AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BERNARD O'NEIL WITH MR RICHARD HARVEY OF NORTH ADELAIDE ON THE 28TH OCTOBER 2004 IN REGARDS TO THE PROJECTS ON THE HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND THE ANIMAL AND PLANT CONTROL COMMISSION HISTORY.

[Square brackets include comments and corrections provided by Mr Harvey in December 2006]

Tape 1, Side A

[0:30] Richard, thanks very much for agreeing to be involved in both projects. Perhaps a good place to start would be a little bit of a personal background, your own story to give us some context if you don't mind – place of birth, date of birth and so on.

Yes, Bernie. My full name is Richard Gilbert Mungo Harvey. I was born in Adelaide in 1926. My early upbringing was in Adelaide. I went to school in Adelaide. When having finished school and graduated to the university I did a degree course in Agricultural Science. At that time, my father had purchased, in the Depression, a property on Lake Alexandrina where we used to spend our holidays and that is what started me off with an interest in agriculture. Although I was never brought up on the land, it became of interest to me; although when I left school I had decided I would be a lawyer but that changed soon after that and I did Ag. Science instead.

Had your father brought this property to go and live there or …?

No, he had not done that. In the Depression the previous owners had gone bankrupt, or virtually so, and so he came in as a partner with one or two other people. Sir James Gosse was one of them. They took over the ownership of the property. He had, other than his ancestral background in Scotland, had no farming experience. He just did it as a business enterprise, which turned out ultimately to be definitely to my advantage. And that's why we only went there in school holidays. So my knowledge of agriculture and running of a property was pretty minimal at that stage, but I enjoyed being in the country. That's why I took Ag. Science as a course at the university. As time went on and I got beyond the botany/zoology stage I appreciated much more the more direct contact with agriculture as the course progressed. In my final year I managed to get a credit and then decided that I would go into wool research. I was offered a post in wool research by a CSIRO-funded position at Roseworthy College, which involved testing various fleeces or samples of fleeces from studs in the north of South Australia to find out ... It was the beginning of the definitive measurement testing of wool, which before had been just individuals. That was interesting and I enjoyed it. I was helped by my superiors up there. But at that time my father had also bought a property, or bought an area of scrub north of Bordertown, in what later became the AMP Settlement Scheme. It was surrounded by them. He suggested to me that if I cared to change my direction, he would be glad if I went down and cleared that country. After a couple of years of doing this wool research work, I thought perhaps I was better suited to an outside occupation in farming. I went down to Bordertown,

lived in a small tin hut where I cooked for myself. I didn't know anybody, but went on with the job of clearing this land and stocking it and sowing it to pasture and so on.

Your father still had the land at Lake Alexandrina?

He still had the land at Lake Alexandrina, yes, the property, Yalkuri, there. It was being run ... It was quite a large property and was being run by a manager who, interestingly, was the son of the former owner, the first owner, of Yalkuri. He'd stayed on as the manager and he was a very able manager. So I thought there was no place for me there anyway at that stage. I enjoyed my life in Bordertown and, in fact, … Go on.

[6:20] Did you have brothers and sisters?

Yes I did. I had a brother who was a bomber pilot in the Second [World] War who eventually became a Pathfinder pilot over Germany. He didn't last very long doing that – was shot down and killed. I had two sisters, one of whom, in fact, married the Minister of Agriculture in Adelaide. That was the family I had.

You were the youngest?

I was the youngest child.

But in terms of children going onto the land …

Yes. None of the rest of my family had any connection with the land in the sense that my father ran a … He had the agency for the Orient Line in Adelaide. It was expected that my elder brother, Alain, would've gone into that had he survived.

Just on your sister, just for the record: your sister was married to a Minister of Agriculture?

She was. Alison was married to David Brookman, who actually signed that letter on my appointment to the Vertebrate Pest Control Authority but he was a farmer who became Minister of Agriculture. She was an interesting person. This is digressing a little but she ended up, having done a degree in anthropology, she became a Doctor of Classical Italian at the age of 70, so there are a few brains left in the family, but not on my particular end of it.

[8:10] Just on your own circumstances, Richard. The wool research work for CSIRO: that was undertaken at Roseworthy College, but that was as a research person not as a student?

No. As an undergraduate research appointment, yes.

So you didn't actually attend Roseworthy as a student?

No, no.

Maybe in your science …

Only in the sense that I was doing my Ag. Science course, yes.

Again just for the record, the degree, you completed it in about 19..?

It would've been 1947.

Forty-seven.

Is that right? That's four years. Yes, it would've been '47.

OK. Just to clarify that then, you would've been at Roseworthy in '48, 1948, and the degree in Ag. Science in about 1947.

Yes.

[9:20] Bordertown came up and …

Then I moved to Bordertown and lived on this scrub block for 13, 14 years. Married. Gradually cleared the country with the help of tractors and things.

You had mechanised …

We had mechanised it, a Caterpillar tractor and so on, to do it. It was quite a change of environment in that I was 20 miles (32 km) north of Bordertown. There was no road, which was only negotiable with any sort of a 2-wheel drive vehicle in the summer. Luckily, I had one of the first Landrovers there and you could get out to the property that way. But it was very rough – no telephone, no power, cooked on a wood stove.

Basically self-sufficient – have to take all your food with you and so on.

I used to go into Bordertown once a week and do my shopping. Then, fortunately for me, I married two years later. That made it a bit easier, because at least I had somebody to cook for me. But, no, it was ... And I built a house on the property, yes at that point.

In your spare time!

No, I didn't build it. (laughs) We got somebody to build it. Petrol rationing was on at this stage, which made life a bit more difficult in a way because I only had enough petrol to go in to Bordertown once a week. If I'd wanted to go in twice a week, it would've been very difficult to do so. I'd forgotten about those days. But that certainly restricted me quite severely for a while. Anyway, we managed to gradually clear the property and had Merino sheep and cattle on the property. By the time I left, out of 8000 acres (3237 ha) we'd cleared 4000 (1619 ha), roughly half of it.

Was it 8000 to start with?

Yes.

That's pretty good.

Eight thousand, yes it was quite a big block.

What was the nature of the property? You say were running livestock at the end there, but the soil …?

The soil was mostly sand, very deep sand with clay flats in between which grew pretty good clover and phalaris. The hills were in those days planted with veldt grass. Lucerne hadn't been thought of as a good pasture in that area. Before I left there we had started to improve it in

lucerne. But it was good stock country and the cattle and sheep thrived on it. It was also very conducive to the intrusion of rabbits because we had … A lot of the cleared country was surrounded by scrub in which the rabbits lived and came out to eat all the pasture and that was becoming a major problem to me before I left.

[13:15] While you were there, Richard, did you maintain an interest in research activities? Were you interested in the science of the soils and …?

Yes I did, to some extent.

How they related to your own property, the soils?

Yes. I guess in a sense that there were the Hoggett competitions in the area and I won one of them later on and used to have visitors particularly more from the Division of Soils at CSIRO because they were interested to know what the trace element deficiencies were there and how we'd cope with that because this particular property, Berangwee, was perhaps the first property that had been developed in that area and outside the good, heavy Bordertown country that had been farmed for many years. But it was the first area that had gone into that trace element deficient country and tried to grow something. That was when we had just been told that copper and zinc were essential to that area, so there were trials on the property about that and we helped to carry those through.

You had some connections there with the CSIRO?

I did, yes.

Did you have connections with the Department of Agriculture?

Yes, in the sense that … Less so with the Department on that side of it, but in terms of the stock management I had help from the Department in selecting my initial sheep, which was not usually the case later on, but it certainly was then. They helped me to do that: I had a man called Dennis Muirhead, who was the fat lamb advisor. He certainly helped me with the confirmation of the sheep and that sort of thing. Yes, I had a lot of help from that and another man called [Steve] Reid, who helped me select my first Merinos. So in that sense I did have contact.

And on the soil side?

The soil side was more the [CSIRO] Division of Soils in Adelaide.

This is the era when the Department was getting interested in soil and soil conservation.

It would've been, but we hadn't got to the stage where, fortunately, the Soil Conservator had any concerns with us, so we weren't creating a danger at that point anyway.

[16:30] What about the Agricultural Bureau: did you get involved in that?

Yes, I did. There was a fairly active Agricultural Bureau. This area in which I lived was actually called Lowan Vale, very new area, and because it was made up of a few new people

like myself and a lot of older farmers who had been there for many years, we just seemed to create an active Agricultural Bureau. That was something in which I became chairman for a year or two. I enjoyed that. Yes it was … an addition to the learning about farming.

The local community. You mentioned new farmers, old farmers. How big was the farming community?

In that area, in particular, there would've been perhaps 50 or 60 farmers. Not a lot because nobody before I came had actually gone out to try and clear … Well they had tried to clear scrub but they didn't have the money or the equipment to do it very successfully and so that all came to a head, it started to progress, when the AMP Society bought land and cleared all around it. That's when everything took off in that area. But before that there had been a very, strong active and – I'd have to say – very stable farming community in Bordertown and Keith itself. Those were people whom it was harder to get to know, but when I did I appreciated the no-nonsense people and the good active farmer.

[18:50] Ultimately, you were to leave the property there or move on from the property, perhaps I should say.

Yes, well …

… the story about that transition?

Before I actually did that the other thing that took my interest was that in the Lowan Vale area the District Council of Tatiara had decided that they were going to increase their size because of all these new people coming in. They wanted to bring our area into the Council. I was made the first representative from that area. I went onto the District Council of Tatiara as a member from that area. Then after about three years they had elected me to be Chairman of the Council, which I was for two years before I left. I enjoyed that: that was quite a challenge.

It sounds like you got, obviously, very involved in the local community.

I did and I didn't in that I was pretty busy trying to run this property and so … and I lived a fair way out from the town, but I did get involved once I came on the Council. Yes, I did. I met a lot of very good people. It was interesting that when you get somebody outside a community, you get a different outlook on things. One of the things that happened at that time was that ETSA, as it was not known then – it was the Adelaide Electric Supply Company, had decided that they ought to expand their lines into that Bordertown district which, in the past, had just had their own generating supply. The local Council members who were negotiating with the Supply Company laid down certain, what I thought were impossible, conditions for the purchase of their plant and the right to supply power. When I got on the Council the Chairman of the Electric Supply Company suggested that perhaps they'd be happier negotiating with me than with some of the older members of the Council. We managed to reach an agreement within

three months and they took it over. I can say that if it hadn't … Because I wasn't quite so – one would have to say parochial – that helped to promote the district a bit.

A bit of an outsider's perspective.

I think so, yes. And I had experienced with how things happened in Adelaide too.

It's quite common in country areas, rural towns and so on for outsiders to be kept on the outside.

Yes. (laughs)

You actually worked your way in!

I was lucky. There was rivalry between the Bordertown, Keith districts and here was somebody who was completely new and had no axe to grind about either place and they felt that was a good person to have in between. Anyway, out of there is how I became involved in the Vertebrate Pests. It wasn't Vertebrate Pest, it was called the Vermin Committee when it was first formed because of my position on the Council and my interest in the rabbit control in Bordertown.

[23:25] We'll pick up on that in a moment. I just wanted to ask you, I was going to ask you earlier, a question – your expectations about moving to Bordertown? When you first went down there, did you have a vision or an idea that this might be a long-term … this is where you wanted to be, this is what you wanted to do, or were you just testing the water?

I didn't really have any idea of what I wanted to end up as. As I mentioned, I didn't have a background on the land and I was so busy trying to know how it all worked and how I was going to cope with what I was doing, but for many years that's about all I did really, was to learn how to weld and how you … what sort of a beast you were trying to buy and what sort of a sheep you were trying to buy. I hadn't thought much beyond that until the latter years at Bordertown when I'd settled down a bit and got a bit of experience and then I had thought that maybe one day I could move onto something else; perhaps like managing the family property on Lake Alexandrina. But at that stage the current manager was very good and I certainly didn't want to disrupt things there. It wasn't until he decided he was at retiring age and wanted to retire that my father said, 'What about coming to Yalkuri and running it?'. Although both my wife and I were very happy at Bordertown and had become certainly part of the community, I thought – although she didn't at the time – I felt that it would be good move to make.

[25:30] We'll pick up on that in a moment. But in the earlier period when you were establishing yourself, were there times when you thought 'This is almost too hard', when you were clearing the scrub and working away? Did you feel like …?

Yes, I think I …

Did you question the wisdom of your decision?

I certainly questioned the wisdom of my decision when one day I had bought a harvester, very old harvester, second-hand harvester, and without … I should've known better, but I managed

to get my hand into the works and before I could stop the machine it'd crushed a couple of fingers not, fortunately, terribly badly but it certainly hurt and I was in hospital for a while. The other thing was that I bought a mob of sheep that had footrot. I should've perhaps not done that, known better. Anyway, in subsequent years when we were trying to eradicate footrot from the flock, one of the sheep kicked me in the eye. I again was in hospital for some time and nearly lost an eye. Those things made you think that it was all getting a bit hard. But I still felt that it was worthwhile. (laughs)

I was also thinking the nature of the land, as you mentioned, the AMP Scheme and further southeast you've got soldier settlers and so on, and people moving and finding it's pretty tough going ...

Yes.

… the nature of the land, the tasks and so on.

Indeed, it was. Particularly in that area it was pretty hard going because clearing scrub as well is always hard work. I felt perhaps that the future was not very bright there. It would never be high-carrying capacity country. It was always grazing country. It was never farming country because of the nature of the sand hills. Because of that fact as well, it would not carry a lot of stock in that area. I did realise, or began to realise in the end, that there were better places to farm.

[28:00] I'll cut you off, so to speak, with two major themes developing. One is, of course, the move to Lake Alexandrina and the other is the rabbits and the vermin. Perhaps we could look at Lake Alexandrina first. What happened in the move from Bordertown to the next property?

That was quite a major move, because we had to sell. We didn't have to, but I'd decided I would sell the Bordertown property so we moved some of our stock down to Yalkuri and we had to clean it all up and so on. Eventually when we arrived at Yalkuri in January 1963, I thought I'd done about five years work in one year. Then I began to … The full impact of what I'd done became apparent when I was confronted with the financial position which wasn't good because there was quite a big debt on the place and there were just thousands and thousands of rabbits on it which were preventing many stock being carried and it was creating sand drifts on which nothing could grow and the stock were not doing well. They were probably … The rabbits had not contributed to the disease but because they weren't getting enough to eat they weren't healthy, so there was a major problem in front of me.

You'd had the rabbits at Bordertown and …

Yes, but not as badly at Bordertown, no.

But had there been attempts at rabbit control at Bordertown?

Bordertown: in the days when it was just a scrub property, there weren't any rabbits there, very few rabbits anyway, because they had nothing to eat. It was only in the last few years that I'd realised that that was going to be a severe problem, particularly down the track, because we

couldn't net the scrub off in the cleared land very economically. We were always moving forward with the clearing and so you didn't want to put up an expensive netting fence to stop them. We had to try and get into the scrub and deal with them and that was a very big problem.

From talking to other people, I get the impression that rabbits might be almost the number 1 problem.

Yes. Of the State as whole that was the case too, perhaps not in the farming areas where obviously they could farm their land and it was pretty turned over and so on, but in the grazing areas, particularly in the South East, it was the major problem.

[31:35] **End Side A, Tape 1**
Tape 1, Side B

[0:05] … to remote properties, the one you're leaving and the one you're moving to, and perhaps you could outline a bit more about your attempts to solve the problem.

I suppose at the property at Bordertown it was a case of trying to rip and get rid of the burrows that were apparent in the scrub and tended to come into the open country. But I'd have to qualify it and say although they were a problem it wasn't a major problem there. It wasn't until I got to Yalkuri on Lake Alexandrina that I realised just how immense the problem could be. I had no real answer to it at that stage. Perhaps if I just tell you how the previous management had tried to cope with it. On this area ... the total area was 16 000 acres (6475 ha), but some of that was scrub: there would've been 3000 acres (1214 ha) of scrub and probably about 2 to 3000 acres of swamp country, low-lying swamp, samphire country, neither of which were conducive to how they got the rabbits. But the other 10 000 acres (4047 ha) were swarming with them. It was again an area where there was some sandy country, not nearly as much as at Bordertown, but some sandy country and the rest of it was a sandy loam which suited rabbits very well, limestone outcrops where they could get in a burrow and hide. They just loved it. To try and deal with this the management had four permanent rabbit trappers who did nothing else but trap rabbits for a living. There were six or seven station hands who worked during the day as station hands and at night they would go out and trap or net rabbits. I think they ended up making more money out of rabbits than they did out of their wages as station hands. Consequently, having been up all night they weren't much good the next day. But, anyway, that's how things were. They had one of the men at least would've been on a tractor most of the time ripping burrows. As fast as he ripped them they would open up again, because there was still more rabbits to come into them. I don't think that they had made – I guess they must've killed a lot of rabbits and trapped a lot of rabbits – but they'd made no real dent in the population. Myxomatosis had been through the property because it was conducive to the spread of myxomatosis there, having lots of mosquitos as vectors and that had virtually wiped rabbits out in the late, middle '50s, but they'd come back again by the time I got there in ever-

increasing numbers, so that had passed over and although it had been a temporary success, it hadn't actually done much towards decreasing the population.

The new lot of rabbits would've been resistant.

They would've been resistant and there'd been mutations of myxomatosis as well, making resistant strains. There I was with all these rabbits and I had little idea before I went there as to how I would tackle this. If I'd then said, that I had not … No, I'd better start from the beginning. I had heard that there was a new outlook by the Department of Lands who were controlling rabbits, or were supposed to control rabbits, at the time in that they'd decided to appoint an officer as an Advisory Officer to the Department of Lands on rabbit control who happened to be an ex-employee of CSIRO who had done research on rabbit control and more particularly in dingo control, called John Bromell. He became a member of the Department of Lands, an officer of the Department of Lands, early in 1962. He travelled around the State trying to find people, farmers, who would be suitable to be members of a newly formed Rabbit Advisory Committee. That's how I met him down at Bordertown. He came out to see me and talk to me. I heard nothing for quite some time about this until I got a letter from the then Acting Minister of Agriculture, David Brookman, asking me if I'd join this committee. Naturally, being interested, I said, 'Yes I would'. [John] Bromell contacted me and filled me in a bit about what the plan was, but he said that he wanted some land area with lots of rabbits to conduct trials on the use of the bait material for the relatively new poison, 1080, which so far had not been used in South Australia, although it had in Victoria. If I was prepared to give him some country on Yalkuri to conduct these trials, he would undertake to advise me how to use 1080 (probably using oats), because it was cheap and easy and poison the whole property. I said, 'Yes'. That all started about three weeks after I'd got to Yalkuri in January 1963.

That was the beginning of the trial. How long was it planned to go for?

The actual trials that he did lasted all that summer. He was trying to find the best bait material between oats and carrots: the Victorians had used carrots and they were very good bait material but they were (a) expensive and (b) very … they required cutting up and it was more difficult to feed them out through a machine. Oats were cheaper and very easy to feed through a machine in a trail. Anyway, he did these trials and the end result was that oats were certainly in our climate in South Australia generally a much more effective and cheaper bait material. As far as my own part in this was concerned, he showed us how to ... We bought two bait-layers to feed out the oats: we started on one on the eastern side of the property and moved westwards with two bait-layers going almost continuously because you have to free feed the rabbits for three times before you put out the poison mix. After a bit it was obvious it was an outstanding success. The rabbits were … Because of the huge numbers they all congregated on the trails and they were just dead everywhere. The trappers decided there wasn't enough money left, so

they went voluntarily. I made it a condition with the men that they would cease trapping rabbits anyway because they'd only disturb them, which didn't please them very much, but they realised that that had to happen. We went on and within five months we'd got to the other end of the place and poisoned the whole thing. The other interesting thing was there was a lot of debate as to whether we would poison a lot of the water birds that were on the property and the raptor birds – the hawks and eagles and things. Although we carefully searched after each poisoning, we didn't find one bird that was poisoned, which was a great relief because had that been the case we would've had problems. Having started with a figure of five warrens to an acre over 10 000 acres (4047 ha), each of which contained an average of seven rabbits and you multiply that by 10 000, that's a lot of rabbits. We ended up with very few rabbits. Also, we'd used more 1080 that year than the whole of Victoria had in that year. You can see the scale of the thing was fairly big.

It sounds like you were baiting, in effect, the whole property?

We were. We baited the whole property. All of the 10 000 acres of it.

You didn't have to worry about the scrub or …?

We didn't attempt to do the scrub or anything, no.

No advantage in doing that?

No advantage, no, it wouldn't have. There weren't rabbits there. The scrub was … Sorry I would have to point out that the scrub was, in fact, netted off, so we had control. There were rabbits in the scrub but we'd at that point not even thought of controlling them. We just netted them off and made sure that the netting was in good condition.

What about the adjoining properties; just have to rely on good fencing or …?

The adjoining properties also had thousands of rabbits. That was one of our main things that we were very lucky in this sense that the southern boundary was the Coorong, the western boundary was Lake Alexandrina, and the northern boundary was one of our areas of scrub that we had netted. So we only had the eastern boundary to worry about and that we had netted, we did net at the time as well, and we patrolled that netting pretty constantly to try and keep them out. Occasionally there might be one come in, but we were very fortunate that we were in that locality that we only had a quarter of the boundary had a rabbit problem against it.

Roughly how long would it have taken for the property to be declared rabbit free?

By the end of that summer we probably would've killed 98% of the rabbits on the property. We then had a man going around on a tractor with a ripper ripping up all the holes making sure that they didn't re-open. Having ripped them he would then go back with a bait material like phostoxin, which is a phosphorous pellet which emits a phosphorous gas, which killed the rabbits down the holes. You had to fill in the hole [if] it did re-open and in that way we

managed to pretty well eliminate them from the area of the property, except on the Coorong where we had limestone cliffs that were very difficult – well they were almost impossible to do any work. We fortunately had an overseer whose wife got sucked into this rabbit fever. She had two little dogs and she used to go along the cliffs and get these dogs to go down the holes in the cliffs and so she virtually got the rabbits out of the cliffs which was great. We ended up with almost no rabbits say in two years time, something like that.

[14:30] John Bromell was running the trial?

He certainly was advising us what to do, yes.

Did he come down …?

He lived there for probably … He used to go back to Adelaide now and again, but he virtually lived there while he was doing these trials because he did the work himself. He actually sat on a tractor and put his material out. He would've been there for four or five months, which was a great help to me. (laughs)

Because I imagined from your earlier comment that he might've had you doing that.

No, no.

Was that one of the conditions?

No, it wasn't one of the conditions. No, I wasn't doing it. In fact, I didn't have time to do much of the actual work myself because I was too busy organising other things on the place and trying to get the fences straightened out, which were pretty bad, and do all the other things with the livestock.

That was a major achievement.

It was a major achievement. I've got to say it was largely due to Bromell who helped us make it that way. It became a focus from then on for people to come and look at how you do effectively control rabbits. The Meningie Council were interested. They bought a machine. We managed to persuade the Tatiara Council, because of my association with them, that they'd do the same thing. Gradually it spread through the State.

[16:40] Of course, the rabbit problem itself continued on.

The rabbit problem did continue on for a long time. Perhaps I could go back to the formation of this Rabbit Advisory Committee, which first of all started as a foundation of the thing. The Director of Lands was the chairman. Bromell was the Advisory Officer. Initially there was a man called Reg Osborne who had been the previous Vermin Officer for the State, but he had no hope of doing anything. (A) He didn't have enough power. (B) He didn't have any time and all he could do was to ask the Councils to send out notices once a year to tell the landholders to control the rabbits which they never did really. He, thankfully, bowed out after about 12 months on this. He was due for retirement anyway, but he started on that committee. The other person

who was on it was a landholder besides myself, a man called Frank Heaslip who was a farmer at Carrieton in the north, who'd been to New Zealand and seen how effectively they had controlled their rabbits. He had very different country to ours, but he had ripped and hadn't used 1080, had ripped and closed off the lines there and had good rabbit controls. He and I were the two landholder members on the committee.

This committee was specifically for rabbit …?

This was specifically, at this stage, for … It was called the Vermin Advisory Committee. Therefore we should've been interested in dingo control as well, but we felt the main thrust at this point should've been rabbits rather than anything else. Foxes were a secondary problem that we hadn't even thought of tackling. Dingoes came into it a bit soon after that because (I don't want to jump about too much) Bromell had done research into dingo control. He was very interested in trying to (a) control dingoes that got through the dog fence in the north of the State and (b) more particularly in the properties outside of the dog fence, north of that, where there were a great number of calves being killed by dingoes. I pushed that a bit because I happened to be a partner in Clifton Hills, which was a large cattle station north of Marree, which was having a lot of dingo trouble at the time. But at that stage we hadn't started to think about how we were going to control dingoes. That would've come five years further on. Our primary task was to go around the State, see what the rabbit problem was and then try and get the District Councils to become interested in buying bait-layers and organising their landholders as well to control rabbits.

[21:00] Just one small point there. You mentioned Clifton Hills. You'd taken over or taken on a part of that station as a part owner?

It was a partnership. I was a part-owner, but we had a general manager and a manager on the station, which was one of the bigger cattle properties up there. It was a very fortunate location in that it was on the Diamantina and the Cooper flood plains and so most years there was good feed on the property, which is most unusual in that area, so we were able to fatten cattle. As far as pests were concerned, certainly the dingoes were a problem. That's really how I became interested in dingo control, through that property.

When did you take on Clifton Hills?

Soon after I went to Yalkuri my brother-in-law, David Brookman, was asked to be a partner and they wanted somebody else so he suggested that I should become a partner. I said, 'Yes', a bit reluctantly because I had a lot of other things I was … trying to get Yalkuri going. But I said, 'Yes' and I was very glad I did, in the future. That's how I got into it. I was probably … I wasn't a big partner: there would've been ten partners at that time.

That's a change in tack a little bit in moving from the farmer into the pastoral …

Yes. It was a bit of change, but I would go up there not very often, once or twice a year at the outside. It was interesting country. Always enjoyed going up there and seeing what was happening and camping. Eventually I became chairman of the company for a while.

[23:25] We'll probably come back to that part when we get on to dog fences and all sorts of things. You're setting up your property, the running of the property, at Lake Alexandrina and you've got the rabbits almost under control and you're sitting on the Vermin Control Advisory Committee as a new body.

Yes, that's correct and …

And you've got plenty of spare time for other things too! (both laugh)

What happened in that sense is that after I'd been on Yalkuri for I guess it was only three years, I applied for a Nuffield farming scholarship, which was a scholarship which Lord Nuffield had created in England for the colonies, in those days, and in Australia there was one farmer selected from each State every year so when South Australia's turn came round every – how many States? – every six years and 1966 was the year that there was due to be another South Australian selected and I was fortunate enough to be selected that year. You had to nominate what you wanted to study in the UK where the scholarship was largely held in those days and I thought that probably what I could learn best to my advantage was farm management where the English farmers were well in front of us in terms of how they did their accounting and kept their books and so on and designed the management of their properties. That's what I looked at when I was there. It was a most rewarding time. I learnt a lot there and met a lot of interesting people and met scholars from the other colonies or Commonwealth countries they were then – Canada, New Zealand, one from Zimbabwe or Rhodesia as it was then – sorry there were two: that's right, there were two scholars from each country, not one. So there would've been about eight or nine of us there. We became great friends and we visited each other a bit after that but primarily it widened your perspective as well as learning how to run a farm. When I came back to South Australia, I was asked to give a few talks about what I'd done and was taken up by the then farming organisation (I wouldn't describe it as a farming organisation, but the Stockowners Association) who'd looked after the people with livestock in this State and toured around with them giving talks and became a member of the Executive Committee and Vice-President in the end. I got a job as a member of the committee, the Research Committee of the Wool Board, and I was on the CSIRO State Committee for a while. Those things seem to lead on from that. I wasn't exactly un-busy.

Were you happy to serve on these?

Yes, because …

You took them on, but did you need that broader contribution to …?

It helped me too, just as much as it did anybody else, because I learnt a lot more through being on them. That was great.

You had someone managing the property for you?

No, I didn't. I actually thought about that but I didn't want to lose the personal contact I had by running it myself. While I could see that there would be difficulties, I just thought I wanted to keep my finger on the pulse and so, with difficulty, I did that reasonably effectively.

What happened in the case of the trip to the UK?

Then the overseer took over, and he was a good overseer and he did a good job, but he would not have been … I'd have to say that he did a good job, but I wouldn't have appointed him as a permanent manager and nor indeed did I think that I wanted to. That went on as it was, more or less, with me spending less time on the property.

[28:55] So you've got a range of activities and Boards and the Advisory Committee and so on and …

Yes, I did, yes. The other thing that did happen was that after I'd been back for a couple of years a friend of mine who was a director of the Finance Corporation of Australia approached me and asked if I would have a look at the five pastoral properties they had in the New England area of New South Wales, because he was a little concerned about the management there. I went up with him and wrote a report for the Board and that ended up with me being their Pastoral Advisor for some years in that area. I used to go up there four times a year for a week. Then I also became – same region – a director of Koonoona Proprietors, which was a big Merino stud in the north of the State, and one or two smaller properties as a consultant to these people. In that sense, I was probably unique at the time because I was perhaps the only true farming consultant: the other consultants that were operating were more professional consultants who had an office in Adelaide, had no direct connection to the land. Maybe that was a help to me. Maybe to them too. That went on for some years. Eventually FCA collapsed and they sold their properties and so I couldn't do that. I gradually felt I was travelling about a bit too much and was quite thankful when that finished and I spent more time with Yalkuri.

But again, that's a part-time …?

A part-time job.

Part-time job and these other part-time responsibilities, between them all it adds up to more than full-time.

Yes, I was pretty busy, yes. Actually, I was then asked to go into [Federal] Parliament when in 1975 Dr Forbes resigned his seat in the South East. I said I would think about it and then I said I would try and be a candidate so I spent a few months travelling around the South East. Luckily for me I think, about a month before the pre-selection was due, I had a mild flutter in

my heart. My doctor said to me, 'Look, you'd be stupid to go on with this', so I pulled out and that was probably a good thing from my point of view in some ways, so I didn't go on with it.

Might've been one thing too many.

Yes, it would've been. I don't know that I would've made a very good politician anyway.

That brings us up to the mid '70s in terms of your career and opportunities and working life and so on, I say career because some of these things … like the Wool Board … Really, you're on a learning curve. As you said, you were learning. It seems like each committee leads to another responsibility.

True. Yes. From that point on … I also had the feeling that you can't stay on these things beyond a certain point because you should be replaced by somebody else. The one thing that I didn't quite feel glad about was the Vertebrate Pest Authority, which it had then become, because I thought it was …

[33:35] **End Side B, Tape 1**
Tape 2, Side A

[0:15] Richard, you were just about to outline a little bit about the activities you were involved with on the Wool Research Committee.

Yes. … That was a most interesting period of my life. At that stage the wool industry was creating a lot of money. The Wool Board was a big organisation and the Wool Research Committee was handling a lot of funds, in the millions of dollars.

This is the 1960s?

Yes, 1960s. It would've been late '60s, '70s. The chairman of the Research Committee was a member of the Wool Board – Begus, Arthur Begus. There was one other member of the Board – a McBride from South Australia, Phillip McBride; there was me who was a farmer with some scientific background; and there were a couple of scientists – one of whom was Dr Morris, who was actually a Doctor of [Veterinary Science], but he done a lot of genetic research and was a brilliant geneticist and had a farm of his own – the other scientist was a wool scientist from Armidale (his name at the moment escapes me, but I could remember it at some stage, doesn't matter anyway). But that was roughly the composition of the committee. We allocated funds to various organisations. For instance, one of them was the South Australian Vertebrate Pest Authority, as it was then, and they had put in a submission for a research officer to do research on rabbits generally. Of course, as you could imagine, I was right behind that when it came to the committee (laughs) and they were given a substantial sum of money to appoint a man called Dr Cook who turned out to be an absolutely outstanding research worker. Unfortunately he has now left the State and he's in the Galagapos Islands, looking at turtles, but that's ... Anyway, there was that side of it. We supported a lot of the textile industry into wool research in their field and the Division of Animal Production, which were probably largely dealing with sheep at that time, into various improvements and methods of sheep breeding and wool technology,

feeding of sheep and genetic improvements in the breeding and that sort of thing. We were asked to support the cattle industry but we didn't because that was perhaps outside, naturally, the scope of what the wool industry ought to be responsible for, but we also gave a fair bit of money to environmental projects like the burning of woody weeds, the control of Beetoo bush on the coast of New South Wales, things that perhaps were more indirectly affecting the wool industry than anything else, but that sort of thing was where the money went. All that was of great interest to me because some of the things I hadn't heard of at the time and that was a great experience to be on that committee.

How long did you serve for, roughly?

I would've been there for about seven or eight years. Then we put up a project which … I'll have to say that most of the money had gone to CSIRO. When we started going to the universities as well they [CSIRO] didn't like it much. I had felt that that was a pity, so I was either going to resign or they were going to kick me out, so that happened anyway. [Dr Morris and I were asked to resign.]

So that would've been into the mid '70s?

Yes. It was towards the end of the '70s. Yes, it would've been about '78.

[5:55] As I said earlier, these sorts of activities you're providing and also developing at the same time a broader perspective.

Yes, indeed. That helped me in some of the other things I was doing like being a consultant to FCA and so on.

That consultancy, as you mentioned, came to a …

Yes, that came to a sticky end, yes. I've just forgotten exactly what date that was, but it would've been the early '80s. Without going into the details, they folded up and I was responsible for selling their properties. I was ready to probably … I wasn't sorry that that came to an end, because it was clearly a fairly taxing proposition going up there quite a lot. Luckily, I had helped to turn the properties around and make them financially viable. They were making a bit of money for FCA when I left, so I felt quite satisfied about that. Just a bit sorry that it hadn't gone on a little bit longer, we could've made some more money. But, then again, I was paid a salary for doing this but I felt that I could've been probably making a better use of my time financially if I'd stayed at home.

[7:35] I was going to ask how the properties were going: you've got Clifton Hills …

Yes. Yalkuri was certainly steadily going ahead. We were gradually getting lucerne over most of the property by this stage. We didn't … We increased the number of breeding [cows] from 100 to eventually 1100, so that was satisfying. We'd probably reduced the sheep numbers from 10 000 to about five [thousand]. I'd taken on a fair bit of irrigated lucerne. We had quite a good

water licence and so we irrigated lucerne and sold that as lucerne hay to racehorse people. In fact, we even sold some hay to the Sultan of Brunei at one stage. That was an interesting exercise because he was very fussy: it had to be free of everything – no beetles, no diseases; and he sent somebody down to inspect it every year, but they use ... We shipped it in a container, in containers, to Singapore. It was then off-loaded onto Arab dhows, where it was ... and it was individually loaded bale-by-bale onto these dhows where it was then shipped to Brunei and used for his polo ponies. (laughs) For the Sultan you can do that!

[9:15] A little bit of international trade.

Yes. I never actually got to see the Sultan, but it was interesting all the same. That was another aspect of something that I developed, perhaps with the idea that we would not put all our eggs into one or two baskets. Yes, the property was going pretty well. The big thing that hit us in the early ’80s, mid ’80s, early ’80s would’ve been the aphid problem with lucerne, which absolutely destroyed the variety that we’d been sowing for many years, Hunter River. Although we sprayed and sprayed and spent a lot of money on that, it virtually wiped out lucerne stands overnight.

Was this a localised situation?

No, it was throughout the whole of the area. That was a major problem because then all of a sudden we’d gone from having good lucerne stands to very poor lucerne stands. Some of it survived under cattle grazing, but under sheep grazing it didn’t because they graze more closely. We were probably in danger of losing half our … say a third of our production in terms of livestock. We had to spend a lot of money going into the new aphid-resistant varieties, some of which weren’t probably quite as productive as the Hunter River strain. That was a fairly big exercise, just resowing thousand of acres of land. In the end, we probably got slightly better pastures out of it all, but no better than what we’d been growing 15 years before. In fact, the other interesting thing about the lucerne-growing aspect of it was that the water table, when we started, was about 8 ft below the surface. The lucerne was drawing on water at a fairly large rate from that 8 ft level and after about 10 years it went down to between 30 and 40 ft, so obviously the roots of the lucerne were going down and down and absorbing all this moisture. Consequently, the stand became less rigorous and so we did lose production but that was going to happen anyway whatever we did. It was just a bit of a change of scene. Originally, before Lake Alexandrina was fresh water we had a lot of wells to water the stock. They just disappeared and luckily the lake had filled so we could pipe it from there, but had we not had that facility we would’ve been in serious trouble with water.

[12:50] They’re the sorts of the broader dimensions of agriculture, the farming life and so on. You’ve got the natural wells; you’ve got problems with, in this case, aphids attacking a crop; whether you

replace another crop or the same crop; and you've got environmental issues and weather patterns. A very complex world.

Yes, it certainly is. The other thing that I did begin to realise, and this was into the '80s, that I did clear a little of the scrub country that was there, but by that time the government had put restrictions on land clearing, quite rightly and so although we cleared another 500 acres (202 ha) of the local scrub I then began to see we are going to destroy every bit of native vegetation. So I thought, 'We're going to stop' and we made a Heritage Agreement on two areas: one of 800 (324 ha) and one of 1000 acres (405 ha) of different type of scrub. One was Mallee scrub and the other was sheoaks in yacca scrub. We put those under a Heritage Agreement where they could no longer be cleared.

Those Heritage Agreements are a relatively recent development?

They came in in the mid '80s, yes.

That, in a sense, ties up the land from …

That goes on in … The undertaking is that you are not … You wouldn't be allowed to clear it anyway, but you don't go clear it, you keep it in that state. We were given some help in that they did help to pay for netting around it. We could've applied for rabbit and vermin control, but we did that ourselves anyway.

But it's interesting given your own experiences with Bordertown and clearing the scrub there and …

Yes, indeed. Complete …

Thirty years later perhaps, it's Richard Harvey saying, 'Hang on. We'd better stop, stop'.

Yes, a completely different outlook. That would apply throughout the State in many ways. When I went to Bordertown, you were encouraged in fact. The tax, the taxation system was designed to encourage you to do that because you were given big tax exemptions for all that work; you didn't have to declare it as a capital cost, you could write it off. You can no longer do that because you can't clear anyway, but the whole attitude has changed, both in government and mostly in the farming industry.

In this case you were involved at the level of making a Heritage Agreement, but did you get involved in the more broader questions of native vegetation and …?

I did because … Actually it would've been just before then, in the early '80s, again I somehow managed to be invited on to the National Parks Advisory Committee of South Australia. I spent quite some years on that. I can't remember when it would've come to an end. It was just before I was burnt in 1990, so it would've been in the late '80s. I found that very interesting because we were then trying to make sure that the national parks were looked after and that they were probably increased in size, general size, throughout the State, the weeds were controlled and the rabbits were controlled and all the rest of it. Yes, I became much more interested in the environment because of this.

[17:40] From the early ’70s all the way through to the present, you’ve got this strong environmental theme, environmental interests coming through. Just generally, in metropolitan Adelaide or the rural areas, a distinctly greater awareness of environmental issues. Having said that, in the immediate post-war, post-World War Two period, you’ve got a Soil Conservation Branch in the Department of Agriculture looking at how to protect soils.

Yes, indeed.

It’s just probably a greater emphasis now, whereas the awareness earlier on was perhaps more limited. I don’t know.

Yes. Also, the other thing, now I think of it, that was changed in much the same way was the attitude to water use. Because we irrigated from Lake Alexandrina and down our end of the river system there is no [restriction], you could take out as much water as you liked for many, many years. Then it would’ve been about the late ’70s the government decided to restrict the use of water in that area. They appointed a committee (in which I was asked to join in as well) to determine what allocation we would give to all the water users around the lakes area and a bit further up the river. I can remember distinctly thinking, ‘I’ve got a vested interest in all of this. Perhaps I shouldn’t be on it’. But at least I had some idea of what was a practical amount to give to a farmer who wanted to irrigate. We determined the quotas for all farmers and every farmer had to have meter put on his pump so you knew what he was using and that was inspected from time-to-time. Looking back on it, they were very generous allocations and by the beginning of the ’80s the government began to realise that perhaps there was too much water being used so they created a Water Resources Tribunal through the court system which looked at any application from anybody – vegetable growers or farmers or anybody who wanted to use more water. I was appointed to that body too. I suppose we spent quite a bit of time mostly knocking back these people who wanted extra water for various reasons or wanted to retain their licence. It just showed you the change in attitude of the government and the people who were doing it.

Of course the governments come and go and the administration carries on, the bureaucracy: in a sense it’s a bureaucracy that maintains that.

It is indeed. Although to be fair, the governments, whoever was in power, the Ministers maintained the same attitude right through. One of the frustrating things was in that particular sphere, I can well remember a farmer’s wife who came in looking terrific, all dolled up, who was pleading on behalf of her husband who was sick: [they] ought to get a bit more water because they’ve got to exist and they were trying to get a certain income so that they could educate their family and this. Again, I wasn’t sure that this was a fair case, but anyway as a tribunal we gave them the water and six months later they sold the farm! They were obviously doing it just to get more money to sell the farm. I felt a bit deflated after that. (laughs) On the whole we certainly helped to stop unnecessary use of irrigation water.

The fact that you were on the tribunal and the water allocation group before, I presume you're being appointed to these positions, the fact that you were also a water user didn't count against you but it might have actually counted in your favour: here's someone who understood the system.

Yes. Things have gone on from there. For instance, now my son who has carried on with a dairy and irrigated the same thing, this was a flood irrigation system and still is, he has now got an Israeli consultant in to see if he can go on to some permanent sprinkler drip system which will, I don't know, less than halve his water consumption, just because he would probably like to maintain the … He won't maintain … They're being cut-down 25% now anyway, but it will allow him to water the same area and more efficiently.

[23:55] An important theme from the Agriculture project point of view is these transitions over time. Again in your own personal experience Richard, you've got the Bordertown through to a system like this where in a sense it's not a completely, but a vastly different, world. You clearing the scrubs ...

Yes, indeed. That's right, yes.

It's always changing and we're talking here over a 50-year time-span …

Yes I suppose it is, yes that's true.

The bureaucratic organisations, the industry organisation and the various groups: it's quite a complex …

It is indeed, yes. No, it's …

I wonder how you keep your hand on it.

I sometimes wondered at the time how I did it myself. It was good fun.

[24:55] That's getting us up into the '80s, which were …

Once some of these things came to sort of … the consultancy winding down a bit and so on ... The only other thing, which is quite unrelated to agriculture, but it's something I've done, was that I was asked to join the Council of Governors of St Peter's College as a farmer, outside the city area. Now this hadn't happened for 100 years. So I said, 'OK. I'd like to do that'. I used to come down to those Council meetings and eventually became Chairman of the Financial Executive Committee reporting in on the school and that took up quite a bit of time for a while.

The mention a moment ago of facing transitions over time, it is an important thing which …

It is. Education is, yes. I was fighting for the country side of things. In these private schools they tend to be very city orientated and that's what they're for, mostly, but it's pretty hard to break in as a country person into those. I was grateful that I was able to help do that.

Not only that, at the student level, someone like St Peter's College, as an outsider one expects they'd have a much more academic focus to education and to have students going from St Peter's to Roseworthy or to do Ag. Science, you've only got a handful during the '50s and '60s I guess.

Yes, that's true. Also, for me it was a completely different thing to be doing. I found it very fascinating, interesting and rewarding.

Those sorts of things kept you active.

Yes. Anyway, then the end of that was that I then got burnt in 1990 in a bushfire on Yalkuri. When I finally recovered I thought 'I ought to be resigning because I've been away for so long', so I did in '91.

[27:35] Where was that bushfire?

That was on Yalkuri. It was actually our own bushfire. It was started by one of our men who was riding his motorbike, in November, through all the big, tall grass seeds and dry grass. He'd built up a body of grass seeds near his exhaust pipe which caught alight. He was cleaning a trough at the time. He saw this little fire but he had nothing to put it out with: although he had water in the trough, he had no means of getting it and so it gradually crept away from him. Unfortunately, it was very close to one of the blocks of scrub. By time we got down there with our fire unit it had got out into the scrub. As you can imagine, you couldn't do much with just a little fire unit so that burnt merrily all night in the scrub. We thought we'd perhaps got it contained by the next morning, but the wind changed around to the south – opposite direction – and brought it back into the grazing country. While we'd been up all night and I was pretty tired by then, we were filling up a tank of water with our truck and the fire was racing across the paddock towards us. I said to the guy I was with that we'd better get out of this. He was driving and he started her up and I hopped on the running board, away we went and we would've been well clear only he hit an enormous stone and I was thrown off. By the time I got to my feet I was in the middle of it. Luckily, I had the sense to run against the fire, run through it, otherwise I would've been curtains anyway. There I was and they took me to the Meningie Hospital and flew me to Adelaide. I was lucky to survive because I had 65% third-degree burns, which is normally enough to kill most people. I struggled through anyway in the end.

You survived the physical and the mental …?

Yes, that's true. The mental side of it seems to worry people a lot if you get burnt, but I seemed to be able to cope with that.

You've got a strong manner, if you've got the presence of mind to run against the fire.

That I had been told to do, obviously, in a grass fire. I mean you wouldn't … I don't know what you'd do in a scrub fire – you'd die anyway. But this was out on grass so that if you run through it there is a period in which you're going to get burnt, but at least you get out in the side where there isn't any fire whereas if you run with it, you're keeping up with the fire.

So if you run …

Yes, yes. But then again the reason I did get quite so badly burnt was that while I had a pair of good moleskins on so my legs weren't too bad, I had a nylon shirt and that just went up. It was a stupid thing to wear, but I just hadn't thought at the time.

You don't think it's going to happen.

No, no.

You say the presence of mind, but also the power of the mind to be able to run …

That ... There was more an instinctive thing perhaps at the time, because I certainly didn't have much time to think anyway, it was right on me. The guy who actually was driving this truck was very brave. He drove through it to pick me up. He picked me up and I could still walk, just. Then, the fire by this time was some distance away, but because it was so hot the petrol vaporised. You couldn't get going for a while. (laughs) It was terrible. I was sitting in this truck, feeling like nothing on earth and we couldn't move. Eventually we got going and I got into Meningie, had a big dose of morphine and they sent me on a helicopter to Adelaide.

It's tremendous that you got through.

Yes, you never know. This is a bit of a sideline, but I was also fortunate that [that particular time was the time of the] Grand Prix in Adelaide. The Royal Adelaide Hospital had set up a special burns unit to deal with the drivers that might get burnt on the course when they crashed. Prior to that they apparently had a very rudimentary arrangement at the hospital. I lobbed there just after all this had been set up. It was a great place to be for treatment.

It was bad luck in the first instance, good luck in the second. (both laugh)

Yes, yes. No, it was.

That led to a few changes: you mentioned not staying on at St Peter's and so on, but also your own personal life …

At that stage … I had, in fact, as I was 64 by that point …

[33:20] **End Side A, Tape 2**
Tape 2, Side B

[0:05] … because a lot of people these days have to consolidate a property to make it worthwhile.

Yes that's true. It was fortunate that happened quite easily so. My eldest son was an accountant in Adelaide so he obviously wasn't going to go and live there, but he's always been interested in the land and had been an overseer for part of his younger period there. My youngest son was already there running the dairy on the property. So he elected to take one-half. While the interim was going on, he managed the whole thing. Eventually, about a year later, they'd divided it up and it's still going that way.

So you've got one son down there running?

One son is down there running his half of the property and the other son has a manager on, who's now living in what was our homestead and running the other half.

You go down on an occasional basis?

I go down. I don't think I'd … It's their show. I have retired completely from the property but I enjoy going down and talking to them and listening to what they've got to say. I suppose they listen to me occasionally. (laughs)

A bit of a holiday for you.

Yes.

Perhaps even a working holiday in some instances?

That's right. Oh no, I enjoy that.

That brings you up-to-date with the Lake Alexandrina. What about Clifton Hills?

Clifton Hills. That actually has changed quite a bit too in that whilst we haven't changed direction in terms of what the livestock population is, I ended up (up until last year or the year before) I was chairman of the partners for about eight years. During that period, there was a remarkable change in the water use thing again, because we had these artesian bores on the property (I suppose there were five of them), which were completely uncapped and the water just poured out without any restriction. There were millions of gallons that were just wasted. Was hideous. The government decided that it was time that that stopped so they, one-by-one, capped the bores. They said to us and all the other people up there that we would have to pipe the water out into tanks and troughs and restrict the flow of water in that way. You could imagine on 5 000 000 acres (2 023 431 ha) that's quite a job. The other thing that they discovered that if they completely shut off the bore (luckily it didn't happen to us), but it was just too much for the casing of the bore and it just lifted apart. So they've always got to leave a certain amount of water flowing all the time. The way you do that is to have a trough without a float ball. You just let it run through there continuously, but at least you're only using a fraction of the water that way to the old system where you had it flowing 8" bore. That's just beginning to take effect. We've got … The government provided us money to help to buy the troughs and the tanks and we're just beginning to do that. Consequently, we've probably fenced it off into smaller areas. When I first joined the partnership we didn't have a boundary fence. We had one horse paddock fenced off, everything was done with horses. But otherwise the cattle used to go across the borders and we'd get other people's cattle and all that sort of thing. (laughs) Now, at least, the boundary is fenced and there would 10 paddocks in the property, perhaps 12, 15, and we're just beginning to put the troughs in the tanks and things into place and that's going to create a big management problem, because in the old days, in the previous period, you knew you had water there all the time. Now you would have to make regular runs which on a place that size is going to be quite a bit of extra work as you could imagine, so that's ...

Driving around or motor biking?

We would use an aeroplane. If anything goes wrong, you would then pinpoint that particular thing and you'd go out on a vehicle. We do use motorbikes for mustering, certainly, and helicopters.

Has the property expanded while you've been …?

No it hasn't expanded, no. If anything, its diminished a bit. There's some … The western end of it, or the western side, is the Simpson Desert. We virtually don't use quite a sizeable part of that at all. We fenced that off, because there just isn't anything on it. But we are gradually ... Yes, I suppose we are expanding in a sense on the existing area: we are beginning to put in new bores. When I say beginning to put in new bores, we put in one new bore (they're a quarter of a million dollars each to put in, so it's quite an expensive operation) and that has watered quite a large section of the property that had never had water before. We'll go on doing that. There would be a quarter of the place that's not grazed to any extent at all, but if it had water it would be.

So you're maintaining a maximum involvement there?

Yes, well as a partner, yes.

Do you go up on a regular basis or …?

Less so than when I was chairman, yes. (Telephone rings) I've got to answer that, it might …

[7:00] **End of session of 28 October 2004**

Session of 11 November 2004

[7:30] Richard, last time we covered a fair bit of you career as a farmer/pastoralist. Perhaps now we could pick on, more precisely, your career and involvement with the vertebrate pests, plants and so on and so forth.

Yes Bernie. My first involvement happened in 1962 when I had a visit from John Bromell who'd just been employed as a officer by the Department of Lands on advising on rabbit control, but in general vermin control. He came down to Bordertown to see me. The next I heard from him was in 1963 when the Minister of Lands sent me a letter to say that I'd been offered a position on the new Vermin Control Advisory Committee, which was to be constituted to try and upgrade the general work on vermin control in the State.

Had you been aware that the committee was being set up?

I hadn't really, except in a very general term. John Bromell had talked about trying to do it, but I hadn't heard much more than that, no.

Not something that, for example, would've come through the Agricultural Bureau or that sort of network?

No, I don't think so. I was at the time Chairman of the Tatiara Council. We had a sub-committee on weeds and vermin, but we'd not heard through the Council or me personally that there'd been any move to try and upgrade what was a pretty elementary and archaic system.

Did that Council committee, the Weeds and Vermin Committee, was that something that was just particular to the Tatiara Council?

I wouldn't have said that. It probably occurred in most of the rural councils, in varying degrees. Obviously, the South East had a greater problem with rabbits and other vermin than probably some of the councils in the drier areas, but most of them had a committee, a sub-committee, of that sort.

But this new committee coming in is a more coordinated or a stronger attempt?

Yes. The problem had been that in the past, before that period, the only contact that we'd had with the then Chief Vermin Control Officer in the Department of Lands was a yearly circular which said 'The Council must issue a notice to all landholders to control their rabbits and weeds within a certain time'. Usually it was issued in August of every year and nobody took any notice of it all, because it was just a written notice and promptly dispatched it to the bin. There was no fine for not doing it. There was no follow-up from the Council to tell you to do it. Obviously, nothing happened at all. It was up to the individual landholder if he cared to control his vermin.

Now with this new authority, this Advisory Committee, coming, you were invited to …?

Yes. I was invited to be one of the two landholder members. The others were at that stage the Director of Lands was the Chairman, was to be the proposed Chairman of the committee. The first one was Mr Grey followed closely, he retired very shortly and Jack Dunsford was there for many years as the Chairman, so he was the Chairman. Reg Osborne had the title of the Chief Vermin and Weeds Officer, but he was also the Officer for Weights and Measures, which took up most of his time in the State. John Bromell was the advisor to him in the initial stages. The other two landholder members [were] myself and Frank Heaslip who came from Carrieton in the Mid North. That's how it started. There was no staff, no other staff of any sort. Luckily for us, Dunsford was a very energetic and interested chairman because he had a background on the land. His parents or his family had been on the land. He was keen to get on with it and took what I would've thought was unusual interest for a Director of a regulatory body like Lands. Soon after we were formed as a committee we spent the next three years visiting, as a committee, most of the State and the councils involved, trying to get a picture of what the problems were.

We are going to come on to that work aspect, but just in terms of your appointment, Richard, did it come as a surprise to you to be asked to join this?

I suppose it did really, yes, because I'd never thought in terms of being on a committee of that sort. I certainly hadn't. Of course, I didn't know they were going to form it, but I was very happy to be on it because I did recognise it was an enormous problem, particularly with rabbits, so I was delighted to be able to join a thing like this.

Did you get any inkling as to why you and Frank Heaslip were selected as the landowners reps?

I can only say that Bromell was a pretty good pick of people's characters. He didn't suffer fools gladly. He was looking for people who had an interest, but also carried some weight in the community. In my case, I was Chairman of the Tatiara Council. Frank Heaslip was Chairman of the Carrieton Council. That was a big plus for Bromell because we immediately had an influence in that area.

[16:00] Of course, John had visited you when you were working on rabbits and so on. A personal rapport perhaps?

Yes, it probably had a personal rapport, certainly. Then as I described in an earlier part of the interview, soon after the committee started, he started these trials on 1080 bait material at Yalkuri where I then was in 1963 and undertook to help me to poison the whole of 16 000 acres (6475 ha) there and that created a pretty good role model for future work throughout the State because up to that point nobody had been allowed or had used 1080 poison as a control method for rabbits in the State. It worked very well. After we'd done this general tour of the State, we realised that there was an enormous amount of work to do. We started to try and get councils interested. It was concentrated at this stage in the early years on rabbit control, because that was the huge problem. Other problems like goats and dingoes and mice were relatively insignificant compared to rabbits. We went to the councils where the rabbit infestations were the highest. Strangely enough, that was the areas in which I'd lived in Meningie and Bordertown – the Tatiara Council and the Meningie District Council. At the same time, Frank Heaslip, who was on the Carrieton Council, although they had not quite the same enormous problem, they certainly had a problem and so he was able to wield a fair bit of weight in that area. Those councils were the first ones to come into – not a scheme so much, just become interested in trying to advance the two methods that seemed to be applicable at that stage to rabbit control: one was 1080 poisoning, and the other was wholesale ripping of rabbits in the north where the ground was much heavier and it was more applicable to good control by ripping.

[19:20] The next thing that happened. Having achieved a very good method of using 1080 by using oats as a bait material and putting out three feeds clean and then one poison bait, we found that was very satisfactory, but Western Australia had started using another method, a variation of that method, which was called 'one-shot oats' whereby you mixed some of the oats

with 1080, but you also had oats that didn't have 1080 and you put that out just in one hit, as one trail. We, Bromell and I, went over to Western Australia for a week or two and had a look at what they were doing and decided it was probably worth trying in South Australia because we were having difficulty in getting the landholders to go through this fairly laborious and time-consuming process of putting out four trails over a fortnight. They tended to say, 'Why should we put out three free feeds? We'll just use one and then put the poison out, or even just put the poison out'. That didn't work well at all. Anyway, we went to Western Australia. We had permission to use their one-shot oats which they'd manufactured over there and that was used for some years in South Australia, but eventually it was found that that probably gave a 60 to 70% kill after poisoning compared to 90 to 95% with the original method and so one-shot oats were discarded after that. Also, there was a risk of having mixed oats with poison more readily available than it had been before; because before when we first started only the Council officers could mix the oats, nobody else could. You were given it in a sealed drum and you had to put it out within a certain time.

That went on for some years. We gradually got a few other councils interested, but there were two major problems. The first one was that we were, in fact, an advisory committee and therefore we had no regulatory authority to tell anybody what to do. They could either accept what we said or just say, 'It sounds alright, but we can't be bothered', or something like that, not quite necessarily in those terms, but that's what they meant. The committee became a little frustrated, particularly Jack Bromell who was an enormous enthusiast about what he was doing and found that he was often dealing with people who just weren't interested in what he was talking about. After a lot of discussion amongst ourselves, by the early '70s we decided that we'd better do two things. One was to appoint a research officer in rabbit control. We were very fortunate in getting hold of Brian Cook who was quite a young PhD. He was excellent as it turned out. He became our only Research Officer to begin with. Then the second thing was that we thought we've just got to try and change the *Vermin Act* completely, or almost completely, and have a statutory authority which had power to act and tell people what to do. That took a fair bit of thinking about and formulating and finally it had to go through Parliament, but by 1975 we had the Act in place and we had the statutory authority, which was called the Vertebrate Pests Control Authority, and we had expanded that authority. It was still under the Department of Lands at that stage but we did expand it to some other landholder members: Ralph James from Lucindale and John Ridgway from that area, Lameroo, both of them chairmen of their councils in that area. We had Bernard Fennessy, who'd been with CSIRO Division of Wildlife [Research]. He had, in fact, been with us right from the start of the Vermin Committee and a great help in many ways. He agreed to go on to the Authority as an adviser. We also had a member of the Department of the Environment, as it was then called, Dr Grant

Inglis, who came to our meetings. We'd widened the scope of the original committee quite substantially. We got underway as an authority and immediately we achieved quite a bit of success. We decided we would split the State into five regions – Eyre Peninsula, the North, the Mallee and the Riverland, the South East and the Central District – and each of those regions would have a regional officer, which we would employ to coordinate all the District Councils. We still wanted to work through District Councils. That seemed the obvious way to go, but they would need somebody in the form of this regional officer to coordinate and advise the councils and get them going on general control work.

The Councils themselves were still onside?

The Councils themselves were onside and we had a lot more authority to tell them that they'd better act more positively towards rabbit control and their officers, their Vermin Officers, would in fact be trained at a training school which we had established on the Coorong. That training school operated well. In the first instance, all the Council officers came to it and that helped them enormously to know how to actually advise the landholders in methods of using 1080 and ripping and so on. That school was then held every year for many, many years to anyone new who was coming in. The second thing was that we needed more research staff because, apart from rabbits as the major pest, there were goats which were creating a lot of damage in the Flinders Ranges and that area. So Bob, Dr Henzell, was appointed to be that Research Officer. Birds in the South East, like corellas, were creating damage amongst horticultural crops. We really needed somebody else to back-up Brian Cook and his rabbit research work and that's when Ron, Dr Sinclair, became a member of the research team.

[29:35] The next thing was the dingoes were proving, or had been for many, many years, a problem in the north of the State, because they were certainly … Although there was a dog fence to try and stop them coming into the sheep areas, the fence had always had a few holes occasionally and these dingoes had not been caught below the south of the fence. North of the fence they were an even bigger problem in that they killed lots of calves, particularly in the dry season. So we appointed Peter Bird as a dingo officer, a research officer. He also organised regular baitings outside the dog fence, again with 1080 (meat baitings in this case), and he helped to coordinate efforts to track down any dingoes that had got through in to the …

[30:45] How did this tie in to the dog fence authorities? How did you liaise?

How did we liaise? The dog fence authority, the Dog Fence Board authority, was a little bit 'anti-us' in the beginning because they felt we might be usurping what they were doing. But, in actual fact, after it'd been going for a bit they were very appreciative of our efforts in stopping a lot of heavy traffic through the fence. We worked well with them because we wanted them to

make sure that there weren't any holes in the fence. Through talking with them, we managed to perhaps increase the level of surveillance that was taking place.

Was there any attempt – I suppose we're talking here on the full span of your involvement – was there any attempt for your Board to take over the dog fence? It seems a bit odd in one sense that the Vermin Authority and the dingo, Dog Board ...

Yes, I see what you're saying. Certainly we did consider that aspect of it but the Dog Fence Board was administered by the Pastoral Board, which looked after the lease country in the north. They were very jealous of their position. The landholders who constituted the Dog Fence Board felt that they wanted to keep control of the fence and make sure that it was done properly and that they had control of it and it wasn't just left to some nebulous authority in Adelaide who had other interests as well. We recognised that and we felt 'Let them go'. They had finance through the Pastoral Board to do this and they raised rates from the adjoining landholders, so really …

[33:25] **End of Side B, Tape 2**
Tape 3, Side A

[0:15] Richard before we pick up on the continuation of the overview of the various authorities and committees and boards, perhaps if we just backtrack a little bit to some of the things you've already talked about. Going back to your earliest appointment to the Vermin Control Advisory Committee. You mentioned you spent a couple of years going around the State looking at properties and looking at activities and so on. What sort of time involvement, time input did you have to committee activities? How demanding was it?

It was initially quite demanding because to visit … We didn't visit every Council in the State, of course, but we visited all regions and that did involve maybe travelling for a week at a time or four days at a time, which I found did interfere a little bit with my own other activities, farming activities. On the other hand, I learnt quite a bit from doing it. I was quite happy to let that happen.

You got to meet a wide range of people and …

Certainly, we met a wide range of people and because ... The big advantage of this initial committee was that it was very small and so there were … There were only five of us. The Director came nearly every time with us, which was terrific, because he also had a lot to do, but he came. Bromell came. There were the other … Osborne never actually went on any of these trips, but Heaslip and I went. There were four of us. With only four you could really meet most of the people that we talked to personally and get to know them to some extent. Later in the procedure when the commission was formed and so on, it was a much bigger body. I frankly got frustrated that there were just too many of us on these trips. But, yes, I met a lot of people I hadn't known and it was a well worthwhile experience, particularly in terms of understanding what the problems were.

It was useful experience from the committee's point of view and also for you personal-wise.

Yes, yes indeed.

[3:15] At the upper level, did you have dealings with the Minister – the Minister of Agriculture, the Minister of Lands?

We had little contact, officially, with the Minister of Lands. He … were the Ministers involved at that time were certainly interested, but because we were an advisory committee, we had far less contact with the Ministers than we did at a later stage when we became an authority and then there was much more involvement with the Minister, or more involvement with the Minister. But the very fact that the Ministers at the time – Quirke and Brookman (who was the Acting Minister) – had wanted to do something about it meant that they were interested and keen to get on with it.

Did you find that, in the early days, an attitude from the government about …?

Yes. There was an attitude from the government. We were very fortunate having a Director as our chairman, who was also very interested in the whole scope of the committee. He seemed to be able to extract money, either from his own Department or from the government, to do what we needed to do. But you must understand, of course, in those days we didn't have any staff. We had no research team. We had no officers outside the central area. There wasn't … The only people who were being paid was us as a committee.

And presumably the Department of Lands provided some support staff or …?

No, not really, no.

No administrative support or anything?

In the sense that they had a ... We had a Secretary that was in the Department, yes. That was it.

Minimal support that way.

Minimal, very minimal.

[5:45] You mentioned going to Western Australia to investigate the rabbit-baiting there. Did you travel elsewhere around the country?

We went to Western Australia and that was a real eye-opener because the Western Australians were years in front of us. They had a big authority – I've forgotten what they called it now – but it was a very large authority and they had …

Comparable to the Vermin …?

Comparable, but it was an authority not a committee and they had numerous people around the State. It was a much bigger State, but they were certainly far more administratively advanced than we were. Bromell and I both learnt a lot through going there. We went to Victoria, he and I, as well. We didn't feel that that was a very good arrangement there. They tended to be far more – How can I put it? – they were public servants who were less interested in actually

controlling the rabbits than keeping their job in the State government. Having said that, they had a few research people who were quite good, but I don't think we got as much from them as we did from Western Australia. That was about it. New South Wales, they had started to do something, but they were more or less at the same level as we were. And, of course, Queensland didn't really have a rabbit problem.

The other States, the Northern Territory for that matter, would've had other similar problems, vermin problems?

They did. In a sense they, the Northern Territory, certainly had dingo problems, Queensland had dingo problems. I don't think they were particularly concerned because it was a far more … There was very little government control in either of those areas and they just let the landholders … They were not particularly interested in what the landholders thought was my impression. We had considered going to New Zealand, where they were pretty advanced in rabbit control, not so much with 1080 (I don't know whether they used that then) but they had shooting teams and because of their smaller areas, they had done a very good job I understood on that. But we felt their conditions were not perhaps so directly applicable to South Australia, so – much to my regret – we cancelled the tour of New Zealand.

[9:05] You mentioned earlier that New Zealand had rabbits, but rabbits seemed to be the focus of the committee, yet it was set up as a vermin control.

Yes. The way I've been talking it certainly sounds like that. We thought at the very beginning, having done this tour around the State, that rabbits, as far as vermin were concerned, were indeed the outstanding and major problem. Then having achieved, which we didn't in the committee, but which we had hoped to do, a good level of control we would then move on to dingoes and foxes and goats and so on. But at the primary we wanted to make sure we got the Councils interested in rabbits because there was no other way really to, without setting up a completely new group of people. We had to work through the District Councils and they were the obvious ones to deal with.

[10:20] You mentioned earlier about the Dog Fence Board and the dingo problem. Of course, the Department of Lands Weeds Advisory Committee, there may be others of course. Did you have any connection with those other bodies you mentioned …?

Me personally?

Yes.

No, not personally. I knew most of the members of the Dog Fence Board. My only other association with dingoes was through being a partner in Clifton Hills where we certainly had a big population of dingoes. As an individual I was keen to push the use of 1080 baits in that area. In fact, Clifton Hills may have been one of the first stations that used baits. We used to drop them … No, we didn't drop them by air. Sorry, that's what Queensland were doing. We insisted that they be taken to the vehicle and thrown out from a vehicle because aerial baiting,

which had certainly been done, before we started in Queensland was a very random haphazard way: hundreds of baits got spread everywhere. We felt that this might prejudice us against the use of 1080 in the future if other species were killed by the baits, so we didn't go along that line.

[12:10] So the 1080 bait could've affected other livestock?

It might well have. For instance, it would've poisoned a lot of dogs if they'd had access to it. If you spread, aerial spreading, anywhere near a homestead or a house or something you've got a fair chance of knocking off quite a number of dogs. We made sure that the baits were put out miles away from any dwellings or anything and that worked pretty well. We had a bit of opposition, as one would expect, from the RSPCA, … of the animal libs, but that seemed to be controllable and we never had any serious problems that way.

[13:05] Before Brian Cook was appointed as Research Officer, did you have any way of monitoring the success of the baiting programs and other activities?

The only way we had was Jack Bromell who had been doing that work. For instance, at Yalkuri when he was doing his trials, I went out with him after we had baited on every occasion and did a spotlight count on the rabbits. Sorry, we went out before we started baiting and did a spotlight count of rabbits in a certain area and then after we'd baited we would go out and do it again and, therefore, get an idea of the percentage killed. But you could imagine when there's only one of us, it was a pretty limited way of doing it, so that there was no … Once it got into the hands of the District Councils, well … No that just didn't happen, until Cook came into the picture.

And with the Council, at the Council level, would they be relying on a similar method of observation – anecdotal evidence and …?

That was all. Yes, it was just a matter of … There was a fairly huge difference if they did it properly, so it did spread the word that way. Yes, that it was a good idea.

[14:45] We'll come back to your overview. Obviously, you're making some sort of headway because you were encouraged to stay on the Advisory Committee. You were re-appointed a couple of times and …

Yes. (laughs) In a way that was unusual because by that time as time went on and I was no longer on the Tatiara Council (because I didn't live there) and I hadn't become a member of Meningie Council (because I just felt I hadn't got time anyway), so my connection with the local authorities became a little more tenuous and the farming associations were beginning to voice objections to the fact that they didn't have a representative. Everyone wants to have a representative on everything and here was this guy Harvey who didn't represent anybody much. Why was he on there? I was fortunate perhaps to have held my position but I did and certainly until we got to the stage with the Vermin Control Authority where we were doing a pretty good job in controlling most of the major vermin that was in the State. We didn't have total control

but the goats had been very well controlled by helicopter shooting and ground shooting and Bob Henzell had all done a spectacular job in monitoring before and after again accounts of that and they virtually didn't eradicate the goats in the Flinders Ranges, but they get them down to a very low level to the extent where some of the places complaining that they weren't getting any goats to kill, so that was good. The dingoes, perhaps, wasn't quite such a spectacular operation but it certainly did reduce the number of dingoes in our case on Clifton Hills where the effect on calves was still apparent but very, very minimal so that was good. I don't know about the corellas and the bird problems: that seemed to be far more difficult to practically do much about because it ended up that you had to net your orchards and we weren't allowed to poison birds because they were native species and all that sort of thing. So Ron Sinclair got pretty discouraged about what he was doing but he did design methods of enclosing orchards that seemed quite satisfactory and alarms and things, special alarms you could have in your orchard to try and scare them away, intervals of when the gun went off and all that sort of thing was looked at and so we had comprehensively covered most of the problems with animal pests to the extent where we were beginning to think about eradication of say rabbits in certain areas by this stage, by the early '80s anyway.

How am I doing? Have I left out anything up to there?

[19:25] Just one of the comments there: your concern over a person shooting birds, an awareness of native flora, native fauna. That's growing obviously in the '70s, '80s and more recent things, like a Department of Environment for instance. But back in the '60s when you first started, were there concerns about native wildlife or the techniques of poisoning and types of poison, herbicides of weeds, 1080 baiting for the rabbits?

I wasn't at that stage in the herbicide part of it, but there was great concern as far as I was concerned at Yalkuri when we did this initial poisoning with 1080 bait because nobody seemed to know what the effect would be on the bird population. There we were putting out miles and miles, we put out 2000 miles of trail! There were poisoned oats everywhere and some birds do eat oats. I was fearful that we might poison a large number of birds and thereby … Not only was it bad to kill the birds but we'd certainly stir up the people who … the only term really I suppose most people use these days is 'greenies', but the people who were concerned about all that. We did go out and John and I looked straight after the poisoning at the trial especially around the perimeters of the lakes and swamps and things and we didn't find one dead bird. It was established by research afterwards by somebody who I cannot, I don't ... Sinclair did eventually, but, anyway, that a bird, the amount of 1080 that was on the material, a bird would have to eat something like 3 lb (1.1 kg) of oats to kill it. Of course, they wouldn't. The rabbits would do that. But that's how they escaped any damage.

But there were some concerns?

There were certainly concerns, yes. It wasn't just me, it was lots of people.

[22.05] We went back over some of those things from the point where you had covered the *Vermin Act* of 1975, the *Vertebrate Pests Control Act*. You mentioned earlier, Richard, that you were aware of deficiencies in the original *Vermin Act* that the Advisory Committee was under. What were some of the concerns there that you … you'd been on the Advisory Committee for 13 years.

Principally we had no … There was no regulatory control that the committee or the Department of Lands could use to enforce. The *Vermin Act* did say that you had to kill your rabbits but there were no specified penalties and that sort of thing. We did fix penalties. I can't tell you what they were now, but substantial penalties like £200 if you didn't comply with your rabbit work in a certain time. The other thing that we could now do under the ... One of the things that we were able to do under the new authority was that we had the staff and we had the officers trained in the Council areas to actually go in and do the work. As a landholder you could either do it yourself or you could, for a fee, get the Council to do your poisoning for you. If you did neither of those two things within a prescribed time, then the Vermin Control Authority had the power to say, 'After that date we'll do it for you and we'll charge you for it'. That certainly stirred up a lot of controversy. We had a few court cases on that where the landholders said that, 'We are being charged unfairly', because they suddenly realised that they were paying quite a bit of money to get their rabbits controlled, but I don't …

There were cases where …

There were cases …

… a penalty was imposed?

Indeed. There were quite a number of cases where penalties were imposed and there were several cases ... We tried usually before it came to a court case to get a member of the Commission, not the Commission, the Authority to go and see personally that landholder and talk to him and persuade him that what we wanted to do, or had done, was a good thing. Mostly that worked, but it didn't always happen and so I had to give evidence in a couple of cases that I remember as a supposedly expert in the area for the Authority on the laws. I don't think at any stage did we not win a case. We thought sometimes the magistrate didn't impose a heavy enough penalty in a lot of cases, but nevertheless we won the cases.

[26:05] Do you recall any instances where you went to see the landowner?

Yes, several. I can't now dredge back into particular cases. I can tell you one later in the piece when the Commission was formed that I did, which was quite interesting, but on the whole I must've gone to between six and twelve individual landholders before we got into court with them. With most of them we managed to make them see reason and they accepted the fact that they'd have to pay for the job and that was it.

I suppose it put you in an interesting position as a landowner going to talk to a landowner.

It did, yes it did but … Oh yes, you know.

You can understand a landholder saying, 'I won't talk to you because you're from the government' … but you're one of them … (both laugh)

That's why they made a point of always having a landholder member of the Authority to go along with an officer of the Authority because, indeed, that's exactly what happened. They'd say, 'We don't want to listen to just a bureaucrat from the government, but we might listen to a landholder'.

Of course, it's one of those situations, I suspect, where you need to move fairly quickly or fairly strongly to get action: if you get delays, the pest can spread.

That's true. We certainly didn't rush into it. We gave him every opportunity to do what I think … He would've had three warnings, something like that, over a period of time that he'd have to deal with them somehow, not necessarily poison them but he had to deal with them.

[28:15] This move to create the Authority: where is that coming from? You've mentioned some of your …

It came to a head a bit early in the '70s when, having done our initial tour around the State as a committee, we were then getting reports of plenty of rabbits in the South East of the State. So we did another, more detailed, tour of the area, the South East, and we found that there [was] enormous complacency amongst many landholders and some Councils. I felt that I knew that that was happening, but perhaps the Director of Lands and Frank Heaslip who came from the north had no idea that that was the case. When we talked about it afterwards, we had got to the stage where we were very frustrated, we were disappointed and the fact that we'd been around and we'd talked to them and they just didn't seem to be doing anything much and weren't interested, we'd have to do something pretty revolutionary to alter the situation, that we were not able to do as a committee.

But to get the legislation through, you've obviously got to have support from the politicians …

Indeed, indeed.

… and the government and so on.

Indeed. We had that. The Minister of Lands was certainly very supportive. The government of the time was supportive. I don't think there was any real serious opposition to changing the Act.

What about from the landholders and the Councils?

No. No, I don't think they even knew what was going on. (laughs)

As a statutory authority, as you indicated before, you were taking on greater responsibilities, staff, financial matters, more finances involved, someone's got to pay for all of that ...

Yes. Indeed …

… taxpayer generally …

Indeed. The taxpayer certainly had to pay more. I can't remember that we had opposition from the government of the day in to providing what must have been substantially more money to set all this up, because it happened over a period of some … Although the Act went through and there we were as an Authority and we had a few more members, but the creation of the regions and regional officers and training the District Council officers all took place over several years so that the expenditure would've been gradually getting higher without it going up in a huge amount.

But I don't think the creation of an authority is something that happens overnight, It's a situation … chasing …

Indeed. Most governments are not keen to create new authorities anyway. They had plenty as a rule that they've got to cope with and they just recognise it as extra expense. They are, generally speaking, not a bit keen but the government did see that this was a worthwhile proposition.

Of course, you're talking in the mid '70s, the Dunstan government …

That's right, yes.

… and that was an era of … There were numerous authorities being created, statutory authorities and boards being set up …

Maybe in some ways that may have helped I guess, it was a bit of a fresh approach.

Was the scope of the Advisory Committee therefore enlarged? The name changed ...

Obviously it was. We just had a lot more regulatory authority and …

… but did the scope of the activities change and ??? ???

Right, well, I suppose yes …

[33:30] **End of Side A, Tape 3**
Tape 3, Side B

[0:05] Yes, We felt that having set up the Authority and the Act had gone through Parliament and we were ready to go, we would again have to, with this enlarged authority, we had new members who hadn't been around the State before, and so we did yet another complete State tour. This time it was not as successful because there were a lot more of us and the chairman spoke each time and the rest of us just stood there saying nothing. We did meet people but, as you can appreciate, when you get instead of just two or three, it's six or seven you begin to lose track of names and obviously the councils lost track of our names. I thought at the end of it it was perhaps not a ... It was a good idea to get the new Authority members to see what was going on, but perhaps from then on we ... I put to the chairman that we ought to just then delegate areas or, if not areas, the expertise of members to regions. For instance ... He agreed to

that and so I tended to go to any Councils that were in the Meningie up through the Mallee area up to the Murray and the Upper South East; Ralph James, who was in the Lower South East, did that area; John Ridgeway did the Mallee. We, at that stage, didn't have anyone on Yorke Peninsula or Eyre Peninsula, but we did split up anyway. I went to Eyre Peninsula a couple of times as the only Commission member. That worked very well because we got far more personal contact with them.

[2:25] Again, I asked a question before about your involvement, how much time was this Authority work taking up? You were travelling around; you've got Commission/Authority meetings.

It did take up a bit more time in that we had a much bigger budget to think about too, and how we were spending it and also trying to support the newly created regional officers who had come into it in many cases without any background in rabbit control. I'm sorry I'm talking about rabbit control all the time, but that's what they were really there for, to begin with anyway. Yes, it did: it took up a bit more time. I still felt it was probably not wasted time, from my point of view, because I was … You get involved with these things and you're keen to see them working properly.

It becomes part of your working life.

It became ...

You were still based down at Yalkuri?

Yes, indeed, I was still at Yalkuri. By that stage, I was helped a bit by the fact that we'd virtually wiped out the rabbits on Yalkuri and we had good control on there. We didn't need much work on them. Generally speaking, the whole property had been straightened up and we were making a bit more money, and so I was a little freer to go and do these sort of things, which was good.

[4:10] Just on that – your own success. Did you find other landholders in your region – in your neighbourhood, so to speak – coming to see how successful your program had been?

They certainly did, yes. Yes, they did that. That was more in the early years of the Committee. Once the Authority was formed, they had all these officers of the councils who were fairly … They were well trained and they were expert so the need for something like Yalkuri as a basis of looking at what could be done had perhaps passed.

That leads me to ask, Richard, were there other properties around the State where people could go and see various success stories?

Yes, there certainly were. I couldn't name specifically where they were, but that would have happened, yes indeed.

[5:30] So the Authority's come in in 1975: perhaps you might want to cast your eye over your notes there for your overview that you were ...

If you look at it in terms of from when the Authority was formed in 1975 to when we took the next step and joined up with the existing Pest Plant Commission, which was 1985 – that was 10 years – we had achieved a lot in that time, because we had got very effective control procedures for all the major animal pests. We had a good research team – very good research team. When I think back on it, we were very lucky that we had such excellent people to operate, who were very keen on their work. I can't think there were any exceptions to that.

By then were you still being administered through the Department of ...?

No, I should have mentioned that we weren't. In 1977 the government or somebody decided, in the government, that Lands would no longer have control of the Authority and we were transferred to the Department of Agriculture. Our immediate worry, as an authority, was who was going to be the chairman. We pushed very hard for the Director of Agriculture to take that job on, but he said he was far too widely involved to do that. We had to settle for one of the deputy directors – there were two or three at that time – and that worked very well. Our initial concern that we were going to be overlooked and not given sufficient recognition within the Department was probably groundless at that stage because the chairmen that we had – there were several in that 10 years, I don't know whether you want me to mention any names or not?

OK.

The first one was Peter Trumble. He was a very good chairman. He was interested and very articulate, what I would call a very good negotiator with higher authorities for money. He was excellent. He was succeeded by Peter Barrow, who was just below me at the university and also was good. There were one or two others after that who were quite good. But we felt we were doing quite well.

I don't think in terms of moving over to the Department of Agriculture ... We changed locations, but the research team, for instance, that were based in Adelaide, went on doing the same sort of things. I would have said Bromell didn't seem to have a lot of problems with the chairman or the whole Authority. I guess what we did miss was the fact that in the Department of Lands we were the only – how would I put it? – outside group that actually worked outside the bureaucratic centre of the Department of Lands. Therefore, the successive Directors that we had there took a higher proportional interest in what we were doing, compared to our actual status in the Department of Lands. Now, that didn't happen in Agriculture. They took a much more probably rational view of things, that we were just one of their divisions and were treated appropriately. But I don't think we suffered a great deal, in spite of that.

In retrospect it might seem Agriculture was a more important ... (phone: break in recording)

[10:40] OK Richard, after a short pause there, we were just talking about how the Authority fitted into the new department it belonged to, so to speak, the Agriculture Department. It seems, in retrospect,

that Agriculture might have been a better home for the Authority, given the nature of its activities and the nature of the Department's activities.

Yes, Bernie. Strangely enough, I don't think it made any difference at all in a positive way, when we transferred to Agriculture. Certainly we had no contact at all with the rest of the Department of Lands, but within our own Authority we were – it had perhaps the advantage that we weren't in any way interfered with or had to face suggestions from anybody else as to what we were doing or how we were going about it, and we were therefore given a much – slightly clear rein with the Department of Lands. That was a plus. The other thing was that, as against that, in the Department of Agriculture there was a greater awareness that what we were doing or trying to do was important to agriculture, naturally, in the Department of Agriculture. In that sense we were better off with Agriculture. But in terms of general operation of the Authority, I don't think there was much difference.

The Authority itself, obviously it stood alone as the Authority, but where were the staff housed? In the Department of Lands itself, in the ...?

Yes. We had a separate building. I don't know where it was, but we had a separate building from the Department, so in that sense we were not in the head office building, we were in a quite different department set-up. (telephone ringing: break in recording)

We were just talking there about the physical location of the Authority.

Yes. In that sense, when we were with the Department of Lands we were certainly outside the main operating centre in Adelaide. The Authority worked quite separately without any real contact with the Department, except in terms of the Secretary of the Authority worked in the main office and the Chairman. Bromell, as the sort of chief executive officer of the Authority, had a lot of liaison with the Chairman and the Secretary. But that was about it.

The Agriculture Department, to which you then moved, the same sort of arrangement remained?

It was. We remained in the same location, in fact, when we were transferred for some time. Eventually we did move to the Waite Institute, which again isn't, in the early stages anyway, directly associated with the … It wasn't part of the Department of Agriculture, so we were still a separate entity, almost entirely.

When you moved to the Agriculture Department, that department had the Pest Plants Commission?

Yes. When we moved to Agriculture they had the … It was a different arrangement. The Pest Plants Commission which was in place at the time had only, in my recollection, one officer who was doing any research work on weeds; the rest of the quite substantial research work on weeds was done by Agriculture itself, nothing to do with the Commission – it wasn't directly related to the Commission – so that the Plants Commission had all their information in that sense from Agriculture. They didn't attempt to do any fundamental or even applied research to any extent.

It's just interesting, though, they've got a Commission on Pest Plants and here you've got the Vertebrate Pests Authority: as I said before, maybe it's a better fit in Agriculture. But is there any simple reason or explanation as to why the Authority moved from Lands to Agriculture?

It must have been considered by the government, I imagine, or by some of the directors of Agriculture and Lands that perhaps Lands should not be doing something which directly was involved with outside activities on the land. That seemed sensible, too.

Do you recall if it was a matter of discussion, as in a matter of great importance, for the Authority?

The only thing we did feel, as I've mentioned, is that we might lose a bit of influence – a bit of 'push' – if we didn't have the Director as the chairman, but that was the only difference. Otherwise we felt it was OK. Perfectly all right. If not an advantage.

[17:50] Continuing the overview, Richard, in 1985 there was a merger between Pest Plants Commission and the Vertebrate Pests Authority – about '85 …

Yes.

… the legislation came in.

Yes. That was a fairly major move. There was tremendous infighting as to who would be the dominating side, the weeds or the vermin; how many of the existing Pest Plants Commission members would come onto the new Commission; and so on. Same with us. It was quite amusing. It was surprising how much parochial attitude a lot of people took to this. I didn't think it mattered much who we had on the thing, so long as they were good members of the new Commission. But there was ... One of the problems that arose was that the Authority, the Vertebrate Pest Authority, had a big research team – a relatively big research team – operating within their scope, whereas the Plant Commission only had one person who was even remotely involved in any research or applied research, and they felt that wasn't a good idea. That went on for many years after the Commission was formed, that it was still very one-sided in favour of the vertebrate pest side, because you can't turn a doctor of philosophy who's been doing research into, say, rabbits for 10, 20 years, suddenly into a plant specialist. That was a major problem really right through until almost the end.

[20:20] To set up this new Animal and Plant Control Commission required some legislation.

It did. That took some time to work out. It was worked out quite easily in terms of the legislation. We probably took a fair bit of the legislation from the Authority and a fair bit of the legislation that the Pest Plants Commission had. That seemed to be just combined into pretty well along the same lines on which we'd both worked within our respective spheres anyway. We then continued with the chairman being a deputy director of the Department of Agriculture, and there would have been two members or perhaps three members of the Pest Plants Commission who came onto the new Commission and about the same with us, the Authority. So we ended up with about six people, three from each side, you would say, in the beginning. There wasn't much difficulty about that, I don't think. We all worked together pretty well.

Initially there was a bit of jostling for position as to whether we'd talk more about plants than we would about animals. But the plant people felt they had a far greater need for people and regulatory help than the vertebrate pest people did. In a sense that was right because we had managed to exercise a pretty good level of control of vertebrate pests, whereas – through no fault of their own – the weed problem was a far bigger one anyway. They were well behind us in that sense. They couldn't … They were a bit … felt that there shouldn't be all these animal research people hopping about on the payroll; they should be more orientated towards weeds. The problem was that it was very difficult to find instant weed research officers. What happened was that some of the vertebrate pest research officers had to turn their attention to weeds. They didn't like it much, but they did end up doing that and did it quite well.

Becoming multi-skilled, in a sense.

Multi-skilled, yes. I don't think it ever ... As you could understand, it doesn't work a 100% that way because their real interest still lies with what they've been trained to do. But, on the whole, it was quite a good solution. Because I was probably the only member of the Commission who had any background of any sort in research, I was continually being pestered by ... because I was with the Chairman, we tended to decide what was likely to be the future of this research body, and it was pretty obvious that we'd have to get more weeds people but we found them very hard to get. It has evened out a bit now.

From your perspective, Richard, where did you see the push for this new Commission coming from, the merged body? What was driving that along?

What drove that along was simply the fact that the government felt that why do you have two similar bodies going when they could save money by having one integrated body. Although it looked at the time as though perhaps it was not a good idea – because, again, out in the field all the Council officers had been trained in vertebrate pests but they hadn't been trained in weeds. So we had to start at the beginning again with them and put them through a weed school. John Bromell, who was appointed the first chief executive officer of this new commission, had had no experience with weeds either. Although he was very good about recognising that was a major part of his work, naturally it was more difficult for him too. We had to … From the top up we had a problem. And down at the other end we had then to train all these vertebrate pest officers who were in place and had to be employed – you can't just sack a public servant (couldn't then, anyway) – and so they had to be trained up as weeds officers. That took a bit of doing. But by the time I resigned from the Commission, that had happened and was working very well.

You made the comment that you're sure it's something the government was imposing on these two bodies, the merger. What about at departmental level, or within the Authority and the Commission themselves? Did they see this being the way to go?

The Department of Agriculture certainly saw it as the way to go. They wanted to merge them together and encouraged that to happen. In fact, I remember we had several sessions with one of the deputy directors who was obviously assigned to tell us it was all going to be a good thing if that happened. They were quite right: it was a good thing. The Department, whether they actually sponsored it or whether they were just told that's how it ought to be, they certainly were onside about it.

[27:50] You've got a unique position, obviously, in the record because you maintained tenure on the new commission.

I did. Again, I was even further away from local government than I'd been because I didn't at any stage go back on a District Council. But, in that sense, I was the only member who had had some … I had a degree in agriculture and a bit of research experience, whereas the rest of them hadn't had any tertiary education, I would think, at all. Bromell and the Department thought that they would try and keep me there if I could, regardless of what the Stockowners Association or the Farmers' Union thought or, indeed, what the Councils thought. Because it did get to the stage, certainly when the new Commission was formed, that there had to be at least one representative from local government. If not two: there had to be two representatives from local government. There had to be one representative from the South Australian Farmers' Federation, which turned out to be me because although I had been on their Executive Committee for a while, I was no longer there at the time, but I guess they just accepted the fact that the Department wanted to keep me there and so they went along with that. Then we had to have a representative of the Dog Fence Board. It was specified, if not in writing at least it was implicitly understood, that there had to be … we had to go to the point where there should be equality in the sexes. That took a while. I don't think there were any other prescribed bodies that to have a ... Oh, the Department of the Environment: they had to have a representative, too. We got to the stage where you had to have all these representatives of various organisations. In a sense, I was the only one who didn't represent anybody – except me! (laughs)

You maintained that connection through to about 1996?

Eight.

'98.

Yes, was when I resigned, yes.

And resigned for ...?

I was 70 at that point and I felt I'd been probably on there for too long anyway and it was time to get off and give somebody else a chance. Also, I'd have to say that by 1995 it would have been, or '6, there was this big move in the Department to try and get everyone to make a profit. You had to earn your keep and you had to sell yourself as a person who would ... or as a group of people who were financially viable. I just felt that was absolutely impossible in a

commission like this where you were regulating farmers to do a job; and how were they going to say, 'Look, we'd be happy to pay you, as a commission'?. It just wasn't on. I got pretty annoyed by saying this continually, because I couldn't see how it was going to work – and I don't think it has worked, I don't think they've ever got the Commission to be self-supporting and are never likely to, even whatever the new role may be, unless they merge with all sorts of other commissions and authorities and parts of the Department who perhaps can do that. That annoyed me, anyway, and I thought it was time I got off.

We used to get all sorts of talk about you ought to think about things like 'Were you doing a good job?', 'Had you had sufficient experience', and maybe ... All sorts of things that I'd never even thought about ...

[33:30] **End of Side B, Tape 3**
Tape 4, Side A

[0:13] Richard, we were just finishing on the previous tape about the circumstances of your resignation from the Commission, Animal and Plant Control Commission. We might come back on that. But you want to talk a bit about some of your activities.

Yes. I just wondered if it would be worth just trying to describe how the new commission perhaps worked a little bit differently to the Vermin Authority in that they had a much wider range of responsibilities. Some of the things, for instance, that happened in that period between '85 and when I resigned in '98. Firstly, there were a number of regional committees, sub-committees, formed to deal with specific problems, nearly all in weeds. For instance, broomrape was a weed of very serious significance which had come in or been discovered in the Murray Bridge area, which was overseas causing tremendous devastation in vegetables. We formed a small sub-committee which I chaired, and there was a research officer involved, Carter, [and] the local Murray Bridge officers. We met from time to time with one or two, occasionally, interstate people who knew about this, to try and first of all restrict the spread of broomrape in the paddocks in which it had been found around Murray Bridge and then to treat it with various methods of spraying and burning. That committee in some form is still going today. Although they haven't finally got rid of broomrape, they've certainly stopped it spreading to the main vegetable growing areas further up the Murray.

[2:50] Sometimes control in itself is a success.

Yes. This was definitely a success in that it, so far anyway, has not gone any further. It would have been one of the major catastrophes had it done so. It would have decimated, probably completely removed, a lot of the vegetable horticultural crops that were irrigated on the Murray.

The second one was, perhaps, of less importance, and that was dodder, which is a parasitic plant which appeared on lucerne plants in the Renmark area. Again there was a small committee, which I chaired, to try and control and, if we could, eradicate it which wasn't practical because it also … Dodder hosted on not only lucerne but a lot of the native plants and thistles and things along the edge of the Murray, and that had the effect of destroying any irrigated lucerne crops that could be used for hay or any purpose. Obviously, that was going to completely remove a whole industry in that area. If it had got further south it would have done far more damage in the irrigated lucerne areas where I lived and along the Murray further down. Over a period of time we've managed to restrict its spread. It's still up in some of the … apparent in some of the river areas, but very, very few, even on the native plants is it still there.

A third one was Cape Tulip. This was a much more limited application in the Robe district of the South East, where it had taken hold as an invasive weed. Very difficult to control. But somebody had designed a wick roller where you rolled round – the chemical was put onto the roller by a wick – and that was a very effective method. We did some trials on that and also with sprays. Now Cape Tulip is no longer a real problem in that area.

Lastly, Salvation Jane, which is still a huge problem. We tried to tackle that in the South East. Had difficulties because some of the bigger landholders didn't think it was a weed. We had regulatory powers but we found them very difficult to enforce where one particular landholder, who was a very large landholder, had perhaps 20 properties and he wasn't in the slightest bit interested. In fact, wanted to take us to court for $2 million for spraying chemicals under the regime where we could go in and spray if he didn't. He wanted to take us to court because we'd put chemicals on what was supposed to be a chemical-free pasture.

They were some of the things that happened in the new Commission, and which showed, in many instances, quite a bit of success. Then we had more meetings, obviously, in terms of landholders who had not complied with the regulations and hadn't sprayed their weeds. We'd got to the stage with rabbits that we had very few cases where we had to go in and do the work. I can't remember in the last eight or ten years of my stay that we had had to have a court case there – but we certainly started to get plenty of problems with landholders with weeds.

We had one case in particular, in the Lower South East, with a native plant called prickly acacia, which was a native and therefore you were not allowed to destroy it. This man, Zanello, had had a big area of prickly acacia and a lot of rabbits under the prickly acacia. The environment authority had said, 'Look, he can't destroy the prickly acacia'. We said, 'How's he going to get rid of his rabbits?'. I went down because he was getting very, very anti-everybody – us and the Department of Environment. I went down with a couple of guys from the

Department of Environment to have a look at it personally. He didn't actually have a shotgun in his hand but he was pretty close to that point, to keep us off the property to begin with. But eventually we went on there and had a look at the system. It was obvious, when you saw the extent of the prickly acacia and the extent of the rabbits under them, that the only thing to do was to clear it and then poison and then rip the rabbits. The two Environment officers agreed this had to happen in this case, and so we ... They couldn't give immediate authority. They had to go back to their Minister, but eventually that's what happened. It turned out that even Zanello felt that at least we'd helped him, principally because I happened to be a landholder there at the spot and could say, 'The only reasonable thing to do is to clear this native plant'. Otherwise I don't know what would have happened. That was the sort of thing that we did.

[10:10] We did branch out into baiting foxes, which up to then had not been considered a serious pest. But we did think that perhaps it was causing some problems with lamb deaths and so now we had prepared a 1080 fox bait and that was being publicised and distributed to landholders and was working quite effectively.

The other thing that ... There were other weed problems where Commission members had to go out and perhaps try and placate landholders that had been told to do things – much the same way as we'd been doing in the Authority for some years.

[11:05] Towards the end of my term on the Commission a lot of my time was spent in going round to various councils when they were told that they had to amalgamate with other councils. Not sure about the date there, but it would have been '92 or '93, something like that, when the edict was issued that there should be amalgamation of councils. Most of them hated the idea that they would be merged with somebody else, especially it was ... over the whole State that was pretty ... there was a lot of antipathy towards it. As a longstanding conciliator, I got a fair bit of that work. That was pretty difficult. Sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't, because in the end the government, in just about every case except two I can think of, had said, 'You've just got to do it. You've got to amalgamate'. But we did try and ... We came into it because that meant the boards had to amalgamate, too.

These were local boards?

The local boards had to amalgamate as well. That meant that we were not only talking to the local boards but we were talking to the whole Council as well. I was just going to read you a ...

[12:50] These were the local boards amalgamating – the local councils and the local boards. Did you still need local officers, the same number of local officers, to do the work?

You tended to want them because the problems were still the same. It wasn't that amalgamation had actually reduced the weed problem; it was still there. It meant, in effect, that the officers

just combined in one bigger group, but you didn't save any money, I don't think, by sacking any of them or getting rid of them. It was there. In fact, if anything it might have made it worse because once you'd got say five or six officers together you needed somebody to co-ordinate their work, so we ended up with – at least the councils ended up with – a man who was the co-ordinator that they'd never had before, who was paid a much higher salary. If anything it cost more. Instance of how things work. But you couldn't fight the government on that one. In some ways the amalgamation did work.

[14:15] I was just going to ... Just a little bit in – this was a monthly newsletter that came out, and this was 1998, just before I did retire. About reorganisation it said, 'Richard Harvey had a pretty tough week because he had to back up at the meeting about dodder on Wednesday' – that was in Berri where we were talking about people who ... Some of the Councils in that area wanted to be active about dodder and some of them didn't. I was asked to go up there and try and persuade the ones who didn't to come into the general picture and do things. We, one of the officers, drove up from Adelaide and went to Berri. Then the next day I had to go to Willunga to discuss the proposed formation of the regional board on the Fleurieu Peninsula and it just goes on to say, 'Although we did not get complete unanimity for an outcome, we were confident that we will be able to prepare a satisfactory proposal for presentation to a special meeting of the Commission the week after next'. It then goes on to say that 'Richard completed his week with a trip to Melbourne for the Australian Pastoral Research Trust on Friday, and he'd just come back from South Africa the Sunday before'. That's the sort of thing that made it a fairly interesting and quite busy week. That wasn't unusual.

I'm just interested you mentioned they had a monthly newsletter.

Yes. This was Richard Downward who was responsible for that. It was good because that circulated through the Commission and it went out to the regional – at least the regional officers; I'm not sure that it actually went out to all the boards, but it might have gone out to some of the boards, anyway.

Was that something that started when the Commission, the APCC, was formed?

No, no. It was probably halfway ... It would have been in the early '90s that Richard Downward started to write this.

OK.

But they had ... It was a very good move. He wrote it very well.

It was a bit of a digest of the ... and ...

Yes, it just gave a bit of insight as to what was happening and perhaps showed that some of us were doing something.

[17:30] You mentioned some of the success stories in recent times, Richard: what about some of the failures – recently, or over the longer period of your involvement? Are there any ...?

The failures, as far as I was concerned, tended to be that first of all, we didn't achieve complete eradication in any area of rabbits, which I thought might have been possible. There is a proposal that started after I left the Commission on the Narrung Peninsula, which is a peninsula with very little access to the mainland, to seal that off and create a rabbit-free zone; and there [was] encouragement for properties to have rabbit-free zones … There are a few properties that went through that. But when it got to the Narrung Peninsula that was a far more difficult task: there were big areas, quite big areas of scrubland; we had Raukkan, which was an Aboriginal area; and ... Can you just switch off the tape for a minute? (break in recording) I don't think that the Narrung Peninsula – it may one day be rabbit free but they're uphill, although the project is still ongoing.

[19:15] What about the … You touched on 1080 baiting and myxomatosis. The calicivirus? The popular conception is calicivirus has got rid of the rabbit, but has it come back?

The calicivirus has done a remarkable job, and it certainly is still operating. But I was talking to one of the research officers actually when we went up to the Waite Institute about it. He said that there are signs of mutations occurring in rabbits where they will be resistant, and that is going to accelerate. You cannot rely on calicivirus to keep them permanently under control. That's the frightening thing: that if we were unable to use 1080 through it being declared a banned poison, then we'd be in real trouble.

[20:30] The other failures we had, generally speaking, are controlling some weeds like Salvation Jane which is probably spreading. Horehound is another bad weed in certain areas which biological control hasn't worked on various things that they've brought in like moths and some fungal rusts have made slight impressions but very little. Emex, the three-cornered jack, is still pretty rife. Most of the weeds of higher rainfall areas, certainly, but we haven't got on top of those.

[21:30] As I mentioned before, control might be seen as a sign of success. Conversely, failure could constitute increasing numbers of rabbits or …

Yes, yes.

... spread of ...

It could.

How does one define failure in terms of the Commission's activities?

I would have to say that, on the whole, there have been far more success stories than failures. Certainly in the animal field, in the vertebrate pest field, it's been a good success story. But because we haven't achieved, for instance, a real eradication or an effective eradication

program, which is getting rid of every rabbit, then there's always the possibility that it might become a problem again. I hope it doesn't.

[22:30] One of the interesting things, probably a sign for perhaps future success, is this new structure that's coming in where natural resource management has started to take more of a totality view, a total view, of the soil erosion, the weed problems, pest animals, and try and work all of those things together. Will it become too complex trying to manage all of those in ...?

It might. I'm sure the concept is a good one. I would see the problem could be that, while at the top that's a good concept, when you get down to the people who are actually doing the work, in terms of whatever you like – soil erosion or anything else – you can't be an expert in everything. This is a real danger. Maybe you can be an expert in vertebrate pests and weeds; I wonder if you can combine that with soil erosion, water management and all those other things that come in. I doubt it myself. You'd have to have more staff on the ground. You'd surely have to have more specialists.

One of the things you come back to there, and it's not our job here to predict the future, but the thing you come back to is you've got to have people doing the work. It's got to be people making the thing in the future work. Likewise it's people who may last 35 years or so as well – your involvement and the people you've worked with, people on the committees and people on the ground.

It would be hard to expect whatever this new natural resource authority or whatever resource management thing is going to do, it will be much harder for the people who are in control of it to actually grasp the whole situation anyway. I would have difficulty, perhaps. If that's the case at the top, you get down to the people who've actually got to do the work – and somebody's got to do the work – it's going to be that much harder.

OK. We're not going to predict too much about the future, but it's good to have some of your preliminary observations; it would be interesting to reflect in a couple of years time, when the things up and running, how it's going.

That's one thing. The other thing is that you cannot always make a profit out of everything. In a regulatory sense, I would hope that that's not lost sight of, that if you push this making sure that it's efficient and going to make some money, I don't think you're going to get there.

That just comes back to where we finished the previous side. You were talking there about the increasing emphasis, growing emphasis, on the profit motive and I suppose some of the financial aspects of organisations and, in this case, the Commission and how it's going. I'm just wondering there, if circumstances had been different, might you have continued on for a bit longer on the Commission?

I don't think so, Bernie. I was realising that ... I had some reluctance in going back to the Commission after I was burnt in the bushfire. I'm glad that I did because it certainly helped me to focus on life in general too. But I do reach the stage … You reach the stage where you can't go on doing things and perhaps stopping somebody else younger and fresher doing it. No, I wouldn't have gone on any longer, no. Definitely not.

Thity-five years is a fair innings.

It is. (laughs) It is a very fair innings. I would have gone off even earlier, perhaps, if there hadn't been ...

There's one aspect that I haven't talked about, and that was that there were one or two of us on the new Commission – I'm talking about the 'new Commission', but the Commission as it now is – who felt that it would have been better to have a landholder as chairman of the Commission rather than a member of the Department of Agriculture, a public servant. One of those – the other one who felt pretty strongly about this – was Des Ross, who was an original member of the Pest Plants Commission. He, in fact, ... We won one point: that he became Deputy Chairman of the Commission for a while, until he resigned. That was a step forward. He then suggested that perhaps, if I was willing, we ought to try and see if I could become chairman of the Commission. I didn't ... I thought it had advantages, but I didn't want to push myself too hard personally, but he was very keen about this and had talks to Roger Wickes and the Minister and so on about it. That never happened. I don't know that it would have been a marvellous idea, but we just felt that there would have been a greater landholder input into the thing and maybe it might have been a better Commission.

That's a view that developed over time for you, that ...?

I suppose it did develop over time, yes. I felt, by the time we'd got to the stage where in the late '80s, early '90s, the chairman of the Commission had so many other responsibilities he – I thought and Des felt – couldn't spend enough time doing what he should be doing ...

Obviously, over time that the demands of the position are becoming greater and the Commission expands ...

Indeed, yes. That was what pushed us to try and implement this idea. But naturally that – not naturally, but the Department didn't like it anyway, so (laughs) it didn't happen. At least the fact that we got Des in as the Deputy Chairman had helped a bit because he, in fact, had done a similar thing with the Stirling District Council, that when they got into argument amongst themselves he became the administrator for some two or three years. Did it very well.

I'm conscious of the fact that we haven't talked a great deal about people – quite a few names have cropped up in the course of our recordings but you haven't actually talked specifically about people and their activities, but it might be something you can keep in mind for another session at some stage …

Yes, certainly.

… to follow through on. It's the people who make the story, in the end.

It does, yes.

It’s people such as yourself, Richard, who for 35 years under various guises started as a new kid there and ended up ... ...

Yes.

You’ve provided lots of useful insights into ...

That mightn’t be a bad idea because it is people who make it up. Certainly there were some quite vivid characters along the way.

Though you’ve provided some very good snapshots of things that happened and the Commission, the Committee, the Authority, the Commission’s activity and so on; we’ve got some good insights and this is, in a sense, the starting point rather than the finishing point!

I’d be glad to do that, Bernie.

Thank you very much, Richard, for the time you’ve made available and the information you’ve shared with us. Obviously, we’ll keep you posted about developments with the project.

Right. I’ve enjoyed it.

We’ll put a pause on it for now.

Right, good.

[32:00] **End of interview.**