

AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY BERNARD O'NEIL WITH MR RAY ALCOCK OF HOPE VALLEY, SOUTH AUSTRALIA ON THE 4TH OF NOVEMBER 2004 FOR THE PROJECTS ON THE HISTORY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND THE HISTORY OF THE ANIMAL AND PLANT CONTROL COMMISSION.

[This version of the transcript incorporates the corrections, revisions and additional text supplied by Ray Alcock from March 2007 to February 2008. The other version of the transcript (Alcockfin.doc) includes a few corrections, revisions and additional text, and these are in the first pages only: it adheres more closely to the recorded interview. In both cases, the extensive war service comments on Tape 2, Side A which were not relevant to the project were not transcribed.]

[0:28] Ray, thanks very much for agreeing to be involved in both of the projects. We're going to chase your working career in the Department and then working on the pest plant area and so on. Perhaps we could start with a bit of your background and leading up to how you became involved in the agriculture sector.

Right. I was born on the 12th of December 1921. Several hours later my twin sister was born, Zoe Pearl. My father was Ernest Simpson Alcock who was one of six appointed RDAs – first appointed as inspectors, agriculture inspectors for the five districts of the State. Later on they were called Agriculture Advisors.

So he was working for the government?

Yes, the Department of Agriculture. I was the third son of a family of six. I had two elder brothers. Alick, he went to Roseworthy in the same year as Max O'Neil. This was about 1935 or something like that. The other one, Max, he went to Longerenong College in Victoria. I myself went to Roseworthy in 1939.

Where was the family living?

Mt Gambier. My earliest memories of that are at Kybybolite at about 3 years old. This was on the experimental farm under Len Cook who was the manager at the time. Later on he went back to Adelaide to headquarters where dad was doing his training. In 1936 we moved [back] to Mt Gambier [for dad] to take the position of Inspector Advisor of Agriculture in the South East. The boundary was from Tailem Bend above the Princes Highway through Bordertown to the border and along the coast. It was a big area. (laughs)

Had not been many opportunities in those days.

His first car was an old Rover, a [two]-seater Rover. At that time there were only about four of us so [we] twins were sitting in the front with mum and dad or one would stand and the other would sit and [then] change over. The two elder brothers, they sat at the 'dicky' seat at the back (the back opened up). We went a long way, all over the place [like that]. Dad was very good that way. He took us out on holidays. He was very strict in lots of ways and yet he gave us a fairly free go to do things and to think for ourselves. [He forbade us to use derogate expressions such as nigger, chink, chow and also to be respectful to other races and the various religious beliefs.] He was a strong Rechabite, ran through his family, you can look up the history of Rechabites in South Australia. Consequently, he didn't drink and he stuck to it too. He never would, even if he was ill he'd stare at the [medicinal] whisky, but he wouldn't drink it.

That's another story. That was a bit different for the family: we strayed, until later on when [I] gave up drinking later. I'm getting off the track.

[5:55] OK Ray, just clarifying there that you were born in Mt Gambier, you moved away and then you came back?

Yes, that's right.

It would have been an exciting sort of place for a young kid, growing up in a rural town like Mt Gambier, plenty of open space.

Comparatively, it would have been but it was a fairly big town still. Yes, it was. The lakes were fantastic. We lived in Wallis Street, note that it's spelt W-A-L-L-I-S. It was down from the hospital. The Valley Lake was just over the hill. We often went swimming before school in the morning. On weekends sometimes we'd stay all afternoon in the water and not come out. We'd swim from one side down to the other there. I mentioned [that we] used to grab a rock and go down deep so we could chase the [tortoises] and things of that nature.

A lot of freedom?

Very free yes. Dad would take us out to the scrub, that's where I got my interest in botany and so forth. I first got the interest, he had tried a few other things and he was interested in native flora and fauna as well and was a great friend of J.M. Black. I've got two letters there from J.M. Black to him. I vaguely remember the man [John McConnell Black], as a youngster. He used to come down and dad would take him out around to different jobs [to look for certain native plants].

Was your father academically trained in these interests?

He was a graduate from Roseworthy in 1904, yes.

So he could impart that knowledge to you?

Yes. He was a great gardener [and a keen amateur botanist] as well and he enjoyed travelling. My first camping trip was when I was 10 months old. I don't remember much about it but we were out every Christmas. Most Christmases we spent our school holidays at Clarks Park which was known in those days as The Springs at Port MacDonnell. There was plenty of scrub around there and some of the places we used to go to, apart from The Springs, were fishing for eels and chasing possums and getting scratched and bitten! It was all lots of fun. Digging out rabbits in the soft sand. We had a wonderful time. Don't forget fishing and crabbing and all those sorts of things, and swimming. The Orwell Rocks up on the other side of Port MacDonnell, that was the surfing beach. That wasn't for fishing, [due to the large waves and rip]!

We had our fun. We had surf boards. Also there was the Bubbling Springs and the 8-Mile Creek which was later settled and divided up for soldier settlers. The Bubbling Springs was an

amazing thing. It was about 30 cm or so high. It'd be bubbling and the spring came up. Later on they spoilt that by digging in to get more water and pumping from it. There were so many of those water holes around there. Up near Cape Northumberland was another one: we used to call it [The Treacle Pot]. There were also birds and we found bats and all sorts of things. Dad would encourage us to [seek out these things].

Was that on a family level you were doing these things?

Yes, but I was more interested than the others. They were interested, but they never took it on like I did. Max went to Longerenong and then he went to the Department of Agriculture in Walpeup in Victoria with the Victorian Department. Alick went into buttermaking at Mt Gambier. That was my introduction. I'd go down to help him and so forth and I'd learn a little bit about dairying too and got paid about 6 pence [an hour] or 8 bob a day or something like that to do this [work in the butter factory].

Was this when you were at school?

Yes, we were at school yes.

Was there a bit of an age difference between the brothers?

The age difference was two years between us. Alick was born (with Max O'Neil) in about 1935, '34. I've got the dates here somewhere.

You can fill them in later Ray.

The only one born in Adelaide was Gordon, when we were there and dad was doing his training at the Department of Agriculture headquarters. He was born there. That was the last son. Anne, the baby, the youngest one, she was born while we were back in Mt Gambier again.

[Ernest Simpson Alcock married Elsie Evelyn Crafter, 30.10.1915. They had six children:

Alick Ernest Arthur, 5.8.1916–

Max Edward, 5.5.1919–

Charles Raymond, 12.12.1921–

Zoe Pearl, 12.12.1921–

Gordon Ladlow, 9.10.1925–

Anne, 15.3.1930–

All born in Mt Gambier, except Gordon (born Unley Park).]

[12:50] Were you much interested in the school or the outdoors life?

Who me?

You, yes.

I didn't take the interest I should have at school. Like most boys in those days, we were more interested in things like going up to the lakes. There was a wonderful playground up there. Apart from fishing at Valley Lake, there was the Leg of Mutton Lake there. There was the old garden and we used to go and help ourselves to the apples and peaches and odd things like that. There was a grove of walnuts which we used to wait on for them to ripen. We used to then get

[into trouble] because our hands were all darkened with the stain of the walnuts. Watermelons too, they were huge watermelons so we'd sneak up and get a nice watermelon between half-a-dozen of us and we'd have a nice feed on the banks of the lake. The other thing [about] the Leg of Mutton was [pine needles] underneath the pine trees. We built skis – not skis, sledges. We used to slide down on the banks there and try [to] avoid the trees and sometimes we'd land in the water of the Leg of Mutton. In those days it was a true Leg of Mutton: you can see the picture behind you there, you can remember that?

Yes.

What else – the other thing was the Browne Lake and the Valley Lake were almost full and joined. One of our things apart from going around the lakes was going up and climbing the face of the mountain and giving cheek to the curator of the tower on top. He'd give us a few biscuits or chocolate or something like that and away we'd go. He enjoyed our company. It got a bit lonely for him I guess. He didn't own it: he owned the [telescope] I know that. I can't remember his name now. He used to ride a horse up there everyday.

It sounds like you had an enjoyable childhood.

What with that and going down to say Port MacDonnell and along the coast there into Victoria and down the Glenelg River and places like that, the sandy water hole. Down the ??? which was under the leg of the ??? in South Australia. Going up that river and then to Dartmouth and we had relations in Horsham which used to go over there. For the Easter we used to go to Halls Gap for the Easter, the Stawell Gift was on in those days. I don't remember going to the Stawell Gift, I doubt we ever did. Dad left us wondering around up in the hills. He and mum went to the Gift and they all left us.

Dad was strict. He would ... at the males and he'd make sure we did things right. I mentioned before we were not allowed to deprecate other religions and other races and things like that. We weren't, for instance, allowed to call Chinamen 'chows' or 'chinks'. Dad had a Chinaman mate; his name was Mr Chang. He used to [call regularly selling fruit and vegetables, stay for a cup of tea] with us at the back door and. Langi was another one, an old one. He used to come around with embroidery and things of that nature made in China, beautiful work.

[17:30] Were both of your parents similarly strict?

No! Mum was [more practical, but could be very strict regarding cleanliness and mothering duties]. ... She [was from the] family of Crafter in Mount Gambier: she was the third daughter [of Charles and Anne Crafter of John St. Her father was a blacksmith and wheelwright employing up to 12 men]. Mum was the lively one[, and was rather a tomboy at heart]. She taught us how to set the rabbit traps and how to [kill and] skin a rabbit and peg the skins out [to dry] and things of this nature. What else? She wasn't ... a naughty joker, a very mild one.

[Mum liked her joke or two, but didn't appreciate dirty language.] Dad, the nearest I heard my father swear was 'Will you pull over this car? (I was learning to drive.) I want to have a leak'. That was the nearest I heard my father swear. 'Confound it' and 'Bother': that was his usual [expression when annoyed].

That brings on another one. There was an orchardist out at Millicent on the Mt Gambier side of Millicent. He was a fantastic fellow. He was grafting and he was one of the first fellows to use bluestone for copper deficiency and so forth. He didn't know what was needed but he knew that bluestone was important. He was grafting different things. He was a very self-taught type of fellow. His biggest thing we used to see, he was profane and he couldn't utter a word without following up swearing. I don't know whether dad took us there to get educated or not, but we [did learn a few new swear words]! (laughs)

[20:20] In 1939 I got a scholarship to ... [In March 1939 I was awarded a three-year scholarship to Roseworthy Agricultural College.] Mount Gambier High School, I haven't mentioned that have I? I went to Whel Street Primary School and high school at Mt Gambier. Bob Herriot was one of the teachers there, the [basic] agricultural course [and he later became the principal of Roseworthy College].

Your paths were later to cross then?

Yes. I knew Bob well. He was a soils expert really, but he was always fairly strict too. That's how [some students] got into strife at Roseworthy – you probably know this story a bit do you?

You may not mind putting your view down.

Apparently the boys were playing up and he wanted to cut out the drinking and smoking and things – as I say he was very strict. It just didn't [work]. The boys were 18 and 20-odd, some of them were 25, they were mixed ages and [could not accept being treated as juveniles]. The debate was that Bob got the sack or was asked to resign. He later came back ... in the Department [of Agriculture].

It's something to look for more information on, the fact that Bob Herriot was with the Education Department and with the Agriculture Department.

He was very strict. He was even at the high school. You had to sit up straight, you had to have no scrubbiness, 'Write that again. We don't want scribble'. He always saw little things. He carried this through to Roseworthy, which is no good [for older college students]. That's alright for high school kids, but it's no good there.

[22:10] Did he carry it all the way through to the departmental days?

I'm not sure, that's because I didn't have too much to do with him because he had resigned by the time I got there. That was another one [topic] – schools. In 1939 I got a scholarship to attend Roseworthy, which I took up.

So you were still living in Mt Gambier and then you were coming up to Roseworthy to the college?

Yes. I was there and I had my 3 years there or just under the 3 years because the war had declared that year in 1939, September '39. Like all other young lads I wanted to join up but dad put his foot down and said 'No, get your diploma first' (wise again!). I wasn't very happy with it: I did what I was told and finally I did get my diploma and we knocked off early, at Christmas in '42 instead of [March] '43.

We also had a veterinary corps, which was [part-time] militia type of training, which we joined up and were [acting as] vets, [attached to the] Light Horse and we'd meet about once a month and have a parade. Every year [they would] have a camp, a fortnight. This one I went to was at Glenburnie[, east of] Mt Gambier. That started it and then I don't know when we finished Roseworthy and then enlisted in the aircrew in the RAAF. While I was waiting I went away up north as assistant wool classer with a shearing team.

[24:30] That was a casual job?

A casual job, yes my first job. I went down to Strathalbyn. I had a casual job there helping on the Highland Valley property with A.W. Barlow, the sea person's property. His grandson David was also at Roseworthy with me. He was also in the Air Force. He joined the Air Force as well at the same time. Unfortunately, later he was killed on the ops in England later on. Then that job cut out and I went down to Port Adelaide with Goldsborough & Mort, sorting, wool classing [and other jobs] helping out there. They wanted me to go out and help with the wool classing and shearing team. That was a wonderful experience. We spent Easter that year in White Cliffs and I paid \$5 for some opals, about 30 or 40 opals all cut and polished. One of them I mounted was worth over \$300, nearly \$400 now. Only one of them: it was a black opal from Lightning Ridge, but I bought them at White Cliffs.

Was that your first experience of what we might call the outback?

Yes, getting that far out. Dad took us to Victoria. In those days it was like that through Horsham, to the area of Horsham. We never went to Melbourne: Geelong was our [limit]. We knew the Ocean Road. We camped and so forth along the Ocean Road in the early days when it was a pretty rough track. That was all cemented [later]. I remember at one stage we had an old tractor pulling us through over the unmade road. It was fantastic.

[27:00] There's a couple of things Ray just before we pick up on that story about the war service. Just to go back a little bit. Did your father talk about his work very much? You described you were going out ...

Yes, [and] any other interest he would certainly recommend to us. He didn't explain the whole lot of it to us, but we knew what he was doing and sometimes we went with him. That's what I was saying. We went out there one day up near Penola when [I was] learning to drive. That was

an experience. We'd been into Penola Station and met people there. [After leaving we met many] people that were born [and bred in the district]. He was quite good that way. He explained things to us. When he went to do crop inspections, we went out in the crop with him. The weeds [and plants he didn't know were sent to Head Office in Adelaide or] he'd go and see the botanists [for positive identification]. That's why to [I became fascinated in knowing plants, particularly weeds]. ... He'd pick this up and he'd bring something in and say 'What's this?'. It was a common weed or he'd give me a leaf or he'd give me the seed pod or he'd give me something like that. He'd say, 'What plant do you think this [came from]?'. This is how he helped educate me. By the time I went to Roseworthy I had a fairly good knowledge of botany [- crop plants and weeds -] in a haphazard sort of way.

Was he working by himself?

Yes. He was on his own down there until later on when [Frank Pearson was appointed Agricultural Adviser at] Naracoorte. He was an [Army] man. I went out with him because also dad was hoping I'd go into the Department and follow his footsteps. I was more interested in the dairying and particularly cheese making. I was really interested in that because during the course at Roseworthy, at Hawkesbury (not only Roseworthy but mainly Hawkesbury) it was more intimate in the botany and in the biodiversity and the ...

Laboratory work?

Yes, then doing those experiments on the painting and so forth of micro-organisms and recognizing them and studying them and so forth. The artwork that ... did well, the CSIRO did illustrate very well. I found that out - I haven't mentioned this before, have I? One of the other things dad taught us was ... drawing in the family. My grandfather, his father, was a copperplate writer, beautifully done. I don't know if he did any painting or drawing or anything but if dad wanted to draw a map or anything he'd sketch things. He didn't have any training in it but he had that ability. I had it. Alick had it. My elder brother had it, Max had it (painting, no that's mine). The late Max, he did a lot of oil painting so it runs in the family. Inside, you probably didn't notice the sketch on the wall there: that's my grandson. He's into doing it now. That didn't stop him going to learning school. He's got now, not a partnership, he's just finished his apprenticeship at Holden's and this is on design so he's getting into his art.

This was very handy for me to do it because I'd learnt all of this plant drawing and dimensions for sketching and things to write this. I was very handy when it came to drawing up pictures and so forth.

If you were out on fieldwork or having to compile a map of some sort or whatever you could do that?

Yes. That's it. I could draw up my own maps or sketch something on the way. I've got a few things, illustrations and then the photography. There's cameras here somewhere.

You've got a lot of things in this office here!

[Yes! Most help with my official work or hobbies. There's my Asahi Pentax camera with through-the-lens focus. It was fitted with] a Zeitz filter [and special] lenses [for fine, close photos]. They were the latest [cameras] then. I was lucky to get it. My sister-in-law had holidays in England, she picked it up for me [in London] ...

[32:50] **End of Side A, Tape 1**

Tape 1, Side B

[0:05] ... [On arrival back in Australia she inadvertently left the camera hooked onto her seat. Later on enquiry at the airlines office,] Qantas or one of them, TAA [Trans-Australia Airlines] – I'm not too sure which way she went now – [she not only got the camera,] but they had a little note to say if [there was] damage the camera, to please advise and they'd make arrangements [to get it repaired at their cost]. It was very good of them. You wouldn't get that today.

One of the things that comes through from that description there, Ray – and we're sitting in your office and you're pointing out maps and paintings and objects and so on, you've got a lot of things!

Yes.

Your office in itself, plus the stories you've been giving, demonstrate how multi-faceted you'd become, and it also applies to your father. When I asked about your father's work, it comes through: he's working by himself for the Department down there, but he's got to know about dairying, he's got to know about farm management, he's got to know about botany, he's got to know about a whole range of things.

Later on, he did get assistance with the dairying, being a dairying district like it was. George Downes was the Dairy Adviser. He came in during dad's time down there, later. That was a load off his mind. There was quarantine, all sorts of things they had to do in those days. Going interstate and with the [Victorian border] at Mt Gambier ... He had the transport at – not Port MacDonnell so much, because the lighter port closed down; but Portland itself – and the stuff would come to Mt Gambier to be distributed that way. He had to watch that [freight] too.

You mentioned, Ray, going out with your father on some of his work trips and so on. Did he talk much about work around the house? Do you remember much about his working life when he was in Mt Gambier?

He was a very keen gardener and very houseproud, but he didn't do much in the house, not until later when he retired. When he started, that was mum's job. We boys – there were six of us, four boys and two girls in the family – with the girls had to learn the washing up, [help mum with washing the clothes], make our beds and all that, and in general had to look after ourselves to help mother. Later mum got [extra] help. Dad did very little in the house until he retired.

What about his actual work for the Department?

His office at one stage was at home. That was when they were very hard-up: the Depression years. [In the mid 30s] he went [back to his] office in Mt Gambier, in the town itself.

When the office was at home, did you have – do you recall people, farmers, coming to visit or people coming ...?

Odd ones, yes. They had to ring up and they'd come in the house. Yes. He'd meet them. There was, from Waite Research, a number of the experts, different people would turn up, because he was – his wide knowledge, again. It wasn't just the agriculture. He was interested in biodiversity or, in those days, native flora and fauna. He took an interest in those things: he got different people calling in. It wasn't just Black himself. Others called in. I can't remember them all now.

No, I was just interested to know For example, he might have had people from other departments coming in or visitors from Adelaide coming down.

Dad was a very keen gardener. He looked after the garden very well. We had a lovely garden – fruit trees and everything else like that. He started off as a horticulturalist with the Department for a short period and that got him interested in it. At home, [21] High Street, Unley Park, his home, that had a big yard ... [His father, Edward Ernest Alcock (Ray's grandfather) and his brother-in-law bought a 3-acre block in High Street, each getting 1½ acres.] They had this home and of all the fruit trees I can remember particularly the loquat trees, beautiful big trees, and 'tons' of loquats and peaches, pomegranates, almonds and grapes. [Also they grew a wide variety of vegetables and things, not forgetting the varieties of flowers and shrubs]. Yes, they were very keen gardeners. There they had their own bore to water the gardens there.

It was a different sort of ... Just to round out that story with your father, he continued through with the Department until he retired?

Yes. He retired somewhere about – he was close on 70 when he retired, because just after the war they held them on because there were shortages.

So he went through the war period?

Yes.

Was he working in Mt Gambier still?

Yes. He stayed. He never moved from Mt Gambier once he went down there.

Once he went back down there.

Yes. He was there all the time. Frank [Pearson] was the other chap I was trying to think of that helped him out – after the war that would have been. Frank was stationed in Naracoorte, so he took that top end over. Later on when you talk about dairying, Frank was also there when I was there [at Kybybolite]. He [would say], 'I'm sorry you didn't join the Department ...'. Later on he lived at the back over here: when he retired, no, when he came to town [Adelaide, he bought a house just over here somewhere [close to me] – I saw quite a bit of Frank. Used to have a few beers together and like that. We were good mates, yes.

[7:35] We'd better pick up on some of your story again. It's nice to round out your father's involvement and so on and perhaps there might be a few more things we can ask you about later on about your father and the Department. It's a bit of a case of 'like father, like son', then, that you went off to Roseworthy.

Yes.

The way you were describing earlier, Ray, it seemed like a very natural progression: you're the son going out with the father, you're studying the botany with him and being educated in all sorts of ways.

Yes.

Did you have your heart set on a career in agriculture?

No, it wasn't so much. Actually, I wanted to be an artist but there was no money in it, dad said, no money in it. [But he insisted that I keep up my artwork as a hobby]. So he sent me to Roseworthy: [I applied for a scholarship and it was granted]. I was [most] happy there. It was interesting and I ...

You said he sent you to Roseworthy: did you get a choice to go?

I was [urged strongly] to go. I was told to sit for the scholarship, which I got, and away I went.

I didn't resent that; I accepted dad's advice. [Had I refused, disappointed but dad would have accepted my decision I'm sure.]

It's just as I said before: 'Like father, like son'. In the railways you can understand the son following the father. With agriculture, the farmer, the son follows the father. But with working for a department? Hmm.

Yes. This was the thing about dad is that although he had these ideas and showed you all these things, it was 'You make your own decision'. 'You're old enough to make your own decision on it', that's the attitude he had. At times he'd insist on doing certain things. This is where his success was: he let us do what we wanted to do. When I came back – after the war – I wanted to go and do Hawkesbury. He said, '[I would like you to join] the Department'. I said, 'No. I want to go into the dairying industry'. He said, 'That's your choice'. There was no resentment about it.

[10:05] So you're going off to Roseworthy. Perhaps you could describe a little bit of your experiences at Roseworthy. Is it a 3-year course?

Yes. There were about 11 – no, 11 got the diploma; there was about 15 altogether. About 15 in our year. Three of them, later on we lost some: [John Arnold] had joined up in the Air Force ... Another one left, he had to go home – father died.

Were you the only lad from Mt Gambier going?

Went back to Mt Gambier?

No, were you the only lad from Mt Gambier who went to Roseworthy?

Yes, at that time.

So you had to make new friends.

Hmm, there was another one. He came in the year after. Funny how you forget. [The next year included Max McKay, formerly of Mt Gambier High School.]

We can find it out later.

Yes. When we were there we had a bit to do with sport [very popular]. [But as] I had hurt my ankle in the time at home – didn't break it but badly sprained it – I couldn't play sport that first year. I was prohibited from playing too much sport. Then the second year I played football and cricket and tennis. I wasn't a very good cricketer, but I learnt to score for cricket.

I suppose in those days there was only a few sports to choose from, really.

Yes, not like it is today. At home we used to play – when I was learning the art – I didn't mention the painting, did I? (laughs) Here we go back. Back there at the School of Mines we were being trained on the different forms of art and I got interested because I was [thinking of Art as my career]. Later on I went to George Reynolds. He was [an ex-]School of Mines and a high school [art teacher] and a recognised artist; not only there but in South Australia, one of the early artists, and he gave me tuition in oil painting. You saw the big [portrait of Reynolds and others of the Plant Breeding Shed at Roseworthy College]? ... There's another one up there.

Along your wall there, yes.

That's the roses, there are actually two. He gave me the tuition.

When were you at the School of Mines? You said you had art tuition there. Did you actually attend the School of Mines?

I went to School of Mines in Mt Gambier, yes. The old School of Mines [for] 5 years. As I mentioned earlier, different forms of drawing and so forth. I've got them somewhere.

So the School of Mines had a ...

A big influence.

They had a place in Mt Gambier?

Yes.

You didn't have to come up to Adelaide, just to clarify that.

[No.]. Used to go in Saturday morning up to George [Reynolds Studio] for an hour, hour and a half, [finishing about] half-past ten. I [then] had to race down the Freeland Park, which was another one of the parks there, [to learn] to play baseball. I had tuition in baseball too. That was until I went to Roseworthy; they didn't play that at Roseworthy. I enjoyed my sports. I was a full back in the [Roseworthy] team, when I did play football. We were in the Gawler Association – for B Grade, not A Grade – and for the two years I was in it we were premiers. What else was there? Swimming, I've mentioned the swimming. Because of the swimming in Mt Gambier and the lakes there I could hold my breath for [over] 2 minutes, which was very

good in those days, which had not the war intervened I probably would have done more of that, but I chose to go into the Air Force and didn't pick it up [again]. That came in handy later on doing tests in the water training and so forth, dinghy practice and things like that.

That sport is obviously a key part of the student life at Roseworthy.

Yes.

So you were living on the campus, you were living at the College?

Yes, at the College itself, yes.

What was it like?

Hmm?

What do you remember about that?

The first [and second] year [students] were [billeted] in the main building itself, upstairs, [with 4–6 per room. A separate building called] 'the corridor', which is off the main building, [was set aside for third-year students, each with a separate room. But] the place wasn't filled up with the third-year students, so [six second-year students, including myself, were given a room each] there. ... In our first year [John] Nobby Arnold, he was [our counsellor]: instead of having prefects they had these officers, [two students from each year were elected by their fellow students to become counsellors to attend to minor problems and] looked after the [students'] welfare and settled a lot of disputes, saving the time and worry of the principal [and staff]. They also conducted the initiations (with strong hints from Callaghan). Dr Callaghan was the principal at Roseworthy at the time, and while he didn't say 'No' (he'd been to a few initiations himself), he said, 'Keep out the rough stuff and the sexual side of it'. 'Keep away from that', which was good advice. That was the sort of thing that [I agreed with and accepted, but some others disagreed]. In my mind, it took me a long time to get used to other boys, how they used to ... We were all mixing at Roseworthy. ... swimming and never ... like that at all, but my eyes were opened later! (laughs) I don't think that's the sort of thing you might talk about.

It's probably relevant to the history of Roseworthy.

We were counsellors, that's what we were, counsellors. When Nobby left in the first year I [was appointed in his place with Syd Reid, meeting monthly or as needed.] I was appointed Senior Counsellor [as a second-year] and that was [carried] over the third year too. So I was for two years Senior Counsellor, which was sort of ... access to Callaghan, and with the problems and ... and suggestions to them, which he appreciated, too. Wally Goulter was the housemaster – fantastic man. I took his place in the football team as a full back. Wally also looked after our [minor pains, cuts and bruises and so on]. The doctor called about once a week, but Wally in between gave us eye drops or bandages or whatever it was we had to take.

Meals ... Our football coach was [Jack Osborn]. He was the main cook [at the college]. He was the spitting image of Popeye. He used to play for Sturt when they were right up [on top]. He knew his football. He was the fellow got us through [to win two premierships]. Wonderful coach. He really was tough, mind you, but a good mate and good friend in his [special] way.

[20:55] So you developed a strong rapport with [your] teachers?

Yes, with all the teachers and everything [most of the instructors]. Even afterwards, when I went into the Air Force, [Jack Osborn] would [occasionally] write to some of us. Not all of them, but some of us that he'd got on well with. Yes, amazing fellow. [Life at] Roseworthy [during] formative years for us at that age, [was] a very wonderful thing because it introduced a life away from parents, put it that way. People that live with their family get a very narrow upbringing ... you can't do much else. [I was brought up sheltered largely from some aspects of life.] But when you get out like that you do see, as I got the shock of my life, to see the things that went on. (laughs)

You were mixing with people from all over the State, I suppose.

Yes. The ex-boys from the other colleges [ex-college boys] too were [generally well versed in relation to sexual matters and smutty yarns]. You know what I'm talking about too, don't you?

On the actual activities of the College itself, the subjects you were learning, the experiences you got there, how diverse was it for you, how eye-opening was it?

The basic life was one day of work out in the fields and one day of lectures. In your first year you went out in the field basically with [a third year student], so they helped initiate you into the work and so forth and did a lot of showing how to do things. We did all the jobs: [for example, collected and] emptied the garbage [cans to feed] the pigs, [cleaned out the styes], milking the cows, grooming the horses and [feeding young animals]. It was still working with horses there, in ploughing the fields and harvesting, making hay and everything else, it was all horse-drawn. [Clydesdale, those large heavy draught horses, were still used for the College farm work. Despite their size, these horses were friendly and gentle whether as a single or in a team. Eight-horse teams were used to plough and cultivate the soil in preparation before sowing a crop or pasture seed. Believe me, there were times when the team knew better than the rookie student driver. Out in the field with a good team of horses was very pleasant work. There were several different makes of tractor which were used to instruct us on driving and their use.]

All sounds so different to the experiences you had with your father.

Yes. It was a practical course. Wheat breeding: another thing that we were introduced to was wheat breeding, because Roseworthy was the principal wheat-breeding place [in Australia] at the time. As new varieties of wheat, barley [and other crops] came out that was another very important part of the education at Roseworthy. Animal husbandry and dairying – cheese- [and butter-]making – we had to each make [a small] cheese.

What particular interest did you develop there, Ray? Did you become interested in ...?

I don't think there was any – at that stage I don't think I had any particular likes and dislikes; I enjoyed it all. We still did woodwork there. I extended my interest in woodworking which I'd had from high school – before high school and so forth and having woodwork [a bench and tools] at home – dad had a bit of a shed there which I took over – I kept on that woodworking side of things. I had my plant collections. And I certainly took an interest in the cheese-making [but only a limited interest in butter-making]. It was a pretty short stage. What else did they do?

[25:30] Just looking back there, from this perspective now, Ray, you said your father sent you to Roseworthy, you had the scholarship so in a sense you didn't have a choice. Do you recall what your expectations might have been? You were doing three years a diploma: what did you expect to do Ray? What was the difference ... put some light on it, but at that time what did you think you might be doing as a young lad graduating?

Get that darn diploma and get in the Air Force, that was our main objective. We had to save the Empire [and Britain our mother country]. Remember these were Empire days.

You were going to Roseworthy before the war started?

Yes. The year it started, in September, we went out in that year. [We students as a group were in the stallion's enclosure (or loosebox) being shown how to trim the horse's hooves. We did have a wireless on as we anticipated that Britain would declare war on Germany.]

So before the war situation, if there hadn't been a war, did you have an expectation of what you might do? Did you think farming was your role, or did you think you might follow your father in ...?

I may have followed my father then, yes. Although I still had an inkling for dairying. In those days there was no dairy course in South Australia. That came after the war. No, I would think that there was a tendency for dairying [i.e., cheese manufacture].

Once you were at Roseworthy and the war situation's there, you stick at it until you join the Air Force ...

Yes [on dad's advice – I couldn't join the forces without his written permission].

[27:10] ... so that's understandable. Then you go off to your war service. Perhaps you could summarise ...?

The first thing after you go through – as I said, we didn't go in till about Easter. It finished normally: at Christmas we finished. A heap of us that year went down and joined the Air Force. I don't know how many of us but most of us joined the Air Force, as air crew. Then we had to wait. I went out with a shearing team. Come back to that one. While I was waiting I went out at Wanganella, [a station] way up north the other side of White Cliffs. When I got my call while I was up there I came back on a wool truck. The trucks in those days weren't as they are today. I remember sitting down there, sometimes I was able to get in the cabin but other times I had to sit up on top of the bales because there was a woman or something coming back ... people from

the station. Sometimes there were four or five of us there going from one station to the other, something like that.

Made a bit of a slow journey to get back.

We had rain. That was fantastic in that it took us 15 days to get back [due to] bogging and so forth. [Such a delay allowed us to see] the greenest grass and beautiful wildflowers [– a magic land]. That's another thing that caught my eye was the botany [due to the earlier] help of dad, all these wonderful wattles, [other showy plants] and so forth. That was one of the reasons I became so attached to wattles, too. So it's building up – it's all background – and we got back and I'd missed my call-up so then I went back to Roseworthy and did a bit of work there. Geoff Rowe had been ... He was third year, my year. He came back there for a while (until he got in the Army) as an overseer, looking after students, seeing they ... their jobs if they got into strife and sort out their horse teams and so forth and (laughs) set their ploughs right.

[30:25] One of them was funny. Funny incident there. I don't remember the fellow's name, I don't think I can recall it. It was his first time on a team [of horses]. They take a bit of handling. ... [It frightened.] They're linked: they had a chain between each horse [clipped on to] the bit. The chain connecting the horses broke and the horses split up. [Four went to the right and the other four to the left due to pulling of the reins and eventually bailed up against a fence, allowing the student to link them up again. No damage, but as soon as he got back on the seat of the cultivator, they took off through the fence (laughs) – he couldn't turn them – over the road, through the fence there, and he managed to get hold of them there. Instead of (laughs) taking them out [through the gateway] he came back through the fence again – [that was the hole in] the second fence he went through, he came back through the [first hole made. What a mess with] the fence [and posts] all over the road – imagine what it was doing to the cultivator! The next thing then is, he couldn't handle [the bolting horses] enough to get through [one of the original holes he had made], so he made another [hole] through the fence and charging down the fence, and this rope he [used to rejoin the team earlier], that broke unfortunately. [As before, one[-half] went this way and one went the other. They pulled up against a fence again and they stopped. [By this time a message had got through to the Farm Office, and several staff members were there to take over.]

A bit chaotic.

Yes. That was [not really] a joke. You should have seen the fence by that time: what a mess it was! That fellow was very stressed[, but he did not give up – held on to the end when help was at hand].

[32:40] So you went back to Roseworthy just to help out temporarily?

Yes, temporarily. I got my call-up ...

Your call-up was ...?

Eighteenth of July 1942.

OK. Well, we're just about out on this tape, so it's probably a good point to pause.

And at Victor Harbor, ATS [Air Training School] Victor Harbor.

[33:15] **End of Side B, Tape 1**

Tape 2, Side A not transcribed – extensive war service record notes, unrelated to either project.

Tape 2, Side B – 11 November 2004

[0:17] Ray, it's appropriate, that we're having a follow-up session today on Remembrance Day, because we finished our session and you were talking about your World War Two experiences. Now we're going to pick up on some of this story in the post-war.

I was [transferred to the RAAF Reserve in April] 1945. ... I had applied to go to Hawkesbury College to do the Dairy [Diploma] course [in 1946], but had to wait for that. So I took a job with Farmers Union down at Mile End, the milk factory down there.

What sort of job was that Ray?

That was handling milk [cans], labouring work, tipping [emptying] cans of milk and washing of cans and [equipment], just ordinary work.

General factory?

General factory work, which proved to be valuable later on. That was sold as whole milk [for human consumption]. Then sometime later I got a call up and when I went to get my ticket, the rehabilitation people said, 'No, that's already gone'. They'd mixed me up with another student, an ex-Air Force fellow, Kingsley Pryor, who was a year ahead of me at Roseworthy. He had applied to go to there as well, also an ex-serviceman, so I went back and I was a bit upset. Len Cook, who was my godfather and also an old member of the Department of Agriculture with my father and going back to Kybybolite days, when my dad was up there learning the ropes of the research and things like that, he was in charge of the thing up there, some early memories. He put in again, and tried and so finally they said I could go there if I didn't mind being in a single room, away from the main corridor. I said, 'That would suit me quite well'. (laughs) I finally went up there and spent about 9 months up there altogether doing the course because I already had a Roseworthy diploma and that meant I'd only do the so-called 12 months, which was a bit short of 12 months.

This is up at Hawkesbury?

This is Hawkesbury Agricultural College, yes.

Why had you gone there? What was the ...?

There was no reason. I couldn't get it done in South Australia. There was no dairy course in those days here. Also I was interested in the dairying side of things, living in the South East and

helping as a kid in the factory, A.A. Brice & Sons, with my brother, so I got interested in the dairying. At Roseworthy we made cheese [in the] dairy. J.D. McDonald was our instructor and he introduced quite a few new things, including a factory, [adding to my] interest then, so I applied and [was accepted for the dairy] course. I [applied myself to study] and finished up in October. I was dux for the course, Honours, and [awarded my] Diploma of [Dairying].

In the meantime, while I was up there, my eldest son Eric was born in Melbourne. [My wife, Elsa, went back to stay with her parents,] living in Melbourne. I went down there: he was born while I was on the train. I saw [them both] for a few days, then I went back to start doing the exams. This was in September ...

This would be 1946, '47?
'45, '45.

But you came from the war in '45?

'45. It would've been in '46, yes you're right, '46. I did 12 months there. Then while I was there I applied for a couple of jobs. One was with Streets in Queensland, with another dairy fellow – Gordon Pickhaver. He got the job ahead of me, so I came back to South Australia and worked, for a start, in town [Adelaide] with A.W. Sandfords. Then the next thing was that they wanted somebody to do the factory out at Kyby [Kybybolite] at Naracoorte. I took that job on for them, as manager as the factory there. I forgot about Murray Bridge – didn't mention Murray Bridge, did I? While waiting there they sent me down from Mile End to Murray Bridge to the Farmers Union there, helping with the testing and grading and so on of the milk. That was also a milk factory [producing city milk] as well as Casein [a milk solid]. They used to make Casein there.

Was that before the Hawkesbury?
That's before Hawkesbury, yes.

Before the Hawkesbury ...
I was waiting then ...

[7:35] OK. When you'd come back you got this work with the company going to Kyby?
No. I applied for the job and got it through A.W. Sandfords and Kyby.

[8:00] What did they do?
Cheese-making, which was my [choice] because I really enjoyed the cheese-making. The place was run down badly when I got there – rats and mice and possums. (laughs) The first thing I did was I put chicken-wire, a fine wire netting, all around the cheese-maturing room and in the drains so that [the vermin] couldn't get up the drains. Things of this nature and so we cut out the possum problems. It's bad enough [with] an 80-pound cheese; imagine what mice would

do. We had the big silver-grey possum going in, [leaving a hole big enough to put your fist in]. They weren't doing too much good for our cheese. The cheese itself wasn't particularly good either. He was an unqualified cheese-maker. I was fresh from Hawkesbury with my new knowledge and [soon] got things going. [After] about 2 years [we were awarded] the most improved factory [which we received again next year, plus the trophy – a barometer and thermometer] ... Somewhere in there [the house] I've got the prize.

Sounds like there was a lot of room for improvement.

There was yes. It was really bad. They didn't have a decent, proper, pasteuriser. They had a modified plate pasteuriser which was really a pre-heating thing. We modified that to pasteurise the milk before [getting a] pasteuriser set up.

Are you able to compare the conditions in that factory to other factories and farms?

Yes, 'cause we used to have annual conferences [where papers and talks were presented and discussed by] different ones, and you'd have competitions and all that. I knew the factory at Penola, also one at Bordertown. If I went to town [Adelaide] that way I'd call in and say, 'G'day'. ... It was pretty lonely there but [the local people and suppliers were most friendly].

Low-down, run-down in conditions and ...

Yes. We picked it up, but the trouble is that was about the time of the European market. The fact that there was competition from Lake Wallace in Edenhope, they were our biggest [concern as] they came over and they gave a bit of a fight about the price of milk, so eventually we went down, but despite my getting around to get the milk, we weren't getting enough so they closed the factory and [in 1950] sent me over to Port Lincoln, which was a butter factory. Again, I was keen on butter. I did lift the quality there, but to attend the Sandfords [at] that time, I wasn't too happy with what I was getting there [and I couldn't agree with their main policies.] So I applied for and got a job with Wilcox Mofflin, which were distributors for pest killers and plant weedicides, herbicides, that sort of thing and boom sprays [spray equipment].

[13:05] It's a bit of a transition?

Yes. I was with them [servicing the] Eyre Peninsula for [about 2 years] when Bill Hodge and I decided that we'd build our own boom. [It] was a 72 foot boom [fitted to] and folded up on an old Ford Blitz, wartime Blitz. It was very [good] if you're doing big areas: [covering 72 ft width] and travelling at 5 miles an hour, not always, sometimes you had to slow it down depending on the situation [and surface of the field]. That was for a while. Then the trouble was by 1950 the price of [farm produce went up, so farmers again] had a few bob to rattle in their pockets. I virtually found myself [in a very difficult situation. I thought I was] set up for years when we started around about 1951 on the Eyre Peninsula, [but in 1953 it] started to tail off. By then I got competition from other fellows with their booms and so forth. Finally I had to give it

away. I took a job. ... P.J. Wren employed [me to service Eyre Peninsula.] He was local government services, [and] I was [to work with] various local governments and associates. After 12 months we clashed and I took over and [did the services on my own]. I recommended to form [two boards] on eastern Eyre Peninsula – Port Lincoln, Tumby Bay – and the [second board consisted of three councils –] Franklin Harbour, Kimba and Cleve.

[15:55] If I could just interrupt Ray, and put some time-frame on this, because you've gone from several, you've mentioned several jobs going from one to another, in fairly rapid succession. What time were you spending there? The factory in the South East, you said for a couple of years and then you went to Port Lincoln. Can you put any dates on those? We can always refer to the notes later and the transcript.

I've got the history somewhere. I formed these Boards and the new pest, that was under the *Weeds Act* and the Weeds Committee and that, which I showed you

[17:00] We've just been clarifying some of those dates. You're now you're looking at the weed control booklet, *Better Weed Control*, and it's got a little bit of information there. OK Ray, while we've been talking around there about the different dates and so on, we can add more information at the transcript stage or something, just to go back over.

What happened with the cheese and butter, about 1950 Britain joined the European market and with that lost control of the worldwide dairy distribution. As a consequence the dairies, there was no longer a market for a lot of our dairy produce. In fact, we closed down – had to be closed down. So I was about 1950 in Lincoln and decided to get out. It wasn't worthwhile. The factory carried on, but I went in with Wilcox Mofflin herbicide company, which also hired merchants, a sheep and animal hide company and they had herbicides. I took a representative job with them for a couple of years but then I wrote to Bill Hodge, who talked to us into going out on the farm on his block of land, about 1000 acres (405 ha) [cleared at Koppio], a bit over 1000 acres [uncleared], 2000 (809 ha) altogether, and also to go into the weed and pest control and we built this 72 ft-boom.

You mentioned that. What was the intention to working in this herbicide area? What was the reason for ... You mentioned that ...

There was nothing much left. I couldn't get much out of the spraying itself from the council, or for the pilot, because of the lack of ... As the price of commodities went up, so the farmers had their own booms and sprays and things like that. They'd do it themselves. There wasn't enough of the [large areas] to do. That's why I [used my hobby botany, became a Weeds Officer on eastern Eyre Peninsula] ... and then later formed the weeds boards.

Before that though, your move from the cheese to the herbicides ...

No, I moved from the butter [cheese] to the butter factory at Port Lincoln to herbicide.

Why had you settled on the herbicide area?

I see. Yes. It wasn't only herbicides. It was plant identification. My hobby was [botany]. Both were essential in my contract weed and pest control by spraying.

We got that last time, so ...

That was a hobby. I found out later as I went through the Department wasn't very strong on the weeds, nor was the Herbarium. They were good on native stuff, not so good on the alien plants, so I found that being a regulatory officer I had to learn my weeds pretty quickly and so forth. Up at Waite Research, David Symon was a great help there. He was in charge of the herbarium in the Waite Research. A wonderful fellow. Later he was made a doctor. He was the sort of chap that could speak the layman's language as well as the [science side]. He was well qualified so he helped me a lot. He was a great friend.

[21: 30] So you'd maintained this personal passion in the botanic field?

Yes, certainly. He used ... While I was on the other, I used to take specimens to him, send them in, as well as weeds, a lot of native stuff as well.

You mentioned Ray being a regulatory officer. Was that later or do you mean in the earlier period?

The weeds side. [To work under the *Noxious Weed Act* or *Pest Plants Act* (or similar legislation) it was mandatory that we were officially Weeds Officers under the Act.]

That was in the weeds period later?

Yes. Registration. No, being a member of the Department then ...

I misunderstood. I thought you were talking about official type duties while you were doing the personal botany interests.

I was. See the botany was a hobby really. And the weed control was the job, the Pest Plant Commission. In those days it was the Weed Control.

The Advisory ...

Weeds Committee. We had a representative on there. It's in that book there and then certainly after, when that previous liaison officer under the Act in Adelaide, [Frank Pearson] in the Department, left and he suggested I apply for the job. Despite all the opposition, I got there as the Local Government Liaison Officer.

[23:15] That was when you joined the Public Service?

A public servant, and shortly after that the Pest Plant Commission came into being.

So you're joining about 1960? In the booklet there it's talking about 1961 [era].

I came over in about '70. About '70 I joined and then I went into ... I was on Lincoln for a while and then I changed over, I was in the Department in '71 ['70]. I came over to Adelaide in 1971 as Local Government Liaison Officer and Weeds Control [Agricultural Adviser].

So that's when you joined the Agriculture Department?

That's right.

When you were doing these schools and so on for the Weed Advisory Committee, you were doing them privately?

In the first instance, yes.

OK.

When I was [Liaison Officer] with the Board [Department], we formed these [Weeds] Boards and Weeds Committees. And [I conducted a] weeds course on Eyre Peninsula. [Maybe] that's why I was invited to join the Department as a Liaison Officer with local government and formed these Boards and set up the liaison work with them and talk about control, plans and [get effective weeds treatments]. It's an easy target for them for a start and the first thing I did with them was we took on boxthorns which were a curse, but the beauty of it, that they were easy to see and easy to treat – either pull them out and treat the regrowth or chop them off and treat the re-growth with Round-up (before Round-up, arsenic treatments). [We got started] and we gave them five years to get rid of their boxthorns. At the end of three years there was [difficulty] to find a boxthorn. We got them going, gave them confidence to do more, so we then learned from that. We had these boards in every district. We formed two or three councils up to three, four or five [depending on the location and income of the individual councils]. We went right through the State and, despite opposition in some quarters, we got them going and they got the [message] and we got an effective weed control [throughout local government]. One of the things I did ... [Smaller farms], soldier settlers in particular, they didn't have too much cash [nor equipment]. I'd go and see what they did; how they'd make use of what they had, either fire-fighting [equipment or water pumps and tanks, trailers and so on]. We'd make use of them and just see what they did have on the place. Very few had boom sprays [or effective hand sprayers. Pre-fabricated boom sprays were available at a high price so we] encouraged the boards to build their own, which they did, and they were fold-up booms and that helped a lot and then we had contractors [assisting] as weed killers, with the government work, which had reserves and roadsides abutting and other special places. It was really a full-time job and in the meantime I had these weed schools, which I selected. The ... thinking, 'Hello, he's in these different boards and different districts' and we had our meeting and talk about the problems and I'd listen to what they had to say, helped a lot, which is important. I learnt that trick from my father: as I mentioned before, 'Listen to see what the farmer tells you and listen to him to work out what he's saying'. That really made a big difference. We had, a lot of the time, trouble with fellows that previously had walked onto the farmer's property and say, 'I'm an authorised officer. You've got to get rid of these weeds'. [But that attitude upset the landholders resulting in poor response.]

We gave them a way how to do it – [set it all out in detail, what's required and when] write a note out for them, tell them when to do it, why, how, please note how to do it, and so forth and

then walk away. They didn't think of the costs or anything like that or the farmer's position as a man himself.

Getting to these people and getting to know them pretty well, I got a lot of confidence and they pushed me along to [make any laggards keep up with the program].

When you're talking about the work in the ...
The farmers and boards and so forth.

Yes. Is the work you're talking about here, is it in the 1970s?
Yes.

Just going back earlier Ray. The 1960s when you're running these, involved in these schools, 'running education' for the farmers and so on, who were you working for?
Myself. I left ...

You had that work with Wren's ...
No, I left Wren's. I couldn't see the sense and I couldn't see eye-to-eye because we clashed. (laughs). I took over the job myself on the Eyre Peninsula [contracting with each of] five councils and then there was another fellow appointed to the other three up there, Elliston, Streaky Bay and Ceduna.

[30:00] When you say 'appointed', you were actually employed by these councils, or were you ...?
Yes. They employed us [under contract/agreement]. The Department paid part of the bill. There was a subsidy given towards our salaries, but [the actual amount depended] on the income of the councils, how well off they were and so forth. As you might imagine, some over on the outskirts [such as] on Goyder's Line, [had low incomes but] Kimba was one of the exceptions. That was outside Goyder's Line, but it was a very thorough, wealthy district and so forth.

When you mentioned the Department paid part of the salary, were you referring ...
Subsidy.

Were you referring there to the Agriculture Department or the Lands Department?
The Agriculture Department. The Pest Plants Commission. First of all it was the Weeds Commission, then it was the Pest Plants Commission, then there were various people from the different districts, they formed these Pest Plant Boards and they subsidised the Weed Officer's salary and they [also] had a [special] allowance for weed control, particularly on the roadsides adjoining national parks and [in] government reserves and things of that nature. However, what I was doing on Eyre Peninsula [was favourably received and I was appointed an Agricultural Adviser seconded to the Weeds Commission as the Local Government Liaison Officer, Proclaimed Weed Control in South Australia].

OK we've got a good ...

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

Tape 3, Side A

[0:20] Ray, just before we pick up on that working experience on Eyre Peninsula, I just wanted to backtrack on one question. I wanted to ask you about your change in careers. Did you at any time want to become ... think about becoming a farmer?

Yes. In conjunction when I was doing the contract work as a private company, I worked out on the farm out there, Koppio, but it soon became obvious that it was too small a farm, although I did try to buy it off my sleeping partner, Bill Hodge. He wanted £2000. I didn't have £2000 (laughs), so reluctantly I leased it from him for a while and did some farming then, but I went and got more and more into the weed control and so forth so there'd be less and less interest in the farm as such.

What about under the Soldier Settlement Scheme? Were you interested in, post-war, picking up a block that way?

No. Instead of doing that I went into dairying and went to Hawkesbury College to do the dairy course there and I gave up my ['right' to be a soldier settler]. No, I never really made a full attempt.

You'd very obviously know quite a few soldier settlers ...

Yes.

... War Service Settlement Schemes people ...

I was a member of the Koppio Branch of the [Agricultural] Bureau, which was a part mainly of returned men. Also I used to help with the Wanilla soldier settlers there, right on the coast there. I had a lot to do with them – used to attend their meetings and so forth and help them out. It was quite an interesting thing to go on. Made a lot of friends with those fellows and some of them, one or two had been on operations, we were in the same squadron and things like that. One in particular, Bert Newton. He was out at Koppio, not at Wanilla. That was one of the things I had, looking after those fellows. There was more than that. There was ordinary farmers as well.

[3:50] You've mentioned, Ray, you weren't too keen on being a soldier settler person yourself and you dealt with these types of people. You mentioned the Agricultural Bureau.

Yes well I ...

How did you get involved in the Bureau?

... I started off whilst I was contract spraying. I personally did my own contract spraying. I became a member there [and continued my membership until I went to Adelaide].

Had you been a member down in the South East or anything with the local Bureaus elsewhere?

No, no, I didn't, I wasn't a member there, no. I was later, but not then. No, that was about it. It was just that I started off doing and then others, there was a few that worked with Bert and me.

Alf Moody, a bit of a red ragger. Old Alf was probably anti-Queen. Alf was a very cluey fellow and his son went on further, much the same but they come into line later on. Yes, so that's at [Green Patch out from Port Lincoln] on lower Eyre Peninsula. They were in there and then they moved up towards Lock. They had a block of land up near Lock ... I'm wandering I know.

[6:05] Now we'll get you back on to ... You were going to talk about your work as a contractor or self-employed person. You had your own firm?

Yes, Alcon [Pty] Ltd. When I went on to work with the Department, it used to be the Eyre Peninsula Weeds Board, that's what we formed.

But your own company, you were then working with local farmers and the ...

Yes [under contract].

... weeds people and so on, in the late '50s, early '60s?

Late '50s, into the 60s, but I didn't come to town until about '68. I gave the councils away. No, it was '70, I joined the Department of Agriculture as a Weed Officer on Eyre Peninsula and then when the job came up for Local Government Liaison Officer. I applied for the job and shortly afterwards in the new year, in June [1971], entered the Department.

Seventy...?

['71] I went to town.

While you were running your own company and you were working with various Weeds Boards ...

Yes. [Government departments and landholders generally.]

... you had about five were formed and you mentioned about five were being formed?

Yes. [I had five district councils forming two boards: Lincoln and Tumby Bay formed one; and Franklin Harbour, Cleve and Kimba the other. The Lincoln District Council Office was based in Cummins, quite separate from Port Lincoln Town Council: it was declared a City later.]

What happened in the '60s with the Weeds Advisory Committee? How did they ... How did you work with that committee?

I had contracts with the District Councils [on Eyre Peninsula], individual contracts with them. It was up to them until about [1970] when the Pest Plant Commission was – the Weeds Commission – which just as I joined, it just changed over to the Department. I took a job as the Local Government Liaison Officer on Eyre Peninsula with them in about [1970–71].

Sixty-two perhaps?

'62, yes. We took over there and went on until ['70] and formed the Boards and so forth and ran them over there. Then the next thing I got appointed there. What I was doing there – advisory ... That was in about 1970, and '71 I come to town [moved to Adelaide].

This time when you were becoming the local officer, in '62, what happened to your company? Did you close that down or were you still doing contract work?

No. ... When I joined the Department I gave the contract work away and employed different contractors. Wilcox Mofflin was one and then that went over to Lawlors [Pest Control and Murray Pest Control]. ... There were others, but they were the main ones [I employed initially, but later there were others, including landowners].

[10:45] Perhaps if we could talk a little bit about your work, as the local officer on the Eyre Peninsula and you mentioned '62 to the late '60s. What sorts of things were you doing?

I was surveying [the problems] with these ... I'd go on to a farm and see what problems they had and mark down the weeds on them as I found them. [I worked for the five district councils under contract to each from 1962 to 1970. In the first couple of years it was mainly getting to know the various councillors, landholders and those government departments and their officers involved in this project. Survey and map noxious (declared) weeds; report my findings; and suggest ways to get affected weed control. Likewise these matters were later taken to the weeds committees. After much thought, plans were set down for the control of certain weeds and in some cases allowing to get satisfactory control completed.]

You showed me those maps earlier with weeds marked and so on. You were going out inspecting properties?

Yes, as much as I could, with the farmer [but that was not always possible] ... If I go the house first and he wasn't available, I'd let them tell him wherever I was going [on his land to inspect, and that later]. So I'd get the information.

So you were inspecting and mapping areas of weeds and so on?

Yes.

Beyond that, did you have to pass advice to the farmer about ...?

Yes ... [I would inform him of my findings and recommendations.] I only served one or two notices when I was with the councils (laughs). No, I got around it by asking and discussing what their problems were, doing the job (if it was equipment and so forth) and tell them what was available and how they could [employ] contractors and so forth, and things of that nature. Help them with their local problems. They were farmers, particularly the soldier settlers. For doing that I sold myself to these people. What else? I had meetings they could come [to] – public meetings – [to talk over their problems] and so forth. They were allowed too in the Bureau meetings [to get help and talk] about problems they had in their districts and other problems close handy and why they should get stuck into this weed and that sort of thing. When I went back on my retirement, I went back to particularly Cleve, which was [one of] the more outstanding places on Eyre Peninsula – Tumby Bay and Cleve and Port Lincoln. There was a person (doesn't matter what his name was), he said, 'When you first came, we wondered what the hell you were talking about. You confused us. Then you called on us and you'd explain

things to us and ask us questions and what our problems were, so now it's just circulars so you could tell us what the weeds were and what you might be doing about them. Then we'd suddenly got the idea and you [demonstrated how to proceed]'. They got confidence in me so we formed the Weeds Committees. That's how it happened though, just took a bit of confidence. Then at the field day, the Department came in [to assist us], particularly on skeleton weed and things of that nature, yes.

[14:35] Where were you based over on Eyre Peninsula?

When I first joined up I still had that block of land, still working the block of land there. I was living at Koppio itself, but that didn't last for long and once I got the [weed control] contracts I had to give that away. So I went back to Port Lincoln and I [had] got enough [capital] out of there to buy a [war service] home and apply to the Department and get a job as [a Weeds Officer under the Weeds Act].

[15:28] When you were working there in the '60s, were you working through the councils, the council offices or did you have a Departmental office?

[Yes: the District Council office in Port Lincoln.] There were Department officers as well, there were in every district. There seemed as if there was an Agricultural Adviser in practically every district. Under him was a junior. He was in adviser stages, with the inspector. They called them the 'Weed Officers' or something and so they were responsible [under] the *Weed Act* trying to get things done with the *Weed Act* [effective noxious weed treatment. There were quite a number of officers throughout the State]. Jack Richards was one on Eyre Peninsula, he helped me quite a lot. Even on the block he helped me clear some of the land (laughs). We were good mates. He went later on to the Lands Department. Who else was there? I can't remember them all. There were others there as well ... It's about time we knocked off. I'm trying to recall, I'm getting tired.

[17:15] I was wondering Ray whether you were actually working, knew all these blokes, but whether you were working with them in a Departmental office situation or whether you were working in the local council ...

In Port Lincoln, yes, it was [the local council office], a separate office from the Department. Later on when I became the Local Government Liaison Officer I had the Council chambers as my [neighbouring] office. They were virtually next door.

[18:05] Did the nature of the work change very much over that decade or so?

Yes. There was a bit more research and some high quality persons moved into it and they had weed schools and things like that [field demonstrations], naturally which helped to train the officers, which they didn't have before ... I suppose that's what was needed. Like when I started off on the Eyre Peninsula, I had those five councils and I was flat out with those five councils, so eventually we had fellow [Weeds Officers appointed] who had offices in Tumby

Bay and Cleve and one for [both] Kimba and Cowell, so that's how it went. There was plenty of work for them to do too. You'd start getting on to intimate surveys. Once they knew their weeds ... See, this was half the trouble. I'd get on to some of the farmers and say it was Salvation Jane, 'cause it's a very colourful weed and very easy to see. I remember one farmer rang one day to say that he didn't have Salvation Jane on his property. I'd already marked stuff out [in the infested area] and had estimated it all. But he didn't recognise it until it came out into flower, he couldn't recognise ... He was told it was a roadside weed, a little thing, it had a smaller but purple flower They said it's just a big one of these. So they couldn't really accept that they had Salvation Jane. Another story about that was in the South East. They had this other Jane species which was very similar. They would say they didn't have the Salvation Jane, they had this other one. So we declared both noxious (laughs), so that solved that problem.

[21:10] It sounds like there might've been some resistance or lack of understanding from some of the farmers about ...

There certainly was plenty of resistance. It wasn't a very popular thing at all. Some were very begrudging [and reluctant to treat declared weeds]. But the thing was to get those in the districts, as I said before, I got the keen ones, the positive thinking ones, got their views on things and how they were going about it. I said to the farmers, I know a lot of the farmers that objected to it, didn't have the money to do big scale like this, they had to do it in a smaller way, a cheaper way to do it for them and get effective results. That's why we gave 5-year terms to do things. Most of the time we put those 5-year terms in, at the end of three years we were hunting to find the weed. That was the sort of things that went on. That progress [on Eyre Peninsula was] why I was asked to come to town.

[22:15] You say you were taking a very gentle sort of approach.

Yes. As I say, the only notice I served on Eyre Peninsula was with the councillors themselves. Got them to show an example. There was only one objection. [He'd] objected right through, yet I [had done] a lot of work privately for him before all this. [He was a councillor, a respected leader]. A very strong man. I was from the district and so forth. Fortunately the other [farmers] competing with him helped me quite a lot, [partly by suggesting he set an example for others to follow, and he didn't like any adverse publicity that would follow should he fail to treat his weeds.]

Yes, you had to pick your mark and work with those and then shame the others into. You got half-a-dozen or so doing the job around the place, you'd say, 'Look, I'm afraid if you don't hop in and do your share, I'll have to serve a notice on you. Now if we serve a notice that becomes legal and then you'll have to finish this all by a certain time. It's a lot easier if you do it in your own time and get it done'. [They accepted such reasoning.]

Obviously, the cost of the work and the time it takes to do it were two important factors for the farmers.

Yes.

Apart from those two reasons, why else would they resist these efforts to clean up?

They didn't consider them weeds, like Salvation Jane was a feed. They'd feed their stock on it.

Despite the fact that the sheep would get bluestone [copper] poisoning ... and other ones as well. There's a number of poison ones – St Johns Wort and others – that you had to watch, but they still didn't seem to think it was worthwhile, but they came to it in the end and then I got them working pretty well in the end.

[24:45] Did you find some farmers, many farmers, who objected to some of the control methods they used in the herbicides and ...

Yes. Even some of the members of the Department. [Of course, some needed special safety equipment.] How much we got to go? I need to rest.

We've probably covered a bit today, Ray, getting us into the 1960s and into the Departmental era and the Weeds Advisory Committee era, so we'll pick up on things in another session.

I'll have to look up my book too, find where I put those things, I put them out because it's handy.

If you get some dates and things like that we'll add them to the record in due course. We'll put a pause on for today and catch you at another session soon.

[25:50] **Side A, Tape 3** – end of interview session

Tape 3, Side B – session of 18 November 2004

[0:25] Ray, last week we talked about some of your experiences on the West Coast, when you were working with the local council.

Please, Eyre Peninsula please. (laughs) [Eastern Eyre Peninsula. Due to the size of the Eyre Peninsula, to help locate places the West Coast and Eastern Eyre Peninsula are still used by many authorities.]

Eyre Peninsula, thank you! The question I wanted to ask you is, following on from that discussion, we didn't talk anything about your liaison with other officers, the 'West Coast' officers.

I started, as I mentioned before, I took over five councils on the eastern side of Eyre Peninsula, which included Kimba, Franklin Harbour (which is Cowell), Cleve, Tumby Bay and Lincoln District Council, not the Town Council, District Council [at Cummins]. Then as time went by I had to get assistance. What I had done was, with the different councils I picked the councillors [and landholders] that had a positive attitude and we formed these Weeds Committees in which we had three or four members [from] the council area, not necessarily councillors, and we'd have a meeting, talk about the problems and how we'd go about it [methods of treatment] and then we'd put that to council later on. These made a big difference. In the end we had the two boards with one at Kimba, Cowell and Cleve, and Tumby Bay and Lincoln formed the other

one, so that was the board there. That was very successful and went on. I had four other officers [employed to help me] by the time this was going on and we were getting on doing a lot of [good] work and my approach to it was that something to do with this, something that would make us see good results ... so it's tackle boxthorns first of all, which were along the coast areas but inland, sandy areas and so forth, quite a lot of them and the method was either to pull them up and spray the regrowth [or spray the bushes with herbicide] and things of this nature. Very successful and our 5-year plan ends up about 3 years. They've got the idea and then ... The other thing was, I had a feeling for fellows that were hard-up, didn't have much money, soldier settlers and [some other] fellows were pretty poor, so we'd see what they did have in the way of equipment: [maybe] they had a water tank, well let's convert that into a spray tank when they want to spray [their weeds. Small booms, handlines etc. were made up] without too much expense for them. This worked well.

Was that something from your own initiative?

Yes. This was something quite new. What I did there, as you'll see and remember there's a booklet [from the Weeds Advisory Committee] that I gave you the other week, it's in there that the Weeds Committees that I'd set up there. When Frank Chapman left the Department I applied for his job ... I joined before that happened, but I knew he was leaving in 1970. I joined the Department of Agriculture in October 1970. I was still on Eyre Peninsula going around and looking after these [council weeds] officers and talking to them. Finally, about June ['71] I came to Adelaide with the Department as the Local Government Liaison Officer taking over the position from Frank Chapman. In those days it was still the Weeds Advisory Committee. It was up to about 1972 when they had about five members on that committee all from the different districts throughout the State. ??? Testrow was a member from the Eyre Peninsula. I can't remember all the others now, but that's how it was formed.

[5:40] Had he replaced you?

Ian Phillips replaced me. Actually he was my side-kick and mainly he's doing ????. ??? employee he was, only a young fellow, but very astute, yes.

[6:05] Back on the Eyre Peninsula, did you have much contact with the surrounding regions? The West Coast people for example?

When you say the 'surrounding regions', local government went across the top end there through the Nullarbor and that. Yes, I did on the western side, the West Coast proper, those councils – the Ceduna, Streaky Bay, Elliston, yes, I had constant liaison. We'd meet together and have an annual conference and discuss our problems, we'd get guest speakers in, we'd have some committee members in there to help us out and all that business and that was my job to run those.

[7:10] Were there common problems?

Yes, there were common problems for all, but some had [recently acquired] problems that were [relatively small as they'd] just got in. What'd we used to say, Lincoln Weed, was one of the problems, which was obviously called after Port Lincoln. It'd escaped in the ships from the port there and started spreading up and this was one we had to say, 'Look, it's coming. Get onto it before it gets further afield', Yes, that was the sort of thing. Onion Weed, there were a few [plants] like this which to me were over emphasised as weeds because better farming [methods, time of cultivation] and use of [super]phosphate and bluestone [copper sulphate] will counteract the loss of copper. These things rapidly got rid of the seriousness of Onion Weed. [There were weeds such as the perennial Wild Tomato (*solanum elaeagnifolium*) having a deep perennial root system which were more difficult to destroy. Also, this weed was introduced from South America. Weeds Officers and farmers had difficulty in separating it from several of our far less aggressive species. With the introduction of Round-up (*Glyphosate*) came effective treatments of these deep-rooted perennials, which included Skeleton Weed (at the time a most serious problem, especially for cereal growers) which was finally all but eradicated by several introduced biological agents.]. Another one was African Daisy, which was again a matter of fertility. It was after the [scrub] burning and so forth it came up, but then as they [developed their good] pastures it virtually disappeared. As a matter of fact, I grew one in my own garden just to let people know what it was, 'cause it's a rare plant now, because a biological control came and fixed that up. Also the natural [control of native species]: those predators [in time] converted over to the African Daisy, so it became less a problem. It was a very interesting time, but what I was doing on Eyre Peninsula ...

[10:00] Just one thing Ray, you're talking here about controlling the weeds. Who was doing the control work: the farmer or companies? How did that fit?

OK. First of all the decision, the noxious weed program, was made [on] the recommendations of the councils through the boards. And the *Weeds Act* itself: the roadsides adjoining the land were the responsibility ... After the roadside joined the property, [that half of the roadside adjacent to the private property was] the landholders' responsibility. [Where half the road reserve was] adjoining national parks and other government reserves [or properties], the roadside [money was provided by the State government to such areas which are included in the overall program for that area. Note that it is half the road reserve irrespective of the formed road surface. It appeared to be] rather complicated, but it [turned out to be] fairly simple when you got to know the system. It was our job and we thought ... Sometimes the farmers didn't have the equipment [or the job] was too big for them. They'd get contractors in, apart from buying their own equipment, they'd get contractors to do the work. We'd employ those contractors. [There were several reliable commercial businesses (Lawlors were one of our main ones over there, but there was also another one) plus some farmers were available with suitable

equipment and ability to do contract work, usually locally.] In those days there was quite a number of contractors doing this work.

Would the government use the contractors as well?

Yes. We used them to do a lot of [government subsidy] work for us [on Crown land (reserves) and half the roadsides adjoining] ...

Knowing that Frank Chapman was going to resign (he was a pretty good friend of mine) ... He was always a bird man, he was a weeds officer but he was as keen on birds. [His hobby was bird watching and recording.] He wasn't to know of my keenness on botany, I knew where the different plant associations were [because of my hobby and keenness of collecting specimens and recording them. One weekend we planned to visit the surround of Coffin Bay seeking out the Western Whip Bird that had been reported several times due to its very distinctive call. But no positive sightings were made. Frank stayed over with us and we also invited Doug Barnes, a local birdman, and my wife Elsa. We were fortunate to have a bird expert from the SA Museum join us. It was decided to have lunch on the beach at Kellidie Bay before entering that park. Shade was scarce so we spread out a little. The meal was going well, when suddenly we heard very clear and distinct Whip Birds calling. Up our end we assumed that the Museum man was playing his tape recorder. Likewise he thought we had turned on our recorder. Then the penny dropped – the calls were genuine and on investigating we found quite a number of birds very active. As it was mating time, they became most upset when we came close to their nests. This was the sort of work I did for Frank when he came over. We did this by easing in a bit of extra deals with birds and flowers and things like that.]

We were a pretty friendly pair. [In addition to our work we were both conservationists.] The Department knew about it and so when Frank left in '71, I had already transferred (as I said before in October in '70) to the Department and worked as a officer of the Department with [Ian] Phillips taking over [my Weeds Officer duties with the councils on Eastern Eyre Peninsula].

[15:40] Just to round out your Eyre Peninsula story, I asked you about liaison with other Weeds people, but did you have contact with other aspects of land: Soil Conservation Boards, for example?

Yes. Soil Conservation members, they had their own authority. We knew Jack Richards, who was later to become a Weeds fellow [with the Agriculture Department at Port Lincoln; some time later Jack transferred to the Lands Department.] Where was it? ... He was waiting to go in the Army. [Geoff Rowe (another to Roseworthy graduate) was acting as] Assistant Farm Manager ... When I came back [to Adelaide after my stint with the shearers I was still waiting my call up so] I went to Roseworthy and took over that job from [Geoff] but later [after the

war] he went to Naracoorte [working for the Lands Department] later on and I met up with him down in Naracoorte [when I took over the River Bend Cheese Factory at Kybybolite].

So your paths crossed ...

Each one knew each other. In those days there was a lot of the Department. [It was a big 'family'.] ... The Roseworthy boys were in the [various] Departments [or associates looking after landholders], then you had Lands and – Outside the Hundreds, what they call the landholders?, station ...

Pastoralists?

Yes, Pastoral ... Pastoral Committees and people of that nature, so the liaison was pretty good there. [Land leased outside Hundreds was controlled directly by the government through the Pastoral Board, not by a council. Their holdings were called stations, which were run by the pastoralist (the lessee) with the aid of station hands, which included Aborigines.]

[While each district had their local conference (or meetings) to which I and other Departmental officers were invited, plus guest speakers offering advice or assistance if required. However, it was my job as the Liaison Officer to organise the main annual 3-day conference in Adelaide to which local committee and the weeds officers were all invited. It was not only to inform them of any new regulations and other official matters, but it was also an opportunity for the officers and special guests to present papers, particularly on special projects or problems – they were free to discuss and add their ideas. The various sessions were chaired by a member of the Weed Board or, later, the Pest Plant Commission. It turned out to be most rewarding in the exchange of technical knowledge, and the development of good fellowship between the weed officers from all over the State.]

[18:25] Were there occasions where you worked very closely with the soil conservation people, for example?

Yes. We'd go out with them. As a matter of fact, talking about skeleton weed, I remember – poor fellow's dead now but he was the soil fellow in Cleve and he said, 'I think I know where some skeleton weed is', so he took me out to what was there and it turned out to be skeleton weed and that was the liaison there ...

We'll get him later but ...

Yes.

Were you actually working together to solve respective problems? They might have a problem on the soil, you've got a problem on the weeds and it ties up.

We worked in with them as we could ... There wasn't much point of getting rid of the weed, whether you sprayed or pulled it out or not unless you had something to replace it. It wasn't so bad for individual weeds where you had an odd one here or there but when you had these

massive infestations of them, if you're going to take them out, put something in its place, native plants or pasture or whatever it was. That was my attitude and particularly if your pasture [included clover or] a medic to get the nitrogen back into the soil, to help build the soils up. That was one of the reasons that the formation of Roseworthy [College] was [to get] the sceptics [to accept] legumes into crop systems, so having [seen and been instructed in] these things, not only for Roseworthy but my own father had [pointed this out] ... I was brought up on it, I was keen [to see farms including such valuable legumes (clovers) in their pastures].

[20:25] Did you find any dilemma, Ray, between the way you were brought up, your love of botany, your love of the natural world and yet the farming world is one where you're using the herbicides, the phosphates, you're changing the nature of the land. Was that a dilemma for you personally?

Yes, there was some problems there, but to having it on side with those that were keen to do it and you had say half-a-dozen doing the job in that particular district, area and there was two or three that weren't, you could shame them into it ... You could say bullied him into it, shamed into it: 'Look here, everybody else is doing it. It's up to you now. I don't want to serve the notice on you. If you do it yourself, you can do it in your own time' and so forth. I said, 'If you don't do it, I'll have to serve you a notice and you'll have to do it within a specific time at expense' and so forth like that. This really did help. In fact, the only notices I served were on to the councillors themselves [to set an example] ... I don't know where I got the process from. It's a bit like my approach during the war as a [RAAF] gunner [with over 50 operations over enemy territory]. I resisted firing my guns. In fact, actually in another aircraft I never fired my guns. The reason being, once you opened them up, it was like saying, 'Here I am', because the flashing of the guns and so you didn't ... It was better to find them first and we had radar and things like that to pick them up. You had to pay attention, not having a quiet smoke or drink on the job while you were doing it and some people did that. But get back to the Eyre Peninsula ...

[Earlier there was no real dilemma as farming was in my background and training. Besides, there were still large areas of scrubland which were being cleared, but there appeared to be ample flora and fauna (or similar) reserves being set aside for the protection of our native species and land areas of special significance. Indeed, as a member of the Nature Conservation Society SA, in my own time I assisted that society in the survey of some 15 pristine natural areas throughout this State, which are now valuable in protecting some species no longer to be found outside those reserves. Then, as Liaison Officer in the Pest Plants Commission, my association with well-informed conservationists made me aware of some of the gross damage we were doing on the application of herbicides and pesticides, which meant that we were forced to find alternative control measures, modify spray equipment and choice of herbicides. It certainly was difficult, but with co-operation of all people concerned we did make good progress.]

You weren't showing your hand by ...

No. It was a ... The other thing went later on. I'm getting eager to get to town now. Have you had enough of that? [Again, probably my Dad's influence: first make enquiries, discuss the problem, and allow time to consider the issue by the person concerned.]

Just if we could add to the story briefly. You talk about serving notice ...

Yes.

My question Ray is more, was there an attitude by the Weeds Advisory people that if you remove a weed, it should be replaced by a crop or by native plants or ...

Yes. There was a message: we had the weed control handbooks, which set out the different ways of doing it [treatment] and also notes. You've seen some of those notes, but one particular one I wanted to show you I can't find. Where I've put it, I don't know. We had a whole copy of them [published: centre piece in colour for] the *Journal of Agriculture*, almost three years of them, about 60 of them somewhere ... [One side] with the photograph describing and showing [identification of] the weed and on the back was ... control [methods] and its status under the Act as a weed – noxious, dangerous and [special notes]. Those things are on the back of it. Did I answer your question?

I think so. We'll give you your steam now on the Eyre ... After the Eyre Peninsula you went to ...

Now, after the Eyre Peninsula?

Have your steam now.

Yes. While I knew what was happening, I was waiting on Eyre Peninsula and the next thing I was already in the Department a bit before June. After Frank had retired, I applied for his job as Local Government Liaison Officer. It was officially Agronomist, Weed Control. I had the qualifications, a diploma. In fact, I had a double diploma which the Department never recognised my Diploma of Dairying, but that's another story. I got the job despite [some in] the Department having other fellows they wanted to do the job, but I had [outside field experience] and the [Weeds] Committee itself dictated that I was to get the job [due to my qualifications, experience and success].

So how did you feel about taking on a government position, joining the Public Service?

I thought I knew what it was. I got the shock of my life when I joined. This is a bit unfair I suppose, but it seemed the attitude was more in [line with] their promotion – 'Don't do that. See my ...'. I was told several times, 'We can't put that forward. It makes [extra] work'. My attitude was this: if I was employed for getting rid of noxious weeds or proclaimed weeds, then I had to get out and [get] the work [done] but that didn't go down well I tell you. Some friends of mine [from] the Kyby. days were in the Department, ... experimental farm. One in particular said, 'Ray, you're making work for yourself'. I said, 'That's my job'. They couldn't see that.

Consequently, I was very unpopular, quite unpopular with [some on the agronomists'] team. Fortunately, although we were employed by the Department as Agronomists, Weed Control, we were seconded to the Weeds Advisory Committee and virtually we were responsible directly to them. It meant that I didn't have to bounce the ball straight back at the Department. It went to them first. I'd make my reports and when the Department said, 'Look, we can't have that for political reasons or some other', I said, 'You [want to alter] my reports, you go ahead [and sign the changes]. That's my report' and I left it there ... In the end, what I put there got through ... Why they wanted me there was because they knew about the Advisory Committee, the Board. What are we now? Advisory Board?

Committee.

The Pest Plant Board [Commission], yes.

That was a bit later, but ...

Most of those [Commission] fellows were landholders themselves. They were landholders and they knew what was going on [in the field and in weed control]. They wanted these [weed] committees and so I went through the State and set up these committees. Some were of three or four Councils, some single Councils; maybe not so much the city Councils, they were usually left on their own – places like Mt Gambier, Port Augusta, Port Pirie, Port Lincoln, Victor Harbor and places like that, big towns which were later on declared cities [perhaps]. I set these up and I'd go out I picked my mark: [that is, farmers wanting effective weed control programs] ... Start off with easy [weeds] and what you could do and show the positive, that there was a positive way to get there. Then we talked, had talks and liaised with them [to discuss associated problems and methods of control]. We used to have annual meetings in the different groups, then we'd have the main one again in Adelaide and we had these problems and experts in different fields, interstate and sometimes politicians, but certainly the Advisory Committee [or later] the Commission members, usually each one had something to say at that conference [and were acting chairmen for the various sessions] ...

That Pest Plant work is more mid '70s and later ...

Pardon me

[30:45] Just to go back on to your first move to Adelaide. You made the comment that the committee on the Eyre Peninsula wanted you to take the job. Did I understand you correctly?

The committee on Eyre Peninsula?

Yes, wanted you to have the job in Adelaide?

Helped me get the job in Adelaide, that's right. [They encouraged me to apply for the Liaison Officer when it became vacant]. What I was doing there and then these ... By then the Weeds Committee fellows knew what was I doing over there through the representative from Eyre

Peninsula, Mr Testrow, and they wanted the same thing set up there [i.e. to implement my ideas on weed control throughout the State].

Was it understood that you would move to Adelaide?

I moved to Adelaide. That was July in '71.

When you took the job on, did you know you would move to Adelaide?

I was waiting to go. I had proved, knew, what was going to happen, which the Department didn't know, I knew. (laughs) [I received 'smoke signals' advising me Frank Chapman was about to retire.]

So were you keen to come to Adelaide?

Yes, because I had reached the stage [due to my deep interest in botany] I wanted to go further with it, which I couldn't do with Port Lincoln. Very difficult to do from Port Lincoln. By that time I'd made a name for myself as a botanist, amateur botanist. I had to because the Department wasn't strong in that direction and nor was the Herbarium (not the official person with naming the plants) [as most botanists] were more interested in the native [species] than they were [introduced weedy species].

You were happy to give up the country life for the city life?

I guess I was ... I don't remember any hassles, although I missed Eyre Peninsula. I had a lot of friends. I was on 22 different committees when I was over there. I had to give [up] ... cut them down, that was a good start.

[33:05] **End of Side B, Tape 3**

Tape 4, Side A

[0:15] Ray, interesting that you were on so many committees ...

Yes.

... on the Eyre Peninsula – regional committees and local committees for state-wide organisations. What sort of bodies?

First of all there was the [weeds] committees I'd formed. That was one lot of it. And there were committees for nature conservation – that was both for the State [SA Nature Conservation Society], and I had my own branch over there which was a private thing, and the federal one [Australian Conservation Society] – and a life member of both. Then I went on to the service committees. I was on the Agricultural Bureau for Koppio, which I just should have gone over there recently for 50 years – no, 100 years. Nature conservation – no, houses, what do they call them?

The National Trust?

National Trust, yes.

Which branch of the Trust? Lincoln Trust?

Port Lincoln Trust, of course! Also with that I was responsible for setting aside the Koppio Museum, which was the blacksmith's shop there where Brennan's were, which ... Frank Brennan was another one that I'd won over with my weed control. He gave the land at the corner [to the National Trust]. His father was the blacksmith, Bert Brennan. Then they set it up. [Then through the National Trust] they got a working committee [to organise and set up the blacksmith museum at Koppio]. I had little or nothing to do with that. I was on my job. I left shortly after, but I got them to commit to do it [prior to my leaving]. The local people set it up very well. They overdid it a bit because they went into tractors; my idea was to stick to the horse era. We've all got different ideas. [The blacksmith's shop was] preserved, that was the main thing at Koppio. The other one was the old lime kiln down in Lincoln Reserve, down on the new West Road, down south of Lincoln. I got the National Trust to look into that and the local people take it over. Then – I don't know there were so many things there that ...

What about the other community aspects?

Other?

Community aspects: sporting groups or council groups or school groups?

Council groups: as I say, each council ... some councils had the weeds committees.

Yes.

I mentioned these before.

In case there were other ones.

In the town itself, then there was a ... What was it I belonged to there? Don't forget there's lodges and things of that nature, there's Rotary and the Oddfellows, but mainly with the Freemasons. [Not forgetting the local RSL and Air Force Association. I also found a little time for golf. But my main relaxation was to get out my 12 ft dinghy and go fishing.]

A very extensive network.

Yes. Gave you a lot of contacts, didn't it?

Yes.

[5:00] ... [Some] of them I was invited to take over [committee duties]. I was popular and that was the point, despite doing regulatory work – and I didn't give these fellows [any favours]: no, I would get them stuck into it [and expect them to do the weed control]. They respected that. This is what the Department, when I got there, couldn't understand – why I was so popular. It soon became apparent throughout the State because of the way I went [about my work]. I didn't even bail [up] the fellow at the post and say, 'Look, you must do this'. [No we got together, discussed the problem and with rare exception effective weed control followed].

As a rule it worked. There might have been some exceptions, people who didn't.

Yes. Certain people did object to it, but then we shamed them into it. When there was three or four, half-a-dozen of their neighbours and they're the only one or two left out, say, 'Come on. Wouldn't you rather keep up?' and get the neighbours on to them as well ... If they didn't respond then I'd say, 'Do you want me to serve you a notice when you've got to do it within specific times, or would you rather do it in your own time?'. We got through it that way. As I said, I mentioned before, the only notices I ever served were token. One or two were serious to the councillors which weren't at it, but basically it worked well. Memories. (laughs)

[6:45] As well as that working life, you've also got your personal life. In your case it's very hard to distinguish between the two because you've got your botany interests, you've got your groups that you belong to and so on, but you've got a wife and family.

Yes. I had a wife and three children (two boys and a girl, in that order). My wife was working. I mentioned before she was a trained tailoress but left that and went into nursing. She was a fully-qualified sister from Ballarat, and that's where I met her during the war, at Ballarat. For some reason she put up with me while I was away for [almost] three years, and we married when I came back in '45. At the end of the financial year, wasn't it? Thirtieth of June 1945. That was it. Immediately after that I put in to go to Hawkesbury College, do the dairy course. She was left alone, so she went home to Melbourne. She was actually from Melbourne – Camberwell. She went [to her old] home to live with her parents while I was [at the College]. Then while I was there – at Hawkesbury – my son was born, about a month before the final exams, so I had to go down to see her. [After several days I returned to my studies] and two days later the practical part of the exam started, so I had to get in smartly with my swotting and get things done. Despite that I ended up with first class honours and dux of the year. I must have made the effort in those days. Where was I?

Over on the Eyre Peninsula, you've got Elsa and the three children.

The three children.

Your children are ...

First of all I went over I was living in a Trust home next to the friend we formed later on, Bill Hodge, who we formed the AgCon [Ltd] with, he was my silent partner: we lived next door to him in this Housing Trust home. Then while I was working at the factory ... AW Sandford's butter factory in Port Lincoln; 'Port Lincoln Dairy Produce' it was named. By the time, about 1950 – yes, about '50 – when Britain joined the European Market ... I got sick of butter making and the [odd hours] of fat coming in, [cream deliveries] and milk coming in, and so [I resigned my management of the factory] ... First of all I joined Wilcox Mofflin, a agricultural pesticide [and herbicide] distributor. They were also wool merchants, down where Cadbury's building is now down [on the corner of South Rd and Adam St, Hindmarsh]: that used to be a wool store.

Beats me how they tamed that place into it with all of the accumulated smell: the floors were all stained with lanoline out of the wool and that. It's there still.

This is when you were in Lincoln; you've got the children going to school?

Yes. They went first of all while I was ... When I was living at Koppio and we had a house at Koppio itself, they went to the Koppio school. Later on that closed down and they came in by bus [for one year. The sons Eric and Robert] went into Lincoln, and the [daughter went to] a little place out of Lincoln. Not Louth Bay, close to Louth Bay [– northeast; Poonindie on the Lincoln Highway.]

We'll get it later.

They went to school there, and then later on they went into Lincoln. Then [we moved to] Lincoln. [We] bought a house in Lincoln and [the children] went to [high] school and finished off there.

[13:00] Eric was a bit like his father. I didn't realise at the time, but rather independent and had too many irons in the fire and he never did well at school and it got to the stage that the inspector – they used to have inspectors go to the school – made an appointment to have a talk to me about my son, which we did. He said, 'He's the brightest kid in that school yet he's around the bottom of the class. He's wasting his time at school. I suggest you go and get him on a trade and he'll come good after that. He'll get a sense of purpose [and understanding] or something in life and he'll come good'. He was keen to be a motor mechanic, but I edged him off that and got him to be a diesel mechanic with Dan Perry[, manager] with the Tractor Company in Port Lincoln. He wasn't keen for a while but then once he got into it he was very keen and applied himself. As a result he was ... Upset them occasionally with his ... (laughs) like his dad, had his own ideas on how to go about things, which weren't always right but they showed an independence. In the end he got, not only with credit, his – what do you call it?

Like apprenticeship?

Apprenticeship. Got his certificate. It was recommended [that he with a] half-a-dozen fellows go to [Melbourne] to [study] supercharging diesel tractors – that was with [Caterpillar] Tractor Company, a branch of the main company in America. A friend who] had moved to Canada [wrote to Eric in glowing terms and] invited him to go over there ... By that time he'd decided to get married. He married a girl from Cummins, Lyn Kloeden. [Not long after they flew to British Columbia.] There they worked in [servicing] diesel tractors. They were big [tractors] I tell you. One of the things they were doing was felling timber and they had these big scissors and they're cutting these big trees, several feet in diameter, and they were cutting them like pruning shears. They cut them and let them fall. This was the sort of work he was doing there.

[17:40] So he maintained, in a sense, a connection with primary industries, but from the mechanical side of things. You've just given an impression there that Perry, for example, in Port Lincoln, obviously it's a major centre for the farming industry.

Yes, it was. [Dan Perry had a set-up to service farmers and others, not only for caterpillar tractors on Eyre Peninsula.]

Supplies and equipment and ...

Supplying, selling the tractors and equipment to go with it. Yes, he was involved with that ... Then, after a while, he wasn't particularly happy with his mate, with his partner, because the other fellow was ... his life, he was living, the whole life was tied up with the business, he had no time for his wife, little time for his wife and family, and so Eric decided he'd set up on his own. So he had ... his company. He set about doing these tractors himself, for the mining industry particularly. He had, at Burnie in Tasmania, to set up his shop there. Then he was gradually buying up industry. There was the Wynyard, and he built himself as a hobby shop a woodworking place, carving wood things like maps out of solid Huon pine, maps of Tasmania and things of this nature with clock faces on them and things, and that was his hobby, turning wood bowls and things of that nature, or getting others to help him do it. He was selling this stuff on the side when he was out servicing as well. He had his irons in a number of fires as well. Eventually he returned to Tasmania. I'm sorry, I told you. I'm repeating myself.

He's been to Canada, he's come back.

Then he came back to Tasmania and he set this up in Tasmania and had that until recently. Then he had heart problems – a double beat in his heart – so he cut out on his shop and eventually he sold it up, sold that part of it up ... Until right recently he held onto his woodwork shop but now he's given that up too. He's building another on to his home, which is separate from the building, and he just got permission to build a woodwork shop like I've got myself down there to carry on with his wood turning and things of that nature. He's got over his heart problem, but he's getting ... Next year he'll be 60.

He's getting older himself!

Yes. He's made quite a success of himself, quite well-heeled and so forth, what with his business doings, buying property and selling property and things of this nature. Good luck.

[Following text supplied by Ray Alcock in 2007:

My eldest son, Eric, was born in 1946 and educated at Koppio and then Port Lincoln. He was a bit like his father – rather independent with too much going on in his life to do well at school. It was strongly suggested by the headmaster that he get into a trade. I was fortunate to realise Eric had a real interest in mechanics and guided him into a diesel mechanic apprenticeship at the Port Lincoln branch of the SA Tractor Company in 1962. This was the key to Eric's ability and he completed his 5-year apprenticeship with a credit. He also successfully completed several specialised training courses with Caterpillar in Melbourne. No sooner had he finished his apprenticeship than he was conscripted into the Australian Army for 2 years, spending a year in Vietnam. Returning from Vietnam, Eric married Lyn Kloeden and, being a bit unsettled, travelled to British Columbia, Canada. Here they spent the

next 8½ years working and starting a family. In Canada Eric worked for Finning Tractor the Caterpillar dealer, starting as a mechanic and finished up in sales, before returning to Australia to take up a business opportunity in Tasmania. This was a partnership of 6 years rebuilding, modifying and manufacturing Caterpillar machinery for the surface and underground mining industry. After 3 years of managing another business, Eric and Lyn commenced their own business where they specialised in the rebuilding and modifying of mining and earth moving equipment. Eric's hobby was woodwork and during this time he built a workshop and manufactured a line of Tasmanian souvenirs from native timbers, which he sold through tourist outlets. After 12 years in their own business Eric had a health scare, sold up and retired at the age of 53, still doing the occasional consulting job for the mining industry. Still based in Tasmania, since retirement he and Lyn spend a lot of their time as 'grey nomads' exploring Australia and travelling around in their motor home visiting their four grown-up children and one granddaughter.]

[22:00] Yes, so Bob, the second son: he was the one that went to Adelaide Boys from Port Lincoln [High School]. He went to Adelaide High then to [finish off his schooling]. I offered to send him to university but he decided he didn't want to. He came home and took a job with the Lands Department. Then he realised the importance of having a what's-the-name, so he went back to uni and completed his course in cartography, diploma or certificate, I'm not sure. Drawing maps and the mapmaking and so forth. He then went back to the Lands Department for a while. He didn't get very far there so he went to Western Australia ... the woods and forests people over there ...

Forestry Commission or something like that?

... Forest Commission, yes. He was in with them drawing up the plans and so forth for replanting the forests. A lot of them were replanting with pine; in those days, wasn't a lot of gum trees or eucalypts planted back. The time he was there they started to realise the importance of [it], they were running short of it, so he was in on that as well. He left his mark. He came back. He followed a girl from Queensland while he was over there and she had no ... In '72, yes, just after I came into town, in '72 [73] he married her. We had to go to Queensland to do that, went to Brisbane and back again. Then they left. They came back to Adelaide and he's been working with ... what's he do? ... I still think it was the Lands Department; something of that ... He was working with those and he got jack of that and went out on his own and did his own thing – letterheads, things of that nature, and booklets, say you want to hand out to people, show them what your job is, what you ... that work.

So he's more into the printing side of things than ...?

Yes, on the printing side, yes.

Although that mapping work and work in Western Australia, again he's got that primary industries connection for a while.

Yes. He still has that connection with them, which helps him get his work done! They're doing very well. He's had a bit of a recession just now, they think he's a bit old to be so ... He said, 'I've got to find new avenues' and so forth, so he's building up again. He's fairly sound, too.

He's got stuff invested and they learnt their lesson ... When you think of your kids you think they don't have much time for dad, but it's amazing how they've followed the old man!

Followed in the footsteps.

Not altogether, there was no way that I insisted what they did. They formed their own, did what they'd choose to do. Except for the only one time I stepped in was with Eric that time and got him on to what's-the-name: was probably the best thing I did because nobody hired ... motor mechanics were 2 bob-a-dozen.

You mentioned Bob going to university: did you mean the university or the Institute?

Bob?

Yes. You said the university. Was that the School of Mines or the Institute of Technology to do the cartographic study? The Institute of Technology is now the university.

I don't think it would ... He went there as a technical student. The unis didn't have ... They weren't always ...

That would be more the Institute of Technology ...

Yes.

... School of Mines in the old days.

Yes

That's alright, I just thought I'd check ...

Stop it here.

[Following text supplied by Ray Alcock in 2007:

My second son Robert went to Koppio Primary School, and Port Lincoln and Adelaide High Schools. I offered to send him to university, yet he decided to take a drafting job with the Department of Marine & Harbours in Adelaide. After gaining his qualification in 1970, he took off for Western Australia, gaining a cartography job with the Forests Department over there. Drawing maps and plans of forest management – a lot of pine plantations, and the traditional jarrah and karri forests. Over there he met a Queensland girl, Judy, and they married in Brisbane in 1973. They came back to Adelaide in 1975, and Robert worked for the Australian Survey Office for many years. He also went back to study, gaining an Associate Diploma in Cartography in 1980 through the SA Institute of Technology. He left the public service in the early 1990s and now has his own small business producing marketing materials for other businesses – books, folders etc. He has also become interested in and involved with the management of the Friends of the Heysen Trail, the organisation maintaining and conducting walks on SA's long-distance walking trail. He enjoys the bushwalking. Robert has also been involved with the local Kiwanis service club for many years.]

[27:50] That's alright. They're the boys. That covers the boys.

The girl! Janet wanted to be a nurse, similar to her mother, when she left high school. She was too young: coming from the country to Adelaide she was only 16 [17], so she went off to Victoria Downs Station as a governess up there for 12 months and got to know the people pretty well up there and helped with their tuition of the kids [child] and so forth. Then, when she got old enough, she came back and went to the Adelaide Hospital and served the time there,

got her certificate. That was about '81 [1971]. [1972] she went to England to do her midwife's course, and [worked] in London ... Took time off and went into Europe and so forth, travelled all over Europe, all over the place. We, Elsa and I, went back to England in '82 [1981] and stayed at the Victory Services Club, which was designed for we returned men. It was a membership thing – I'm still a member of it. They gave cheap board and so forth and helped with tours and things of that nature. She said, 'Bad luck. I'm going over to Bella...', a Russian city on the other side of the Pacific, the east-west road, Moscow to the Pacific. Belladoskov? She said she'd be away on this train trip. When we arrived on the Victoria Station from the docks, from the airport, who was there to meet us but our daughter! We had a wonderful time with her there. We went all over the place with her.

[Following text supplied by Ray Alcock in 2007:

My daughter Janet wanted to become a nurse similar to her mother. On leaving Port Lincoln High School she was too young to enrol in nursing, so she went off to Victoria River Downs Station in the Northern Territory as a governess for 12 months. Helping with the tuition of their child, she got to know the people pretty well. Then she joined the Royal Adelaide Hospital, serving her time and got her nursing certificate in about 1970. In 1973 she sailed to England to do her midwife's course, working in London and Bristol. She, of course, also travelled all over Europe, all over the place.

We saw Jan in Canada in 1975, on a visit to see Eric and Lyn. It was a real surprise as Jan had told us she was going on a tour of Russia, so we 'nearly died' when she met us at the airport in Vancouver. It was a good trip travelling with Jan, and Eric and Lyn. Jan, Elsa and I also travelled to Prince Rupert and had a scenic flight over the icefields.

She came back to Adelaide in February 1976. After more travelling, Jan married Peter in 1983 and has a girl and boy plus six of Peter's children. Unfortunately Peter died suddenly in March 2003. Jan continues to live on their Murray River property and has gone back to nursing.

In 1981 Elsa and Ray went to England and stayed at the Victory Services Club, which was designed for returned airmen. They helped with cheap board and tours etc. I am still a member. We had a wonderful time over there.]

A bit of a Grand Tour?

Into the Continent and so forth – Germany, Italy, down the Rhine and we went to Greece as well. That was fascinating. Unfortunately, we didn't go any further into [North Africa] ... We went down as far as Morocco but weren't game to go any further, it was too dangerous with the upset about that time and in Africa itself In fact, we weren't allowed to get in there.

Was this a retirement sort of trip for you? The trip you were making, was it a retirement ...?

No, before retirement it was. Yes, long service it was. When we were working with the Pest Plant Commission, we had these meetings with the councils and the boards. I used to arrange it so sometimes I could do three meetings a day. I used to have one first thing before lunch, [another] a couple of hours before lunch. Say I'd go to Port Lincoln then go on to ... Tumby Bay [and] after lunch I'd go to Cleve and [then on to Kimba for the night ready for a meeting in the morning then on to Whyalla and an evening at] Port Augusta. I did three in a day and then, quite often, not stay there but drive home, so it was 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning before I got

home. At the start I [often] used to [do separate meetings at night]. Then with the changeover to the Pest Plants with the animal authority coming in, before [being] amalgamated ...
[Of course, these long, late hours at meetings and travelling built up my overtime.]

[33:25] End of Side A, Tape 4
Tape 4, Side B

[0:05] It had to be taken within 12 months, the total amount, and it was limited to 3 months. What we did, worked out in the end ... I'd take my 3 months or whatever I'd built up for ['74], and then I'd take the other side of it, the other three months, for ['75]. I had the 6 months away. It was a good break, as you might imagine. This was before retirement: I retired '86. This was the first one. We went there and had a ball with the daughter and so forth, went around.

When I came back, we went up – I only had that 3 months over there – came back, flew back, and went to Queensland, took the caravan up there, stayed at various places, collecting specimens as well as sightseeing and photographing. One of our major stops was Noosa Heads, which was quite a different place to when we saw it when we left from there in the First [Second] World War [in 1943]. The head had been built over and there was a nudist colony there, and the caravan park was in the centre of the town and you had very little access except to go through this nudist colony down to the reserve further down. They'd built on the foreshore big high-rise – typical of what was going on on the Gold Coast as well. That was OK. Went on, then we went up to Mossman, that was as far as we got that time. At the point there, Mossman, looking out there, it warned about crocodiles. Shortly after we had been there a woman ... you were told not to paddle or to enter the water, and keep a watch out for crocodiles. She went paddling, didn't she? A crocodile got her.

What was interesting there was seeing the modern sugar refineries: they come in, they burn the sugarcane [leaves] off, then the machine would come over and top-and-tail them, and they'd just have the [bare] sugar cane itself. That was stacked onto these little trolleys. Then they were connected up to a train, small train, which had their own rail only 2 or 3 ft wide, and they'd then take them into the mill, the mill at Mossman. They'd pick these trolleys up holus bolus and tip them upside down, and then [the canes] were cut up and put out to ferment in the tanks.

You were showing your interest in investigation, observing what's going on.

It was fantastic! We went through the mill, that was a thing we did. Then Point Douglas, went up there and saw that place before that was spoilt [overrun], before too many people got there. That was wonderful up there, the spear-fishing, crabs, oysters and things like that. We were very spoilt in those days: there were plenty of fish and that around, it wasn't like it is today. I

was one of the guilty persons of helping to overfish, I guess, not realising what we were doing until too late.

So all up you had about 6 months away from the Commission.
Yes.

[5:00] What happened in your absence? Did they have someone to ...?
They had the trainee helping. I had the assistant there, and they'd carry on with my work.

The Commission was happy for you to take your leave?
Yes. There was no argument about it. I was due for it ...

Took the chance to see him [your son, Eric].
We went up, took a seaplane from Fort Jackson – Fort Jackson? – and we went right up to the Arctic Circle to have a look at a goldmine up there they had then in the Arctic: [it was tunnelled well in to a mountain,] under the mountain. They had a team carrying their stuff [ore from] under the mountain ... onto a railway line there which brought that down to a wharf ... which was [shipped] to Vancouver. It was interesting to see that. ... [A beautiful visit] seeing those glaciers up there. They talk about the glaciers in Switzerland (which we've also seen): they're nothing compared with some of them up there. It was Prince George ... They had their own ... Queen Elizabeth was ... Lake Louise was the tourist centre there and had the Queen Victoria Glacier, hanging glacier, up [above] and [the melted water] used to run down into Lake Louise which was a beautiful [light shaded] blue colour, which was due to the colour of the ice water. There were a lot of places we visited along there ... We took a tour into the mountains [which at times was breath-taking with numerous beautiful scenic places to admire].

[8:40] Bit of a contrast between that and what you had seen over on Eyre Peninsula and around South Australia.

Yes. I worked with the Weeds Board – I don't think I told you – I worked with them and saw some of their problems, how they were going about it at Saskatchewan and Prince George – no, Saskatchewan and ... It was two places anyway. I went to their board meetings and I went to see the farmers. They had a similar *Weed Act* to ours, and run by councils – according to our councils – and they had a commission, and it was good to see how they were going about the process, how they were doing it and so forth, and got some of the ideas of their treatment and their going about things, and some of the weeds.

[Following text supplied by Ray Alcock in 2007:

Initially I had planned to visit Eric and Lynette living and working in Prince George, British Columbia, Canada. But by chance a Liaison Officer, J.D. (Jack) Forbes, Chief of Weed Control for the Manitoba Province was visiting Adelaide. Following our discussion on weed control and that I was planning to visit my son he invited me to meet up with him to see some of their work on unwanted weeds. Following several weeks touring many wonderfully picturesque and most interesting places I decided it was time to visit Jack Forbes at the Manitoba Department of

Agriculture. He had arranged a 4-day weeds tour of research centres in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Basic discussions were on the role of herbicides, off-target damage criteria and policies in declaring weeds. Inspection tours of trials at research centres at Carman, Elm River, Canberry and Brandon in Manitoba. Then on to research centres at White City, Regina and Findlater, and industrial trials near Regina. It was a most rewarding trip in education and a broader understanding of weed problems. The Canadians went out of their way to demonstrate and help. Not forgetting the social side for both my wife Elsa and myself.

Note: See Agronomy Branch Report No. 72, 'Some observations of weed control in Canada', SA Department of Agriculture, 1975]

[9:50] [After Manitoba I also] went to one of the offbeat religious people ... We had them here: the hippies and so forth. Those people weren't hippies but similar sort of thing. They had their own colonies up there, [rather independent] people ... They sent people to universities [and other institutions outside to get an extended education, but then come] back again. They were very hospitable ... non-drinkers and very religious people. When we went there for meals they catered for us. They gave us not only fish but they gave us meat as well and they had wine for us and things [which their religion forbade them to eat]. This was the sort of hospitable people they were. They were fantastic people. One of their problems was that [when their group reached] ... about 200 or 300 [people] the surplus had to go out and form another unit. The trouble is marrying-in, inbreeding caused problems, imbecility and things like that, which they were well aware of and were trying to overcome. They'd come out to Australia and they were by that time allowing the people to marry outside, but [insisted] they had to come back [to their group]. It was quite interesting to meet them. There were several of those [groups in the region].

[11:45] That work you did going to visit the weeds people, was that your own initiative or had you arranged that from here to be part of [your trip]?

No, I had a contact from here.

It wasn't a work visit; it was more a holiday?

It wasn't official from the Department, but I had an officer that was ... [see note above re Jack Forbes]. When he went back I kept corresponding with him and then we arranged that I do that. Yes, he looked after me. He was a member ... He also was a bit different religious. Again, they didn't try and inflict it on you, but there were certain things they asked you to accept and respect for their religion, which wasn't hard to do. I quite respected them for that. Up until quite recently I was still corresponding with them – up to say 10 years. That was wonderful to see those and come back. Coming back we had to race back to catch the ferry back to Vancouver.

So that was a holiday trip more than a work trip.

More holiday. The thing is I didn't get paid. The [Department of Agriculture] wouldn't pay my expenses, but the Pest Plant [Commission finally paid in part for my work but nothing for my travelling expenses to and from Canada].

What did you get out of it work-wise? What benefits ...?

Apart from the broadening of mind and liaison work, new methods of handling and that. [Most impressive was] how they handled the winter season, the icy season. They only had about five or six months free of ice, so they had to get their crops in quickly and so forth. [Remarkable] how they adjusted to this, how they coped with it.

Were there any things from the South Australian experience that you could provide to them?

Yes. I took [selected] information home and I've got the stuff back there somewhere [in the study], there's a heap of [Canadian, especially] Saskatchewan stuff there somewhere that I brought back with me [and which was handed to the Pest Plant Commission]. While I [was working with the local weeds officers] my wife went out with [their wives] and saw some of the villages again, Indian villages, and they were looked after pretty well. They took her down a river cruise and things like that. I joined them on one [trip] too. They were so hospitable, the whole lot of them! There were no exceptions. Even went into native places [and their homes] ... There was one case, we were going into this town and, as the bus pulled up and we got out and stretched our legs a bit, this Indian came up to us and he said, 'How are things going?'. I said, 'Very well. They're looking after us really well'. He said, 'Come back here when you're on your way back. If those Indian boys give you trouble, let me know and I'll chastise them very much'. I've got a lot of time for the [Canadian Indians]. They looked after me very well. Educated me. [My original contact] had a Bachelor's degree in Art or something like that. Well spoken too. As you see there, it's like everything else: our Aborigine, they were well educated with their system, weren't they? Give them the opportunity now they're starting to show up now, aren't they? It's the same sort of thing: it's the opportunity that we'd had. It was like our peasants: until education came they were pretty crude too, weren't they? I'm philosophising now! (laughs)

[17:30] There's one little thing we should put down on tape, just to round it out because you talked about your children, and you mentioned Elsa working as a nurse and so on: was she working in Port Lincoln?

She did nursing, yes. She did nursing in Port Lincoln at the local hospital. Then became a doctors [dental] receptionist. Then, for some reason or another, she got a job in Hoppings clothing shop. She enjoyed her job there and got to know [a lot more people and helped to broaden her attitude]. A change from nursing. [Being normal daytime work she was better able to attend to the children.]

She was working after the children had been born?

Yes. After we came back to Lincoln, yes. That's the reason she gave away the nursing. She had normal hours so she could be home in time to feed the kids, look after the kids. That was the arrangement she had with Hoppings.

What about when you moved to Adelaide? Did she keep working?

Yes. [Elsa went back to nursing, once the children had grown more responsible and reliable.] She went to the Adelaide Hospital then, she worked there, because the kids were off her hands then. Bob still had a bit there but nothing to speak of. They were independent then [and starting to make their way in life.] ... Yes, she did work there until I retired.

[19:40] That rounds out the family story pretty well. Now we need to look back at your own career. We've got you coming to Adelaide, bringing the family with you, re-establishing yourselves and you're going to work as the Local Government Weeds Advisory Officer.

My official appointment was Special Agronomist, Local Government Liaison – something of those words. As I mentioned just before, when I get in there it wasn't long before ... I had my initial [period] with the Department, I started to set about setting up these Weeds Boards in various districts throughout the State.

At this stage it was the Weeds Advisory Committee in the Department of Agriculture.

It must have been still Weeds Advisory Committee, yes. Peter Barrow[, a Senior Agronomist,] was one that helped me and that was it. OK, I had an idea it was shortly after the time: I could be wrong in that. Later on while I was there it was made the Pest Plant Commission, and separate from the [pest] animals, although I had had the responsibility of the animals when I was with the local councils, and also health work and building inspector work, so I had those experiences there. But coming [to Adelaide] I was statewide weeds. [Proclaimed weeds were my official responsibility.] I set about setting up these [weeds boards with the local government councils], which didn't take long to do. [They soon] became well-established and accepted, and we were really making inroads into some of those more serious and difficult weeds such as skeleton weed, wild tomato and [similar deep creeping rootstocks (Physomes)]. There were so many. There was something like – I'm not sure – about 80-odd weeds on the list [initially].

When you say you were setting up the boards, how did that differ from the boards that already existed – the council arrangements and so on? Were you just creating more boards for more areas?

Those boards ... no ... Weed Committees, name was Weed Committees, I'm sorry, they were Weed Committees I set up [to assist the Council's Board by meeting and discussing their problem weeds in far more depth than could be done at Council meetings].

Was it just a matter of creating more committees?

They'd be two or three councils' weed boards, yes. Then we'd have on those plant identification and weed people. We had meetings to discuss these: committee meetings we used to call them ... I'd pick, as I told you, several positive-thinking people in each from each district and board, and not always board members, and they helped decide how we'd go about [weed control] and we'd discuss how to treat these weeds, what we'd treat and how we'd go about it and so forth, and then we'd put the recommendations back to the boards which would then go

on to Pest Plant Commission – or, in the first, the Weeds Advisory Committee. From that then the money would be granted. My job actually ... It was to be okayed by the Commission or the committee [and then] I was responsible for those funds. I was drawing up and making the recommendations. There were formats to fill out for each council, what they'd treat, where they were going to treat – the Hundreds and Sections and roadsides and things of this nature, it was all set out for them – and the [time and method of] treatment they were going to use, estimated cost and so forth. They were all then added up and put in and made ... I'd do them all up and send them in to the Pest Plant Commission or the authority, put it that way. (laughs) They'd have a go at it, they'd talk to me about it. Sometimes – they wouldn't always adopt it just like that – they would certainly remove some of the stuff [as priorities, costs and other issues had to be considered]: 'Look, we've got to limit it to probably \$1 000 000' or something like that. [Of course it was necessary to keep within our budget and allocations for the control of proclaimed weeds was \$1 000 000 or more. It was considerable money, the whole lot. That was my job, to distribute this in accord to what they allowed.

[I obtained through the Pest Plant Commission] the first calculator: it was a little bit different to my little thing like that [on the desk]. (laughs) It was [an oblong] box [c. 40–50 cm], like that, and it had earphones and a big screen. Same things [are now done] on small calculators, but on this big box you'd do all these calculations and so forth. Saved me a hell of a lot of time, because there were percentages and all sorts of things that had to be worked out [different calculations were done quickly and effectively. There was that problem of human error to overcome]. The trouble is that it was bought by the Pest Plant Committee (or the Board): it was theirs, not the Department's. The senior officers [initially] were always on to me – they wanted to use this thing. They said, 'It belongs to the Department'. I said, 'No, it does not; it belongs to the Commission'. It took the director, just about, to tell these fellows that they couldn't. They could have a loan of it when I didn't [use] it, but ... they'd pick it up and take it away, wouldn't let me know they had it – I had to hunt to find it. [Eventually other calculators were purchased and end of the problem.]

Because you were still based in the Department?

We were with them, yes, down in Hindley St and then we moved, later on we moved up to [the Grenfell Centre] in the Black Stump there. Yes, 14th floor, Black Stump.

You said Hindley Street. The Commission was in, the Pest Plant Commission, in Hindley Street?

No, not Hindley Street, it was ...

Gawler Place?

Gawler Place, that's the one, sorry. Yes – thank God you knew! (laughs) No – well, you know what was down [Hindley] St, that's enough.

We're going to come back to that because the Commission was set up as an Authority, but just on this early period, when you're talking about the new boards, to clarify things, you were actually setting up new committees in new regions?

No, they were already set up.

So it was more amalgamation of ...?

When I set them up they were ... I already had those weed committees, had them all set up, before the Commission. It was after the Commission was formed [that] they were accepted by the [Weeds] Board under the new Act (because the new Act came with the new board). Yes.
(break in recording)

[Following text supplied by Ray Alcock in 2007:

I was employed by the Department of Agriculture, but was seconded and responsible directly to, initially, the Weeds Advisory Committee through the Department of Agriculture. Then in 1975 the Pest Plants Commission was formed to take over much of the responsibility from the Department of Agriculture, resulting in more direction through the Pest Plant Commission to the Councils/Pest Plants Boards which resulted in more direct contact and field planning with landholders resulting in more effective and efficient treatments and results.]

[28:15] OK. We were just talking off the tape there to clarify that the Eyre Peninsula committees had been set up – obviously that's where you worked – and when you joined the Department and joined the Weeds Advisory Committee, part of your role was to establish new committees in new areas of the State.

Yes.

Then later, with the Pest Plant Commission, you had to do more work with those committees to bring them under the Commission.

Yes.

OK, that puts it in [context].

They were mentioned in the new Act. The wording was there, included them in there quite clearly, whereas under the old Act they were just accepted, but they weren't officially as clarified, clearly established, as they were under the new Act.

Yes. Why had there been some gaps and committees not being set up? With such important work as weeds control, why had some councils not got around to it?

It was just the reason that some of them didn't feel like doing it until they saw what was happening. I can't remember too many councils refusing. We'd go and have a talk to them. Most of them joined fairly readily[, but after a short delay all the Councils and Board accepted the proposition].

But you were coming along to set up some new committees, so ...

They knew – this is the point – the Weeds Advisory Committee members from the different ... there were five of them, at least five of them, from throughout the State, from each district, and they knew what was going on over there because they saw reports and so on from me on what

was going on, so they were able to [communicate] to the councils, meet the councils – and they did, used to go to councils – and tell them what was going on. They were told as much by the committee members, the councils, as by me, so they broke the ice for me [most helpfully].

That's actually a good point to go in another direction. I'll just pause. I'll just put another tape in, Ray, so we can pursue a little bit more about that early period of your work with the Weeds Advisory Committee.

[30:50] (break in recording)

OK, rather than start a new tape we'll put things to one side and have a session later on to discuss more about the identities of the Weeds Advisory Committee and the Pest Plants Commission and Ray's work under the Pest Plants Commission at the time.

End of Side B, Tape 4

Tape 5, Side A – session of 25 November 2004

[0:28] Ray, last time we were talking about some of the work of the Weeds Advisory Committee and the work of the Pest Plant Commission and how the boards were set up in local areas and so on. It's probably appropriate this time to look a little bit at the individuals, at the people, who helped make things happen, kept things ticking over. It's pretty general, but looking more particularly at the period when you were actually working in the Department of Agriculture or on secondment to the Pest Plant Commission.

I mentioned before that the reason for going over there was for what I had done on Eyre Peninsula setting up these Weeds Boards (committees we used to call them: they weren't boards, they were committees) [to more detailed information from the farmers with a strong desire to get effective weed control under way]. They were dependent on some of the things they were meant to be for. Let's get on Where are we going to kick off. Just hold it. (break in recording)

OK Ray. We were just collecting our thoughts there about this. As I said, last week we were talking about the boards that were set up in the local council areas ...

Yes.

... and you mentioned you started in '71 in town and boards are being established in the next year or two out in other areas. What we're looking at now is more about how you worked with the people on those boards, the local officers.

Right.

You mentioned here you've got the *Weed Scene* from 1974 says there's something like 57 officers, something like that.

Yes. That's the one year '75, yes.

Yes. We're looking at how you worked with those sorts of people – not necessarily all the individuals, but how ...

Actually, when I'd go and see them it *was* individuals. Quite often in doing the work I'd go up to each district [meet up] with the Weeds Officer and ... We'd be off to attend a council meeting or the board meeting, sometimes both, and discuss the problems they had. I had already been in the field talking to this and getting the positive ones that had successes and see

how they went about eradicating. It wasn't all government recommendations. I listened to what the successful farmers were doing. This was the trick I learnt from my own father: 'Listen to what the successful farmers are doing and try and impart this on to other people', and that's one of the bases I worked on. It certainly worked, because if I saw someone in the district was on top of it, [then to someone who] probably got a negative [result from his treatments I would suggest he try the successful treatment]. That's how we built it up, in that way. There were things new; nobody knew. [There was so much to learn in the use of these new hormone weedicides] that we had to work out for ourselves. We had trial plots, put them down. When Peter Kloot[, a Senior Research Officer, came in, he set out trial plots more scientifically in many areas of the State]. He'd put out different trial plots.

Those trial plots would be on farmers' properties?

Yes. Or sometimes out at Northfield [where he was stationed]. They had plots out there, but that was more for grain trials and that sort of thing, pasture feed with weed control[, not only for declared weeds].

At agricultural research centres. Use the Department's research centres at all for ...?

Yes. Some of the research centres up in the Riverland and places like that. Minnipa too. Minnipa, where else was there?

You've got Kyby., you've got Turretfield.

No, not Kyby. Turretfield was, again, mainly ... I didn't have much to do with, that was more grains and pastures. Karoonda in the Murray region, South East. (laughs) I don't recall. No, they had ... the Department had a ... out at Naracoorte, they had a research station there in this old home.

Struan?

Struan, that's the place, yes. That was where they operated those officers, the departmental officers, the agricultural adviser type of people and their offiders, the [field officers] – what we called the trainees under them. They put down plots as well. It wasn't just one lot of people. I did some of my own when I had ideas that I'd picked up and I couldn't get anybody to do it for me, so I set out and got it myself.

[Following text supplied by Ray Alcock in 2007:

The Agriculture Department Research Centres

Research headquarters were based at Northfield, Adelaide. Others were located at various centres throughout the State, such as the upper reaches of the Murray River, concerned mainly with irrigation. There were the cereal cropping centres at Minnipa (Eyre Peninsula) and Karoonda (Murraylands). In the South East out from Naracoorte the old Struan House and Kybybolite were rather extensive to cater for pastures and a host of crop plants, including horticulture in the higher rainfall districts. The departmental officers – Agricultural Advisers and their trainees, the Field Officers – set out some weed control plots. In addition, for special problems or those not tackled by the Research Officers

some of the Pest Plant Officers, including me, put down our own trials, particularly for weed such as on reserves and roadsides.]

Talking about that we should talk about mistletoe. We were getting nowhere with the mistletoe very much. I wish I knew his name, but he was a New Australian chap down Yankalilla way somewhere. He observed that the mistletoe on the sheoak transferred on to the mistletoe on the gum trees, on to the mistletoe itself, and that destroyed the mistletoe. He found it very effective. He started collecting them – the seed – [from the sheoak (*Allocasuarina* sp.)] and doing it and was getting very good results [by putting that sticky seed directly on to the eucalyptus mistletoes]. I don't know who, somebody followed up later on [following my retirement]. It was quite an interesting thing [and in keeping with other practical and effective] ... information out there that was never used [or published].

Did you find farmers would be passing information around amongst themselves without necessarily informing you?

Yes, that was done, quite a lot of it, one to tell the other. Don't forget the [Agricultural] Bureau meetings and there was also church meetings. There were all sorts of [places] where people could meet and talk and discuss. Cockies are known to talk about their problems and they talk about things [new and effective treatment methods] ... I found that the communication was good in the country – far better than the city. Still is I suppose, just. Then I'd go through and see what and then I'd do a report to the Board [concerned] (if the other boards were formed), and I'd report to them on the [declared pest] weeds [in their district] and which ones were considered the most important weed, like skeleton weed, we'd get stuck into that. Occasionally I'd start off, as I say, use something easy like boxthorns and which was big and they could see the results very quickly with them, it gave a good aspect to the weed control: they could get somewhere and very quickly with it.

Things like silverleaf nightshade and some of these perennials, deep perennial rooted systems [rhizomes] or underground systems were very difficult to kill until the herbicide glyphosate and things came along. They were damn difficult [to destroy]. ... If you couldn't, and some of these went too deep to grub them out, the only thing you'd use [would be] arsenic or [soil sterilants], and naturally they poisoned the soil as well. The income of new herbicides and pesticides they were like the word 'done'. We've got to thank overseas [countries such as] America, Britain and Europe too (Germany did a lot of work too). It was a worldwide thing really ... When you talk about 2,4-D, Americans carried on with 2,4-D, whereas in Europe – in England, particularly – MCPA, which [was a] similar type of [hormone-like herbicide] worked similarly ... and went through and destroyed that way. They were growth regulators. I've mentioned this before, the growth regulators ... [Originally applied to stimulate better fruits and due to excess

use (overdose) with further research were found to be excellent herbicides but were] still used to set fruit [in the original formulation]. What else we got?

[11:00] What was level of concern or level of awareness about the use of the pesticides, herbicides?

There was some concern but not as bad as it is today, because people weren't aware of [the serious damage that these chemicals may have on desirable plants]. Even myself, when I first started I knew there was danger to be watched out for, but nowhere near as bad as it was. One of the demonstrators one day with 2,4-D, no, with ... (break in recording) [2,4,5-T]

If the name comes later, Ray, we'll put it on the transcript.

He said it was quite safe, no harm with it. At the demonstration this fellow mixed up the mix [2,4,5-T] at the strength [he] would use to spray blackberries or whatever and he downed it. Not long after [eventually he became critically ill] ... That fellow didn't last much longer after. [Later] we found out that this wasn't so safe as it was meant to be or said to be[, and other herbicides/pesticides weren't as safe as had been believed]. A very common ...

That's a bit of a worry.

2,4-D [DDT] is an insecticide – very commonly used [at that time]. Used it in Vietnam and so forth in bulk [to reduce the jungle cover], but they also used [DDT mixed with 2,4,5-T] – they warmed it. They knew what they were doing and they overheated it so they built up the poisons in it, [and released a most potent dioxin poison to both man and beast].

So that awareness about the toxic nature of some of the chemicals ...?

Yes, there were ... Some were new: ... and the other ones ... The other one we used, similar in those days, was strychnine for rabbits and other pests. There was potassium chlorate. That was a very common one, too. That was a dessicant, and very good too, as I found out, for making gunpowder. Very good – that and top-grade coal and a bit of sulphur. That's boyhood pranks! (laughs) We had that at home because Dad had them for doing government work and so forth. He had this stuff stored at home in 4-gallon drums. There were a number of poison things but gradually they got rid of them. Then we had ... we got these selective – so-called selective ... – ... they were selective to a limited extent: they took out broadleaf and left the grasses and vice versa. What we found there was the drift in the spraying, from the spray itself and the volatility of the chemical, that in the wind it went across the fences on to desirable plants such as somebody's crop of peas or lupins or something like that. Or canola: that was one with 2,4-D, they had to cut out their 2,4-D and MCPA because canola ... That's one of the specific plants, in other words the cabbage and mustard turnip family, they all belong there. All these problems came. We had to sort things out how to overcome them. We did a pretty good job, apart from the department's where they were working different research stations.

There was also private enterprise: they were pretty well on the ball too because there was big money in those days. We [farmers and others soon caught on and it spread like] a ball of fire spread, the people picked up [the methods] and in a few years they were getting control of weeds they never thought they'd ever get control of. Mind you, they were doing damage they never thought (laughs) they'd do too, to [pastures and other plants]. There was a conundrum: what do you do on a roadside with things like African daisy on it, or blackberries and [other invasive plants] like that, on the roadside only? Do you spray it and kill some of the native stuff, or leave it there and let it gradually get into the [adjoining lands] there? That was a decision we had to make quite often, I had to make, and I wasn't very happy with the greenies – having been a member of the Greens I (laughs) was able to talk to them fairly well!

[Following text supplied by Ray Alcock in 2007:

There were quite a number of toxic (common salt, copper sulphate, potassium chloride, potassium chlorate, petroleum products [e.g., kerosene and waste oil]) and highly toxic (strychnine for animal pests, and arsenic compounds for shrubs and trees) chemicals in common use prior to current-day herbicides and pesticides which, depending on the dosage, could destroy all vegetation by rendering the soil sterile. Most of these chemicals were soon replaced by more effective herbicides such as 2,4-D, 2,4,5-T MCPA and, later, amitrole atrazine glyphosate (RoundUp) plus quite a few others.

Some were selective to some extent, i.e. they would take out the broadleaf plants but leave the grasses while other herbicides would do the reverse. Due to the volatility of the chemical used, plus spray drift in the wind, it went through fences and sparse/light growth of timber, which resulted in settling on crops and pastures with, in some cases, most undesirable results. Plants belonging to the crucifer family, such as mustards, turnips, canola oilseed crops, especially the hormone-like herbicides e.g., MCPA (MCPB), 2,4-D, 2,4,5-T. With further research, new chemicals, more efficient application equipment, time of application and identifying the weed correctly ... A massive effort was made to improve weed control through further research and other trials by the Department of Agriculture, chemical companies and councils and weed officers. But we weren't alone as many other countries were doing the same and with rare exception readily published and shared their finding with others.

Do you spray and destroy some or all small and stunted native plants in addition to the weeds? Or leave the pest weeds allowing them to further spread through fences on to farms, reserves etc. The decision to spray the weeds often resulted in very unhappy conservationists (or 'greenies'). But as I was also a 'greenie' it enabled me to understand their aims and explain pest plant or noxious weed control in relation to native plant conservation.

Following my retirement in December 1981 I've been recognised and well rewarded for my contributions to conservation of our native species. Some of my senior officers appeared not to appreciate my work in that area nor accept the dire need for such conservation, or were perhaps reluctant to take on the extra work and responsibilities.]

You could talk their language.

I was a greenie and I still am a greenie myself – within reason. Some went overboard about it.

[17:15] How much of that decision making – about in this case roadside vegetation – was left to you, or the Pest Plant Commission, or the local office – working at the coalface with the council?

It would come first of all to the councils [or the local weeds boards]. He would come down and

I'd go and see what he had in mind, and some of them were very good, they had worked it out:

'Yes, I'd like to do this and do that'. There were forms to fill in [showing] what they were going to do and where it was, details and so forth and estimated cost, what [herbicides] you're

going to use, the mixtures[, timing] and so forth and the estimated cost and so forth, which had to go in to get their subsidy and things like that ... Then I'd have a look at it and if I wasn't happy we could discuss it, say 'I think you're overstretching yourself', or 'That mixture won't do the job you're expecting there', and all things like that, and making sure he did it at the right time: for Salvation Jane don't wait until it's flowering – you're too late, you've got to do it before it flowers ... With glyphosate it's a little bit different: you can spray a bit later. Soursob's a good example too: if you wait till it flowers, the bulbs are already formed and they pinch off and they won't [absorb] the herbicide. It's little things like that we had to do.

[18:45] Looking at your period there in the '70s and certainly into the '80s, were you working from the head office or going around and making visits to these offices?

Yes. I was working for head office. I'd go out to say fly over to Port Lincoln [in some urgent cases, but mostly I would drive a departmental vehicle which allowed a number of calls to be made on the journey] or sometimes I'd take a bus and do a trip up north, Lower North, Upper North, visit the councils there, and then go to Eyre Peninsula, have the board meetings there and see the officers and probably see some of the landholders and all that. I'd stay there say for the week or so and sort things out, and on the way back I'd call in somewhere else and see farmers if I could – depended what was on, because it was no good going to the council and next week you came out to attend their meetings unless you had some message to give them; but letters are good for that. I was kept busy. It wasn't unusual for me to ... say I'm going up north I'd go into Mallala and attend the [council or board] meeting there, then go on ... (laughs) [to another meeting later in the afternoon at Crystal Brook or Port Pirie then forge on to some other council for an evening meeting].

You'd go to the next council.

The next council up the road. Then say end up at Port Augusta or Port Pirie or something like that and have three in the day. Now, if there was something on next day [in Adelaide], although it was [late] ... By the time we'd finish the meeting about 10 or half past 10, had a coffee and probably a bit of Red Ned or something like that, just to finish the day off, it was 11, half past 11 and I'd shoot home again and be ready the next morning.

Come back to Adelaide?

Yes, come back to Adelaide, so I'd be around the place next morning if something was wrong.

So it's a mix between the longer, extended trip, where you might be out and see a couple of boards over a week or two, and these trips where you might do two or three boards in a day.

Yes. [These rushed trips occurred during planning the council weed programs and the peak of the treatment program.]

OK. How often were you going out, then? Between ...?

I would spend three weeks out of four out in the field. It was my job, liaison with the [departmental and local weeds] officers and the farmers and so forth through our department offices. Some [farmers initially] just wouldn't accept me, but the Weeds Officers, through them and the councils, I don't think I had any trouble with the councils at all, not one council. [Generally they were most co-operative.]

So it was more than liaison by letter, fax, phone call.

Yes. And examples.

[21:50] Were you the only person from the Commission doing that?

Yes, virtually. Only one officer employed. There were others [non-qualified field officers to assist in fieldwork]. There was a mention in there [booklet/newsletter]. There was from the ... where were they? Arthur Lewis, Les Hoff. Les Hoff was with Bushfires. Not too sure ... Robert, was he? No. There was about four officers came in. They were with Bushfires [Research], the department there that had experimental work for bushfire control and the diesel part of that, there was two of them from there, plus, three, there was another one, a senior officer which came in later on to the Department as one of the advisers. He was a qualified ... He was a very busy person. Just trying to think of his name – but not very effective, his mind wasn't on agriculture at all [i.e. lacked practical agriculture]. A good officer otherwise. He could sift through information and pick out the guts of it pretty well.

These people from the Bushfires group, they came in as a whole group?

In the group, yes, to help us with inspecting sheep and so on for burrs and things of that nature.

In the pastoral areas, outside the council areas, they helped us out there, yes. [The group was transferred to the Department of Agriculture.]

Were they with the CFS, or ...?

No, they were Department officers.

As in Agriculture Department?

Yes. What was I looking at that just now? He came from the river [Les Hoff].

These Bushfire people came in. You mentioned Les Hoff in particular, as one of the ...

Yes, Les was particularly good. The other one – the names of them ... About four altogether ...

They served their time. Jim Garrick was another one. Poor old Jim – he had a stroke. Jim's not the best now, he's a pretty sick boy. He got over that fairly well, but he left the Department and went into a delicatessen for himself and made quite a bit of money out of it, old Jim.

These people are the same as you, seconded from the Department to work for the Pest Plant Commission?

The only thing different, they weren't qualified. In other words, they weren't [university graduates or] diploma holders of Agriculture.

They were still seconded to ...?

They were seconded to Pest Plant Commission. Now, some of them – Les was one [plus Jim Garrick and Arthur Lewis] – most got their Weed Control Certificate: [the same as] the council weed officers had to have, which is the one you've got the copy of ... that was their qualification. Les was on the grasshoppers too. Les was selected to do the work and co-ordinate the work with the spraying of the grasshoppers and all the other [similar pests] ... Those sort of things when they came in, and he got a pat on the back for that: he did a damn good job.

[Following text supplied by Ray Alcock in 2007:

Both Arthur Lewis and Jim Garrick were delegated to look after stock movements, sales, mainly to search for pest plants carried by the animals. Garrick, due to his previous experience in plant identification, became my assistant in that work and was really missed following his later resignation.]

[26:40] We'll come to the certificate aspect in a moment. Just talking about individuals, what about at the Commission level? You were reporting to the Commission, to the Executive Officer, to the Chairman? How did that work?

I reported direct to the Commission.

Who was your boss?

Good point. (laughs) The chairman of the Commission. [I reported directly to the Commission's chairman through the secretary, Bob Christiansen.]

So whoever was the chairman was your boss?

Yes. That was right. Not forgetting, behind the scene is ... there was the [Pest] Plant Board and these others within the Department [agricultural advisers and other government departments]. You still had to, you couldn't ignore them altogether, get their co-operation. You worked in with them. You didn't always agree with them. I know the South East for a while I had a bit of trouble [initially], but finally [we] prevailed and the officer got shifted (one particular one got shifted) and it didn't take long for the others to come into line [with weed control plans].

You had Max O'Neil as Executive Officer and ...

Yes, Max ...

... Bob Christiansen was there for a while.

Bob came in as Secretary of the Commission before Max took ... Max came in with ... Max must have come in ... He's retired ... I see that he's Secretary ... somewhere on there, Secretary.

He would have been there before you?

Max was, yes.

How did you find working with Max?

It was all right until this Grant Baldwin came in. Because I [accepted the] Board instead of Max, he got upset about that and then my name was mud from then on. When Grant went and I

was to be nominated for the job, he was ... The job was liaison. No, I made right from the start I did not want to become a senior officer, quite deliberately didn't; I wanted to be out in the field and get the good results. That was quite a deliberate undertaking. The other reason I didn't take superannuation out with the Department for the same reason: what hold did they have on me to develop me and things like that? Knowing what the problem was, political problem was – I won't make it an issue how I knew, but I knew what the problem was behind the scenes. I did all right out of them because I had my own private superannuation which worked out better, because they didn't get me slugged 20% when I retired and it was mine. I learnt that early in the piece, that private insurance was a damn good way of looking after it.

[Following text supplied by Ray Alcock in 2007:

With the formation of the Pest Plant Commission Arthur Tideman was promoted to a senior rank and a member of the Pest Plants Board with Max O'Neil Acting O/C Weed Section and Executive Officer, Pest Plants Commission. Shortly after, Bob Christiansen transferred from the Lands Department to become secretary for the Commission. In the initial stages all appeared to settle in to place until Grant Baldwin was appointed over Max as the senior officer. I accepted the appointment but Max was most upset and developed a negative attitude. Because I willingly accepted work as directed under Grant, my old friend Max was most upset. I was asked to apply for the senior position following Grant's resignation. But from the start I made it quite clear I didn't want the job as I wished to continue my work in the field. Apart from the sound results being achieved, there were personal reasons. The decision was quite deliberate.]

[29:50] When you joined the Department did you have an expectation that it would be a short career, a long career?

I expected to go through with it, yes, right through, yes. I never had any sense of ... (laughs) I never had the old worry about wanting to get out. [When I joined the Department I expected to remain there until I retired.] In fact, I was damn sorry I had to retire at 65 because I was doing my hobby by then, wasn't I? (laughs) Yes. But others wanted to get rid of me, I know that. Dare I say, as I said before, it was as much my fault as theirs, I feel, because I didn't handle it properly. I learnt the lesson too late.

Were you a bit of a red-ragger?

Headstrong I suppose is the word. [Headstrong, determined not to be bullied out of telling the truth and distorting the true facts in my written report to the Commission.]

Stirring the pot?

No. Ignoring the directions to ... Like for the [golden] dodder. That was ... There was no *campestris*, no [*Cuscuta campestris*] bad dodder, it was native dodder up there, wasn't harmful at all. I took it and looked at it. It couldn't comply. [On examination of several specimens I couldn't agree.] By that time I had expertise on other plants [dodder species], learning very well on plant identification, and the only thing I found – because I had American literature [to refer to and without a doubt] it conformed with the *C. campestris*, which is the serious one, most dangerous one. What's more, [it is suggested that *C.*] *campestris* came from America via

the irrigation settlement out from Renmark. They brought with it Noogoora burr, also from the same place, which is one of its main hosts [for this dodder]. One of the things that saved me – that was in '81 – I went back to England, so I collected four or five specimens of this, not all *campestris*. There's about ... I'm not too sure how many, half-a-dozen or more different species of dodders, some are native and some are not. *Tasmanicus*. They were calling it *tasmanicus* because that was a native species. [I collected specimens] and sent them over to Kew in England, Kew Gardens, the headquarters of botany. When I went back in '81 I wrote over and told them I was coming. There were other plants as well I sent over, because I couldn't get any satisfaction in Australia here – and we did the deal at the ...

[33:05] End Side A, Tape 5
Tape 5, Side B

[0:05] [In giving my details to the receptionist at Kew Gardens Dr Verdcourt overheard my name; he was the top] specialist in Kew Gardens particularly on dodder family [*Cuscuta* species. He] said, 'Come in, Mr Alcock. I've been waiting to get in touch with you'. That was ... For just a little squirt like me, fancy getting this well-known fellow. When I get in there he said, 'Beautiful specimens. Well set up and well collected and detail was excellent. Yes, what you're saying, the ones you've numbered, you've got them correctly: there's four different species here'. I had them all determined properly. That was good enough to go. At the same time a [Dr R.W. Johnson] from Queensland had an article in his weed ... (break in recording) [about a *C. campestris* in Queensland infecting commercial crops of chrysanthemums].

[1:10] OK, Ray, we just paused there to look at some of the photographs of dodder that you took in 1983, 84 after field trips out to Berri and into Victoria and other places. One of the photographs you've got is Bob Christiansen and Sue Barker from the Commission with other interstate people. How many trips did you make with members of the Commission? Did they go out regularly with you? No, we were representatives. Not very often. We had a committee chasing up that water hyacinth in Gidgee in New South Wales, and the Premier at the time, Des Corcoran, offered \$200 000 to help them clean up there so we didn't get it into South Australia. I've just been thinking: was it water hyacinth? Out of it came that yes – Mr Bill Parsons was also the Victorian chief fellow – he said, 'No, hell, that won't go near it, anywhere near it'. They decided then to form a committee. Now, initially we may have had one of the Commission members on that committee, but then it was left to me and David Murray, he did a couple of stand-ins for me when I couldn't get away, and then about every month, I suppose we had meetings – it might be more, mightn't be that much, but fairly regular meetings – to discuss the problem, progress and so forth and work out a plan of action and so forth. That was about 1970 – no, it was not ... 19...

[Following text supplied by Ray Alcock in 2007:

The committee would represent New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Canberra (the last approved to share the costs of the project, but took little interest in the work plans.

In addition to their regular monthly meeting at the Department of Agriculture HQ in Grenfell St, Adelaide, the Commission or delegates would attend meetings at various DA regional centres such as Streaky Bay, Minnipa, Port Lincoln, Jamestown, Renmark, Naracoorte etc., particularly should there be matters of special interest to be introduced and discussed with the local Pest Plant Boards, including the local weeds officers, agricultural advisers and special guests.

Also there were State Border meetings to formulate treatments of declared weeds infesting border regions. More particular were the quarantine stations set up to check for contaminated stock, produce, farm machinery etc. before crossing over the State borders.

Then at stock sales throughout South Australia the Department's Stock Inspector and local Pest Plant officers were directed to examine and withdraw any animals from sale found contaminated with proclaimed weeds.

A most interesting control program concerned a large outbreak of water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) over the flood plains of the Gwydir west of Moree in New South Wales. South Australia's premier (sic; Minister of Lands?), Des Corcoran, offered \$200 000 to help destroy it to prevent its spread to south Australia. Bill Parsons, a senior officer with the Victorian Vermin and Noxious Weeds Destruction Board exclaimed, 'No way! That sum is far short of the full cost of eradicating the weed'. It was then decided to form a committee representing three States, viz., New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. A meeting was arranged and held on 25 November 1969 at Mildura. The delegates were:

G.W. Douglas, R.T. Borbidge, W.T. Parsons and F. Etheridge (Noxious Weeds Destruction Board, Victoria);

J. Strang, H.R. Carter (councillor), F.R. Clyde and L.N. Fletcher (Noxious Weeds Advisory Committee, New South Wales);

A.F. Tideman, M. O'Neil, C. Oliver, R. Humphrey and W.S. Reid (Weeds Advisory Committee, South Australia); and

W.T. (sic) Parsons, secretary.

All present were enthusiastic, made their points and joined in the debates or discussions. Issues covered were: border problems and specific pest weeds along the borders between States. Agreed that new records of potentially dangerous weeds should be made known to the committee and other authorities; criteria for declaration of noxious plants; training of weeds officers; interchange of research and control programs; noxious plant legislation in the various States, especially of committee members.

A most positive and rewarding meeting, which was to become an annual event.]

If Des Corcoran was the premier it was the end of '79.

When?

This is in 1979.

Yes. [No.] ... By [mid 1971] I was certainly in Adelaide, and that was the job. It's a wonder I haven't put that down somewhere. It must be somewhere.

Was this an interstate committee?

Yes, interstate. There was one, as I say, from Victoria, one from New South Wales and one from the Capital Territory. There were four on that committee. Yes, I'm trying to think who our rep. was. He didn't always come, but we had one. We met over on the site out of Gidgee, out there, and we'd go in and spend the day there and look at the problem, going over it. They had a special [problem] – imagine, this was flood country and there's water everywhere and fallen logs and bushes and everything like that there. It was difficult to [traverse]. They had this

machine built, 'the Tortoise', they called it: it was a platform with a fan-driven gear system; small, about 6-horsepower, engine on it, little BSA; but it had these four big wheels, they were about 4 ft diameter and about 6 ft long, like cylinders, and these gave a flotation and allowed us to get over on dry land as well as wet land and mud and so forth and get along it. The biggest snags were the spikes where the fire – they burn at times, it's nice and spiky – they go through the tyres, and when we first started we didn't have any repairs. At \$800 apiece, they were a bit expensive. Then in the end cold vulcanising came in and they repaired them for us, so it cut out a lot of the cost. By '79 – yes, 10 years. I came into town in '71, yes, that started there about '72, pretty soon after I came to town. It was '79. By '79 we reckoned it would take between 10 to 15 years to clear it, 15 to 20 years. [By] '79 we're hunting for the stuff. There were still banks of seed, which we had to go down and treat those beds. The cotton industry, we'd cleaned up a lot of the logs – they'd been burnt out, dragged out and so forth – cleaned up the rubbish, and next thing we know ... and the laser came in for levelling the ground, and the cotton growers had increased 10 or 20-fold and they'd level the ground. They were irrigating this cotton and it was a bit of an eye-opener to see that until we suddenly realised what was happening: they were dragging more water out of there and they were spraying 28 times a year, so you can imagine what it did to native trees and things like that and the insects – not just the vermin, but the insects and [natural species]. We weren't very happy about it at all. They did serve the purpose, it got rid of water hyacinth.

What could you do about it if you weren't happy?

It was just one of the negatives of treatment. You had that ... You had had to watch the negatives. Now, as I mentioned before spraying sides of the roads: you get rid of the weed and stop it spreading into the [adjoining land], or you kill the natives, some of the natives, on the side of the road. It's a decision you had to make and against your better judgment it's a decision you had to make, knowing it was a good judgment to do it. In all things like that you've got to sit down and weigh up the pros and cons, and that was one of the jobs I had. I didn't have to make it all myself; I had help with that, with the committee. I found them very co-operative.

[9:40] I asked you before, Ray, we got sidetracked on to the Victorian–New South Wales interstate committee, but the actual Pest Plant Commission, how often were members of the Commission itself, the controlling committee, how often were they coming out in the field? Did they make field trips as a group, or as individuals with you?

No. They'd go on special [field days etc.] in their districts ... Remember everyone was from different districts. In their own district, yes. He was out that day with us going over the river there [inspecting problem areas] down there. [Commissioners, usually] two came with me when we were going over on the Eyre Peninsula [or other districts], but yes, they'd rather [not] as a group go over. They would go to the Weeds Officers' Conference. They all had – I made sure, because I used to run the conferences – I made sure that they all had something to say there so

the officers knew their Board members or Commission members and could relate to them and speak to them, and gave the Board members or the Commission members a chance to meet these officers and see who they were and so forth. It was a very worthwhile thing. We'd do that once a year. Then we'd have one in every district, we'd have a conference, annual ones: we'd have one on Eyre Peninsula, sometimes it was at Minnipa – that was the handiest place, that was about central – but we had them at Streaky Bay, Ceduna, Port Lincoln, Tumby Bay and those other places (laughs) Cleve and ... Any rate, that's what we used to do and get them to know the officers ... While they're there, any particular weed of importance that's come up or they hadn't seen before, make sure they'd see what it was and what the problem was. That was another thing with the Board, too. They had first-hand knowledge, yes, made sure they got first-hand knowledge of [declared weeds].

[12:20] Were there any occasions where you had to, say, call in the chairman of the Commission to, say, intervene in your dealings with officers or farmers?

No. I think I told you we didn't call them in ... The only time I served notices myself – I was the one that served them through the Board – were to the odd chairman of the Board or the committee, [should] the councils themselves [not be] doing it. That was the same principle I adopted, and most of the fellows, as soon as I did, that they hopped in and did the job, and plus their neighbours doing the job shamed them into it, too – or threatened them into it. Yes, a lot of co-operation went on. Those who were dead against it, yes, there were a few notices but very few notices served on those, there were so few. Some of the councils served the notices themselves, but they were more or less for minor jobs and so forth, which we let them do because it gives them an interest too and taught them how to handle the Act and so forth and go about it.

Did you find that the Commission itself would back you up and support you in your decisions, or ...?

Yes, in the most cases. There was one or two. That dodder was one. That was not so much the Commission, it was the Commission's influence. No, I didn't have trouble with the Commission so much; it was the senior officers in the Department, I've got to state that. They'll say that I was the biggest so-and-so under the sun, probably. I don't know. That's for them to say. I don't blame them because I handled it wrongly myself: knowing what I know now I would have been a different fellow. But I mightn't have got the results either. I'm certain that these Agricultural Bureaus and that knew that I was having trouble with the Department, the senior officers. Yes, that's probably why I got a lot of co-operation. You don't know, do you, what's happening behind with certainty. I don't hold any grudge now, although I haven't forgotten. As I say, at least 50% of the trouble was my fault as well as theirs, so let bygones be bygones. We did achieve something in there.

[15:30] My biggest disappointment now is that it's getting out of hand again. They got back under the Department again, virtually is what it is. They're not doing the work. They're frightened of being demoted, I'm certain. I might be wrong and that's a pretty rough statement to make, but I feel that's the point, that's the impression I got.

We'll have to wait and see on that one. There's a new authority yet again coming in. You finished up in 198...?

Six.

Six. You've obviously kept some involvement because of your hobby interest ...

In the last two years I suppose it was ... Not Ian Phillips. I was working three days a week and the fellow who wrote with Black ...

Ian Black?

No. Cooke, David Cooke, Dr David Cooke – he took my place two days a week and wooed him onto the pest plant side of it. I did most of my work, apart from advising and discussing problems with him, to get him on the track, was I did the plant identification of the Department for a couple of years.

That was for the Department?

For the Department, yes.

That was after you'd retired?

No. The last three years before I retired.

OK, just to clarify that.

Yes. That is about the end of Pest Plant Commission, because ... There was one fellow, you've got Dick, Richard Downward – now, who was his boss?

I know he was working for the Pest Plant Commission there for a while.

No, he was working for the Pest Animals – the Animal Pests.

Vertebrate Pests?

Yes, Vertebrate Pests, yes. He was in charge of that. I knew him fairly well because when I was over in Lincoln that was part of my duties, supposed to be looking after vermin as well, so he'd come and see me and we'd talk. John Bromell. John was a very bright fellow in lots of ways [(well qualified, university degree)], but he wasn't a regulatory officer. He was not a knowledge person[: he lacked regulatory experience in the field]. You've got to have a special outlook on life to be regulator and handle it, and he just couldn't see what we were doing and opposed a lot of what we were doing and killed it off. Thank God some of his officers underneath him were better. Dick Downward wasn't. He was a nice chap and he knew his vermin fairly well, but as far as weeds go – he was already a Weeds Officer down the South

East somewhere when I first met him, but the number of times he went out with me when we were joined, amalgamated, the two working together, he'd come out with me ... I remember at Crystal Brook one time – that was another council meeting, we stopped at the meeting – but Crystal Brook, he made a blue there and I had to – normally you might make a slip of the tongue or something at a meeting you don't howl a fellow down and knock him down in front of the mob, but this time I had to say, 'In my opinion ...', and the only way I could think to do it was say, 'No, I've got a bit different opinion there. As a Weeds Officer I've got a different opinion. This is how we should handle it, this way', and get him out of it. It was pretty thin. (laughs) Most of the fellows could see what it was ... I can't say he ever went against me, he was that far as it goes. There were others. There's ... he became a doctor. Cooper was another good one, Don Cooper. Not Don Cooper, Dr Cooper. He was a vermin [officer] ... Started off with vermin ...

We'll get it later.

He was an Air Force man. Poor old ... got killed, yes, something like that. No he didn't, he was a prisoner-of-war. Now, let's get back onto this.

[21:10] Talking there about the vermin side of things and your last couple of years: how did you feel about this amalgamation, merger, taking place between the Vertebrate Pests and the Pest Plant people?

I wasn't very happy about it because here they were, at that stage about the only animals they were worried about were rabbits. Here we had – what did we say, 80 or something? – 50-odd weeds ... no, [upwards of] 100 [declared] weeds. A large number of weeds in different categories which we had to handle, and here they come and they dominated our section.

Was it a merger?

The reason was because John, he was a doctor – John Bromell was a Doctor or a Bachelor and I was only a diploma. You know how it works in departments.

Yes.

Yes.

It's something that's being imposed at a government level, it wasn't as if the two Commissions had agreed that they must do it. The government's got to pass legislation and so on.

Yes. But then the animal fellows seemed to dominate the Commission, the Plant and Animal ...

They carved off – what was the first one? Animal and Plants, wasn't it? I was out of it by then, it's very soon after I retired and it was on the board, obviously on the cards when I left because they were working there together and they had to be amalgamated. That's the only thing I felt about it, it was a pity. Same as when I walked in the other day down there to that meeting. They were all animal advisers on all the committees. Not one weed officer there, weed man. What happens under those conditions? That's when I made the statement that 'No, you're not quite

right there. I might prove you wrong there. But this is what it's etc.'. See, this is I'm too blunt or too 'Pardon me. Excuse me. But ...'. Something like that. It took me a long time to learn that.

[Following text supplied by Ray Alcock in 2007:

Note: It was a time of takeover by university graduates.]

Maybe by the time you joined the Public Service you're at an older age and harder to train up, so to speak.

Yes. it was ... I could see what ... Because having had the family background, brought up under the Department, virtually, and what their work was doing and how they were doing it, and when I got into it and saw what they were doing, they were told what to report from the Minister; whereas the other way they reported to their senior and their senior took it to Parliament – the Ministers, I mean – and they decide what to do with it. If they accepted or rejected it that was up to them, but you didn't alter your report to suit the political whims of the politicians. That's what they do today, I'm certain of it. Listen to what they know about it.

[24:35] One of the things you mentioned a moment ago, Ray, is the fact that it's very much a male exercise. You said, 'The men of the Pest Plant Commission', it's 'the men of the Vertebrate Pest Control'.

Sue Barker was an exception. Marie was probably a good one – she was a secretary, I know, but she was a linchpin, she was a ... If you can get it out of her she'll have a lot to tell you.

That's Marie Caskey.

Yes.

She's on the administrative side ...

Yes. We had a few ... I can't remember the names, we had two or three up on the river, had women weed officers.

At the Council level or ...?

Council level. Later on there was – what was her name? – she came over and she was heavily pregnant when she came there, and I had to cart her around and she couldn't do the inspections herself. (laughs) I said I was a married man; I knew what the problem was. She turned out a good officer – she stayed in later on. There were several women did come in later, but sure it was male dominated, no doubt about that. Still is. So's everything, what isn't? Women are getting there, but ... I don't know: I've a little bit mixed feelings. We are the dominant one. This is the point: we've got to hunt and find the girls that suit us, and basically we've evolved and it was us to put the hard word on the girl and it was her to reject us, wasn't it – accept or reject us. Those things have changed now, not so for the worse: a lot of good's come out of it. But it's a lot harder for we fellows to accept it as we were brought up the other way. It's like us, we were brought up with the empire, mighty empire. We fought for the Empire – not [just] for

Australia. We fought for the Empire, remember that. That's what the people don't realise, that that was our home country and our Queen, and England was home.

There were other aspects, going through university, going through Roseworthy, very few women if any would be doing Ag. Science or the Diploma ...

Yes.

... at the time you were there; now it's more accepted.

We had two girls at Mt Gambier High. Remember that was – I mentioned his name before ...

We had two girls doing Ag. Science when we were there [plus Max McKay and Bob Bickford].

Would they [the girls] have gone on to university?

They did, yes.

They are the exceptions rather than the rule.

Very few, but they weren't the first graduates in Agricultural Science. Not many of them. I can't remember at all now. Mind you, come 10 years ago ... (laughs)

[28:35] A couple of quick questions to finish with for today, Ray. We said we were going to come back to the certificates and it ties in with the diploma, degree references there: you were involved in a small way, I believe, in the weed control courses and so on that were put out in the '70s.

Yes. After I came to town and so forth I helped out with some of the lecturing and plant identification, particularly; usually, quite often helping Peter Kloot because we got pretty close friends with Peter, he was the Research Officer. I had to depend on him so much and he had to depend on me so much. Yes, I'd go along there and I'd probably demonstrate while he was talking about it, show the pictures and point out the parts of the plant and so forth – the pistils and the anthers and so forth – and explain the difference between petals and the calyces and things of this nature.

You were there more like an assistant rather than the lecturer, perhaps?

Yes. I suppose I was more of an assistant, that would be more like it. Although ...

You took some lectures yourself?

Yes. I did some lectures. I'm just trying ... Some of them were the practical ways of dealing with the Act itself, introducing the Act and so forth. I was onto that, yes, helped with that.

Who organised these courses? Where did that initiative come from? Was it through the Department, through the councils?

Outside. They were organised by the Department, but Adult Education, wasn't it?

Or Further Education or something?

Further Education.

Is it something that the Agriculture Department or the Pest Plant Commission are insisting on?

Department of Further Education. Yes, that's who they were.

They were the people putting on the course, but who's saying 'We need to have it' in the first place? Pest Plant people or Ag. people?

I would say qualified officers ... It was started before the Pest Plant Commission. Under the Noxious Weed Committee or Noxious Weed Board: is it Board or Commission? I don't know. Whatever that ... before the Commission, though.

So there was a perceived need to train people, be they farmers or local government people, about weed identification, weed control practices and so on?

Yes. They did have a few weed officers before that and it gradually built up. As I told you myself, I took over in '70 or something and within 2 or 3 years I had five officers under me. (laughs) That was a bit unusual, though.

[32:20] The other quick question I wanted to ask you, Ray, relates to that education aspect. It's the little publication that you've been waving around today – and other times – *The Weed Scene*. How did that come about? You're there as the editor.

I'm not sure on that.

What's the background on that one?

I don't know where it started.

Was it something you were involved with from the start?

Probably somebody like ... Probably set out. I've got an idea the ones in red were Frank Chapman, before I came there ... [and Peter Kloot's were in green. I took over *The Weed Scene* when I was transferred to Adelaide].

**[33:05] End of Side B, Tape 5
Tape 6, Side A**

[0:10] Ray, one organisation in particular where I thought you might have strong links was the Pastoral Board. How much dealing did you have with the pastoral people? They were Department of Lands ...

Jeff Rowe was one[; based in the old Lands Department building opposite the GPO in Adelaide]. I'm trying to think. Yes, I did have with them ... up in the ... south of Quorn and things like that. There was a research station up there, and I used to spend a fair bit of time with them up there and help, and they had schools for the farmers – the pastoralists – up there, overnight, sort of thing. They weren't as formal as what the official education [was], but it was the problems they had and big problems a lot of them had, we couldn't treat them in the same way as we did down [south]. We had to try and look at what effect it was having first of all on what they were producing, on the contamination. And the other thing, what it was doing to the land itself and what could they do with putting in more watering points and things like that to stop the stirring up of the soil around the watering points where the stock come in for miles around. With shorter running they didn't do so much damage. Also, it didn't tend to get these areas that allowed the weeds to get in, whereas where there's more watering points spread

systematically over the place they could graze more evenly over what was there. All those sorts of things came in. Yes, I did ... Smythes is one lot. I can't remember all the people now.

Do you recall making field trips with pastoral people, with the Pastoral Board people?

Yes. Going out all the time ... and talking about it with ... mainly at meetings, somewhere like that, where they'd get a few together and we'd have a bit of a talk about it. It may be probably at a saleyard that night or late in the afternoon, with those who were interested, we'd get together and we'd have a bit of a talk about what their problems were. Yes. Now, with the SA Survey, I've just been talking Out of Hundreds, pastoral, mining companies and so forth, those sort of people: [I] had to go and see them and let them know what was going on, particularly out from Whyalla and all those mines up there – I can't remember.

The Middleback Ranges, the iron ore.

Yes, those, yes. They weren't very conscious of weed problems and things like mesquite and things like that. They were planting it quite deliberately at times. The Flying Doctor spread that. Did you know that? Have you heard that before?

You might like to elaborate.

Flynn was the first one. Flynn, the aerial flyer thought ... Are you right? Flynn was flying and he wanted to introduce something that would help with the pasture, a leguminous plant. I'm not too sure where it came from now, but he got this mesquite – from America, America: that's why they wear the chaps and so forth, because of mesquite. He imported this, what he thought was the thornless one, these trees with no thorns, these trees he got the seeds off. What he didn't know was that when they're seedling stage, when there was a height, when they were grazing height, they had these [spines] anything up to 4" [10 cm] long thorns on them, double thorns sticking out on them. As they got mature, out of reach of the grazing animals, they had less spines on them; it was, at the most, little spines [and none on the tall mature trees, out of reach]. That was another very interesting thing.

I haven't mentioned, or I may have mentioned before, David Symon, now Dr Symon. He was the botanist at the Waite Research and very helpful to me with a lot of these identi[fications]. Early days he taught me the basic and the real fundamental business of plant identification or determination. I'm very thankful to David Symon for he helped me in that line.

[6:20] You don't stop learning!

No. I see he's still in there. He's after something in ... Where did we get to? Council Weeds Boards, specialised meetings to discuss weed problems, control methods, herbicides and equipment, those sorts of things. Also one of the things I was careful about was to watch the finance of the people, how well off they were. It was no good asking them to go out and buy a great big, heavy boom. They were big booms, not the size [of] today but even say the 14, 10,

15 foot, 14, those sort of booms, plus the engine to go on it and the trailer and what have you: a lot of those fellows couldn't have afforded that. What can you do? You'd go down, have a look at what's there. If the pastoralist [jetted his] sheep or [had similar gear], they'd use that engine there and got them to make up their own booms and things like that [hand sprayers and fire control knapsacks], so they could get out and do some work. Once you do though, because you get the confidence of the people and you go out in their workshop and you can help them do it and do it for them, you show them how to tap – some of them didn't know how to tap a thread. I don't know how good you are at tapping threads, are you?

Practical demonstrations like that, as you say, you get the confidence of the people and you get your points across more easily then.

Yes. I was very good at welding, by the way. (laughs) At times I had to ... I learnt that using rusty fencing wire. I couldn't use the galvanised wire. Used rusty fencing wire to weld [broken] mower blades to get [back to the job], nothing, the spare drill broken – this was in the stony country – and I learnt how to handle it then but that's another story. That's how we got to

[8:25] The other big thing of mine was the annual Weed Officers' Conference in Adelaide every year. It was for five days with inputs from the Department of Agriculture and Commission members, mainly as chairpersons of each session and we'd have often, say, Tideman he might be the chairman to open it and so forth like that, and then one of the Board members would do another session, another Board member do another session, and tried to ... If the fellow was interested in particular or had a special problem they were talking about, I'd try and get them on it. Sometimes their own officers, Department officers, would be there because they had the special message to get over say the Animal Health people and things like that. The input was from the district weed officers, the council weed officers: on special subjects they'd have the opportunity to talk about any survey or any findings or any special treatments, they had these particular sessions.

This was another side of the weed control was when you went into a district and for some reason this farmer was a bit more astute than the others – they worked out a method or how much herbicide, what herbicide to use under what conditions, under these circumstances – he's got this information and that you passed on to those who were having trouble getting success. This was the sort of thing you could do, really. There was no copyrights in those days for these sorts of things. It's going that way now, madness today.

Very keen to share information and help each other out.

Yes. They'd received a bit of information that [was proven to be effective]. Then the photographs. You saw those in the [agriculture journals, weed control book and papers] and things like that. We had those enlarged and had those around the place for their purpose for

those who didn't see them. There'd be charts and there'd be handouts to give them on some special program where we were chasing up, say we were going to chase Noogoora burr: now, those officers in the marginal areas where Noogoora burr [was known to] exist, which is mainly on the river but it went over into the lakes and over the other side in the north and so forth, so we'd hand those out specially. Things like that. Native boxthorn, although there's still a lot of those Councils wouldn't tackle it until they heard from the others 'How do we go about it?', so we sent out newssheets on them and, as you saw, the various ones on those. They weren't always mine. Some of the other officers brought them up. Kloot was our research officer for the Department: we made full use of him. Peter, he was a very good officer but not a good botanist.

Each to his own.

I was a particularly good botanist, so they were always sent to me to have a look over and if I wasn't happy I gave it to David Symon to check it over. Well I had to. What they did in the Department it overlooked the fact that it was regulatory; and you ask a fellow and demanded and fined him because I'd given this particular weed a name, say Noogoora burr, and it wasn't, it was some other weed altogether – and it would happen, don't worry, it would happen (today they wouldn't get away with it). I realised early that I had to make sure that weeds we were talking about were correct ones. Something like Salvation Jane, there's a fair number in that family. There's one down the South East which is very similar, so we had them both declared so there was no argument! (laughs) Those sort of things.

[13:15] Things like the *Weed Scene* publication and the information brochures, pamphlets: they were things being organised by the Department for the Commission? How did ...?

No, no. That's hard to ... No, most of them, we did most of our own but there was some input from the Department, yes. It's like it was ... I don't remember now. Mainly we did our own, mainly because the others ...

I was just wondering if you tapped into the resources of the Department to put these things together, the editor or the publications people or ...?

No, we set all the publications. At that time, in those early days a lot of those agricultural guys in the field weren't particularly conversant with the Act itself. They were more concerned with general agricultural problems and that sort of thing, particularly with so much settlement going on in those days. We were left alone, but not entirely, we'd need a lot of help, particularly fellows like Peter Kloot and that. Interstate: don't forget we got information interstate, we swapped it both ways. They were for the Commission mainly, Chairman of the ...

Would you have an idea, Ray, of the number of publications you would have worked on, from pamphlets through to journal articles? Did you ever keep a list of them?

There were a couple of photographs – number 78, 78 of those – there were two to each journal.

Some of those didn't always go into the journal. They were especially done for, say, Out of a

Hundred, for things out in the desert country. They were in ... Not desert country; just low rainfall. A lot of that country isn't desert, only where man made it or the Aborigines made it, where they bared the sandy places. The Sahara's man-made: a lot of people don't realise that. It was the granary of the ... When the Romans were there it was the granary. They kept ahead of it. The Arabs and that overdid it and ... Every 7 years: 7 years good years, 7 years drought. What happened? They'd outstripped all the fertility left in the soil working for 7 years without adding anything to it, so they'd move on to another area and then come back 7 years later that sort of thing, that was their idea. It was on the Tigris, the Euphrates, those places there, that's what it refers to. That was proved later on: you see these heaps of mud and they were the old houses, huts of these people, they'd just broken down and leave little hills. You've got me on the wrong track again.

Just testing your knowledge!

It mightn't be true, too. I might tell you fibs.

[17:15] Royal Show: we worked with the Department here, we did work in. We had a little section with them but it was under their Show place, they had a special display area, and we co-ordinated with them. The country shows likewise, with the local officer if he was available or willing, we'd display and attend and talk [about] special weeds and identification. They'd bring them in, a lot of them bring them in.

Was there anyone from the Commission organising these displays, this material?

Yes. The district officers which were really Department officers, they'd help too and we'd liaise and help me with specific things and what I was going to do. I'd send them a note of what we wanted to do and they'd go down and get the permission of the show committee and things were all organised. It was again a combined effort, the agronomy officers in the Department and agronomy officers under the Pest Plant Commission.

A lot of those people weren't too sure about interpretation of the Act and the officers themselves, they just didn't know the limits or the extent and so forth. You had to sometimes say, 'Yes, you get around the problem this way'. It's like all law: if you can't get it that way, quite often you can go back another way, from another direction. That's with the Act too. You could do things like that. Or go into another Act altogether. Fire control, you see: 'It'll have to go. There's going to be a fire hazard so get rid of that'. Things like that you can work in with, and we did work in with fire control officers.

Field days arranged in conjunction with the weed officers and the Department.

Field days have got a bit of a reputation, big get-togethers and so on. It's important to have a presence there.

Yes. Usually particular things, special weeds, say skeleton weed and mesquite, 'What do I have here?'. They'd run the field days, have handouts and speakers there, not just my one, just on my own. My main job was to arrange it all. I usually had a bit of something to say, but they didn't want too much of one fellow, they wanted a variety, to hear from other people. It also introduces the other people to them, new officers particularly, they'd have to get up. It was only say five minutes, at least they stood up and they could see who he was. Those sort of things. There was skeleton weed and there was silverleaf nightshade was another one, mesquite and prickly pears, and so the whole host of them you'd do in the different districts You'd not only got the people, but you'd also use the local papers and radio stations if they were handy. They all helped us out. ... show you something if you were talking about silverleaf nightshade, and publicise in local papers and so forth, and the radio stations would help us with the field days, even the ABC itself and the local stations in the rural sections of it, they'd be part of it. Our team, it wasn't all mine, there was a team there to work and they worked well. The team we'll talk about later. Interstate.

How big a team would it have been? Just a couple ...?

There was always a senior officer, because Max was there one time. Before him was Grant Baldwin, then Peter Barrow and then Arthur Tideman. No, Arthur Tideman was before Peter Barrow.

Just the three of you or four of you?

No, there's more than that. There was ... We talked about ... Jim Garrick and the other fellow you've got there, these assistants, and there were about three or four assistants: one was with the research officer and there was ... In the early days the Seeds Officer did the botany identification work, but he wasn't particularly good and I eventually convinced him that ... He said he was bloody pleased to get rid of it, so I took it over then set up our own herbarium, got that all set up nicely, so we had the specimens there to look at and show to people. (break in recording) What else was it on that?

[24:00] We used everything we could, within reason. I had a pretty fair sense of when fellows weren't happy or didn't really want to talk to you or something. I'd back off and say, 'We'll see you later', and I'd leave them. Then what happened? Then he'd ring up some of his best mates who were mainly Next thing I got a call or a letter from them saying, 'Will you call the next time you're up this way. We'll discuss the problems I've got here'. That was so often it came back to me, because I picked the ones that were pro-weed control for a start. Like everything: to become a Member of Parliament and to get nominated you've got to pick the fellows for you, don't you, the ones who are going with the things you want to get done? That's

how you get there: you don't go to the opposition! (laughs) Yes. Mind you, I had a good father to help me with these things: I learnt at an early age about those sort of things.

[25:35] These things like the Royal Show, the rural show, the field days that you were describing, did you participate in these all the way through while you were with the Department?

I wouldn't say I attended them all, but I tried to do them as regularly as I could.

Was it something you maintained all the way through to your retirement pretty well?

Yes, we always had somebody there at these shows. Andy Michelmore was another good fellow in the field. Poor Andy's dead now. He was another third year. He was at Streaky Bay when I came in. He was an Army man. He also was working at the Herbarium after he retired, together with his wife [Elizabeth]. She still comes down there. Andy, I think I mentioned him before. What I liked about Andy when I got to Roseworthy, as the first year we worked with the third years. Andy was a fellow that ... A lot of third years made rubbish of us: 'You're only first years. You're only scum'. Andy came to us and he was the first one to show me the difference in some of the different soursobs. I've never forgotten Andy. He always had something to [show or demonstrate] when we went out there or something: 'I don't think you've seen this' or 'Have a look at this. Now, what we did here ...' and so forth like that. He really was good at instructing us, as they were expected to do. Most of them were pretty good too. There was that sort of deal. Later on I was able to help Andy with his identification. (laughs)

Field days: I answered earlier. Do we want any more on that?

You've given us a few insights there, so we can [move on].

Interstate.

[27:30] Yes. Liaison with interstate people and linking up there.

We had South Australian delegates with those from Victoria, New South Wales and the federal, Canberra, reps to assess plans, costs, assess the problems, plan treatment and costs for joint control of water hyacinth [over the Gwydir River] wetlands, which led to the Darling River [west of Moree] in New South Wales, and that was a big project and we've touched on this before: a politician at the time offered \$200 000 to help them clean up and that was a bit of an insult but it got the thing moving. We went up about two times a year, some of the time, I didn't attend all those meetings – David Murray took my place for one or two of them, might be more. In about 9 years we had cleaned up the problem very well and that deserves a fair bit of time to talk about it because it was interesting to see what happened there. When we went there it was just this wetland area with mixed trees in it and dead fallen trunks and snags and water weeds and you name it. We had to get rid of [most of the rubbish] and burn out and drag out these logs. Then we had to get over the country and then we had this, I mentioned, 'The Tortoise'. We got that all done within ... [2 years], we estimated it was about \$1 000 000 a year

it would cost us to do it. The first couple of years it did cost us \$1 000 000 with all the extra equipment and stuff we had to get to clean it up, but once we got that done it was a lot easier, [we] could get in and do the spraying and the surveying work much easier. It was instead of being about 10 years of about \$10 000 000 [cost], it ended up about 2 or \$3 000 000 to clean it up, which pointed to the fact that if you're given the right plans and enough money and the right treatment you [are more likely to succeed in getting] rid of these things. If you skimp on the money you're just throwing good money after bad. That was the attitude I had towards weed control or any other [problem]: if you only half do it you're making work for yourself because it becomes more difficult probably next time.

There again, we raised it in an earlier chat, you're talking there about control because eradication might be the intention but it's unattainable in many respects.

In this case that was difficult. We got rid of the [weed] that was floating about, on the mud, got rid of that but there were [buried] seed banks that we had to [treat] ... and they were marked, all determined [and mapped] and that was what they had to go back [to each year]. It was from the new town up there. The Council were responsible. Mind you, the Council's very responsible here. Moree councillors were very good; the weed officer there, their weed officer's a fantastic fellow. Everybody in that council was good. It was the overriding authority – I'm not too sure of the word now: as soon as the Commission walked out they more or less stopped work on it and I understand it's nearly as bad as it was. What did help in a way was that what happened then, the cotton growers came in and what with laser levelling and then new access to this land, they just went woof! Just exploded. They went into land that should never have [been permitted to]; now they're in strife, there's not enough water and there's the salt problem creeping in. The two things that Australia shouldn't be growing is rice and – what's the other one up in the Riverland? ... [Cotton in Murray River areas.]

[33:10] **End Side A, Tape 6**

Tape 6, Side B – 9 December 2004

[0:30] Ray, it's an interesting time to be interviewing you, it's almost 18 years to the day since you left the Department of Agriculture, 1986 you tell me, so I thought we'd pick up on that story of your time in the Agriculture Department, some of those aspects. We can't cover everything, but to get some impressions of working in the bureaucracy, working in the Department. You joined in ...

Yes, OK.

You joined in October 1970?

Ninth of October 1970, yes. I was at Port Lincoln at the time. I went over to Adelaide to get an introduction into the Department, workings and so forth of their offices. I came back again on the 26th of October and returned to Port Lincoln. In '71, 9th of August, I was transferred again. 9th of August in '71 I was transferred to headquarters as Agronomist Weed Control/Local Government Liaison [Officer]. Then immediately I went up to Spalding, the town of Spalding,

with Stephen Hogg to advise the E&WS on the E&WS reserve in [that district]. These are the sort of things we were doing then. A few days later we set out to record the African daisy in Adelaide Hills with the East Torrens Council, with a field officer S.G. [Jim] Garrick of DA and Weed Officer [John Stafford], East Torrens [Council]. This was the peak of the African daisy problem. That night I attended a Noxious Weeds Committee in the Adelaide Hills with Max O'Neil. Now I'm just giving you an idea. This is the first few weeks. 'Central Adelaide Hills, survey African daisy with Baldwin [Grant Baldwin – S.G. Baldwin: it's Grant, S.G.], Max O'Neil and Stephen Hogg and Jim Garrick'. It's amazing, all those fellows, like me, are known by their second name, not their first name! (laughs) The 'Meningie Council with Wally Saltmarsh, the local weed officer'.

Then we went to Roseworthy on the same day – that week – went to Roseworthy College, inspect soursob trials accompanying the Israeli delegates and to go and point out to them our problems with the soursob (*Oxalis pes-caprae*), which they have problems with but they were different. [Their soursob varied from ours slightly.] They had ... already changed a bit over there, but it was interesting to discuss that with them and see them. Then the next thing I sat down to prepare and finalise Penong weed inspection spray work, and that's Out of Hundreds.

[5:00] Then we came back to the next week, the 3rd of September, Morphettville, horse inspections, that's on behalf of the Quarantine: that was one of our jobs to do, horse and sheep and cattle for weeds adhering to their hair and so forth.

When you say 'quarantine', you actually quarantined the animals?

Yes. If they had to clean up, yes. That was the whole idea. We weren't health-wise, that was another job of the Health ... The stock inspectors did that. A lot of the stock had been through Health, they knew their weeds well. It was, again, a combined effort and not just always on your own. [Contaminated stock and produce was withdrawn from sale to allow it to be decontaminated or otherwise not permitted for sale.]

Had you done any work with livestock before from this weeds aspect?

Yes, in Port Lincoln and places like that. Des Habel was the stock inspector at the time I was at Port Lincoln. Old Des also was third year in my first year at Roseworthy. (laughs) It goes back, doesn't it? Des was there and very good, but he wasn't particularly good at his weeds so he'd say, 'I think they might be from such-and-such', he knew the weeds that were problems, and I said right, we'd come and help him do the inspections. I wasn't as keen – he picked up the horses' hooves pretty well – although I'd had a fair bit to do with horses I never liked picking up the ... I didn't mind picking up the front, but the hind hooves. I'd seen too many of them close, hell when they come both ... Two times that happened, one time up at Roseworthy and

when I was with the Army, the horses, the one in front backed and kicked out. We're getting off the track again. It was not unusual.

Now, then in the special leave in September that year, to assist in the survey of Oraparinna Reserve. Oraparinna is in the Flinders [Ranges]. That was a 'love' job for the Nature Conservation Society, not the Department. It was a love job, no pay there.

Something you were doing ...

It was one of 15 reserves I helped out with as a love job.

You were doing that in your own time.

My own time, yes.

These sorts of activities, though, this is your early days having joined the Department.

I started them before that. While I was on the Eyre Peninsula [we] surveyed [Hundreds]. Hambidge was the first one and we did that and ... about three of them: Hambidge, Hincks and something Well [Basecombe Well in the Hundred of Blesing] ... On the West Coast proper that was. The Lincoln reserves. All those things; and not only my job, because some of those were my job, but also as a member of the Conservation Society [to inspect those reserves for declared weeds and other alien plants] and that was another thing getting me into ... Well I was mainly looking out for weeds, see if the weeds were there, so I was virtually as much doing my own job as I was anything else but I collected more native species than I did weeds ... As far as I'm concerned it was still good fun [and added to the interest and pleasure of the inspections].

Were there other people in the Department who had a similar sort of overlap between their professional and personal interests, people you were aware of at all?

Before me Frank Chapman was one. He was a member. I can't remember any others. There were other members, but not active members. Arthur Tideman was a member but he never did anything. All he got there was he got the news on it to see how he could ... That's enough said. [It was another source of background information.]

[10:05] Just on that aspect, though, what level of interest or awareness was there within the Department about nature conservation? Here you're talking early 1970s.

Mainly lip service they paid to it; a lot of the government departments are still doing the same thing. (telephone rings) There they couldn't see the reasons. They still had the clearing ... The attitude there was still [land to clear]. Is that yours or mine? (break in recording)

Just a bit of a pause there for the phone, Ray. We were just talking about the attitude amongst government departmental officers in regards to conservation, nature conservation and the environment.

Conservation in those days was still hard to get across, particularly in the farming community and in the rural areas where they'd been still clearing their land. It was still fairly close, soon after the war and the land was still [being cleared, particularly for soldier settlers]. They

couldn't see any damn reason to save this [scrub] which they're knocking down and burning off. It was very hard. There'd been talk about 'improving' the land and producing food and export, and what was the value of our native species and biodiversity. That came in recently, that's a very ... Never heard of biodiversity until recent times. Another way to confuse the issue as far as it was ... But no, that was what it was about. Although most of them would be convinced now, up until I left there were still a lot who weren't that happy with conservation. It's gradually settling in now. See the reason for it: as you see, a lot of farmers are now replanting native species and they're there to rehabilitate – that word – their land.

It's interesting though, isn't it, because you've got a department working on soil erosion, you've got the Pest Plants Commission, you've got Weed Control, you've got Vertebrate Pest Control, there's an awareness of these, the biodiversity – using the modern term – there's obviously an awareness, but ...

Reg French – in my day in the Department, Reg was the Soils Conservator – and don't forget my early tutor at high school [and Principal of Roseworthy, Bob Herriot], he was also later in soils. Their main thing was to say on the sandy areas plant marron grass and plants [to help] to hold the drift that way; and on land windbreaks were put up, where they're trying to get the cover on it they'd seed it down to stop the wind blowing; then not use harrows to flatten out after they ploughed it, they left it ridged so less erosion that way. Also contouring for water erosion, they used to contour the land – that was very popular going through, and you probably still see in a lot of places [remnants of] the old contours. It was very effective, too, in stopping water erosion. It was still in its infancy. Remember that the farmers were just recovering – although they reckon they're hard-up now, it's nothing to what it was in those days. They were getting virtually nothing for their produce and living on the smell of an oil rag, a lot of farmers. It was pretty tough until about 1950, '60, between ... '50 it started to come good with the European Market and the higher price of their produce.

[14:50] Thanks for that. We'll pick up a bit more of your story.

Then I went to Crystal Brook, Georgetown and Port Wakefield, attended the District Council's joint meeting with the idea of forming a weeds committee. We talked about the weeds committees and three or four councils would get together and form these committees of one or two councillors, and with their weed officers they would meet and discuss the problems and look at the problems in the district. That was one way of cutting down a lot of my work as a liaison officer. I started off in Lincoln doing those things and I started them on the mainland. It was one of the reasons for coming over to Adelaide – to pick up this weeds committee with the local councils.

In one way it's cutting down work, but then if you're creating new committees and working in new areas it's actually creating more work for you.

Yes, that's right. The point is about these committees that what I did on Eyre Peninsula – and remember there were reports to the Weeds Committee ...

Advisory Committee?

Advisory Committee, yes. They had delegates from all over the State and they had their meetings, they got these reports on the success of it and they spread it out amongst the councils and receptive people, and the ones that were [with] a positive outlook towards weed control, the ones that knew about them, took an interest in it so for the first ones it wasn't hard to get volunteers from the councillors to go in. Mind you, some councillors lost their seat because they were pro-weed control. (laughs) There was a mixture. These are the times we went through and then gradually, in the long run, we got them all on board. I don't think there were any exceptions. We didn't worry too much about the cities, particularly the metropolitan area, unless they came to us – and some of them did. I remember Hindmarsh was a particularly good one ...

Where would the boundary have been? Adelaide Hills or the Barossa? When you say that the city people didn't come to you ...?

In the official metropolitan [area]. The Adelaide Hills were certainly in it. East Torrens, I talked about that before. East Torrens and Salisbury and these places immediately outside.

Virginia, McLaren Vale – in the north and south? How far ...

Hmm?

... Virginia in the north, McLaren Vale in the south, how far did you ...?

Right up Out of Hundred. The whole local government areas, that's what it ...

Did you have a metropolitan boundary?

There was, and there's still a metropolitan boundary. It expanded a bit since then, but there was one here, yes.

I was just wondering what it was.

The metropolitan councils, like Tea Tree Gully – and later on they became cities, these councils. Those councils like Tea Tree Gully, Norwood and [others]. They combined too later on, amalgamated. It was in that changing process we got into it. They were ripe for it too, because they were talking about amalgamating councils, it made it easy to get these boards formed. It added to the ease; I won't say it was that easy. I had to work on it and get [acceptance, not only from the Councils but also from the Weeds Board and Pest Plant Commission].

[20:00] Then I reported in. I went to Nundroo, Penong inspected and surveyed the problems up there and report [with] recommendations of what we could do out there, Out of Hundreds.

Over what time frame is this?

That was 3rd of September we went to do the horse inspections to the 10th of September. This was Crystal Brook, Georgetown, that was during that time, in that week.

These are dates in 1971?

Yes. Then, on the 10th of September, I gave my report on the 10th, which I'd already been up to Nundroo and Penong in that week. You can see here. Don't forget I worked at Crystal Brook and Georgetown, Wakefield ... this is the way it used to work. Then come back; as you say, might stay overnight and then come back and do three or four councils on your way back. That's how I do it, that's how I could get through it otherwise. Then on the 14th I had that special leave, and the 22nd of September to the 28th I went to the District Council of Blyth and Balaklava proposing a Weed Board there. A good hearing and that eventually went through, they formed their Board. Also, on the last day there I did horse inspections at One Tree Hill for Salvation Jane [contamination], eating live Salvation Jane, [then] getting the samples of dung and things like that to get the seeds checked out and so forth. All sorts: checked the [mane, tail and] hocks for any other weed that might be on them – burrs and things of that nature.

On 29th it was local government areas, outer local government areas, and that was up north 'cause the other one's on the West Coast. It says 'trip to do inspections Oraparinna National Park'. It says *veronicus*, that's poison apple. 'Oraparinna National Park, *veronicus*' [to check and survey a reported infection of *veronica persica* and other problems] ... We'll get that later. It says other problems that were in the area. Then following on, the next week I started off correspondence (checking the headquarters correspondence), the *Weed Scene* and the technical papers, got rid of those; and I went to a Gumeracha District Council meeting.

[23:50] Did someone from the Weed Section come with you on some of this?

No. If they did I'd have put them down when I went through my thing. Those early days no, I can't remember anybody particularly going [with me] to those, but later on some of these others they did go with me. That's when I first came over. The trouble is (laughs) they weren't that sure of my approach and frankly [in some Council areas] it went against some of the grain, in those early days, of the officers themselves. They didn't like to go out with me because they didn't want to contradict what I was saying, because I was quite firm: 'We have to get this thing done. It must get done. We've got to find ways', and things like that. Not so much demanding they do it now, but suggesting it's in their own interest to do it in the future and so forth. They were ready for it, which the Department ... [of Agriculture and the Weed Advisory Board gave me lot of support].

After Gumeracha I went over to – four days in Kangaroo Island. Again, Kingscote and Parndana and Penneshaw – again, getting together with one Board and seeing what their problems were and the difficulties with the island. There were a lot of difficulties over there costs, freight cost and things like that. I had a good reception there. Henry Day was in charge of

Parndana, which was our [Department of Agriculture] research station over there. [Henry Day was in the same year as Ray Alcock at Roseworthy College.]

Was there a particular set of problems with Kangaroo Island that differed ...?

I'm trying to think now. They had their weeds alright [as it had been farmed for some years. It was insular with salt problems due to spray drift from the sea].

[26:00] Didn't get that far with that one, that was my break [in the homework for the interview] and then I picked up again. (laughs) This time I went to do some topics and themes in your letter, I'd got your letter by then.

OK. That first list you're looking at there ...

The weeds one ... I have a list of those somewhere, but I just ...

That first list gives us an impression of some of the areas you worked in. You talked before about the type of work. Now we're going to talk hopefully ...

That could be expanded later on. I'll go through and get them all. That was just one month, if you notice! (laughs) As you see, I was most of the time out and they were long hours.

Gives us an impression, that's good.

Now, this topic seems ... questions, answers: Stockowners Association – we mentioned stock inspections and stock inspectors' reports; they also helped us, those that knew their weeds. Some of them were pretty good [most helpful].

You had liaison with the Stockowners ...

Yes.

... and the Farmers and Graziers and ...?

Yes. Used to go to some of their meetings or they'd write in and want something and report to them and send a letter to them to answer their questions. What I don't know, the South Australian Farmers' Association [Federation] – where would that come in?

[27:50] That would be more recent.

Yes. Agricultural Bureau were very strong in my day. I was a member of both Lincoln and Koppio, a member in my own right. They were throughout the State. I used to attend the meetings as much as I could – not all of them – and discuss weed matters. At their annual conferences for sure: usually got a place allotted to me to discuss the recent problems and forward problems and like that.

The Agricultural Bureau and the Rural Youth are two particular organisations for South Australia.

Yes. Rural Youth were just coming in in my day. I don't know that I can remember ... I just can't remember attending them. I know of them. What did you say before that was the other one?

Agricultural Bureau we've mentioned.

I've mentioned those. They were ... Still very strong, are they? It's a wonderful organisation.

They're still going and Rural Youth's still going but it's just interesting you didn't have much to do with them, either before you joined the Department or when you were in the Department, you didn't have much to do with Rural Youth?

Yes. I can't really remember much. Whether I did or didn't, it's one of these things I can't ...

I'd have to go through there to find out. There were so many things I attended to. [I did attend some meetings when invited to lead discussions on weed control and identification of plants.]

A pretty diverse organisation, the Agriculture Department.

It was, yes. Then it had got rid of quite a bit of stuff. When the diversity came, plant diversity [was adopted], and other ... the flora and fauna reserves, those things, they formed their own [departments to reduce the load on the Agriculture Department], where they were more or less covered with the Department in those early days. Attending to them: although they had their [own] officers on them, they looked to us to give them advice and advise the rangers and help them. They were very friendly and helpful. In fact, they helped us a lot: some of them were very good officers. It was a diversion from their normal work of looking up these weeds and learning something new again. They were like everybody – some people responded, some don't. That was good.

Was there a formal liaison or was it done on an informal basis?

Being Government Liaison Officer through the Department of Agriculture and the Weeds Committee, and later on the Pest Plant Commission, it gave me that liaison with these different departments – E&WS and those places, Mines, Lands, Conservation, Highways and those. If there were any problems it was my job to go and see them, I just looked at it that way. Overall, I usually gave advice. I'd usually get on to them before and let them know I'm coming. Same as the farmer: if I was going out to do a specific survey of his land I'd get in touch with him beforehand, give him the opportunity to come with me and so forth, which helps a lot because it's amazing ... some of them didn't want to tell you anything, others would tell you the lot – that's one of my mob. (laughs)

I was just wondering there, Ray, when I said was it formal or informal, I was wondering how much it came back to the personal level, that you could establish rapport with other officers in other departments and just a phone call or a personal visit or an informal chat might be sufficient.

It was formal in that I'd make my reports, formal reports, on them and so on. Yes, they were formal, although there were some quiet meetings or something like that I didn't report ... it wasn't worth reporting at that time; it was leading up ... You're waiting for evidence or waiting for something else to come up ... [further information to finalise the planning].

[33:10] **End of Side B, Tape 6**

Tape 7, Side A – session of 9 December 2004

[0:20] OK, Ray, we finished off the other tape, it just ran out part of the way through the story about the rice growing and cotton growing and the impact on salinity and so on.

Yes. I'd like now to go through my trip to Calgary in Canada in 1975.

You mentioned some of this on a previous tape.

Yes I did, but I didn't get into detail like I've got now. We left here on the 18th of July and returned home on the 11th of August. It was unofficial ...

In what year?

... in '75. It was unofficial visit. It was made basically going to see my elder son who was at Prince George at the time. Right, you ready now? I went to Edmonton first of all, in [the province of] Alberta, and contacted the Department of Agriculture there and discussed and compared weed control, species, equipment, legislation etc. Also visited local government offices and officers, with officers – weed officers, that is – inspected problem areas and swapped control measures. Winnipeg, that was three days at Winnipeg – had eight days at Edmonton – [returned for] three days at Winnipeg, [the province of] Manitoba: again, the Department of Agriculture and weed officers, tour of [and trials at] Branden Research Centre [and other centres], inspect weed control trials at Indian Head. At Regina, [the province of] Saskatchewan, with again the agricultural officers and the weed officers, inspected the weed areas and discussed treatments; inspected trials at Saskatchewan Research Centre. Two days there. Calgary, which is in Alberta, inspect weed problems and discussed their control with department officer, local government officer. They were much the same sort of deal, and these are places I visited and a total of some 13 days. A full report, written report, was given to the Weeds Advisory Committee on return, when I returned to Adelaide.

You said it was unofficial visit, in that you don't ...

Yes, it was unofficial. This is only part of it. I was away, you can see I was away well over six weeks I was away altogether, so that was only 13 days of the six weeks. [Officially I was granted 6 weeks leave to fly to Canada. Spent 29 days with my son Eric, at Prince George and 13 days with the Canadian Weed Department exchanging weed control and related problems with them.]

While it was unofficial you still prepared a report for the Committee.

Yes. Because I'd been and seen these information to hand on and so forth to them, which was ... Some of it was very handy, too, some of the ... it's different problems with different climate and so forth: they were snowbound, and when their treatment and that ... It was not only interesting ... The best time to treat weeds – we always say, 'Before flowering'; but some of their weeds they would have to wait till flowering. They couldn't get them in the wintertime, it was under the snow, and things like that. It was quite an interesting thing as much as anything.

Really not [applicable to our Australian climate] ... It's good background, but it wasn't much useful information really, but it was another background. A paper presented in 1984 to the 9th Interstate Border Liaison Conference, delivered, received and fully discussed. This was the paper we're talking about.

Then Europe. [I took leave and travelled to England and several parts of Europe]. Went to Europe 21st of April to 19th of October '81. [Had an] appointment with [Dr Verdcourt], and I've checked that, Kew Gardens Herbarium. Gave me a most welcome welcome and we went through the entry there: he heard me give my name and who I was and what I wanted and particularly for correctly determining the three separate dodder specimens I'd sent earlier. I'd determined as *Cuscuta campestris*, the golden dodder, oringen from the USA, the most serious of all the dodders. Probably introduced with Noogoora burr and Californian burrs, the *Xanthium* species, some 60 to 70 years ago when setting up the large irrigation area out from Renmark on the River Murray. Was considered a native dodder due to misidentification or – no, we'll put this – [there was some] political fear [concern for] overseas markets, because it was a dangerous weed and in any fodder and in produce, they wouldn't want to [import our produce for fear of introducing dodder to their countries] ... They would knock it back, so they didn't want people to know about it. Quite deliberate, actually. (laughs)

At what level is this, when you say it's a political fear? You say it's a political fear – at what level? Government level or administrative or ...?

Government level, mainly through the Department itself, in the ... our [senior] officers. I'm not too sure how the Quarantine officers were [placed] ... whether they didn't discuss it enough to hear what a certain person said about AFT [Arthur Tideman. My recommendation opposing my senior officer, AFT] made me very unpopular, but not unusual – by that time I was used to his remarks. (laughs) The report, there was never much done with it until later – we'll get to Ian Black and Richard ... fellow that took my job, doctor.

Yes, you've mentioned ...

Yes, doesn't matter. That was upsetting.

[8:30] Working conditions. These were working conditions. Initially typical public service with [some] senior officers' main interest [appearing to be] in promotion and priority over work. I make that quite clearly and I'll stand up to it. Limiting the workload. Reports considered likely to upset the MPs were often rewritten or not presented, e.g. early reports on the spread of dangerous weeds such as skeleton weed, dodders, silverleaf nightshade, just to name a few.

How could some of these reports upset the political masters or your own ...?

My own department, yes. See they never got to the Department, not officially.

But if you're reporting on a particular weed problem or a disease, aren't you ... Isn't the Department obliged to present that as a factual document?

Yes. I'd report it as I found and made my recommendations accordingly. What I said eventually to my senior officers who wanted me to rewrite them, I said, 'This is my report. This is what I found. Now, if you want to rewrite them or anything and alter them, that's up to you. But this is my report'. I wasn't very popular because I wouldn't [rewrite my report to suit them]. My feeling was this: we were there to report what we saw to our Members of Parliament, or the Board and the Commission and then to the Parliament. I can't see the sense – but this was the sort of thing that was happening then and it's happening ... That's where it started, around that time. One time – and I can remember my own father said when he was Agricultural Adviser in the South East, this is when I was a young lad – he went out and reported [what] he found and that's what he was told to do and that's what he reported, and that was their job, to advise the Members of Parliament. Not do as the Members of Parliament or it was suggested the Members of Parliament wanted to hear. That's what the difference now is, that they don't want to know the truth, apparently. I don't know. That's my feeling.

But in the cases you're referring to, Ray, it's hard to see why a politician or the Department would want a report rewritten to ...

What you found?

Yes. You're reporting on a particular problem, a particular issue.

Two reasons. That it means less ... it's not there so they're not going to report on it and not going to do anything about it, are they, so it's going to save them money for a start; and the public relations overseas, that was the other side of it. If the senior officers, or those who were in charge of it to handle it, push it through, through the Commission to the Parliament, if they sent the true report to them they'd be unpopular and they might miss out on their further promotion. That's how I think. On several occasions I was told, 'You're making extra work'. My times worked, no overtime. When we worked overtime we didn't get paid for it in those early days. [The point is that my responsibility was to be out inspecting for weeds and any problems. Then I would write a detailed report with recommendations. Now! Should those responsible want to alter or shelve the report it was up to them. Note: there may be reasons to do so.]

[13:05] Weed surveys [usually] recommended control programs and the individual responsibilities – [owners of Crown lands], landholders, farmers and graziers, parks and reserves, roadsides abutting. Not forgetting estimated costs and best treatments and when to apply. [But] they told me to ease up: 'We haven't got the money'. I said, 'Look, it doesn't matter. The thing is you've seen it and this is what you've found. This is the extent of the problem. How much are you going to deal with it?'. Some old friends of mine, long before the

Department at Kyby for instance, one of those was one of the first to have a go at me. 'We don't do that sort of thing in the Department'. I said, 'Yes, we do. We used to'. He says, 'What do you mean?'. I said, 'My father. Don't forget I probably know more about the Department in those days than what you do'. He said, 'Yes, alright'. He was the same as myself. You're out there as a service to the public. You weren't there to pander to the parliamentarians.

How different was that to when you were working over on Eyre Peninsula?

It didn't worry me at all there.

You didn't notice it then?

Not to the same extent, no. Not until I got with the Department itself. Although there were some [times when] I could see something was wrong somewhere ... You've got to remember there was a Member of Parliament there, the Deputy Premier under Tom Playford, [Glen] Pearson, and he was also an ex-Air Force man and he was also a [farmer at Cockaleeche on Eyre Peninsula] and we knew each other fairly well, pretty friendly. He knew something of what was going on. (I got a little bit of information – probably I shouldn't have, and he got information probably what he shouldn't have got. That's how it was. It was handy to have that information at times.) I'd learnt in some ways to protect myself in lots of ways by writing [particularly the choice of words and phrases] and signing and so forth, and was able to prove 'That's what I wrote; that's not what went to him' [by being able to produce a copy of my original report, which got me out of trouble].

[16:00] Every time I come and see you something happens with the weather. We've got a thunderstorm coming down now, so that's the noise in the background here. Keep going.

You want weather prophets or something. What are the ...? What do the Aborigines call them?

Yes. Not forgetting the cost ... That's where I found difficulty with the honesty of the thing really. There are times when you've got to tell a lie or misplace the truth for certain [special] reasons, but in my book there was no real reason for it here.

Did other officers notice this? Other people comment on it or ... (interviewee laughs) amongst yourselves?

Yes. They knew about it. Had to, when they'd seen my report and they got copies of it and next thing they see it come out different. Some agreed with me, some didn't. Max [O'Neil] was against it. That's why he didn't want me [around as] he thought I was looking for his job. I wasn't looking for his job; as I said before [I made it quite clear] to them, I didn't want a promotion. I was happy with my salary and I didn't rely on that for my income [fully as I had another income and a private superannuation rather than through the Public Service], so I was happy where I was.

[17.35] We'll get back into the office. The office provided was quite satisfactory, but initially I expected a vehicle to be provided to do my job. I believed this would be done. Senior officers insisted that I provide my own vehicle and claim mileage expenses, which was the current practice. Likewise, the cost of transferring my phone from Port Lincoln to Hope Valley: I was expected to claim any calls on behalf of the Department. (laughs)

Keep an itemised list and ...

Yes. I was used to different [arrangements]. Claim any calls from the Department. I didn't accept and my private phone was never included with the Department's lists, my private phone. Councils, weed officers, Weed Boards and weed officers knew my number if they wanted me in an emergency.

[19:00] Superannuation. I didn't take out the superannuation. My private cover, as I was doing it, was a far better deal ... When I retired I didn't have 20% of my total come off, as the government superannuation was. There were other things too: the restrictions on it and things like that. Where I got it, it was life insurance actually, it was that what I had. I knew the right place to go to get it. You can't get that now.

The other thing about the car was ... When I was in Port Lincoln with the councils, they supplied the car for me. All I had for my wife to run around was a little 4-cylinder Cortina. It was [not suitable] for running round the country. Eventually they came to the good, I got the car. In the end before I left the whole thing had changed: you couldn't have your own private car, you had to have a department car.

So it was a departmental car and not for the Commission?

I won't say why it happened, but it did happen. Because it was cheaper for government to buy the car ... less sales tax, about 25% cheaper to buy for them [also] because of the [government] mark-up on them [was excluded], it was a lot cheaper to buy. Petrol: [we would buy from nominated petrol depots which was considerably cheaper than from service stations. But it didn't add to my popularity.]

That's provided through the Commission or through the Department?

The Department provided them. They were in a [government vehicle] pool.

And the Commission ...?

Equipment: most of the equipment was the Department equipment and we used it, we were quite welcome to use it if we wanted to, yes.

Promotion. I've already mentioned this, that I refused and didn't seek promotion as I wished to stay helping landholders, councils etc. in the field. I felt it was more important they had my point of view, and satisfaction, not only with the others but from a landowner's point of view.

My satisfaction and happiness out in the field was far better than sitting in the office, pinching ideas from the field officers and so forth. That's as far as I got.

So when promotion opportunities came along you knocked them back and ...?

Yes. Ian Black, he came in but he didn't last long because he wasn't worth 2 bob [unreliable despite his high qualifications]. The other fellow, Cooke, David Cooke, took my place, Dr David Cooke. He was quite a good officer. He knew what he was about. He was a qualified botanist. He had to learn [our work routine]. In the end the last 2 years ... I was working 3 days a week, he'd come in the other 2 days a week and take over while I was away. He gradually got worked into the job that way. Then the special problems he got into while I was away he'd come in and hold them up to me and we'd discuss them and how to handle them and things like that. I got on well with him. Ian Black – got on well with him. He had two degrees, Honours in one of them – but he couldn't interpret, he couldn't put them into practice.

Not a practical person.

I felt sorry for him.

[23:00] Were you working with the Commission members, for example? You mentioned before reporting to the Commission, but how closely did you work with Commission members?

I quite often went up into their districts and let them know I'll be in there if they want to come around me. Sometimes they did, sometimes they didn't. A particularly good one was the one you're on to, [Roger] Brockhoff. He was an exceptionally good man. I helped him with a mistletoe [problem]. He was, as a Commission man, he was one of the top ones, too. There's one or two were deadheads, but then you get that in all boards.

Did you appear before the board at any time, before the Commission itself, to present your reports?

Yes, [mostly]. I'd present my reports, yes[, directly to the Commission at their meetings].

Discuss them, have a discussion?

Yes, if it was necessary. Discussion and ... Not only the report, but recommendations would go. Most times they'd look at that and they'd say, 'We'll have a think about that later and let you know. We'll discuss the matter and if there's any questions we'll come back there later', which they sometimes did, sometimes they didn't. Then nine times out of ten they'd say, 'That sounds good to us. Let it go that way. We'll do that treatment and we'll rely on you to get the program set up with the costs and so forth for individual councils where it's concerned'. That was my role. Had to go down to the council weed officer [to plan and work], and again, if a councillor or a member of the Weeds Committee wanted to come with us, they were welcome to come. There was no holding back on them. [And this would apply to a Commission member or any person interested in our work.] But I was limited. I couldn't hang around and say, 'No, I can't do it today. Be here tomorrow'. Tomorrow I had to be 100 mile, 200 mile away. But it worked out quite well. I tried to be open as I could with them all.

[25:15] I can remember up in Kimba way there, there was a chap there, I walked on his property: 'Ah, so-and-so' and he abused me, really abused me. He says, 'You officers, Department officers, wouldn't know a weed from a so-and-so'. I said, 'Come on'. He said, 'No. I'm not going there. I don't want to have anything to do with you'. I said, 'Let's go round and have a look at some of your weed problems'. Eventually he cooled off a bit and came around and he said, 'Salvation Jane's not a problem'. I said, 'Why?'. He said, 'The stock eat it well'. I said, 'What are your sheep numbers? What are your lambing numbers?'. He said, 'In recent years they're down a bit'. I said, 'That can be marked directly to Salvation Jane. It's poisonous in the ewes. First of all they abort the foetus, or they don't become pregnant when they're eating Salvation Jane. It's as simple as that. The few that do get through, half of them probably die too before they get born'. Things like that. He said, 'Oh'. Then he pricked up his ears, he ended up in the end with about 3 or 4 years with him before I finished there. He was ringing me and every time I went up there I had to go to dinner with him and there was all that sort of thing. Changed man altogether. Kimba, Kimberley, Kimbla, something like that his name was – doesn't matter what his name was, but he was a pretty solid man.

[26:55] Yes, and he helped later on. Strange as it may seem he was one of the landholders that was keen on conservation, and around about the Hincks there, he came there and brought some others. They came there with their ears back: 'This conservation! What rubbish is this all about?'. We had a bit of a talk and took them around what we were doing. Next day they turned up with their jeeps and so forth and Landrovers and stuff: 'Take us round. Help us with it'. Some of them became members of the Conservation Society. That's how you can change people, when you show them and say, 'No, we're not against clearing land. We want to put some aside [as permanent reserves] ... We're not asking farmers to give up their land'. [Tops of sand ridges were replanted by farms to make wind breaks and prevent sand drift.] I believed, and I still believe, that if the government had sold that land – scrubland or land to a fellow to clear, to turn into a farm, then he's quite entitled to do it. Wouldn't you think? It's for the government not to sell it in the first place. They did that a lot. [Sold then repurchased] a lot of land [that had not been cleared] ... As I say, it's all coming out now.

Real change of attitude over time and so on.

It's always the same. You can't ... Very rarely can you get things to happen overnight. You've got to take your time and put good [sound] arguments up [before people to get their support] and not upset people and all the rest of it. What I can't understand is why it upset my senior officers. I know particularly why [now. The differences were as much my fault as theirs due to my inexperience at the time]. I'm not going to go any further with that. My fault, half of it.

You mentioned before it's a two-way street.

I was a so-and-so too. I could be. Like everybody else, given the right attitude, the right treatment. Wrong treatment, I should say.

[29:00] You operated with an interesting mix: you've got the lifelong interest, the practical knowledge, and then you've been to Roseworthy, Hawkesbury, you've had a bit of the education aspect, so you're an interesting mix there.

Yes. Roseworthy was practical farming and not only farming but sheep husbandry, animal husbandry, and limited weed control, identification and so forth, those things there. I had that, and although we didn't have much to do with tractors and machinery we did get a turn on one of the crawlers for probably a couple of hours' run, and then we'd one hour on the tractors doing something, might get half-a-day on it, but most of the time it was all horse, that was still the horse things. I'm glad of that. That was a good experience because you still struck some of the farmers still relying largely on horse when I first kicked off, relying largely on horses, and when I could understand the horse and how to handle horses it made a big difference to them, too. Having done a bit of cockying myself and got into troubles that some of these fellows got into that again was another thing. Being on the contracting work, it's all good [experience]. You see the game from different angles all the time and different emphasis on things. Then when you come to put it all together it makes it a lot easier. I had a lot more experience than many of the officers in the field, particularly the Department officers. A lot of those fellows went in straight from Roseworthy or the university, went straight into the Department.

Not much hands-on.

... practical training, see what practical training they did have, very little. I don't condemn them for that, but what I always reckoned that they should have, they should have had the academic with the practical man, with a diploma and those sort of things [to assist] him out in the field and his 5 years in say ... after leaving Roseworthy 5 years apprenticed with farmers in different areas. That's what I reckoned would have improved it. They still did ... Our Department in South Australia did a fantastic job, considering the dryness of our State and the problems we had here, they did a damn good job. Like everybody, if you don't make mistakes you're not making much, you're not doing much, are you? (laughs) [Most important is how you handle your mistakes.]

Ray, you've given a lot of interesting insights into your work with the Commission, the Pest Plant Commission, and also Agriculture, and you've given us a lot to work with.

Yes. Something else has come up just now.

There's going to be a few things we'll follow through with later on, because we're just about out of time today ...

[32:25] **End of interview**