old Church of England, Anglican estate in Glebe, which had maintained nineteenth-century streetscapes. Woolloomooloo there was a huge development project being pushed by the New South Wales Government, which would have put high-rise all round Woolloomooloo Bay, and this was not only opposed by Tom, it was opposed by the builders’ union and it had a green ban on it, and we came up with a plan for Woolloomooloo.

Now, interestingly, with that, the people in the New South Wales Government planning area were terrific on that. They really wanted it and were very, very helpful on it. The City Council, because it wouldn’t get as much rates (laughs) out of it, was dead against it, and we had this huge battle. But we pulled it off in the end. I only say that as background because that informed, in a sense, the attitudes of the officials in DURD to the City of Adelaide Plan, which was a typical 1950s land use plan without any concern about these other things.

Was that a George Clarke one?

Yes. In our view. Now, I’m quite sure there are other people with other views; but we felt it didn’t – while it certainly has as an objective to increase the numbers of people living in the city, its main concern was about plot ratios and getting large high-rise buildings and things like that. I don’t think it was very well-received, actually. They had to be polite about it, but I don’t think it was particularly well-received by the COADC, either.

City of Adelaide.

That’s the City of Adelaide Development Commission. And certainly people in the Housing Trust were deeply concerned about it because they had, of course, a number of interests in the area. They had hostels, they had plans for things that eventually came to fruition like the Box Factory; they had plans for doing middle-income housing which would provide an income stream for their further activities. All things that will probably get revived in future years because they were sensible ways of doing things but are now, through the Thatcherite years, regarded as appalling.
So you’d had some interaction and you knew –

Oh, yes, I knew.

– given your background in Adelaide and your dealings with Premier’s Department people. So you took up the position of Senior – what was it?

Coordination Officer, it was called.

What was the role of that? That was the head of – – –.

The primary role was to establish the intergovernment relations function, and it was to coordinate activities between the State and the Federal Governments. And I think it had been initially – well, I know, because it was explained to me – it had been initially set up because the State Government was worried that the Federal Government was running off in different directions and having too much influence over state government activities and skewing them to their direction and that there was a lack of coordination overall; and there was particular concern about section 96 specific-purpose grants, which would be sorted out, if you like, between officials and ministers in Ministerial Councils and things would go racing off. So a general lack of coordination. And when I think it was advertised just before the Whitlam Government fell – yes, it was; yes, that’s right, because I’d actually applied for it before the Government fell – and I think there was a sort of a hiatus for a while while the South Australian Government wondered whether they needed to go on with this. But by the time I came down, of course, the Fraser Government was in power and if you like the role had changed (laughs) quite significantly, because most of the Fraser Government activity was directed towards cutting back these section 96 grants. So the role became much more how to defend some of them rather than to be worried. But at the same time there was still this question of coordination, so that was – the main thrust of the job was about setting up that function, getting it recognised throughout government in South Australia and, of course, using the contacts in Canberra to be mutually beneficial in both directions.

How did that actually work, the contacts? There’s the official forum but I’m interested in the networking and unofficial as well.
Yes, of course. Well, at the official level things would come into the Premier’s Department from the federal level. So the Prime Minister would write to the Premier; one would have to deal with that. That would then lead to, ‘Well, what’s the issue? How are we approaching this as a government?’ And that involved quite a lot of interaction with officials and other South Australian Government departments with ministers and ministers’ officers, so that meant that that network got built up very quickly indeed because the Fraser Government was a very vigorous government, actually. The amount of correspondence which flowed, at that head-of-government to head-of-government level, was really quite extraordinary. I mean it would be most unusual if you didn’t get two letters a day, most unusual, so it was quite substantial.

Now, the other thing was, of course, that the Commonwealth Government under Fraser was setting up a whole series of inquiries because it didn’t want to just come in and abolish everything the Whitlam Government had done, so it was very important in these inquiries to have close relationships, too. One of the most important of those inquiries – and there were a whole lot of them – was the huge health and welfare one that was being coordinated through the Prime Minister’s Department and again I was very involved with the officials in the Prime Minister’s Department who were doing that and I organised our responses to them. Similar thing with the Codd inquiry into youth unemployment.

Then there were all the parliamentary inquiries, Senate and House of Representatives inquiries, and they usually involved – well, there’s someone from either the Senate or the House would get in touch and say that the committee wants to come to Adelaide for these two days and we’d like this, that and the other. So one would have to organise an overall South Australian Government response to it, which had never been done before, and also to organise people to meet with them and have discussions and talk issues through. There were a whole number of those ranging from things like preschool education, child care, through to urban and regional development, drug policy – alcohol and drugs, it was. That was a
particularly interesting one, actually. I don’t know, there were so many of them, George.

Now, I didn’t have very much staff, and there were also some other – because it was part of the Policy Division, some other coordination activities that the Director of the Division, Bill Voyzey, had handed to me, but they tended to be rather strange things like Adelaide Week in Penang and Penang in Adelaide and those sorts of things. I have to admit I didn’t pay a great deal of attention to those; I was very much concentrated on getting all this set up. And we’d, of course, work as a division so Bruce Guerin and myself – I think Bruce’s title at that stage was –

Was it Policy and Programs?

– Policy and Programs, something like that, I can’t remember. But he and Bill and I would sort through issues and work things out and we met weekly with Bob Bakewell, the head of the Department, and usually we met weekly with the Premier, too.

So what happened at those meetings, what sort of – – –?

We essentially had a list of projects and things that we were working on, so a project could be a briefing to the up-and-coming Premier’s Conference – Andrew. I can’t remember one, but something that Bruce was doing – Bruce. And we’d discuss them, the three of us, then we’d go and talk to Bob about it and then we’d go on to the Premier.

And what did the Premier add to these? Just a political perspective?

No, no. No, no, no. No, no, no. Don was – well, I mean he wasn’t totally engaged by everything, but with a lot of them he was very interested in and put quite a lot of input on them. And he’d often say to me, ‘Well, go and see So-and-so about that and go and see So-and-so about that’.

I’ve left out a very important point in this, because when I was first appointed Bill and Bob took me in to see Don, and Don really said what he wanted.

Which was?
Which was that he wanted this federal/state coordination thing done and he was looking to me to do it, essentially. It was very much a, ‘You’ve been appointed; get on and do it. I’ve got confidence in you’, that was the approach. And in fact at the same meeting was Deborah McCulloch and he said the same thing to her, the first Women’s Adviser – just so happened our first day was the same day (laughs) and we both saw Don on the same morning, together.

Did he mention things that he particularly wanted followed up or thought about or traps to avoid or anything like that?

I can’t recall specific things, although I think he did talk about Monarto.

Right, okay.

And there was a very big meeting coming up with Hugh Hudson and officials on Monarto that had been organised before I’d arrived, anyway, that he was going to chair in the Cabinet Room in a week or something like that. He also wanted me to keep in touch with Rob Dempsey, who was his senior adviser, and that subsequently became quite important, too.

In what sense?

I’d known Rob before – well, he often rang up to say, ‘What’s going on on this?’ and ‘What’s happening on that?’ and ‘What progress have we made on this, that or the other?’ And that sort of relationship tended to happen quite a bit with John Templeton, too, who was the press secretary. And the other thing was – I can’t remember whether Don said this to me or whether it was Bill – but they said, ‘Given the field, the first people you’ve got to go and talk to is the Treasury Department’, which is what I did and spoke to Ron Barnes, who had just been appointed, actually. Gilbert had just retired and Ron was very Ron: he was charming, open, ‘Let’s try and get on and we’ll have to work very closely because a lot of these things involve funding issues’. And he said, ‘Tom Sheridan’s done quite a lot of work in some of these areas and would you work closely with Tom?’ Which I subsequently did, and that was actually quite interesting because in a lot of these issues where the
Commonwealth was cutting back on the section 96 grants and we had a lot of to-ing and fro-ing, not just in terms of writing letters but in terms of officials’ meetings and ministerial meetings, Tom and I tended to divide up the areas, so that say I’d go to Education and Children’s Services and he’d go to Health, although we both knew the results of the deliberations. We also always did a similar thing before each Federal Budget. The first was a mini-budget, I think, brought down by Phil Lynch, when that was being announced and inevitably that’d be in the evening we’d be down at Parliament House, having done all the briefings on what the impact of cutbacks would be in these particular areas and getting Don – who of course was also Treasurer – immediate advice. I was put in charge of doing the overall briefing for Premiers’ Conferences and Loan Council meetings, but of course couldn’t have done it without close working with the Treasury Department and in particular Tom.

When you were looking at this, as you said you were looking at the impact on services on withdrawal of money and presumably if there’s money coming in the improvements or gaps to be filled in policy.

Yes, exactly.

What other specific things did you have in your mind whenever any of these proposals – whether it was more money or less money coming in – what was the analytical thinking going on?

Well, I suppose it gets back to that broader agenda of social democracy. We were really trying to make sure that the best result for South Australia was achieved in terms of trying to advance those or ameliorate disadvantage.

So the policy background, yes.

Yes, so the policy background was the ALP and Don’s strong social democracy program. And of course let’s not forget that was very strongly interventionist, and whether it was expressed by Don or expressed by Des Corcoran or expressed by Hugh Hudson or Geoff Virgo, they were all separate things. So transport was a very important one. We had to put back in South Australia significant public transport initiatives in terms of upgrading of bus and train services, and that was quite
significant. There had been federal programs in that area; they were virtually abandoned, actually, so they just had to be put back and different things tried. Of course, Des Corcoran being Deputy Premier, if Don was away or not able to sign letters back to the Prime Minister or sign off on certain things, either Bill and myself or Bob and myself would go down and do that with Des.

**Were you looking at data and evidence of claims being made: ‘Here’s money’ or ‘We’re taking money’ in the departments?**

It was very involved and, I mean, to be fair to the Commonwealth there were some pretty naughty things going on because the money had flowed in a big way under Whitlam, and I remember, for example, that funds which were meant to go to Victoria for preschool education and child care ended up in the Forestry Commission, and this was actually traced all the way through.

**By the Commonwealth.**

By the Commonwealth, yes. And I have to say I don’t think I could have done this job if I didn’t have the sort of network of people I knew in Canberra who I could just ring up and we could talk things through. And it’s almost like bureaucratic politics: that had a lot to do with South Australia occasionally being really rather well-treated.

An area that Don was specially interested in, of course, was ethnic affairs and immigration, and he was Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs as well as Premier and Treasurer. And this actually coincided with an interest of Malcolm Fraser’s. Viner was the Federal Minister at the time.

**John, I think it was.**

No, not John. Can’t think of his Christian name.

**We’ll pick it up.**

He was a very nice man, actually. Viner, anyway. And I went with Don to several – they were called Immigration Ministers’ meetings, but unquestionably the most important thing that we were concerned with was the boat people from Vietnam and South Australia took a significantly larger proportion per head of population than I’m
sure we otherwise would if Don hadn’t been so accommodating. And that was an area where we really worked very closely together, that things were done to the Commonwealth hostel down at – not Otway, where is it?

Pennington?

Pennington, that’s it, Pennington. And that led me into doing a lot of coordination, making sure that when they arrived they were met at the airport and taken there and all those, and Community Welfare Department was very helpful there.

Good, yes.

So it was an example of the two levels of government working really closely and really well.

So it didn’t really matter one was Liberal and the other was Labor.

Absolutely not. No. No, no, no, no, no.

Interesting.

And the other thing was when occasionally these things would come up at the Premiers’ Conferences Fraser was very – well, he’d praise South Australia and say, ‘Look, they’re doing the right thing, why can’t you?’ to John Bjelke-Petersen who’d inevitably be sound asleep and totally disinterested. Oh, dear.

So you were at Premiers’ Conferences?

Oh, yes.

How did they work?

Well, as I said, I was overall in charge of getting the briefings together, which was an administrative job but also an analytical job, and of course getting and working closely with, particularly at our level Treasury, but also with the Prime Minister and Cabinet Department in Canberra, over the agenda and what things were on it and arrangements.

Clear all the way beforehand.
Oh, yes.

**So no big surprises or whatever.**

No. Although occasionally there were surprises. They tended to come in the Loan Council areas. I mean, Loan Council now of course is something of the past, but in those days it was incredibly important because it determined the states’ budgets, really, in terms of how much they were allowed to borrow at reduced rates; and it also dealt with semi-government, so it dealt with all the local government loan ratings and statutory authority ones, of which in those days there were many. They were called ‘semi-government’, but they were really government, slightly outside the control of administrative departments. And the surprises often came in that, because the Commonwealth was always concerned about its own deficit, therefore it was first and foremost concerned about its own loan raisings and the more they could screw the states and semi-governments the better off they were themselves – or at least that was what the then Treasury said. The head of the Treasury Department in the Commonwealth at that stage was a man called Sir Frederick Wheeler, and Fred used to pull incredible stunts in these Loan Council meetings in particular, so I remember one where we’d been arguing, arguing, and he’d come in and proposed some extraordinary committee to do this, that or the other and delay everything even more, and he was absolute master of drawing out the meeting till the politicians went nearly berserk and the Treasury got its way.

**Oh, really? With the Treasurer backing them up, presumably.**

But there of course was a Treasury Club, so there were very close relationships between [them], even down to the point of the Treasury Department always used to send an official – it was I’m sure all organised between the departments – but strange thing: every time we’d arrive the night before the Premiers’ Conference in Canberra up would turn one of these little Commonwealth officials from the Commonwealth Treasury Department, very much known to our Treasury, who would have great long conversations, and [I] always found that a little bit worrying.
And how did – presumably you’d fly in the night before or whatever.

Yes.

Would there be some preliminary meeting to gather up the tactics for the next day?

The first one I went to, that was extraordinarily difficult because, of course, we were the only Labor state and the Liberal states all got together and did their own and didn’t want to have anything to do with us. Subsequently, of course, Neville Wran won an election in New South Wales by one vote – one seat, I should say; one vote in Parliament – and that would have been January ’75, wouldn’t it? No, it wasn’t ’75, it was ’76. And so yes, we used to get together with New South Wales. Not terribly productive; I always used to try and do things with them beforehand – and I knew quite a few of the staff, actually, on Neville’s, and subsequently got to know some of the New South Wales people. They were very nervous, I think, about having just snuck into power and didn’t want to be tarred with what was then regarded as the Whitlam brush, and South Australia was perceived to be so, by them. I can remember a terribly outburst once from one of these New South Wales Government officials carrying on about how terrible South Australia was and how useless they were.

Really?

Quite extraordinary, yes.

What was the issue, you can’t remember?

Just generally, approach to government. It was all wrong.

What, too profligate?

Yes.

Was that linked with the Grants Commission figures, like the cross-state comparisons?
It wasn’t an argument about Grants Commission. But often Don, I think, was quite disappointed that he expected more support from New South Wales than he ever got.

And you had meetings with Don the night before, or during — — —?

Oh, yes. And during — — —.

What was his sense of tactics in these sorts of things?

He always listened to our briefings. But we’d usually worked out the line on things before we went, actually. If something had come up, like new information had emerged or something, we’d have to sit down and reconsider and that sort of thing.

And how did he perform in the conferences?

Very good, very good. He occasionally took another minister with him. If the agenda, for example – once he took Hugh Hudson to one because agenda items tended to fall in his area, interest and expertise, and that was interesting because of course Hudson and Fraser had both been education ministers in previous times and knew each other quite well and got on rather well and would chat about things. But no, Don – well, he was a standout around the table. But they were not a particularly auspicious group of Premiers, I must say.

And the decisions were based on what people had said or they’d been pretty well locked in beforehand and it was really just a process going on?

Oh, no, compromises were made.

Compromises, right.

Yes, and things would be worked out. But the big argument always was, ‘You’ve cut us back on section 96 grants, you won’t give us Loan Council raisings; where are we going to get the money to run our important functions?’ It was usually an argument about that, as it still is today.

Right, yes. And there were economic adjustments going on, like the tariffs and things like that.
Oh, yes. Yes. The Commonwealth was looking for – and Malcolm used to keep talking about it – a boom in minerals. You know, there was meant to be a minerals boom; but of course the huge decrease in world economic activity as a result of the oil shock meant that it never happened. But they were – and that was one reason Hugh Hudson was there – they were still very interested in supporting things like Redcliffs and major minerals and energy-type issues.

So downstream produce.

Yes.

Interesting.

Yes. But, generally speaking, no; Don was, as I say, a standout.

There was one occasion I remember where Malcolm had really got him into a states’ rights corner over, of all things, the referral of cases to the Privy Council in London. Malcolm wanted to abolish it and Don was sceptical. I think it was just Don worrying about, ‘Well, are we taking away a right?’ And he was very, as you know, terribly exercised and concerned about people’s rights.

Interesting.

But he quickly changed his mind. I mean it was a to-ing and fro-ing and he came back again.

The law of the sea was interesting, too, because of course that was a difficult thing to work out and again Malcolm was very much pushing the national line, that we want to sign the law of the sea international agreements which meant there were implications for where the Commonwealth starts and finishes.

Right – this was an international treaty as well?

Yes. But the issue at the Premiers’ Conference was where the Commonwealth’s jurisdiction started and finished, and it all had to do with closing off of bays, so for South Australia this was a particularly difficult thing in terms of the Gulfs. And it had an important resource implication for us because Mr Raptis had taken the prawn-
fishing issue – where we were putting quite sensible quotas so that it wouldn’t be fished out as a fishery, he was wanting of course to get as many prawns to sell as he could, so he took the issue to the High Court and eventually won, I think.

Oh, really? Interesting.

But then we came to an agreement between Commonwealth and the State on the issue of sensible quotas. But it was a long-drawn-out thing. But Australia signed it in the end. Queensland was just impossible about it: they wanted the whole of the Barrier Reef and then there were implications for the Barrier Reef Authority.

And as far as Commonwealth–State relations are concerned there does seem to be a sort of – throughout my whole career, this sort of unnerving thing: you approach a sensible national agreement, you get everybody to agree, they all agree, they go back to their states, and either Queensland or Western Australia ring up two days later saying, ‘We’re pulling out’, because their politicians had told them to, because they’re states’ rights and obsessed with it.

But we did have some really quite interesting things. I mean, the whole children’s services area: South Australia was the only state that had a Children’s Services Council. Every other state had funny arrangements where things were split between health and education and welfare, and strange ministers turned up from health, for example, to tell everybody about preschools, which was really quite strange. Fraser put Marie Coleman in charge of this whole area and Marie is a very wily operator and very good at coordination. I managed to get the Children’s Services Council and Marie quite close together and we got some quite good seeding funding through that. So the role had that type of thing involved in it, too.

These things took an awful lot of time and effort, of course. You go to meetings, you get things to ministers’ offices, you go to the Minister, back to the Department, back to the officials’ meeting, back up to a ministerial council called somewhere or another which brings them all together. Quite difficult. But I know it was successful, because I remember someone from Prime Minister and Cabinet saying,
‘Well, we know we can always get a good response from South Australia because all we do is ring Andrew up’.

**Oh, right.**

(laughter) And that was a first assistant secretary in Prime Minister and Cabinet.

**Good. What about follow-up, like there were agreements; was one of your roles to make sure things actually were followed through and then monitored?**

Yes, well, we did do that, and we did that through the Policy Division tracking system, you know, the project system. And Bill was pretty good at that. Yes. And then certain things spun off, like I got asked to chair that inquiry into emergency housing, for example. And why I say ‘spun off’ was because there were huge fights going on between the Commonwealth and State over State Housing Agreement funds, which the Commonwealth was cutting back on.

**This was a national committee, was it?**

No, just in South Australia. Just in South Australia. But I suppose I just quote that as another example of coordination at State level. But it was, yes, never a dull moment.

**I just want to ask one thing about the role in the financial proposals and agreements. From my recollection, there was a role of making sure departments didn’t commit to initiatives –**

Yes.

– where initiatives would then incur recurring costs over whatever the years of the agreement.

Precisely. And I think that was probably one of the more important aspects of the job that diminished to some extent because of the change in the Federal Government. No, that was a real worry. But one area where that was an ongoing problem was TAFE\(^3\) because the Commonwealth was prepared to give money for capital works

\(^3\) TAFE – Technical and Further Education.
but not a cent for ongoing running costs, as a consequence. But the subsequent ministers – well, one was Hopgood, of course, mainly, while I was there, but prior to that Hudson had been very happy to accept all these new facilities and they weren’t being used. It was as silly as that, actually. Whereas across the road there was a lonely high school or an old building or something. I mean it was just not well-coordinated. So yes, some of that took place.

I suppose health was one of the biggest areas like that. I had a lot to do with Brian Shea and various officials in health, and also with the Minister. But a lot of that spun off, really, from the Commonwealth’s health and welfare review, which they were trying to redirect certain things. So we were anxious to make sure that good things that were happening didn’t stop and you had to immediately start again on something different because that was what the Commonwealth wanted done.

**Trying to switch, yes. Interesting.**

Yes. So that was a big issue in health and took quite a lot of time.

**So you tried to understand how health operated –**

Yes. Oh, absolutely.

– **and what all this funding stuff meant.**

Yes, exactly.

**And there were quite detailed documents coming through.**

Yes, and letters flying to and fro, that sort of thing.

**You mentioned Rob Dempsey before, and there was Barry Hughes on the economic side.**

Yes.

**How did those sorts of links actually work? When you mention the other advisers as well, did they help or cut across what they were trying to do?**

Well, Barry mainly interacted with Treasury, and Barry was mainly giving Don advice about the state and direction of the national economy and its impact on South
Australia, so he wasn’t terribly involved in the sorts of things I’ve been talking about, whereas Dempsey was much more so because he was concerned about the various areas as well and I tended to have quite a bit to do with him, yes.

And then Bruce became Don’s executive assistant, key adviser and head of the Policy Division.

Yes. That’s right. He really took over Dempsey’s role and Bill Voyzey went to Services and Supply. Yes, that’s right, and I was appointed Assistant Director, Policy Division, so I had that wider role, yes. And Bruce was up there in the Premier’s Office. It didn’t work too badly. The problem, I think, the really big problem was when Bob Bakewell left. Because the new arrangements at the top of the Premier’s Department seemed less directive, really. It was sort of a bit murky. Whereas Bob would have a very specific input into things before a Premiers’ Conference, going with Graham he didn’t have the same sort of interest.

So less of a policy orientation.

Yes, much less, much less.

And did Bruce fill that gap –

Yes.

– or you had to fill that gap?

No, no, no; Bruce did, and then Bruce came along to – well, we certainly went to one Premiers’ Conference together, yes. He didn’t go to the previous one – or two, maybe it was even two. Gosh, I’m having trouble remembering. There were so many of them.

I’m just interested for the record how these sort of interplays went on, like the policy view, the coordination view, the politics/political and the links with the ministers, and of course even the Labor Caucus, if you like, how all that came together. Presumably there were some things to be sorted out.
Well, I suppose the political links came very much through the advisers in the various ministers’ offices. I mean I didn’t go and address Caucus or anything like that, that sort of thing didn’t happen.

Wasn’t there a link with one of the coordination reports, there used to be a report that would go to Caucus, the Coordination Unit –

I think you’re right, I think there was.

– yes, Kelvin Bertram used to do that.

That’s right, that’s right, yes, I’d forgotten that. (laughter) Well, I obviously had a good look over it, but it was really a static report.

You weren’t getting messages back?

No, no, no. It was more a report on achievements. I don’t think it was really – no, it wasn’t something that you negotiated, no.

Or, ‘Here are some concerns you ought to pick up’.

No. No, not really. No, most of that would come through the ministers’ offices. And there was quite a network of people there who I had quite a bit to do with – some of whom I’d known before in Canberra, of course, like Mant and McPhail in particular. But I got to know the others quite quickly.

And if you were talking to an adviser, ministerial adviser, what would be some of the things they’re bringing up that you wouldn’t necessarily be aware of or wasn’t coming through the bureaucratic channels that you’d have to take on board, if you can remember any cases?

Not really. I mean, they’d be more concerned about if it was something – ‘When can we make announcements about it?’ ‘What progress is being made on – – –?’ Sometimes there’d be a specific thing. I remember Normie Dalton in Des Corcoran’s office would chase things up if he thought he hadn’t had a reply quickly enough, something like that. But it didn’t happen very often, really, no.

And they might be speaking on behalf of the minister or a channel on the minister’s concern?
Well, being South Australia, often the minister would ask to see me. So we’d all be in there together. With Geoff Virgo it used to sort of happen in the corridor and Geoff would say, ‘Look, I’m worried about this, come over and have a chat’. So it was more like that. Quite informal. Used to happen quite a bit with Hudson. Trying to remember what all the issues there were.

**Were you involved in the uranium one?**

Not at that stage, but subsequently, when I was in Environment, I was because I was the Environment person on the Uranium Enrichment Committee. But I was aware of the uranium issues just by being in the Policy Division. We talked about them, with you and with Bruce.

**Okay. Well, just going to the Premier’s Department and the Policy Division more widely, what was your view about its operations when you had this coordinating role and adding value into inter-government relations and sitting back the work of the Policy Division, how did you see that?**

Well, I think it was one of the strengths of the South Australian Government that it did have a policy, it did have the capacity to analyse issues, track issues, keep the Premier very much informed across all portfolios of what was happening and also was a resource to enable the Premier to say, ‘Well, this is where I want something to happen and let’s develop something about it’. I think it was curious because at one stage Bruce and I did a trip around to the other states – well, when I say ‘other states’, we talked to the Commonwealth and we talked to New South Wales and we talked to Victoria, and it was essentially about their central agency coordination mechanisms, advice to cabinet, how cabinet supported, that sort of thing. And out of that it’s fairly clear that, as far as we could see, the Policy Division was really sort of a combined cabinet office plus analytical resource and coordination mechanism. The most elaborate of all were the Commonwealth and New South Wales, which were very similar, which is not surprising because the Commonwealth’s cabinet process and cabinet commenting and all that sort of thing was very much based on the New South Wales one. And Victoria seemed a bit chaotic – I can’t remember us being
terribly impressed, actually, I don’t think we were. Although I got on well with and knew the Victorian people quite well through Premiers’ Conference and other issues, actually, and they were always very helpful and responsive and sometimes we were able to do a few things together; but it was more informal and less formalised than New South Wales and the Commonwealth.

We were lucky because of the smallness of South Australia enabled you to very directly relate to the political side, to the Premier and Cabinet process, and I think it really was a strength of South Australia that the Cabinet process was a single-tier one, if I can put it that way. Other cabinets had officials in all the time recording everything, all the rest of it. The South Australian Cabinet of course didn’t do things that way; officials were occasionally asked in to provide briefing on something, but the coordination mechanism was really the docket and what came out on the docket was what the Chairman of Cabinet wrote and what the Head of the Premier’s Department then subsequently wrote.

**Right, and interpreted.**

Or interpreted, yes. And I think that worked for South Australia extremely well. And it seemed to lead to a Cabinet that took less time, it was much more specific in its decisions. I think it did work a lot better, actually. And that was really our conclusion: we didn’t want to muck around with it.

**And the quality of the work, did you have any sense of that?**

Well, you can always ask for more, can’t you, and think it could be better. But the Policy Division was – I suppose the thing there was that it did actually suck up, I suppose, a great deal of the talent so it was in one place and not spread around. But no, it was very high, very good. I mean I did have a couple of people who weren’t up to it, but that was addressed over time.

Just looking at change processes, Don and the Government were seen as reformers and there were a lot of changes put through. What do you put down or think about in terms of how that was done, the success of the change process generally? I mean, sure, there were some failures; but just generally – – –.
Yes, I suppose Monarto’s a good example of that. That wasn’t a failure. I mean, it was run over by changes in circumstances is what I’d say about that, and ultimately the right decisions were made.

Yes. Do you want to talk about that? You were going to talk about Hugh Hudson and Monarto, I think earlier on you mentioned that.

Yes, I did. Well, I think the thing was of course that early in ’76 Hugh got John Mant, who had been a secretary to Whitlam but prior to that was a lawyer and a planner in NCDC – National Capital Development Commission – and in DURD, and he got him as an adviser, and John was right across all the population issues and concerns that I was talking about earlier, and I think that started to influence Hudson and he started raising questions about it. There was a big meeting of several ministers and officials – Policy Division people were there, Bob was there I think – and Don was at that stage, that was only about two weeks after I arrived in the job and Don at that stage was saying, ‘No, I want to go ahead with it’, and we sort of all left it. But over time it became apparent that it couldn’t be justified and you couldn’t justify the expense that the State would have to put into it, or probably couldn’t find the funds because certainly the Commonwealth was not going to continue to fund it.

So the decision had to be changed. But I think it was a disappointment for Don, yes.

Your observation on successful changes, any particular ones, and just thinking about how they were achieved: was it Don’s push and coherence and articulation, or that with the ability to follow up –

Yes.

– through the policy work and the sense of whatever was being done?

Well, I mean it was a good public service. People were enthused, they wanted things to work, and they worked hard to make sure they did, and I think that had a huge amount to do with it. And I think really – it was Don articulated the goals and the vision and those sorts of things, but he also had trust in people to get on and get things done, and that was done. I mean that’s not to say there weren’t some rumblings about, say, the power of the Policy Division as it was perceived – I think it
was overplayed – you know, some of the other ministers didn’t like the Cabinet commenting system. And that I think did, in the sense that Policy Division made comments on Cabinet submissions which were for the Premier and they weren’t also provided to the minister who was bringing the proposal forward, and unless things had been sorted out beforehand – which nine times out of ten I think they were – occasionally there’d be a little bit of fuss about that. But I think that got addressed over time anyway, a few changes to procedure and operation.

**Did you ever find out why it was done that way?**

No, not really. I sort of arrived and it was being done that way.

**It happened, yes.**

I mean, I certainly never had a discussion with Don about it, saying, ‘Do you want it done? Should this continue or not?’ No, it was something that was done.

**Just was there for whatever reason.**

Yes. The Minister that used to carry on most about it, of course, was Corcoran, and Des had a big – and I think part of it was his jokey nature, that he developed this lovely nickname for the Policy Division of ‘The Gestapo’, and he enjoyed it so much that he couldn’t help using it all the time. (laughter) Because we certainly didn’t pull people’s fingernails and toenails out, and we certainly didn’t lock them up. (laughs)

**That’s right, yes. That’s right – interrogate them.**

We might have asked some searching questions from time to time, but not in such an intimidating way. Oh, for heaven’s sake, no. It was silly. But I guess every large organisation, especially as diverse as government, is likely to have these things. And on the personal level, I mean it just didn’t really – as you know – didn’t really matter when you got down to the issues. Occasionally there’d be flare-ups.

**Just looking at the other departments, did you have any sense of an Old Guard and a New Guard or by the time you’d come that had been sort of resolved? Like young, new department heads who were wanting to get on with things – – –?**
Well, there was a bit of that when Hudson set up the Department – now, what was it called – HURA. Housing, Urban and Regional Development or Affairs – Affairs, I think it was, HURA. Yes. There was a bit of a sense of that about that when the old State Planning Authority and Stuart Hart in particular was feeling a bit miffed, I think, and probably rightly so in a way. After all, this was a new department, it was much more ambitious in its scope and so there was a bit of a feeling about that about that. Generally speaking, no. I think a lot of the departments were probably quite settled down by the time I got there. Actually, no, there was a bit of that with the Housing Trust too, you know, a little bit. But I think they felt their role was – there was a bit of an Old Guard in the Housing Trust and they were perhaps not – – –. But then there always had been a bit of a tension between – curiously, because you’d think there’d be a lot of common ground and there was – but curiously there was quite a lot of tension between the Housing Trust and the Government.

**Interesting – at that time you were there?**

Yes. Still, yes, still hanging around a bit.

**What about did you ever see Don with industry people, senior industry people, and how he related to them?**

Well, I didn’t go to those meetings he used to have with them on Monday afternoon, of course. Nor did I go to the trade union one he had the alternate Monday afternoon. Occasionally we’d run into somebody at the airport or something like that and there’d be a chat. But he was quite keen to keep all those relationships open. I think that was a bit of a tension with Housing Trust, you know, I think there was a bit of a feeling that they were a bit too close to that.

For example, Bruce and I were quite involved with negotiations and discussions between Corcoran and Marine and Harbours and setting up the North Haven development, and that of course was with the AMP in Sydney and not with the Housing Trust, as it were. So there had developed a bit of a different model of development which I think the Housing Trust used to feel a bit left out of and a bit miffed about. And I think there was always in Alex’s mind this worry that they’d be
condemned to being a Victorian or New South Wales Housing Commission of just dealing with ‘welfare’ housing. Not a role he ever desired, I must point out, that was very important; but they also thought their development role was terribly important to secure some funds that could be directed back into that line of business.

But the whole Commonwealth–State Housing Agreement, of course, was based on loan funds, it was through semi-government raisings; it was never grants. There were some grants during the Whitlam years, but it meant that this was always a time-bomb waiting to happen: what was the Commonwealth going to do when they called in the loans?

Interesting.

Yes. Well, it is. And that should be exercising Treasury and Premier’s Department officials right now.

Right now, yes, most definitely.

If they’re looking at it.

Yes. You moved to the Department of Environment and Conservation. When was it, in about – – –?

Well, Environment. It was just called the Department for the Environment.

Environment then, sorry, yes.

Yes, well, essentially there was a job going there which was called ‘Coordination and Policy’, and it was the deputy head of department role and it was just too good an opportunity to let go, so I applied for it and was appointed to it. The Minister was Des Corcoran, and my role there was very much coordinating activities across the various parts of this rather far-flung department. So it had National Parks and Wildlife Service, it had significant responsibilities for environmental assessment, had a whole series of things going on with the deposit legislation, what to do with rubbish, what to do with tyres. It had responsibilities for heritage, European and Aboriginal. And a whole lot of these areas, there were nascent proposals about to actually put into place government policy on these matters but they hadn’t actually
got to the point of either implementation or, indeed, in several important cases, even legislation. So it was a matter of really getting together a new division and appointing staff that could help that process along in a big way. So importantly while I was there – and I wasn’t there all that long, really – setting up the *South Australian Heritage Act*, which was the first one, which we appointed Dame Roma Mitchell as Chair. She was the first Chair, and getting that up and running and getting a whole list of items on the State Heritage List. Getting the legislation through and the whole list. Similar thing with Aboriginal heritage, that was a big and difficult one to get through, particularly to get through the Upper House. Environmental impact legislation, which was opposed vigorously by HURA who said it all should be part of planning, and their domain and not a separate process. The Cabinet kept saying, ‘We want it a separate process’. There kept being these difficulties and problems. It was very difficult, but we got it up and we got it through. Yes, so it was that sort of thing, that role.

I didn’t have a lot to do with Don on it. I mean, I know he was extremely happy about setting up the South Australian Heritage Committee because that was something he was interested in – and I just don’t understand why they hadn’t *done* it, actually. (laughs) It just seemed to me so silly. They’d done some of the spadework. I think it had been a problem at the top of the Department, it just couldn’t get on and get things done.

National Parks and Wildlife Service was a really difficult problem because they were suffering enormously from lack of staff and they had these enormous areas.

**Why, because they hadn’t got the money or couldn’t find people to run them?**

Both. They didn’t have either, really. They had largely staffed it up by then, that’s to be fair, but they needed more staff and that was a difficult thing to try and get through, too, and we made some progress on that, although I think we probably put in rather the over-ambitious proposal. I did, of course, work quite closely with Policy Division on environmental impact and things like that.
The Aboriginal heritage one again was a really difficult one to get because you had to deal with the communities as well, of course, and there were quite different views about how it should be done and there were huge difficulties about keeping things that were sensitive, and that led to difficulties with the Museum. But they were all sorted through and we got the Act through in the end and set up the List and the Register, which are still operative.

**So you had this scientific – was it mainly a scientifically-based, like scientific officers? I know the balance – –.**

There were those people, but no, we had others as well, who were more used to policy development.

**Okay, there were.**

Yes.

**So it wasn’t a new thing.**

But they were mainly appointed by me.

**Okay.**

Mainly, yes. And then, of course, when Don retired, resigned – resigned is the better word – well, he certainly retired as Premier – Corcoran was elected Premier and I got seconded to go back to the Premier’s Department essentially to be Director of the Policy Division. But not Bruce’s former role where he was in the Premier’s Office.

**The dual.**

– the dual thing, no – which didn’t last that long, of course, because then that government was defeated.

**Just reflecting, you’d been in the Premier’s Department, you went to Department for the Environment and then you came back, what sort of things did you pick up when you were in the Department of Environment that worked for you in your role back in the Premier’s Department, like the different perspectives you would have picked up?**
Yes. Well, I suppose it’s a broadening thing, isn’t it? I suppose also a bit that issue we were talking about before, to try and make sure that relations between ministers and the advice going to the Premier and Treasurer were open and they could sort things through. So yes, I suppose – I mean I was the Department for the Environment’s representative on the Uranium Enrichment Committee so I was right in the middle of all that, and from that perspective now the departmental scientific advice was quite strongly against uranium enrichment. The Minister, Corcoran, was not too happy about it, either; but the minister to whom the Committee reported, of course, was Hugh Hudson, who was quite of a different view.

From the mining side, yes.

Yes. And it was heavily-biased in that direction, as you know, and I suppose that’s where you get the exposure to the shenanigans of a Ben Dickinson, a former head of department. But you couldn’t help liking Ben; I mean he was an extraordinary man. But I had quite a few arguments with him. And who knows? Maybe in the longer term it’ll be seen to be something of a missed opportunity. But, as I say, at the time the environmental impact advice was very clear: don’t get into it. And it was very much on the incapacity of us to deal with the waste and the extraordinarily long times this waste was going to be around until we finally do have a solution, and we still haven’t.

Did you have any sense of where Don was sitting on all of this?

Oh, yes. I was fairly clear that Don was very concerned about it and, if anything, was against mining and enrichment, yes, well, very much so; and in fact I think Des had told me that, too, and was also very sceptical. I don’t know, because of course one can’t tell these things unless you’ve actually been involved in them, but I can’t help thinking that it was a bit of an issue in terms of why Corcoran took over rather than Hudson took over.

Really? Interesting.
But I can’t prove that, I don’t know, I’m really not sure. But I think it was one of the elements. I think there were probably lots of elements, but it was a — —. Well, I think a lot of people assumed that Hudson was going to take over, right up until the Caucus met. But I don’t actually know, of course, you’d have to ask the Caucus members about that.

**What was your sense of the relationship Des Corcoran and Don Dunstan [had]?**

Well, unquestionably a terribly close one over a long, long period of time. That one could see. Did go to – it was Des’s fiftieth birthday, there was a big celebration out at Campbelltown in the community centre there, and Don was the main speaker. And you could see, you could tell, that it was a – I think they actually complemented each other in curious ways, and because they were so different it worked. (laughs) And he was a very loyal deputy, you’d never hear him be anything but full of praise for Don and support on the issues that were issues of the day.

**Did he had a nickname for him?**

No, not that I can recall, no. He did for most people. No, no.

**Sorry, what were some of the issues?**

Not that I can recall, anyway. I mean maybe he did, I’m not sure.

**What were some of those – you talk about issues of the day, were there any you want to talk about?**

Well, I suppose uranium was one. He was strongly supportive of Don’s support for the Party line, which was against it. (break in recording) When he actually became Premier I think Des probably did a few things that Don might not have done, and *vice versa* sort of thing – I’m thinking there particularly of the Royal Commission into Drugs.

**Yes, I was going to ask that one.**
Des just wouldn’t accept any advice to say that any of it was any good; he just wanted to bury it, essentially, and that was rather awkward and difficulty to handle. (laughs) I mean he wouldn’t even see the chairman of the inquiry.

**Oh, really?**

Yes, I had to beg and beg and beg, say, ‘You’ve got to, you’ve got to’. So that was an awkward one. But I think that was just Des’s – was clearly a much less – well, he was a more traditional sort of person.

**Yes. Industrial democracy seemed to peter out as well as an issue or initiative.**

Yes. I don’t actually recall that as being something that was discussed at great length. Because, of course, Des was very aligned to the Union Movement, he had a lot to do with them, and of course was terribly close to Virgo, who also did, and they had very clear views on that. But no, I don’t think I can recall other issues. What were we on? We were on other issues that they might have disagreed on. Not really, no.

**Just rounding up our discussion this morning and into the early afternoon is there anything you’d like to say about the Dunstan Decade that you don’t think we’ve covered, Don’s legacies, maybe some things he didn’t do so well, that you’ve thought about over the years?**

Well, it’s hard now not to look back on it as a bit of a golden era, to be honest. I think it’s a very popular phrase at the moment, ‘getting the balance right’, but that’s what Don was very good at. He did get the balance right, he knew just how far he could take radical proposals with the electorate, he knew that a state such as South Australia needed significant government intervention and control of certain things to make sure that the population got their share of what derives from it. When you look at things today like the significant elements of power and water not returning to the State significant dividends, this is a great shame and what one could do with some of those things had continued.

I have to say I think towards the end, with all that alternative lifestyles thing, he was clutching at a few straws that I think a lot of us in the Policy Division had a bit
of trouble getting our mind around. I mean there were very good elements in it one could see, but just how the State Government was meant to take it, we had a bit of trouble with that. So that was a bit of a negative, I think. And I think he expected us to come up with more than we were actually capable of coming up with. (laughs)

Despite what people used to say about his Government, he ran a very tight ship with Treasury. He, I think quite rightly, always opposed the amalgamation of the banks, and that was in hindsight very smart and very sensible. Keep rural lending with the State Bank and certain government projects that needed certain amounts of funding that could be derived from that sort of source, and a savings bank is the people's savings bank, it is not to be a gung-ho, mad, Wall Street operation. There were certain things he'd already done before I came that were absolutely essential and dogged one's earlier life in South Australia, like the unfair electoral system, that he must be, is, responsible for having fixed up. His concern for Aboriginal matters was very genuine and I think it's to David Tonkin's credit that he carried that on, actually, and didn't just say, 'We're not interested in that'.

I don't think there's any doubt that towards the end he wasn't very well and he was running out of energy and that was a great shame and maybe if he'd taken a bit more time off or something earlier on that year maybe things would have been a bit different; but overall he made us proud to be South Australians. People came, they applied for South Australia, they came to live in South Australia, because it was seen as progressive and it was going places and it was open and it was doing things. And I think that flowed over to the private sector too, actually. There's no doubt that the Chamber [of Commerce] was a bunch of dopes who whinged and whinged and whinged all the time and said it was not a government in favour of business, but that's not true; I mean, it was, because again Don was very much a mixed-economy man. He was a Fabian, he wasn't a Stalinist as occasionally they tried to make him out to be.

And of course, as someone personally to deal with, he was extraordinarily – well, he was often highly-brilliant. For example, if we were at say that immigration – I
remember this happening – that immigration conference: you’d give Don ten minutes’ briefing, he’d go in there, and all the words – not your words, his words – he’d just put it into such a way that it was persuasive, people would come along with him. As you know, he did that in Parliament again and again and again. And he was the first television politician in this country so he pioneered that, and again he was a great communicator, and I think much more so than Gough. Gough could be a fantastic parliamentarian, but I don’t think he was as good, anywhere near – because he tended to ramble and go off onto tangents. But no, he was an exceptional man, no question about that, and an exceptional Premier.

And I think the legacy is there, but an awful lot of it’s been frittered away.

Well, on that note, thanks very much, Andrew, for our interview.

Yes, pleasure.

END OF INTERVIEW.