

Ray BUNKER

This is George Lewkowicz from the Don Dunstan Foundation interviewing Mr Ray Bunker on the issue of urban and regional development in the Dunstan years for the Don Dunstan History Project. The date today is 14th December and the location of the interview is at the UTS – University of Technology Sydney – campus in the city.

Ray, thanks very much for doing this interview with us for the project. Can you just provide some background for us on your academic qualifications and how you led into working in DURD, or the Department of Urban and Regional Development?

Yes. I came to Australia from England in 1959 to take up a post at the University of Sydney in the Department of Town Planning. While I was there I completed my PhD in 1966. And I've always been very interested in the public policy government side of urban affairs, and in some ways 'town planning' is rather too narrow a description of my interests.

Very good. What sort of work was going on in England that might have informed what came later on in Australia?

Frankly, not a great deal at that time.

Oh, right.

Not a great deal at that time. The initiatives came particularly with the Whitlam Government and, previously, with Don Dunstan's South Australian Government and were very much home-grown.

Right – not New Towns, was that informing any of the discussion?

I guess New Towns were to some extent, but they were largely home-grown.

Home-grown, right. And when did you start in DURD, what year was that?

In March 1975.

1975, that's toward the end of the Whitlam period. But what led you to start working for DURD?

Well, I'd been involved in some of the preliminary discussions and research in the years previous to 1972. The Urban Research Unit at the Australian University with Max Neutze and Pat Troy had been involved in research and a series of seminars developing appropriate urban and regional development programs and I was involved in some of the

Ray BUNKER

seminar discussions, so I guess I was aware to some extent of what was being developed in terms of potential programs both by the South Australian Government in the early 1970s and later the Whitlam Government.

And what sort of issues were being discussed through those seminars? What was new about some of the thinking that was going on?

Well, there was some quite innovative thinking about problems of land supply, servicing of suburban land, sewerage backlogs, areas of deprivation, urban renewal – pretty well the whole spectrum of urban problems and issues was being fairly intensively done over.

These had been building up under the former Liberal Governments.

Yes, and the Australian Institute of Urban Studies, for example, produced in the late '60s and early '70s – I can't give you precise dates because I haven't checked, but there were a series of reports on new cities, on suburban land development and things like that.

And how did you get to end up in DURD? Did you see a job come up or did somebody headhunt you?

Well, I've explained that background, and how I became involved. I'd always been interested in the development of government policy regarding urban affairs rather than narrower town planning and my own PhD was on metropolitan Australia and its issues and problems and characteristics. I became Acting Head of the Department of Town and Country Planning at the University of Sydney in 1974, when Professor Winston retired, and a successor was appointed and by then I decided I'd been there fifteen or sixteen years and my sort of lifestyle is to move on, either location or career or both. I decided that was an opportune point to hand over to a new head and, fortuitously, at the same time DURD was advertising for the head of a Strategy Division, so I applied for that position and got it, so I left and joined DURD in March 1975.

What level was that, was that a – – –?

First Assistant Secretary.

FAS, so very senior. Was there a deputy of the department or just a secretary?

Well, Bob Lansdown was secretary. Pat Troy was either officially or unofficially deputy secretary – you'd have to ask him that.

But you were pretty close to the top of the hierarchy there and –

Ray BUNKER

Yes.

– particularly in the strategy area. What was the general role of your position there, when you're talking about strategy?

Well, it was rather a difficult one. The Strategy Division was supposed to develop a national strategy for Australia, but more immediately it was to become involved in strategic planning work, particularly involving the states where my expertise lay, and that's where I encountered the South Australian Government and Don Dunstan.

So who were you working with in the executive group, who were the people? You mentioned Bob Lansdown and Pat Troy, and I think – was Peter Till there at the time?

Peter Till was there at the time. I was very friendly with Peter. Michael Keating was head of the – I forget the title of the division but it was 'Economic Planning' or something like that. And Michael, Peter Till, myself and Jim Crawford, I guess, were the people that formed the group of officials from DURD that met in late April with the South Australians. Bob Lansdown led us of course.

Can you remember some of the discussions around the table at the time and the energy level? It seems as though DURD had a lot of interests in a lot of things and was trying to get this huge program moving, but can you maybe just talk a bit about how your own strategic thinking with your group and how you were going to pull all these things off you were trying to do.

There's a bit of hindsight in this because, as you know, I moved to South Australia in 1978, very much enjoyed my life there in academia and I also became Chairman of the Planning Commission - later the Development Assessment Commission, so I was still able to continue my government interests and involvement in that way, so there's a little bit of hindsight to what I'm saying.

Sure, yes.

The ministerial meeting was on 30th April. I'd only been in DURD some five or six weeks and I was still trying to sort out what the hell was going on. But I guess if I can summarise very briefly what was beginning to emerge was that a series of agreements and programs had been arranged and signed off with South Australia of various kinds, individual ones, such as the Land Commission program; but it became apparent, particularly from the DURD view – and I think this is reinforced by my later

Ray BUNKER

understanding of the South Australian position – that there really was a lack of an overall view of what all this meant, where it was leading to.

Let me give an example. In my preparation for the meeting, my division looked at the population projections and compared it with the program forecasts for Monarto and the Land Commission and there was an obvious discrepancy. You have to ask the question ‘Why do you need a new town *and* all this suburban land development? It really doesn’t fit in with any realistic population projections in the medium term.’ Now, that wasn’t a question you could ask directly, particularly as we were working on a very collaborative basis with South Australia. We have to remember they were the only mainland Labor Government while DURD was in existence, and South Australia had set up some of its programs in anticipation of the DURD operation. So there was a good deal of familiarity between the two.

And I have to say there was a great desire on the part of DURD to act collaboratively with the states and to work with them and not against them. That wasn’t always achieved in practice. I notice from these papers that the South Australian Government got very irritated at the incessant requests for information to substantiate program details and funding. I think that partly was the inexperience of both parties in this kind of arrangement, but these papers are full of the South Australians complaining about not only DURD asking for information but other departments of the Federal Government, and it wasn’t at all clear why some of this information was required and it required a great deal of time to process. I think that’s fairly understandable; I think that’s more frictional than substantial.

Yes. Was that because they expected DURD to be the co-ordinating department rather than – – –?

I think they did.

Right, okay.

And DURD tried to play that role. But it wasn’t always an easy one.

Why’s that?

Oh, the old problem of urban affairs always runs across a number of interested departments and they become quite irritated, not only because they think a co-ordinating urban department is treading on their toes but the dislocation it might occur to their own

Ray BUNKER

programs. In these papers you'll find that some of the programs run by other departments, such as that of transport, Department of Recreation, sort of had urban implications that DURD was interested in and it all got a bit messy.

So just to get a bit clear about co-ordinating roles which is pretty important for just understanding how the Commonwealth worked and how the Commonwealth related to the states, you had DURD and you also had the Treasury, presumably, being the co-ordinator of the finances – I'm not too sure about Department of Finance, whether there was one at the time; then you had the Prime Minister's Department as well. So how did those organisations relate, let alone the other Commonwealth departments?

I'm not too clear on that; you should ask really Jim Crawford.

Jim Crawford, okay.

Jim Crawford was an extremely important guy who was responsible for administrative and co-ordination arrangements and particularly for the signing of the agreements. I meant to mention this book to you which you've probably heard of.

Yes, I have, yes.

Well, there's a chapter by me in there which refers to the South Australian experience. But more importantly there's a chapter by Jim on program agreement, and the latter pages of that deal much more effectively than I can with some of the issues that arose.

Yes, okay, good.

Also, in my chapter, I've looked at it again, actually mentioned some of these issues.

Okay, good. That book is the *Federal power in Australia's cities: essays in honour of Peter Till* and edited by Patrick N. Troy.

Yes. It was produced after DURD finished, in memory of Peter Till who was heavily involved with the Land Commission program.

But what was your reaction – I know you talk about it in the book there, but can you recall your reaction at the time of trying to just work through? You were the strategy person, so strategies, both programs and getting agreement and change, not only in the Commonwealth itself but also in the states. And I don't want to put words in your mouth, but South Australia was the only Labor Government, and was the change process involving 'Well, let's get onto some winners as much as we can to demonstrate what can happen in a state'?

I was only a few weeks into DURD. I knew something about the South Australian situation. I regarded my role as trying to connect with the South Australians in some way

Ray BUNKER

and I left to Jim Crawford, - frankly, who's very good - the whole question of relationships in the federal scene. I had to concentrate on the South Australian scene. And the way I saw it - and Andrew Strickland and I were partners in working this up - was how to try to begin to uncover the strategic issues about future population growth, urban growth, urban structure and some sort of at least overall view of where it might all lead without upsetting or treading on the toes of the South Australians. But as I read my notes on the ministerial meeting I'm pretty clear that Don Dunstan himself was aware of these, this lack of an overall perspective, and I note in my notes here that he mentioned, for example, the Metropolitan Development Plan was out of date or insufficient.

'Seventy-five, yes.

Yes. And he referred to the need to revise the planning system to make it more facilitating of the kind of development needed. Those are my own handwritten notes.

Right. Can you recall what he was talking about in any more detail? That's Don Dunstan.

Not in detail. He certainly had a grasp not only of all the programs but I think there was an implicit acknowledgment on his part that it needed to be in some sort of better overall framework and there were a number of dimensions to that, and it relates to the financial agreements. The financial agreements for each program ran from year to year and it was Jim Crawford's thrust to try and translate these into five-year agreements, that were called 'umbrella' agreements, that would be rolled forward from year to year because of course they were to some extent constrained by the annual budgetary cycle, - and he discusses that very well in his chapter. But that was part of the attempt to put more of an overall look not only on the programs but on urban development together with the policy levers that needed to be put in place and pulled to try and make development more co-ordinated, better related to resource availability and that sort of stuff. These papers are extremely important in that.

Do you just want to talk about them a bit, some of the information that's in there, so we can get that on the audio record? Not necessarily all of it, but some of the key characteristics?

No, I'm not going to discuss it in detail because I'm giving you the file.

Right, yes.

Ray BUNKER

But I made a note here – this is a note at the time, on 30th April, of Don Dunstan’s actual comments.

Good, yes.

I’ve got a comment that first of all he said we redress the priorities of the Playford Government regarding urban development, to make it much more socially-oriented rather than just concerned with physical infrastructure. Secondly, there are tight budget constraints. Thirdly, he was happy to get involved in population projections because one of the main arguments we were using is when you looked sensibly at the population projections they did not add up with the quantum of development expected in suburban land development and Monarto. There was a need to balance things out a bit, catch up on some of the past developmental needs as well as looking forward to the future; and the need for prior consultation between the two governments before requirements set for matching grants in the programs.

I’ve also got a note here (laughs) which I don’t quite understand, but it says, ‘Stop the slugging match at the Premiers’ Conference between the PM, the Treasurer and the Department of Urban and Regional Development.’ (laughter)

Right, yes. Okay. What do you mean, you don’t understand that?

But I think he was referring to the issue you’ve raised: how effective is the co-ordinating role of DURD? It comes along with a very powerful minister with the argument that not only can it administer its own development programs but it can help to co-ordinate a wide range of activities across the Australian Government to facilitate better economic and urban development in South Australia.

It was Tom Uren at these meetings?

Yes, Tom Uren was the Minister. And Jim Crawford in his chapter there refers to this as a weakness. In a sense, Tom was the only federal minister there and, while he was a powerful minister, there was a question as to how much he could deliver on behalf of the Australian Government whereas South Australia were represented by Don Dunstan, Don Hopgood, Corcoran; Broomhill couldn’t be there. But that’s all there in the papers. In fact, I ought to sell these to you for an enormous sum.

Ray BUNKER

Yeah, right! (laughter) So in terms – were these negotiating meetings, or were they more exploratory? Negotiation in the sense of firm agreements being made; or was it something, because the Prime Minister wasn't there in comparison, say, with the Premier of the State, that the decisions couldn't be made at these meetings, the ultimate decisions?

No, it was partly an exploratory but partly consolidating and cementing progressive understandings. It was a very important meeting. I illustrate that by a joint study that had been going on between South Australia – mainly Treasury, I think, and Premier's Department and Mike Keating's division about looking at the next five years to see if there were any resource bottlenecks or constraints on the operation of the programs as envisaged. This was a very important study. And one of the things we sought to do and accomplished at this meeting quite amicably and properly was to carry on that study but to enlarge its compass so that the study should encompass the review of likely population trends, the distribution of population among the major centres and regions, the likely pattern of economic development and the broad regional location of that development. In other words, the study was meant to expand much more into a spatial and urban arena. It had actually been concerned mainly with resource constraints in the building and construction industry and possible skills needed for future jobs anticipated and that sort of thing. .

And South Australia was arguing that the State was growing and it was going to have all these demands placed on it, not only population but whatever industries were going to be developed, and it's I guess in hindsight again a bit hard to just try and recall what those industries were, but presumably there were these bottlenecks anticipated.

There is in that study an anticipation that South Australia's economic development is likely to become less labour-intensive –

I see, right.

– less concerned with the traditional whitegoods, car manufacture and more with, I guess, the application of information; less labour-intensive but much more with skilled, high-technology manufacturing or information processing. That's specifically mentioned in here.

There's a sort of tension between this – between the need for looking at those possible resource constraints in the study, mainly manpower, and the economic growth of the State – and yet a likely diminution in the rate of population growth. So what we were trying to

Ray BUNKER

do here is really just open up that, not in any pre-emptive way at all but to begin to ask the questions that I am sure the South Australians were beginning to ask themselves. For example, there's a comment in one of these papers that – I forget the actual timeline of growth, but the Monarto projections show that it's likely to take forty-five per cent of the growth in metropolitan Adelaide in that particular time period, so there's an obvious question about, 'Ooh, hang on!' And in fact the paper showing that anticipated population growth to about twenty-five thousand people even at that stage can be shown to be very, very optimistic.

Yes, and that was assuming some public servants were going to want to relocate up there. I recall a bit of a stoush about that when some departments were nominated like Planning and like Agriculture, I think.

Whatever the reason there was obviously a gross over-estimate of the initial growth of Monarto. You only have to look at any new town experience in the UK, for example, to know that it takes a hell of a lot of time to get the first ten thousand people. There's an enormous infrastructure investment that has to be made and, even when you're talking about transferring jobs, it's slow and complex. I mean, I thought the Monarto projections were hopelessly out of kilter. But it wasn't appropriate to say it like that and the tack we put was to draft a series of resolutions, carefully worded to raise the issues in a non-threatening way which Andrew and I helped to draft.

Andrew was working with who at the time?

He was in the Strategy Division.

Strategy Division, that's right.

He was my senior partner in this because he knew far more about government relations than I did. (laughs) And fortunately I had the sense to realise that! (laughter)

Right, fair enough.

But we drafted a number of very important resolutions that were actually adopted. For example, population trends:

It is recommended that the ministers note that the preliminary assessment of population growth by both South Australian or Australian Government departments, in conjunction with the National Population Inquiry,

Ray BUNKER

suggests a slower growth of population in South Australia in the next twenty or thirty years than previously expected.

And elsewhere in the papers we expect that the growth in metropolitan Adelaide, which was running at some ten thousand people a year, would drop off to six thousand by the end of the century. And we brought into that the pattern of urban development. This was a diplomatic exercise: we didn't want to get into the business of strategic planning when the South Australians were much more competent to do that once they got onto it. So the Department of Urban Development note that:

In terms of land available there are no substantial impediments to continued growth to both the north and south of metropolitan Adelaide in the next five years and therefore agree that the absence of substantial impediments to a steady continuation of established patterns of development affords the opportunity for careful consideration of the nature of major planning decisions which may arise over the next few years.

It was very important to cement that agreement. What we were trying to say is, 'Look, things are reasonably clear for the immediate future and the various funding programs address that, but there need to be some serious questions asked and answered in the next five years.' So if we're going to accept that urban development can continue reasonably well we've got that amount of time to look at things a bit more strategically and circumspectly.

There are some quite interesting signals in these papers. For example, the South Australians acknowledge that, despite them having a much more effective infrastructure servicing program than almost all states, they acknowledge that suburban development is getting ahead particularly of water supply and sewerage.

Right, yes. That's interesting. You mentioned the ministers who were at the meeting; who were the staff people there? Bruce Guerin was there?

Bruce Guerin, yes.

Anybody else from planning area?

I don't remember.

Okay.

It's thirty-two years ago, George.

Ray BUNKER

And was he involved in talk, did he actually talk, can you remember that?

Bruce from memory – this is where I first met Bruce. We had some preliminary discussions before the ministerial meeting, a day or two before, in which we discussed this kind of agenda with Bruce because obviously you don't go in and do a ministerial meeting with a series of resolutions before you're aware they're going to be accepted.

Yes – so there's some officers' work involved.

So we went up there I think the previous week, had an interesting discussion with Bruce. I think that was the occasion when he wasn't able to start the Chrysler Valiant to take us back to the airport, and we missed our plane - but you'd better expunge that from the record!

Okay.

And because I came to South Australia after I've had a fair bit to do with Bruce regarding the comic multi-function polis. I think we got to know each other fairly well on a personal basis. I always found Bruce good to deal with; he made his points and I made mine.

And you felt he had that pretty clear relationship with Dunstan –

Yes.

– so whatever was agreed that was the sort of thing that Dunstan would follow through.

The recommendations I've quoted just point to the need to try and establish some sort of strategic review of what was going on in conjunction with the extension, of programs into umbrella agreements for five years. It was all part of trying to put an overview. Part of this was expanding the resources study to incorporate much more future population growth and pattern of urban development. And I think Bruce was completely in favour with this, provided South Australia was provided the information. There is somewhere in here a resolution that South Australian expertise and information be used in the development of any projections or analysis of metropolitan land supply. There is a Land Commission study of metropolitan land supply mentioned in this.

Okay, good. And I think Ken Taueber was there at the time, he was chairing the Land Commission, so I was just wondering whether he got involved anywhere?

Ray BUNKER

He might have been there, I don't remember. I know Ken well, he was Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission when I was Chairman.

So what happened – so there were various agreements arrived at this meeting; what happened after the meeting?

There were two main results. I think that an umbrella agreement was signed with South Australia before the demise of the Whitlam Government, I think on 11 October – it's mentioned in my chapter here. So that eventually happened as part of the process of which this ministerial meeting was an extremely important component. But we also agreed to set up a consultative committee comprising representatives of each government nominated from time to time by the ministers, and that as I understand it was an extension of the Resources Study Group, putting it in a wider and more formal setting. The papers involve some interesting recommendations about that.

Do you just want to read those out, for the record?

I can't quite find them. But I notice – I'm trying to find that important one. Oh! 'Integration of research planning and operational activity':

Without limiting the process of consultation on major planning decisions, ministers endorse the principle that, wherever possible, studies relating to programs under the agreement and initiated by agreement between the ministers to be conducted within the appropriate South Australian bodies or using South Australian expertise as far as practicable.

That's the actual citation I was looking for when I previously mentioned that.

Yes.

South Australia, quite properly and understandably, was saying, 'Well, we have the data and the information and that's where it should come from initially.'

What was DURD's role going to be, just to touch base from time to time or – – –?

We were to continue – that committee would continue the sort of strategic studies that had started with the Resource Study with Michael Keating, and that's why it was so important – the resolution I've cited before, that the study go on; but it was expanded to encompass population projections, urban and regional growth and centre development.

So this all got taken over by the fall of the Whitlam Government, is that what happened?

Ray BUNKER

Yes. Except the umbrella agreement. It had been signed and put in place before that, a month before; I'm pretty sure it was 11th October.

So what did that mean for a new government?

Well, a new government had to live with the funding of five years or it may have been four years – – –. It had to agree with a basic level of funding to keep the programs going, and I'm pretty sure under the new Fraser Government it would have been an absolute minimum level.

Yes, right, okay.

But there were similar umbrella agreements – well, they *weren't* umbrella agreements; similar agreements signed with New South Wales and Victoria by the Fraser Government.

By the Fraser Government?

Because negotiations had continued with those. Here we are.

And they were Liberal Governments.

Fifth of January – yes, they were Liberal State Governments – 5th January, New South Wales 29th January and Western Australia 22nd March. They were one-year umbrella agreements.

One year.

Just one year. But the important point from that is to underline the point that DURD did seek to work with state governments. The Fraser Government actually signed umbrella agreements with Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia, admittedly only for one year, but the momentum had built up to the extent that the Fraser Government did sign those one-year agreements.

So what happened when the government changed, how long was DURD – DURD got abolished, didn't it?

It got immediately disembowelled.

Immediately, right. So who picked up the work that DURD was doing, where did that go?

Well, that would only be administering the program stuff. I mean all the strategic planning stuff disappeared completely.

Ray BUNKER

Disappeared, right.

It would only be the programs, and you should ask Jim Crawford about that.

Okay. And one would assume the government came in and somebody said, 'DURD's been disestablished.' But were there any explanations about that at the time?

There's a bit of a hiatus because of course it was a dramatic dismissal and to some extent the Fraser Government had to sort out what it was going to do about urban affairs, given that there were some agreements that had been signed, I think with all states, and particularly the important ones with South Australia. There's a bit of a hiatus and there was an interesting period when I was involved in trying to brief – I don't quite know how this occurred, but I can remember I was asked to try and brief the new Fraser Government about urban affairs. Senator Greenwood was appointed the relevant minister, I forget what his precise title was, and he went to South Australia I think some time in January to talk about the programs and I drafted the speech for him, which was basically an argument drawn from the constitution about the Commonwealth's influence on urban affairs whether we liked it or not. And the speech was largely adopted as I drafted it and delivered, and did foreshadow at least a continuing interest. But unfortunately Senator Greenwood died very shortly afterwards, so that collapsed.

So where were you in the changes?

(laughs) Well, the Department of Environment, Housing and Community Development picked up some of the pieces and I was made head of what was called the Research Directorate: in other words, they didn't know what the hell to do with you so they formed a research directorate and put me in charge of it. I had some people from DURD and some people from the previous Department of Environment in the Research Directorate and we began to work on some useful research. Our directorate, for example, produced the report, 'A Basis for Soil Conservation Policy in Australia', in 1978, which I think was a landmark document.

Just to go back to the negotiations with the other states apart from South Australia, what were the relationships like with them? South Australia signed a five-year agreement; the other states signed only one. Was there something about the role of government or not wanting a strong role of government, particularly a federal government, in all of this from the Liberal Governments, the State Governments?

Ray BUNKER

Well, Victoria and New South Wales, the senior states, had strong Liberal Governments and you'd have to ask Pat and Jim Crawford how that worked out. But I sensed there was a genuine desire on the part of DURD to try and work with those and certainly Land Commission moneys were made available to those states despite their ideological objections to that.

The only thing I can remember as part of my interaction with other states was that we did get involved in some official discussions with the Victorian Government about Melbourne metropolitan planning. I went down to Melbourne with some members of my division – I can't recollect whether there were any other members from other divisions in DURD – and we talked generally with the Premier's Department. The whole object of that was to say, 'Look, we're not coming in to ride over like a herd of elephants about what you want to do. As in South Australia, tell us what are your metropolitan problems and we'll see what we can do to help.' Which may not have been much, but – – –.

Yes, I recall one of the issues, and this seems to be a perennial with Commonwealth/State relations, states not wanting to get locked into a one-off program and then they have to continue with particularly the recurrent costs. Did any of that sort of issue come up in any of this or was it mainly capital works projects?

It came up in South Australia. These documents contained some reference to the water treatment program.

I see, yes.

And I've got a note, a handwritten note, that Corcoran expressed disquiet about getting locked into some necessary infrastructure development and then not being able to find the money to deal with it.

To operate, yes.

I mean the water treatment program is an interesting exercise in itself. My understanding was that the sewerage backlog program, which was so important to the other cities, didn't benefit Adelaide much because they'd been good housekeepers and basically serviced their suburban development. It may have been a bit behind but it was there. And the argument was, 'Why should we be penalised for our good housekeeping? Oh, by the way, we've got a water quality problem.' So the water treatment program was an important one and it may be a bit simplistic to say it was in substitution for the sewerage backlog

Ray BUNKER

program but there was that argument, ‘Why should we be penalised for our good sewerage provision compared with the other cities?’ So there are some papers there on the water treatment program in which Corcoran expresses great unease. He admits water supply has been lagging to some extent but expresses disquiet about putting in train the necessary infrastructure development without some guarantee as to its continued operation. And in fact the specific papers where South Australia suggests different financial arrangements to those normally carried out for that kind of program, the details are in here.

Right. And they were, what, innovative arrangements or just – – –?

Well, for example, South Australia wanted a thirty-year payoff period whereas the normal period was forty years. I can’t remember the details but I think they wanted some deferment for ten years, some rather unusual circumstances that could be argued – I’ve got a note that I think our minister said, ‘That’s probably not possible.’

The other states were also into the regional growth areas as well, like Albury–Wodonga, Bathurst–Orange: were you involved in any of those discussions?

Not directly, no.

Okay. But they seemed to be accepting a lot of money for those.

Well, Pat Troy was very involved in the Albury–Wodonga thing and I know much of that occurred before I came to DURD.

So just looking back over that time, what sort of reflections have you got in hindsight about any lessons that came out of that era for how things work or don’t work in the present day? Like there’s discussion these days about lack of infrastructure all over the place.

The biggest lesson I learnt – and fortunately I think I was willing to learn this lesson – is that these intergovernmental relations are a matter of process. I don’t think you can spring something like the ten million dollars Murray–Darling water initiative –

Ten billion, yes.

– without bringing the partners on board before you do it, which is what we were doing here.

Yes.

Ray BUNKER

These meetings are a part of process and each partner tries to nudge each other into accepting what it wants. But I think sufficient understanding developed where either side became aware that you couldn't push your demands too far. It's very much a matter of process, that's what I've tried to outline. There have been some very important preliminaries. South Australia had got Monarto off the blocks and - I think the Land Commission - either before the Whitlam Government came to power or very shortly afterwards.

Shortly after, yes.

So they argued that they'd got these cabs ready to come off the rank; where was the money? And the Whitlam Government, Uren and Lansdown and Pat Troy, sort of developed their own urban programs but also interacted with these parallel initiatives from the South Australian government and the thing developed in an interactive way into umbrella programs, opening into a much more strategic view not only about resource needs and economic development but about urban and spatial development and I think that was a very fruitful road to go along. I was very disappointed when all this fell apart in November 1975 because I think it had great promise.

And when did you go to South Australia to work?

Nineteen seventy-eight.

'Seventy-eight.

I spent three years in the Research Directorate. We did the Soil Conservation Study which I always enjoyed because in a sense it wasn't urban so it was a challenge in a rural area, and it was a study dominated by the states in a very static way, and I think we managed to make it much more dynamic and with much more a national system of priorities built into it, or we tried to.

Where were you working in South Australia, what department?

When I went to South Australia?

When you went there, yes.

Oh, I joined academia.

Academia, right.

Ray BUNKER

I joined the then South Australian Institute of Technology. But I was a friend of John Mant who became head of the Department of Housing and Urban Development in South Australia. And Andrew Strickland came back to work in South Australia

So I kept in touch with them as friends and as colleagues. This is why I think – a lot of what I'm saying is in hindsight, but I don't think it's distorted by hindsight; I think it's enriched by hindsight.

And as you continued to live and study what was going on in South Australia, what were your impressions about the Dunstan Era and its legacies in this urban and regional development area?

Oh, a very dynamic and progressive area. I think it may have overreached itself and I guess that's the point of a lot of what I'm saying. Things needed to be sorted out and, through co-operative agreements and arrangements, one could do that in a sensible way.

And as you continued to work in academia in South Australia, what sort of observations can you recall you were making about what happened after the Dunstan Era? Did things fall back or were they continuing to progress innovatively?

You'd have to check with Pat Troy but I think South Australia got a lot of good funding in the Dunstan Era. I got the impression that the federal budget, lays down funding for specific outlays and programs. If you lay out so much for land commissions and you're not able to get agreement with New South Wales and Victoria, you may be able to spend that money with South Australia. I'm not clear and definitive about that, but I'm fairly sure that South Australia benefited quite considerably in funding terms and was able to buy and develop a large amount of suburban land; and of course it had the agency of a well-respected Housing Trust and Land Commission to drive that.

And after the Dunstan Era? Well the momentum (and some of the funding) continued for some time. Proper decisions were eventually made, such as the abandonment of Monarto. And also they developed a very effect land monitoring program, which still exists in the department – Ian McQueen and his team, who I've worked with and known for twenty years – and I've nothing but admiration for their work, which is still inputting into the Metropolitan Plan. The land data system is superb.

Ray BUNKER

All right. Was there anything that we haven't discussed that you'd like to add for the record?

Not really. Of course, I think the Dunstan Government ended in 1979 –

Yes.

– so, just like DURD, there was something of a dropping of interest in those programs, though by then many of them had got so much momentum that they carried on.

Over the years, of course, Monarto became – what shall we say? – well, I guess disestablished.

Disestablished.

And frankly that was no surprise to me because – this isn't entirely in hindsight, but I always thought it was a fairly ambitious proposal; perhaps not so much in substance, but in trajectory and impetus. It might have succeeded with a much slower and more incremental and modest build-up to become a major thing. But it was a bit too far out, to start with.

Bit too far ahead of his time on that one, Don.

Even Elizabeth had those sorts of problems initially.

Yes. But it had that manufacturing, motor vehicle-based, [that] underpinned some of the development there. Well, Ray, thanks very much for the contribution you've made to the oral history project and I hope we'll get this transcription organised and back to you fairly soon just for a look at it. Thanks again, that's the end of the interview.

END OF INTERVIEW.