

Pat TROY

It's Alan Hutchings here, a volunteer with the Dunstan Foundation, interviewing Professor Patrick Troy. Pat, perhaps you could just start off by giving us a little bit of background on yourself and then perhaps moving into how you first met Don Dunstan.

Well, I'm Patrick Nicol Troy. I've been at the Australian National University since 1966 and, although I'm technically in retirement, I'm still trying to make some contribution. I was first appointed to the university in a temporary research position and then ultimately got a tenured position and finally ended up as Professor and head of the Urban Research Program.

It was during this early period of my career – I was trained and worked as an engineer, but travelled to London in 1960 to take a postgraduate program in engineering specially because it gave me an opportunity to do a town planning program at London University College. I then came back which was a condition of the original scholarship. I worked for the Board of Works in Melbourne on the freeway construction program and decided that the thing I needed to do was to get some specialist knowledge. So I then went back to university and did a degree in highway engineering at the University of New South Wales and after that I was appointed to the State Planning Authority as the first transportation planner for the State of New South Wales.

It was in this capacity that I started to take notice of what was actually happening in Australian cities other than Melbourne or Sydney where I'd worked, but I came across Don Dunstan's response to proposals to build freeways in Adelaide, and I wrote to him saying that there were other ways of looking at the urban development.

You're referring to the MATS Plan there, are you?

This was in 1966/7, I think.

Yes.

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He was not the Leader of the Labor Party at the time, but he was a very, obviously, young, successful politician with ideas and full of energy. So I decided to come to Adelaide, partly because we were trying to do a study in Adelaide which was on housing conditions in the central city area but also because of my second interest which was transportation. So I ended up going to see him in the Parliament House and he was in his safari suit days and where he'd scandalised people with his pink gear and so on, and we had a very useful series of exchanges – at least, *I* thought they were useful – about the need for better integration and better planning in the provision of transport infrastructure.

At that time, the major emphasis was on improving the road-based transport system, which was important, and at the time I was something of a sceptic of transportation studies and had already published an article that arose out of my experience both on the Melbourne transportation study and on the Sydney transportation studies carried out by two American firms. I was worried that they were doing what I regarded then, and still do, as simple-minded models of the nature of urban life and certainly urban life in Australia. Max Neutze, who was the head of the Urban Research Program at the time, and I both approached the transport issues in collaboration but from quite different perspectives on investment in transport infrastructure in Australia compared with the American approach. This all fuelled the conversations that I pursued with Dunstan. Those same conversations were pursued with Whitlam, from 1967 onwards. I wrote the first draft of a number of his speeches on urban issues that also provided me with the background for similar kinds of arguments that were put to Don Dunstan. I was in a program which was relatively well-funded and we were trying to focus on the major cities in Australia, excluding Canberra. The experience we had in the Urban Research Program was in Sydney and Melbourne and we were trying to extend it to Adelaide so I was the person figured to handle that.

I was carrying out this dual set of conversations with Don and with Gough's office and these evolved and to some extent intermeshed and overlapped and they

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continued to do that after Uren was appointed as the Shadow Spokesman in Urban Affairs. This overlap was partly driven by necessity because this was in the pre-computer days: when you wrote something you only had a limited number of opportunities to revise it because it had to be retyped and, since I didn't type, I had to try to make economic use of the material. So typically one of the things I did was to produce some kind of advice note on an urban issue, housing and transport being the two most common, but also environmental planning as early as '67,. I typically used the same material for all three of those politicians, because the only one who actually had resources to retype it easily was Whitlam. So Whitlam would use those speeches, the eight pages that I'd provide would go in to Freudenberg who would rewrite them in Whitlam's style, add all the classical references and alliteration which Gough loved, and basically that would mean I'd have the same material 'clean', because by the time it had gone through his office it would be unrecognisable. I could then use that sort of material in periodic discussions with Don Dunstan and then later with Tom Uren. I knew and met Dunstan probably at least three years before I met Uren. I didn't meet Uren until 1970, when Whitlam asked me to write for Uren because Uren was now the Shadow Spokesman and had no experience or knowledge in this area. So that's how – and I'm sorry this is confused weaving of the three names together, but they are tied up.

To me, I get a picture.

That was intensified because at that time Don was articulating the position in relation to the proposed new town at Monarto, which you know more about than I do, but that was also the period when I was advising Whitlam and writing the speech he gave to the Institute of Architects, the so-called Walter Burley Griffin Lecture, which became the template for many other speeches that followed because we cut-and-pasted those speeches a lot, because I still had to earn a living; I have never been a political appointment to any position, I've always said that if I didn't make it on my professional competency I wasn't interested. So I've never taken a position other than – and including the DURD one, that was only ever on loan from the university,

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so I was on secondment, not on the staff. And so all that material, a lot of which was used in discussions with Don, I don't know how much it influenced his views, but that material which was ultimately found in the major speeches was the Water Burley Griffin Memorial Lecture which charted the Whitlam position, followed by the Wilkinson Lecture, and then the Fabian Society pamphlets and so on that I did for both Tom and for Whitlam. That provided the framework for the continuing set of conversations with Don.

Now, I was not actually a close friend of Don's, we had a professional association and largely because we shared values, but I wouldn't ever claim that I was an intimate friend of his in any sense because we only met socially on a couple of occasions and they were sometimes by accident. But of course the association changed character once Whitlam got elected, because I was asked to devise the Department of Urban and Regional Development because there was no template at the Commonwealth level for that. Whitlam asked for me to be seconded from the National University, because I refused to take a position in the bureaucracy, so I was seconded and in that position wrote and devised the whole structure and rationale for the Department of Urban and Regional Development. I was offered the headship of it and refused that because I thought that wasn't my role and I didn't have those ambitions, and stayed out of that; but that then opened up and changed the nature of conversation with Don because I was now in an official capacity and so I saw him quite a bit when we were negotiating the first stages, especially of the Land Commission program, because he was the most enthusiastic supporter of that program and I was then appointed to that Commission because we had suggested to the states that they should construct these semi-independent bodies which had some external technical competence in them. So the first four were staffed with people from the ANU: Peter Harrison, Max Neutze and myself. All three of us were on the boards of those – we weren't on the same board, but those four organisations had us involved. I was on the one in Western Australia and the one in South Australia; Harrison was on the Sydney one; and Neutze was on the Victorian one.

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By Harrison you mean Peter Harrison?

Peter Harrison, yes. Ex-Chief Planner of the National Capital Development Commission, and by then a colleague of mine. But when we were negotiating with the states, that's when I had most frequent contacts officially with Don. So I would lead the Commonwealth delegation and until that was all signed off and settled was always accompanied by a rising lawyer from Sydney who'd been appointed to the Department, called Michael Eyers. So he was the person who put the legal frameworks together for all the stuff, he and I then went around the states and negotiated the conditions and we would deal personally, directly with Don and came here until it was all settled. Of course his role in it was different because he was now the Premier he didn't have to be involved in that kind of negotiation. So I saw him on quite a number of times between 1966 and 1973. I didn't see anything at all of him in 1972 because I deliberately went away to be away from the political process, I went to the OECD, because I didn't want to be identified with the political campaign. (telephone rings, is answered)

So I can't remember, I didn't keep a good diary of these meetings, but while he was still in Opposition I saw him at the Parliament House and we would go and have a cup of tea and talk things through. I never saw him outside of those official engagements, that's why I said I wouldn't claim that I was a close personal friend. But I did see him a lot. Then, once the Government got changed, I think my recollection is we came down here in January '73 was the first visit.

That was soon after – well, Whitlam was elected –

In December '72.

– end of '72, yes.

And the Department of Urban and Regional Development existed in name, basically in name only, at that point. But one of the things that Whitlam had done that he's been very keen on was the so-called 'growth centres' program, and the first step of that was a negotiation with New South Wales and Victoria over the growth centre

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proposed for Albury–Wodonga. There were other growth centres for other states that were in train in discussions. By then – I can't remember when Dunstan became the Premier, but he was Premier by then, so we were running around, because I was not only running the negotiations for the creation of the Department and the Land Commission Program I was also leading in the Growth Centres Program, there were only four staff. The Department of Urban and Regional Development had very few staff at that time so I'd recruited a handful of people as temporaries and we just marched off into the future, (laughter) full of confidence that things were going to happen.

The Cities Commission was around at that time, wasn't it? That was sort of left over from NURDA.¹

Well, what had happened in mid-'72 the McMahon Government decided, because they could see the rise in popularity of the urban issues, they decided to try to head that off by creating a National Urban and Regional Development Authority, which they did by gutting – taking a very large proportion of the staff out of the National Capital Development Commission and giving them a new remit. They left the National Capital Development Commission there specifically responsible for Canberra but took Sir John Overall and Bob Lansdown and various others who had been the core people at the NCDC, were taken in to create this new body called NURDA.

I was, as I said, working at the OECD at the time, so Sir John Overall came to Paris to talk to me about this in August/September of 1972. Tom Uren had come just a week or so before because he was trying to recruit me to come back to Canberra – (he was confident they were going to win the election) he wanted me to come back to head up the new department. I told him I wasn't headship material and didn't have those ambitions. That was followed by Overall who then asked me what my ambitions were. I told him that I had no ambition other than to do what I'd been

¹ NURDA – National Urban and Regional Development Authority.

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doing and that, as far as I was concerned, there had to be a future for that kind of capacity that NURDA had. But I was also determined to make sure that that did not become the Department of Urban and Regional Development because it was too architecture and engineering oriented. That wasn't what I thought was the most important sets of issues to deal with. I returned to Canberra in December 1972, a week after the elections, and I was immediately isolated.

Uren actually transported my family away to the coast so I wouldn't have any distractions, so then I had a week or ten days to devise the new Department. In the structure of the Ministry I had said to Uren, 'in discussions with Whitlam over the administrative arrangements, don't destroy NURDA. Change its name, we'll call it the Cities Commission, but we don't want that to become the Department; this is a separate operation'. The Cities Commission would be a statutory corporation whereas I wanted to make sure we had a department within the bureaucratic structure. The Cities Commission was, of course, up and running and had all sorts of professionals they'd recruited or transferred from NCDC so they had a lot of technical capacity, it seemed, on deck, whereas when Whitlam announced the creation of Urban and Regional Development and they put in Bob Lansdown as the secretary of that, I was then made the deputy secretary of it on secondment from the university. And the first thing I did was to stop any further recruitment from what had been NURDA into the Department, I didn't want any more of those people transferred, so they were limited, because I didn't want it to become a limited town planning and design group. As you will see if you had a look at the book *Innovation and reaction*, the whole process was spelt out.

So we had limited resources. I was allowed to pick up a handful of people to help us get things running. I recruited a chap I used to work with in OECD, an economist, Peter Till, who had been in the Australian Treasury before he went to the OECD, so I brought him back; and I recruited various other people from overseas, handful of them, including Joan Vipond who ended up in the New South Wales administration.

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But the most important were Michael Eyers, Henry Wardlaw, David and Jill Wilmoth, (David Wilmoth subsequently became a professor of Planning).

I remember David, yes.

They're no longer a couple. But anyway, they both came in as young graduates, young graduate town planners with a social policy interest; Michael Eyers, who was a young lawyer who was doing a lot of work for Indigenous groups and so on. I knew I had to have people who could respond to challenges but didn't want them to be influenced overly by the pre-existing operation, I wanted them to think about urban issues as rather broader policy questions. So they came in and we then set to. Peter, Michael and I carved up the responsibilities under Bob Lansdown's general leadership. As you know, Governments make the decision about departments and then assumes that the department is born fully-fledged.

Yes.

We didn't have those resources, and we were straight away put into the position of having to negotiate Commonwealth-State agreements. So we did the Albury-Wodonga one the third week in January of 1973 and we then marched on. We (Michael and I) then started to launch the first-stage documents for the creation of the Land Commissions around the country and the growth centres program. So we ran that and that's when I came on a much more regular basis into contact with Don Dunstan in that early period. I have to say he was always – in the negotiations, he was always very fixed about what was the ideological position, if you like, value systems, that we were trying to pursue and he was prepared to take on trust commitments that we were prepared to make, and in fact the whole program after its first, second and third versions was basically what ended up in the legislation in South Australia, and that was very largely because of Don's openness and preparedness to discuss things and take the issues. So he was always good from our point of view in relation to things like that.

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And I thought it also reflected very positively on the nature of South Australian public administration, and I actually said that in the book I did on the Land Commissions. Of all the states, this was the one state where there was a South Australian view and there were simple reasons for that and some of them are locked into the way South Australia's conducted its business, with a common docket, for example, and better database, stretching all the way back to the introduction of Torrens titles there's been a tradition of that; so we were able to work on that. Don was very much aware of that, so we were able to quickly come to agreements on that and get the program running, and when he asked me for comment on what was happening I said to him on one occasion one of the things that was bugging us was that we were anxious to get the programs underway but there was a kind of sense of timelessness on the part of a lot of the bureaucracy which was common across the country, it wasn't something unique to South Australia.

So he actually said in this conversation – I think he started it – ‘Would it help if we had a one month deemed-to-comply provision in negotiations?’ And the reason why that became important was that the money that was being advanced to the Land Commission was real interest money in real time. So any delays, the interest bill would simply run up and then it would become impossible to deal with. So he was quite important in issuing that instruction. It went around in the administration quite early in the piece. But we were anxious to try to make sure that the funds that were allocated were actually delivered. So that's why South Australia got the lion's share of the funds for the first couple of years, because they actually reached a state agreement, unlike say New South Wales where there was no such thing as a state position; there were positions that were adopted by the Department of Planning, there were positions adopted by the Department of Industrial Development, a different position by the Main Roads Department and another one from Sydney Water, so you had all these conflicts which are never resolved, where you always have this dreadful, awful fight which you didn't want. And it wasn't because – one part of it would say, ‘Oh, you're interfering with states' affairs’. We said, ‘No, just read

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what's said. We're not actually after that and we want you to establish the processes and we'll provide the funds on the right kind of conditions. But you have to show that you can actually deliver on it'. The only state that did that with any kind of understanding was South Australia.

Was Ken Tauber involved?

And Ken Taeuber was then, when finally the Land Commission was created, Ken Taeuber – who I regard as the model public servant, I think he was really in a class of his own, I had very high regard for Ken, I think he was magnificent – he was taken out of the Lands Department and put in charge of the Land Commission program, and Alec Ramsay from the SA Housing Trust and I were then appointed the other two members of the Land Commission. And the functions that we had decided that should apply right across the country was that there should be an independent voice on those bodies – which we had in Western Australia and Victoria and ultimately New South Wales as well as South Australia – because we felt that we wanted these things to be up-front and open, we didn't want anyone to be able to say, 'You're doing this for political direction'.

Gee, things have certainly changed.

Well, they have. And I think for the worse, not only – I mean they never were much good in the other states, it has to be said; the most disappointing was Western Australia because they put people on that body who actually had private interests and we had real trouble trying to keep people from acting privately in relation to public information. That never happened in South Australia, very largely due to, I think, the way it had been put together as a consequence of Dunstan's principled position but also because he actually had Taeuber and Ramsay who were I think incorruptible and they were imaginative and tough but, when they came to a position, that was it.

And that common docket thing that you've got in South Australia was also important in all that because it meant that you were not arguing about a position of the Department of Lands or the Transport Authority, you actually had a South

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Australian position. Hugh Stretton and I have talked about that a lot, that that was really a feature. It probably came out of necessity but was a feature of sound administration in South Australia and I believe it actually had a lot to do with Playford (and the Head of the Premiers Department whose name I forget), that's my personal view, because from 1936 to '56 when he was actually not only the Premier but the head of the housing operation, made for a big difference and a better understanding, a very much more nuanced understanding, about what you could do if you really just got your act together. Whatever other strengths or weaknesses Playford and the Playford Administration had that was clearly a strength. And it sticks out if you look at the statistical profile, South Australia was way out on the public housing programs and development programs and so on.

Well, on this area that we're discussing Dunstan had a lot of time for Playford, he often said that.

I'm sure – I didn't know that, but I'm sure that's true because that's the way – there was in lots of respects a sharing of objectives, sharing of minds. I'm not sure that Playford was as liberal as Don.

It was on this business of having a coordinated public service with clear goals.

And one of the things that I liked about it is I knew that – you're flying in as the Commonwealth representative for eight years, and you knew when you took an argument that there would be a position taken. It would not be having to fight seven fights, there was one central group. It's hard for people to understand this but it was an incredibly stimulating and reinforcing because you had the view that there were people who were responding to the challenges of the administrative needs of the State in a really important, professional way, and they knew who their political masters were but their masters were ones who acted on information and advice that they were given; they didn't bring in extraneous matter, everybody knew what the game was. So you knew when you dealt with the South Australian administration in that period – I don't know what it's like now, but in that period – you knew that this was a view conceived by the bureaucracy in a coordinated way to deliver on what the

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Government's stated policies were. A proper relationship. But the details of it were worked out by the administration. Which was in direct contrast to Western Australia or Queensland, which was appallingly bad. Paradoxically, the Queensland administration is now much better than the others by a long way; but at that time in New South Wales, there would have been ten different state administrations, in a way, that you couldn't deal with.

Just to reflect myself for a minute, I used to think the way we did it in South Australia was the way you did it everywhere and I used to get a shock when I'd go to, say, chief planners' meetings to find other states – anyway, we won't go into that.

No, it's exactly right.

They seemed to be in disarray.

Well, they were in disarray because there was no common policy. That's partly a scale thing.

Yes.

Partly it was also the nature of the power plays that are politically evident. And I think that the stewardship – I can't remember the name of the public servant who was there for a very large period of the Playford Era who was a reforming bureaucrat, he was there for a very long time at the centre, might have been the head of the Premier's and Treasury.

Just won't come to me, I know who you mean.

That long series of clear-sighted ambition and policy pursuit, whatever the other circumstances were, that unity of purpose was evident and wasn't immovable but it meant that when you negotiated with it you were dealing with people who knew their own strengths and played to one another, didn't play off against one another. I mean New South Wales would be dreadful cat-and-dog fights. And also, in a much smaller scale, in Tasmania. No, the South Australian administration was easily the best in the country: most competent, most professional. It's smaller-scale, it's true;

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but when we came and we'd have those meetings for the planning of the Land Commission we'd actually have a lunch and they always went to the same place, and Taeuber and Ramsay would know all the other public service department head , so that a lot of issues could be resolved right there in a very civilised way. It was just a real eye-opener to me because I'd always seen –

Different fighting

yes, when I'd worked in Melbourne or in New South Wales and when I'd been negotiating in WA and Queensland and Tasmania. You had fights between officers and you also had fights between officers and the Government.

I can remember in the middle of all this negotiation – the negotiating team was Troy and Eysers. On one occasion, we flew to Brisbane, got into a problem, had to fly from there to Hobart, and we went from Hobart to Perth and back to South Australia; that was all done in one week. We'd had this terrible brawl over it in Queensland; got to Hobart and, when we put the position, the Deputy Premier of the State said, 'That's what we want, we'll take that. Is this the version that we've got?' I said, 'This is what you've got, it's what we've offered to every state. The clean version you've got is the one that's got a green so far with South Australia'. And he said, 'That's the one we're having'. He was then contradicted by a senior bureaucrat and I was stunned to find out the political leader was being contradicted by a relatively-junior – I mean, you know, in terms of power play – junior officer, bureaucrat. And it was a fight of the ignorant because the Minister was a fellow called Doug Lowe and he was actually very well-informed and competent, whereas the bureaucrat concerned or the bureaucrats concerned were not, they'd never read the stuff or anything. Of course one of the things we did was used, whatever agreements we'd reached with Dunstan, all those agreements would be automatically incorporated and that document became the next phase of the negotiating document. So the negotiating document, after the first one, when we put the first version out and we said, 'We want to negotiate it state by state', when we did that – and we didn't want it to have one meeting because we knew that we would get swamped, so we

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decided to focus on South Australia and use the fact that Dunstan was so keen about this stuff to change – every time, if we made an agreement, ‘concession’ is not the word, but if we agreed with South Australia that that was the way to go, that became the standard document which we then applied to the next state. We would send that version back to – I mean on this particular trip we ended up with South Australia, so we got that agreement, we then sent that right back around the track and said, ‘Well, this is where we’ve reached; we’d like you to come to the same position because we think this is a principled position’. Now, that was only made feasible because of the clarity of instruction that came out of the bureaucracy in South Australia, and the negotiating leadership was expressed by Dunstan.

I was actually able to see him, no other ministers present – I mean, Uren didn’t come with me in negotiations except in Queensland – oh, once in Victoria – everything else was settled because of the authority that he gave to it and that I was then able to, in a sense, benefit from. Not that I touted his name, but the fact that we had a document which was clear, protected states’ rights, gave them resources under sensible conditions of probity and proper processes, and get on with it, and he then removed the barriers to make sure that they did work. We’d say, ‘Well, look, if the South Australians can do it, surely you can’ – which wasn’t always the best tactic. (laughter)

Did you meet any of the other ministers here, have anything to do with Corcoran or – – –?

Yes, I met Corcoran a few times but I also met –

In those days Don Hopgood was also – – –.

– I met Hopgood, Hopgood was the minister responsible at one point.

For Monarto.

He was also responsible for the Land Commission program.

So he was, yes.

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So I had good and sensible conversations with him, although Dunstan was still the best one. But the one who I later on had to deal with was Hudson and he was a bit too much of a market economist to really pick up and run with the nuances, whereas Dunstan had a much better sense of the mix – the reason why you had to have probity and all those aspects of administration, but he also had a social policy agenda which was articulated, it wasn't something which was hidden that you didn't know about, so there was a divergence of emphasis. I mean, Dunstan had the clearest understanding of all that urban stuff of all of them. I mean Hopgood was a really nice man, I liked dealing with all those people but I was just dealing with people around the place. There was only one minister outside of South Australia – the South Australian ministry itself was much more competent and much more intelligent and better-read than most; the only other person that really stood out in my mind was Doug Lowe from Tasmania, and I dealt with a lot of ministers. But he became a tragic figure and was destroyed by the Labor Party, unfortunately. So anyway, that was my experiences with Dunstan.

I think that's a pretty full coverage, thank you, Pat. Any concluding remarks?

No, I just wished – I mean it was always said to me that what happened afterwards, because the Land Commission – I believe, I'll go to my grave believing, that under Taeuber's leadership and until Ramsay –

Died too young.

– yes, he died too young. Ramsay was a very interesting, innovative bureaucrat. He was replaced on the Land Commission by John Mant, who was Peter Hudson's head of the department at that point, and John's a very urbane, civilised human being but didn't understand the issues in quite the same way. So my take on it was that there were – well, as I've said, just incredible openness dealing with people in the South Australian administration which I've never experienced anywhere else in quite the same degree. So my recollections of Don were always very good ones. I mean we disagreed, we disagreed, but you had a position, you argued for it; if you didn't win,

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you didn't win. You sorted that out and went on to the next point on the agenda, as it were. But there was always progress because he didn't renege on things. I mean, he struck the bargain, that was it. That's what characterised the South Australian administration generally. I wouldn't say that – I mean I'm currently in the middle of a huge brawl with the Federal Government and I simply can't believe the lack of integrity that you're facing, because when you go into these negotiations you just don't know what you're going to come out with because you just don't know whether they're going to continue to agree with what they agreed upon yesterday or last week, what you put in writing or they conceded in writing, and they change position. That never happened here. It was a tradition that Dunstan inherited and built on.

Yes, that's a good way of putting it, yes.

I think it got lost later when other people got in the game. And I've always had a certain sadness that the ambition that was dealt out or defined for the Land Commission, when it lost its way – well, it didn't lose its way but government lost its way, and then economic circumstances changed and the Land Commission ceased to be as effective as it was. And then when it was changed to being just a land supply and –

Trust, yes.

– land trust it was sad because the thing that stood out is that – I used to compare it with the Land Commission that operated in Wales, which was roughly the same size in terms of the population it was dealing with. but the Land Commission program here – so I compared the Land Commission here with other, similar bodies around the world, and I went to see the Land Commission program in Wales when I was recruiting staff at one point We actually had a program here which was producing four thousand lots a year at that time, and they had a total staff of I think it was, twenty-three, twenty-four; the Land Commission in Wales had a staff of something like two hundred and fifty and was producing a thousand lots. The cost overheads,

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the complexity, the bureaucracy, the madness, the intransigence, no-one prepared to see the wood for the trees: contrast was just amazing. I had the same kind of view that – and, as far as I was concerned, all the internal documentation indicated that it was a great success, but it wasn't being allowed to run properly for the last few years. So when you compared it with like-minded organisations in other places you didn't have an equal. It was an administrative initiative, political administrative initiative, which just when it was revealing its strengths was decimated for ideological reasons, and that was sad. That was really sad.

Well, thank you, Pat, that was very good.

Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW