

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

LC Members Ante-Room, Parliament House, Sydney

Wednesday 12 September 2018

The discussion commenced at 10:00 am

PRESENT

Mr David Blunt

Dr David Clune

Mr Richard Jones

Dr CLUNE: How did you become a member of the Legislative Council?

Mr JONES: I got involved in politics back in 1971-72 when I was trying to stop the destruction of Myall Lakes, which is now a national park. I wrote back and forth to Premier Robin Askin, as he was then. He said, "Well, you may know about publishing, Mr Jones, but you know nothing about politics", which was like a red rag to a bull. So I abandoned my career and that new trail led me to standing for the Legislative Council in 1988. I gave up an extremely highly paid job back in 1972 to campaign for the environment. I was at the top of my earning capacity. I was general manager of Hamlyn House. I had a property portfolio I was building up as well. Anyway, I gave all that up. I was approached by Armon Hicks, who was Lis Kirkby's offside, to stand for the upper House back in 1984. He said, "Would you like to be an MLC?" I said, "I would rather be a senator actually", just jokingly. He said, "If you want to be an MLC follow this path. First of all you have to stand for the lower House. You have to stand in the next election"—which was 1984—"for Warringah", where I got about six per cent. It was pretty pathetic, really. Then I stood again for the Senate and I was third on the ticket. And then, come the 1988 election, I was second on the Council ticket. But Paul McLean who was number one on the ticket became a senator, leaving me in the number one spot.

During the election campaign I worked with all of the minor parties, with people like Milo Dunphy, Jack Munday, Millie Ingram and a whole myriad of others. We used to meet every week or so. It was called the party party. We all agreed to swap preferences. There was formidable opposition with people like Milo Dunphy and Chris Townend, the animal liberation person, and a very high-quality team of others. It turned out that preferences came my way. They piled up. I got about 2.6 per cent the first time around—not a very good showing but the competition was fierce. Then I built up the numbers to get a 6.25 per cent quota. After that, I said, "I will represent your interests when I am there. So I will not be just an Australian Democrat, I will also represent the Aboriginal community as though I were Millie Ingram and Milo Dunphy, Chris Townend and Colin Charlton of the Nuclear Disarmament Party.

I regarded myself as not just a single Democrat but as a representative of all those people whose preferences elected me, which I thought was fair enough. But that did not necessarily go down as well with the Democrats themselves because they spent an awful lot of time, money and effort, such as people handing out how-to-vote cards, to get me there. Nevertheless, I was faithful to the Democrats and faithful to everything they stood for; it is just that I had this aim when I met with Aboriginal people and others to make sure their interests were well represented.

That is how I became a member, just working hard. I had a high profile. I had the magazine *Simply Living* at the time; I had a business; I was a high-profile campaigner for the environment, for animals and so on. The Democrats recognised that I was a good person to recruit, as I would have a chance of getting in.

Dr CLUNE: When you arrived, what was your impression of the Legislative Council and its effectiveness?

Mr JONES: When I first arrived Labor was sitting there, shell-shocked after losing office, and I said, "Come on guys, get a spine. You have got to start from scratch." I was fresh and I had not got that attitude of, "Oh my God, we have just lost government after 12 years." It would have been a hell of a shock for them being on the other side on the Opposition benches. They took a while to gather themselves together. They were just sitting there in a state of shock for quite a while. We had to be their backbone. That sounds very arrogant but they were just bewildered.

I did not have any experience prior to that so I did not know how frustrating it was to sit there as a member just watching things go past and not being able to have any effect. But for me holding the balance of power was a normal thing from day one. I think I was awestruck by the whole place and how on earth had I got there. I thought it was a very exciting time, of course. There was much more toing and froing. I just thought the whole place became alive somehow. It is a wonderful Chamber, really.

The very first thing we did was when Nick Greiner had a regulation which we knocked off, which was quite satisfying. Frank Walker brought in legislation in 1978 to allow half the stamp duties revenue to go to the Aboriginal community as a compensation fund and Nick Greiner tried to stop it but we stopped that happening.

Dr CLUNE: You obviously saw the rise of the crossbenches to the balance of power as a positive development?

Mr JONES: Well, yes. I was not arrogant enough to think I could run the Government from the crossbench, which we were accused of in the *Herald* one time by Nick Greiner. I did not think that but I thought it was the opportunity now to work for all the things I had been writing about in *Simply Living* magazine and

campaigning for with the various organisations I had been involved in. The original reason I stood for Parliament was I wanted to get in there to do something and now I was there. I felt now I would be able to do something, hopefully, for all the obvious issues that I cared about plus many more.

Dr CLUNE: With your background in business, did you take an interest in economic and financial legislation as well?

Mr JONES: Yes, absolutely. Michael Egan, later Treasurer, was surprised that I was so fiscally conservative and outrageously green at the same time. I had been the general manager of a public corporation so I knew how dollars and cents worked. I was adamant about not wasting taxpayers' money. I talked to Treasury quite a bit. I made submissions to the Expenditure Review Committee from time to time and it actually adopted a recommendation of mine, which is interesting. I talked to them quite a bit about it. I managed to get Premier Peter Beattie on side. Treasury said to me, "Can you get Queensland to increase its tax on cigarettes?" I said I would give it a go. So I wrote to Peter Beattie and said, "What are you doing? Having a low tax on cigarettes is causing an outflow of people getting their cheap cigarettes in Queensland." Peter wrote back and said, "Okay, I will increase them." That sort of thing happened from time to time. I made all sorts of submissions to government—not publicly; it was done more privately.

The thing is, though, that I did not really understand at that time what the full implications of the neo-liberal agenda were. I was somewhat naïve. I just thought some things need to be in public hands and some things can do better in private hands. I was not aware of the sort of gradual creeping privatisation of every public asset. I was not really conscious that was part of the agenda: public is bad, private is good. I just looked at everything on its merits, like privatisation of the State Bank, and persuaded Ian Cohen to support it. He said, "You misled me on that one Richard". Today I think some of those things were not so great. I think we should have kept the State Bank in public hands, as a matter of fact. I supported that because I was fiscally conservative.

I looked at everything on its merits and worked with the Greiner Government. I supported a lot of quite conservative fiscal changes because I just felt it was the right thing to do from my experience in business, extensive experience in business. So that was one side. Also, they did concede some things to me on my social and green agenda; they were not too bad within their limits. A conservative government obviously has severe limits. I used to have meetings with Nick Greiner one on one. He said on one environmental matter, "Tim Moore has gone too far on this".

Garry West, the Minister for Forests back then, said that he would not add another stick to the national parks system. That is what I was fighting. One year, we managed to get a national park out of the Government, the Bongil Bongil National Park. Chris Hartcher, who was the Environment Minister of the day, said in the House, "This is a Christmas present for Richard Jones." I tell you, it was like getting blood out of a stone getting national parks out of those guys.

Nick and I had quite productive conversations, it was very friendly, but also some enormous rows. There was nobody else present, it was just the two of us, but we used to be on equal terms. I was not afraid of him and he was not afraid of me. Nick did do one interesting thing. I made a speech here about selling off Crown land for \$1 an acre. They were converting Crown land to freehold and selling it and then loosening the controls over that land. I said, "You've got to stop this, Nick", and he did, he actually stopped it—for the moment, because now this current Government is doing it all over again. Victories are sometimes short-lived.

Mr BLUNT: I remember in your valedictory speech you referred to an incident where Nick Greiner came to you and asked you to help defeat something in the Legislative Council.

Mr JONES: Daylight saving. I tried to help but the Labor Party was playing hard ball. I did not tell them that Nick Greiner had asked me to help. Nick said, "Please try and get them to vote against it". I went to the Labor Party but they said "No, the National Party want this and we're going to let them hang themselves". I said, "Sorry, Nick, I can't do it. They won't be in it".

Dr CLUNE: As well as your causes and your economic interests, there were a huge number of issues that you were called upon to vote and decide upon. How did you cope with that?

Mr JONES: I had a team of brilliant young women, all PhD types, and I gave them complete power over negotiating and talking to Ministers and staffers. Others tried to pinch my staff half the time. I did not do it myself; I had brilliant people working for me and they analysed everything. We had a system; we had about three people there, brilliant people, and when we got new legislation we looked at who it affected, whatever it was, and we sent out copies all over the place, whether it be to car wreckers or whether it be a lending agency or whether it be builders or whatever, and they were all informed about the legislation, because often they were not even consulted. "We didn't know about this", they used to say to us.

Then we used to have meetings of the crossbenchers and call them in and discuss the legislation and they gave their concerns to us—"This is outrageous"—and that was the basis. We did not do it on our own; we did it in consultation with whatever the industry or business was—nurses, whoever—we did it with them, and they had direct consultation through us. Then we went to the Government and said, "Here are our amendments." One of the interesting things was that Lis Kirkby and I were incredibly active with amendments to legislation—I think we made more amendments than anyone has ever done if you add them up, even to this day.

We knew it could only go so far with the government of the day and we negotiated and negotiated and then we had another set of amendments for Labor and we negotiated with them. So we had two sets of amendments—not all the time, but very often we had two sets of amendments. We had Labor amendments, which were much stronger, and we had the Government amendments, which were inevitably weaker. If Labor would not agree because they were too conservative on that issue, then we went with the Government amendments. We passed the Government amendments and Labor sat there saying, "What's going on?" and I said, "Well, you wouldn't negotiate". So they cottoned on that if they did not come with us then we would go with the Government very often—not every piece of legislation obviously, but whatever needed it in our view. That was the way we used to do it: pull in the community, pull in interest groups, pull in everybody who was associated with the issue, talk with them and get them to bring back submissions to us. We were like a Cabinet office on the side, as it were.

We used to have meetings of all the crossbenchers early in the week at 10 o'clock. There were not that many in those days, and Fred Nile and I used to be there as well, of course; we worked together. When I was first here I was quite rude to Fred Nile really. But in the end we became friends. I did not respect his politics but I respected him as a person and I still do. We still are friendly with each other now. Very often Lis and I, and depending on the time, Peter Breen and Ian Cohen, had the numbers anyway.

There was a time between 1991 and 1995 when the lower House Independents had the numbers there—Clover Moore, John Hatton and Peter Macdonald. We used to work with them after that because Fred and Elaine Nile had the balance in the upper House during that time. So it was a bit frustrating for us sitting there watching the stuff go by, but then when we had Clover Moore and Peter Macdonald and John Hatton in the lower House, and we got them to move amendments, we included them. So they became our equivalent in the lower House. We still had the balance of power but not here, in the lower House.

Dr CLUNE: You mentioned that you talked with the Government and Opposition. Was that a regular series of meetings?

Mr JONES: Yes, absolutely. We were constantly meeting with them. Eddie Obeid one time said, "Richard, I want to talk to you about this and this and this." I said, "Okay. Get the Lebanese food ready and I'll come down." I was joking but I got down to his office and he had this huge spread of Lebanese food. I thought, "Oh my God, I was just kidding."

We took our job so seriously. We had very good staffers. We took our roles so seriously, as though we were government, in a way. I think it worked really well, as a matter of fact. As I say, we were not opposing. We were just facilitating and working with and "Would you consider this?" and "Would you consider that?" They would go away and they would say, "No, we can't do that but we can do this." We were a constant hive of activity in negotiation. We were always negotiating, meetings here and meetings there. There was none of this ramming it through. They couldn't and that was the key to it. They never knew what the numbers were.

Dr CLUNE: How successful were you in obtaining support from the Government for the issues you were interested in?

Mr JONES: It depends on how far they could go and how far I wanted them to deviate from their agenda. They were very reasonable as far as they could be. In Estimates Committee hearings one time I asked George Souris, who was Minister for Forests at the time, "Why don't you have anything in the budget for eucalypt plantations?" It was all pine, pine, pine. They said, "No, we haven't got anything in the budget." Afterwards I said, "Why George? Why can't you do this?" He said, "Because you greenies won't allow us to log them." I said, "I will, and I will help pass resource security legislation if you plant the eucalypt plantations on already cleared land." He turned to the Forestry Commissioner and said, "Write the legislation."

That led to tens of thousands of hectares of eucalypt forests—not all necessarily in the right places—which have now become koala habitat, which I knew was going to happen. It was an interim measure so the koalas have breathing space. But 25 or 30 years later these trees are quite tall. My idea was to create jobs for the timber industry people not just then but also in the future and to have another resource. It worked quite well. They put in millions and millions of dollars. It did not last forever, of course, but it provided a bit of breathing space for the old growth forests. Now up our way we have problems with all the koalas in those plantations. It worked really well.

Dr CLUNE: We talked earlier about legislation. As we were saying, the number of amendments has greatly increased. Do you think this has led to better legislation?

Mr JONES: Inevitably, because the Government would never accept legislation unless they felt it was bearable at the very least. We were so careful with it. We used to read every piece of legislation. From beginning to end, every word of it was read. "Have you read the legislation?"; "Yes, we have." We really did our homework.

We had a big ding-dong battle with Terry Metherell one time on the education bill. I was negotiating with him directly and we got amendment after amendment through. It turned out to be much better legislation. The peculiar thing was that one of his advisers was a woman that I had founded a school with at Lane Cove, Currambena, back in 1969. She knew exactly what I was after for the children. She said, "Oh, it's you," sort of thing. The school is still going, by the way. We steered the legislation back to a much, much better situation for the children mainly. It was not done for an ideological reason; it was purely for the children's education. He was sitting here late at night, hammering his head and I said, "One more amendment, Terry, and it will go through." He said, "Are you sure?" I said, "Yep. One more, this one." He said, "Okay then," and he let that one through. It went through at 10 o'clock that night.

One of the early things I was doing in the Greiner administration was campaigning against forcing people to retire at the artificial age of 70, for example, retiring judges at 70. I started a new career at 70. I thought that was very ageist. So I started knocking these provisions in legislation off one by one. Finally they said, "Okay, we will delete all of those, we'll just knock it off altogether."

Dr CLUNE: Did you find Ministers fairly responsive on the whole?

Mr JONES: Yes, mostly. I talked to Barry O'Keefe when he was the ICAC commissioner. He was at a committee hearing giving evidence to us. I said to him, "What about doing deals with the government on legislation, you know, "You want that through, I want this through"? He said, "Well, that's called log rolling. No, that's not corrupt." I said, "Oh, good." And I would not do it if it were. It is perfectly okay. We had a strategy, a wonderful strategy actually, we always knew how we were going to vote. We had worked it out, we talked to the industry, talked to the unions, we talked to whoever might be affected and we worked out our position. We already knew but we did not let the government know. We never let them know.

In 1995 when the conveyancing bill was going through, the government came to me and said, "We want this conveyancing bill through. What's your view on this?" I said, "Oh, I really don't know." Of course I knew; I thought it was a great idea. This was on the Monday or the Tuesday. They said, "We want it through" because it was Bob Carr's baby. I said, "I want my duck bill through. If you want this through, I want my duck bill. I want to do it on Thursday." Incredibly arrogant, but I had been working on this since 1987. I was the very first person to go out there and protest about duck hunting. It was dear to my heart. We used to be outside Parliament here with dead ducks for several years before that. Every year we had all these dead ducks, including endangered ones. Pam Allan, the Minister for the Environment, said, "Oh Richard, I'm sure we can do this. Bob Carr wants to talk to you. He's going to call you." Bob Carr called me. He said, "Listen, we need more time on this." I said, "Bob, you have no more time. I want it through on Thursday." So arrogant, outrageously arrogant. You can look at the record. Fred Nile and John Tingle, fought it every step of the way but we won by one vote, one vote, one vote, one vote. It leapt past all the other legislation; it got through. Then, of course, John Tingle did a deal on the side to allow the shooters to be invited in. But it stopped the annual carnival of shooting ducks, which is still going on in Victoria. It may still happen but it is not celebrated any more. They still kill duck, but they do not do it in this big celebratory way. That was the power of them not knowing how I was voting. Wonderful stuff really.

There was the Cape Byron Marine Park, declared in 2002. It was scientifically acceptable; it was not as if it was some outrageous request. The Government were not planning it right then but it was on their list so we now have a marine park at Byron Bay. The major agenda was getting very large no-take zones in marine parks to protect the environment. We tried to convince the fishers that it would benefit them. My staffer went to New Zealand to check out the effect marine parks were having both on fish stocks and on the actual fishermen and fisherwomen themselves. They found that after a while, of course, that the fish were breeding at a much faster rate. When they survived in the marine parks they got bigger. Bigger fish produce a lot more fish than smaller breeding fish. It was beneficial to the fish, to the species, and of course to the industry and to the fishers. The fishers here do not understand that relationship.

Another time Ian Macdonald came to me in the chamber, "Mate, we want your vote on this". I said, "I don't know about that, Ian, I really don't know." "Mate, we've got to get it through. What do you want?" I said, "Oh, leave it with me." I went up to my room and I phoned the environment movement and got on to Keith Muir of the Colong Foundation. I said I thought we had an opportunity, let's try and get something for the environment. Keith Muir said, "Oh, yeah, well, we want \$5 million for the Dunphy Wilderness Fund, it's run out of money. We want to buy 48,000 hectares of old growth forest to link up the national parks so they have wildlife corridors." I

said, "Okay." I went back to the chamber and Ian said, "Well, what mate?" I said, "I want \$5 million for the Dunphy Wilderness Fund". He said, "Mate, you gotta be joking. The Premier won't want that." I said, "Well, go and ask him." So he went up and asked the Premier. Of course, Bob Carr said yes. He came back astonished about half an hour later, "The Premier wants to see you." I said, "Okay." I followed him up to the eighth floor to his office and Bob Carr was walking around the office rubbing his hands, "Something I want for a change." Because I knew that he had set up the Dunphy Wilderness Fund. Milo Dunphy was a personal friend of his and I knew that Michael Egan had the money in his slush fund and that he could fund it. So he said, "Call in Michael Egan." I said, "Michael, I know you can do it because you have got a flush slush fund, you can do this stuff."

We went to the Governor Macquarie Tower a few days later and we had the official re-funding of the Dunphy Wilderness Fund. I was standing there next to Lee Rhiannon and I think Ian Cohen was there and Bob Carr came striding in and said, "The cheque's in the mail, Richard." Lee Rhiannon looked at me and said, "What have you done now?" Well, we had just bought 48,000 hectares of forest, that's what I had done!

The Greens were purer than pure. They have this stand and it is based on ideology. I was not ideological, you see; I did not have this fix on ideology. The Democrats were very fluid so I was able to negotiate in my own portfolios quite easily. But The Greens did not negotiate very much, presumably because they did not feel they had the flexibility to do it. I would do whatever I could to amend legislation to make it better.

We did not have quite the same leverage with the Greiner administration because they were ideologically a bit fixed. The Carr administration was far more flexible in that respect and they were okay with our agenda anyway. They did not have to stretch very far. They would rather save the forests if they could. But the other side were, "We're not giving you that." That is why Bob Carr was happy to fund the wilderness fund because he was doing what he wanted to do anyway, so it was much easier. The other side was far more difficult. We did whatever we could. We took it as far as we could with what we thought we could on each thing. And that is all we could do.

We had a huge agenda and the agenda was very clear. It was to protect as much of nature as possible without destroying people's jobs. Look at the South East forests. It was very torrid with the unions. I was called the head of the "gang of four" by the CFMEU; they put a great big advertisement in the *Herald*. I was accused of trying to put people out of work. But we were not actually; what we were trying to do was to conserve the old-growth forests. Penny Wong came to see me in the Fountain Court in Parliament House and said, "Richard, what if we raid the Environmental Trust Fund and close the loggers down?" They had \$289 million or something like that at the time. I said, "Fine, raid the fund but don't close them down because they will just start up again. I don't care if every logger becomes a millionaire. I want to save the forest; I don't want to destroy their livelihood." "Oh, okay, great." They used that money to pay out the various people so they did not lose on it. Of course, they are still logging down there but not those particular forests. That was a good deal. It was a good deal for the loggers, it was a good deal for the forests and it was a good deal for the Government. No-one really missed out. The Trust Funds, of course, were stripped of their current balance but then it built up again. Today but it is a fair bit of money there.

Dr CLUNE: Do you think things work better in the New South Wales Legislative Council than in the Senate?

Mr JONES: Yes, no question. Some crossbenchers do not seem to have an agenda. They pluck things out of the air capriciously and say, "I want you to exclude the big banks from the tax cuts." Get real. I would never have proposed something like that, something as ridiculous as that. We had teams of people working with us both inside Parliament and outside of Parliament. We had links to everybody. The community was represented via us. It was not just us having a brainstorm of an idea and presenting it to the Government. These were all carefully thought out. I had my speeches very often written for me—not always. I was told don't deviate from the script.

There are one or two people in Federal Parliament who are just lunatics. Giving the balance of power to a lunatic is not a good idea but you cannot stop the people making those decisions. You need a broad cross-section of members without too much ideological baggage. The Shooters and Fishers have their ideological baggage and I guess Fred Nile has in particular, but if you can get non-ideological, ordinary people in there, people who do not have a particular barrow to push, I think it is very healthy for government. Do not forget governments are also influenced by vested interests, corporations, and they are obliged, they feel, to act in their interest. That is why good Independents can have a very powerful moderating influence, but they have to be non-ideological, in my view anyway.

Dr CLUNE: Another role of the upper House is the accountability role of keeping the Executive honest. Do you think that crossbench power led to better scrutiny of the Executive Government?

Mr JONES: Probably it would have. I think I put in one of my speeches that the Cabinet office is like the evil empire. As has been said, you put a minute into Cabinet office and it comes out the other side unrecognisable. It is hard when the Executive government itself is not necessarily an Executive government. Sometimes the Government does not have the courage to go against the Cabinet office and all the myriad of advisers. We used to talk to everybody. I had many talks with Gary Sturgess, for example, when he was there. I thought he was quite a reasonable guy, as a matter of fact. We talked to everybody. I think we probably did have an impact. It certainly was a moderating influence. It certainly took off some of the sharp edges. I remember Ted Pickering once swung around in his seat and said, "You save us from ourselves, Richard."

Most people, at least our mob, were basically reasonable people. They were not trying to work against government. I never tried to work against government and nor did Lis Kirkby. When we had the balance of power—almost on our own for a while—we never worked against government. We were not there to try to get our own agenda up and try to overturn the government. We facilitated and smoothed government. They were not our enemy. Both sides were our friends.

We recognised the mandate, but some things were just beyond the pale. Some things we would never support and we told them so. We said, "Whatever you try, we will never, never support you on that." Look at how much legislation was actually blocked. It was 1 or 2 per cent or something of that order. It was not much, you see. It was a reasonable process so the outcomes were reasonable. Chaos did not ensue as a result of them negotiating to pass their legislation.

Mr BLUNT: What is your general view of the Council committee system?

Mr JONES: I was chair of General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5 from 1997-2003. I thought it was wonderful that we could self-refer inquiries. The Rural Fire Services inquiry we had was a really good one. We examined the whole thing and we talked to so many different people and really got the views of people on the ground. We went all over the countryside and really got to know their concerns. I was congratulated afterwards for the report. It was not my report; I did not write the report, we all know that. The report covered so much about what they were concerned about and they were so happy with it. That enabled us then to put all their concerns and make major reforms.

Some of the inquiries had no effect, like the M5 tunnel. We tried and tried, but the RTA was so obdurate. They were like a kingdom of their own, a law unto themselves. I tried again and again on various issues with them, but they were just like, "No, we just do what we want to do. Basically, you can just get lost."

Mr BLUNT: Can you think of any other examples of committees that you were associated with that had a positive outcome?

Mr JONES: The Standing Committee on State Development inquiry into coastal development back in 1989, I think was pretty good. I think it made government and councils aware of the need to conserve natural spaces and to work within the catchment capacity rather than allowing untrammelled development. The oil spill one was another good one: the realisation that you do not put in chemicals and try to disrupt the oil; you actually allow it to break down naturally. That was an eye opener.

The committee on waste management, which I was on with Pam Allan back in the early days, I am still quoting today. My wife, who is head of the National Toxics Network, still uses that material. The report itself is somewhere gathering dust in the library but it is actually an extremely good report. What we discovered then is absolutely relevant today. That was quite an eye opener for a lot of people. We discovered about 90 per cent of all waste could be recycled or reused, only 10 per cent should end up in landfill. Of course, it has got a lot worse since then.

Mr BLUNT: Have you had any thoughts about how the committee system could be improved?

Mr JONES: I think the freer committees are, in the sense that the more they are able to be free acting agents, free from Government control as the General Purpose Committees were, the better. It is an irritant for the government, of course; they do not really want accountability. The more we can make government accountable via these committees the better, I think. The hung parliament with Peter Macdonald John Hatton and Clover Moore was a difficult time for Nick Greiner, of course, but it did not impede government. Government still goes on; they still get their agenda through; it still works. Look at the Julia Gillard Government. They got a lot of legislation through.

Mr BLUNT: You made use of the power that was confirmed by the High Court in the so-called Egan cases to order the production of documents on a number of occasions.

Mr JONES: Yes, absolutely. Again and again and again, constantly. It was a pain for the Government and governmental organisations and those bodies that do not like accountability. They do not like being exposed.

I think it is incredibly important, even if it is only read by members of Parliament. If it is not in the public view, it is still really important that they know they have to be accountable. Look at the banks inquiry, which was fiercely resisted by the conservatives but it finally got through. Now see what that has exposed. We absolutely need to have that breath of fresh air and exposure for the people.

Nothing really was for us as a party or me as an Independent. Everything was for the community upon their request. Saving the Finger Wharf, for example. I used to present petitions on the Finger Wharf day in and day out. I had all these petitions and would dribble them in. Then finally George Souris saw me in the street. He said, "Richard, I have seen all your petitions. What do you want to do with the Finger Wharf?" Finally they caved in. Even petitions have an impact.

Mr BLUNT: Who were the party leaders in the Council who impressed you the most and what was it that made their leadership effective?

Mr JONES: I am still friends with former Greiner Ministers. We are Facebook friends. I talk to Ted Pickering regularly on Facebook. Wendy Machin is a friend, as are quite a few others, including a former Attorney-General. A lot of members on both sides are still friends, which is interesting. I suppose Ted Pickering would be the one that stands out. Odd, isn't it? I did Ted a great favour and he did me a great favour. We were friends because he was a moderate person and he was, I thought, really good. Ted and I had a good relationship. One time there was a vote of no confidence in him by the Labor Party. I am not anti-Labor, I am not anti-anybody. Ted came to me and said, "Richard, if you support this"—because Lis Kirkby supported it—"I am going to have to resign." I said, "Really? Then I won't support it". I made sure he did not have to resign because we would have lost a really good guy.

When Ted Pickering was Minister for Local Government we had a big battle up Byron Bay way where the National Party wanted to divide the whole local government area into little wards. It meant that they would probably gain control of the council. It was a huge battle and it looked like they were going to win. I went to Ted and he had the power to say no to it. It was his very last day as Local Government Minister. I went to his office and said, "Ted, can you help us out on this?" He said, "I'll do it for you, Richard." So he said no and the National Party have never gained control of the council. He did not like the National Party much; they were far too conservative. He was a moderate Liberal. He was like the old style Liberal, like a real "small l" liberal. If they had those kinds of Liberals now in government in Canberra they would not be in the parlous state they are in. So I had a fondness for Ted Pickering. Even though we were on different sides of the fence on a number of things, he was just a very amiable, good person to work with.

Michael Egan and I were mates as well, but we did not have a close personal relationship. A few like John Ryan and others I had friendships with, if not personal friendships. We just had a great respect for each other. John Hannaford was a very good person too. He was very honourable and very easy to work with. Virginia Chadwick, I had a bit to do with her, of course, as well and she was also good.

Mr BLUNT: Who were some other members who impressed you and, again, what was it about them that impressed you?

Mr JONES: I think of all the multiplicity of different characters. A lot of people were friends. I think Brian Pezzutti was a very funny character. I felt he really should not be there, in a funny sort of way. He should have been an anaesthetist. He would say, "I get more money on one day doing my anaesthetist work" etc. Sir Adrian Solomons I felt was a really nice person, too. John Ryan was a really good guy. He should have been a Minister. He should absolutely have been. He was so good with all his work. He was so good with constituents. He was so authentic. We worked together on a lot of stuff. I was friends with both sides. John would have been a brilliant minister. He should never have been relegated like that. It was just disgraceful. It was so crazy. Such a good man. Not from the upper House, but he could have been Premier. He would have been so honest and so good. Never mind. It is history now.

Ann Symonds was a very, very lovely person. Meredith Burgmann was really good. She was quite radical. I liked all of them, basically—well maybe not all; there were one or two I did not. You see, I got on with most people but there were a few who impressed me in the unfavourable sense. But they all had their different capacities and different attitudes. I guess when you are working together in the hothouse of parliament you have to get on with each other. You cannot be fighting all the time. That is why I got on with Fred Nile in the end, even though we were the most ideological opposites of anybody in the House. Even John Tingle was good. I had been a shooter myself, but not animals, of course, so I could understand what his sport was. We were on opposite sides of the fence, but he and I got on really well too.

Ian Cohen was easy to work with and Peter Breen, of course. We are still friends. I still see them regularly. And Alan Corbett; my wife used to work with Alan Corbett. Ian did not always necessarily agree with me. He

thought I was a soft green, or something like that, not a real green. He used to attack me from time to time quite unnecessarily. But on the whole they were all easy to work with.

Dr CLUNE: What about the other Greens, such as Lee Rhiannon?

Mr JONES: I like Lee, actually, although she is highly controversial. She and I got on quite well together. I advised her. I said, "Lee, you're coming across as far too brittle and far too aggressive. People are not reacting well to the way you are coming across." I was able to say that to her and she would say, "Oh, really?" We still give each other a hug when we see each other. We are still friends. We do not see each other all the time, but I had no problem with her. Obviously, she is ideologically based, but I have no problem at all with people who are ideologically based stating their case. We were friends. She was not close to Ian Cohen at all, and he will tell you at length why not. They have got the Eastern Bloc and the green Greens, you see. I thought it was a pity for the Greens to have become ideological because I am not an ideological person. I just think it is not good to govern the people from an ideological point of view. You have to govern from the people's point of view and not from some rigid ideology, which you are stuck with and which is probably 50 years out of date.

Mr BLUNT: What is your general assessment of the Legislative Council and its role today?

Mr JONES: The same as it was then, I guess. Thanks for the good old days, I think. I am hoping personally that after the next election—I am not quite sure how the numbers will pan out—that it will become much more moderate than it has been for the last few years because it has worried me seeing the stuff that has been going through. Obviously the government of the day has to pander to the crossbench who have the numbers. Some of the work that we did back then is now being sort of undone bit by bit. So from a personal perspective I am hoping that the numbers change so that we get a more moderate upper House.

Mr BLUNT: Do you have any suggestions about how the Legislative Council's effectiveness could be improved?

Mr JONES: Not really. I think it is really effective. I just think it is up to the people out there. I am not aligned to either major party; I am not aligned to any party actually right now. It is up to the people to vote in and try to identify the people who genuinely represent their interests and not just vote along party lines, not be rusted onto the Liberals, The Nationals or Labor. It would be good if we could try to get people like the Peter Macdonalds, the Clover Moores and the John Hattons of this world, people of that calibre, who are not coming from a particular ideological position, to represent the people. It would be a much better upper House if the people can identify who these people are and vote for them and get them into a balance-of-power situation, regardless of who is in government. If you have got those sort of people there you are bound to get a much better government altogether. That is what I am hoping will happen. We need broad-based experience, not just party hacks and staffers getting into Parliament and just toeing the party line. When I was in there, I used to come down for a vote and often Labor or Liberal MLCs would be saying, "What are we voting for? What is this? What is the vote about?" I mean, that is not democracy.

Mr BLUNT: Richard, what do you believe your main achievements were during your time as a member of the Legislative Council?

Mr JONES: Getting McDonald's to drop their expanded polystyrene boxes in 1989. A lot of things went on under the radar, you see. This is a funny thing. It was only because I was a member of parliament that I was able to do it. We had a big harbour clean-up in 1989 in about March. I took two great big bags of expanded polystyrene to their headquarters in West Pennant Hills and said, "Look at this." Well, the media followed. I had a meeting with the vice-president who said, "Well, what are we going to do?" I said, "Well, use cardboard. Why can't you use cardboard?" The vice-president gave evidence at one of our committee hearings a decade later and he said, "You got us to change our packaging, Mr Jones." I said, "Good." You work out how many billions of pieces of plastic did not go into the environment because of that. That was one of the under-the-radar things.

I had my legislation to ban smoking in cars. I had it sitting there and it never actually succeeded at the time but it got up later. That was a very personal thing because my lungs were affected by my parents smoking, who both died before 60. The duck legislation, of course, was a big one, getting that through. I had been working on that from the beginning. That took eight years. Of course, there was the \$5 million for the 48,000-odd hectares of land, which was a very satisfying thing, and the Cape Byron Marine Park. The South East forests was a big one. Some things I did on my own but with most of the issues, like the South East forests, it was a huge community issue involving lots and lots of people. I do not claim responsibility for that but I managed just at the very end to get it over the line. Other things were the result of personal, quiet negotiations with Ministers, like expanding the national parks system, which was my whole thing.

I have been driven by a passion to save nature and the environment and, of course, Aboriginal rights. I was the only one to go to La Perouse when they pushed the front fence over in Macquarie Street at a demonstration.

They were in terrible trouble. Everyone condemned them except for me. I went to see them. I was the only parliamentarian to go there to talk to them about their grievances. I was regarded as their person in Parliament. They used to come in and see me all the time.

It was a great privilege to be in Parliament. I can say that I was aware I was here for only a limited time. Right from day one all the way through, I tried to do my absolute best. I was never sitting back and taking it easy. I was always working on behalf of the people and the environment in New South Wales, all the way through. Lis Kirkby and others did the same thing. Ian Cohen did the same thing. We took it extremely seriously. It was not just a fun job; it was an extremely important position of responsibility to be in. I am very grateful to have had the chance to do it and represent the people of New South Wales.

Mr BLUNT: Richard, on behalf of my predecessors who worked with you, all the staff of the department who worked with you over the years, including those who are still here, I thank you for making yourself available for the interview today and for sharing with us all the experiences and recollections that you have. I thank you for making our lives interesting, challenging at times but it was so interesting when you were here. I also thank you for your service to the Legislative Council and through the Council to the people of New South Wales.

Mr JONES: Thank you. It was a great privilege.

Dr CLUNE: Thank you, Richard, for those fascinating and stimulating insights.

Discussion concluded 11:20 a.m.