This is a statement in relation to the oral history project being undertaken by the Don Dunstan Foundation. It’s a statement by the author, Mike Duigan, and covers the period from about 1968 through until about 2005 or 2006 in the year or so prior to Dunstan’s death.

It’s divided into four main sections: one will be a quick summary by way of a parallel summary of my own political involvement and those of the activities of Dunstan; the second will be my active involvement in a number of key areas of Dunstan’s initiatives, which will be followed by some specific examples of the interface between my own work as an official at either State or local government level with the initiatives of the Dunstan Government; and, finally, some observations about the interchanges between myself and Dunstan while I was a Labor Member of the State Parliament between the years 1985 and 1989.

The first section is a summary of the role and function of the Dunstan Government and the impact that it had upon me.

I first began my tertiary studies as a student of Politics and History at the University of Adelaide in 1965, a period when Dunstan was preparing for what became a series of major political and social initiatives that changed the face of Adelaide. I was vaguely aware of Dunstan, as I had attended four years of secondary schooling in Prospect, where the man who was the representative for Enfield was Jack Jennings, a man who Dunstan acknowledged as his intellectual equal and who later contested the leadership following the demise of Frank Walsh and who was only beaten by one vote, by Dunstan, to the Opposition Leader’s position.

1965 does not figure prominently in my memory and perhaps the strongest political initiative at that time – namely from about the beginning of 1965 through to the middle of 1967, when Walsh was the ALP Premier of South Australia, but in the period following that in 1966 and 1967 in particular – Dunstan had of course become Premier in June 1967. My tutors and lecturers at the University of Adelaide in those first few years were Neal Blewett, who went on to become a professor of politics at Flinders University and subsequently a Federal Member for Bonython in the northern suburbs of Adelaide and a senior of the Hawke and Whitlam Governments, in
particular being identified as the architect of the Australian Medicare\(^1\) system. There was also a Bob Hetherington, who went on to become a professor of politics at the University of Western Australia; Bob Etherington – similar-sounding name but different person, obviously – who was the principal lecturer and tutor in Australian Politics supported by both Bob Reid, who was a keen observer of the political and international scene, in particular the American Presidency and the elections for it, and Dean Jaensch, who is still around as a major psephologist.

At about that same time, although unknown to me, a man who was to become a future Deputy Premier, Don Hopgood, was also in the process of completing a master’s in politics, specifically focusing on aspects of psephology and he eventually received a PhD in that topic from the University of Adelaide.

I mention these people – and in particular I remember Bob Reid – for opening up a different panorama to American presidential elections and requiring fairly hefty and substantial reading to be done from one week to the next, which paid great dividends as the years went on, both in terms of being able to consume a large volume of material and being able to analyse it as well. It was his lectures which changed my views – or perhaps I should say ‘developed’ my views – on the American involvement in Vietnam, and it was that conflict and the analysis of that conflict, the reasons for it – both the geopolitical reasons as well as the ideology supporting the intervention – that led to taking a more active involvement on the campus in debates about American foreign policy and the Australian attitudes towards it.

At the same time, that is in the period about 1967, and with the analytical help of people like Jaensch and Blewett, many students became involved in the debate with Dunstan about what constituted a fair and reasonable legislature and the various methods by which people should be elected to them. I recall in 1968, early in that term – in fact, I think as part of the pre-election manoeuvring at the time – Dunstan

\(^{1}\) Initially named Medibank.
called a meeting I think in Light Square attended by a huge number of people to outline and then criticise what he termed the ‘Playmander’,\(^2\) that is the methods by which people were elected to the Legislative Council and the methods by which the boundaries were drawn for House of Assembly seats. This was an eye-opener in terms of the dramatic impact that Dunstan had as an orator, his command of his facts, his ability to read his audience, to garner their support and to identify what needed to be overcome in order to create a more just and fairer society.

There were also other demonstrations held at the same time, mainly through the efforts of the Student Representative Council at the University of Adelaide; and I can recall that, when John Bannon was President, there was a group of people – not anywhere near as numerous as the Light Square group – who marched up North Terrace to the headquarters or to the only building occupied and operated by the Adelaide Club, erected a ladder and then proceeded to give an analysis of the members of the club as being those responsible for the unfair nature of the electoral distribution and electoral return system in South Australia and, having done so, then proceeded to have a reverse auction for the building and its occupants, getting the price down to something like one cent or minus one cent. It was all rather light-hearted fun, but it still made the same point.

There was another demonstration, again around about 1967 or 1968, when students marched on Parliament House and on the steps of Parliament House again reiterated their views about the unfairness of the electoral distribution system, offering their single-minded support to Dunstan in his desire to reform the Parliament.

Dunstan was the Premier for a period of just under a year between ’67 and ’68. Then there was the interregnum of Steele Hall, followed by Dunstan’s re-election in June ’70, which went on through until his resignation due to ill-health and other matters in February of 1979, a remarkable term in office. The impact of that term in

\(^2\) The then Liberal Premier of South Australia was Thomas Playford.
office I think can be summarised as one in which South Australians of a particular generation, namely somewhere between about sort of 18 and 25 – although, by the end of it, it was more like 18 and 35 – were made more proud of their State, became more confident about their State, became more confident about their government and more confident about the way in which their government would carry out its affairs for and on behalf of the people of South Australia; and I think Dunstan understood this, not just in terms of each individual project, but of this general sentiment that he was unleashing, if you like, from the stultification of all those 30-odd years of government being done by the conservatives and by Playford in particular.

My second section wants to make some notes about the impact of this mood or this change in mood which made South Australia more relevant, more positive and more accessible.

I think ‘accessibility’ is probably the key word here, as it was a matter of making not just governments and the election of representatives fairer, but it was also of ensuring that governments, ministers and departments engaged with the community and took the community into its confidence as the whole notion of community involvement in planning and politics gained new favour and support. This only increased as people’s experience of being involved bore positive fruit.

Perhaps the most dramatic of the nominal description of changes that took place was the changing of the welfare department\(^3\) to the Department of Community Development.\(^4\) This was a key aspect in expanding the role of the Department, expanding the role of government in the development of a range of community facilities and community developments that would benefit individual families and individual parts of the metropolitan area rather than being seen, as it had been in the past, to ameliorating problems after they had arisen.

I have already mentioned how Vietnam and the Vietnam demonstrations and the support that Dunstan provided to the Whitlam Administration, both in opposition and

\(^3\) [check name]

\(^4\) [check name]
in government, captured and inspired and encouraged people to become actively involved in politics and in policy issues that went beyond the local domain in which people lived. The other examples I would like to quickly mention was the review that was put in place by one of Dunstan’s ministers, namely Geoff Virgo, the Minister for Transport, of a review of the Metropolitan Adelaide Transport Study [MATS] which had begun in the early–mid 1960s, and by 1968 or so was getting to the stage where the compulsory acquisition of properties along the proposed routes for freeways north and south of Adelaide and east and west of Adelaide was getting to the stage where construction was about to begin.

My involvement in this particular project and the destruction that was being proposed of so many areas by the creation of freeways in an environment where, internationally, freeways were being torn up or substantially downgraded, led to my choosing of the Metropolitan Adelaide Transport Study as the topic for my honours degree in Politics. Because it so closely dealt with the issues confronted by government, it was necessary for me to interview a range of people in government, both in administration and in politics, to determine their views as well as examining what they espoused as their views in debates in the Parliament. It was at about this time that Hugh Stretton was becoming prominent in the area of the human development of cities and metropolitan areas and, luckily for me, he was happy to become the supervisor of my honours thesis and it was a successful relationship that we then developed and that has continued over many years.

The third area I would mention is the time that I spent in Hindmarsh as part of the Hindmarsh Area Research Committee’s effort to eliminate the threat and the destruction that the Metropolitan Adelaide Transport Study would have had on that area.

I worked for the Hindmarsh Area Research Committee, which was a community-based body funded through the National Poverty Inquiry, and the purpose of the study was to identify for each household the potential impact of the cloverleaf interchanges that would completely desecrate Hindmarsh and throw so many people on welfare benefit payments out of homes with no prospect at least identified of
where they would subsequently go. This also required involvement with local councillors, local members and others in the administration of government affairs.

That leads me to also make a note about a significant change that I think took place under the auspices of the early administration run by government, which was the establishment of the Policy Unit within the Premier’s Department and the operating philosophy that there was to be more engagement between major policy initiatives and community organisations prior to any matter coming to the Government or the Cabinet for consideration. This community participation theme running through Dunstan initiatives was picking up on the urban development initiatives that were taking place right across the Western developed world at that time, where increasing numbers of people with extended educational qualifications were questioning the ability and the viability of governments making decisions without reference to a wider audience. The Policy Unit served a particular function in engaging with a wide number of people right across the State and using their views to enhance the nature of the submissions that they were making to Dunstan and to the Cabinet.

On a personal basis, one of the urban projects that I first became involved with was the Hackney Action Group, where Dunstan had proposed that a substantial part of the urban and residential infrastructure along Park Terrace at Hackney be compulsorily acquired by the Government and converted to two- and three-storey walk-up flats for people who would otherwise have to live in the outer suburbs. It was a vexing issue, as it had positive and negative elements on both sides of the argument; but what it did succeed in doing was crystallising and engaging almost to a household all of the people of the Hackney area into an opposition group to Dunstan, as this area was within his electorate, and, as they had a wide range of skills, they were able to present the arguments in social, demographic, architectural and a whole range of other ways rather than just being seen as oppositionists, and Dunstan was persuaded in the end by the cogency of their argument as well as the political impact of their voting behaviour should he persist in this arrangement.
I became involved because of my work in Hindmarsh and the MATS plan, and because of the number of talks that I had been giving around the area, and had some contact with again public officials, local government officials, in order to ensure that the encouragement that we’d been given to participate in government affairs was able to be realised in respect of this one particular area.

Another example was Dunstan’s unilateral decision to build what initially was the Nurses’ Education Building on the northern edge of the parklands adjacent to the Botanic Park. There was a small but active group who organised a protest movement and a submission to Dunstan, arguing that he was reneging on earlier promises to protect the parklands, and the upshot of that was a substantial *mea culpa* from Dunstan, who committed himself and all future Labor Governments to never touching the parklands again; however, the building did go ahead.

I’ve already spoken about the MATS plan and the close cooperation that I had working with the Hindmarsh Council, sometimes as its advocate, sometimes as its researcher. I don’t think there’s any need to reiterate those.

The things that were going along in parallel with this – which I have to say was a very active policy-oriented time, where large numbers of people who had been at university had gone through the arguments about Vietnam, the arguments about fairness, the arguments about participation – were also [being] able to observe that there were a range of other social goods that were being delivered by Dunstan as well. There was the establishment of the SA Film Corporation; there was the development of the arts; there was the increase in the social environment, particularly in terms of Aboriginal rights and the White Australia Policy. It was also a time when, particularly in the early ’70s, where Dunstan was operating more and more on the national stage working with Whitlam as the Opposition Leader and subsequently the Prime Minister on a whole range of initiatives that would, on the one hand, secure South Australia’s financial independence and, on the other hand, provide South Australia with the opportunity to pick up on the regional, social development, urban development and regeneration of Australian cities.
There was, of course, the famous 1975 election when Dunstan found himself on the edge of defeat and issued the famous statement to all South Australians to be aware that the vote that they would be making on the forthcoming Saturday was a vote for South Australia and that it wasn’t a vote for the Federal Government, it wasn’t a vote for the Australian people, it wasn’t a vote for any national issue but simply for South Australia; and it was that sentiment which is often credited with separating the difficulties that the Whitlam Government was then in from the re-election of the Dunstan Government.

I think it’s well-known that Premier Dunstan presented himself as the Leader on behalf of the Australian Labor Party in South Australia on five separate occasions and was in office between June ’67 and April ’68 and again from June 1970 through until February 1979. The period in the early–mid ’70s of the preoccupation with federal affairs changed again so that, in the latter part of the ’70s, the latter part of Dunstan’s reign as Premier, it was an issue from both jurisdictions that preoccupied his time and effort. The first was, in about 1977, the dispute between Dunstan and the Police Commissioner over which of them had the constitutional and legislative authority to determine the activities of the police force and in particular the operational arrangements that the police had made to continue keeping dossiers and files on many South Australians: the Police Commissioner insisted that it was his prerogative and Dunstan insisted that it was his. But that was not the thing that led to the Royal Commission; the issue that led to the Royal Commission was, rather, that the Police Commissioner actually was found to have lied to Dunstan over what it was that the Police Commissioner had kept and what he was doing with the files. That led to the Royal Commission and led to a period of acrimony and uncertainty within the community, as this was politics being played out at the highest level of authority.

The other issue that Dunstan was actively involved in in that period of time was one that was not yet a federal and not yet completely a State issue, which was the development of the uranium resources that had been found in the South Australian Outback. There were arguments as to whether it should be mined at all. There were
arguments that, if it was mined, should it be exported. There were arguments that, if it should be mined, should it be processed. There were arguments about, if it was to be mined and sold or processed, what would happen to the waste: was there any obligation on the Government from whose borders the material was exported, in whatever form, to accept back the waste, and where would that place be in South Australia? There were many issues, great uncertainty, conflicts between professionals, a political dispute, an uncertainty relating to the unknown.

Dunstan determined that the best thing that he could do was to collect information from as wide a range of people as he could, so he undertook a study tour with Bruce Guerin, Mike Rann and some others, of Britain, France and other parts of Europe. In his absence, Peter Duncan, an Attorney-General in Dunstan’s Government, had organised a meeting of antinuclear protesters at the Metalworkers’ Union in Sturt Street in an attempt to pre-empt what it was that Dunstan might say and might do and might proclaim in his policy analysis. The debate was vociferous and angry and the remaining issue is what was it that precipitated Duncan’s calling of the meeting. Was it a leadership ambition? Was it an attempt to bring Dunstan down? Was he operating on information that he guessed at or had he in fact received some indication from one or other members of the study group as to what was going to happen? Either way, this precipitated an enormous pressure and put enormous strain on Dunstan and his health and, as well as other matters that were occurring in his personal life, led to his hospitalisation early in 1979 and, later on, his much-regretted resignation from the position of Premier and the Cabinet.

I’ll just finish now on some observations about the parallels that I’ve drawn between some of Dunstan’s initiatives and some of the activities that I was involved in, and relate them to the period that I spent in Parliament between 1985 and 1989, although that period can be, really, extended back to the beginning of campaigning in about 1982 right through until my defeat at the 1989 election and afterwards.

The two main examples that I wish to mention for the purposes of this exercise are a significant and wide-ranging motion on urban development, urban regeneration and a combination of housing styles that I brought to a State Convention meeting in 1986
or 1987. By that stage, Dunstan had returned from Victoria and was again one of the delegates from the St Peter’s Branch of the Norwood Electorate. For some reason, my motion did not attract the initial attention of the agenda committee so it was necessary for me to move at the beginning of the Convention an amendment to the Agenda Committee’s proposal as to what would be discussed in order to get my motion up. This motion was seconded by Dunstan and was carried unanimously. In the subsequent debate, which unfortunately was limited as there was no opposition to it, I spoke of many of the things that I’ve spoken of today. Upon returning to my allocated position as a delegate from the Prospect South Sub-Branch, I had to walk past the Norwood Electorate table and Dunstan grabbed me by the hand, congratulated me, told me to maintain my efforts in this regard as it was one of the most important issues facing the community in terms of ensuring that there was a cohesion of identity and that people were able to feel part of a community wherever they lived rather than part of a larger, suburban blancmange. I agreed with him, thanked him for his comments and resumed my position.

A couple of years later – I think it must have been early–mid 1989 – I was invited to a luncheon in the city which turned out to be a luncheon of four or five very prominent and very well-connected businessmen who had an interest in ensuring that the city and the Government ran fairly effectively and in a way that ensured as many interests as possible were able to be satisfied. I was surprised that the fifth attendee at the luncheon was Dunstan, apart from myself being the sixth. Following pleasantries, it became obvious that some examination of my views on certain urban development matters was being canvassed, and Dunstan could obviously see that I was a bit bewildered so he turned to me and, sotto voce, said, ‘They’re here to talk to you, not me, so get on with it’, which I did. I walked from this luncheon engagement with Dunstan, who encouraged me to maintain my contact with these people, indicating that he had from time to time sought views across the whole wide spectrum of the community of South Australia, and some of them were done in this manner and others were done in a more public and open way, and that I should
ensure that the lines of communication remained open to the Labor leadership as well as to the sort of people that we had had lunch with. He wished me well and in particular said that the, again, whole issue of urban development and finding a satisfying lifestyle within cities was probably the most important element to prevent social dislocation.

I did not see Dunstan again before he died but was one of the many thousands of people who attended his memorial service.

During the course of my political life, I had some contact with Gretel, his wife, as I’d undertaken some economics subjects during my undergraduate years and was a [student] in some of her tutorials. I knew Paul and Andrew, as well as Bronwyn. Bronwyn was a member of one of the sub-branches for which I was responsible and we’d meet on a regular basis and exchange comments and views about our respective families. I knew Andrew mainly from his active involvement in what was then called the Centre Left Movement of the Labor Party and I knew Paul again as a member of the Norwood Electorate delegation; [through] his involvement, sometimes belligerent, in the Union Movement; and, perhaps most latterly, as a co-candidate seeking preselection for Ross Smith following John Bannon’s retirement from that seat. Neither of us won that preselection; it was won by another colleague from the Prospect South Sub-Branch, namely Ralph Clarke.

There is little I can add to this personal record, other than perhaps to note that, while a tutor at the Western Teachers’ College, which was subsequently merged into the University of South Australia, I taught Australian Politics and used a lot of the material in the The Dunstan Decade book as well as my own personal history covering this period. I also taught Australian Politics and International Relations at the SAIT\(^5\) Campus at The Levels, which again subsequently became part of the University of South Australia.

\(^5\) SAIT – South Australian Institute of Technology.
Mike DUIGAN

That’s all I have to add to what has been a very interesting and positive effort on behalf of the Dunstan Foundation to get this oral history project in place.

END OF STATEMENT