AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BERNARD O'NEIL WITH MR GABE BYWATERS, FORMER MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, ON THE 17TH OF FEBRUARY 2004 AT SEMAPHORE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA IN REGARDS TO THE HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.

[Incorporates corrections supplied by Gabe Bywaters in June 2004.]

Well Mr Bywaters, before we get into your period as the Minister of Agriculture perhaps we could start with a little bit of your personal background and perhaps even leading in to your working career and career in politics and so on in general. It starts obviously with your date of birth and place of birth.

Well I was born in Gawler on the 2nd of September 1914. I went to the Gawler Primary School and on to the Gawler Technical School after that. From there I went to work for a greengrocer in Gawler and stayed there until I was almost 20 years of age. Then came down here to Largs Bay to take on a Rawleigh's round. Rawleigh's sold products at that time, most people know Rawleigh's products, so I had four years down here with that. That was the period of time when I met my wife and married her. Incidentally, she lived next door to where we're living now when I first met her. We were both members of the Church of Christ in Semaphore, as previously in Gawler. After we were married we went into a small delicatessen business up at Cheltenham. The war came along during that period and they wouldn't accept me in the Army so they manpowered me. At first I worked for John Dring's, the carriers, and then I went down to work on the waterfront. I was manpowered down there. I had four years working on the wharves. Having done that (I didn't enjoy the best of health, I had a fairly big breakdown in health at that time, that's incidental), we went up on to the River Murray. I bought a small block up there and worked up there with a fishing lease and grew a few vegetables and things like that for a while. Then I sold that place and went into Murray Bridge to live because I had this possibility of going into Parliament. Prior to going down there … going up there, I was in the Labor Party down here and took an active part in the Labor Party. Of course when I went up there I saw the opportunity that there was a man about to retire up there, a Labor man, and I thought I would probably step into his shoes, if I got up there and did a bit of work around. That's what happened and eventually I got into Parliament through that.

Well perhaps we could backtrack over some of those aspects, just on your family, your own family, did you have brother and sisters?

Yes, I had six sisters and one brother and two half-brothers, so I was the second to last of a big family.

Did they all live in Gawler?

Well they lived in Gawler for a start, and most of us spread out as they had to go to work and went on to Adelaide, most of them were thinking about getting married when I was at school. (Laughs)

You being younger.

That's right the older ones, yes.

You had a varied work career throughout.

Yes, that's right.

Took you through the Depression years and so on.

That's right, yes.

Do you remember much about the life and times of the Depression?

Well I worked, as I said, for a greengrocer in Gawler for £1 a week. We worked long hours at that. Of course there was not much work about anywhere else, things were pretty tight at that time. My father had retired at 70 on a very low superannuation at that time. He had three of us still going to school so it made it a little bit hard going for my mother, but eventually we seemed to get over that.

Where was your father working?

My father worked on the railways, he was a fettler on the line, did all the maintenance of the tracks.

Life around Gawler was a rural sort of environment?

Yes, although it was mostly more the industrial because they had the big foundries up there at that time – Perry's Engineering and May Bros and all those places. Then there were farms around about: I went out to sew wheat bags at different times during the harvest, things like that to get a few extra bob, and so a little bit of experience in that regard.

Was your family in Gawler itself?

Right in Gawler, yes, that's right.

It was a different sort of place then, of course.

Oh yes, of course, it was only a much smaller place then. It has spread out now like some old country towns.

And the trek coming down to Adelaide: we think now by road to Gawler is very close with fast vehicles but at that time ...

Yes. Well, I rode a bike in those days. I came down on a pushbike with my clothes and that sort of thing, stayed with my sister down here, then met my wife living next door, and … yes.

Did you ride to and from Gawler?

I did at times, yes, until eventually I bought a little car and we used to drive up and back then.

Just out of curiosity, were you riding on bituminised roads?

Bituminised the main road, yes, but all the side roads were all mud roads in the winter.

A bit of hard work pushing a bike!

Oh well, I was pretty fit in those days. (Laughs)

Also, I mean your working experience working in the shop, grocery shop, working on the wharves, you were a pretty active sort of person?

Oh yes, very active. I used to play sport and that sort of thing.

And your interest in the church.

Yes, very keen interest in the church, I was an active member.

Was the sport, was that linked with the church group?

Yes, some of it was. Tennis for instance: we had a tennis club at our church. We had a basketball club for the girls and things like that.

And you mentioned becoming involved in the ALP, the Labor Party?

Yes. When I came down here to be with Rawleigh's and met my wife and so on, I also joined up with the local sub-branch here – Ethelton and Glanville Sub-Branch. There was a man there called Harold Tapping who at that time was in the Port Adelaide Council. I became very friendly with him and I was connected with the Labour Day Council and things like that. I got into the swing of politics through that. Harold got into Parliament while I was still down here. Then when I went up to the river that's when I saw the opportunity to enter Parliament.

What attracted you to join a political party?

Well, I'd been brought up in the Labor Party.

…

My father was a Labor man, and I was brought up as a Labor man all my life and never knew anything else, but ...

Was he a Labor man as in a Labor Party member?

He wasn't an active member of the Party so much, but he used to work for them. When it came to elections he would always give out how-to-vote cards. I was giving out how-to-vote cards when I was about 10 years old. But the thing was, I've been asked this question, 'Why did you join the Labor Party?'. I said well I was born into the Labor Party and then I eventually became convinced that they were right (Laughs) so I remained a member of the Labor Party, their philosophy and mine were spot on.

I was thinking you know that you were born 1914, by 1930, 1935 there was a lot of agitation, the unrest of the depression era, and ...

Well, of course, the trouble was down here on the wharf at that time which was a very bad thing, still a sad memory I believe for the older people, but yes there was a lot of agitation and a lot of unhappiness about being out of work, plenty of street march, hunger marches, all that sort of thing those days.

I don't think you can compare it with today, but there seemed to be a lot of political awareness as well at that time.

I think people were more politically aware because they had something to be aware of, and politics was much closer to them. They used to get people would stand up on soap boxes in the main street and make their speeches. Every Friday night in Gawler was what they called the Walkers Place in Gawler where these fellows used to sprout up there. I used to think then, 'I think I could do that you know'. But it was quite interesting to go and listen to these fellows, all talking politics.

Did you do any of that soap-boxing?

I did later on. I did at the Botanic Park where we used to have a box, a stand down there in the Park, and we'd all have to take our turns (when we were in Parliament) to go down there and speak on a Sunday.

Could you elaborate a little bit more on that? I've heard about this Speakers' Corner in the Park, but …

It is a lot like a Speakers' Corner, it was a quaint place. Used to get crowds of people there of a Sunday afternoon. There wasn't only the Labor Party. There were other parties there too. Mostly radical parties and people, they weren't called parties in those days, but you had people with certain crushes on different ideas and they'd get up on the stand. There was nothing to stop them. They could go ahead as long as they could find somewhere to stand and draw a crowd around them and that sort of thing. It was most interesting; it was a very interesting place to go.

Was there one spot only or were there …?

Oh no, there were several spots there, but the main spot was where the Labor Party had it. I remember a fellow who used to be in the Labor Party – a bit of a radical type, a fellow called Thorpe – and he stood on a neighbouring place and he started off. He had a very loud voice, gradually all the Labor Party people went across there, all listening, but it wasn't long before they came back again. (Laughs)

Did you operate on a regular timeframe?

Yes, we have an allocation when we went up there.

Did you have a sort of roster?

Yes, we were rostered, usually to have at least two speakers, sometimes three. I used to come down from Murray Bridge, drive down 50 miles and drive back 50 miles to do my stint. Yes, it was all part of the job and part of the learning.

What sort of crowd did they attract, not just in numbers but …?

Well, you'd get people there that some of them were very loud and noisy and they would interject quite a bit. I remember Gough Whitlam was down there on one occasion. He was speaking and these people were all interjecting to Gough and one lady said, 'You can put your shoes under my bed any time you like …'. (Laughs)

Bit of a radical thing to say!

(Laughs) Arthur Caldwell was down there on one occasion and this fellow called, some bloke yelled, 'Arthur, You've got no guts' and Arthur just looked over and he said, he was a thin fellow, he said, 'Look at the skinny looking hairy gutted fellow over there. I've got no guts. He hasn't got any at all'. (Laughs) You used to get good repartee coming back, you'd get people having a shot. It was quite funny at times.

People would actually make an effort to come in. You say you'd come from Murray Bridge to give a speech. Other people would make an effort to …

I don't know were they came from but mostly they were local people on a Sunday afternoon's outing I think.

When did they continue to … ?

Discontinued, I think, somewhere about the '60s, I think. They just folded up.

Whereabouts in the Botanic Park were they, do you remember?

As you came through the garden, you'd go straight through, and you'd come straight through to where we were.

Through the main gate?

The main gate. Go out the main gate and go across the park and it was over there a little way towards the zoo, over that way a bit.

A bit more on the zoo side than on the Botanic Gardens side.

That's right, yes.

I don't know if there is any marker down there to show which …

I doubt if there's a marker down there.

There should be.

Most people used to go in I think from that road there, what's it called the road that runs along there?

Frome Road?

Frome Road, yes, that's right, used to go in from there.

When did you start going there?

Not until I was in Parliament. I used to go up there before, but I didn't speak until I was in Parliament.

Would that have been going in the '30s.

Oh, yes, that was the main time they were the most active, back in those early days. Yes, people were more interested in those days.

So you had an early sense of political activism?

Yes, that's right. I don't know if I was ever very radical though. I was more of a moderate type of fellow.

I wasn't going to ask you about the grand plan to change the world (both laugh) but you developed a political consciousness …?

Most of my main concern was to change people and help people, that was my main aim in life.

A social welfarism?

I'd do a certain amount of that too, yes. In fact, I think as just a local member you get a lot of that, helping people get the pension, helping them when they are in distress and that sort of thing, counselling of people and that sort of thing.

Did you think of anything … I'm thinking of when you join up in the sub-branch, any potential career as a politician?

Not at that stage, no. I had … didn't have at any time. We had a debating society along the Port Adelaide route, and people from Hindmarsh, Woodville and around Port Adelaide, Ethelton, Glanville and Largs Bay and all these suburbs debating society and we used to compete against one another, and they used to compete for what was called the Bardolph Shield at that time, and Harold Tapping and another fellow called Alec Riddoch and myself we were in that debating team for Ethelton–Glanville.

You liked getting into the verbal jousting, debating?

Yes, I enjoyed that, yes, that's right.

Was it unusual for you as a shopkeeper, so to speak, you had the shop at … [Cheltenham]?

No more than an engine driver coming in as a Prime Minister, I suppose. (Laughs)

One may associate a shopkeeper with a small business philosophy but …

I'd also worked on the wharf you know, had a varied sort of career.

What sort of things were you doing on the wharves?
Just loading and unloading ships.

Stevedoring sort of thing.
Yes, that's right. Mostly working down the holds of ships, carrying bags of wheat or something on by shoulders, packing stuff into the holds of the ships.

You mentioned that was in war time, World War II.
Yes, I went on in 1942 and 1947 I left.

So as soon as the end of the war and wartime …
As soon as the war was over well then I decided to … you see I'd had trouble, I had a health breakdown when I had the business. I was driving for Dring's at the same time. And I had quite [a bout of sickness] … about three months with pleurisy, pneumonia and bronchitis, so that's why I got knocked back from the Army. Then when I went down on to the wharf, well they still had a lot of dusty work down in those days, the bulk loading of ships done by shovelling this back into … and you got all the dust and everything, and the same down at the ICI works you got the powder from the soda ash and that's why I didn't do too well. When I went up the river I never looked back health wise.

So you say this physically demanding work was impacting on your health.
Yes, it didn't do me any good, no.

So you moved with your family to Murray Bridge?
Yes, I only had two young children at that time: one was seven and the other was four at the time.

Did you live in Murray Bridge?
Right in Murray Bridge. At Mypolonga at first. I was at Mypolonga for the first seven years, and then I went into Murray Bridge, lived right in the town.

Where at Mypolonga were you?
It was opposite Mypolonga on the other side of the river.

OK, the other side of the river?
The eastern side of the river.

Eastern side of the river.
The eastern side of the river.

That was just a small block?
Just a small block, yes, basically vegetables, and used to irrigate from the river.

And Mypolonga itself was a small place?

Yes, well, it's a long settlement Mypolonga and it's mostly dairying and so on on the orchards.

I know the orchards up towards Wall Flat.

Yes, that's right. I was back the Murray Bridge side of that.

We're covering things fairly briefly and quickly, but you've moved into Murray Bridge, working ... ?

Yes. Worked for an electrical supplier. I was a salesman for him and I did it for a dual purpose, one was to make a living and the other one was get known. Door-to-door in Murray Bridge, Mypolonga and those places, just getting them used to the power that was just coming on in a lot of those places, as I was able to move out of those places and sell them different things, yes.

So you were selling electrical products?

I was selling electrical things for this chap that I worked for.

Radio, fans?

Yes, everything, fridges, all sorts of things. Didn't have the quantity of stuff they've got now, all this electronic stuff.

I was just going to say.

None of that.

The power was supplied from local sources.

No it was the Adelaide Electric Supply Co. at the time, and then ETSA took over. When ETSA took over all of it started to expand out through country areas, but Murray Bridge had already been connected up to ETSA, the Electricity Trust, they called themselves the Adelaide Electric Supply Co. before ETSA, before Tom Playford socialised it.

Either going to say socialised or nationalised but it still stands as one of the classic nationalisation …

I reckon that and the Housing Trust – they would be the two major things to give credit to Tom Playford for.

I would agree with that but the AESCo one stands out as actually taking over opposed to the Housing Trust where they are creating something …

Yes that's right.

… but in nationalising he's got a good record.

You see Tom Playford took this over because he couldn't get his own way with getting Leigh Creek started. Coal was getting short from Newcastle so he wanted to develop Leigh Creek, and the Adelaide Electric Supply Co. weren't interested. So he just said, 'Right, well we'll take it over' and that's what he did. Started working the Leigh Creek coal as well as the Newcastle

coal, and that's what developed the Port Augusta Power Station, and eventually getting another one up there.

That's a fascinating story that one.

That's right. Well it kept us in power at that time when things would have been pretty rough without it. We didn't have natural gas or anything like that in those days.

What sort of area did you cover when you were working as a salesman, out to Tailem Bend?

I used to go as far as Tailem Bend and down to Jervois, and go up to Mypolonga and Mannum and around that area, generally.

That's obviously a large part of the electorate …

Yes, a portion of it anyway. Yes, it used to stretch out, the electorate used to stretch down to Callington in one way and it used to go right up to Walkers Flat, and beyond Walkers Flat, and it used to go down to Wellington East, and then across to Moorlands and through there.

Pretty extensive.

Well, it was a tidy little electorate.

How many people would have been? I know it changes over time.

I had about eight and a half thousand electors in my time, but it's grown a lot since then of course.

Eight and a half would have been about the peak?

Well it would have been at that time, yes. But then they enlarged it with the 'one vote, one value' they brought up now to something like about 20 000, but of course they go all the way down the country, a long way to service, to Strathalbyn. Peter Lewis has got that district now.

He's inherited your tradition!

Well I don't know whether he has or not. (Laughs) I don't think I was quite like him.

I was only joking. You were developing more of a presence in Murray Bridge getting better known and so on, and developing …

There were some other activities in Murray Bridge as well. I got into the church of course. I was very active in the church but apart from that I started getting into other organisations.

Were you still playing sport?

I played tennis on the lawn courts there, right until I was about 50, soon after, well I was still in Parliament, right up until I finished Parliament I think I played lawn tennis.

Service organisations, local council, were you ...

I didn't have any on the Local Council, but I was on the High School Council, I was on the Adult Education Centre Council (now called TAFE), I was on the School Committee at Murray

Bridge and I was in one or two welfare groups that were active up there at the time, so I had a bit of activity there.

You mentioned at the time you moved to Murray Bridge, that there was a possibility of replacing the sitting member.

The sitting member was a man called McKenzie, and he had gone blind and the last time he stood, he only won by less than 100 votes, and there was a man called White. Well I stood at the time in 1953 that they thought the former mayor of the town might have a better chance than me, a fellow called Cook. Well it was found out after the election preselection nominations had closed, that he didn't have the qualifications, he hadn't had his length of time as a member of the party although the union that he'd been in they signed his papers, but he hadn't been a member – 18 months instead of two years – and so he was disqualified and I couldn't come in at that stage it was too late. so he stood two old men on the pre-selections, and one of them a fellow called Moroney won it, but although he'd got fairly close, he got within 60 votes of the other fellow, he lost it, and this fellow White held the seat for three years, until I came along and took it off him by 193 votes and in the next election I won it by 2000, and the next election I won it by 3000. That meant when we became the Government and that sort of thing, people turned around and they said, 'Well we were not voting for the Labor Party, we were voting for Gabe Bywaters himself', so they turned around and came back to the Party again.

You were a personal representative …

I think that's what it was, yes.

What year were you elected?

Elected in 1956, and I was forcibly ejected in 1968.

When did you feel that a political career, as a Parliamentary career, was to your liking? Sounds like the option was opening up there …

I rather fancied the idea of getting into Parliament. There is so much that I felt I could to and so even back when I was down here living, mind you there was no opening down here, so I thought there was a chance up there, and as it turned out the following year 1956 I had the opportunity and I took it. But I enjoyed being in Parliament, I really enjoyed that 12 years, it was really good, very satisfying.

Perhaps we can outline a little bit more about your parliamentary experiences. I was just interested in your development of where the idea comes from and why State Parliament versus Federal Parliament.

Yes, well I had no ambition to go Federal. I had a young family. It was a sacrifice being a Member of Parliament, particularly for your family, because I'd be away for most of the week, they would see me at the weekends, that sort of thing. My wife had to carry the can during that time, not particularly when the House was sitting and I used to live down at Parliament House,

we had rooms up top of Parliament House, I used to live down there, so I would be away from Tuesday morning until Thursday night, so the ...

Did you come down by train?

Yes I came down by train, that's right.

Do a bit of work on the train or rest?

Do a bit reading, we had so much reading to do, to keep up with things.

I think it's a fairly common complaint or comment from politicians, the amount of reading.

Oh yes, you can't get away from it. It's there and you just have to do it.

And, of course, at that stage you had to do it as there was no-one else to do it.

Well I think you wanted to do it really. You wanted to keep abreast of things. It's like anybody in any particular industry or trade they've got their books and manuals and that sort of thing, they want to know what is going on.

It sound very much like a lifestyle sort of thing, certain hours of sittings (Tuesday to Thursday) …

Yes, that's right. We had a fairly good pattern in those days too because it was pretty late at night some times.

And you still had to service the electorate even though you had to go down …

That's right. I struck the 1956 floods soon after I came in and that's what got me some notoriety because I was in amongst it all the time, sand-bagging with the fellows alongside of me on the banks, and going to town trying to make representations for them for different things, and so on. So I got really known pretty well along the bank of the River Murray for what I'd done.

Was this prior to being elected, the flood?

Oh no, this was after I was elected, just after. I was asked a pretty stupid question the first time I stood on the platform, Murray Bridge, someone said 'Will you promise rain?' and I said 'Yes I'll promise rain within the three years that I will be in Parliament', and of course it created a bit of a laugh, they got the greatest flood in history. (Laughs) So I fulfilled that promise anyway. (Both laugh)

Well you could go back to the electors on that one. But I wasn't sure from your comment whether it happened …

That happened soon after I was elected. Actually I was elected in March and the flood didn't come down until August or September, the peak, through the Spring ...

But regardless of the politics you still would have been there sandbagging and helping out anyhow I expect.

Oh yes, I guess I would have been.

The way people pitched in and so on.

Yes, that's right

And, of course, for the local people, you were in the Opposition but you still could have some influence?

I'm sure I had an influence. My method of doing this was that if I needed something I would go to the head of that department and present what I thought was the case. Say people wanted a water supply for an area, that sort of thing. I'd just put up a case for it and I'd take it up to the government, and it would go back to that particular head of department, and he'd have to say what he thought. He would have my point of view beforehand, you see, and I think I got results because of that. You've got to go straight to your Minister ...

End of Side A, Tape 1
Tape 1, Side B

[They wanted a] water supply that was a bit quicker you see. They only had ¾-inch meters at that time. So I went down to see the man in charge of the water supply, Lance Cambbel, a very nice fellow, and I told him about this and he said 'Well it was only supposed to be for domestic and it was not meant for irrigation', and I said, 'Well look Mr Cambbel, I came down this morning past Urrbrae and the sprinklers were going full tilt down there, don't tell me that's domestic'. (Laughs) He says, 'I get your point'. Well they got their meters, they get their large meters: instead of ¾-inch they got an inch meter. So that's just the small points.

There were lots of cases like that where people … although they were so close to the river there were a number of people that didn't have a water supply. I battled and eventually I got water supply for most of those areas. I went out to a farmer one afternoon. He'd just come in off the reaper. He was a mess of dirt all over, all the dust from the reaper. A hot day. He just had a little tin of water, gets out in the back yard with a dish, with a hand cloth, and washes himself all over with this dish of water, that's how he got his wash. Except he had more mud on him afterwards than he had at start. They had no water supply. The only way he could get water was to go to a standpipe in Murray Bridge and cart it. It was pretty well difficult at that time, at harvest time. So I put this up and eventually I got some water for that area.

So that was mains water supply …?

Mains water supply to them, because the river was not within distance. You could always see water and yet these people were without water. That happened just about all around my electorate. There were lots of places like that.

Just to clarify that: the mains supply was then coming off what, an extended irrigation pipeline …

No, that was the town supply.

The town supply.

That's right.

Could they have had it supplied from the river, pumped up?

If they paid their own expenses, yes. But its a fair way to do that, with piping and that ... Most of these farmers were not wealthy people. Mallee farmers, they were battlers. There were not too many of them could afford to put in a water supply although one crowd did. They got Southern Cross to take a pipeline out through to their place by all joining together, out [a run?], but these other people they had to rely on ...

I think the Mallee farmers did it pretty tough.

Yes, that's true.

Even people living on the river – on small blocks and not much income.

No, not a lot of income, but still it was a good life.

You mentioned, Mr Bywaters, accessing the public servants, the top person of the Department. Obviously living in Adelaide you got to know people. Did you develop links or connections with ...

Well with certain people, particularly on the community welfare side, you get people who come to you with a problem, they're wanting help. Just an illustration. There was a lady … a man rang me up from a shop in Palmer. He said, 'There's a lady out here, her husband dropped dead in the street in Mount Gambier and she's left destitute, can you come and help her?'. So I went out. I got all her particulars, rang up the Welfare Department because I knew the man in charge so well, told him the whole position, he said there would be a cheque up there this afternoon for her to get food for the children. So that's the sort of thing you can do by having contact and people knowing you and trusting you. That's a big thing. They know you wouldn't give them the wrong information, you were genuine when you applied for someone like that.

Did you have to work at developing those connections with people?

It's not very difficult. You only had to be decent to people, you know. You ring people up when … you get to know them when people come to you with a problem. Used to get some people that were dead losses, they would come to you. You would ring these people and you would say, 'What's the background of these people'. They would tell me what they knew, and I would say that I had a suspicion along that regard. So I would go back to these people and say, 'Well look you don't deserve help you've done the wrong thing'. So that was the attitude, that if you treated them right … well you didn't go forcing people on that you didn't have trust in yourself, you had to get the background. You get background in lots of different ways. For instance, if you find someone that's in problems and those sorts of things, you go to the local police station, see the sergeant of police and say, 'What do you know about these people?' and

he would tell you. Very often the sergeant of police would come to me with a problem and say, 'Look these people are in trouble, Gabe, can you help them?'. So that was part of the work.

And you're talking there of when you were in Parliament.
That's right, just a private Member.

Not everyone succeeded, obviously from what you're saying there, some people got knocked back.
Well, they were told just exactly what the situation was. I didn't get rough on them or anything like that. I just told them. Just as an illustration. A lady rang me up one day and said she was in trouble, the welfare had stopped, would I come and help her. So I went out to see her and took my wife out in the car. We were going to the Mannum Show that day. So we went to this house and talked to this woman and I said, 'Now one of the things the welfare people say is "Have you got another man living with you? Do you get support from him?" because they aren't going to keep you if there is'. So she said, 'Oh no, nothing like that'. When I got back to the car a little girl had been talking to my wife and she said, 'My mother's going to have another baby' so I immediately pricked up my ears. So I went to the local sergeant. He said, 'She's been living with another fellow all the time. She's told you a pack of lies, you see'. So I rang up the Welfare Department and they confirmed this. So I went back to her and I just told her the true position of the thing: 'You told me lies, you can't expect help when you do that'. So I told her what the whole position was and she wasn't very happy, but still she knew the score. (Laughs)

It works both ways.
Well, you've got to know your mark. It's no good unless you do some enquiring, but if you rush in to a place and abuse the man in charge for not helping these people and that sort of thing, well he hasn't got much respect for you. When a genuine one comes along it doesn't work.

I was thinking also when I asked the question about your contacts … I was thinking in the broader sense, the heads of departments or the key people, bearing in mind the department had a different structure then you could actually … I mean everybody knew who the Director of Agriculture was.
That's right.

Now nobody knows who the …
That's right. (Laughs)

Did you have opportunity to make those connections with people.
No trouble at all. You'd get on the phone, you'd ring up the department, tell them who I am, very often the voice that came over the first was pretty sharp, and when you tell them who you are, the voice changed completely. Then they know that you're a Member of Parliament, they would open the door and you'd get straight through to this person if they are available, and if they're not available, he would ring you back. It was as easy as that. Not today. (Laughs) When

I was Minister people used to ring me direct to my phone, a direct line to my phone. People'd ring me up to see if there was going to be a fire ban on the day. (Laughs) You don't get that today.

No. You're lucky to get a recorded message.

That's right. (Laughs)

But speaking in terms of the Opposition, you being in Opposition before the Government, did you develop liaison with Government Ministers, you mentioned before the Playmander which kept you out of power for a long time, therefore did you have to develop similar relations with Ministers to get things done?

In Parliament, it's a funny thing. You went down the corridor and you'd see a Minister or you'd see a Private Member or the Clerk of the House, see somebody – 'G'day Bill', 'G'day Tom' – and you're always friendly. You'd go and have a cup of tea with them. You'd have an argument in the House and they would say come out and have a cup of tea with me afterwards. That sort of thing. So it wasn't difficult to approach a Minister. You'd walk across the chamber when the House was sitting. If it wasn't sitting you'd ring him up, and you'd tell them who you are and you would get through to him. It was never any trouble being just an ordinary Member. You got through to the Ministers without any trouble at all.

It sounds like a level of bi-partisanship.

It was, it was. Yes, in fact I think a lot of things that Tom Playford got through was really through the help of the Labor Party. Mick O'Halloran was the Leader of the Opposition in that time and Tom Playford would say to him, 'Look Mick I would like to get this legislation through today, it's fairly important' and he'd explain it to him. Mick would come into Caucus and tell us the story … and would say, 'Now I will speak today. Anybody else want to speak on it?'. No, not particularly. Someone'd say yes he would like a few words. Okay. But then the debate would be over and done with, moved and supported, and it would be carried. The Government Members would come across the chamber to us and say 'Did you know this was going on?'. I would say, 'Yes, of course we did'. They didn't know anything about it. He didn't need to convince them. He had them on his side. He convinced us and that was (Laughs) ... he was a shrewd politician Tom Playford.

Yes, it's often said.

Yes, very shrewd, yes.

Given the fact that the Playmander, the gerrymander and …. in that sense you had no hope of getting in at that time, I guess the only alternative is to work together.

Well, that's right. We got a lot of our legislation in by bringing it one year and Tom would bring it the next, modified, because he wanted the credit for bringing it in. That happened time and time again. Mick O'Halloran would bring down a Bill, introduce a Bill and the Opposition

would knock it back. The Government rather would knock it back. Next year you'd see a similar thing come up on the paper. It mightn't be quite what we wanted, but we got some of it.

When you were Opposition did you get particular interests to pursue in the way that now we've got Shadow Ministers and so on. Did you have responsibilities …

We didn't have Shadow Ministers in those days. Everyone knew the sort of bent by the way you're questions were asked of different Ministers you see. So I had a bit of an interest in … being an agricultural area, people who were dairy farmers would want something brought up, well I would bring it up in Parliament. Something else about grape growers or whatever, and so I was sort of on … The Labor Party had committees and I was on the Rural Committee and so it was a sort of an introduction to agriculture. When I came on to the Caucus vote I was the outsider, they didn't expect me to win. There was a fellow called Clark who would beat me but didn't, I beat him. So I was elected. Agriculture was the natural choice that they gave me.

Did you have … In the lead up to you becoming Minister, you had these interests in agricultural views …

Oh yes.

… and representing obviously your local people and so on … you developed a feel for it.

Yes, that's right. I used to keep in touch with orchardists and dairy farmers, mostly. I would see quite a lot of farmers as well, wheat and wool growers and that sort of thing. It was a area where there weren't any real big farmers, they were mostly smaller farmers, in the Mallee they had to have big areas of land, they were still considered fairly small farmers, so ...

Before you became Minister did you go touring around the State to see some of the other bigger farms, or …

No, I didn't do much. I did go interstate looking at dairy farms. I went over there to see how they milked, the milking machines, Rotolax and all that sort of thing. But I didn't have much ...

What about around South Australia, within the State?

In the State I did a fair bit of getting around, yes.

Developing a feel for what might happen on Eyre Peninsula for example?

Well I had a bit to do with what happened on Eyre Peninsula with the Port Giles silos over there because that was just coming up at that time. But I didn't get in touch with a lot of those people, but …

And you said you became the Minister by, was it Clark?, …

Yes. Well he was … he always thought he was going to be Minister of Education because he'd been a school teacher. But Caucus is a popular vote. There's a round that elects the Premier or whoever the Ministers are. Usually have to have people on your side or else it just doesn't get

anywhere. So I had more people on my side than what he did, that's what it amounted to. They thought I would be better suited for the portfolio of agriculture I guess.

Was that the only portfolio?

No. I had Lands as well for about 10 months. Then that was too much. Usually it was two separate portfolios. Anyway I was working long hours to catch up with all the work and so they brought in an amendment to the Constitution to allow another Minister to come in. That's when Des Corcoran came in. He took over Lands. I just kept on with Agriculture.

What about Woods and Forests?

Woods and Forests was in with Agriculture. It was all in primary industries. They had them separated at that time, Woods and Forests was probably one of the oldest Ministries I gather, before Agriculture. Agriculture, Fisheries and we also Flora and Fauna which is now what they call the …

Primary Industries?

… Environment now.

Environment.

So I had that but it was in a small way in those times.

So if I understand correctly there was a Minister of Agriculture and Minister of Woods and Forests (or Minister of Forests) and Minister of Fisheries. Three Ministerial titles. There were three separate departments?

Yes, completely separate. Woods and Forests Department was quite a big department because they had a lot of money. They were self-supporting, of course, all what they needed to do.

There is a bit of an overlap of course in all those areas, but Primary Industries.

Yes, that's right. They're all ... Today it's all involved in one as they call it Department of Primary Industries, they don't call it individuals.

Did you have a Minister's office to link these three together?

No, I had my own Minister's Office entirely. It was a Department on its own. My Secretary was the Director of the Minister's Office. But that was abolished after I went out.

It was in existence when you came in?

Yes, it was in existence. Bert Rush was the Director. He was not only my Secretary but he was the Director of the Minister's Office. There was only five of us in there, but we controlled all of the others around. One man was mainly his job was to look after the bushfires area and also the agricultural shows, because at that time we used to finance the different show societies with the different prizes that they gave out for show jumping and all that sort of thing. On the fire side

of it, the CFS, that was a pretty big thing to handle. There was one man just doing that pretty well.

There were five people, including yourself or ... ?
Yes, including myself, yes that's right.

Those sorts of activities with the shows and so on, was that separate to the Department?
They were all part of the Department but …

They were separate to the Department of Agriculture?
They were all tied up in the Minister of Agriculture's Office.

But that Minister of Agriculture's Office is separate to the Department.?
Yes, they controlled the other. That's right. Everything resolved back to the Minister's Office. The Director, who was directly under me, the Director of Agriculture, Strickland, he was directly under me. The same with the Director of Fisheries. They had a Director of Fisheries to that time. Then, of course, the Woods and Forests. They called it a Conservator in those days but he was the same as Director in his own right. They had the full status of a Director. There's a lot of snobbery in the Public Service. You get people that are Directors, so anyone beneath that are inferior to them. (Laughs)

Very hierarchical.
On one particular occasion, I had a joint thing with the Minister of Roads, Stan Bevan, and the Director of Roads and so on, he chastised my Deputy Director, Marshall Irving, on a point as if to say that 'I've got it right over you because I'm a superior to you'. I chipped in. I said 'Now look you don't bring that in'. He said, 'I'll claim superiority over both of you'. (Laughs) But I said 'Cut that out, we're all here on an equal basis'. So that was the way of things in those days.

But very structured and everyone had a …
That's right, yes.

So that's you and the Minister's Office. Where was the Minister's Office itself?
The first place was in the Education Department Building.

In Gawler Place?
Gawler Place, yes. That's the old building. Then we went around to the Reserve Bank Building. I had a new office around there. The man that was in charge of the Public Service was also a man who was in charge of fitting the office out, a chap called Max Dennis. He came in with the patterns of timber that were to go around, they were a veneer, to go around the walls. I said, 'No, that's not good enough. I'm Woods and Forest. I want a Woods and Forest veneer'. So they did a special job for me and they called it 'Gabe's Cabin'. (Laughs)

Your ‘log cabin’?

My log cabin. (both laugh)

So your office, the Minister’s Office, was not actually in the Department itself?

No. It wasn’t in the Department at that time. At that time it was a separate office but nowadays, of course, it’s all in one.

So then you can get the Minister’s Office being located in the same building but on a different floor and all sorts of [locations].

Yes, that’s right.

How did your relations work with the Department while you were Minister – daily contact or ...?

I had a very good relationship with the Department. Very good relationship with all the officers of the Department. They really treated me well. Although we came in as a new party after 30 years, we thought perhaps the change would be rather hard for them to adopt to, but they didn’t, they adopted us straight away. They said, ‘We’re not there to represent parties, we’re there to represent the government of the day’. They did that thoroughly and successfully. So all Departmental officers in that Department I had a lot of respect for.

Did you come in with a view personally, or did you the Labor Party come in, with a particular platform for agriculture?

Well it wasn’t a big platform, but we did have platform for people who were grape growers, they were having a bad time at that stage, and there were other things that needed to be attended to, dairy farmers and that sort of thing, But we did have a few different things on the agenda, but not a big thing. No, we didn’t have any great big policy on that. The party at that time was more … the policy was more on social welfare and education and that sort of thing. Because Tom Playford when he was in, he was all for industry and he neglected education and neglected social welfare. When we came in we changed that, went the other way and brought in much better benefits for welfare, better things for education, when we came in. Agriculture, as I said, was pretty well non-controversial. Most of the legislation that I brought in was stuff that the industry wanted, so it was very little, except one or two things that I did on my own and they were controversial.

I could ask you to elaborate.

Well, the first thing of course, we had trouble over the wine grapes. The grape growers up there at that time were mostly soldier settlers. They didn’t have all these big vineyards that they’ve got now. The grape growers, of course, were subject to the prices offered by the winemakers. At that time they were getting a very low deal, very poor return, so I persuaded the government to bring in legislation, and I introduced it, to put a minimum price for grapes so that the winemakers would have to pay at least a certain amount of money to get the grapes. I got … at that time the Prices Commissioner was still in operation and he brought in … I introduced the

legislation. Didn't know whether I would get it through the Legislative Council because there was a good deal of hostility from the winemakers about this, and a good deal of hostility from certain members of the government but they had members in the government who were representing wine-growing districts, Condor Laucke and Harry King and George Hambour and those fellows, and so they were in a [bind] didn't know which way to go. And the same thing in the Legislative Council. The wine grape growers themselves got lobbying these fellows in the Legislative Council and said, 'Now look you rely on us for our vote, do the right thing, support this legislation, or else'. So I got the legislation through. It turned out very well at that time. I went up to a turn-out in Tanunda expecting to have my head bitten off by a lot of these winemakers and they congratulated me. After that things settled down quite well. People were buying for, giving above the minimum price range to get the grapes, that was one good thing I brought in.

Turned out not to be controversial?

Well it was controversial at the time. I had the gallery, the Speaker's Gallery was full of winemakers. I went out to the toilet and Tom Playford came out and he said, 'You're making a very big mistake Gabe'. I said. 'If I'm making it, I'm making it, and that's all there is about it Tom, and that's it'. But anyway it came in, hardly a murmur afterwards.

The other thing was that the eggs. The egg producers were … all the other States agreed to what they called the Commonwealth Egg Marketing Authority (CEMA they called it) and South Australia didn't. Under the Agricultural Bureaus, or the departments of all different States, if one State hung out it didn't come in, all had to be in agreement. When I came in I agreed to it and that caused quite a furore because there were people in my electorate who were selling eggs to these interstate buyers, there were eggs coming over the border this way and supplying Coles and Woolworths, and there were eggs going from South Australia supplying the supermarkets over there, cutting the price, all the time. This didn't worry the small farmer bloke who had 100 fowls or so, but it worried the fellows that had two or three thousand birds. They wanted this legislation to join up with the Commonwealth; every other government in the Commonwealth, Agriculture, agreed to this except South Australia. When I came in I agreed and caused quite a few headaches, I can tell you.

It had a big impact on the industry?

Well, afterwards, the industry settled down and they were very pleased. I got letters of congratulations from people who had opposed me before, but I didn't have time to get that in before the election. A lot of people voted against me because of that.

Was some of that just that natural human reluctance to change?

No. You see a lot of these people up there were farmers. It used to be a little bit of pocket money, or grocery money, and that sort of thing. It never ever went to taxation. They got this money, cash-in-hand at the door: people'd pick up their eggs, give a bit of money and take it away. That was very handy for them, so they were very much against it. Quite understandably so, too, but this wasn't going to do the industry any good; the industry was crying out ... if I hadn't had agreed to it, I was prepared to agree to it without this threat, but the threat was there that if South Australia didn't come into it they would flood South Australia with eggs from interstate, they would knock the bottom right out of the market. At that time they were getting a very low price for their egg pulp and they were … had a surplus of eggs for sale, so they had to put into pulp. They were prepared to sacrifice everything to make sure that they got this organised controlled marketing, that's what they wanted. But I faced some fiery meetings at Murray Bridge in my own electorate, I can tell you.

Arguing your case?

Yes. Anyway I was determined to get on with it, went on with it, and it came in, and afterwards I had people coming and congratulating me and saying it was the best thing that ever happened to the industry.

The vagaries of interstate marketing, interstate trading, the vagaries of that ...

Well under Section 92 there is nothing to stop eggs trading across the border, but under this system was instead of taxing the eggs, they taxed the hens, and by taxing the hens, they don't go interstate. (Laughs) So the egg price didn't make any difference. It was taxing the hens and so there was always a levy through the Egg Board for the organisation itself … so they paid that to people who were paying it, until these people came in, they didn't have to pay any levy so they didn't want to do that. When this came in they had to pay a levy on their hens whereas before they didn't have to pay anything. So they were cheating because the people that were in the Egg Board that were paying this, particularly in the Barossa Valley, down Gawler and Salisbury, they didn't have these interstate buyers. They were selling through the Egg Board and paying their dues all the time and they were carrying these other people. They were really trading on them to ... and the price was always fixed by the Egg Board and so it was giving them a margin for them to work on with the interstate buyers and so they were doing alright and not paying any tax. (Laughs)

End of Tape 1, Side B
Tape 2, Side A

Mr Bywaters, looking at those various boards and various industries, you've got dried fruits, you've got grapes, you've got eggs, potatoes, the whole lot yet the Constitution says free trade. How did you come to grips with the range of responsibilities … all the different boards, all the different industry aspects?

It was only free trade interstate. Inside your own State you had control and I believe in control. The person that gains mostly by not having control is the merchant. People like Woolworths and Coles and those people they can gain more by people that are not regulated then they can by things that's regulated. It is the same with the Milk Board, which I was on for 15 years. The same with the Egg Board. Didn't matter what Board you were on. Potato Board. They had the control of organising different aspects such as the quality of the product, the quantity of the product and the distribution of the product. When people produce a certain thing if it's a free trade, they're at the whim of what the people will give them, whereas with this they know that they are going to get a certain price and that's what they did. They got their fixed price. With the Milk Board particularly, the Milk Board used to fix the price and the farmer got half the amount of the money for what it was sold in the shops, the vendor got a percentage and the manufacturer got a percentage. The storekeeper or whatever was the vendor. So everybody was treated fairly. They all got their fair share according to the cost, cost of production and all sorts of thing, it was all organised. I believe in that. I think it's a sorry day that they de-regulated some of these things.

Well they've de-regulated so much!

Well now as far as the Milk Board is concerned there's a statutory authority but they don't have the same control. People can pay the farmers just what they think they want to and it all comes back as profits all coming one way. The farmer's getting less, got to produce more to get the same amount of money.

Bigger properties and …

That's right, get bigger herds of cattle.

It's been one of the things that surprises me about the agricultural industry sector is the plethora of boards and organisations for control. They get aid, support, assistance. They seem to be very wide ranging, and a voluminous number and I thought as a Minister sitting there with these … boards (both laugh)

Well most of them were producer controlled. They would have a Board of say five, you would probably get three people interested in the primary production side of it, and so it was producer orientated. There was one thing about the Milk Board that was set up – they had no controlling interest from any section of the community, couldn't have a dairy farmer representative, they couldn't have a manufacturer represented, they couldn't have a vendor on the Board. They were all independent people on the Board, which was a good thing really, because they were treated all fairly. I had accountants that worked out the exact amount of money that they should be paid or charged.

Did you as Minister have responsibility to oversee those Boards?

They all had their own autonomy, but they had to come back to the Minister for authority on lots of things.

Appointments to Boards came through the Minister, or … Did the appointments to the Boards …?

Mostly they would come with a Board member, or the Board itself would usually suggest who they would like to have on the Board. But quite of lot of it was conducted by ballot through the Public Service. The Public Service would hold a ballot. Say there were three people interested in going on a Board, well they would put it to the people, all classes of the people, the producers and the manufacturers would have a vote as to say who got it. We'd go through the Public Service.

The Department itself, would have people on the Boards as a rule?

Sometimes. In fact Tom Miller was on the Potato Board. Geoff Strickland was on the Barley Board and because of that I didn't see very much of Geoff Strickland. Geoff Strickland was more orientated towards the Barley Board than he was to the Department of Agriculture. He used to go to into town and that sort of thing, and we had to find him lots of times. In fact, I found that Marshall Irving was more of a Director to me than what Strickland was.

At that time you didn't have a Deputy Director as such?

No, no. He was regarded as second-in-charge at that time.

By status?

Yes, by status, that's right.

Did you meet with Strickland?

Yes, we used to meet occasionally but mostly when we went out perhaps on some inspection or other. We'd go out, for instance to inspect Nagoora Burr which was a problem up the north, we went up and had a look at that to see what was going on, tried to overcome that. Strickland, he'd be with us on those occasions, but lots of times he wasn't there at all.

So it wasn't as if you had a regular weekly meeting?

No, no regular meeting, no. With the Chairman of the Woods and Forest Board he used to have a weekly meeting with me. The Department of Agriculture had an Advisory Committee and they used to meeting regularly with me. The poultry industry used to meet in my office, a weekly meeting in there and I would very often go in and chair that. But as far as Strickland was concerned, he was just someone that I knew. (Laughs)

Was there any necessity or interest at that stage from you about having hands-on with the Department or ... ?

No. no. I was very friendly with all people. When I went in there first there was a little bit of a low morale in the Department. I said that one of the things that I wanted to overcome at the

start was to get to know these fellows so I used to go to the canteen and have lunch with them. Sit down like the ordinary blokes working in there, not the heads of the departments, just the ordinary fellows, and they used to feed me a lot of information, it was all very useful. If I wanted any information I would go not to Strickland, but I would go Tom Miller if it was something to do with horticulture; if it was something do with dairying, I would ring perhaps Graham Itzerott who was in the Department for dairying, whichever was around I would ring them up and get them to come over and have a talk with me about it. I found that was most helpful.

Very much one to one ...

Yes, that's right. They all treated me [well]. If I wanted to go open a show, which I did a lot of during those times, just about every Saturday I would go somewhere or other, and I'd write across and ask for some notes on that particular area. The first thing was, there was a man called Peter Angove, he was a public relations officer, very fine fellow, but he would write out a speech for me, and I would tear it up, 'That's not what I want, all I wanted to do was get some facts and figures of what the district does, how many cows they have got in the district, how many grape vines they've got, what their production is and that sort of thing. Just give me figures', I said, 'and I'll make my own speech up'. So I did. The papers, the local papers, they always want a copy: 'Now look, I'll give you what I've got written down here, but', I said, 'Don't quote me on this, I'm likely to say anything'. (Laughs) If you want to know what I'm saying like the farmers you'll have to follow me. So it was just ad-libbing, different things happen, as long as you've got your figures there, your facts.

You were very much a loose cannon, so to speak, when you were ad libbing and going off …?

No, I was there mostly to eulogise the district, something about that and tell them what good people they were, and how much we appreciated them in the Department, and that sort of thing, tell them about what they're doing and that sort of thing. It used to go over quite well.

So you got around to see a fair bit of the State then.

A lot of the State at that time. I went up to all sorts of places, as far as Ceduna one way right down to Mount Gambier the other, so right along we went to different places, little places, people would ask me to come an open a small show, didn't make any difference whether it was a small show or a big one, I used to go.

More or less, well not more or less, it is a full-time plus job isn't it …

Oh yes.

… being a minister?

100% plus, 100% plus.

Did you get holidays as such or were you …?

I always took a holiday every year. I always thought it was a responsibility to my family to take them away for a couple of weeks to some place or other.

You didn't take them to an Agricultural Conference!

No, we used to keep as far away from agriculture or Parliament as what it was possible to do. We did that usually over the Christmas holidays or something like that.

You got a break.

Got a break.

Talking of travel, what about at a different level, Ministerial meetings and so on. How did you get on for those Standing Committees on Agriculture.

We used to have the Standing Committee and of course then there's the Ministers' Committee. They were interesting. I enjoyed those, every one of them. I had three of them. I had Fisheries, Forests and Agriculture. They all had separate, sometimes once a year, sometimes twice a year, and you'd go to every State in the Commonwealth, and you'd discuss things of this nature. I had the first one a few weeks after I became Minister, lobbed it onto me and I had to have it and we had it in Parliament House, Adelaide. I was Minister of Lands and Agriculture at that time. I tell you I was flat out. Anyway we got through it, but it was interesting. But the Standing Committee used to meet first. They would discuss all of the topics on the paper. I had a chap called Viv Lohmeyer and he would come to me and he would say, 'Look Mr Minister, these are the relative points that affect you. No good you talking about sugar or tobacco or anything like. You're not interested in those things, but you are interested in these, these and these. This is what we'd talked about in the Department and it's up to you to make decisions when you get in there. Now these are my recommendations'. That would be it. He'd come to my room the night before, they would be one week, and I'd come over on the weekend, on the Monday morning to go into conference, perhaps for three or four days, and when it came to sugar and tobacco and things like that, I would go outside for a cool off. (Laughs) Then there were other things I would be right into it, with good background information I knew what I was talking about. But very often beforehand, if we were at a Council meeting, the industry itself had a problem, they would come to me and say, 'Look this is our problem. You're going to Ag. Council. We'd like you to look at this'. So they would tell me their point of view. You had one angle of it as well as the other departmental avenue, which was a big help in doing those things.

Did the advice conflict at times between the Department and the industry?

No, not really. There were times when I had to make a decision between the two, but not in the Agriculture Council. But at local level, yes, there were times when I had to make up my mind just to see what the Department said and what the industry wanted. But mainly that didn't happen. Mostly the industry were very conscious of the Department and very appreciative of

the Department. They reckoned they were getting a fair deal from the Department. You didn't get much criticism.

Something that's been emerging over more recent times is the 'us' and 'them' type of mentality. In earlier times perhaps the government was there, seen to be something that is helping. Now the government is almost, by that I mean the Department, is in opposition.

No, that didn't happen. There were odd occasions. We were talking about this grape issue before. The Department were dead against me doing what I did, but I did it and they agreed with me afterwards that it was the right thing. But at the time they advised me against it. But that was just one thing. There was another occasion when small seeds were just coming in, like lucerne seed and all those small seeds. They wanted to have a certification programme, the Department, particularly under Strickland, he was very keen to get this certification. Well they were too new, and we agreed in a year or two's time when we become established, we would be right behind it, but at this stage, no way, so I sided with them. But funnily enough the fellow that was in charge of that department agreed with me, though it was against the Department's will. But it was against Strickland's ideas. He was rather keen to see certification immediately on the small seeds. It came about a couple of years later, but it was common sense, you had to use a little bit of that occasionally as Minister.

You said earlier that Strickland died basically in office right at the end of his term.

He had just retired.

What was he like to deal with, even though you only had some limited …?

I was on very friendly terms with Geoff, very friendly terms. When we went away to Agricultural Council together, we got on very well. No I never had any problem with him at all, not in that regard. There were times when I got a little bit uptight, I asked for decisions, but he would not tell me about things that were over there and I would find out and I would want to know why. But that only happened once or twice.

Would you say over all you had good relations with …?

Very good relations with him and all the departmental officers. I think it is borne out that they still invite me to their luncheons, after 35 years, now that's incredible, isn't it?

Hmmm.

I'm the only Minister that goes. They invite me to go on their safaris once a year that they go away on. They still regard me as one of them. Tom Miller will turn around when he is speaking at these functions, when we go away they have receptions at these different places, as we had at Port Lincoln, and he would refer to me as one of the others, he would just refer to the former Minister. He would always mention that I was there. He reckoned it gave a bit of prestige to the

gathering that they had a former Minister with them. But they are excellent. All those people, I don't think I got a bum steer from any of them.

That comes through with the fact that they are delighted when you turn up at the retired officers …

Well they invite me to come, so there you are.

It is interesting that you've retained that rapport, had that interest. How did you balance the portfolios, given that you had Woods and Forests, and … Put it differently, how much time would you allocate to the various portfolios?

Whatever they needed. Agriculture took up most of my time. Woods and Forests run pretty well on it's own, but they always kept me informed what they were doing. They were particularly good on that. This Brian Bednall, he was excellent. A funny thing happened. I don't know if this will interest you or not, but I was attended my first Woods and Forests Conference up at New Guinea, Bulolo. A very nice turn-out, but I found out up there the government, the Federal government were offering an allocation of money on a loan and a grant basis for getting more woods and more forests, more soft-wood forests. I said, 'How much was South Australia getting?'. They said, 'You didn't come into it. The former Minister said we didn't need it'. I said, 'Well that's news to me. There is a new government in now. That ought to be reviewed'. So they did agree they would get the Conservator-General who is in Canberra, a chap called Jacobs, to come over and have a review of the situation in South Australia. Brian Bednall came to me: 'This fellow's been over, you're not going to get anywhere with it', he said, 'You won't get any money'. So they decided against giving South Australia any money. They were giving it to the other States. They reckon they've got more potential growers. I said to Brian, 'Look if we were to buy more land down in the South-East, could we plant more trees?'. He said, 'Of course we could'. I said 'Why don't we do that with the money?'. He said, 'They just won't give it to us'. I said, 'We'll see about that'. So we went up to Queensland for the next conference. Used to have the night before the Ministers get together to have a drink. We were chatting away and this was about 3 o'clock in the morning, but this was one of the key topics. In the morning this fellow Jacobs stood up to speak, but before he did the Minister for New South Wales, a fellow called Bill, moved that South Australia come in with the rest of the Commonwealth. A fellow called Thomson (Victoria) stood up and seconded it. Everybody's mouth went open like that, including the Conservator-General. Anyway he [Bednall] said to me, 'You bugger, how did you do that?'. (Laughs) I said, ['Oh I just did']. (Laughs) Anyway, that passed through and we got quite a lot of money out of it. We bought into line with [other States] but we wouldn't have got it if I hadn't have worked on it.

You've got those responsibilities in other areas. You've got your local electorate. Your family. And you've got parliament …

Yes, that's right. You've got to do a full-time job, I can tell you.

Did you find any issues coming up in Parliament that from the agriculture point of view were difficult to handle?

Not difficult to handle, most of it was fairly routine stuff. Probably the meat producers. They would want to do something or other, they wanted to bring in a tax on bulls and anyway that was alright, everybody supported it, no trouble. All those of little things, we got a lot of that, but it didn't have much controversy with my legislation. The only thing was the grapes and the poultry. They were the only two that I had any controversy with, any debate on.

Agriculture being a back-bone industry …

It's pretty well non-partisan, both parties would have a very similar outlook on what should be done.

On another level, did you have any issues with legislation or regulations? Did you have to change regulations?

Yes, regulations were quite often changing. The industry mostly asked for them. All I'd do was introduce them and they would go through the *Gazette*. They would have to lay in Parliament for 14 sitting days. They can be challenged in that time, but in the meantime it goes on. It is in operation right from the word 'go', but they have the right, any Member has got the right, to challenge the regulations within 14 days, full 14 days sitting time. If they do, well then of course it is debated. But I didn't have any debates during the time I was in there. No-one challenged any of the legislation that I bought in.

What about in applying the regulations? Were there any instances where you might have found difficult to enforce regulations?

No, no. Once it was finalised, it was gazetted, it was proclaimed, that's it. But, in the meantime, even right from the word 'go' the regulation would be operation, even until that time was up. Sometimes the House wasn't sitting, it might be months before they had the right to challenge it. Sometimes the regulations were challenged. They had what they called a Committee of Subordinate Legislation where all these regulations and all the by-laws and all those other things that councils bring down and so on, they would have to go before them and they would have a good look at them. So very often anything that was not right would be knocked out at that stage. And if it was wanted to be brought back in, the people that, the Upper House or whatever they were, they would have the right to challenge it and so on. No. Regulations and by-laws – I don't think there were too many ever challenged.

What about the existing regulations and so on? Did you find the Department having to take a law enforcement sort of role and really applying regulations or could there be stand-offs? It's probably a question that applies to all your Ministers …

Yes. Regulations, it's got to be policed of course, but you don't get much trouble with it. Having regulations: people know what has got to be done and they do it. If anyone bucks over or whatever they could be in trouble with it. It becomes a law thing then, not a parliamentary thing.

There might have been cases thought where the Department rather than you personally, that the Department was able to say to a producer of whatever, 'That's not quite the right thing, don't do it again or else' ...

I think there is a lot of that done, there is a lot of that done. People shut their eyes to things to a certain extent. Every circumstances fit the occasion, you know. I think most things that they brought in were tempered with common sense.

What about relations with the Commonwealth government and the interstate Ministers? You alluded to that situation with the Agricultural Council, sorry the Woods and Forests Council rather.

With all the Ministers from all the other States I got on first rate. I never had any trouble at all. They were really first class, they were all top brass, all of them. I was quite friendly with all of them. In fact, with the Barley Board, the control of the barley was in two States' hands – Victoria and South Australia. The Minister in Victoria used to ring me up about a certain thing with regards to barley and I would ring him back. We pretty well had a direct line. We used to talk to one another frequently about this sort of thing. We were quite on very good terms together. Charlie Adaman, the Federal Minister of Primary Industries, he was a first-class man. I think there was one Minister, he had the Health Portfolio, Dr Forbes, he was perhaps a little bit uppish, a bit distant. You couldn't get too close to him. But most of the others, you could go and have a drink with them, we were all friendly together. After every Council meeting we would all go around the bar and have a drink. In the New South Wales Parliament, Askin was the premier at that time, he saw five of us drinking orange juice. He said, 'There's a lot of wowsers here'. I said, 'There is five of us could preach a sermon to you if you want to'. (Laughs)

There's some degree of separation there between political adversaries and what is happening parliamentary level?

In agriculture it's not like some of the other departments. I think with most of the other departments too, the Ministers would say that they got on pretty well with their counterparts. Apart from our own branch of Ministers we didn't seem to get much help from the Commonwealth, but we were small fry in comparison with the … We had different Ministers for Fisheries, different Ministers for Forests, some of them overlapped, but a lot of them were different Ministers that would meet in different places. But in all cases, I found them admirable people. Very first class.

On a different level of politics. How did you get on with the Public Service Association? Did you have any dealings through …

The Public Service Association and I were on very, very friendly terms. We had the director of Public Service at that time, a chap called Max Dennis, he was a champion fellow. On one occasion I had to approach him with regards to the salary of some of our officers in the Department. They reckoned they were not getting a fair amount of salary for their work, ??? counterparts in other States. I took it up with him, they made a recommendation to the Board, and they got an increase. But no, I think as far as the Association were concerned they didn't worry about me. They were more interested in the Premier or somebody else. But, as far as we were concerned, no. The Clerks Union used to come around and have a talk with me. Harry Krantz was the Secretary at that time. He came round and had a talk with me about his different ones. Soon after he came in I noticed that the fellows in the Department, the workers in the field, they were still on the 44-hour week. Everybody else was on a 40-hour week. I said, 'This is no good'. I took it to Cabinet and had it reversed. So they got a 40-hour week. Those sort of things all helped. No we had pretty good relations.

No great sticking points …

No, no.

… because you didn't necessarily come from a union background, you had an ALP background.

Well I did have some union background. I was a member of the Transport Workers Union for about four years and I was on the committee on the Waterside Workers' Federation too when I was working on the wharf, but I did have a little bit of union.

By that I meant you weren't an active member at Murray Bridge of the union.

Not the union. Of course, the unions weren't active at Murray Bridge. They didn't ....

It's not as if the PSA was knocking on your door as if you are a fellow unionist in that sense.

No, no, they didn't worry me at all. We didn't have any Jan McMahon's in those days either. (Laughs)

And the others.

Yes, that's right. (Laughs)

End of Tape 2, Side A
Side B, Tape 2

You mentioned before we started the recording that you lost office in '68 when the ALP lost office, only by a handful of votes.

That's right.

And you subsequently stood for re-election?

Yes.

And that's 1970, was it?

1970, yes.

So you lost office in '68 … missed out again by a handful.

Well, a bit more the next time because the district had enlarged with country areas.

A larger handful.

Yes.

And you worked as a real estate agent?

Yes.

You sort of took a turn: still connected to the land but in a different way!

Yes, that's right, I sold a few farms. (Laughs)

Not as a result of politics I hope!

No, no. Well I reckon I got business because of politics, not just from Labor members but from Liberal members. I had a man say to me, 'Gabe, I never ever voted for you', he said, 'If I can do any business with you I will'. That was fair enough. A compliment.

Just to round out our story, we've covered a fair bit of your time as Minister, but you had some involvement in the agriculture sector post-politics, or post-parliament at any rate. Did you maintain a political interest?

Do I now?

Did you then and do you now?

Well, I did then, but now it's more academic. I keep a close interest on what takes place. I read up what takes place, both State and Federal, so I'm keeping a very close eye on things, but not so much an active part any more.

But you were active in various boards and so on in the agricultural sector?

Well I became, after I came out of Parliament, I was invited to go on the Milk Board although I had to withstand an election. There were three of us, through the Public Service. I was successful in getting it. So I had 15 years on the Milk Board with some very fine fellows. One of them only died a couple of weeks ago, a chap called Jack Langley. The Milk Board was made up of a chairman full-time and three part-time members. I was one of the part-time members.

What was involved in the Milk Board, was it …?

We used to meet regularly every week and we would discuss things. mostly … they had regulations over the cost of production, the cost of distribution, the cost to the public, and also the quality of the milk. With the quality of the milk we had to have inspections of dairies to make sure they were clean and to make sure that the cows didn't eat the wrong food and make

the tainted milk. Any people used to complain about the milk going off, before the use-by-date, and that sort of thing, they would always be looked at. All these sort of things used to come to the Board. But matters of when price rises took place, when the industry applied for an increase according to inflation, well that would be looked at by an accountant who'd go into all the costs – their cost of production, the cost of the dairymen themselves, the cost of manufacture and so on – and that would then take place and be ironed out so that each one got the correct amount of money that they got. So all that came to the Board for ratification and that sort of thing. It was quite an interesting job really. We used to go out an inspect dairies: very often went out on a day trip looking around dairies.

That would be part of your weekly meetings?

Often it was, yes. In fact on one occasion there was a dairy farmer next to where I lived out on the river. We went and looked at his dairy and then we went along to my place and had the meeting. (Laughs) Had a lovely spot on the river. That finishes with the Milk Board? Anything else you want to know?

That would have been in the early 1980s?

No, it would be the early 1970s.

1970s.

Yes, that's right. I came out in '68. I think it would be about 1970, I should think.

Oh I thought it might have been after some years.

Soon afterwards. I came on the SGIC in 1970, because that followed pretty close. First the Milk Board then the SGIC. I used to go them both on the one day, on the Wednesday, go to both. Used to come down from Murray Bridge.

So the Milk Board was for a couple of years?

No, 15 years on the Milk Board.

You said '68 to ....

Oh no, no, no. I started in '70 on the Milk Board. I finished in '68. Milk Board I started in 1970 and I went on until about '85 – 15 years, yes. The SGIC went on for about the same time: I had 12 years for them.

Thanks for correcting that.

That's alright.

That's tidying up that issue.

That's OK.

Is that the only Board, the …?

The only two Boards I was ever on, yes.

What about contact with Parliamentary colleagues, former colleagues, and people who became Minister, people like Ross Storey, Tom Casey, your successors: did you liaise with them?

Ross Storey, of course, was on the opposite side in the Legislative Council too, as well as being in the Liberal Party. Although I was on quite good speaking terms to Ross, I didn't have anything to do with him personally. Tom Casey, I knew as a person in Parliament. We were colleagues together. As far as having anything to do with him once he became Minister, it was only on one occasion that I had anything to do with him. It was when the Egg Board wanted me to become their chairman. He invited me down to talk about it. I said, 'No, Tom, I don't want it' and so I didn't take it.

Lacking the time or lacking the interest?

Well, it wasn't lacking the interest, but I knew the way they treated me, and I thought that well I don't think I can really be happy in this particular one.

It's a bit of a turnaround in one sense though …

Well that's right, yes. But it was the people on the Egg Board that wanted the ??????? so that's why they wanted me as chairman. But the man who had been poultry adviser at Murray Bridge, and I brought him down to Adelaide as the Chief Poultry Adviser, a chap called Ray Fuge, I got him to be the chairman of the Egg Board. He did a very good job too. No, I didn't want that job.

Thanks for your comments. I'm not expecting an outsider, but a former Minister would automatically have entree to the …

No, I kept away from them. It's like a minister of religion, a new man coming in: he starts to say what I would do and what I did and all this sort of thing. It's a new broom, let them sweep it.

We've pretty well covered your time as Minister, and your career and so on, although we haven't perhaps touched from 1985 to the present you've been keeping [occupied] …

(Laughs) Yes, well I am still on the different things I do.

But are there any comments you might like to make about your involvement with the Department. I'll throw it open to you.

Well that'll be general. I've said most of them. But I enjoyed the time I had there. I was only sorry that I didn't have a bit longer. When I first started as Minister of Agriculture I also had Minister of Lands as well. I used to have to go in at 8 o'clock in the morning and do all the chores side of it in the Department of Agriculture and then go over to the Department of Lands and have the same thing there. [The] book work on the Department of Lands was terrific. They used to have a lot of leases and that sort of thing. You had to sign in triplicate, all of them, and you would get a great stack of them. I tell you I was working late at night to keep up with the

work so I was glad when we changed over to having an extra Minister and Des Corcoran relieved me of it. Then I had a chance to become full-time as Minister of Agriculture and I enjoyed that immensely. It was just one of those things that was a challenge. I felt that I was able to do some good insomuch that I believe I got to know people in the Department and I got their respect and they got mine, and we … It was funny, the first time I met the people in the Department, they came in this morning and they all wound around the room, all these fellows, all the heads of the Department. In turn I was taken around and introduced to each one of them. It was an ordeal, I can tell you. (Laughs) They were all good fellows and they treated me particularly well. Anything I wanted to know, I found out. I certainly asked a lot of questions and I got a lot of answers – the correct ones.

You seem to have enjoyed the experience, as short as it was.

I would dearly like to have had another three years, and I think they would have liked me to be there a bit longer too.

It remains one of those 'what if' situations.

I was just feeling that another three years I would justify some of the things that I'd done. They were just starting to show results, particularly the egg industry because it turned out afterwards that it was the salvation as far as the poultry industry was concerned, otherwise they'd have gone under. But, in fact, it was recognised by the director of what they call the Stock Graziers Association. They paid me that compliment, that I saved the poultry industry. So, yes, I think that the things that I did were right at the time. They've all gone by the board now. There's no more Boards, they have all gone, deregulated. More's the pity, but more so I think that quite a lot of the old people have gone that I knew, and that sort of thing. (Laughs)

You still maintain connections through the Retired Officers Group.

Yes. I still have a lot of … we have a monthly get-together too of former members. I'm the oldest and the fellows still come along, once a month we have lunch together.

I might get the names of a few more Ministers of Agriculture then! (Both laugh) There seems to have been quite a few!

These are not just from Agriculture, these are purely former members.

I realise that but there have been so many Ministers of Agriculture since your time.

Well there have been. There have been quite a lot, haven't there?

And that's why … you were one of the last to serve a full three-year term I think: only a few since then.

Well Ross Storey only served two years, but Tom Casey served a full-term.

And Brian Chatterton did.

Yes, probably did too. And Mayes. They would have all served their full term I think.

But in the more recent times they've been one or two years and then a turn over. It's making it pretty hard to get a grip on what the Minister ... what the government policy is and what the Minister's views are.

That's right. You see, today it's split up, the Department is split up under different Ministers now. You see, Paul Holloway, lovely fellow Paul, he's got part Lands and he's got part of Agriculture, he's got Fisheries, so it's all divided up now. It's no longer – it's a hotch potch today.

A strange mix.

I think that the Department is not as well off now as what it was then. I think the Department then there was a lot of knowledge in the Department. These fellows like Tom Miller and all those fellows – they knew their stuff, and they knew what they were talking about and you could rely on them for what they said. But today I think a lot of these fellows wouldn't have a clue.

You've got a lot more, back then, had a lot more research capabilities, research activities. Now it's more regulation, compliance. The education role of former times is being supplanted now by …

You see they had to go through their different class: they go through the Roseworthy Department of Agriculture which was a pretty tough school; and they go to university and they'd have a term there; very often did Waite Institute and that sort of thing. They got a pretty fair – a lot of them went to different States, interstate they got an insight into what happened there and then they came back here again, they got a terrific amount of knowledge at that time, and it was really good.

Part of what I'm doing is following that transition and change. A lot of the things have stayed the same all the way along, except that agriculture is a pretty basic necessity. They've got to keep producing to survive.

Well, that's true, it's a pity it has been let go because I think the history of the Department could be a very important thing in the future.

Well we'll keep you posted on how it turns out.

Yes, I'll be right.

I thank you very much for your involvement in this part of the project …

That's fine.

… and you can look forward to having a look at the transcript when that comes in the mail.

(Laughs)

Thank you very much Mr Bywaters.

That's alright.

End of interview.