

AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BERNARD O'NEIL WITH MR AVON ROSENZWEIG OF MANNUM, SOUTH AUSTRALIA ON THE 8TH OF FEBRUARY 2005 FOR THE PROJECT ON THE HISTORY OF THE ANIMAL AND PLANT CONTROL BOARD.

[Square brackets include comments and corrections provided by Mr Rosenzweig and Joanne Rosenzweig (his daughter-in-law) in January 2007. Note that the interview was recorded at a time when Mr Rosenzweig was experiencing some memory loss: the transcript should be read accordingly.]

Tape 1, Side A

[0:30] Avon, thanks very much for agreeing to be involved in this project. We're going to cover a little bit of your life story and your involvement with the Board, the local board in this region. As an introduction, it's significant to note that not only were you the Australian Citizen of the Year in Mannum in 1992 ...

1999.

... and the Order of Australia in 1999?

'99, that's right.

Yes. Also that you showed me a plaque you have in the house here that, in 1996, you'd served – or been a member, I should say – of the Agricultural Bureau for 50 years at that stage, and you're still a member. So they're just a few of the significant achievements. I know you served for some time on the local council here and we're going to cover that part of the story too, I guess. But an obvious point to start would be on your early years. Could you tell me a little bit about your personal background?

Like going to school and that?

Yes, or if we go back to date of birth, place of birth and ...

Right. We'll start from the place of birth. I was born July 27th in 19 ... I've got to think. Just stop ... (break in recording) [Parents] married in '27 and [I was] born in '28.

OK, 1928.

That's when the parents were married and [I was] born.

And you were born in Mannum?

Yes, I was born in Mannum. When it come into schoolday life I went to school at age of 7 years, a little school by the name of Frayville, which had to walk one mile those days, morning and night, and thumb a ride wherever we could.

A ride on a vehicle, or ...?

On a vehicle.

Right.

When that ... Frayville School was on my parents' property so I felt I owned the school and the property at the same time, sort of thing, part of me.

So I assume you were born in Mannum Hospital.

Mannum Hospital, yes.

But your parents had a farm?

Yes, they had the farm out there.

Where was the farm?

At those days it was called The Mile from the farm, north of the Frayville School. So my father, he played a big part in community affairs and when I got to that age I thought I could follow suit. When I got to that age I married, then father and mother, they came into the town of Mannum and lived and I was on the farm. So I had to operate the farm in the early '70s, but what I did find hard was my father was 56 and I was still going ... I was Grade 7 those days, and I had to leave school because he had a heart attack and I had to go home and drive the tractor so that he could do the seeding. So that's where it all started and then one thing led to another.

Were you much interested in school? When you say you had to leave school, do you regret ...?

I was in Grade 7, those days that was the last grade you could go. They used to have an exam at Grade 7 and I couldn't have that on account of my father's [health] and I could just go home and help him out, because my father's ... said that was his first heart attack.

Did you have brothers and sisters?

I've got two sisters. Then when I was on the farm immediately I was under father's control, had to do what I was told – I had to. (laughs) In those days he'd just got rid of his horses so I could drive a tractor. I thought I was made king that goes round the countryside and drives a tractor, because those days they were very few and far apart. There were still horse teams around.

That would have been hard to handle, the early tractors?

No, I thought it was easy.

You were a big, strong lad!

It's different now, they've got power steering and God knows what and hydraulics and everything. But no, I could drive this tractor. I know the first lot I done because the issue was seeding, and everybody remarked how straight the rows looked where I'd been sowing. My shoes were 2" higher when I heard those stories! (laughs) From then on ... Then I got married, eventually got married, that's when my parents came to Mannum, and we lived on the farm place. When I thought I owned all this country I had ant's pants: I was king of the country. But things weren't meant to be too easy. I didn't get interested much in community affairs till after my father passed away, and I have to think just when ... (break in recording)

So that was – we're just checking there – that's 1957 your father died.

Yes, that's '57 when he died.

What had happened just prior to that, Avon, in terms of the farm? You said your parents came into Mannum. Had you basically inherited the farm, or ...?

That is right, yes.

[7:30] From then on I started to get involved with community affairs. I thought seeing my grandfather was in Council and I had an uncle that was in Council, and I thought I'd better follow the same footsteps. I always enjoyed these Council meetings because I thought they were very informal and very helpful ... to us. So that was great ... So I went to Council, eventually got in to Council. Then I was virtually put on my first job was being member of the Animal Plant Board. Those days it was a little bit different to what it is now. They never had a committee, it was just a local thing. I was also in Council on many occasions and certainly it used to take up a lot of my time. It's with all things: if you're conscientious with things it does take up your time.

You say there's a little bit of a family tradition there, with your grandfather and your father being involved in the community and the Council and I presume other groups and clubs in the town.

Yes, especially the bowling green. They were at the stage of forming their club. Being a member of Council they pushed me. I had a fair bit of response to them during their time. Very heavily involved with Council. They had a committee to make recommendations to Council, and I found that very strong feeling. There was mixed feelings with it because you make recommendations to the Council and then they go and upset everything and start all over again. (laughs) I was in Council for 25 years and I hold the ... 15 years of that was chairmanship, which is the longest serving Chairman of the Mannum Council. I was five years Deputy and five years as Councillor. That sort of kept me very busy.

[10:55] You were still running the farm?

Yes, at that time.

But you had enough ... First you had that sense of civic duty. You also had enough time to be able to do ...

Yes. Those times the family wasn't so bad because you had the tractor you're only putting in a small amount of acreages, not to compare nowadays – bigger acreages, there's more time involved – but those days it was somewhat a little bit different. You had a team of horses, well, that would cut you out altogether because that was too slow. It's just sort of the change, changing at the time.

Yes. Did you employ people on the farm?

No. I used to do everything by myself. What I used to do a lot of, I used to go out shearing besides. I used to do a fair bit of shearing, just to make a bit of pocket money because dad never gave me pocket money. I had to trap rabbits and try and earn my own pocket money. But, nevertheless, I just naturally thought that was it those days. Everybody's doing the same thing, because parents those days, all they think about is feeding the horses and the cows, go milking cows morning and night. Had to milk before we went to school and when you come home still milk another cow or two. Of course, then there's always had to feed the pigs at times when

father wasn't about. Just the general farm work, keep your mind occupied. But at the end I thoroughly enjoyed that life because I thought I was ant's pants.

Very self-sufficient – you could run the farm and ...
That's right.

Did you have children that could help you and that you might encourage in the farming?
[After we got married, we had four children, one girl and three boys, and John the eldest inherited the farm], he is still on the farm. But it has increased a lot. He's got a lot more acres than what I had. But they seem to enjoy it so that's their problem, and he's got a big piggery at present. While I was on Council I thoroughly enjoyed the days going to these meetings, because I thought I knew before anybody else used to know.

[13:50] Then the amalgamation came about in the late '70s, they were talking about this ... animal and plant control board, but at that stage it never had a name.

So when you were the councillor ...
I was still on Council.

... when you first started with the Pest Plants Control Board you were the councillor from Mannum and you were just serving on this board with no name. So it didn't have a name?
It had a name I think.

It was just the Pest Plants Control Board for Mannum, or ...?
That's right. That was just for Mannum at that stage. They, in the mid, late '70s, when the amalgamation took place, this board, together with the councillors from Cambrai and another council involved ... I just can't quite remember.

With Sedan or Murray Bridge?
Walkers Flat area.

Walkers Flat, OK.
... and to join the Mid Murray Pest Plant Control Board. That's where it started from. That was gazetted 20th day of January 1977, that's when that was ... gazetted.

So that started in 1977, but you're saying from 1972, when you joined the Council, you had served with ...?
They had a board.

So it was just a local board.
It was just a local board.

So more like weeds and ...
That's right. They virtually ... doubtful they had any power. They'd go and tell the men, neighbours, whatever, just to scare them. Then in 1977, 1.3.1977, that's when it became

operational. I still remember all the comments the community was making and they weren't very kind and polite: 'Just wait till the BB comes on my property, I'll tell them bloody well to go!'. (laughs) But anyway, that started off then. I was a member of that organisation 28 years and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

You've served all the way through to the present day.

Yes.

So that's your 28 years.

That's what I was told, it was 28 years.

[17:40] Yes, 28 years.

Near enough ... I stepped down after a while, when the Mid Murray Animal Plant ... when the Mannum Council joined Mid Murray Council, then I stepped down. I just thought I was Chairman there for so many years and the rest of the time I could just sit there as a member, representing Mid Murray Council. I was not a member of Council at that stage because, when they amalgamated, I just naturally said, 'It's too big to handle'. That's when I stepped down – out of Council, but I'm still a Council member. They must nominate me on the track somewhere, but I'm still representing the Mid Murray Council now.

So just to clarify the record here, in 1997 the Mid Murrayland Council came into being, and that's when you stepped down as a councillor ...

Representative.

... but you remained a representative on the ...

Yes.

[19:05] ... Animal Plant Control Board, so that clarifies that part of it. Also 1997 is about the time you moved in to Mannum itself and left the farm?

We've been in Mannum eight years. Where are we now?

2005 now.

'Five, yes, that'd be right, be '97.

So a lot of things happening in '97 for you.

That was a rather hectic year. In the first meeting, it was held in the Council Chambers in '87, and I thought everything in there seemed familiar, just being in Council Chamber. But then in Cambrai (reading) 'at 7:35 pm, minutes from the previous Pest Plant Control Board and Vertebrate Control Board 23-6-87 were taken as read'. That was the first set of minutes that was come over. William Judd, he was representing the Animal Plant Control Board as a representative, and Robert Hodges was the first ... which would be the officer.

1987 there is when Pest Plants and Vertebrate Pests merged, and of course now in 2005 you've got cessation of the Animal Plant Control Board and the Resource Management Board coming in ...

That's right.

... so you've seen quite a few changes.

Yes. Yes, you seemed like you were walking at one stage, and now you're running.

Also you just get accustomed to something and it changes yet again on you, so ...

During that time I served there seven years as Chairman.

So you were Chairman of the Pest Plant ...?

Mid Murray. It would have to be Mid Murray.

Sorry, yes: after '87 you served ...

Then after that Hughie Glastonbury took over.

Yes. So you were Chairman of the Animal Plant Control Board.

Yes, that's right, yes.

[21:45] The local one. OK. Perhaps we should look now at the activities of the Board and your own activities. You were saying you were appointed by the Council as a representative.

Just talking about that at this stage, I never get told by Council that I'm representing them. It just seemed to be automatically there.

I was going to ask you why was that so. Your background as a farmer?

(laughs) Mm, yes.

[22:20] What about on your farm? Did you have any problems with pest plants, the vertebrate pests?

Our biggest problem would have been rabbits.

Right, the vertebrate side.

Yes. Those days there used to be a lot of foxes around also. We had a gang there – called ourselves 'the Happy Gang' – used to go out spotlighting and enjoy ourselves. We used to catch up to 20 foxes a night, something like that. We'd skin them all and end of the year we'd take our wives out on the houseboat for a couple of nights (laughs) on the river.

Were they – foxes and rabbits in particular – were they really big problems for you on your farm?

It was big problems, not even my own area but overall. Everybody had rabbits and foxes those days. Especially when it came to lambing time these foxes were rather cruel. We even had a police[man] that used to come and pick us up, one only reason why: because he thought we always had green wine on board. He loved it! (laughs) Yes, he used to have a good mouthful and then he'd go on his way again. 'Happy hunting,' he reckons! (laughs)

As you do. The fact that foxes, rabbits, other feral pests, animal pests and so on going through your area makes me wonder how supportive the landowners, the farmers would have been in these early days, to ... You said before that there was some reticence.

Yes. When you used to go spotlighting those days you were supposed to have consent from the farmers who you were travelling on their property, and that had to be in writing. When the police comes along we could show him we're on the right track.

But you had permission for that sort of hunting. My question, Avon, was more when they were setting up the Vertebrate Pest Authority – ‘Here’s the government coming to help you,’ that sort of notion – what was the attitude then of the landowners, the farmers, towards ...?

‘You’re not going to tell me what to do’. They’d heard that so often! If we’d think they had a problem, ‘We’ll get rid of them’. ‘You’re not telling me what to do’. Things now are a lot more serious and they know that we mean business. All due respects, today they take a lot more respect of the officers that come around and approach them than what they did years ago. I’ve got nothing, a grudge against those officers years ago. I thought they’d done a marvellous job, but the community as a whole, they’ve got a lot more respect.

[25:30] Just recently we had a bureau meeting. It was that well received I got the shock of my life, that we got him to come to this meeting, and he presented traces of what’s going on. Very well, very well received.

Was there a long education campaign, a long road to acceptance?
Acceptance to what?

To these activities of the board, the staff members and the government’s ...?
No, I don’t think ... we never had much problems with that.

It’s just you were saying before that people were ...
That’s the people. But the government themselves, being a new board, they’d be well on the board. In other words, they wouldn’t leave a stone unturned, they’d let you know pretty quick what’s going on.

What about when you first started and you were saying the general attitude may have been some reluctance to accept this, but did ... you’re Council representative and you were saying you had a few problems on your farm: were there farmers willing to take on this, accept this new role, this new board?

In other words, they’d watch what was going on. If they could see that it was benefiting, then they’d be be[hind you]. But you’d have to do something first that they could see what’s going on, they could see its benefit.

The fact that there were two boards, one for pest plants and one for vertebrate pests, did that create problems – we’re talking here late ’70s into the ’80s – did you perceive problems in having two sorts of authorities?

No. They just thought we were the same thing. People just naturally thought we were the same thing. But if a problem arose then I wouldn’t like to say what had been happening. But things were working very smoothly at that stage. It all had a lot to do with the staff. Be surprising how people watch what’s going on, and that means a lot. If you’ve got good staff, which we’re privileged to have, means a lot.

So it’s important that there are people ...
That is right.

Just to clarify one thing, Avon: with the two boards, Pest Plant and Vertebrate Pests, were you the council representative on both?

Yes.

So you had a double lot of meetings to go to. (laughter) You must like meetings.

Yes. ... But like I always say, so often it just depends so much on the family. If you've got family help behind you, it means a lot.

You need that support.

You need that support.

But the meetings themselves, were they short and sharp or did you have a lot of business to discuss? What sort of time did you have?

The meetings at that stage weren't very long. But it's just like everything new, it takes a while to get across to the public what's involved. But as time went on it got smarter and smarter and smarter, and same thing today. There's always something new coming up, and there always seems to be problems.

It seems as if the work of both the boards early on and then the merged board, the work seemed to be increasing, it always seemed to be there's more and more things – more and more diseases, more and more pests.

That is true, that is going on, they're finding different plants now, they've got to find out what they are and what they're made of, how long will they exist and all that type of stuff, what they've got to do with them. I still recall the time when I finished there that there's more contact with the Pest Plant Control Board, together with the main board in Adelaide – what did they call it?

We had the Vertebrate Pests and ...

Yes, together with Vertebrate Pests. There's more correspondence between those two boards than what there was from the beginning.

Again, thinking here of the earlier period, you were involved at the local level. Through either of these boards did you have contact with the Adelaide people, the main boards?

Not very much, no. It was just clearly sitting there making our own ideas and rules and regulations, the go-ahead boys.

So you were sort of left to your own ...?

Discretions. Till such time ... It was one of the first boards ever would start it, going elsewhere in the State, starting it. That's when the Animal Plant Control Board were getting more tensed, I should say, and we certainly made a stand.

[32:05] Related to that, Avon, the territory, the region that you covered. You mentioned earlier on you were just the local Mannum rep.

I was rep with Mannum Council at this time, but at that stage this Vertebrate Pest Plants Board was combined with Cambrai, but we worked together with them.

What sort of area, how big an area would you have covered?

Cambrai Council – I don't know if it went up to Blanchetown, I'm not quite sure about that.

But basically you were covering the Council area of Mannum and Cambrai.

Yes, that's right, the Mannum and Cambrai Council areas.

Would that be the same with the Pest Plant sort of work, covering ...?

At that stage. But, when they amalgamated – what did they call themselves? – Mid Murray Council which goes right up to ...

[33:20] **End of Side A, Tape 1**

Tape 1, Side B

[0:05] ... the divisions of the Boards, it was claimed by the Council, Mannum Council, as the areas for the Pest Plant and Vertebrate Pest Boards, and then when it became Animal Plant Control Board obviously those two Councils merged, the territories merged. Did you have extra territories as well, did the boundaries change come '87 and beyond?

That'd just be up to Morgan now I think it goes.

Yes, and that's the '97 ...

It was, yes.

... that's the '97, but between '87 and '97 did it remain the Cambrai–Mannum, the old Cambrai–Mannum ...?

Yes, yes, still the same.

OK, right. That would be quite a few landholders, then, to ...

Yes, and there was only one officer. That was Robert Hodges, and he done that for 12 years by himself.

Serving both boards?

It was virtually one board and he was serving the two Councils.

That territory also involve the River Murray?

Yes, on this side.

On this side, yes?

There'd be some on the other side too, which was the Mannum Council area comes out of ... up there somewhere.

Were there any particular problems associated with the Board's work in relation to the river, any particular pests?

Not at that stage, but these latter years it has really started to show up. Probably heard today they were talking about boxthorns, those swamps along here. To me they are a great menace to the community or a great menace to the swamp, and the landowners of the swamps. Changing a little bit now, but early in the piece they just simply reckoned we're a lot of nuisance hounds or

something. But that's starting to change now, it's starting to get a bit more serious and they've made it today too that these fellows that had the boxthorns are starting getting to be more co-operative. But I hope that keeps going.

It's an interesting thing that you say things like boxthorns with the river, and part of the role of these boards is to control these pests. Yet, as we said earlier, there still seems to be ... it's ongoing, the need: you don't seem to be able to eradicate them, it's all a matter of control rather than eradication.

That seems to be progressing quite well, especially near the top end of Mannum, up there.

Down this end it doesn't seem to have been nearly so bad. I always reckon the punters should draw a line from the punt upwards. (laughs)

[3:50] You mentioned the regions of operations for the board. Obviously, there are boards in adjoining areas. Did the Mid Murraylands Board ... How much interaction did it have with other APC boards nearby? Did you deal with other boards?

Virtually never heard of it. (laughs)

Very territorial!

Yes, that is right. We had our own problems and our own piece of ground. Admittedly, they had their annual meetings where they all get together and iron out problems, but as individuals we never heard much what was going on up further or down further.

That's as board members: what about at the staff level? Did the staff officers have to liaise with the others? I mean, the obvious thing is a rabbit doesn't know a boundary, a boxthorn can grow anywhere.

Yes. The office staff, we only virtually had the one or two secretaries. They were the only people I can ... at the time and that's Dennis Snow, so he had his share up there. I thought there was another one, just can't think of his name. But we never used to hear much, only what we'd report back to Council after the meeting, that's where the first ... goes through. You got the local paper, what you call *The Standard*: they used to put a heading in the paper every now and then saying 'So-and-so will be around, Mid Murray Animal Plant Board, to look for rabbits', and that's how we still get the message across to the people.

It sounds very much like the Board's inward-looking, it's worried about its own territory. You mentioned the newspaper. Your role – you're reporting to Council?

Yes, that was right ... Our Mannum Council that time, all the committees they had all used to report back to Council, no matter what it was.

So things like notices in the newspaper or notices in the Council offices about ...

That's where the newspaper used to get it from.

Yes. About undertaking certain activities or ... What about if someone hadn't abided by the instructions? Were there cases where people said, 'We're not going to implement the Board's ...'?

Right. Then the Board would go and do it themselves and charge. We used to get paid sometimes, but sometimes we may not have. (laughs)

So some people would thumb their nose at authority and they're not going to ... Was there any sense of community pressure on those people? You know, 'This is something you should do for the good of the community'?

When it started originally I had it thrown back at me quite often, 'Huh! You're now on the Pest Plant Board. Now you're going to tell us what to do'. That was the very often comment. Yes. The reply was, 'You get your finger out and do it'. (laughs)

Some of that, I suppose, comes back to the education aspect you mentioned earlier.

That is right. They sort of watch what you're doing; if they can see it's improving, 'We'd better do something about it'. But seeing that in my case was one of the officers, representing Council, they'd watch you very closely. You'd better do what you're talking. So if they can see you're getting rid of rabbits and things of that nature, that is fine. But in those days there were no fox bait put out, anything of that nature, that only come latter years.

In some ways it's an odd situation for you to be on the Council: you're on the Board as a Council representative and you're on the Council some of that time as Chairman, so you're sort of wearing two hats; and thirdly you're a farmer, so you've got a ...

I was virtually Chairman for two. I was Chairman for this for seven or eight years or something and I was virtually Chairman of the Council at the same time.

But do you find you have to weave a path at times? Were there any problems in wearing those hats?

No. I thought I was Chairman, that's it, representing an organisation.

I suppose it's always possible, of course, that something would come up at say this Board level that you might have to issue an instruction to Council to get its act together: did that scenario arise?

Not really, no. But the biggest advantage of the whole thing is the officers that are doing the work, their approach to the public and to the people. We were fortunate we had those officers and they had the right approach. That makes a mighty big difference. If they go there being nasty, the reply would be nasty too. We'd hear that quick smart. 'You're not going to tell me ...'. I won't say the name what they used to say, but ... (laughs)

[10:55] A couple of things about the Board itself – when I say the Board here I'm really thinking of before 1987 merger and since the merger. You mentioned the staff: who hires and fires the staff? Is it the Board?

The Board does. It always has.

So that's done at the local level?

These days I can't remember one staff member being fired. It's been ... Robert Hodges was there for 12 years or something. He was officer for 12 years. Then we had his brother, that was Peter Hodges. They were the two officers we had there for a long time. Till this amalgamation: they were going up further so naturally you had to have more officers.

But that's all done at the local level.

Council, yes.

This level. Is it something that has to be run past the main Commission in Adelaide at all, or is this left ...?

No, we wouldn't worry about them till we wanted problems or had problems and wanted help, assistance.

Things like the day-to-day operations, like this morning at Cambrai I was seeing the facilities there and so on: that's something that's all arranged through the Board?

All those facilities there, they are ... [run] past the Board and the Board always used to consent to what they want. By doing that, then we knew they were happy. If you consent some to what they don't like, you're working uphill. That's some of the reasons why our officers, I feel that they've been so obliging to the Board.

There's a fair degree of local autonomy. I presume if there was a big capital expenditure item you might have to go to the Commission in Adelaide?

Now, what do you mean by expenditure?

Like if you were ...

If we had the dollars and cents there we'd do it under our own power. See like a vehicle, they get changed every so often, and there's not that many dollars involved because you get such a high trade-in and they get changed over quite frequent.

Building facilities at Cambrai, for example: would that be something that needed higher authorisation?

That time when we built that end on, we did get some help from the Commission, and to me that was really wonderful, instead of going into the Council Chambers, that we could have our own offices to walk into. It was good. But when was that, '87 wasn't it?

'97 for the office.

Office, '97, hmm.

At least that's what it says on the plaque.

Yes, that was wonderful. Then we had the Ridley-Truro Council ...

When I asked you earlier on about the staff and the facilities, the other aspect of the – again I use the word 'Board' to mean the whole boards over time, all of them – did you have autonomy about Board membership? How did people come to be on the Board?

They'd been elected by Council.

When you say 'by Council' you mean the local government?

Local government, yes.

But not everyone on the Board was a local government ...

Mightn't be in those days but they're still there. (break in recording)

[15:20] There is always a government representative and a representative from farmers and a representative from Council? How did that sort of balance come about?

Generally councillors, virtually most of them were farmers, so it was their problem. Those councillors in the town, they took a terrible lot of notice of what they were saying, and they could see the advantage: 'It's their problem, and we'll take it from there'. If my memory goes back, I don't think we ever had a bad word in Council regards to Mid Murray Plant Control Board. That is the community and everything. If they'd have a problem they'd go straight to the officers. (laughs)

This sort of puts you on the spot a bit because I know you were Chairman for a time, but as a rule, and over the 28 years, did the councillors work together ... the Council members work together collaboratively? Was it a pleasant experience or did you have problems at times with people?

No, I had no problems with that. They elected the Board, the Mannum Council had so many members on it and the Mid Murray Council had so many members on it. Each one elected their own members, that was it.

I don't know if it was harmonious, speaking as an outsider, but looking at the roll board today in the office there, it's interesting that there doesn't appear to have been a very high turnover of board membership. Seems to be fairly stable over time, people stayed there a long time.

Once you get there, you stop there. (both laugh) Yes. No, the membership never used to change very much, if at all.

I guess ...

The last comment was somewhat good too, because the Council then, we just naturally thought we must be doing the right thing, otherwise we'd hear something about it.

I guess for you personally there must be a high level of satisfaction, given the fact you've remained involved for 28 years, even after you've left the Mannum Council and after you've left the farm, you've maintained active involvement.

Yes. Now like this interview today, that really gives me a lift. I really feel that's good. I don't know how much longer that's going to last, but I do think, I feel sure in my own mind, once the NRM comes into it I'll probably finish up too. Age is catching up and it's time to let somebody else have a fly at it.

The session today gives you a chance – and our previous discussions – are giving you a chance to reflect on the highs and lows.

Renewing a memory. I'll probably go to bed tonight and that'll be all going around in circles.

It's good.

It's not all ...

I like the person that is asking the questions. Makes a big difference. I just feel lucky that one of us is an easy person to comply with. It seems so often, in all the organisations that I've been involved with, it only doesn't take you very long when you can sum a person up. That's me. And you as well.

I'm on the learning curve and I'm here to learn from someone who knows a lot.

Right. (laughs)

[19:50] Perhaps it's good to get some general observations. As I've said numerous times, we're covering 28 years in a very short session. But are there any observations you'd like to make about the activities of the Animal Plant Control Board – some of its successes, some of its failures? Just general things.

At this stage it's pretty hard because the region is changing. While it's changing I don't know if there should be any alterations [to] the Animal Plant Control Board. That's how I feel, because it might just get ... When you want to change something, just get organised: bang. How this new region's going to fare, I'd put a question mark on it. It's starting to get too big. You'll have a job to keep contact. Even the officers, no clue where their headquarters are going to be, the distance they might have to travel, which would mean a lot of expense to the Board.

It's a bit early to predict that.

It's a bit early to predict that because we don't know.

Looking as we are now, backwards, are there things that stand out as significant achievements, significant successes, where you think, 'The Board did its job'? In one sense it's done its job by surviving 28 years, but are there things, on-the-ground activities, where you think, 'We were able to influence change significantly'? Does anything come to mind, like in any of the pests or any of the pest animals or the pest plants, where ...?

When we first started we never heard of things about wombats or deers or that type of class.

Now, we only heard today how the wombats are increasing. How you're going to treat them I don't know. If a farmer comes up to you, 'What do we do? How do we get rid of the wombats?', what would you say? 'Feed them with bad oats' or something? They always dig their warrens in cliffs and that type of stuff. What are you going to do? What does a wombat eat? Just straight grass? Don't know.

The wombat's a good situation where the local Board might be on the phone to Adelaide saying very quickly, 'Commission, please tell us'. Yes, it's a difficult one.

In our area and the broader area there's not many wombats involved, till you get up to the top end like the Swan Reach area and those areas.

Swan Reach, Morgan, that area?

They're all in the outback countries. It probably comes a lot because a lot of the land is cleared and they don't get many visitors and they just go merrily ahead their own way. It's between Cambrai and Sedan, there's quite a few wombats along that creek.

When I asked you about successes, Avon, what about the obvious, the rabbits, the foxes? The ones that were there when you were out shooting 50 years ago: has there been success there? The numbers, anecdotally or scientifically, numbers falling ...?

Numbers have certainly decreased a lot, that's my view of things. To me now it's very rare you see one crossing the road. Those days they'd be crossing roads all the time and now you very

rarely see a fox across the road. But still population-wise ... You see very little spotlighting, because you've got to have a permit now. Before this permit stage come out there was too many that were spotlighting, not responsible. Say no more. (laughs)

One of the things, as a society generally and of course it relates to the Board quite obviously, is this ongoing, increasing regulation: the list of plants that are considered pests and weeds, noxious weeds and so on, the list of animals: that seems to have grown over time.

When I first started all that was known about was horehound and boxthorns. The rest has sort of all come later. They may have been there, but we weren't realising they were a noxious weed. Like even in the present there's bally calthrop so thick everywhere – we wouldn't worry about that years and years ago, didn't realise what it was.

But now people are more aware?

They are more aware of weeds than years ago, till the Board started. One fellow said, 'We know where the weeds are. They're sitting in an office up there'. In other words, (laughs) mentioning that the Boards, they're just a mob of weeds! Heard that saying quite often.

I suppose this is more a question of your personal observations, given your extensive farming experience, extensive knowledge of the area: is the land in better shape now as a result of these eradication control programs?

It's got to be! I mean you heard a bit about rabbits – you want a rabbit to eat you'd be really working hard to find it, that's how I see it. You don't see many rabbits now, you only ... If you've got a sandhill or something like that, you may see a warren there – that's easy to control. But to see a warren on the roadside now, wouldn't even see a warren on the roadside, not like it was years ago.

[27:20] There are aspects ... you touched on the size of farms being bigger now and the technology that's used, now you've got these ... the work of the Board and the eradication and control aspects, so as I say, you're in a position to make some value judgment over 50, 60 years.

That's how I see it at this stage. It's a different country. If you went back years ago there's nothing new, you'd just see acres of crop being mowed down by rabbits around the scrub. It's a rare occasion you see that, although I know that if somebody's got a few warrens in the scrub, they'll tell him, 'You'll have to do something pretty quick smart', they'll get on his tail. (laughs) Tell him to get out with a front-end loader and dig them out. But you still get that odd one, I suppose.

Part of my question, I suppose Avon, was – we already touched on it, too – the education process. The modern farmer – and this is not to denigrate the farmers of old – but the modern farmer is perhaps more in touch with the land now? We've got away from that transplanted European farming concept to a more, shall we say, a greater acceptance of the land as it is?

Mmm. If you go back years ago, when it first started off, quite a lot of horse teams around.

What could they do with a horse in trying to eradicate rabbits? Eradicating rabbits, I mean

ripping. Everyone's got tractors now: one, two, three and it's all over. Just keep a check on what you're doing.

It's still a tough life though, isn't it.
Life is not meant to be easy.

I've heard that somewhere before.
(laughs) Yes.

But I know we've touched on it in our general discussion about ...
You're talking about life being easier: you just look at the community. Those that really work hard, you just watch their approach as they're walking down the street compared to one that's battling.

But the farming life, even though in some respects it's easier, in other respects it's harder; and the economics of farming now – trying to get a good return ...

Yes. Another thing I should mention too, I forgot about, is a lot of farmers have been cutting up in blocks and you get that person coming in, he wouldn't give a damn about rabbits or weeds or anything. They're the hard ones that I've served with.

The new ones – the ones new to farming?

Mmm. They think they can come in and turn the world over and it doesn't quite work like how they expected it should work. If you say something about it they just say, 'You're old fashioned'. I've heard that saying lots of times. (laughs)

They're not Roseworthy graduates, are they?
(laughs) Could be.

We've ranged widely and generally. We're nearly out of time now, probably at the end of the tape, so let's pause for a moment so you can pause ... (break in recording) OK, we'll put a stop on it for now and then we can always follow through another time or with a transcript, whatever. But I must thank you very much for your contribution and for inviting me up for the Board meeting this morning – it was just an interesting experience for me and to meet you.

That's good, because before I rang ... 'Shall I or shan't I? What'd he say?'. So I was pleased that you took it the way you did. But that's right through, because I do think you are on the right track – all your suggestions and ideas. That makes me stand close behind you.

Thanks. We'll see how it turns out, but I'll be in touch very soon with a transcript for you and that'll give you a bit of light reading.
(laughs) Right.

[32:05] **End of interview**