

PARLIAMENTARY HISTORY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

AND

STATE LIBRARY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

TRANSCRIPT OF AN INTERVIEW WITH

HON. GIZ WATSON

b. 1957 -

STATE LIBRARY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA - ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

DATE OF INTERVIEW: 2015-2016

INTERVIEWER: ANNE YARDLEY

TRANSCRIBER: ANNE YARDLEY

DURATION: 19 HOURS

REFERENCE NUMBER: OH4275

COPYRIGHT: PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA &
STATE LIBRARY OF WESTERN
AUSTRALIA.

Our ref: BA/OH/15/0262

THIS DEED made the eighth day of June 2017

BETWEEN **Hon. Giz Watson** of **19 Evandale Street, Floreat. WA 6014**
(hereinafter called 'the Author')

AND PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA (hereinafter called the Parliament) AND THE LIBRARY BOARD OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA, a body corporate constituted by the Library Board of Western Australia Act 1951 of Alexander Library building, Cultural Centre, Perth (hereinafter called 'the Board').

WHEREAS:

- A. A digital recording has been made and transcribed, with the consent of the Author, of an interview or interviews held between the Author and a representative of the Parliament in 2015 - 2016.
- B. The subject matter of the recording is of historical interest to the Parliament, the Board, and to the Australian public at large.

NOW THIS DEED WITNESSES AS FOLLOWS:

- 1. The Author HEREBY ASSIGNS to the Parliament of Western Australia and the Library Board of Western Australia all that copyright which the author now has, or at any time hereafter may have in the recording and transcription for the whole world for the full term of such copyright SUBJECT to the reservations (if any) contained in the First Schedule hereto.
- 2. The expression 'the Author' where herein appearing shall mean and include the heirs, executors, administrators and assigns of the Author.

SIGNED SEALED AND
DELIVERED by the AUTHOR

G. Watson
(author)

IN THE PRESENCE OF:

[Signature]
(witness)

THE COMMON SEAL of
THE LIBRARY BOARD
OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
was hereto affixed in the presence of



[Signature] DATE 4 July 2017

The First Schedule

1. Publication (cross out whichever does not apply)

~~I do not wish to be advised of any requests to publish this material or part thereof.~~

OR

I wish to be advised of any requests to publish this material or part thereof until 20 21. I agree to keep the library advised of my current address.

2. Internet access (cross out whichever does not apply)

I give permission for the interview to be available on the internet.

OR

~~I do not give permission for the interview to be available on the internet until 20 21.~~

G. W. Watson
(signed)

8.6.2017
(date)

NOTE TO READER

Readers of this oral history memoir should bear in mind that it is a verbatim transcript of the spoken word and reflects the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Parliament and the State Library are not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein; these are for the reader to judge.

Bold type face indicates a difference between transcript and recording, as a result of corrections made to the transcript only, usually at the request of the person interviewed.

FULL CAPITALS in the text indicate a word or words emphasised by the person interviewed.

Square brackets [] are used for insertions not in the original tape.

CONTENTS

Contents	Pages
Introduction	1
<i>Interview - 1</i> Parents, family life and childhood; migrating from England; school and university studies – Penrhos/ Murdoch University; religion – Quakerism, Buddhism; countryside holidays and early appreciation of Australian environment; Anti-Vietnam marches; civil-rights movements; Activism; civil disobedience; sport; studying environmental science; Albany; studying for a trade.	4 - 22
<i>Interview - 2</i> Environmental issues; Campaign to Save Native Forests; non-violent Direct Action; Quakerism; Alcoa; community support and debate; Cockburn Cement; State Agreement Acts; campaign results; legitimacy of activism; “eco- warriors”; Inaugural speech .	23 - 38
<i>Interview - 3</i> Graduate from Murdoch University; move to England; squatting and Islington Community Housing Association; Carpentry and Joinery Trade Certificate; Greenham Common Women’s Peace Group; Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament; Peace Movement; War Resisters; peace protests in England; Direct Action training; opposing militarism; class and gender issues; politics and political culture in Europe; consensus decision making in Greens Party and Parliament.	39 - 59
<i>Interview - 4</i> Influence of European politics/politics of the Left; returning to WA- Albany and involvement with local conservation issues; women in the trades; Anarchism and Socialism; Builders Registration; trade unions; Coordinator of the Marine Coastal Community Network; Cockburn Cement and Cockburn Sound; marine reserves; role of political representative; volunteer groups.	60 - 80
<i>Interview - 5</i> Environmental groups leading up to Greens Party (WA) – Green Development, Alternative Electoral Coalition, Vallentine Peace Group; joining the Green’s Party; candidate for South West Region and campaigning (1990); 1990 election; Greens Party policies, meetings, regional /grassroots base, community support and membership, etc.	81 - 102
<i>Interview - 6</i> 1993 Election; campaign to get Jim Scott elected; electioneering;	103 - 124

joining the Australian Greens; Green's policy making in early days; economic policy and scrutinising government expenditure; image and perceptions of the Greens; candidate selection; working in the Perth building industry; consensus decision-making; Jo Vallentine; 1996 Election; winning North Metro seat; early days as parliamentarian.

Interview - 7

124 - 144

Paris Agreement (COP 21); global warming; renewable energy initiatives;

Parliament building and working conditions; George Cash; induction to Parliament; Maiden Speech (sexual identity, economic rationalism, aboriginal people and culture, Native Title, criminal law and prison population.

Interview - 8

145 - 166

1997 Balance of power in Upper House; debates in the Upper House; Democrats and Green members modus operandi; Select Committee on Native Title; Parliamentary Committees (Standing and Select); effect of party status in operation of Parliament; representing the electorate and electorate office; local government and party politics.

Interview - 9

167 - 189

Committee representation – Select Committee on Child Advocacy, Standing Committee on Legislation; Estimates Committee; Select Committees; passing legislation; question time and minor parties; minor parties in the lower house; Genetically Modified(GMO) debate; Richard Court; working relationship with other members; sexism in Parliament.

Interview – 10

190 - 209

Misuse of Drugs Amendment (1999- 2000); impact of Greens on Parliament (1997 -2000); Native Title Bill; Hairdressers Registration Board deregistration;

2001 Election – electioneering, issues; rise of One Nation; Dee Margetts;

Robin Chapple; increase in primary vote; 5 Greens elected; Geoff Gallop – election of Labor Government; consensus decision making and shared leadership model –co-convenors.

Interview - 11

210 - 231

2001 Election; old growth logging; economics of logging; Biodiversity Protection legislation; wildlife protection; Drug Summit ; government responses to community issues – drugs, domestic violence, prison system, incarceration, justice system, refugees; gay law reform (Lesbian and Gay Law Reform Bill 2001); marriage equality.

232 - 252

Interview - 12

2016 Federal Election - preselection process for seat of O'Connor;

changes to Senate voting process; micro parties; Geoff Gallop – electoral reform; One vote One value reform; Biodiversity Conservation Bill; protection and penalties for breaches.

Interview – 13

253 - 274

Candidate for O'Connor (Federal 2016 Election); mentors in Parliament; Laurie Marquet investigation; Role of Corruption and Crime Commission (CCC) in Parliamentary and Police investigations; Parliament investigating itself – Select Committee to investigate politicians; confiscation of assets; campaign funding; Public Health issues and interests– anti smoking, preventative medicine, aboriginal health, sexual health and sex workers, decriminalising sex work.

Interview – 14

275 - 291

Green's policy and policy formation on issues - public health issues (Euthanasia, advanced health directives, palliative care); domestic violence; environmental health; women in Parliament – Old Boys Network; quota versus merit based system for women.

Interview - 15

292 - 308

Results for Green's in 2016 Federal Election; Greens Party less radical and treated more like a major party; assessment of election results; support base; marginalised voters; campaigning and result of election; 2017 State Election – voter issues –telecommunication, local employment, economic policy, GST, downstreaming, and diversify the economy; Uranium mining.

Interview - 16

309 - 325

Expectations for 2017 State Election; reflections on Proportional Representation (PR) System; role of Parliament and its operations; Committee work; role of Legislative Council; transparency and Parliamentary Privilege; accountability for politicians; ways to improve the Council; advice for new politicians; future of the Greens Party in the political debate.

Introduction

The Hon. Giz Watson, MLC, was interviewed by Anne Yardley between September 2015 and August 2016 for the Parliamentary History Project of the Parliament of Western Australia and the J S Battye Library of West Australian History.

The interviews cover Giz's early life in England, the family move to Australia, her school experiences and studies at Murdoch University resulting in an environmental science degree. She became involved in the direct action Campaign to Save Native Forests and went on to train groups in non-violent direct action. Following a stint living in England, Giz became a registered builder and ran her own business. She joined the newly formed Greens (WA) party in 1990 and has acted as state convenor and co-convenor.

In 1997, Giz Watson was elected to the Legislative Council as MLC for North Metropolitan region and was re-elected in 2001, 2005 and 2008. At the state election in 2013, Giz ran for the South West region but was unsuccessful. She was the first openly lesbian parliamentarian in Australia and championed gay and lesbian law reform.

Giz was a particularly active parliamentary committee member, serving on the Standing Committee on Legislation; Parliamentary Services Committee. She was the Chair of the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations; a member of the Select Committee on the Department of Education and Training as well as six other select committees between 1997 and 2009. Her work on these committees is discussed in the interviews.

Also discussed are her observations about the role of the Legislative Council, the Greens (WA) and the wider environmental and conservation movement. Giz talks about the Greens position on the One Vote One Value legislation, proportional representation and their commitment to consensus decision making. The more significant issues that came before the parliament during her time there are also covered.

At the end of 2016, Giz is working on the Greens (WA) campaign for the March 2017 state election.

[GizWatson_1]

AY This is the first in a series of interviews with Giz Watson, who was the Legislative Council member for North Metropolitan from 1997 to 2013. It's being conducted at her home in Floreat. Today is Tuesday, September the 8th 2015. The interview is for the Parliamentary History Project and the interviewer is Anne Yardley.

Giz, let's start with full name, date and place of birth.

WATSON Sure. My full name is Giz Watson. I was born on the 18th of January 1957. I was born just out of Southampton in the southern part of England at a place called Eastleigh it says on my passport, so there you go [chuckles]. I don't remember that bit.

AY Who were your parents and what did they do?

WATSON My father, his name is David Stewart Watson. He was a GP, now retired. He specialised in obstetrics. He did quite a lot of work with Aboriginal health and he was a very enthusiastic traveller. He had a strong history of naval connections through his father and grandfather. Mum's name before she was married was Ruth Marcia Town-Jones. She was a nurse and then went on to work in health education, some of the early campaigns on anti-smoking and drugs in this state, and has put a lot of her time and energy into the Quakers¹. That is a snapshot of my parents [chuckles]. They were both born in England and we migrated out here in '67.

AY A snapshot then of the rest of your family; your siblings and your place in the family.

WATSON There are four children. I have an older brother who was born James, but is now Abdul Wahab. He's just over a year older than me. I have two younger sisters, one called Rosalind, who's a psychologist, and she's based in Albany these days. My youngest sister is Catherine. She's a nurse and also lives in Albany with her daughter and is working in Aboriginal health down there.

¹ Quakers, or the Religious Society of Friends was founded in seventeenth century England. Quakers are notable for their commitment to nonviolence, their belief of 'that of God in everyone', their mostly silent worship, consensus decision making or 'sense of the meeting' and peacemaking efforts. The Quakers were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947.

AY What do you remember of the UK, of England, before you came out?

WATSON Well, I've got pretty good memories largely. We lived in a very beautiful part of the country. For the majority of the time that I remember, we lived in the countryside in a small village called Botley, which is about 15 minutes' drive out of Southampton, which is a very large port town. The countryside was beautiful. We had a piece of woods, what is called a copse, at the back of the house. Certainly, my brother and I spent a lot of time playing outside on our bikes or going down to the river. I have very clear and sharp memories of the English countryside and every time I revisit I delight in knowing the woods, the fields and knowing what I grew up with. I don't have particularly fond memories of school there. School there was pretty challenging and scary. I was at a private girls' school and I think they were pretty strict in retrospect. I went off there when I was four, which was quite young [chuckles], now I realise, looking at grandkids and thinking how vulnerable and young you are at that age. But that was the sort of tradition, so that's what you did. It toughened you up [laughs].

AY What led to your father's decision to come here? Why Australia?

WATSON I think he was concerned about the direction with the national health system in England and he thought that it might be being attacked or reduced in its capacity, so that was certainly a factor. He was also quite adventurous. He had travelled to Canada, he'd been a ship's doctor, so he had a bit of an adventurous spirit as well. I believe the clincher was one very wet holiday which we had, I think, in Wales where we went away for the annual summer holiday and it rained nonstop for two weeks [chuckles]. I believe at that point they said, "That's it. We've got to get out of here; it's too miserable." They tossed up actually between Canada and Australia, but he applied for a job in Mandurah and was offered a job as one of the doctors at the practice down there, so weather and politics, I suppose [chuckles].

AY What did you and your siblings think of this?

WATSON Look, to me it was a great adventure. I was nine when we were making the decision. It was interesting; we did things like got books out on Australia to sort of get a sense [chuckles] of the animals and how people might be. There was a great book around in those days called *Let Stalk Strine* (those who are older might remember) which was like colloquial slang. It was a humorous book, but we practised [laughs] talking Australian so that we would be able to understand the locals. My brother was wasn't so impressed. I think he

felt a deeper attachment to the history and place of the country. I know that he was upset about the idea of us moving. I think my two sisters were probably a bit young to really have much of an idea. For me, it certainly had been portrayed as an exciting adventure and so it turned out [laughs].

AY First impressions when you got here?

WATSON Well, we arrived really early at dawn at Perth Airport and we were taken straightaway to Kings Park overlooking the river, which was a great way to create a first impression. I remember the magpies, the carolling sound of the magpies in the trees there and being quite transfixed by that melody up in the trees, quite different to English songbirds. There was something quite extraordinary about it. The light was really bright and it was sunny and it smelt fresh and the smell of the eucalypts; that was the first impression. Then we drove down to Mandurah and had a bit of a nap to catch up and then I awoke again to the sound of the magpies, which was interesting, so there was a sort of consistency. If you were to say to me what do you associate with coming home, it's the sound of the magpies doing that carolling and the smell of the gum leaves [laughs]. That's probably typical of quite a few Australians. Well, I don't know; you don't hear the magpies so much in the city these days, but certainly if you're in the country, you'll hear them.

AY How did you settle into Mandurah, to life in Mandurah?

WATSON Very quickly and very well. For me it was exactly the sort of life that I enjoyed. We spent a lot of time outside. We went sailing, we went down to the estuary and collected bottles to take to the shop, as you did in those days, and make a few cents on returning the bottles. We went to the local Mandurah Primary School. We were allowed to go to school with no shoes on [chuckles] which was just so novel. I found the schoolwork very easy because of the age, the slight difference of entry age, at school and the fact that I think I'd been at a fairly demanding school in England. I went from probably being a middle-range student to being top of the class; in fact, I got a bit bored at school in that respect. I loved sport and there was plenty of that, so I got into softball and tennis and, as I said, sailing. I would spend all my time outside doing those kind of things [chuckles] if I was given half a chance. So, yes, Mandurah was lovely; it was a beautiful place. We, not long after we got there, bought a place a bit out of Mandurah on the Pinjarra Road, Barragup, and that property backed right down towards the river. We used to go down there and we had a kayak and we'd paddle up and down and go fishing. It was great, really fantastic. We were a bit

wary of snakes; that was it, snakes and fire. We discovered snakes and fire fairly early on down there [laughs], as you do.

AY But that's not unreasonable, to be wary of snakes and fire.

WATSON No, absolutely; they were there.

AY That was a very different countryside to the one you left behind. What was your impression? What did you think of it?

WATSON Look, I was fascinated by it because it was different. I suppose it was certainly less friendly; it was prickly; it got dry; it certainly burnt [chuckles]. It was a more dangerous environment by and large than what I was used to. Having said that, at some of the places we played in England, there were massive tides and huge mudflats, so it wasn't [chuckles] without its dangers as well. But it felt much less inhabited; it was much less inhabited. It felt exciting in that you'd find places that you'd never been to, whereas the English countryside had a familiarity to it and a sort of comfort about it. The Australian environment was full of surprises and lots to learn; lots more creatures and plants that you might never have seen before. To me, the European environment is beautiful but it's quite—it's sort of safe and sort of pretty, whereas the Australian environment was much more challenging. Things like going whitewater kayaking, you actually had a sense [chuckles] that this was pretty wild, for example.

AY What were the circumstances of moving to Perth, though?

WATSON Okay, so I think the key was schooling, which is often the case, that my brother was going into high school and so it was felt that we would be better off being closer up here. So, we moved up to South Perth, but we kept the house down at Barragup, so I kind of feel we had a quite a long connection with Mandurah, because we went down there every weekend, basically. We came up here, went to school and then were there for the weekend. We built boats. Dad set up the sailing club with a few people down there; they actually didn't have one before that was set up in the late '60s. I guess we had the best of both worlds; we had probably the advantage of better schools up here, but spent the weekends in the country.

AY It sounds as though you are the kind of family, or were the kind of family, that did a lot together. Would that be right?

WATSON Yes, that's true. I mean, dad worked long hours right through his working life so he wasn't really ...we didn't see much of him during the week, but on the weekend. Certainly, I spent quite a lot of time with him because my brother wasn't really interested in the sort of things that he was, like the sailing and the sport and I guess the more active outdoor thing. My brother was a little bit more of a philosopher [chuckles]. Certainly, I spent a lot of time with dad doing those kinds of things. We always went on holiday together (in fact, a bit of a classic here) in the kombi van [laughs] with the six of us and we would always go somewhere new. We went out to the goldfields and we'd just head out and take a map and camp out somewhere and go fossicking or we'd go all the way down to Esperance and out into the park there, and Kalbarri in the early days. I think my father in particular was very keen that we explore the state and knew kind of where we were. Those holidays, it's interesting I loved them, but it was just the other day I was talking to my youngest sister and apparently she didn't like them at all [laughs]. She would much rather have stayed at home and played with her friends. For me, I've got very strong memories of being around the campfire, camping out, a sense of adventure, a sense of the history and the remoteness of it all. We did that as a family.

AY It's a very different kind of bush and environment from the one you had nearer Mandurah.

WATSON Yes.

AY What was your response, and your family's, to this landscape?

WATSON Well, I know what mine was; I was just completely absorbed in it, especially the more arid country, just that quality—if you're out at night and you've got a campfire setting (this is a classic Australian image) and you're lying there looking up at the stars and it is so quiet and it is so extraordinary what you can see in the sky. It just touches you in a way that's not quite like anything else and so I kind of had quite an extraordinary sense of the place in that way. But it is also pretty unforgiving. You realise if you walk off (because often I'd get up early in the morning and go off for a walk and come back) and if you lose sight of the camp or whatever, you realise that it would be quite easy to get lost out there, not that I actually ever did. So, I had a sense of respect for it, definitely, and that you didn't want to be

foolish; you needed to have your wits about you. It wasn't exactly a friendly country, but it was awesome. That's about the only word I could use [chuckles] to describe it. The colours and the sounds and the range. I got very interested in birdlife, of course, because we've got such an extraordinary diversity. The birds are one of the features of the landscape that even in places you think there's nothing alive out here, suddenly you see this little flock of finches appear or something like that and you go "Oh, wow." There's hidden parts of the landscape that will reveal themselves, especially if you're patient and quiet. Being observant, I think, is one of the things that I learnt out in the bush and enjoying being on my own and just listening to what was happening around me.

AY Around the campfire and around the dinner table, maybe back in Perth or Mandurah, what were your conversations? Were you a politically aware family? Did you talk about philosophy and politics?

WATSON Yes, and again it's probably one of those things that becomes more apparent the older one gets and the more comparisons one has. Both my parents are very political people. They're interested in justice; they're passionate about making a difference. They both have worked in healing, basically, in health, so they care a lot about how we are as a community. They are both engaged in their community wherever that is, whether that's in a sailing club or whether it's with the Quakers or a spinning group or a bush care group, they're always involved in a range of things. I think they're the sort of people who recognise that joining and being part of making a difference is part of their makeup and they're certainly in that category. They're both highly competitive with each other and everybody else in terms of knowledge of world events and history, certainly, local, state and national politics. We didn't talk much about anything else really, I suppose [chuckles]. We might not have talked so much about art and literature and that kind of thing. My mum in particular is very well read. She is an avid word person and I've really appreciated the fact that she has an appetite for ways that we express things, too; a kind of knowledge of the use of words, which came in very handy when I then got to be thinking about speeches and that kind of thing. You know, quite a wordsmith.

AY Around the dinner table and the campfire, were you discussing and debating? Were you honing some of those skills that might be useful for you? Were you as children engaged and able to contradict your parents, to engage in those kinds of rigorous discussions?

WATSON Again, I think certainly my brother and I were. Yes; we were certainly encouraged to participate, asked our view. Included in that, I think, encouraged to question definitely, and question authority, interestingly enough, would be one of the key things that I would attribute to both of them, because when they talked about their childhood they were both fairly questioning of authority as well and took on certain things. So, I guess I had that sense in my head that if you felt something wasn't right then not only might you well be right, but you should also do something about it. It wasn't okay to just let things go if you felt that something was unfair; you should step in or at least voice something, depending on how much power you had in the situation. So, that was a very strong sense that you should be out there, I guess, fighting the good fight in that regard, because there were things that needed sorting out.

AY Your mother, Ruth Watson, became involved with Religious Society of Friends. How did that come about?

WATSON My understanding of that is that during the period when Australia was involved with the Vietnam War, a number of Quakers were quite vocal in the opposition to that and I believe she heard someone on the radio speaking about that and coming from their position of faith being a Quaker, being a member of the Religious Society of Friends, and she went along to the meeting, I assume, at Mt Lawley (where they still meet) and had a very strong affinity with what was being said. I mean she'd been raised, as had my father, an Anglican, so they had basic Christian, quite strong Christian upbringing. We went to church when we were in England. We continued to do it a little while after we came to Australia, but I think it kind of faded off; it's not such a strong thing here in Australia. Thank goodness, I said [laughs]. I didn't like going to church. I found it incredibly tedious. But, nevertheless, I got a lot of basic Christian context, which isn't a bad thing because it explains a lot of things about our society and attitudes and values and things like that, and some of the values are great. But I digress. So, she became a very active Quaker. I think it kind of gelled with her political view as well because some of the fundamental tenets of Quakerism really resonated, I think like no hierarchy, that women could preach and they were equal in that sense; a commitment to pacifism and to actively bear witness. So, not just be a pacifist, but also to be politically active in pursuing that. It's not just enough to have that belief. Yes; I think it kind of clicked and she has been involved ever since.

AY How did this filter through to you as children? How much did you take on board of her commitment to Quakerism?

WATSON Well, look, I can remember discussing what Quakerism was about, but it's interesting, part of it, as I understand, is that you don't proselytise, so you do not go running out, unlike some of the other Christian traditions where you're expected to go and convert people. It's very much about people asking you about what the experience is. I certainly felt that probably the key affinity for me, and that mum and I've discussed and shared, would be about nonviolence consensus and peace. My brother and I got also involved in the anti-Vietnam movement here in Perth in the early '70s, even though I was relatively young in the early '70s [laughs]. But I was passionate about how wrong war was. In fact, it's interesting to hark back to sitting around campfires. I read *All Quiet on the Western Front*² out in the desert, virtually under the moonlight, and it's still raising the hackles on the back of my neck right now because the power of that story and the futility of the war, particularly told from the perspective of those that as English people we would have historically seen as the enemy, was extraordinary.

It's an extraordinary book. It kind of really triggered something in me about how if we could solve this problem about why people resolve conflicts by killing each other and acting in an adversarial manner, it would be extraordinary. That kind of was a really core thing for me and how you really did that, how you really took that to a personal level in terms of dealt with conflict and your attitude to other people and those kind of things got me really thinking at quite a young age about that. I mean, I had posters on my wall that were all about being anti-war. That was a strong movement in the '70s, and it was global; it wasn't just obviously in Australia, it was international.

AY It was. Did you go to Quaker meetings as well?

WATSON No, I didn't. I've really only in the last decade attended from time to time. And it's interesting, partly to be honest, because I sort of had this image (and it's not entirely untrue) of kind of elderly people sitting around in a circle because for whatever reason, the age demographic is quite older in Quaker circles. But more recently I have spent time meditating. For me, sitting in Quaker meeting for an hour of silence, is actually just like doing meditation; I quite like it and I like sitting in circles. I do from time to time join in that way, but I think, to be honest, I'm not Christian enough to actually follow that tradition, even though I think perhaps my mum might like me to be more involved or more attracted to it. I would

² The 1929 novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*, written by Erich Maria Remarque, tells the story of a German veteran of World War One and the hardships encountered by the soldiers.

certainly say I'm more of a Buddhist than a Quaker. There's quite a lot of similarities, of course, [laughs] but I'm not attracted to it at that level.

AY Are the two incompatible—Buddhism and Quakerism?

WATSON No, no; I don't think so at all. I suppose it's more about the practices kind of thing. I could imagine that I could sit for an hour a week with friends and just have some quiet time, that's okay. I don't know. It just hasn't, kind of drawn me back in that way. I mean, it's a nice quiet space; it creates a nice sense of connectedness and reconnecting, but I'd be more attracted to go to a Buddhist teaching, for example. It's interesting; it depends on your view of who we are and what we're doing on the planet. I'm a firm believer in reincarnation, so I have a sense that I probably spent more time being a Buddhist than [laughs]—maybe I'm attracted to something that seems more familiar. I know what it is. They have more fun; they laugh a lot. The teachings are about humour. The Quakers seem a very serious lot. I love them dearly (people like Jo Vallentine and obviously my mum and others who I know and respect and love dearly) but they're a bit serious [laughs] and I just think that I've had some more profound experiences in the Buddhist circles.

AY But it seems to me, looking at your life and your life's work that Quakerism has actually had a strong influence on you. Would you agree with that statement?

WATSON Yes, I think so. That fundamental grounding in peace and nonviolence, I think that was its origin. Certainly a little later on, in the late '70s when I was involved in trying to protect the native forests and the northern jarrah forests, it was the Quakers who did the original training in civil disobedience and direct action here in Perth. That was a very formative point in my life, realising that there was whole philosophy and writing and tradition that not only came up through Gandhi but obviously through the American civil rights movement. That was strongly informed by Quakers as well. A lot of the civil rights movement were—there were Quakers in there doing the heavy lifting, so to speak, along with others, but that was part of that social activism in America.

AY Was this something you absorbed or were there formal teachings in civil disobedience?

WATSON Formal teachings, yes. There were specific training sessions, and in either '78 or '79 a small group of us trained to be trainers, so that was the origin of it. It's interesting

because it predates the Franklin blockades and what happened in Tasmania, but we were only relatively young to realise that what was happening in terms of the environment in particular, the destruction of forest, we'd gone through all the legal avenues, we'd made the arguments, so what else was there other than to take direct action, because we felt that we'd run out of other options. In the context of what was happening globally, there were a lot of protests in the US against nuclear reactors and the building of nuclear reactors, so there was a wealth of training material which we basically just adapted to WA and had a lot of fun doing it. I mean, that is the other thing; part of the joy of a whole tradition of nonviolence and civil disobedience is that it's empowering and fun, and that is why people stay engaged and commit to doing the work that's required to protect the environment, to prevent dangerous developments like nuclear reactors. You have to have some pretty strong commitment to do that, and it builds that. It's just the most wonderful transformation process, too, to see people put together, kind of, the philosophy and the politics of an issue with their own personal skills. People get to be more confident in this or more able to persuade others because they get reaffirmed that what they're doing is valuable, important work and can actually be energising; I think that would be the key word.

Just to digress a little bit, there was a book written in the '80s called—I think it's called *Fear and Empowerment in the Nuclear Age*³; I might check the reference. Joanna Macy is an American writer, an activist and Buddhist, as a matter of interest. *Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age* was what it was called, and it talks about how people feel disempowered and frozen in the face of really big challenges like the threat of nuclear war or climate change. She was talking about nuclear issues back in the '80s. I read that book and I just thought, "That's it; people get intimidated and frightened and think there's nothing they can do to make a difference." You actually have to confront that and turn that fear into, at least initially, anger, and then into constructive action, and that's the sort of phases that you move through in terms of tackling the big issues of our day. You think about where people started with the civil rights movement in the US and how many centuries of slavery there were up against a very entrenched system, but they managed to win. They managed to actually turn that around with very little actual what would be recognised as power and resources in their hand. They didn't have money; they had people; and they were frustrated in every way they tried to organise, but despite all those things they developed the capacity to win. It was extraordinary, absolutely extraordinary, and very inspiring. Every time when you think this is too hard, you think, "Hmm, overcoming slavery was pretty hard too [laughs]", and then getting civil rights for the non-white members of the community. We shouldn't

³ *Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age* by Joanne Macy, 1983

complain; speaking personally as a white, middle-class, affluent, educated person, how about if you had to fight these sort of struggles with both your feet nailed to the ground? I've been very inspired by the civil rights movement and the strength of that.

AY We've got ahead of ourselves.

WATSON Sorry, yes [laughs].

AY No, that's absolutely fine. But let's talk about high school. You went to an all-girls high school, Penrhos. Tell me about that.

WATSON Most of my schooling I was at an all-girls school in the UK. Briefly I went to Mandurah Primary School and to South Perth Primary School, both of which I found much more relaxed than either Penrhos or the school I went to in England. Look, Penrhos back in (when would that have been? I was in grade 7) let's say the early '70s, was actually a very small school. I went in grade 7. The primary school was in an old house in Angelo Street. The whole school only had, I think, a couple of hundred students and a very interesting and progressive headmistress; Mrs Way was her name. She was quite inspirational. She used to do speeches to the assembly (kind of motivational speeches when I look at them in retrospect) sort of saying girls can do anything; you can be whatever you want. One that stuck in my mind was that she talked about—She said that when she was growing up she wasn't particularly a fit or sporty type of girl, but she decided that she needed to learn to run. She made herself run up and down sand dunes for weeks on end and she ended up being quite competent. So I was stuck with this image [chuckles] because she was quite sort of proper in lots of ways. Her background was actually accounting, but she had obviously a passion to teach girls and had gathered together quite an interesting team of teachers to do that. Look, I enjoyed being at school there. I had some great friends; we used to have great fun. I think I was fairly [laughs]—no, I was probably not the ideal student; I tended to be anti-authoritarian and nonconformist. I think I'll blame my parents for that [laughs]. But I achieved well both academically and in a sporting sense, so I would thank the school for having provided a good education for me and good opportunities.

By the time I was in high school, and certainly from third year on, I was fairly frustrated at school, I think it's fair to say, and had strong views about things, so [laughs] I didn't quite get expelled, but probably close. But I kind of felt like I was always measured. I'd do things like in religious classes I would ask difficult questions, and that was seen as being disrespectful,

and I spent quite a lot of time outside sitting in the corridor [chuckles]. This might have added to my dim view about Christianity; it all depends on who's teaching it and what they're saying.

Some of the questions about how the school was run, I took an active interest in. I'll give you the point at which I think I really realised about power and how power worked. I was in third year and it was the beginning of the year. The school had made a decision to have a student representative council; an excellent democratic proposition. The classes were asked to vote for their representative. In the class I was in the vote was tied equally; it was an even number and it was tied. The teacher promptly said, "Well, I'll have the casting vote and it will be for X." I saw white. I just stood up and I said, "You can't do that; this is a student representative council. What do you mean you're going to have the casting vote?" I didn't even think, I just blurted out, "This doesn't add up; excuse me? Student representative council; which bit of that don't you understand?" Basically, she backed down and we had a second ballot, and that time the ballot was different. I wasn't in the ballot, just to be clear; it wasn't about me personally. The person she didn't want got in. Right. So I thought, "Well, that's democracy; you have to live with that"

I used to get a lift to school with the parent and the head girl, and the next day she said to me as we were driving along, "Oh, I hear that you're going to be called up today to be issued a demerit", for basically insubordination, I suppose, for want of a better word. I said, "Really? What's that about?" So this teacher hadn't had the courage to challenge me at the time, but basically she'd said that I was out of order. So I was then not hung on it, really, but I was (what's the word?) insulted, I suppose, that somehow that had meant that I had done something wrong and I didn't have a chance to appeal that or anything. So that's when I thought, "This is how the system works [laughs]. Those in power will continue to use it as they see fit." That started, I guess, a fairly steady war of attrition with those in authority at the school. But I knew which rules to break and when, but my respect for individuals and the system, that set me on a path.

AY And yet perhaps it was instructive that you had that experience because it then maybe helped you to formulate how you really felt about these things, would you say?

WATSON Oh, absolutely.

AY A training ground for you.

WATSON Oh, yes; no, no, absolutely. I think things are meant to be how they are meant to be. But it was one of those tipping points. Look, something was going to cause that. But it reminded me also (this is a quick comparison) that when my father was at private boys' school they had an initiation system where they used to beat up the new boys who came in; a delightful English tradition. When his younger brother was at that age where that was going to happen to him, he and a bunch of his mates (my father) went in and broke it up and stopped them from doing it. So I had a few stories from my parents of, as I say, if you see something's wrong, if you think it needs sorting out, then sort it out. I mean, I think, unfortunately, they sorted it out with cricket bats [laughs]. It wasn't a nonviolent protest. But, look, I think for me it was about understanding the nature of authority, the nature of who makes decision and for what purpose, the kind of values that are being perpetrated.

It was also a time in Penrhos when there was a transition from being this small, almost like a family sort of school which really encouraged girls to achieve in whatever the field they wanted, to being about prestige, to being about a big school, like THE best school, to looking in a certain way. All of those things went hugely against my values system. I made a point of always wearing a uniform that was just on the edge of falling apart because [laughs] I was wearing a uniform, you know, and I'd get it from the second-hand shop and all those kinds of things, just to—[laughs]. Yes, I was probably delightful. They had a rule about how long your hair could be before you had to have it tied back. I would make sure it was always just touching my collar, so they always had to look twice to see whether I was complying or not [chuckles].

Those kind of rules, which to me were incredibly irritating and petty, I chose to push. But to be fair (I have spoken with and know some of my teachers still afterwards) I think as much as they knew I was sort of testing the rules, I did all my homework, I was virtually top of my class, I won awards for the school in sport; I did all those things. So I think that's probably why I didn't actually get expelled [laughs]. I should say the other thing probably I remember about school is a lot of my friends saying, "Why do you always talk about politics? Why do these things matter to you? Why can't you just relax and do whatever?" I couldn't understand why most of them weren't interested. I had a very small number of friends who were. I suppose I was a bit of a leader in that sense, although I didn't see myself as being in that role. I was certainly—Yes, I was outspoken; let's put it that way [chuckles].

AY Was politics an actual subject that you could study or is this the politics of the school and the environment that did prove—you know, it's sounding like a training ground for you in a lot of ways.

WATSON Yes. No, politics wasn't something that I could study. Unfortunately, also, we had to do things like home economics. I found that extraordinarily painful and spent most of my time outside that class because I thought, "Why on earth are my parents paying good money for me to learn how to do the washing up [laughs]?" I'm sure my home economics teacher found me very difficult and probably not always respectful; let's be honest. I was interested in a lot of subjects at school and I probably would have liked to have done even more; but, no, politics wasn't one of them. I did science and I did literature. I didn't do English because I decided—despite the fact you had to do English at the exam - I wanted to do literature. I basically sat all those exams. I can still remember my English teacher to this day saying, "Oh no; you can't sit the exam not having done English because you'll fail." I got 86 per cent or something. I sort of went, "No, I assure you I'm not going to fail English", and I didn't. I didn't do politics at school, no; it was more the politics of the situation.

AY The small "p" politics. I'm wondering about the fact that you were at a girls' school. Was this a good idea for you rather than a co-ed school? Did it, as I think you've alluded to, give you that sense that girls could do anything?

WATSON Yes. It's interesting [pause]. I think it did suit me well because of that reason that I understand that the dynamic (and I don't know whether I would've played into it or gone along with it) when there are boys in class, girls tend to not push themselves so hard. My mother went to an all-girls school, so she was very keen on that style. It's got its limitations, but I also think for girls it is actually really good. Look, I wasn't interested in boys other than as friends. I wasn't attracted to boys. I know one of the things about boy-girl schools is that girls get distracted about boyfriends and all that kind of dynamic happens. That wasn't part of the equation too, I think. I enjoyed the all-girl environment and I kind of liked the challenge that girls could do anything. But absolutely my parents reinforced that, "We'll back you in whatever it is you want to do." There is no question that you're expected to follow a traditional role or, for that matter, even get married; you know, they weren't conformist in that way at all. It was probably very much part of that '70s politics, that sort of questioning of a whole lot of social values, and they were involved in those sort of circles; left circles.

AY What were you thinking of doing when you left school? What was working its way through your system? What were you thinking of? You said you liked sciences.

WATSON Apart from to get out [laughs]. I played a lot of sport so I was torn between wanting to be a professional sportsperson. I was interested in physiology, health. I had three things that I thought I might do. One is to play sport, two is to be a physio, and the third was to do something in the environment. The environment stuff kind of grew a bit later in a way. I had a very interesting geography teacher who was very nonconformist in himself. I really thrived on his particular style of teaching, which was more like university style where you'd open up a topic and you'd be encouraged to go and find out about it. That really worked for me, and in fact I went on to work with him down in Albany where he went to establish an environmental school. So that interest in the environment was very strong, but, interestingly enough, there wasn't any university training in that at the time I was at school. But in 1975, which was my first year out of high school, Murdoch opened and it had an environmental science school. So I applied (I applied for, I think, three or four things) and was accepted at Murdoch, so I thought, "No, that's what I'm meant to do." So I followed that thread and thought, "Well, if I want to play lots of sport, I can do that in my own time anyway [chuckles]."

AY What sport? You've said sport in general, but we haven't talked specifically about it. What was your sport?

WATSON More than one. I mentioned sailing; I did a lot of that growing up. I did compete in that, but not at school. I played tennis, I played squash, I played hockey, I played softball, I did athletics. I wasn't a swimmer; that didn't really appeal to me. I blame the English climate on not learning to swim until you're about 10. That sort of puts you at a bit of a disadvantage. And then I played soccer, and I always rode my bike everywhere, so I was reasonably fit. I played squash for the junior state team in '74, I think it was, or '75. I played soccer at UWA and was selected for the state side. Interestingly enough, I couldn't play for them because I was playing interstate squash at exactly the same time [chuckles]. Anyway, I was pretty competitive. My father was pretty competitive at sport and encouraged me in that direction. I loved it, I love it still, although various injuries mean that I'm not up for that much these days [laughs]. But it was a great way for me to let off steam. I think playing a team sport is actually a really good way of learning certain skills and things about different people, and about teamwork, obviously. I've often reflected that in terms of going into politics. Quite a few people in politics have some competitive sporting background, but often, interestingly, I think more often individual sports than team sports [laughs] dare I say.

To digress briefly, one of the things I did when I got into Parliament, I discovered that there was this annual, parliamentarians versus the media cricket match. Now I hadn't played cricket as I grew up, but I played a bit of backyard cricket over the years. In fact, I said to Barry House, "Barry, do the women parliamentarians play cricket?" He was somewhat taken aback, I think, [laughs] because he's a cricketer from his youth. He said, "Well, yes, of course you can play", so I said, "Okay, right, well put my name down." Certainly it was unusual; I think maybe there had been some in the past. But I thought it was great just to get in there and say, "We can do this too, and I can bowl out Peter Kennedy [laughs]." Peter has never really lived that one down, I think.

AY That would not have been difficult.

WATSON [laughs] I don't know; he's a fairly wily player is our Peter. He happened to lift his bat at the wrong time, so he says [chuckles]. I guess what I'm saying is that sport is interesting. It's a very strong thing in Australia. I've really enjoyed sport. I've enjoyed the kind of confidence that it gives you, too, and a sense of understanding the strengths and weakness of a team and how to build team relationships and how to do things together as well as playing individual sports. That's a good training ground for the more competitive nature of politics, I think, in my sense.

AY Back to Murdoch. Was this the first year of the environmental science degree?

WATSON Yes. So '75 was Murdoch's opening, and the environmental science school started then. My memory is that there were about 30 or 40 in that intake, so it was quite small. You know, of course, it was out in the bush in those days. I used to ride my bike out there from South Perth, and it was kind of just a single lane each way and bush and dirt either side, so it felt like quite an adventure trekking all the way out there. And it was a very exciting place to be. It was a university that started with very high ideals and a great deal of excitement. It also had peace and conflict studies. It didn't last very long, but it started and John Razor was the professor and Patsy Helen was part of that. The first year, because the format was that you did cross-disciplines, so I did, obviously, a fair amount of science, but I also did a number of the peace and conflict studies units and literature. I thought it was a great place to be. It had high aspirations of having a flat structure, unfortunately which didn't last very long for various reasons which I don't really know. But, to be honest, after six

months I actually thought that its aspirations had already had a huge dent put in them. So I stayed on to the end of that year, and then I took two years off because I wasn't quite sure whether the revolution was actually going to happen in the university [chuckles].

So I then went down to the south coast, to just out of Albany, where this former geography teacher was establishing an environmental school. The idea was to offer training for a whole range of schools and residential courses in the environment. The start of that project was actually clearing a spot in the bush, building the buildings, and all of this being done with very little money. I worked in a voluntary capacity for about a year and a half, I think it was, and had some great experiences. That's where I learnt my basic building skills. I also worked in the local fish factory, went to the local TAFE, did car mechanics, animal husbandry (a whole range of interesting courses) at a great, interesting TAFE, and lived out in a tent on that bush block out of Albany. That really is, kind of, my homeland now, that part of Western Australia. That was what I did after I broke my uni studies.

AY I'd like to take you back to that point. It sounds to me as though the politics within Murdoch is what stopped you continuing at that point with your environmental studies, which is what ...

WATSON Yes, that's right. And also the fact that I had a burning sense that something needed to be done quickly about what was happening with environmental issues in the state and that perhaps spending three years getting a university degree was not the best use of my time. So I thought it might be more to the point to encourage the, kind of, practical side of teaching people about the environment. There kind of was the sense of disappointment in the way the politics had changed at the university, but also, I guess, an impatience of what was the point of having a degree actually—if the world was going to hell in a handbasket, me spending three years getting a degree wasn't necessarily going to be the best thing I could do with my time and energy. I think I was also ready to get out of academia and get a bit more hands-on.

AY Because you went straight from school to university; you didn't have a break?

WATSON Yes, that's right.

AY Your geography teacher with his school, was it actually quite a serious environmental science school? You were learning about the environment?

WATSON At that stage we were just constructing it; no, so we weren't actually learning any more there. In fact, what I was learning was carpentry, concrete mixing [chuckles], how to blow up dead trees; all sorts of exciting things like that. We had to gelignite the dead stags because they were a hazard. A quick digression, this hill, Torbay hill out of Albany (it is about 25 km out of Albany) was logged I believe in the early 1900s, karri. They logged, as they did in Denmark and Margaret River and all those places, and they took out the good karri. The big ones that they really couldn't handle because they were doing this all with hand equipment, they left standing but they ringbarked them. So you have these huge dead karri stags dotting this hill, which was quite magnificent, and they were also extraordinary lightning conductors [chuckles]. I could digress, but there's some really interesting stories about that hill. One of the things about putting up buildings on this hill was that we had to get rid of these trees because they were going to come down at some point, and you didn't want them to come down on your building. Mostly we blew them up with gelignite. Sometimes that didn't work, so then you had to burn them out, which was quite a slow process of burning out the base of the trees. I had some, sort of, interesting occupations. A lot of shovelling [chuckles] and a lot of hard yakka, but I enjoyed that.

AY You've just mentioned a couple of things then, but overall what did that experience of those 18 months, two years ...

WATSON Eighteen months, yes.

AY What did that do for you in the long run, do you think?

WATSON Look, I think it reinforced for me that as much as I liked politics, I also liked a practical task, a tangible task; I was reasonably good at it. And it reinforced that if you put your mind to it that you can challenge traditional occupations not only in doing the work, but then also going to TAFE and sort of being in a class with all the blokes, learning about how your engine works in your car; a very useful thing to know. I guess I was accumulating a lot of practical knowledge because I felt that it was going to be useful in what might happen next, and that's proven to be the case. It is useful in a lot of circumstances to be able to fix things if they break, to be able to understand the structure of things and know when they're unsafe or when they're not. One of the things that attracted me to have a trade was that it

was a portable skill, that you could offer it wherever you were, because I was also quite attracted to doing things like volunteering abroad in assisting communities and that kind of practical work. I liked the solidity of being able to actually take this pile of wood and turn it into a shed or a house or a roof, and just actually doing the work was a pleasure in and of itself. I guess it brought out a particular side of my character and gave me a confidence, which, again, I have reflected when I was in Parliament.

One of the things I felt was that I could sit there and say, “I don’t mind what you throw at me or how rude you are or whatever silly things you want to throw at me to try and make me feel”—to throw me off my game, basically, as part of the fun and games of politics. If they said that, I’d go, “Well, mate, you don’t know how to build a house; you haven’t got a clue; you wouldn’t know one end of a hammer from the other”, which is kind of almost a very blokey thing to kind of think, but I knew I was the only builder in the Parliament, “So, what is your problem [chuckles]?”, if you know what I mean; “Why don’t you just step outside and show me what you can do? I don’t care what you say about me; I know who I am, I know what I can do, and you’re not going to bluff me.” It’s interesting because it’s a fairly mixed travel to ending up in Parliament, but I think that did ground me in a way that it just gives you a kind of good CV, I think [chuckles]. It’s not all about what’s in your head, it’s actually about what service you can do, what practical skills you have. It’s a grounding is the best way I can describe it. It’s feeling grounded in the world.

AY We’ll come back next time to the other things in this progression to the Parliament.

[End of GizWatson_1]

[GizWatson_2]

AY This is the second interview with Giz Watson. Today is Tuesday, the 29th of September 2015, and we're once again sitting in her lovely courtyard listening to the birds.

When we left you last week, Giz, you had bailed out of your first lot of environmental studies at Murdoch and you were mucking about in the south west. But I'd like to get a better sense of how important environmental science was to you at that point and what you thought you might have achieved, given your frustration with Murdoch and the way it was going at that point.

WATSON I think it was very clear from the choice to study environmental science at the outset that I felt that the threats to the environment were probably the most pressing issue, particularly in WA. Once one gets a sense of the environmental damage that has been caused by European settlement, whether that's cutting down native forests or whether that's clearing very large areas of the bush, and also an awareness of how in some ways Western Australian ecosystems are very robust but in other ways they're very fragile and very ancient and have been isolated from a lot of changes for a significant period. Once I got that kind of picture of the place that it was that I was living in, I felt that being able to do what I could to, I guess, be a custodian for that environment was what probably moved me the most. It was always tough. There were always a lot of things that I felt strongly about, but I think that's why I felt on a practical level I could do something active to protect the environment, to advocate for the environment, and it would be useful to be qualified to add weight to what I did.

AY What did you think you would actually do with that degree?

WATSON Well, look, to be honest I didn't really consider that when I joined. Unlike some people's view that everybody decides what they're going to do in terms of educational training with a job in mind, I certainly didn't have that in mind then, in 1974 when I applied. I was excited by the fact that this was the first time there was a course on environmental science available in Australia and I was after the knowledge. Interestingly enough, that's what I did get out of it. Although I've never been a paid environmental scientist in the narrow sense of the word, when I did work in an NGO capacity it was on environmental issues (marine conservation) and having that training was really useful. It also was very useful in terms of when I joined the Campaign to Save Native Forests that I had some training and

capacity in analysing environmental impact statements, understanding air pollution, meteorology and those kinds of things. It was all very useful but I did not really think about who might employ me, and that became a problem later; I can either mention that now or touch on it later.

AY We'll do that one later. You were still a student when the save the campaign for native forests ...

WATSON Campaign to Save Native Forests.

AY That's the right way around. How did you become involved with that?

WATSON Interestingly enough, I think this again goes back to something my brother told me about, because he was at the time living at least part of the time in the south west. So the impact of logging, and particularly the wholesale clearing of jarrah forest for bauxite mining, was something that those communities out in the country were living and really distressed about. So he said, "Look, there's terrible things happening in the forest. Maybe you ought to go and find out." So I did and went to what was then the environment centre in Perth, and very soon got involved with the Campaign to Save Native Forests, which had only just really started to get to be an active organisation. There'd been forest activism through the early '70s, but I think it was particularly the decision to expand the bauxite mining in the northern jarrah forest and obviously in the hills just outside of Perth that galvanised a lot of people's concern really.

AY It really was the first of its kind of a major direct action campaign, was it not?

WATSON Yes. There might be some contest in terms of which was the first environmental direct action campaign in Australia, and certainly in New South Wales they would suggest that the Green Bans predated that, which is probably true. But the direct action campaign around bauxite mining and the clearing of the jarrah forest predated, for example, the Franklin blockades in Tasmania. We certainly as a group realised that we would have to do some really basic training in nonviolent direct action if we were going to undertake civil disobedience against the expansion of the bauxite mining. People were at that stage because lots of the more conventional avenues had been explored in terms of protesting with the Parliament, protesting with decision-makers, making the case that the jarrah forest was better left standing and those kind of arguments and water catchment, but

there was a feeling that with the government of Sir Charles Court, which was so clearly pro-development, that that wasn't going to ultimately make any difference.

AY Can you explain what direct action really means in this sense?

WATSON Sure. Direct action is a ...Let me start one step back. The context of direct action is in acknowledging that there is a role for civil disobedience and that there are sometimes times when laws are wrong, laws haven't kept up with community attitudes, or there are higher principles above the laws of a state that should be supported and held up. The history of it is rich. It comes through from Gandhi in India fighting the British Empire with nonviolent direct action through to the civil rights movement in the United States. Arguably some of Mandela's work in South Africa was direct action; whether it was nonviolent, we could probably spend half an hour debating that or more; some was and some wasn't. The direct action that we were undertaking was in the context of that nonviolent model; not all direct action is. Direct action is a term that's used by, I guess, groups in the radical parts of community politics, and it's actually taking a stance or undertaking an action that will demonstrate your unhappiness or break a law that you think is wrong.

Within the context of the Campaign to Save Native Forests we were very clear that our direct action would be about protesting the poor decision (the wrong decision) of continuing to damage our native forests, and we were very clear that it would not be about endangering people; it would not be about doing anything that—well, endangering people, I think, was the limit that was put. We had lengthy debates about whether our direct action would include things like breaking padlocks or accessing—these are the questions that come up in all direct action campaigns. Some people would argue that it is not problematic, it is not a violent act to cut a padlock. Others have a different view and say, "No, you don't damage property either." I think there's, again, a very rich sort of history in this, and I am reminded of things like the Ploughshares action where peace activists have gone in and damaged the guidance systems of military aircraft and those kind of things to directly make the point that these are the killing machines, these are the weapons that will be used against people. I very much think each potential direct action has to be weighed up in that regard, and not the least that you also don't want to alienate people. It's a very fine line to walk between wanting to demonstrate, I guess, the injustices and the power of the state or of a company against the community's will. But you have to measure that up against whether you're going to bring people with you or whether you're going to put them off.

AY In this instance, the Campaign to Save Native Forests, how was the decision-making taken in terms of where you drew that line and what you were prepared to do and what you weren't prepared to do? Was there consensus decision-making around this within the group?

WATSON Yes, that's very much part of the model. We organised with consensus decision-making on all occasions. We organised in relatively small groups; so what are called affinity groups, and you might have more than one involved in any given direct action, but the power of working within a relatively small group, not only that consensus works more easily but the level of trust and communication between those people is very strong. The other aspect of it is that we made a very strong commitment at the outset not to have clearly identified leaders because, again, that is a way that you can overcome—the natural response of the police in those circumstances is to arrest the “leaders”. Well, if you don't actually have any that makes their job much more complicated. It is also the model of empowering all members of the group to take responsibility for what they're doing. So, yes, that's the kind of model, and it was tried and tested in many previous campaigns, whether that was the civil rights movement in the US or, as it was happening then, the movement against nuclear power in the US as well. So, we took those models, those training manuals, and actually engaged a number of Quakers to come and do the training sessions here in WA to train a number of us to continue to train other people. That was the approach that we took.

AY I was about to ask you whether your Quaker leanings had guided you in this, and perhaps it would be timely just to discuss a little bit about Quaker understanding of nonviolent action.

WATSON Yes; as I understand, the Quaker's approach to this is that there is a belief and expectation that Quakers will bear witness to what's happening in the world and a very strong commitment to peace and nonviolence associated with that peace, recognising that if we are to have peace on a societal and global level, then we have to be peaceful in and of ourselves as well. So, it's that combination of personal responsibility and personal work to achieve the right attitude and the right approach to be peaceful in the world. And that model and that philosophy is applicable to environmental activism, to feminism and, obviously, to anti-military activity. I think the other aspects, of course, they have commitment to consensus; they have commitment to a flat structure that every member speaks, and a respect for that which is of God in everyone. So respect for your opponent is also a very powerful message in Quakerism. Now, these are the sort of values I think that were instilled

in me and that if you're going to disagree with authority or the status quo that at the same time you need to do that with a respect for certainly the people involved in enacting those positions. You don't have to respect the structure or the legal framework, but you do have to respect the people that are your opponents.

AY How successful do you believe you were in this campaign to apply those principles?

WATSON Well, it was a challenge, to be honest. I think we did conduct the actions that we did in line with those principles. I think, interestingly enough, we experienced some reaction to us that certainly didn't fit that category. A friend of mine had their motorbike sabotaged and nearly killed themselves when they applied the brake after they had been in consultation with the people on the construction site. The police were variable in their response, too. I think things have changed somewhat in that regard. I guess what I'm saying is there was quite a lot of pressure on those individuals to maintain their nonviolent stance, but I think we did that respectfully and appropriately and although, ultimately, the campaign was not successful (the bauxite refinery was built at Wagerup and the expansion of the bauxite mining did go ahead) I think there were two results that I now see with the benefit of hindsight. One is that Alcoa as the company involved greatly improved their rehabilitation techniques and somewhat ironically in my view now win awards for their rehabilitation. We certainly shone the light on what wasn't happening there at the time by taking busloads of people out to have a look and to ask questions. I think the jury is still out about how successful that rehabilitation actually has been and will be in the long term. I think the other thing is that in the more recent times, having worked very closely with some of the people affected by that refinery, particularly by air quality, by the rate of illness among workers, and people living in the zone of the refinery, actually vindicates what we were saying about things like the inversion and the effect of the scarp. It's kind of rather extraordinary to have some of those people who were actually very angry with us at the time say, "Thank you so much. You were actually right and thank you for coming and standing with us now to try and have our health protected from this company", including people who worked for the company. Over the long term, there was a level of trust and respect and acknowledgement that has played out.

AY Has there been a shift in community attitudes towards environmental damage and pollution since the late 1970s?

WATSON I think that was a significant campaign and there were some pretty extraordinary aspects to it, including the one that sticks in my mind. It's a photo that I think was on the front page of the then *Daily News* taken from a plane of how close the complete clear-felling was going to the catchment for Perth's water. It was out of sight, out of mind until we started to shine a light on that and, hence my comment about how I think it had a major impact on some of the rehabilitation and management of run-off and those kind of things. Look, I think it was the first time in Western Australia that a campaign was taking it up to the authorities and saying that we think that allowing companies to use the Western Australian environment in this way is detrimental and largely benefits international shareholders and potentially if not actually damages our water systems and the integrity of the forest system et cetera, et cetera. So, yes, it was an intense campaign and it was only really defeated by a very rapid change of the penalties that went through the Parliament in a matter of days that people suddenly realised that they couldn't risk two years in jail, and that kind of stopped people in their tracks, I think, otherwise we were set for quite an ongoing and growing direct action campaign.

AY You said you didn't have leaders, but amongst your group who were some of these activists and what were your roles?

WATSON As I say in affinity groups you do allocate roles but try and share the responsibility and the leadership functions. We certainly had spokespeople and they would probably go down in history as having been the leaders [chuckles]. That's the nature of dealing with the messaging [chuckles] and the way that that's conveyed. I guess the roles were things like liaising with the police (that was always an important role) looking after the health and safety of your fellow protesters, liaising with the broader support base because but these campaigns work best when you've got a much bigger group of people who are fully supportive and assist in the process but not actually willing or able to put themselves in an arrestable position. There's a lot of logistics required to usually camp somewhere that's [laughs] challenging and to make sure that people have got food and water and the basics of life and developing media, developing statements. All of those jobs are really shared between all of us. We would rotate who would facilitate the conversations so that people were sharing that role as well.

AY How did the police and the other authorities actually respond to what you were doing?

WATSON Well, we made a point of keeping them informed right from the outset. That was part of our understanding of what was a nonviolent direct action that we said to the police early on we are going to be going to the site and we will, if necessary, obstruct vehicles if they're starting to clear the site. I think the police actually were a little surprised about this [chuckles] approach, but ultimately it meant that we had good relations. Interestingly enough, it didn't actually stop the police from spying on us anyway. We had people crouching under the window at our meetings with microphones on who quickly ran over the back fence when they saw someone coming [chuckles], so there was a fairly high level of surveillance of our activities, including phones being tapped, but we considered that we were being completely open about what we were going to do. Interestingly enough, the law that they were most likely to apply, which was in the group of laws that included the one that made it an illegal assembly to have three or more people gathered in a public place, which the union movement was also heavily opposed to, the law was that it was an offence to obstruct or conspire to obstruct a government-ratified project, which is incredibly broad.

We knew that by telling the police what we were doing we were already giving them the case to prosecute us for conspiring. Interestingly enough, when it came to the crunch and we actually did go onsite because they were about to start the activity to clear the site to construct the refinery, we were charged with obstructing. Now, we actually hadn't obstructed yet because we hadn't had a chance to [chuckles] so they arrested us the day before we actually did anything then laid the wrong charge, because if they'd laid a charge of conspiring, I would have thought that they had every bit of evidence they needed. It's always puzzled me somewhat whether someone was just being inept or they really didn't want to have us go through the courts and have the opportunity because, of course, part of the process of this sort of civil disobedience is you can use the court to raise the matters that you wish to raise about higher principles and why you've broken the law and why you think it's in the community's interest. So we were deprived really of much of that opportunity [laughs].

AY What do you believe was the community support? Did you have a great groundswell of support?

WATSON Yes, I think we did. We certainly had significant offers of food, money, transport, the sort of things you need to organise a direct action campaign. Of course you gauge these things too by letters to the editor, the conversation in the media, and it did seem that we had a growing level of community anger about what was going on there and there were a number of aspects to that. I think people were also really pleased that there were

some people who were willing to, I guess, take a bigger step and put to some extent their personal safety, certainly to a large extent any potential sort of reputation and career and those kind of things that are associated with undertaking something which might have a criminal penalty. But again, I think there were also people who recognised that the state government was being incredibly heavy handed not just on this issue of government-ratified projects but also public assembly. So it was combined with that and you have to remember also there was a lurking threat of a nuclear reactor in the state. The Court Government had thrown up some positions and proposals that were making people pretty unsettled and I think that a large portion of the community or a significant portion of the community that engaged in thinking about these things was worried about that direction.

AY Would you say that your campaign actually encouraged community debate and shone a light on what was happening and had people thinking about these issues that they maybe hadn't thought about before?

WATSON We absolutely made a point of producing fact sheets and material, which was distributed as [chuckles] not in the day of electronic communication but the Gestetner and the [chuckles] old-fashioned ways of circulating leaflets and getting debate out in the community. We had some good contact with people in the media. There was more than one daily newspaper in those days and that was significant and we had the support of quite a few academics and scientists. We built a case and put that information out. It was very much part of the campaign to win over people's understanding, to have them realise here you have an American-based multinational company, and I think I'm right in saying at that point they probably weren't even paying any royalties. I could be wrong, [chuckles] I'd better be careful what I say on that but I'll draw a parallel. Cockburn Cement, which is also wholly British owned (it was British, not American) was operating under (continues to operate under) a State Agreement Act, which is a contract between the company and the state, and they were paying no royalties for taking shell sand out of Cockburn Sound. That's a later campaign, much later, but we won that one and we won that one in the court. The government moved to make them pay royalties at the very least. So there were other aspects to this campaign that weren't just about the environmental impact but also who were we favouring and where did the money go and did we really want the relatively few jobs that were created in the bauxite mining for producing this product that is incredibly destructive to produce and most of the profits are going overseas. The state governments of the day were supporting big mining operations over other considerations in our view and doing things like offering them State Agreement Acts. If we had longer I could go into the evils of State Agreement Acts, they offer

very generous conditions for companies, they run over extended periods and the Parliament is not able to amend them; you can only accept or reject and you can't amend the wording. They get access to reduced cut-priced gas, unlimited water and this is ongoing, this hasn't changed. You've kind of got to provide this information to people so they understand the full story of what bauxite mining in Western Australia actually is.

AY Looking back with the benefit of hindsight, what do you think the successes were, the long-term successes of that campaign?

WATSON Apart from what I mentioned earlier which is that Alcoa now wins awards for environmentalism and in the community they're seen as one of the better ones [chuckles]. I don't know whether that's a win; it's probably a win for them [laughs]. They get to name things like Alcoa wetlands. I find that exceedingly problematic that sort of corporatisation of public assets, the naming rights. I think it raised environmentalism in Western Australia to a new level. I don't want to downplay other work that had been done earlier, for example, Bessie Rischbieth who was trying to protect the Swan foreshore from road building. There were some excellent examples of earlier environmental campaigns, but this was one that was building community support I think in a way that had not happened in Western Australia and challenging some of the bigger concepts about the structure of our economy, about the business that we do with private companies.

So I think it certainly was part of the ultimate dismantling of those laws like the one about public assembly. People suddenly thought, wow, they can actually do this and they are actually prosecuting people for these kind of things which people could actually accept were—not everybody—but there were enough people who accepted that civil disobedience direct action to shine the light on certain activities in the state was legitimate and could be argued by people who were thoughtful and peaceful and weren't going to take no for an answer. I think it did also set a basis for a culture in [interruption for helicopter flying overhead]. I think it set a very strong groundwork for a culture of nonviolent direct action in WA. It certainly, by comparison with other states, and I am now reflecting on the broader green movement, I think meant that our grounding in marrying the attributes of the anti-war movement and pacifism and nonviolent direct action with environmentalism was bedded down very strongly and very thoroughly early on with that campaign and that has influenced things like what happened later in the campaign to save old-growth forests and the antinuclear movement here in the state and in the Greens.

AY Let's talk about what is in and what is out in activism. What is legitimate in your view?

WATSON As I say, within the philosophy and the practice of nonviolent direct action there is a range, and one of the exercises we do actually is we ask people who are training to make a line and at one end of the line if you think that it's okay, shall we say, to put sugar in the petrol tank and at this end of the line if you think that you can only sit passively in front of a gate or a vehicle or whatever. People have conversations and then they place themselves on this line and it's fluid. I think the principle is that you don't do harm to people or animals or the environment so the principle of non-harm is fundamental. I think the principle that the means must be consistent with the ends is also a critical component of it. So if you don't want people to lie to you and play tricks, then you don't do it yourself either. That is slightly off the question of what's direct action but it is also a fundamental, I think, in participating in that way.

Whether you think, as I say, cutting a fence to get in or a padlock or interfering with a vehicle is violent or legitimate or not, depends on the context of the circumstance. I think if I was in a situation where I felt that I was going to prevent damage to the environment or to people by locking myself onto a bulldozer, I don't see that as being violent at all. Whether I put sugar in the petrol tank, well, it depends on the circumstance to be quite honest. If that bulldozer was about to knock down the last red tingle in Western Australia, I would not have any problem with doing that. In fact, I'd probably drive it over a cliff [laughs] as long as there was nobody in it.

It's a bit difficult to be hard and fast on that. I think we get a bit tied up on this sort of respect for property and I think that debate has shifted quite a lot. I think we are more kind of fixated that everybody's property is sacred. Some of my politics says property is theft, so whose property is it anyway? You know what I mean. Damaging somebody's personal car, for example, is quite different than perhaps choosing to damage a vehicle that's owned by the military; it's profoundly different. I wouldn't have any problem sabotaging war planes if I thought they were engaged in killing people basically because I think there is a there's a higher principle there. I am right there with those nuns who go in there with their hammers and break the guidance systems on military aircraft, and not the least that we as taxpayers pay for those things too. So I can't kind of give you a black or white this is in and this is out. It's in my experience that part of the process of training and preparing for any direct action is those conversations, is that debate, is that rigour that you have with your fellow activists

about where the line will be drawn and agreements that are reached on that. They are always difficult and they are always contested, I think. I mean, if the world's going to melt down in the next decade, I think then sometimes direct action is justified, including that very vexed issue about whether graffiti's a good idea or a bad idea, or legitimate or not. It's amazing how that debate has shifted so that people think that any spray paint on a public building is, they should lock them up.

I think there's an enormous role for creative, political public statements. I love the work that somebody like Banksy does, you know, profound. I know all of my parliamentary colleagues would be horrified, but I actually think that there's a helluva lot of difference between tagging and genuine political commentary and that each case ought to be taken on its merits rather than, "If you have a spray can, we will lock you up", or "We'll fine you." They don't actually lock people up for having spray cans. So, it's a great debate; I think it's a debate that ought to be more live in the community, whereas we've got very, kind of, precious and isolated and obsessed with our own personal possessions. Gosh, there's a lot more out there than that and a lot more pressing matters. I have no problem cutting fences, for example, but I wouldn't do it in such a way that it might endanger somebody, you know, like somebody might. You've got to be considered in those kinds of things.

AY You do. Now, I'm wondering, in the cold light of a meeting room, you've made decisions on what you will and won't do and the boundaries.

WATSON Yes.

AY But in the heat of the moment when you're actually out there, do some of those boundaries change and is there a conflict there?

WATSON Yes, yes. Look, there's always a degree of tension. One of the things I think should never be underestimated in direct action is the amount of effort that's put into reaching agreement and anticipating what might happen. So you do role-plays and they can be remarkably powerful and real to people in terms of, "Well, what if I was being pressured or an opportunity arose and I thought: oh, I could just do this if I could get away with it?", or whatever. You go through discussing all of that and it's interesting. I've probably got a fairly high threshold on this one in that some direct action groups will say you have some basic agreements but then you don't want to constrain your fellow activists in what they're going to do. My answer to that is that that's dangerous and unpredictable and it can create, at the

very minimum, risks to all involved. I know of cases, having worked with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in England, where people—this is going back a bit in the '60s—were involved in direct actions and found the whole experience so confronting and physically dangerous that they committed suicide once they were let out of prison. So, we do have a responsibility to our fellow activists about understanding and talking about consequences and an awareness of what they're doing. That's an extreme example but I am well aware that that's happened on occasions. So you want to ensure that those who you or I are taking action with have made those commitments. I really don't think it's useful if people suddenly join an action at the last minute. That can be a problem in and of itself because sometimes the activist group has to say, "I'm sorry; we appreciate that you'd really like to come and do this with us, but you have to have done some training before you do." Not all activist groups operate like that but those are kind of my ground rules because you can get some pretty random and negative consequences otherwise.

AY There's a lot of thought gone into your approach to direct action, nonviolent direct action, and I'd like to bring you to the present day because just last week we've seen in media stories about this schools' anti-radicalisation kit and there's some discussion as to whether it was supposed to go to schoolchildren or not, or whether it was a resource. It's a resource of some description but in it is supposed to be an alert to identify the steps to radicalism and violent extremism. Now, the first case study is a young Greens activist called Karen⁴ who goes to a forest camp. I'd like to know your response to this.

WATSON [Chuckles] Well, part of me thought it was pretty funny but the other part of me feels that this is an extraordinary document to be produced. It will be interesting to see what exactly it was produced for, and if it was a resource to go into schools I would be very concerned about that. The scenario that they give to this fictitious ...

AY I believe she's not fictitious; I believe it's a real case study.

WATSON Oh, true. Is that right? Her name might have been changed to protect the innocent, yes. Well, okay, it is an interesting scenario in that the argument is that she gets involved with activists who are protecting forests and are engaging in some activities such as spiking trees, which is a way of trying to prevent the fellers from risking using a chainsaw on

⁴ In September 2015, the federal government launched the Radicalisation Awareness Kit. Through a series of examples and fictitious case studies, the booklet aimed to illustrate the circumstances which can lead young people to become radicalised. It became controversial amongst environmentalists, teachers and others.

a log or putting it through machinery. It's a highly high-risk and dangerous activity to engage in for the people working in the logging industry and it's not something that I would support at all. I think the trouble with the scenario is it presents the most extreme of forest activism and I think it does not, to me, make the case why they think this would lead to these people being defined as terrorists. I think we've got to be really careful about the sort of language around this.

In my experience in the Parliament, one of the kind of most distressing and exhausting things is trying to make the case that expanding the definition of who is a terrorist in this way is really problematic because it runs the risk of covering for people who are genuinely engaged in terrorist acts by casting such a broad net and, at the same time, it means that civil disobedience and direct action can be captured in that definition. Legislation has gone through the Parliament (not with the Greens' vote) that has done that, whether that's for a special circumstance like the COAG meeting or more generally.

There is a big problem with that, plus if you're going to genuinely talk in schools, which I think is fine, about radical activity and possible consequences, then surely what you do is you facilitate a conversation among the students with a range of views. They need information about what the laws currently say. They need to have the capacity to discuss the politics of why people might choose to act in certain ways. They need the opportunity to talk about what's the role of the state, whichever state we're talking about, in this whole process. It's the same with the approach on drugs. Rather than trying to instruct people on the perils and the dangers, and young people just really don't respond particularly well to that kind of messaging, it's better to just have an open and frank debate about what's happening in the world. I think you then have much more chance of reducing young people going off on dangerous and destructive paths. Now we've become very kind of authoritarian [chuckles] in directing particularly young people.

AY This case study, do people look at the detail of what this forest camp is doing or do they simply hear Greens activist in a forest is a path towards radicalisation on a much bigger level. How do you feel about that?

WATSON Yes, that's right, and I think that's true because the commentary on this particular document has emphasised that if you don't read the fine print, you can just go "forest activist"; they're going to end up being a terrorist beheading people in the Middle East [chuckles]. It's a quick line from here to here. I just think it's extraordinarily offensive to

people who, like myself, have understood what's happening in terms of the need to be good custodians of the environment and are willing to put aside their own expectations in terms of no reward and work and other life choices to make a stand. Almost without exception they are exceptional people who are exceptionally committed, think deeply about what they do, and they're not paid to do it. There's a cost to them both in terms of pure income and also the stresses and strains on their relationships and families and those kinds of things. These people are, in my view, ecowarriors in the best sense of the word because a warrior is not necessarily a bad thing. They are speaking for the voiceless. No matter how hard people try to squash this down and hope it's going to go away, it has to keep coming through because we continue to live in a way that is unsustainable and destructive to the environment. If it takes direct action to illustrate that, then that's what it'll take and the people that are undertaking it are not doing it lightly, almost without exception. I mean, for every statement you make like that, there's always going to be one or two who are in there because they just want to kind of muck about or whatever [chuckles]. But by far the majority are amazing people who are far-sighted and willing to put aside their own personal ambitions and wealth to look after the planet.

AY You mentioned a little while ago that we've become very authoritarian. In your maiden speech you said that you believed in revolution. You talked about revolution, and I wonder whether now, in 2015, that would be acceptable language. I wonder if you stood up in the Parliament and said that now, would you expect to get a different reaction and would you censor yourself at all?

WATSON Well it's interesting. I thought long and hard about using that language and that analogy, and it comes from—you might be aware of Erich Fromm's work *The Revolution of Hope*.⁵ It is not a revolution in the Bolshevik sense of the revolution or Mao Zedong or one of those but it is expressing that there needs to be a complete change. It's like a comprehensive realignment of how we live on the planet from how we are with each other, which is the sort of social justice argument and respect for each other and allowing people to participate in decisions that affect them. It's also a revolution about how we live on the planet in terms of recognising that we're part of an environment and that the economy comes afterwards; the economy fits within the environment, not the extraordinary hijacking of public discourse into "It's all about the economy". I suppose it's revolutionary in the sense that from where most people's thinking is at, it's quite hard to imagine the amount of change that's needed to live differently.

⁵ First published 1968, the full title is *The Revolution of Hope: Toward a Humanized Technology*

It's interesting you say, "Would I use the language today?" I hesitated then because, in a way, it's a little provocative. I don't know that it's any more or less provocative now. I mean, you have people like Naomi Klein⁶ and it's not new, but she's getting some response and some focus for saying it's not just about climate change; it's actually about how we do business and it's about a capitalist system and whether that is the best model for sustainable living on the planet, and the role of companies and the role of profit and all those kinds of things. I certainly remain committed to that kind of level of revolution. But the choice of language is so important because if you were to turn around and discuss things in the sort of terms that the socialists still choose, I think it actually alienates a lot of people because it just sounds like rhetoric. So you need to be able to explain and shift the conversation into contemporary language. I probably should try it out with some young people [chuckles] and see what they think about it. I guess my point in saying that in my inaugural speech was to indicate that I had a strong agenda, that it wasn't business as usual as far as I was concerned. But, of course, I go on to say I will very much be looking for consensus and cooperation because that's how I work and how the Greens work, but when there is something that is a matter of principle we don't agree with, we're not going anywhere either. I guess I'm trying to make that statement that, yes, we're here to cooperate, to try and make some big changes, and we will also hold very strongly to certain policies and views.

AY We have talked a lot about consensus decision-making today. You've actually done training courses in this I understand. How did that come about?

WATSON Well, partly with the anti-bauxite Wagerup campaign, we received that training ourselves so we became a small group of half a dozen, 12 of us, who considered that we had sufficient training to train others. Whether that was true or not is another question. The model in terms of building direct action campaigns is that you continue to train more groups of people to get involved, and that was what we were undertaking here in Western Australia. I then went to the UK in the early '80s and became involved in the campaign for nuclear disarmament there, interestingly enough just at the point when they took a decision to train all their local groups in direct action. Surprisingly in some ways, they hadn't done that before, so we are talking about '82, '83. Because I'd already produced training material, run training workshops, and was deeply committed to using direct action as a social change agent, I thought, great. I can do this work there. So I did that I think every

⁶ Naomi Klein is a Canadian author, social activist, and filmmaker known for her political analyses and criticism of corporate globalisation.

weekend for about three years [chuckles]. So, yes, I became quite confident in the training process and we worked with nuclear disarmament groups and the peace camps there.

AY We'll talk about that next time. Thanks for today, Giz.

WATSON No worries. That's a good point to stop.

[End of GizWatson_2]

[GizWatson_3]

AY This is the 27th of October and I'm interviewing Giz Watson again. This is our third interview and we're sitting in her lovely garden.

You graduated from Murdoch with your environmental science degree in 1980. We talked about your working on the Campaign to Save Native Forests, but what did you do to earn a living?

WATSON When I finished uni I had the opportunity to work doing a geophysical field survey, and that job was almost a year's work. We were engaged to do a gravity survey of the whole of the south west of the state. It was actually an area—we used to quote quite often—the size of Spain [chuckles], and we were, in effect, looking for another Collie coal. That is what the company wanted. So we were looking for sedimentary rock, and that involved taking readings of the gravity at known datum, so benchmarks. All those benchmarks are associated with roads, pipelines and railway lines because that's how they surveyed, or did in those days, in those service corridors. We drove around the countryside with this precious little machine in our car over all sorts of rough roads and whatever and took a reading on each of these things. What that gave us is a map of the sedimentary deposits. Now, it was a great job; I loved it because it required a lot of planning and you were out in the bush all the time and you were self-reliant. I worked with my then partner and we actually got a reputation for being the most efficient and reliable team because as two women we didn't get drunk and wreck the equipment [chuckles]. We did a pretty good job.

There's an interesting end to the story because when we successfully completed that—I have to say that part of my rationale for, kind of, allowing myself to do that kind of work was if I thought we were going to find coal under a bit of our precious jarrah forest, I would have mucked the figures up to make sure that we, at least, delayed whatever was going to happen, if that was possible. But the interesting thing was once we had finished that project, the indication was we were going to be offered more work, but I was called into the office and asked if I would work with uranium, to which I said, "No, I wouldn't", and that was the end; there was no more work. That was another example of the mining sector not being willing to compromise. To have a job it's important that you don't work with what you're not ethically comfortable with.

AY Indeed, and coal and uranium, you were not.

WATSON Coal and uranium, yes, well, that's right. Well, we're a mining state. So, yes, indeed, I certainly was part of the look for another Collie coal. It's interesting because I look at it now historically and realise, of course, they have identified more deposits down around Margaret River. I don't know whether we just missed something [laughs]. I didn't muck those figures up by the way.

AY Perhaps you just weren't trying hard enough.

WATSON Yes, maybe I wasn't. My heart wasn't really in it [laughs].

AY So, there you are: you're graduated, you've been working; you've got the Campaign to Save Native Forests under your belt, and you decide to go to England. Why?

WATSON Well, my partner decided to go to England, so then I thought I'd better go too. I didn't actually have a specific reason other than I had been back over to Europe once immediately after I left school, so I had a bit of a taste for travelling and enjoyed travelling in, particularly, Greece and Ireland and other parts of Europe. So, I was quite happy to go back again. I didn't really have a plan in terms of a work career. I had a hope that I might be able to work in national parks, and that was one of the things I pursued when I did get to England, but found, Interestingly enough, they didn't even recognise an environmental science degree. They said, "Well, are you a biologist or a chemist? We don't have this cross-disciplinary approach." We're talking early '80s in England, because the background to environmental science qualifications was actually from the [United] States. Anyway, that was another thing; it didn't quite fit their model.

AY So what did you do?

WATSON Well, for a while I cleaned houses, basically, and made enough to live on. We were living very inexpensively. We were actually a part of the squatting movement, not surprisingly. You'd rock up in London in the '80s and it's an expensive place to live and it didn't take us long to figure out that we had some friends there who were also squatting in houses in Islington, just close into North London. To quote the figures, in those days there were 9 000 empty houses owned by the council—so they were not owned by members of the public—that were standing empty just in Islington alone. There was this mismatch between a lot of people not being able to afford to rent, but all these buildings that were actually losing

the council money every week that stood empty. So we became part of that group and eventually there was an agreement struck between the council which led to Islington Community Housing Association, I was on the management committee of that and the maintenance, but that's another story. But, yes, in order to make ends meet I cleaned people's houses, and that left me a fair amount of free time to do a lot of politics in the evening, which is basically what I did.

A little later an opportunity arose with a training project that was being sponsored by the government to train women in the building sector, and a friend encouraged me to look into that. Because I'd already done a reasonable amount of building in Australia I didn't have any problem getting accepted onto that. In fact, what they found fairly quickly is that I knew more than most of them, so they made me a supervisor [laughs], which was slightly strange. It was a really interesting experience.

The whole thing about those training schemes is whether they are really offering people a good opportunity to get a skill and make a different career. I suppose they did for some, but it was incredibly inefficient. When they didn't offer us any money to buy equipment, so I said, "We need some nails", and they said, "Haven't you got some bent ones you can straighten?" I quote. I am not kidding you. I was just appalled that they would patronise trainees with that kind of rubbish. Nevertheless, what it did do, it meant that I was able to get a place in the City & Guilds, in Hackney, in carpentry and joinery; so I did two years there and completed a carpentry and joinery trade certificate. I was officially a carpenter and joiner and went on to work for an anarchist building collective, which was also a very interesting experience because it was run along anarchist principles. All the trades, the architects and all the components of the building team were paid the same amount of money. We all met together to make decisions and we had two types of work. We had cash jobs, because there was a lot of building and renovation work going on in London at that time, but we also worked for organisations where we converted a church, for example, into being accessible for disabled people, so it became, half of it, a centre for people with disabilities. So that was great fun and they were a great mob to work with and had very clear ethical principles about not being a profit-making organisation, but providing a community service by way of building things for worthy community projects.

AY Around about this time in the UK we had the Greenham Common women's peace group⁷. How did you become involved in this?

WATSON Fairly early on; I think maybe '81 or '82, I started looking around in London for the sort of organisations that I might work with. I always have some eye to politics here or there and I was involved in a number, but one of them was the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which people would be aware had been going since post-World War II in the UK. Around about 1981 there was a decision nationally to train all their local groups, because they had hundreds of local groups around the country, in nonviolent direct action. CND had had some involvement in direct action throughout its history, but not what I would describe as kind of by the books nonviolent direct action. They had what was called the Committee of 100, I think it was, which was made up of people who were doing direct action. But, by all accounts, their method was that these people would indicate they were willing to do direct action; they'd turn up at a designated time and place; and someone would say, "Well, we're going to be marching to Aldermaston", which is a weapons factory, "and we're going to blockade the gate", or whatever it is. So the people who were participating hadn't been engaged in any of the decision making or the training or planning in any real way. I was quite horrified by that as a model. So, when I was at that meeting when that decision was taken, and relatively new, obviously, to the organisation, I sought out the people who were planning to plan for the training and said, "Look, I've got a bit of experience." In fact, I thought I might learn more myself, but it turned out there wasn't a huge amount of experience in what I considered the heritage of nonviolence that had come through the civil rights movement in the United States and then jumped across to us and been developed in various campaigns like the Wagerup campaign and the Franklin blockades and those kind of things.

So, I found myself in a training collective, there were probably about 20 or 30 of us, and we spent every weekend heading off to one or other local group around the country and running training sessions all weekend. And around about that time, we heard of these women who'd marched from Wales across to Greenham Common, and of course we were very interested in what was happening there. I don't remember whether some of us went down to meet with them or we met with them in London, and it became obvious that what we were doing in

⁷ In 1981, the Welsh group "Women for Life on Earth" arrived on Greenham Common, Berkshire, England. Their intention was to challenge, by debate, the decision to site 96 Cruise nuclear missiles there. Within 6 months the camp became known as the Women's Peace Camp and gained recognition both nationally and internationally by drawing attention to the base with well publicised imaginative gatherings. The protest continued for 19 years. <http://www.greenhamwpc.org.uk>

terms of training would be useful in terms of assisting women who were planning to go down and be part of that peace camp. So there was a kind of loose relationship, I suppose, between that CND training group and the Greenham women.

AY You should probably explain what the Greenham women were doing.

WATSON Yes. Doesn't everybody know [laughs]? Of course not. In, I think it was '82; I'd have to ...

AY '81, '82.

WATSON Yes. A group of relatively few women, maybe 10, 15, walked from Wales to Greenham Common, which is near Newbury in—is it Surrey or ...

AY Berkshire.

WATSON Berkshire, yes. Berkshire, even [laughs]. They marched to the site of American cruise missiles that had been put onto the base, which was a joint facility, and were in silos. Basically, cruise missiles are long-range nuclear warheads that were, in effect, aimed at Russia from British soil, as it were. At the time, this was seen by the peace movement as a major escalation of the tension with Russia and the Eastern Bloc, and the fact that these missiles could be launched and be in Moscow in 20 minutes, you know, many, many people found deeply wrong and scary and immoral and all the rest. I think the added element was these are American missiles [laughs] and I think I'm correct in saying that's the first time they'd actually been physically based in England. I think there were some in Europe at various places, but not in the UK. So there was a mixture of, I guess, sort of, national offence at this, as well as those of us who are staunchly opposed to nuclear weapons. I think you've got to remember at the time the Cold War was still alive and well. You were very aware that if there was some sort of crisis whether caused deliberately or inadvertently that you had roughly 20, 30 minutes before missiles from the Soviet Union would hit England. That's pretty sobering. There's nothing quite comparable to that. Australians, I think, unless you've lived there and actually appreciated that, just don't understand that and what that does. The posters used to say "What do you do in the event of a nuclear catastrophe?" Well, "Kiss your children goodbye" was what they actually said. So, there was a lot of anxiety about it.

It's very interesting. I just noticed that there's a film that's just come out which is called *The Man Who Saved the World*, and it's actually about a Russian (one of the guys in the command headquarters with their missiles) when there was a false alarm that there were incoming missiles, and he had to make the decision whether he was going to retaliate, and he didn't. I mean, that's how close it got. I think we were absolutely right in our assessment of exactly how dangerous the situation was. These things haven't gone away, but I do understand that there aren't any cruise missiles in England any more. That camp that was established stayed there for 15 years. One of the things I would comment on about having done political and direct action work with the peace movement here and in England is how extraordinarily determined those women were to stay until the job was done. I mean, 15 years. For anybody who's kind of looked at the story of Greenham Common, living in appalling conditions, in mud and freezing (literally snow and sleet) and constantly having your tents taken away, women mostly, living under sheets of plastic in appalling conditions for month after month after month. Amazing story; it really is.

AY Do you have recollections of the camp and the living conditions?

WATSON Yes, [chuckles], in talking about it, I straightaway have a picture of the camp around the main entrance, which was where the main camp was and where the women maintained that that would be a women's only camp. There were other camps at other gates where there were men a bit later on. But it's pretty basic and it's pretty tense, really. I guess, having grown up in England, and knowing how cold, wet and miserable it can get, I take my hat off to them for having held out. Yes, so I have a very strong image of the gate, the fence, the little camp fire with the kettles going, and always somebody there to talk and update you on what's going on. And of course the big actions that we had there, like encircling the base, which was just the most extraordinary event, because I think there was a hope that we'd get enough people to actually encircle the whole perimeter fence, which is over eight miles long, and that we would be basically able to encircle it. Well, when the day came, there were so many coach-fuls of people that the traffic was just bedlam, and we had enough people to almost doubly encircle the base and not with your arms stretched out like this [indicating] but actually people quite bunched up close together and then having other people still just running around the outside. I don't know how many thousands of people got there, but it was the most extraordinary thing to experience. There were the big mass actions and then there were ongoing actions that were carried out, sometimes with just a few women, including going on the base.

AY And there were threats, too, of assault; women were arrested. It certainly wasn't for the faint-hearted. What do you think kept the women's solidarity and motivation going?

WATSON Well, I guess to confirm that it wasn't all beer and skittles, as they say, particularly for a lot of middle-class women who had been brought up with the training that English policemen were these nice bobbies who stood on the corner and gave you directions to the shops, to actually have them throw them around, hurt them, you know, in quite a few cases and be threatening and seriously unpleasant was quite a shock, quite a politicising thing. I think that was partly what, I guess, hardened their resolve—those that it didn't put off entirely; they suddenly went, "Whoa." I can't emphasise enough the sense that you were up against a whole militarised culture, because one of the things about the UK is that it has a long, long history of militarism and it prides itself in that.

This came to me more clearly during the Falklands War, and maybe we'll talk about that a bit later, but during the actions protesting against the war in the Falklands, I had such a sense of being up against something so formidable, so deeply rooted and so basically evil [chuckles] that I think there was enough critical mass of women who suddenly went, "Well, if this is my experience that the system, that the state, will be so aggressive". One of the results of civil disobedience is that you amplify the violence of the state, you make them demonstrate that they are willing to be violent, to have things their way, so it can be dangerous. I also think that there were a core number of women who were just adamant that this was the most important thing that they could do, to make a stand against nuclear weapons where they could, in their own country, and that that was more important than jobs, in some cases than their commitments to their families, all those things. And, to be honest, I think they're right [laughs], but there aren't that many people who can really see it through in that way. I mean, there were changes; it wasn't entirely the same women all the way through. But there were key women who held that together.

AY You say that they had the whole state apparatus against them, and there weren't political affiliations within the women particularly ...

WATSON Not particularly, no. I mean, they would have been of the left by and large, but I think one of the things was women who were middle class. There's much more of a class differentiation in the UK, and that continues to this day, but they were more well-paid, articulate women who became politicised, not the least because there was, in conjunction

with the peace camps, a huge amount of informing and educating people. So one of the things about their being 20 minutes away from being vaporised was that the state responded by saying, "Well, we will utilise the bomb shelters that we used during the Second World War to shelter us from nuclear reaction". Some of the things that we would do outside of the peace camps directly was do sit-ins on top of the lids of these bunkers and then pretend that there'd been some nuclear thing and we weren't going to let anybody in because we'd decided [chuckles] to demonstrate how stupid the whole thing was and that it would only take a couple of determined people to basically lock the rest of the populace out and say, "Your air-raid shelters are absolutely useless", not the least that the oxygen would get sucked completely out of them and all that kind of thing. So it was demonstrating that the government had no way of protecting the population if there was a nuclear exchange, and it was just criminal to even be kidding people that that was either what could happen or would happen.

AY What was the left of politics doing in the UK at the time? Was there bipartisan support for this?

WATSON Largely, yes, there was. I don't think that the left had any opposition to it. I mean, there would be people who had more sympathy with the Soviet position. Quite frankly, part of me got to understand that better. You've got to remember this is a country that had lost 20 million of its civilians during the Second World War and it was, not surprisingly, naturally defensive. I won't go into the whole history of the politics of the Cold War. I think there was certainly some Soviet sympathisers, but most of the younger generation thought they were equally wrong and bad in this scenario, and I agree [laughs]. That's my analysis. But you've got to remember this is also the time when Thatcher came in and was actively and systematically demolishing the unions, so to a large extent they had their work cut out just trying to survive that period of the most concerted and systematic attack on unionism that the country had ever seen. So, as much as we had union support, those from the left mostly had their eye on that ball, and I wouldn't argue with them; I think that was what they needed to do.

AY Where was other support coming from, internationally, within Europe, even as far away as Australia? Who was providing that moral support for the women?

WATSON Well, it's interesting, because I came back to Australia briefly, I think it was early '84, and Jo Vallentine had just been elected in the Australian Senate as a

representative of the Nuclear Disarmament Party. It's worth pointing out the only person I'm aware of, anywhere in the world, who was elected on a sole platform of nuclear disarmament—in Western Australia, and it was the time when there were peace camps at Cockburn Sound and there were camps even going up to Exmouth and Pine Gap and those sort of places. So there was a sense that there was a very strong global solidarity about this, and that, certainly in Europe, there were similar activities at bases.

My involvement with the European chapter, or section of the anti-nuclear movement, was via the War Resisters. So the War Resisters, again, are a long-running peace group that fight against militarism globally. I'm not sure if they started in America, but certainly they were active in America, in the UK and in Europe. That international group was very much supporting and engaged with the peace camp movement. I can't remember at the peak how many peace camps there were in the UK but it would be, I would've thought, about 30 or something like that. It did really mobilise a lot of people and inspire a lot of people.

I remember one of the stats was if you're in the UK, you can't ever get more than about, I think it's 30 miles, away from either a nuclear reactor or some sort of military establishment. You realise how militarised the whole place is, whether that's a training camp or a site for missiles or weapons factories there's a lot of them. The fascinating thing is often if you look at a map there's this sort of blank spot. That's one of the ways you can find out where they are [laughs] because they don't put them on the map, which is sort of strange, really, because it doesn't take long to figure it out [laughs]. I don't know if that's still the case, but that certainly was the case. I think that was a hangover from the Second World War, where they kind of figured if the maps didn't show the Germans [laughs] the bits they didn't want them to know about, they wouldn't be able to find them. I don't know; it's a bit sort of James Bond—esque really.

AY But you know for all this and all the amazing work that the women did, it really was largely ineffectual.

WATSON Yes, yes; look, we still have—I mean, there's been some reduction in the number of warheads. There has been some destruction of fissile material because, interestingly enough, that's one of the reasons that the price of uranium was kept down; it was because they were actually using fissile material from warheads when they agreed to reduce the ridiculous number, thousands of them, that were floating around in Europe. But, no, it hasn't fixed the problem. It hasn't rid the world of nuclear weapons. Yes, I guess much

as that specific objective of getting cruise missiles out of the country was ultimately achieved, it's interesting to note that with Jeremy Corbyn⁸ just coming in now, one of his first things was to try and either not buy or produce any more Trident missiles or to dismantle that program altogether, and he failed comprehensively. I don't quite know why people still don't get how precarious the situation is [chuckles] that we've still got weapons systems that are on high alert. None of that's actually gone away.

AY Looking at the legacy of Greenham Common, one view is that the real success of the protest was not simply what it changed at Greenham Common but how it changed the nature of protest.

WATSON Yes.

AY And I wonder how you respond to that.

WATSON Yes. Well, I think because it required a combination of factors, one, a steely determination and creativeness on site to continue with a presence to continue to undertake various activities, either getting on the base, so keeping your opponent on their toes all the time; but it also was combined with a very successful public debate, you know, the level of discussion that was happening. I guess one's view is always coloured by the people you happen to be talking to yourself, but, nevertheless, what was in the papers and what was being discussed on news channels and in the pub deeply affected the whole community.

I think it also empowered and made people realise that kind of ordinary people, in inverted commas, could play a role and that that was an important component, if not a powerful component, in trying to bring change. I think that sort of politicising of comfortable middle-class women in particular had a major impact. In a way I think what happened with the peace camp and the peace movement in the UK in the '80s was kind of akin to what happened in the [United] States with the Vietnam War. There were obviously protests against the Vietnam War globally, but in terms of something that was happening actually in your own country and was about what your own government was doing and how high the stakes were, I think that this was a pivotal moment in very volatile times. I mentioned the fact that there was the attack on the unions happening as well, so the state response was pretty uncompromising as well. I think that led quite a few people to think, "Well, what is the state actually about, really?"

⁸ Jeremy Corbyn was elected the UK Labour leader in 2015.

AY The concept that a protest is what you do when those you elected are not listening. Do you agree?

WATSON Yes.

AY I wonder whether the women there were inspired by what they'd done, perhaps, at Greenham Common and inspired them to continue to protest.

WATSON I haven't followed through with any of those—I'm not in touch with any of those people so I don't know whether specifically it has. But, as I say, only in just the last few months I've been contacted by some women who are making a film about Greenham Common, so it's obviously still considered to be historically important and topical enough to want to make a film about it. I think for a lot of those women, when you are that sort of deeply politicised it's pretty hard to go back to kind of where you were, because you've experienced and learnt stuff that is a bit out of the box in terms of perhaps your more traditional life choices of working and having a family and being a member of your local community or whatever. This is something that actually challenges you to think about power, about the role of the community, and, as you say, what do you do when your leaders aren't listening to you, and when they've brought a certain narrative. The narrative was mutually assured destruction, so you had this kind of permanent standoff. That was what the powers that be thought worked, in inverted commas, putting aside the enormous cost, the huge risk and everything else [laughs]. The argument was that they had maintained peace in Europe somehow.

And it's so fundamentally bizarre that I think once you scratch the surface and start doing your homework, it's pretty likely that everybody who got close to it would have been impacted. I would like to hope that it meant that people went on, at the very least, to work within their immediate community in a way that was more empowered and informed and confident, really. If you take on the system—for some people it wasn't a good result. I had a friend who was killed. There was another woman who was actually, we believe, killed by the military because she was about to blow the whistle on something. But none of this is able to be proved. The other aspect of doing direct action, being involved politically in the UK at that time, was that, of course, the IRA was still actively doing bombings and terrorist acts on mainland England, so the police were also incredibly jumpy, and so certainly any action we did, not so much on the peace camp, but things that we did in the streets, you had to think

that they might think you were IRA before they thought anything else, especially if you had red hair, which I did [laughs]. Yes, that was a level of potential violence that was ever present; it was always in the back of your mind. Certainly when we protested the Falklands War, it was a dangerous thing to do.

AY Going back to your personal involvement in activism and CND, apart from Greenham Common, what else were you doing? You were leading up to the Falklands there I think, too.

WATSON We were training local groups to protest against the establishment of nuclear reactors, so Sizewell B was one of the ones that we were actively involved in (that was up in East Anglia) and training not just people to take direct action in their local areas but also to train other people, so we were training the trainers as well. Yes, the international stuff, well, I guess that kind of came up because I was participating in training in Europe as well, so there was a training group based in Amersfoort in Holland. I went and did the week's training there, and that led to getting involved in—the War Resisters do an international march every year, so we actually went down and protested in Spain, which was pretty hairy, too [laughter] ...

AY Why was that?

WATSON Well, Franco had only just died, so you've got to remember that Spain was heavily militarised and didn't like or allow much protest against anything. We had rather a bold plan and that was to go and protest because the southern part of Spain was then and still is highly militarised, so you had the American base, you had the English at Gibraltar, and Spanish military are heavily focused around that area as well, and we were going to take them all on [laughs] much to the enthusiasm of the local Spanish peace activists, because they'd not been able to do anything much for a very long time [laughs]. I've got to tell you one of the first things we decided we'd do, which we thought was very low key, because it was the anniversary of Hiroshima, that we would go into this small town and sit on the steps of the post office just with some placards that said, "Remember that nuclear weapons kill" and Hiroshima and the people of Japan and all the rest. So, people piled on the bus, went into the town, got off the bus with their placards and were all arrested [laughs]. They hardly got off the bus. So, this was a sign of things to come. There's a whole story attached to that, but, basically I felt quite passionate about opposing militarism wherever it rears its ugly head, basically, because of the cost and the culture and the lies that go around suggesting that military solutions are going to be what solves our problems. I still remain absolutely clear that

if you look at the huge amount of money that gets spent on arms, the huge cost to the civilian population these days (80 per cent of the casualties of wars these days are civilians, not military) and it's so fundamental to how we relate to each other as humans, and if we think that resolving conflict by warfare makes any sense at all, you know, it beggars belief, really. I think I kind of really have, from whenever I can remember, had a very strong sense that dealing with the whole thinking and the machine that creates militarism is an important and worthy cause. I don't know, it's not really high on the agenda at the moment, I don't think; there's too many other crises going on [laughs], but it is still a huge part of the cost and the woes of the planet.

AY It is, but can you put yourself back in that period of time when the Cold War was still raging and you're in Europe. What was that feeling like of the enemy just on the other side of that border and the mutually assured destruction aspect?

WATSON There was a lot of us who didn't buy that sense of the enemy on the other side, because in the peace movement there's an interesting history of, particularly in organisations such as WILPF, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, which goes back to, I think, just between the First and Second World War and had strong European roots, including in the Soviet Union. So, if one does one's homework in history (and I've never been to the Soviet Union or to Russia) the desire for peace wasn't wholly on our side of the fence and that makes sense [laughs]. Having said that, I didn't ever have any direct contact from the other side, but I think, particularly working with people in Germany and Europe and Spain, on the continent, you got a much different sense of us all being on this same lump of land together.

If you think all the wars that have been fought recently in Europe, it's their grandparents, it's on their bits of lands, it's still pretty fresh, or certainly in the '80s, was still pretty fresh in people's minds, whereas England—of course, England was never invaded—at that point was somehow a bit isolated. I guess the European sense was that there were an enormous number of mainly younger people rising up against the hypocrisy of it all, the danger of it all, the distraction and the cost of this constant standoff, and basically saying, "We can't continue to live under this sort of pressure." But, as I say, it's interesting to see that that urgency has died off. Even the push for nuclear disarmament has—it's still there in the background and there's still people who are putting energy in, but it hasn't got that huge mass support. I don't know, maybe some of these campaigns are really hard to sustain. A small number can, the dedicated few, but the bulk of the population can't be engaged, I think, in that way for an

extended period. They have jobs to go to and families to look after and all that kind of stuff. The notion that we would mobilise enough people to grind the system to a halt, that model [laughs] ultimately didn't work.

AY What about your sense of conviction, and I'm wondering here how you're juggling life and having to work and earn a living with this?

WATSON [Laughs] I didn't get much sleep [laughs]; seriously. Well, it's interesting. I still have my diaries from those years and if I flick through that virtually every evening I was at a meeting and all weekend I'd be out doing training and things. It helped to have a job that in some respects didn't require a huge amount of thinking. I'm not suggesting that building doesn't require thinking, but it's not like you had to do a lot of reading. You go out, you do the work and you can kind of put it down at the end of the day, whereas other jobs it's harder to actually make that separation. If you're young and fit and well, you can pack a fair amount in, but it was pretty full; there wasn't much spare time for anything. I didn't socialise or go out and I probably wouldn't fit the norm in that sort of spectrum. I was either working or I was doing politics pretty much. So, there was the CND work, the War Resisters and I was also in a group called Women Opposed to Nuclear Threat, that was like a local group, and also a group that was opposed to violence against women, so we were also working against domestic violence and basically assault on women in the community. So, there were a few things going on [laughs].

AY Well, yes; you were involved in quite a lot of things. I'm wondering what you were learning from the experience of being involved with these different groups. I'm thinking about what might have brought you to where you are today.

WATSON Well, one of the things that was very rigorous and kind of challenging was the debates that were occurring about class, about gender issues, about race. It's one of the things I miss not being in that European tradition of the left, I suppose, that kind of came along with that peace camp era. Some of the things that came up at the peace camp were about class and assumptions and about being white, and sexuality issues too, because what was the image of the camp that people wanted and who were going to be the spokespeople, and there was this kind of natural flow that it tended to be the articulate, white, middle-class women. And women of colour said, "Well, hang on a sec, what's going on here?" We spent days and days and days of debating and having, you know, West Indian women challenging us for being white and comfortable and having privilege and all the rest. So there's nothing

quite like that experience to make you really figure out what you really believe and what you're willing to give up. Are you willing to step outside of your comfort zone and recognise that you have been privileged because you've had a good education and never really had to worry about not having enough money, all those kind of things? They were really formative and quite personally—middle-class women were not exactly physically attacked, but almost; there was a lot of anger, so experiencing that rage and generations of disadvantage in a really personal way was a powerful learning, really. For example, if I was to jump then forward to being in Parliament in Western Australia and sitting in there with a bunch of elderly men who'd probably been on a wheat farm in Western Australia, it's just poles apart in terms of whatever they've—I don't want to patronise people—interrogated or whatever their personal experiences have been are going to shape them. So, a lot of them, to be frank, are quite limited by all of that.

That's not to say that I know everything or sorted everything out, but I had a lot of opportunity to really think about how people are with each other, what are the values, what are the ethics, what does it mean to be privileged, how does politics work on a really one-on-one personal level. Whereas, I just think not that many people do that or put themselves in that position or even think that they need to or want to [laughs]. So we're in a very unpolitical sort of environment, particularly in Western Australia. I found it quite shocking when I came back to Western Australia. I felt like everybody was living on a cloud somewhere completely divorced from the major events of the world and what was actually shaping the world and what was going on. It was comfortable. People talked about going to barbecues and that was about it really, so it was pretty strange by contrast.

AY Would you say that here there's more a sense that the political is just what happens in the Parliament, whereas in Europe, perhaps, there is more the sense that the political is how you live your life. How would you respond to that?

WATSON I think that's true, although obviously there are some exceptions in Australian history to all of that, but they tend to go in waves rather than being a permanent sort of fixture. Well, I think it's changing quite rapidly now, but the difference between the wealthy and the not so wealthy, certainly in Australia in the '70s, was nothing like that whole history in Europe. I think Australia, certainly in the '70s, had egalitarian principles and they actually were lived; whereas, I think unfortunately, we've moved very quickly from there and that continues to accelerate, and in Europe there is definitely a tradition that people, as you say, live your politics and discuss politics of the community. Greece is fascinating. You know,

like walking through some little village with your backpack on and there'll be an elderly man sitting at a table who'll call you over and say, "Sit down and have a coffee". Not much language in common, but they want to talk about politics—it's cultural—and Ireland is the same. The two reasons why I particularly like travelling there; and that doesn't mean that they'd got it all sorted out, but they were political people; political culture was right through to the villages. Whereas, here, it's almost like people don't want to talk about it. They love to take the micky out of politicians, and I think that's one of the problems actually [laughs]; It becomes very circular. If the whole position of representatives in Parliament is denigrated and ridiculed, then who will want to go there? Well, people who can put up with that and perhaps have a cynical view of the world themselves. I just think that it becomes very problematic. It's not exclusive to Australia, but it's certainly one of the more problematic places for that kind of stuff.

AY We'll be talking about what brings people to politics later on.

WATSON Yes, right; it's a very good question [laughs].

AY Well, it is, but I'm still trying to get a sense of your experience with the different movements in the UK and in Europe. What did you learn—was it consensus decision-making, being part of an organisation that voted on things that came to decisions? What did you learn?

WATSON Well, certainly it reinforced my commitment to consensus and facilitation and nonviolence. Interestingly enough, my first experience of group decisions and politics was with a commitment to consensus. So, for me, it was really odd to go into the more standard model of where people put up proposals and debate for and against and then vote. I found that just bizarre, but I do understand that's a particular tradition [laughs]. I think it showed to me very clearly that consensus could work under pressure. My experiences at peace camps and demonstrations, particularly in Spain, was that you could have hundreds of people who, if they had enough training, would have enough trust in each other to actually come to a consensus decision under threat of teargas. That's pretty amazing, really; it takes an enormous amount of discipline. So it just reinforced my commitment to that method of working with people. That was reinforced. I think it also reinforced my sense that women organise differently and that women had a greater understanding of collectivism and working together cooperatively. Now, I say that with some caution because it is not always the experience [laughs]. The general tendency is towards being cooperative and consensus-

based in working in groups, whereas men in that experience tended to struggle more with not pushing themselves forward and wanting to lead things and direct things and know best—so all of that politics was thrashed through. I found that I enjoyed working with women, but not exclusively, interestingly enough, because certainly in my peace actions, although there were a number of groups that were women only I actually chose to work in mixed groups, because I found in that context, for some reason, that that combination worked better, which is interesting.

AY Can you tease that out a bit more, why that might have been?

WATSON Yes. I suppose, when we were dealing with issues like violence against women and the organisation that was specifically women against nuclear—Women Opposed to Nuclear Threat was about understanding masculinity and militarism and bringing up little boys in certain ways you were actually going to end up just replicating the same problems in society that lead to conflict and that competitive ways of resolving differences was the norm. Whereas, in the broader peace movement, I think there was a sense that the solution had to include keeping the men in the tent and working for the solution, I had a sense. It was interesting because there was also a mixture of organisations like Pax Christi, which is a Catholic peace organisation. So, there were interesting challenges about Christianity in the context of peace, and I found that good to experience a Christian view of peace. I guess I would have thought previously that Christianity was part of the problem, really [laughs]. You only have to think of Crusades and other things like that and realise that a lot of terrible things have been done in the name of religion, and continue to be. So, yes, those sort of gendered politics were a good learning experience to work out what was the best combination for any political challenge, I suppose.

Also, the other lesson I remember strongly, if you talk about the way that a lot of those women's groups were organising in the '70s, '80s, they were without leaders in theory, which led to the discussion about the tyranny of structurelessness, which means, in theory, there's an expectation that everybody's equal, but of course it never actually works like that. I've got a wonderful story of being at a demonstration—I don't even remember what the occasion was—but there was a small group of women protesting outside a building, and the police come along and they say, because it's the first question they always ask, "Who's in charge?" Because it was a group that didn't have any leaders, we all looked at each other. There was this one very energetic and forceful Jamaican woman and she said, "What are you saying? We're a women's collective; we don't have any leaders here. But, anyway, what is it you

want to know?" So, someone will step up. If you aren't clear about the power dynamics and all those kind of things and have frank and clear conversations about that, then someone will assume the role and so, for all intents and purposes, they occupy that position, but because it's not named, it's harder to manage.

AY And certainly with the Greenham Common, I know that it threw the authorities because they were a bit flummoxed by 'who's your leader?'

WATSON Yes, so it's a great tactic but you have to know that you're actually doing that and it's part of anarchist thought too that what you create is like a multi-headed Medusa; you cut off one head and there's 10 more to replace it, and it's great; I love it.

AY But there comes a point where dealing with the media say, someone needs to step out the front and speak. You need to get your message across. Now, with this kind of a structure how do you achieve that?

WATSON Yes, of course you recognise that there are certain roles that have to be fulfilled. You do it by being very clear about what the limitations and what the powers are that are being opened up for one or two people or whatever. I think we also deal with it by having a good critical evaluation of how that's working and how people are finding that. It is one of the ongoing dilemmas with any community organising and direct action politics in general, this issue of leadership. That was the other one that was just debated long and hard and relationships with power and all those kinds of things; it's still ongoing that conversation.

In classic direct action organising you discuss all that, you work out who is going to perform that role, whether it's just for that particular occasion or whether it's an ongoing role, and you might say that this person can do this but they have to have some clear consultation with the group to decide what it is they're going to say. You don't necessarily give people carte blanche. You also say, well, the group will retain the option of picking somebody else at any point they want to change it. I think that's good and I think sharing it on the one hand is good for the group but it doesn't necessarily work really well for the media because they want a shape, they want to have that relationship, they want to know who to ring at any given time.

AY This is something we'll come back to I'm sure when we start talking about the Greens but you've talked about consensus decision-making in smaller groups. Can it be successful in a big organisation?

WATSON I'm so glad you asked me that question [chuckles].

AY We can come back to it if you like?

WATSON No, no, it's fine.

AY We probably will.

WATSON We can come back to it as well but, look, I think it's a fascinating challenge and it's one that I have been, in the time since I finished up at the Parliament a couple of years ago, engaged in our national organisation. We have now about 14 000 members and probably 10 times that again in terms of supporters, people who actually think they are the Australian Greens but they just haven't paid us any membership fees. So it's a big group and dispersed geographically and coming from states with different political heritage and experience and cultures, some of which are more consensus-based than others. So can you genuinely say that you're providing a participatory model? Because one of our four principles is that people should have the opportunity to be engaged in decisions that affect them, in a nutshell, and we have to do that within our own party. So how do you do that?

When I started here in Western Australia there were probably 30 of us to start with and obviously you can work differently with a group of 30 than you can with a group of 13 000. So I guess what we find most comfortable and functional and in line with our principles is a bit of a marriage between a representative democracy and a consensus model. The local group or the regional group of Greens ultimately should have the most power, but of course you have to make decisions for a whole national body. You need functional local groups that engage their members and make decisions by consensus. They then appoint somebody to be their representative. Now, that representative also has to have some capacity to negotiate, to reach a consensus. So you've got that kind of matching of the two because not everybody from this group, all these 50 people, can then go and sit in a meeting with 500 people. I mean you can, but you need a very big venue and most people can't actually physically either afford to be there or it's not practical. So you have to have a system where you have representatives who are that bridge between those two meeting forums. Really I think the most important thing is that those people in particular, but all members in general, understand how decision-making works; what works well and what doesn't, what prevents decisions being reached and creates conflict. So training in understanding consensus

facilitation and nonviolent communication has to be across the board because then people kind of have confidence that whoever they're sending as their representative will be skilled enough to do a good job, will know when they can say, "I'm sorry, I can't continue with this decision because I know my group would want me to stop here."

Look, we managed to do it. We have got a lot more sophisticated and mature in our ways of coming to consensus quickly, or more quickly, and effectively. We very, very rarely vote at any level of our organisation, not in the least because we have got a very high bar for going to a vote and for achieving a vote, which is how you encourage people to try and find a solution in a consensus. It's not without its frustrations. People find it slow. Sorry, I should say we also do vote on a couple of occasions; if we have a secret ballot for candidates that seems to be the most democratic way of deciding candidates and office-bearers, so we do do that. I like to think that it's kind of a level of commitment that we ask of our members, which is over and above most political parties. Most political parties just want people's—they'd like to say they've got lots of members and supporters and they'd like to have some money but the politics is seen as this is the sort of war chest and the capacity but, you know, not truly listening and engaged in the same way and that flow of information backwards and forwards. Now sometimes people find that frustrating because to get everybody up to speed be able to debate everything also takes a lot of commitment. Information has to flow very well between all levels, and when you've got decisions that have to be made quickly or strategically there's a decision to keep some things quiet or confidential that makes consensus harder. There is no perfect answer and I don't know that anybody's sorted it out anywhere on the planet.

It probably works best in small, village-sized communities, and that's not to romanticise or idealise those communities who have got their own challenges, but how you do that with a national organisation and national representation I think is a great challenge. If we get that right and we can maintain that culture, then we can model that you could have a more consensus-based approach to the broader politic. It was one of the things that, apart from policy objectives going into the state Parliament, I felt very strongly. It was about seeking to have some influence on the culture and that meant a stronger influence in terms of conflict resolution and consensus-based decision-making in the Parliament wherever possible, whenever there was a possibility. Obviously, legislation, motions, all those things ultimately get voted on, but a lot of the work that goes on behind the scenes, particularly committee work, actually lends itself to consensus.

AY We will talk about this a bit more next time. Thank you, Giz.

[End of GizWatson_3]

[GizWatson_4]

AY This is a further interview with Giz Watson. Today is the 24th of November. We're in her home in Floreat and I'm Anne Yardley.

Giz, last time we talked, we did touch on the experience of being in Europe and how that may have changed you, I suppose, or informed you or informed the politician that you became.

WATSON Yes, I think European politics, politics of the left, has a number of aspects that are really different to Australia, and maybe that's obvious, but it's much more international. Some of the people that I met and worked with in London were from Nicaragua or Africa or the West Indies or India and very articulate about the politics of international relations, about colonialism, about class and colour, those sorts of things, so a much broader view of international politics, but also the history of political debate in the European context—and I think it's probably true in a lot of Asian countries as well—that people talk about politics all the time. They talk about power and decision-making and who's doing what and who isn't and how you might influence that and what attitudes you might take to that, so politics is very much integrated with everything you do—your choice about what you buy, your choice about what work you do, your choice about what groups you get involved in—and that's got a really long tradition. That's what you sit around and discuss when you have a cup of coffee. It's not like whose party you're going to next or which barbecue is happening around the corner or even to that extent kind of what the kids are doing and those kind of things. There's sort of an integration of politics into everything that your life's about, whereas when I came back here, it was really quite a considerable reverse culture shock.

I felt like I'd landed on this fantasy island where everybody was working on a fairly superficial communication level and happy and content, and the sun shines and you go for a swim, and you've got a job so you've got money and all that kind of stuff. People were pretty comfortable. We're talking mid '80s here in Western Australia, and that's not everybody, obviously, but generally there wasn't this feeling of—in the UK there was still mass unemployment; people who experienced generations of unemployment, and we'd had the attack on the miners by the Thatcher Government, so some pretty intense politics.

Yes, it felt like it just hadn't ever touched Western Australia, so I felt pretty much like a fish out of water. I went straight down to the country, which was probably good, because then I

was in the country and I was working. I wasn't really doing much politics for a couple of years, because I was building a house for my parents, which was the reason why I was enticed back to Australia. My mum came to visit and said, "Oh, what about if we asked you to build us a house, would you come back?" That was a pretty good carrot, so that's what I did. I moved down to the south coast, just out of Albany, a bush block, and built them a house, which was about 18 months' work.

AY Was there more to leaving England than that, though?

WATSON Well, I certainly could have stayed there. I mean, I had plenty to do. I had a job I was enjoying with my anarchist building collective, and interesting politics, but in some respects I felt like I needed a bit of a break, too, from the intensity of that and, to be honest, the sort of grey drizzle of London can get to you after a while. So, I did feel a bit spoilt that I could just hop on a plane and go back to Australia and enjoy all the amazing things that we have here about relative ease of living and gorgeous weather and beaches et cetera, et cetera, and the bush. I could go back to all those amazing things, so I felt in some respects I was abandoning some of my political allies to go back to the colonies [chuckles].

But, on the other hand, there were challenges. The challenge of building a house—the first one you've ever built—was suitably exciting for me. So, I guess, for the next couple of years I didn't do an enormous amount of politics and what politics I did was local. Inevitably, you take an interest in what's going on around if you have that kind of perspective, and so I got involved in protecting the wetlands down there, the debates about protecting the seagrass, and removing the sewerage out of the harbour. Yes, so we worked on local conservation issues.

AY Before we get to that, though, before we leave England, you did get your trade certificate. Why did you want to do that? What was it about building that attracted you?

WATSON Well, I was good at it [chuckles]. I was quite good. I guess I've always been quite practical, so I'm handy with working out how things fit together and using tools and that kind of thing, and that was always the case. I had the opportunity with a former teacher to assist in building an environmental school, which was down at Torbay; in fact, it was about 100 metres away from where I built this house for my parents, so it was all in the same area. I realised after I'd finished my environmental science degree that I didn't want to work for a mining company, and WA is largely a mining state, and I didn't want to work for the

government, and there really weren't many other options at that point. So, I figured that I wanted a way of earning an income that was transportable, that could be applied anywhere and do a useful contribution, and so a practical skill, a practical trade, seemed to me logical.

So, when I was in London and the opportunity arose for some equal opportunity training in the building industry, I thought that's better than cleaning houses and I might be able to learn some more with that job. I got into that organisation, which was called Southbank Builders, and it didn't take long to figure out that most of the people who were doing the training didn't really know much at all and so that meant that I became a supervisor because I probably knew about as much as they did. That was fine. I supervised a team in basic construction and carpentry, which I'd learnt on the job as it were.

AY How unusual was it for a woman to be doing this in England at the time?

WATSON Well, reasonably, except that there was quite a move to get women into the trades that predated moves probably about five or six years later in Australia. In the early '80s, there was a move from within the training sector to recognise that having more women in trades would be a good idea. This particular company had 50/50 employment, so half the employees were women, most of whom hadn't got much experience but were keen to learn. It was interesting because there was another non-Englishwoman who got quite involved too, and she was from New Zealand and had a similar sort of background; she'd done carpentry and building work in the country. So, between us, we, I guess, had a level of competency that was a bit unusual in that regard. Part of the deal with working for that organisation was that they would find a training place for you. There were three of us who went off to City & Guilds in Hackney. That was a fairly gruelling experience, I have to say. Good character-building stuff, incredibly misogynist and racist, the whole place, so it was quite an effort to do two years there.

AY Gruelling because of the misogyny and the racism or were there other aspects?

WATSON No; that was the main thing. You just knew that they didn't want you to be there. I mean, mostly the teachers, and some of the students; not all of them, but by far the majority. They would have been much happier if they had just had the class to themselves like they'd always had. I believe that it was only the second year that they'd had any women in that. That's amazing. That guild's been going sort of since the 1600s. I could be wrong, but

we were told this was pretty novel for them to have any women in there. So, they were basically giving you stick all the time. It just made it tedious really. But some of the teachers really liked the women in the classes, because we were actually attentive and wanted to learn, whereas most of the lads were just going through whatever they had to do to get their certificate.

At the end of the class we'd often stay behind and have a chat to the teacher and he was delighted to have somebody who actually asked intelligent questions. You know, I don't want to kind of paint every bloke in this course as being a bit of a boof, but there was a fair number of them. Just the fact that we wanted more information—so some of them were good. It was a three-year course but they allowed me to be excused one year because I'd basically had a fair start already. It was very funny because I had to persuade them that I was going to be able to manage their maths and science. So they did this interview and they go, "How're you going? We're a bit worried about the science and the geometry." And I said, "No, I'll be fine. I'll be fine." After about five minutes, I said, "Look, I didn't really want to make a fuss about this but I just need to let you know that I have a science degree [chuckles]." It was like, "Oh, okay. Well, in that case ...".

AY How did you find your way into the anarchist building group?

WATSON That's a good question. Well, I think basically I saw an advert and I answered the advert. It was in the same area where I was living and the structure of the organisation appealed to me particularly, because the collective was organised as a flat structure so we had the different trades and the architects all on the same wage and all meeting as a team to plan and organise the various jobs. So, it was good. They were a fun group, quite eclectic, some of them quite political. There was this one guy—I think he was a carpenter by trade—who in his time off would go to—I think it was Afghanistan. I think it was the time when the Russians had invaded Afghanistan and he saw that as being a good example of socialism liberating the people of Afghanistan, particularly the women who, you know—he was the only one who'd go off on holidays with the Soviets [chuckles]. That to me is also an indication of this thing about politics being integrated into all that you're doing: your job, what you do on your holidays and what activities you do in your spare time.

AY I think one would assume that an anarchist building collective would be quite political in nature, and I wonder what you gained from that.

WATSON The main reason that we wanted to be doing building work was to assist in projects that we thought were important, like we converted half of a church into a centre for use by disabled people. There was a lot of things about access for people with disability or disadvantaged or low income. It had very strong socialist principles in terms of redistributing the means through the community and assisting groups that otherwise would have struggled. But we did that by also creaming off money from what we used to call private jobs and so we did cash jobs, not that we overcharged, but basically subsidised the socially good jobs by taking high-paying jobs from people who could afford to pay it. I mean, that absolutely appealed to me, but there aren't that many ways that you can sort of contribute in that redistribution. It did involve a very dodgy bit of bookkeeping, but we won't worry about that now; it's all in the past. There was a lot of that going on in the building sector, probably still is, in the UK. The idea was that work was not just about earning a living but also about doing something for the community and something that was politically constructive and taking responsibility for being good community members.

AY As you leave the UK to come back to Australia, where would you place yourself politically? What were your political leanings or understandings then?

WATSON Probably anarchist in the best sense of the word, because the trouble with saying that you have anarchist political leanings or positioning is that people have this image of people chucking bombs and wearing black and being completely individual, whereas in fact the theory of anarchism isn't like that at all. It's about a method of organising collectively and taking individual responsibility within a political framework. The anarchist origins in Russia, for example; the anarchists got very badly mauled by the Bolsheviks. Hence, if you read the history, anarchists got this reputation, as I say, bomb chuckers. And some people interpret anarchy as "I'll do what I want and stuff the lot of you [chuckles]" to be quite frank, but it's not my experience of it at all.

Some of the nonviolence theory has similar organising methods, to say the least. The theory of organising in smaller collectives and having a degree of autonomy and having a dispersed leadership is that if somebody gets taken out of the equation in a more intense environment, they get killed or they get in prison, then your organisation doesn't fold because you've lost that particular individual. I think that's really powerful. It's not perfect because some people are always going to be more naturally or innately either self-selected or by the group selected to take leadership roles, but you've got to keep on saying, "Let's share this around. Let's make sure that these tasks and responsibilities and knowledge are shared so that if

something happens we are able to continue on.” In that way, that’s particularly why the anarchist model appeals to me in that regard.

AY How in your mind, then, does it differ from socialism?

WATSON Yes, probably the units of organisation. Socialism tends to organise in the state in the same way as capitalism does. I guess the thing with socialism, they’ve got different policy objectives. There are different policy objectives with socialism, including collectivism, but certainly in the traditional mould, still in a fairly hierarchical structure, so that is probably the difference. Look, I would also quite happily be described as a socialist. I don’t have any problem with that as well, because, policy wise, I think socialism is a thing to aspire to: sharing wealth and that people have control over the means of production; all of those things, I think, are a better way of organising than capital being the trump card.

I guess, globally, socialism has floundered in lots of ways. Maybe it’s going to have a resurgence; look at what’s happening in the UK at the moment. Yes, the function of the state is, I guess, the difference; whereas I have much stronger affinity with a more grassroots organising structure that genuinely asks people to participate, not just once every election cycle, but to be engaged as a political being for the duration—as much as you’ve got energy for. That’s not antisocialist, but it’s slightly different. I think what we’ve got in politics at the moment is, basically, the two-team approach: do you want one with this colour or that colour, or are you going to go for the Dockers or the Eagles? There’s not a huge amount to pick between them because in lots of ways they organise in similar ways. They train up people through their organisations to become members of Parliament, so they are sort of almost like two sides of the same coin.

AY But is it different in Europe, is it different in the UK or is it still very two party?

WATSON Yes, I think probably it is still very much two party. The only difference that I was making I suppose is that I think that there’s more debate and ownership of the shape of that politics by an active political community. It might have changed; I could be completely wrong but when I go back, I find people still are talking about those things in that same way, maybe feeling, you know, not so empowered. I don’t know what the conservatives do. They might do that too; I don’t know [laughs].

AY You come back to Australia, though, and you go down south and build a house for your parents. Have you fallen back into the Australian way of being politically unaware for those couple of years?

WATSON That's a good question. I certainly fell back into being less active, apart from anything else. It was interesting because I used to have this insight that doing hard physical work all day that it's very hard to be sort of plotting and planning the revolution because you're [laughs] actually really tired and you haven't got much energy left, which is probably why intellectuals often were the ones that became the focal point for a lot of political activity because they actually had the physical energy to organise. Anyway, that's sort of another matter. I felt that I was very much engaged in a kind of physical task that didn't leave me a lot—and I was also studying as well because I'd decided that I'd take advantage of being able to do a builder's registration at what was then the Albany TAFE and so I'd be doing evening classes as well. I didn't have a lot of extra time or energy but, having said that, I listened to the radio a lot, so I felt like I was thinking about all that political stuff; it didn't stop my brain working. I would listen to Radio National and I would read the local paper. I wanted international information and I wanted really local. I didn't want to know about the bit in-between, the sort of state politics or national politics didn't at that point really interest me.

AY At that point.

WATSON [Laughs]

AY I'm wondering about your experience at Albany TAFE and how different that was, say, from your experience in the UK. Were there more women there doing that?

WATSON No, less; I was the only one in the class there, but it was a very small class. It's interesting; I felt quite comfortable in that class. I felt like I was with a sort of bunch of people that I kind of knew, so there must have been another element there. The builder's registration is all mature age, so I think that's a bit of a difference. In Hackney I had landed in the middle of a boys' high school, which was pretty weird really [laughs]. They were all 16 and we were mid-20s, so there was that as well. I think probably they felt threatened by us really, so it was a bit of a cultural mishmash. Look, Albany TAFE, I had been there before. Back in the '70s I'd done car mechanics and animal husbandry while I was down there last time. I like the TAFE. I think it's a great resource.

To be honest, I found that the pace of the course was painfully slow, so I actually stopped attending and just did it by correspondence. I don't know, it might have changed, but I felt like I was being drip-fed and if I had one more class on concrete I'd [chuckles] blow a valve. I used to sit up the back. I was probably a bit irritating, but when the pace slowed right down and the teacher would talk about football, which of course the boys all loved and they found it much more interesting than talking about course work, after about 10 minutes of that I'd get out my *Guardian*, shake my paper, put it up in front of my face and read the *Guardian Weekly*. Then, eventually, I remember he said, "I think we're boring somebody up the back," and then he'd go back to actually teaching.

AY I can see a continuity happening between your high school years and your ...

WATSON [Laughs] Sitting up the back [laughs]. Yes, there is something about that. It's a bit of a theme that emerges; it's true.

AY You became one of only three women registered builders. What was that experience? Were you accepted by the men?

WATSON Look, I've got some wonderful funny stories about building. Most of my building I did was building houses and extensions. My major projects were in and around Albany, Denmark, that area. It's a pretty small community; it was even smaller then, back in the '80s. There's a limited number of suppliers and a limited number of people who are working also in running building businesses. You get a bit of kind of teasing to start with. There was a wonderful story about how the guys came out to the house I was building out at Torbay to put in the telephones (Telecom I think they were in the day or the postmaster's or whoever they were) and I don't know whether they thought that we couldn't hear them or they didn't really mind, but one of them turned around and said to the other, "Jeez, sheilas; you'd think a doctor would be able to afford blokes" [laughs], which is funny on all sorts of levels, really. So, we thought that was absolutely hysterical. There was a bit of that that went on, but, look, I got on really well with the building inspector, which was great. We always used to get on pretty well, and he knew that I wasn't trying to bend the rules or do anything like that, so that really helped.

I don't think it took long before I felt like I was doing what I was doing. I had plenty of work. I've never advertised in my building work at all; it was all reference and word of mouth and

people recommending to other people to engage me. I can't say that I felt criticised; a bit of teasing here or there. But one of the things I really like about a practical task is if people who know what they're looking at come on site and they have a look around and see what the site looks like and see your work, it speaks for itself; it's either good or it's bad or it's somewhere in-between. I'd do the same.

There was another site right next to where I was working. I'd wander through at the end of the day check it out, like, "Look at that, they've split that bit of wood" or whatever. I felt very confident that the standard of work that I was doing was good that I never, ever had to go back and do anything again and that people were happy with the product, and then as much as anything else the interesting thing about building a house for somebody is that it is also quite a communication thing. If you've got a good capacity to talk to your client and to discuss what the options are, there's a lot in that and I felt that that worked really well.

AY What was the product? Were you mostly building houses?

WATSON Yes; houses or bits of, like, the roof or an extension, a verandah. So, big and small jobs, but by and large whole houses were more satisfying because, you know, you take it from the stumps up or sometimes clearing the site before you put the stumps in or the pad or whatever you're doing. I usually had at least one other person working for me and then subcontract out the usual things like electrics and plumbing.

AY You must have found the mental energy because you got involved in environmental things and environmental consultancy work; so, how did that come about?

WATSON Yes. I did building work for quite a number of years and then I came to Perth and was still doing building work up here, but I was actually finding that I was experiencing numbness in my hands, so there were some issues with my shoulders or my neck or my hands. It's interesting now, as I get older, I think it might even have been an arthritic-type thing. That's the reality of doing hard physical yakka is that bits [laughs] start to go: backs, knees et cetera, and I think the wear and tear was beginning to set in.

I looked at actually teaching at TAFE; in fact, I was asked if I would apply for a job teaching carpentry and joinery at TAFE, and that sort of interested me, but not hugely to be honest because I prefer to do the work rather than talk about it. That was a fairly disastrous experience; in fact, it was one of the most negative work application experiences I've ever

had. Again, it was about getting women into the trades and the woman who was the acting director of building at Leederville TAFE actually sought me out, asked me to do some part-time teaching to see how it went and, ultimately, to apply for this position. Well, the blokes in that department, they really didn't want that to happen. They made that clear; they were completely unequivocal, the blokes who were supposedly giving me material to run a lesson. I'd arrive 40 minutes, half an hour before a lesson and say, "Okay, can you tell me what it is you want to do today?" They'd go and make a cup of coffee and rah-rah and five minutes before the class this bloke walked in and he threw a file on the table and he said, "Why don't you talk about that?" I opened this file and it was about fixing nails, bolts, whatever. I had about a minute to glance over this page and then I was stuck in front of a class of very toey 16-year-old boys who thought it was pretty clever to swear and carry on. So, basically, they wanted me to fail absolutely, no doubt, from whoa to go. If I'd been really keen on the job, I probably would have taken a different course of action, but I kind of played it through.

When I went for the interview—this is the bit that really was the clincher—I took a portfolio of material, pictures of the houses that I'd built and the various other jobs to show my range of work and passed that around the interview panel. There was a guy there from the teachers' union whose name was Tom. He had a look through the file and then he shut the file and kind of said, "So, love, apart from a few odd jobs, what have you done?" That's the closest I've ever got to actually just physically getting up and smacking somebody in the nose. That was the union, the teachers' union. I was just pretty angry and I thought, "Well, I don't actually want this job." You know, outrageous behaviour. I thought, "Mate, you don't even look like you know which end of a hammer was which. You wouldn't have a clue, so how dare you suggest that I've just done a few odd jobs." Anyway, that's why I thought, "No, this is a set-up. Someone's setting me up here and I'm not going to play this game. I don't need it that much and I don't enjoy it that much." So, I didn't pursue that.

AY Not surprisingly.

WATSON Funny enough [laughs], but it was really disappointing. Disappointing is probably the mild way of putting it for union behaviour, too. My other one was when I came back to Australia to build the house for my parents. One of the first things I did was to ring the union, because I was a union member in England, to inquire about joining. So, I rang the Carpenter and Joiner's Union and this person picks up the phone. I say, "Oh, hello, I'm ringing up to inquire about joining the union." Literally, there was silence for about a minute, and then this bloke goes, "So, what does your husband think about this?" [Laughs] Oh dear.

So, I put the phone down and haven't joined a union since [laughs]. I mean, when you said were there any challenges or prejudices in the sector, that's where they came from. It's interesting.

Eventually, I did contact a good member of that union, ironically enough, because I think it was the Builders' Registration Board said, "We're not sure that we recognise your qualification from the UK City & Guild, Hackney." I said, "This guild thinks it's the best carpentry and joinery guild in the world and you're telling me you think that it's not up to scratch." So I had to ring the union and a guy there, Bill Ethel, was fine. He just wrote a letter saying, "I certify that this is the equivalent." But, you know ...

AY Do you think that was based on gender rather than the old country?

WATSON Possibly, but you'd think a certificate was a certificate, but anyway, apparently not.

AY I was going to ask you about your attitude to trade unions because I felt that you probably had been a member.

WATSON Absolutely. Well I think they're really important structures. Collective bargaining is an essential component of empowering workers to be able to have some sort of power in the bargaining process, so I don't have any question about the importance of unions and the role that they played historically. I think that's true throughout the Greens that we recognise that, but, there are things to be challenged about the way they operate. Maybe I just had a particularly bad run [chuckles]; yes.

AY Change of direction, let's look at the coastline and environmental consultancy.

WATSON Yes, how I got into that. After that failing to transition into another part of the building sector, someone actually brought to my attention this job that was being advertised for WA Coordinator of the Marine and Coastal Community Network. So this was some federal government funding that was available in the early '90s that flowed out of the Resource Assessment Commission's report on the coast, which was a comprehensive look at management and planning in the coastal zone. The commonwealth made a decision that in coastal conservation one of the biggest challenges is you've got so many stakeholders, so

many jurisdictions, most of the population in Australia live on the coast as well, that this network was tasked, and it was a ridiculously huge task for one coordinator in each state, to build communication and trust on conservation matters on the coast; so to deal with all the stakeholders from community groups, conservation groups, progress associations, the oil industry, the fishing industry and other industrial interests who were on the coast to promote and encourage coastal conservation.

It was a great job; I couldn't have written a better job description [laughs]. The interesting thing was, in applying for the job, my CV in effect was fairly irrelevant, because all the work that I'd done was irrelevant, or all my paid work had not been in conservation. So, here was the first opportunity to actually be paid to do the sort of work that I did in my spare time, it was great. But I was able to demonstrate a number of campaigns that I'd been involved in, particularly there was a 10-year campaign to have Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve remain a nature reserve and not become a national park, which is an interesting thing, but basically it's a higher level of protection to be a nature reserve. It's such an extraordinary little bit of remnant bush that's in Two Peoples Bay, which is just to the east of Albany, and it's where they've rediscovered Gilbert's potoroo⁹ and the noisy scrub-bird and western whipbirds. So, it's this little haven that has remained protected, largely because it hasn't been burnt and it's right on the coast and it's got some amazing deep gullies where these animals have managed to survive, whereas on most of the mainland they've just been wiped out.

AY How did you become aware of this?

WATSON Two Peoples Bay?

AY Yes.

WATSON You know, it's funny. When June and I moved to Perth, we lived in Swanbourne. In Swanbourne there was a little street that we were in which had a dead end, and because it was a dead end everybody used to sort of talk in the middle of the street. The neighbour across the opposite side was involved in endangered species conservation. He came across the road and said, "I've just been given this information about Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve under threat, because if they make it a national park, they'll build visitors' facilities and they'll compromise the conservation of these species." Now, actually the source

⁹ Gilbert's Potoroo is a small marsupial close to extinction. It is found naturally only in dense scrub on a rugged, windswept headland thrusting out into the Southern Ocean. <http://www.potoroo.org>

of information was somebody within the department who was unable to actually do anything publicly, so we became a small group of three who ran a very long-running and successful campaign—and it still remains a nature reserve, I have to say—over about 10 years. It was a conversation in the middle of the street, basically, that started that off. I knew Two Peoples Bay because I'd lived down on the south coast. It was just one of those synergies that happened.

AY Have I got this right? This led in some way to the WA coordinator's job?

WATSON Yes, it did, because it was the same person who'd said there was this job going in marine conservation. Now, I had also, because I was involved in a number of conservation groups, had some dealings with the Conservation Council of WA, who were the host for the job, and I knew Rachel Siewert¹⁰, who's now one of our senators; she was actually my line manager for that position. So, I guess I had enough of an entree into conservation circles that that transition was there to be had.

AY Because your environmental qualifications, your degree, was a while ago, wasn't it?

WATSON Yes, it was; that's right.

AY So, it suggests that they were looking for other qualities that you might have had in activism; would that be correct?

WATSON Interestingly enough, I think in terms of organising meetings, public meetings, displays, that side of it, it was very clear that the job was not allowed to be political, which was an interesting thing; it was that tension between commonwealth funding and—When I first got the job, one of the first things that happened was I was sent a very curt message that I had to attend a meeting of the State Coastal Coordinating Committee, which I didn't even know existed, and they hauled me in and said, "Well, I want you to explain why you've been sent over from Canberra to tell us what to do in WA", [laughs] which I thought was rather flattering that they thought I was going to. So there was this tension between the state and Feds about coastal management which was ongoing. It was very much part of that job—certainly, you had to deal with the politics of the situation, but not be overtly political. So,

¹⁰ Senator Rachel Siewert was elected to represent Western Australia in the Senate in 2004. She is a member of the Australian Greens parliamentary team.

it was about facilitating the process; it was about promoting best practice. You could certainly talk about conservation values and you could certainly argue for better coastal protection, but you had to be a bit careful. Push came to shove in the issue of removal of seagrass in Cockburn Sound which had been looming on and off for quite a while, because just briefly, Cockburn Cement have a state agreement act to dredge shell sand from Cockburn Sound and high quality calcium for their cement production.

Ironically enough, the shell deposits are overlaid by seagrasses and most of the seagrasses in Cockburn Sound had already been lost due to industrial and development activities, so the bits of seagrass that were left were really important. I guess, in terms of engaging with that, which was highly political, the role I took as the coordinator was to be part of a coastal alliance and, in a way, in assisting that alliance to establish, to challenge the removal of seagrass—and successfully ultimately in the court—but I had to play very much a background role in that. But it was an interesting alliance, because it included the Powerboat Club, the Professional Fishers Association, numerous conservation groups and local progress associations, all saying that removal of seagrass is going to have a detrimental effect to Cockburn Sound and the fisheries. I think that was unusual. I'm not saying it's the only time it's ever happened, but to bring that level of diverse groups into the same room, then take the EPA¹¹ to court ...

AY How did you achieve that, bringing those groups together, that diverse group of organisations together, because they weren't natural friends, were they, some of them?

WATSON In a lot of other cases, no, they wouldn't be. Well, meeting with those various stakeholders is obviously the start point. Usually, in my experience, it's critical if you can find one or two key individuals who will be the glue that keeps it together. So, like, with (What was the organisation? The amateur fishing—it's changed its name)—But anyway, there was a guy there who was a passionate fisherman and he looked after powerboats (that was his job) but he understood that once he got the connection (and it didn't take much) if you take this away this is going to happen. He became a link that drew in all the other non-conservation-type groups, because he was seen as an honest broker, I think. He spoke the same language; he wasn't a classic greenie in that way. So, it's identifying and working with those sort of key individuals is kind of what builds those alliances, and a patient, respectful engagement saying, "Okay, where are we going to agree, where are we going to disagree, what can we do together?" I think, to be honest, having links back to doing building work and

¹¹ Environmental Protection Authority

working with a, you know, blokey kind of environment that developing connections with people about sort of practical things is something that I think I could do, whether it's talking about boats or sailing, that's the sort of stuff I really like. So, you're not coming in as some sort of expert or intellectual or know-it-all that kind of thing; I think that's really critical.

AY That's exactly what I was going to ask you: what qualities, enabled you to do all of this, to bring these diverse people together and to juggle that between—it's essentially political. I'm sorry, but it's political.

WATSON Yes [laughs]. Just don't tell the commonwealth that bit.

AY Exactly. How did you tread that fine line?

WATSON Well, I think you've got to start with where people are. So if people enjoy fishing and they see very much that's part of their identity and their leisure and their—and I like fishing. I always used to start with that line. I'm actually quite good at it [laughs]. I can catch fish, you know. It's fun if you do it properly and humanely and not excessively, and it's one of the great things about the Western Australian coast. And that's genuine; I'm not making that up. It's like finding a point of common experience or just going out on the water with some of these guys and having a chat about what they know, what their knowledge is about tides and winds and fish. They're living in that environment. You can share that knowledge and that information, so it's kind of building a bit of rapport about that, about what it is that's important and why we have to use it carefully and why we need to conserve certainly elements of it. I mean, the debate always came—The kind of sticky ones were the importance of reserves and having no-take areas, and that was where the kind of push came to shove in terms of those arguments. But I think we did make quite a lot of headway in that debate from the outset when I decided that I'd take a roadshow around the coast to talk about the significance of marine reserves in the conservation of fish in particular; there were other biodiversity. At the time, it was a hot potato.

I remember going into Esperance and I tried to have a few people in each town who would help with setting it up and maybe advising whether to book the library or the hall or the shopping centre or wherever. The people were very reluctant to do this in Esperance. I actually had, you know, virtually death threats saying, "If you come down and talk about making the Recherche Archipelago a marine park, we'll slash your tyres and run you out of

town.” I thought, oh, okay fair enough. But I’m coming anyway [chuckles]. So when we had the public meeting—it was in the yacht club—and there were maybe two or three of us there, and I was waiting with my PowerPoint and my leaflets and all the rest, about five minutes before the meeting was due to start all these cars rocked up and all these blokes in the classic sort of flannelette shirts and big boots plonked into the hall and sat up the back with their arms folded, about 30 of them [chuckles]. I got up and stated, “Hello, everybody.” There’s two people up the front and 30 of these blokes up the back and I think, “This isn’t looking good, is it?” Anyway, they started kind of interjecting and calling out and saying I didn’t know what I was talking about, so I said, “Okay, okay. Hi, guys. This is fine. You can do this if you want, but how about you just give me half an hour to say what I’m going to say and then you can ask me as many questions as you like and that’s fine. I’m not going to stop you having your say.” So we did that, and by the end of the evening, we were standing around the bar together having a beer. I just thought you’ve got to actually just call their bluff every now and again and say, “This is a free country. I’m offering some information. You might not like it.” That was where the debate was about marine reserves back then in the early ’90s.

AY Had you brought them round?

WATSON I think to the extent that I wasn’t going to be intimidated, yes.

AY In terms of changing their view?

WATSON Well, interestingly enough, what happened in that particular grouping was that there were a couple of people who were commercial fishers but they also ran dive exercises as part of their business and so they knew what had changed. They knew what it looked like under water, as did the other fishermen actually. I mean, I remember one of the senior women down there said, “I’ve been living in Esperance for 50 years and I know what they were catching and where they were catching it 50 years ago, as compared to what there is now, so I know that if you had said 50 years ago that you’ll be having to motor two hours offshore to catch whatever it is that you’re going to catch, you’d have laughed at me.” But that’s what’s happened. So the fish population has been impacted. So those people who had a foot in both camps were very valuable because you could see that they were going, “Oh, yeah, well that’s a fair comment. I’ve seen that change.” I think also respecting that the fishers have a lot of knowledge. It’s an interesting sector because most people don’t know a lot about it. It’s out there. They come back with fish and that’s all good and we eat them, but

it's a dangerous sector. It's got one of the worst occ health and safety records of—I don't know if it's still the case but I imagine it probably is. It's rough and dangerous, but they have to have an intricate knowledge of all sorts of things. I respect people who can do those kind of jobs; I really, really do. So, I'm not out to paint them as villains. I just think that there needs to be some recognition.

The evidence about the impact on fish stocks is there in terms of the importance. But, yes, probably the main element there is they didn't want somebody from outside the town, much less a woman, coming in and suggesting that I knew something about their patch, and maybe was saying something that might threaten their capacity to fish wherever they wanted.

AY How important do you think it was that you would join them at the bar and have a beer? Was that important?

WATSON Oh, yes. I think it is important, yes. Fortunately, I do enjoy a beer as well, so that wasn't a real hardship [laughs]. It's very funny. I was just reading of late a bit of an autobiography. I think it was Pat Giles. There's a book called *Carrying the Banner*, but in there she talks about, I think it's in terms of union connections, how she would sit on a beer all evening. It could be her last [chuckles]. I thought that sounded terrible; it would be terribly flat and warm [laughs]. Yes, absolutely. First of all, you've got to be really committed. You've got to be there on time, do what you say you're going to do, but then be willing to stay behind and talk to the people who want to talk. It's the same in politics. That sort of setpiece public meeting is obviously an important way of initiating a conversation or providing some information or starting the sort of dialogue, but, really, where the work's done is over a coffee or a beer at the end of the meeting, because that's how you actually get to have those one-on-one conversations, when you can say, "Oh, well, that's really interesting. I didn't know that you could catch that over there. Do you know whether that's seagrass?" Gee, it's just sort of not exactly being one of the blokes, but being unpretentious being willing to engage in the sort of activities that they would normally do, like have a beer at the end of an evening and yarn about this or that.

AY How much of it is yarning? Is it trying to convince them of your position, that your position is correct, or in listening to them?

WATSON Well, you've absolutely got to do the second bit first [chuckles]. You have to give people your attention, genuinely be present and engaged. You're trying to win

arguments with information all the time and, certainly in those more community-level contexts, well, it doesn't come naturally to me, but I also think it's ineffective. But, interestingly enough, it is something I've observed with some bureaucrats and some politicians, is that there's a feeling that "Well, I'm still here to tell you how things are" or to be right. I think you've got to learn to use that a bit more [chuckles] advisedly, because you just have to think about it. Isn't it boring when somebody comes along and all they want to do is tell you how it is; really, isn't it? You've only got to think how—I guess it's a human failing; we're not necessarily good at self-reflecting—but if you think, well, what's the conversations I actually enjoy where I felt that I did learn something and not necessarily in a factual sense, but I came away wiser or changed my view about something? It's because you made a connection with somebody and you liked them maybe and you thought they were funny or you thought that they had some interesting perspective which you hadn't thought about before. So, absolutely being present to the conversation is critical. It's interesting because there's a number of bits of feedback where people have said, "I really had a sense that you were listening to what I was saying." You have to suspend all of your clever answers that you're thinking of or whatever it is. You've just got to hear: What is it this person's—actually motivating them? What's going to make them angry? What's going to make them happy? What's actually happening here? There are very, very few bad people in the world actually, very few [chuckles]. Most people are just limited by their experience and their, perhaps, capacity to reflect in that sort of sense or go "Oh, yes, that's interesting. I didn't think of it like that" or "I hadn't thought of looking at it like that."

AY This is a question a little ahead of the time, about your political life, but how important is it for a politician to approach people in the way you've just described?

WATSON Well, I think it's—I was going to say essential. That might be a bit strong, but I think: so what's the role of a political representative? The role of a political representative is to provide an interface, because, inevitably, you have to in a representative democracy. Yes, you want to establish as many avenues and mechanisms for people to be heard directly, first up; and that's something that we've always argued as a political party stronger than most. An example I will give was when, under the Labor government, with Jim McGinty as Attorney General, there was the move for one vote, one value and we said, "You have to go out and talk to the community about this", and it was "Oh, no, we've got a mandate. We've got the numbers with you. We'll just put it through." I said—not just me, the Greens said, "But this is a fundamental interest to so many communities, It's not right to just flick it through. The only process is what happens in the Parliament." Anyway, we insisted on that, but then it

became a kind of a bit of a setpiece, you know [laughs], because the Labor Party, the members on that committee wouldn't even ask questions. They went through the basics. They'd turn up at the meeting and they'd sit there and if people wanted to offer information, I guess they sat there, but they hardly asked any questions, they looked bored, they looked like they didn't want to be there, which they didn't. But it wasn't an engagement. It was, "Well, if we have to do this, we will." I thought that was even more disrespectful.

I think, as the interface, you've got to be able to critically listen to everybody, as much as you have the capacity for, everybody's issues, and sometimes that's incredibly exhausting and incredibly harrowing, because usually when people come to members of Parliament, often you are the kind of last resort—not entirely, but often. You have a lot of people with mental health issues, fights with the Family Court, all the sort of intractable challenges. It's giving everybody a fair hearing, but also being able to then come to some sort of conclusion in that conversation to say, "So what actually is it that you'd like changed?" And then you've got to decide is there something that you as a member of Parliament can actually do in that process, or is it not the right jurisdiction or you're on a hiding to nowhere and you've already tried all these other things and I have to tell you I'm afraid that I don't think you're going to actually be able to progress this anywhere else. You've got to be able to listen very astutely to what people are really saying [chuckles].

AY Right. We are ahead of ourselves but the question just seemed to fit in with what you were talking about. Just to finish up today, I'm interested (still in your job) you are coordinator for your marine and coastal network. Is this for the entire coastline of WA?

WATSON Yes. It's long; 13 000 kilometres I think, from memory [laughs]. But, in all practicality, yes, I had connections in most parts of the coast. Part of the challenge of the network was to actually have a database of people who are interested in marine and coastal conservation, and so we produced a national newsletter and that was distributed and people could input as well. But, yes, probably inevitably, because the travel budget wasn't limitless unfortunately, because there's some beautiful bits of coastline that are quite remote, probably the bulk of the work was sort of from Geraldton south, that area, yes.

AY How many of you were there?

WATSON One [laughs]. One paid position, not particularly well paid at that, but at the time it was fine. So it was one full-time position, yes.

AY Now, this meant that you were working with a lot of volunteer groups.

WATSON Yes, that's right.

AY Had you had a lot of experience with working with volunteer groups before?

WATSON Yes, of conservation-based volunteer groups and sort of landcare-type weeding and rehabilitating bush and that kind of thing, yes.

AY How do you approach these groups? It's very different from people who are in a paid position ...

WATSON Yes, absolutely.

AY ... to work with volunteers. So what do you need to bring to that relationship?

WATSON Well, I always feel most comfortable with the not-for-profit sector. That's kind of my natural fit. I had, I think, probably the strongest connection with the community-based volunteers whether it was doing their beach clean-up or rehabilitating sand dunes, because I knew what the work was and I could really empathise with the commitment that it takes to do that often kind of fairly thankless task for no pay and sometimes having to deal with departments that were just exceedingly patronising. I remember one instance with a senior regional director of what was then CALM¹² basically said to me, "So your community network, how many shovels will that get me at my next whatever?" We were seen as this kind of free labour force. I do sympathise that their budgets weren't particularly generous either, but, you know, a lack of really respecting that not only the community were putting in an enormous amount of time voluntarily, but also that they were often very knowledgeable and had very valid input in terms of conservation and in terms of the politics of decision-making. They certainly didn't deserve to be patronised. Yes, the bureaucrats, a fair amount of them, wanted to remain in control. There was this whole thing about control: "We love community volunteers. Just don't be critical of what we're doing."

¹² Conservation and Land Management

Just as a quick aside, one of the first organisations I got involved in on the south coast was the West Cape Howe National Park Association, and we deliberately decided to call it a national park association not friends of, because we might not want to be friendly all the time; we might actually want to be critical of management plans. I note these days most community groups that are associated with a park or reserve are “friends of”. I don’t mind that. I think maybe that’s fine in most circumstances, but I think it made a point that it’s just a bit cute somehow just to be “friends of”. The community fought for that particular national park. A quick history: the Japanese were going to mine the cliffs for black granite for grave headstones and at that stage it was only a C-class reserve, not much used by anybody other than locals who’d go out there to fish. Beautiful, beautiful park and, yes, we fought for it to become a national park. It became a national park and the first thing that CALM did was advertise it as a great place to drive a four-wheel drive. So you had this massive inrush of four-wheel drives that chopped the place to pieces before they’d got any money to manage that [chuckles]. That’s an example of why we weren’t always going to be friendly, because that was a really poor decision.

AY That’s an interesting point and probably a good one to finish on for today. I’m sure we have a lot more to talk about along these lines. Thanks for today, Giz.

WATSON Thanks, Anne.

[End of GizWatson_4]

[GizWatson_5]

AY Today is Tuesday, the 1st of December 2015 and I'm in Giz Watson's lounge room.

Picking up from last week where we were talking about your role as coordinator for the Marine and Coastal Community Network, which was political but wasn't political, of course, but politically where did you stand at this point, because there were a number of groups in WA that were involved in green issues, progressive issues, left-of-centre issues; where were you?

WATSON I wasn't involved in any kind of overtly party political organisation; I was focused on environmental groups, so obviously the whole range of marine issues, which I was doing non-politically, of course [laughs], and I maintained a commitment to forest activism, anti-nuke activism. Those were the key groups that I would be participating in their meetings and keeping tabs on. I mean, in terms of the sort of precursors to the Greens, such as Green Development, such as the alternative electoral group, Alternative Electoral Coalition I think they were called, I didn't have anything to do with them; I wasn't part of that. I certainly would have assisted in the state election when Green Development ran Louise Duxbury as a candidate for the South West, but I wasn't part of that group.

AY Who were then these groups that were the forerunners, you've just mentioned a couple, to the WA Greens?

WATSON In the south west there was Green Development, which was organised around a whole lot of—environmental issues were still very much the glue that were keeping that group together, but interesting with the name Green Development, it was about saying, "We need to be very much looking to the future and planning for a green future for the south west." They ran a very respectable campaign for that seat of the South West and I can't remember what percentage of the vote, but as sort of newcomers on the scene, I think they did reasonably well. So the south west has historically been a stronghold for green-minded people and remains so, largely, at the moment.

The second group was the Alternative Electoral Coalition, and it is interesting; I was just discussing this the other day, and I'm not quite sure what their policies—other than doing politics differently was very much the slogan that sort of arose, I understand, from that group.

I think they had probably more emphasis on the social justice side of things, so people like Christabel Chamarette were very active in that organisation and she comes from an Anglican social justice background, so, yes, that brought in a different component into the ultimate mix that made the Greens (WA). Then there was a small group of people who had ownership of the name the Greens, which they got from an association with one of the groups that had established in New South Wales. It was complicated and it became very messy in that regard, but there was an understanding, I think. I'm sorry; I should say the fourth component was the Vallentine Peace Group, so that was a group of peace activists and community people who had supported Jo in her previous election attempts and were an established and organised political group. So, the commonality was that everybody agreed that having the name Greens was a powerful thing; it was happening in Germany, and it was happening in Tasmania and New South Wales. So those were the conversations that were had: let's work out how we can come together as a group and be the Greens (WA)¹³.

It was a complicated and fairly stressful negotiation, I understand. I didn't have anything to do with it [chuckles]. I'd joined the party after that had happened. But you had Jo Vallentine¹⁴ and her office and the capacity of a Senate office and her staff and her supporters and people who were very long-term peace activists, of which there was a solid group in Western Australia, which is an absolutely fascinating phenomenon, really, because you've got to bear in mind that Jo's the only person in the world who was elected on a nuclear disarmament platform solely. Of course, at the time that Jo got elected, it was considered that Peter Garrett would get elected, because he was the lead candidate in New South Wales, and for various reasons he didn't. So, Jo's group was very strong and experienced, but at the same time there were these other aligning groups that wanted to be part of that. People who owned the name, there might've only been a few of them, but they were very adamant that they wanted things to be in a certain way if they were going to let the name be used [chuckles]. It was also done under a considerable amount of time pressure, which probably, ultimately, was a good thing, because it meant there was a deadline [chuckles]; otherwise, those conversations might've gone on for a long time. The deadline was to have Jo endorsed as a candidate for the Greens (WA) for the 1990 federal election. I think it was January the

¹³ The Greens (WA) was formed to contest the 1990 Federal election, growing out of a coalition of the Green Party and progressive political groups with interests in peace and disarmament, environment and conservation, gender equity and social justice. Partly as a result of our roots, The Greens (WA) have always stood for a wide range of progressive issues as well as support for the environment. These include peace and opposition to the nuclear fuel chain; support for land rights; equality gender and workers' rights. For more history on the WA Greens: <http://greens.org.au/wa/our-history>

¹⁴ Following the formation of The Greens (WA) in 1990, Jo Vallentine was re-elected as the first Greens Senator in Australia. She had previously been elected representing the Nuclear Disarmament Party.

1st, 1990; it was certainly January 1990 when the formal document was signed and the parties to that document merged and formed the Greens Party in WA.

AY At what point did you become involved? What were the circumstances of that?

WATSON Yes, so, I had connections with Jo through my anti-nuclear activities and through the Quakers as well, because my mother being a Quaker and Jo being a Quaker, we sort of overlapped at various things. And I had an enormous amount of time for Jo; I think she was an extraordinary, and continues to be—I only just saw her on Sunday—an extraordinary contributor on peace issues and anti-nuke issues. So, I was happy to support Jo, work with Jo, and if that was being part of the Greens, then that was all good. And I could see what was happening in terms of globally that the Greens were going to be a political force. I mean, I think my political voting habits prior to the Greens establishing were [that] I voted Labor. The first time I voted was after the Dismissal in 1975, so it was a pretty exciting political time and I didn't have any doubt out of the choices that were there that that was who I was going to vote for. But particularly with their decision to support uranium mining, the Labor Party federally, it then put me in a real dilemma. There wasn't a political party that I could support. So when the Greens formed, I thought "Ah, now, here's a political party. I don't have any question about their fundamental principles or their policy direction, and the fact that it organises as a participatory body and that it's based on consensus", all of those things. I suddenly went, "Right; now we've got the political party that I wouldn't have any hesitation about getting involved in."

Nevertheless, the first actual formal contact I had with the Greens (WA) was someone rang up from Perth to say—I was in Albany at the time or in that region—I was on a database of peace activists down the south coast; my mother and I were both on it. I think at that time I was the president or the secretary of the Albany Peace Group and we used to make a point of protesting, because in those days the American warships came into the harbour and we made a point of expressing our opposition to that, especially if they were nuclear armed, powered et cetera. I was on this list and this guy rang me from Perth from the Greens and he said, "We want to form a branch of the Greens (WA) down in Albany. Are you interested?" To be quite honest, I gave him fairly short shrift because I said, "Well, I'm already in all these groups. I don't have any time to either be in or form another group." But I did then go on the phone database for supporters and I was fine with that. A bit later, it would have been very early in 1990, I had a phone call from someone called June Lowe in Busselton who said

would I be on a phone link-up to find a candidate for the seat of Forrest in that federal election, and obviously to support Jo. That was the thing that this was going to be; that we would run candidates in as many seats as we could in the House of Reps' seats to support the Senate ticket.

So, yes, 10 people on a phone link-up, I'm the last person on the speaking list and we go through all the various places and nobody is putting up their hand to be the candidate. My experience of it was that there was this voice that came out of somewhere and it said, "Well, I could do that." Then I thought: that was me who just said that; crikey [laughs]. It was pretty funny actually; I really did have a sense that there was this voice that just came through me. I don't know who I was channelling at the time. So that was it basically and everybody said, "That's great" [chuckles] and then I joined the party. That was the precursor to being the candidate [chuckles]. You've got to remember the party was pretty small at this point, maybe a couple of hundred people max, so a lot of this was going on, you know, basically asking people in the community if they would run as candidates for the party, particularly looking for sort of activists and environmental or peace-based people. So, yes, that was it. I was doing building work at the time, so I was able to take time off from various jobs, and I did an intensive campaign over about a month [chuckles], which was about what you did in those days, and it was just the most fun I'd had for a very long time. Being on building sites, you often would have almost an entire day where you might say three words, because it's really busy doing the practical tasks. But one of the interesting side effects of going around the country towns doing the public speaking at the town hall events, which is kind of how the politics was being debated back in 1990, I lost my voice in the space of about 24 hours because I wasn't used to talking [chuckles]. I was escorted around the south west by a great friend called Marilyn Palmer, who also talks a lot. So we'd go to some function and I'd get up on the stage and be one of the candidates and then you'd talk to people afterwards, and then we'd jump in the car and we'd talk [laughs]. So after 24 hours, I said to Marilyn, "We're going to have to just be really quiet between Bridgetown and Manjimup", or wherever it was, "because I need to rest my voice [laughs]." It sounded very husky by the time I got to there.

AY What was it that you were saying at these meetings? What I am wondering is, apart from voice work, how were you preparing yourself for this campaign?

WATSON Yes, look, it was really seat-of-the-pants stuff. I mean, I focused on where my knowledge base and strength was, and it was compatible with what the south west Greens were looking for. They were just keen to have a candidate who wasn't completely

bonkers, just someone who could present reasonably well. We were really learning it as we went. So I spoke about environmental issues, forests, the future of the south west, the farming, the environment of the south west. One of the things I realised fairly rapidly—and I can't even remember who the other candidates were off the top of my head, so I probably won't be slandering them directly, although you can probably look it up and find out who they were [laughs]. Geoff Prosser was the sitting member. I remember that much, and there was a Labor candidate and a Democrat candidate, and ourselves and a National and probably maybe one or two others. I think what struck me most is how little information it was felt [chuckles] was required to present on a stage and be a candidate, and I thought, "Really? Is that all you've got to say about that?" I suppose it was this sort of sense that this isn't that hard [chuckles]; you just need to have done a bit of homework and know some facts and figures and be confident enough to present. That's a long way towards doing what you need to do to be a candidate. Now, actually, I wasn't very confident about public speaking; I hadn't ever done any and it's not something that I'm naturally attracted to. I'm much more comfortable talking to people one on one, after the meeting or before the meeting. I mean, I think quite a lot of that public speaking is a little ego driven, but I am also minded that unless you can do it adequately and, ideally, well, then you might have the best ideas in the world or you might be the most eloquent thinker or planner or whatever, but if you can't get your ideas across in a way that people can hear, you're really stuck.

AY Campaign manager, did you have one of those?

WATSON [Laughs] Well, sort of, in as much as the main organising was being run out of the sort of Bunbury–Busselton area and Denmark, so there was sort of like two main centres. But, yes, so, it was when I got to Bunbury, where there was a candidate launch (probably in the town hall or somewhere in Bunbury) that I met June Lowe, who was the campaign manager for that particular federal campaign for the south west. I'd spoken to her on the phone a number of times. As I say, she was organising the first phone link-up, and I remember being incredibly impressed about someone who could facilitate a meeting on the phone with 10 different people, because there wasn't a lot of that being done at that time. Now it's sort of a lot of online meetings and telephone meetings. But having dedicated quite a lot of my time to consensus and facilitation, I thought, wow; this person knows what she's doing. She had a great way of drawing people to work together, so I thought, it will be interesting to meet her. When we got to Bunbury, I remember I hopped out the car and we sort of went towards where the event was and there was this rather small person coming towards me [chuckles], and she said, "Hi, I'm June Lowe", and we had a hug and I said, "So

how are you?" and she said, "Oh, well, all the better for that", which was [laughs], I thought, pretty cheeky at the time, although there was a lot of hugging that went on and continues in the Greens.

But I was really impressed that the image I had of her wasn't of this sort of small, dynamic older person. I had her pegged as quite a different person. So that was fun, and we really enjoyed working together. We didn't actually do a lot of working together on that campaign because, as I say, I was out and about around the countryside with Marilyn, but extraordinarily impressed with her energy, her organising capacity and, yes, the sort of team-building stuff that she could do. She could bring people together in a way that was quite extraordinary. As people say, you don't say no to June [laughs], but she does it in such a charming and delightful way that you think it was your idea in the first place. Hence, I think, the thing about me saying, "Oh, yeah, I could do that" [laughs]; someone put the thought in my head. So, yes, that was when we first met.

Then we met when we had a debrief, like an evaluation of the campaign, and so we caught up again then, and then it wasn't till we were on the phone about some Greens business and June said, "Oh, I'm thinking of moving to Perth", and I said, "Oh, that's funny; I'm thinking of moving to Perth too", and the timing was the same. So she was in Busselton and I was down on the south coast, and so she said, "Oh, well, so what about sharing a house?" [laughs] and I said, "Oh, yes; yes, that'd be fine", and then she said, "Oh, by the way, I've got three kids" [laughs] and I thought, oh, that was the right order to ask those questions in, wasn't it? [laughs] and I said, "Oh, yes; that's okay." So that's what we did. We moved to Perth and she had a house, and the rest is history.

Twenty-five years; we just celebrated 25 years a couple of months ago, and, yes, the kids are all grown up now and we're getting grandkids [laughs].

AY She's continuing to organise you?

WATSON Well, not so much organising me these days, because I think what happened, certainly when I went into Parliament, much as I often have said to June, "Well, that was your idea; you were the one who kind of asked me to be a candidate" and was my campaign manager on a number of campaigns, that was just the first one, then you're actually in Parliament, the sort of support system is sort of provided by the system in that way, and I think we have over that period tended to pick slightly different campaigns to work on. But June continues to be an activist campaigner; that's the passion that drives her

on. At the moment, she's working on GLBTI Rights in Ageing and a Tibet campaign, so we have [chuckles]—campaigns are many and diverse, and if you had an hour or two and looked at all the files in this house, you could see all the different—from the impact of feral animals to I don't know, say Tibet or street kids in Indonesia; a whole range of different projects.

AY I think some of these will pop up from time to time as we talk.

WATSON Yes; I'm sure they will, yes.

AY But going back to 1990, what sort of a reception were you receiving in these town hall meetings, because in some areas you're here in timber country, mills and things?

WATSON Oh yes, yes, yes [laughs].

AY What was the reception?

WATSON Well, that's a good question. I don't know whether it was that campaign; it probably was. But we decided that we shouldn't just be so anxious that we wouldn't go to some of these places—and one was always Manjimup, and Collie. They were always [chuckles] scary places for Greens to go. We did a walk through the Manjimup Show, I remember, wearing Greens' T-shirts and hats, and we didn't get a very warm reception to be honest, and it was at the height of the forest tensions and, yes, there's a lot of loggers in Manjimup [laughs]. Things have changed over the years, at last. At the sort of public meetings, I think there was a sort of curiosity. We had people there who were definitely coming to support us, so we would have, I guess, a small core of people in each community who were keen for a change and keen to support the Greens. I think I was the only woman, too, so that was probably the other thing. People say, "Oh, well, did people give you a hard time?" and usually that question is couched in, "Well, as a lesbian in politics or in Parliament, did people give you a hard time, or do they?" My response always to that is, "Well, I can't figure out whether it's because I'm a greenie or because I'm a woman or because I'm a lesbian", and it could be all three, but even if they do give me a bit of a hard time, it doesn't last. People have their own set views, and all you can do is be yourself.

I think a sense of humour helps, definitely, and being able to be a bit self-deprecating is important; a bit unusual in politics [chuckles]. So, yes, there was a bit of hostility; no doubt

about it. But on the one hand, that's part of the whole picture. I mean, if you're not a threat to people, or not a threat to their way of doing things or their ideology or their prejudices, for example, then you're not making a difference, if you see what I mean. You've got to present an alternative view, and for some people that's going to be threatening, especially if they think you're going to be successful.

AY But in these towns it's not ideology and prejudice; it's their livelihoods in some instances. It's their work. So how do you stand up in a town hall, full of timber mill workers and put forward a Greens' argument?

WATSON Well, yes, with respect for the fact that they have, and often for generations, been earning a living by logging. As a carpenter and a builder, I often say that, I mean, "I know how amazing WA hardwood is, and obviously I've built houses using the trees that you've logged." That's not the issue. The issue for me is woodchipping, burning trees for charcoal, it's the fact that the amazing trees that we have taken out of the forest are not regrowing. They're just not. I mean karri, yes, but not jarrah. It just isn't doing what they anticipated it would do. It doesn't behave like European trees. It's a drier climate. There's a whole lot of other complexities.

There's *Phytophthora*, there's water-logging and there's all these things that have affected the forest, and they know about things like wastage. I talk to foresters who are deeply distressed, for example, about using jarrah logs to make railway sleepers. This is joinery-quality timber that is being squandered on a one-off, low-grade use. So I think you've got to know the history, respect people's need to have a livelihood, but work towards win-wins, because people who want to work with trees and want to work with timber, I absolutely identify with that [chuckles] and they know that the resource, or most of them know, is not being used sustainably and that we should've moved into plantations much earlier and much more thoroughly, and we might arguably have lost that window with the drying climate, but that's another story. But they know that. The ones who are thinking ahead know, if they're looking at jobs for their grandsons or granddaughters perhaps, that we need to be doing something different. Not everybody; there's still kind of an argument that it's all sustainable and we've just got it wrong, but the science doesn't stack up on that, so you've just got to work with the ones who are open, I mean, and be frank about it, the transition that is going to be needed, so whether that's logging or whether it's coalmining in Collie.

Just on that one, two and a half years ago I ran for the South West and wasn't elected into that seat, but I went into Collie and was doing an interview with a journalist. I didn't really think about it very much, but I said, "We've got to be planning for Collie beyond coal because the resource, if it's exploited at the maximum speed," which is one of the scenarios they were looking at, "it'll only last 20 years." That's not even a generation. Maybe it might last a hundred, but you've still got to be thinking about what you're going to do with this place when the coal runs out. You know, that got this angry headline on the front page of the paper and suggested that might not have been the best thing to say, but it was honest and accurate based on the information that I had. Now, two years later, the council is saying the same thing: "We need to plan for Collie beyond coal." I was just a little premature perhaps [laughs]. I think you've got to be evidence based, you've got to be respectful, and you've got to be willing to concede some things and stand firm on others, and where you draw that line is the art, I think [laughs].

AY Was there, in this election, no-one standing over you, keeping an eye on what you were actually saying? Were there people saying, "Ooh, why did she say that?"

WATSON This is in 1990?

AY Yes.

WATSON [Laughs] I don't know.

AY In those days, did you have free rein?

WATSON [Laughs] I don't remember anybody doing that. We were, as I say, flying by the seat of our pants, because we had four weeks and we were just lucky that we'd had somebody to be the candidate. That was fortunate that the basic component was there. There were policy documents. The party had put together in a fairly short time some fairly solid policy positions, not surprisingly on the key areas environment, social justice, health, education; the kind of key issues. We had enough of a policy platform to run on, and I'm sure I was taking advice from people. I mean, apart from anything else, although that was for the seat of Forrest, which is the whole South West Region in effect, most people wanted to talk about local stuff. So, if you were well informed by local people who were sympathetic and supportive, then you could have a good conversation at a public town hall.

AY How did you poll in that election as a new party?

WATSON Well, yes, I seem to remember it was something—it wasn't double figures, but it might've been eight or nine or something like that. That's completely off the top of my head and I might be making it up, but it was kind of reasonable.

AY I guess that's more important than the actual number. Were you happy with this new outing and the result?

WATSON The whole point about running candidates, the two main objectives was to get Jo re-elected, and so we knew if you ran—and this still continues to be true obviously—if you run strong lower house campaigns, then you boost the vote in the Senate or the Legislative Council at the state level. But it was about having a platform and an opportunity to talk about the issues that we felt passionate about, so it was the platform. Once every three years when people sort of seem to wake up and take even a half-vague interest in what's happening around them, and so we were saying things like, "We've got to think about rainfall in the south west. We've got to think about climate change", we were talking about climate change three decades ago, "that renewable energy makes a lot of sense in Western Australia because we've got these amazing resources." So it's having an opportunity, as the candidate, to have those couple of paragraphs in the local paper that says this is what the Greens stand for, and people go, "Well, that sounds sensible; gosh" or "That's an interesting way of looking at things."

So, it was generating an alternative, because, honestly, most people would struggle to differentiate between what the Labor and Liberal Party stood for. Usually, they say, "That bloke's a bit better than that bloke" [laughs] or something. In some elections, obviously, there were clearer points of difference, but we were definitely about presenting an optimistic, forward-looking, long-term vision for Western Australia and the world. But we know and we knew that we were part of a global movement and we had our bit to play, even if it was in the backblocks of Nannup, or wherever it was, that we were doing what others were doing right around the planet. Our planet's in trouble; someone needs to get out there. You can't leave the political decision-making and the political game-making and whatever to the others anymore. We have to go into that arena.

Look, I didn't particularly want to be a parliamentarian. I mean, [laughs] I wanted to make a difference in whatever way presented itself, and this way presented itself. But I didn't put my

hand up thinking this is going to be my career path into the Parliament; it didn't even cross my mind. I'd never been there. I knew it was a very conservative—I knew the basics about Parliament. A very conservative place based on the English system, the Westminster system, and that it was slow to change and it was full of blokes. But they're the ones who are writing the laws; that's where the decisions are being made. Scott Ludlam has got a lovely little—it's probably not his thing, but he quotes it—there's this story about this woman seeing dead babies washing down the river, and after a while she says, "Well, I'm just going to have to go upriver and find out who's throwing those babies in [laughs]." I think that's the story, but it's a bit like that; you know, the consequences of things are impacting. You've got to work out what's the source of this, where are these decisions being made, who's in control here and, basically, head in there.

AY So, after this experience of this 1990 election, how did you then feel about continuing with politics? Had it fired your, not so much imagination, but you know what I mean?

WATSON Fired me up to be more engaged? Well, not entirely, to be honest. I thought, well, that was really good fun and maybe I'll do that next time. What it did give me was great connection with a network of people, and that was what inspired me to say yes. Working in a political structure network can be fun and can be empowering and can be effective. I moved to Perth not long after that federal election experience and, initially, didn't get involved in the party up here, not for at least 12 months. Now, it was interesting, because it was Jo Vallentine who said to me, "I'd really like you to get involved in the party. Things are a bit tense and we could use a bit of facilitation and consensus and that kind of stuff." She definitely prodded me in that direction to get involved in the organisation at a state level, which was based in Perth.

The other aspect was the south west Greens culturally saw themselves as being somewhat separate and a bit more grassroots and a bit more experienced and were a little critical is probably the least I could say, you know, almost snobbish about the others in the city; those terrible city lefties who do this or that or the other. So, some of those images were played out.

I did start going along to the meetings, and they were quite small, a really small group of people, 15, 20, the core, and I experienced that some of the ways of organising were much more like the Socialist Alliance, even things like they didn't sit in a circle. I was appalled. I

was amazed. So the first meeting I went to, the seats were all lined up and there was a sort of table out the front with a couple of seats behind it. I said, "Have I come to a Greens meeting?" This is something to this day that I completely identify; if there is not a good circle in the room, someone says, "Well, Giz hasn't been here", because my thing is, if you're going to meet with people as equals and you're going to do good work, you have to be able to see everybody; everybody sits at the same level. There're no back rows in our organisation, so you need a room big enough for everybody to sit facing each other. I took that room apart and reorganised the chairs around the thing, and people were a bit shocked, but they actually found that it worked better. I'm not claiming I'm the only one who thought of that, but certainly at the beginning of the organisation, some of the organising, I thought, didn't reflect a consensus-based organisation. It's a big job to establish a political organisation, to work out the constitution.

There was a constitution at that stage; obviously, that had been thrashed through before the party formally established in January 1990. But did that work and what processes and what communication, and what were we going to do? As a bunch of activists, and some who would probably identify more as political people, come together, so you had an activist way of organising and you had a more traditional way of organising, and melding those and respecting people's where they're coming from and their different experience was quite a challenge.

AY Apart from putting people in a circle ...

WATSON [Laughs]

AY ... what were some of the other challenges, as you've said, you're trying to do it as a participatory model, but you have this disparate, in some ways, groups of people coming together? How do you do that, apart from the circle? What are the other elements that need to come into bringing a group like that together?

WATSON I think being a good listener. I keep on coming on back to that one, I think. So, as a sort of flavour of it, you would have, in those early days, some members who came from families where their parents were Communists, and so they'd grown up in Western Australia with that very strong political—to stick with being a Communist through the whole suppression of Communism in Australia, you have to be really sure that that's your political allegiance and that that's your political analysis, so it was tough, right. There are some

extraordinary people in Western Australia who have made extraordinary contributions. Vic Williams I'm thinking of, for example, was one of our founding members, pacifist, Communist; and Justina Williams, his wife. So there was a small group of them, and they were involved in the party at the outset. Then you had, I guess, more conservative social justice people who came from a Christian background. Politically, they were quite different, and different priorities I think it would be fair to say. Then you had the environmentalists who, you know, and I would probably mostly sit myself in that camp, if I was to sit in any, planetary emergency, everything has to be about looking after the environment, and the politics is a bit of a nuisance but if we have to do it, we have to do it to save the planet. Then you had the peace activists who were a mixture. They were direct action activists; they'd done peace camps. They had Quaker connections, they also had Christian connections, and they had Communist connections. In some respects, the peace hub had already been working on bringing some of those elements together, which is why I think the group that was organised and, I guess, part of Jo's team was pretty core to that, because they already had the experience and they had developed a team.

But, yes, look, I think the key thing is respecting that people—we had all decided to create this vehicle for the social movement that was reflected in the peace movement, the environment movement, and doing politics differently, that sort of sense of the political system's pretty broken and it needs to be sorted. Having people listen to each other about how they got to that point, and being very clear, spending a lot of time going through policy discussions: Why do you think like that? How are we going to do that? How would you describe that? Because the discipline of having to take your ideology and your thoughts and put that down in writing and say, "Okay, here's our policy on this", and there are some that are always going to be really hard-fought, like drugs. What do we do with issues of addiction and health? Sitting down and talking respectfully and energetically but fully about those priorities, that's kind of what formed the bonds, I think.

It's a slow process, especially if everything's got to be made by consensus. You don't vote on this. You have to keep on talking until you agree on what words are going to be in and what are going to be out, and long, long hours, and having good capacity to deal with conflict when it arises. I think, over the years, we have got better at that, and have clearer mechanisms and clearer identified skilled people who can assist in that. Look, people are going to disagree, especially in politics, because if people are passionate, and we, probably perhaps in some respects more than the other political parties, attract people who are really passionate about an issue. They're not generally kind of career politicians; they're people

who want to make a difference about something. That's fine except that they can sometimes think that what they want to make a difference on is the most important and everybody else should stop everything and do—whether that's drug law reform or protecting animals or nuclear issues. So, it's managing that intense sort of energy as well.

AY Were there, at that stage, other political parties across Australia or across the world that were doing what you were doing? I'm thinking of Greens in New South Wales and ...

WATSON Tasmania.

AY And Tasmania, West Germany. Were there other models that you could turn to? How do we do this, if we're going to do participatory stuff, which is new for politics, it's different? How do we do it and make it work?

WATSON Yes. Well, certainly, there was a drawing on the connection with Germany with Petra Kelly¹⁵, who was alive and active then. My memory is that Jo Vallentine was involved in bringing her to Western Australia to speak, and that certainly inspired and energised and, I guess, affirmed what was happening here. Interesting thing is, having been involved a bit now over time with Greens in different countries, it's almost like this spontaneously arising very similar forms of words and direction; it's quite extraordinary. Now, I don't know how much collaboration, but I certainly feel—Let's put it this way: I was never part of kind of going, "Okay, let's see what they're doing in Tasmania or England or Germany or America and draw that together and then that will inform how we organise here." I felt like a lot of it we kind of thrashed through ourselves, which is perhaps also one of the reasons why Greens (WA), because we were quite resilient and independent in lots of ways, which is a strength and potentially a weakness if you're going to be part of a national body, we were the last state to join the Australian Greens. Interesting, when we did join, I felt it was more like a merger, because—And that's also the history and experience in the environmental movement in WA is that we've had to operate quite independently, just because of the geography and the nature of the distance and the politics. So, yes, we certainly have drawn on international experience, but I also think we sort of nussed out a fair few things ourselves.

¹⁵ Petra Kelly (1947-1992), West German pacifist and politician, had the reputation of being one of the most active and best known protagonists of the European peace and ecology movement
Read more at <http://biography.yourdictionary.com/petra-kelly#Q5YkwG7rEXPJ61O1.99>

Culturally, because of, I think, the continuity through from the peace movement, we've got a particular cultural flavour, which is about consensus. I mean, when you talk about other political organising happening at that time, we should acknowledge that the Democrats were also a political presence in Western Australia and had been successful in South Australia and particularly Queensland. Interestingly enough, there's a sort of relationship between where the Greens were strong and where the Democrats were strong. So, Tasmania, New South Wales and I'd say WA were strong starting places for the Greens, whereas the Democrats, their base was South Australia and then Queensland, and so our Greens struggled in that environment to have a critical mass. If you read the policies that the Democrats were working to back in the '80s and '90s, they were almost indistinguishable from ours, and so there was a closeness between us in some ways, but then we were also the kind of deadliest rivals. There was quite a period there with the senators, it was either going to be a Democrats senator or a Greens senator and probably not both, so that created a challenge for us. Interesting probably isn't quite the right word, but, in terms of progressive politics, much as it created a challenge for us, I think it was better that people had that choice, because the Democrats came from a Liberal base originally and people felt kind of safer with that; whereas we were seen as having a more radical agenda, to which I would say, "Well, yes, I do actually have a more radical agenda, but that doesn't mean that we're not responsible, articulate and that you shouldn't vote for us", if you see what I mean.

AY As you became a new force, how did people differentiate between the Greens and the Democrats? How do you think they perceived the Greens? You've partly answered that, so let's take it one step further. The name the "Greens", did that mark you out as being a single-issue party? Was that a liability?

WATSON Oh, yes; that old debate still has even a little bit of heat in it. Yes, the name the "Greens", which again I believe the genesis of that was Europe, was Germany, I think Die Grünen, was the first political party globally to take the name and use that, and people will still say—members, supporters, others—that it's disadvantageous for us to have the name the "Greens" because it clearly says you're an environmental party, a one-issue party. Yes, having been involved in these discussions over many, many years, I still think that it's good currency. When you see now how much people more generally in the community and certainly in business want to use the word "green" as a positive thing to say that they care about the environment, I think we'd be foolish to change. You could argue that maybe we ought to be something like "Green Development" or something like that sort of slightly, kind of, knock the edge off it, if you see what I mean. I find it hard to distance myself from it,

because I would rather suggest that, yes, we do strongly advocate that there needs to be big changes in how we live our lives and how we live on the planet and how we behave towards each other; no doubt about that. In some respects, people find that a bit threatening because it's too big a shift for people to contemplate.

The thing is to say that even though that's the vision, how we get there, we can do this together; it's not going to be as scary as you think it's going to be. It might be scary for some vested interests. So it should be [laughs]. That's what I say. That's the nature of the big political kind of environment in which we work that the people who have the power and the money and the influence will continue to paint us as being dangerous and radical. Part of me wants to say, "Yes, bloody hell, I'm dangerous and radical", because we need to be rebalancing this thing in such a profound way and if you are going to continue to want to hang on to your privilege and your power and your resources and continue to do to the planet what you're doing, yes, we are dangerous, because we don't think that anybody ought to be doing that. So, it's a way of persuading the community that that transition is needed and it might actually provide more jobs and different jobs; in fact, I believe it will, and it's actually our opponents who keep on saying these people are irresponsible and couldn't run an economy.

I just have to throw in there it was many, many years when both the Liberal and Labor Party here in this state were running in the red all the time. We ran on the smell of an oily rag and we continue to run on the smell of an oily rag. We never went in the red, ever; we just ran elections on very little resource, a lot of people power. So, it really galls me when we're sort of portrayed as somehow being [laughs] economically illiterate or something. I mean, I ran my own business for 15 years. Anyway, so the arguments are made by our opponents and the messaging is largely out of our control; not entirely—then I think about how much effort has been put into, basically, destroying us as a political organisation, it's a testimony, I think, to the fact that we're on the right track and that we're incredibly resilient that we're still here; and not only are we still here, but we also continue to grow in terms of membership and support.

AY That might be true, but in 1990 it was a different country.

WATSON Yes, absolutely.

AY And a lot of the things that Greens talk about now might be, particularly with climate change conference, with COP in Paris, as it is this year in 2015, there's a lot more talk, a lot more people willing to listen to some green ideas. That wasn't the case in 1990.

WATSON No.

AY So, how radical were you considered and how difficult was that?

WATSON Oh, yes. Well, as you say, being betrayed or even labelled or called out as a radical, I actually take it as a compliment. I think, oh, good, I must be making [laughs] some sort of impact. I think there's a real danger if one's beige [laughs]. It's interesting that you touched on that, because to some extent my inaugural speech in the Parliament was trying to grapple with this language around saying we have quite a radical agenda, but we are not irrational; we are, in fact, nice, considered, peaceful, loving people [laughs]. But, yes, we are the voice for what we consider is needed, and that is radical changes. Our system's broken and not happy. So, in 1990 when I first experienced being a candidate, one of the things that struck me was the media. One of the first questions they would say is, "So, why are you bothering to do this, because you know you won't get elected?" And I remember saying, "I might not this time or I might not next time, but sooner or later you're going to see that the Greens will be winning seats in Parliament." It's rather gratifying that that did actually turn out to be true [laughs]. And the second thing, as I said before, is saying we feel it's really important that people are given an alternative and that we give a voice to issues that have long been neglected.

AY Another thing that's sometimes said about, well, the Democrats and then about you is that people simply vote for the Greens as a protest vote. How do you respond to that?

WATSON I think it's fair and accurate to say that there are people in the community who go, "Oh, I can't stand Labor or Liberal; who else is there? Oh yes, okay, well, we'll go for ..." In fact, I've got a very funny story about that. I was on a polling booth, I don't know which election it was; I've been involved in all of them since 1990, and we were setting up, and it was just before the actual doors opened at eight o'clock in the morning. There was this young man who came screaming to a halt in the car park and you could see he was very agitated and he was very annoyed with everybody and didn't want to be there. He's marching up to the door, which unfortunately was closed, which didn't help his mood [laughs]. But

anyway he's going, "I can't stand you and I can't stand you", and he came past me and he said, "You're okay [laughs]. It's not about you; it's about all of them [laughs]." I would have picked him as some sort of One Nation voter maybe, I don't know. He was more that very angry young man, kind of what people would call a bogan. So, there are certainly people who are looking for—they don't like what Labor and Liberal do; they probably don't think a lot about politics, so they just do look for something else.

I mean, there's another very interesting story, which is about the state election where we got five members in; Dee Margetts got in Agricultural and Robin Chapple got in in Mining and Pastoral. They got in on One Nation preferences. We put One Nation right down the bottom of the list, not surprisingly, but their voters—and I think that was the classic protest, I mean, a pox on both your houses sort of thing; didn't want to vote for Labor, Lib or National. They put One Nation first and then, you know, who else is against the big ones? Us. So, they got a very low primary vote, but huge swing from One Nation, despite the fact that they were directed by One Nation not to preference, to put us last [laughs]. So it's an interesting phenomena. And, of course, that really annoyed them because we had the balance of power. They got three members in the Council and of course they had been really hoping to have the balance of power themselves. They imploded very shortly afterwards.

AY Going back to 1990, what we haven't talked about is why you wanted to come back to Perth. You were down there in the south west; you've just campaigned and got through an election or at some point in process you'd made the decision to come back. Why was that?

WATSON All right, I'll give you the real story, but it is somewhat bizarre. I was living down on the south coast, very nice, doing building work, basically a lovely place to live, but I kept on getting this, you know, information that I had to move to Perth, basically. There was this little voice in the back of my head saying, "You know, you've got to move to Perth, you've got to move to Perth", and I'm going, "I don't want to move to Perth. Why would I want to move to Perth? I love this south coast." Anyway, that went on for a few weeks and I made a joke with a friend and I said, "I'm getting such a strong message about going to Perth and I feel if I kind of ignore it any longer I'm going to get struck down by lightning; it's like just overwhelming." Next morning, seven o'clock, there was this extraordinary explosion, blinding white light, the house shook to its foundations and I thought: I wonder what that was. I won't bore you with all the details, but anyway I was close as being struck by lightning personally. The house was completely—it blew the substation. So, basically, hit a tree behind the house,

came down the tree, ran along the cap rock, making a furrow about a metre deep, hit the corner of the house, blew the fuse box off the wall, embedded it in the wall opposite, blew the lid off the phone connection a hundred metres into the bush, then it went all the way down back to the road and blew up the pole, and then it went all the way along the road to the thing at the end of the road and blew that up, and went all the way to the substation. So, it was quite a—what should I call it? It was a very important moment in my life [laughs], I came to realise. When people say, “Why did you go on to Perth?” I said it was a lightning bolt that got me to Perth, and it was. It really was; that’s what happened. So, basically, I said, “Okay, you win [laughs]”, and I took about two or three weeks to get the mess cleared up and came to Perth.

AY Did the lightning bolt suggest what you might do when you got to Perth? What were your plans?

WATSON Oh, no; that was the frustration. No, it didn’t, so I was kicking around going, “Okay, well, what next?” I kind of joke about it, but I do really know that I was sent to Perth; I had to come to Perth. I wasn’t going to be living in the country and doing whatever I was doing down there. I was in Perth and I continued my building work as a source of income of course, I had enough work. And, yes, I was literally sort of going, “Well, okay, great, thanks very much, but what do you want me to do next?” It wasn’t until I was elected to Parliament that I realised that’s what I was doing in Perth. It’s really funny. I got involved in Greens stuff because I was then actually in the city. I assisted in whatever way I could in terms of organising: party organising, policy work, being a candidate. I think I was a candidate six times before I was elected, and even when I was elected I was quite surprised that that had happened. I hadn’t thought, well, what’s next after that? So, once I’d settled into the job and I realised that a lot of the things that I’d done prior were really useful to the work that was needed to be done in the Parliament, I thought, “Yes, so that bit was useful for that”, and it kind of all fell together in a way like a jigsaw puzzle, and I thought, yes, that’s why I’m here; that’s what sent me here. So, I felt quite, I guess, empowered by that and really clear that I was meant to be there and I was meant to be doing that work.

AY It was perfectly possible to get into politics and not be in Perth.

WATSON Yes, it’s true. What was this other plan [laughs]?

AY Yes, why was the Perth bit important, do you think—

WATSON Yes, that's a good question.

AY ... for both you and your political career, I suppose?

WATSON I think because there was more work to be done with the party up here that I couldn't have done from Albany, that's my sense; the connections and the building of the organisational capacity, the building of the team. That's pretty much been the main priority since 1990, really, I thought. The job we've got to do is really important and building a resilient organisation is going to be really important because, interestingly enough, I think I was saying before about people who're passionate about issues: forward thinkers, passionate, articulate often, but often not really good at organising [chuckles], so there's sort of an element that's needed building up, I think, and I think we've made a huge difference there now. People would say that of the Greens: "Oh well, you couldn't organise," blah blah blah. I tell you what, the most recent example I can think of is the Senate election where they lost the ballot papers, if you remember that, and we realised that in order for us to retain Scott Ludlam as our senator, we were going to have to scrutineer this recount like we never had before. The way that we organised and the team that we collected, we had people from all the other political parties saying, "My God, you people know how to do this." I said, "Yes, you bet", because we're kind of like fighting for our political existence in that, and people really enjoyed working together, REALLY, you know. Senior ALP people said to me, "You've just taught us a lesson in scrutineering." Yes, we did [laughs]. And then they lost the ballot papers, but that's another story [laughs].

AY We're getting way ahead of ourselves.

WATSON Sorry, yes. I'm ...

AY No, because while you're on that subject, just to finish up today, I thought that's true. That election you had huge numbers of people out and about doorknocking and making phone calls and it was acknowledged it was a great grassroots effort. Why do you think you were able to call on people like that?

WATSON Within the membership and supporter base, we've got a core membership and then probably about 10 times the number who identify very strongly with being Greens and they just aren't formally a member. It's quite funny. They think they've got all the same

rights, responsibilities and putting the same amount of effort, but that just don't want to pay the membership fee or maybe they don't like going to meetings. So, those people, a lot of them, are very active in their communities. They're the people who are doing community gardens or weeding in the bushland or doing the Clean Up Australia stuff. So, we have good links into the community to call on, in terms of those networks, and it's the honouring and the kind of continuing to consult and talk both ways with those networks that means that when we need people, they're there, and not just as sort of to make up the numbers kind of thing. We give big emphasis on valuing people—I'm not saying other political parties don't, because I think they do—and what they can contribute, and trying to increase their skill levels as well so that they get a mutually beneficial experience. So, we put planning and effort and resource into doing that. Of course, now, with electronic communications and great databases and great tools, you can do it in a much more sophisticated way than we ever could with telephone trees, although there was nothing wrong with telephone trees. Some of these young crew they were laughing about telephone trees and I said, "Well, sometimes, they're actually still the best way of getting people there. Ringing up is sometimes better than emailing people and assuming that they're going to come [chuckles]."

AY I'm quoting from something that was said about you, the Greens WA, in 1991, that it was clear that power had devolved down to the regional groups in a genuine grassroots organisation. Is that what you're talking about?

WATSON That's part of it, because you know our model of power and organisation also reflects what we see as the best in terms of the broader community politic. Okay, well, you see it in transition towns and precinct groups where you have a well-informed and well-connected community that works together on living together. So, we tried to ensure that that works in our political structure as well. I mean, it's a challenge. I mean, it's a challenge nationally when you've got 15 000 people, but a lot of the power and decision-making still rests with those regional groups. I mean, yes, we come together with representatives from those regional groups to make decisions at the state level, but you know if regional groups says, "We don't think this should happen" or "We don't think that policy should be", one regional group can stop the state from taking that decision. And it happens very, very rarely because we have means of talking through issues so that compromises are made or new proposals are put. It's a way of being more fluid and creative about decision-making and taking the time to take a decision back to those people out in the regions and say, "Okay, we've discussed this once, but what do you think? We want to know what's going to work on the ground here."

I think it's also fair to say that one of the trends seems to be that people are struggling to be involved in lots of organisations, not just the Greens as a political party, but any volunteer groups. People seem to be time poor and perhaps less motivated, and young people just generally don't join things in that way. They think joining a Facebook is joining something. It's a whole different way of viewing the world and I'm sort of still struggling to work out what I think about it. But it does mean that, I don't know, maybe people are kind of organising in slightly different groupings. But most volunteer-based organisations are struggling because the membership is 50 and over, the bulk of it. Having said that, we've got a whole bunch of young people who are coming in now as a new wave of organising and very keen to get out there and talk to people. That's the kind of thing that I think we're really getting right. As you say, being on the phone, what are described as persuasive conversations, talking about—yes, face-to-face with people, talking about things that matter to them.

AY It's interesting that you say that about young people; that they're not necessarily glued to Facebook that they are prepared to get out talk to people. That's probably a good place to finish it today.

WATSON It's an optimistic place to leave. That's good [laughs].

[End of GizWatson_5]

[GizWatson_6]

AY Today is Tuesday the 8th of December and I'm sitting in Giz Watson's garden again.

WATSON A balmy afternoon [laughs].

AY It is a balmy afternoon.

We finished last time about your unsuccessful tilt at Parliament in 1990, and I'd like to talk about the processes that led you through to actually a successful campaign in getting Jim Scott elected in 1993. Now, you're a young party; you're a new party; you don't have all the background that the Liberal and Labor and National Parties have. How did you begin this process?

WATSON You're absolutely right that we were a very young party, and relatively a very small group of people. The active members in 1990 through to '93 were probably only 20–30 people, who were the core people keeping the party going and growing the party. We had, I guess, a stronghold in particular in Fremantle in that south metro area and we had a stronghold in the south west of people who had run election campaigns in the '80s, and then, I guess, a group based around Perth–Swan, that sort of area. And there was a lot of work to just know the basics of running a political party. We spent time and energy refining our processes, and there was also, interestingly enough, a fair amount of debate about the question of whether we were going to join the Australian Greens. That question came up in 1992. So, there was a lot of debate and discussion. There was a lot of debate and discussion that went into our policy statements, and that was a way of developing a consensus among the members as to which policies we thought were the ones to pursue, which ones we were going to modify or drop.

And I think there was also a lot of kind of relationship-building going on. If you go back to the origins with the amalgamation with the people who owned the name “the Greens”, and then the other group, which was a combination of the Vallentine Peace Group, the Alternative Electoral Coalition and Green development in the south west. And developing relationships and building on that took a while, and I think also there was a lot of work and focus on what was coming out of Jo Vallentine's Senate office; it was a powerhouse of campaigns and organising. So that was the sort of things that we were doing.

When it actually came to election campaigns and the firing gun was fired, I have to be fair and say often it was incredibly chaotic. But people were so motivated and energised to do well in elections that we really did fly by the seat of our pants to get all the booth material out to the right places, to get the printing done, all those sort of things that, as you say, a longer-running party already had systems in place, which you just sort of did it like the last one kind of thing. We now have that, obviously, under our belt, and I think we're really good at it. But in those days, we had virtually no money. We had very small premises. In fact, at one time we were operating out of the back of a single room behind a drivers' training office in East Perth [chuckles]. You know people used to come in and say, "Do you want a truck licence or do you want to join the Greens [laughs]?" It was literally like that.

So, the beginnings of the party were fairly precarious, to be honest, and it was driven by an enormous amount of volunteer time and energy. To be fair, there were a few key people who had come from, for example, the Labor Party, who already had been involved in running elections, so people like Robin Chapple, for example. I can remember him in a number of those early elections. He knew the legal requirements and so the basics were explained to us who were, I guess, more about heart and less about the sort of practicalities of the job, not to suggest that we weren't practical people. So, a sense of mission and enthusiasm, and then it always all came together at the last minute, no matter how much we [chuckles] might have struggled to get to that point.

AY What was the thinking, the process about not joining the Australian Greens, and were there differences in your policies, substantial ones?

WATSON No. There weren't substantial differences in policies. So, the differences weren't policy; it was more to do with ethos and decision-making structure. I think it was more of ultimately a misconception than a reality that if we joined the Australian Greens decisions would all be made centrally and we would be controlled from some central hierarchical place. I think to be fair, we did take a long time to join, but part of that was negotiating some changes to the Australian Greens' constitution. So, when we did eventually join in 2003, some 11 years later, it was because there had been an agreement to change some of those issues in the constitution. And I think we have a model, which is still in place, with the confederation of state bodies where the states are free to operate as they wish as long as we're within the charter of the Australian Greens. Not every state has to, for example,

do pre-selection exactly in the same way; not every state has to have the same processes for dealing with membership applications.

Interestingly enough, now in my role as one of the national co-conveners, I'm working on a process of at least harmonising some of those processes across the different state bodies and saying, "Well, if this is working really well in Tasmania, why don't the other states look at modifying their processes to look more like that?" So, rather than forcing states to change, just say, "You might find that this process works better", or at least there's a degree of compatibility. So those were some of the questions about ensuring that the decision-making power ultimately rested with regional groups in the states and that we weren't going to be directed from Canberra.

But you see, a lot of this stuff is perception rather than reality. We went through a long period when the Greens WA attended Australian Greens' national meetings as observers, and I was one of those who was an observer who regularly went to the meetings. And because everything is done by consensus, it actually doesn't make a huge difference if you're an observer because nothing ever really comes to a vote. So you can participate, and we had a strong history of participating, but we were just being a little coy about joining. And to be honest it took quite a lot of conversation with the membership to just have them feel reassured that it was actually going to be a plus, not a minus, which I think there's no doubt now people would, with perhaps a few exceptions, agree that that was the right decision to make. But we took our time [chuckles], and I don't think there was any huge loss in that, because we still got our federal Senators elected; we still ran effective election campaigns; we had a separate, and maintain a separate, registration with the Australian Electoral Commission as the Greens WA. To me that's like an insurance policy; it's no big deal.

AY Let's look at the policy making, how you settled on those policies, the sort of debates that went on, in those early days.

WATSON Yes, sure. We used to have a whole weekend set aside, three days even, sometimes, where we would have often a residential gathering, so people had plenty of time to have formal workshops on the wording of certain policies, but also a lot of informal time where some of those conversations could be had. We emphasised that, as with all our decisions, they were going to be consensus-based decisions. We tried to ensure that we had people with suitable level of expertise to argue on some of the more complex areas of policy on the floor so that people could ask questions, and then in effect sort of had that input early

on. I think it's my experience that we've never been short of the kind of intellectual interest in policy, and that the final wording has been debated long and hard with all the people who turn up. That's the first part of the process. So then you get drafts, then those drafts go out, and then every member has a chance to further suggest amendments, and it culminates in a consensus document.

I think if there's any criticism, our policy document is too big [chuckles]. I think we're the only political party that produces a policy document that is literally hundreds of pages of considered [chuckles] positions and also the initiatives that we might take out of those policies. The art with writing policy is to have it detailed enough that it's got rigor but at the same time not so prescriptive that you don't give your representatives enough room to discuss and negotiate, or put yourself in a position where it'll go out of date very quickly, or that it's too fine-grain, because if it's too fine-grain then your opponents can pick up on the one line. The classic one line which comes up time and time again is in our drugs policy, where it says we don't seek to legalise any drug that is currently illicit [chuckles]. And so that's a fine line, because it's not saying that we support the criminalisation of the possession and use of drugs of any kind, but we do support ongoing criminal penalties for trafficking or selling and those kinds of things. But I can guarantee if you want a good debate, you put that one on the table and say, "Okay, let's have a conversation about this one again"; and, look, even the experts in that area are not of a mind about the best way to tackle issues of addiction in the community. So those are the really juicy—I get excited just thinking about debating those sorts of things, because I think those debates that challenge people to think about what principles it is that you're trying to present, what level of consistency are you applying across your policies, those kinds of things are great, and we have heated, fantastic debates, but done with a respect and a kind of acknowledgement that ultimately we have to agree on a form of words.

Now I gather that other political parties do this by having committees or working groups that go away and write these things, and the first thing that the membership sees is the final document. Well, that's a lot of control to exercise, and I guess arguably it's quicker and easier, but what we're attempting to do, and I believe we're doing reasonably well, is to develop a sense of ownership by the whole membership of the policy direction that we're taking. And not everybody gets everything they want. I mean, the classic joke about Greens' policy is, "Doesn't it insist that everybody has to be a vegetarian?" Well, no [chuckles]. Some people might like that in the policy, but that isn't going to happen any time soon [chuckles]: you can't join the Greens unless you're a vegan. I joke, but that's the perception that people

have. That's not in our policy. We do recognise the impact of animals in terms of global warming and animal welfare issues, probably, oh, well, I believe, more strongly than any other political party [laughs].

AY What do you do? How do you handle it if you do get bogged down?

WATSON That's where our commitment to good consensus and facilitation is essential. Some of these debates are very hard to moderate and to come to a conclusion. Usually, in my experience, if there's something that you really get stuck on and people have got entrenched views, you just have to say, "This is not going in, either way; it's obviously too contentious, so we will leave it out." We won't say anything about it, rather than seeking to force one side of the argument to accept something which they don't find palatable. I mean, having just said that we have extensive policies on practically everything, I think there's no dis-benefit in leaving out some of those matters that remain contentious. But at the same time we don't shy away from contentious issues, and again some of the issues around health and drugs and animal welfare are debates that the other political parties generally just try and stay out of, and I know why [laughs], but someone's got to be—I think some political organisation has to take on the hard issues.

AY Let's look at the policies that you were drawing up and taking to that 1993 state election.

WATSON Yes. There a big emphasis on peace and disarmament, definitely, because that was deeply embedded in the Vallentine group and in what Jo had been doing in the Parliament. To my memory, we were still having nuclear warships visiting, so that was still a very hot topic. The environmental policy was comprehensive, including a particular emphasis on creating a vision for how we thought the south west of Western Australia could be lived in sustainably, so issues about land clearing, about conservation of forest, about putting aside adequate reserves, those kind of things were right in there. We drew also heavily, not surprisingly, on the policy statements from a range of other organisations. There's no point reinventing the wheel if some of your conservation organisations have already put a lot of energy into developing policy, or similarly your social justice groups. So we did a lot of collaboration with those groups, and indeed there was quite a crossover of membership, too, so we kind of benefited from that. And it was, I guess, idealistic and sort of far-reaching.

And that would be one of the things that would've been different from, say, the Labor Party or the Liberal Party, is that we wanted to lay out a vision for the next three generations, and this was the first time that a political organisation had got together and said, "Well, if we were going to live sustainably, what would it look like in terms of energy use, in terms of preserving the soil, in terms of social harmony, housing, transport?". We try and demonstrate the integration of the different areas of policy [chuckles]. In fact, one of the challenges is always how are we going to do the index, because everything is related to everything else [chuckles]? That's always interesting controversy after having done all the hard work: okay, how are we going to now make it accessible to people? Because, obviously, things like the social determinants of health, housing, poverty, we all are very much at the forefront of linking things. It's like, hello, the planet, all kind of [chuckles]—it's not a single—you can't hive things off into silos. Well, you can, but it's problematic when you then try and have a coherent vision. So I think, if anything, the way we've moved now, too, is that we try and put together some regional documents, so a vision for the Kimberley, a vision for the south west, a vision for the agricultural area, and obviously a lot to say about urban planning and how the metropolitan area could be greener, healthier and sustainable. That's as much as anything else trying to convert the issue-based policy document into something that people can—it's a narrative. It's a story that they can see themselves in.

AY Where does your economic policy fit into this, because you've said yourself that the Greens are often thought of as being not very strong on economic things? Are people going to look at that and think well, where's the money coming from?

WATSON Sure. Yes, look, and I think it was probably already illustrated by the things that I chose to emphasise up-front that the economy is not the first thing that comes to my mind, and I think if you were to sort of summarise the Green philosophy, the view is that there are no jobs on a dead planet and that the economy is a subset of the environment. That's where we are, for a lot of people, quite a radical shift. We're not alone in this now. We might've been alone in this 30 years ago, but there is a lot more knowledge and information and intellectual rigour behind sort of steady state economies, ensuring that jobs are meaningful and that the benefits are shared more equally. All those kind of things fit within our model. Now, yes, we are sort of portrayed as being "Well, you've got this great wish list, but how are you actually going to buy it?" A lot of effort, particularly in recent years, has gone into an analysis of, on the one hand, saying it's not right to say that the current economic thinking is so without fault, notions like perfect knowledge of the marketplace, which is one of the fundamental underliers of classic economics—everybody knows that's nonsense—and

that competition will always give you the best results, because there are many examples where obviously competition gives the best results for those who are already in the good position and not for those who are struggling to attain more.

So we do talk about economics. We do talk about the need for green jobs, and by that we mean jobs that are meaningful, sustainable and build community rather than short-term and not satisfying work for people. I think also saying that we can responsibly manage business, manage economic questions, I myself ran my own business for 12 years, so I don't have any personal problem with saying, "Yes, I can balance books. I understand how you can't spend more than you've got." One of the things that we've done in the federal arena in conjunction with the Gillard Government is establish the office that actually costs initiatives, the Parliamentary Budget Office. That was quite an initiative, because then when you go to an election, all your promises are costed, and so we demonstrate that we could afford to, say, move to X percentage of renewables and this is where the money would be saved and where it would come from. I can't help but think, as a long-term peace activist, you only have to look at the amount of money that gets spent in military hardware to work out where there is considerable expenditure. Occasionally that gets raised as being an extraordinary amount of money, but most often it's sort of just a passing thought. But if you really want to look at where we spend our money; Collins-class submarines are fairly expensive. What a good friend of the Greens calls 'expensive things that go bang' [chuckles].

So one has to move the debate onto another level, I think, and I think it's wearing a bit thin this sort of accusation that somehow that we're an irresponsible lot of layabouts who never did a day's work in our life. It's interesting because that was one of the sort of tones of attack that was levelled in the Legislative Council when I was in there. I can remember Norman Moore, who was the leader for the Liberals in the Legislative Council all the time when I was in the Parliament, it was a steady mantra: "Oh, well, you just want to sit around under trees and have never done a day's work in your life", which I found deeply offensive, because I consider myself a very hard worker in all sorts of things that I've done and continue to do. But it's one of those sort of throwaway images of you just want to hug trees and sit around and have a good time. I know for a fact that so many people who are involved in the Greens are some of the hardest working people that I've ever met. I guess it's an image that doesn't stack up.

AY But, nonetheless, it's an image that sticks.

WATSON Yes.

AY And some of what you've just been saying to me there about economic policy is a little bit in the abstract. When we come to electioneering campaigning, the major parties will make concrete promises to the electorate that they will do this, they will do that and they will do the other in economic terms. How do the Greens counter that?

WATSON Yes, well, I guess because we—this comes up frequently in the decision of wording of policy statements or initiatives—can't promise we will spend, you know, \$10 million on restoring the wheatbelt, it's healthy rivers or whatever, because we don't have the purse strings, whereas obviously at the moment the old parties can say that and they are then required to deliver on that, and it is very powerful. So we have to give our message in a way that doesn't mislead people, and that's really important. But what we can say is that we will—it's the same argument that the Democrats used—be scrutinising the expenditure, we will be seeking to have money spent in certain ways but we can't promise we actually will spend it.

There have been some pretty good examples where we have had an impact, though, and the most recent and probably the largest is of course with the climate package that was negotiated at a federal level with the Labor Party. That was, you know, huge amounts of money which we were part of. In fact, the reality is Christine Milne had already designed a package of measures that she negotiated with the Labor Party. The Clean Energy Corporation is our work and it had dollar signs on it. It had actual amounts, but we couldn't do it alone. So all we could say is, "When we're in, if elected, we will do everything we can with whoever is in government to achieve these outcomes", but we can't—apart from saying that we will ensure thorough accountability, transparency and equity as much as we can, we're not in control of the dollars. We'd love to be, because we think we've got some great things that we would do with that, but, yes, we are limited by the reality at the moment, by that reality.

AY Going back to the lead-up to that 1993 election and before you had a lot of the knowledge and experience that you've just been talking about, what was the process of selecting candidates in those days and what was your electioneering?

WATSON Yes, so, not surprisingly with a small party, we often would struggle to get candidates to run in all the lower house seats, but we did. We did find people and even if—

in certainly the early years, it was a name to put on the sheet so that you could vote Green and you'd make that point of supporting the Greens and our policy positions. The selection of candidates for potentially, how we saw things, winnable positions, was a lot more thorough and is a lot more thorough, you'll be pleased to know. It's like being interviewed for a job in effect and it does allow all of our members to have input and then, ultimately, a vote in a ballot for who will be the nominee. So it's one of the few areas in the Greens where we actually do have a vote, a secret ballot, for those positions.

Now, back in the early '90s when we were setting up, certainly when I ran for North Metro in December '96, I think there were seven other people who contested the nomination, because we'd gone so close in '93, apart from anything else, and North Metro was seen as within our grasp. So, yes, we have meetings where the members are encouraged to come and ask questions of the nominees and the nominees have to demonstrate, I guess, that they have the qualities that we would like to have in an elected representative. I'm certainly comfortable now that our process is about as thorough as you can get and, at the same time, leaves the final decision in the hands of members. The members get a wad of paper for each of them, each of the nominees, and it's as though you're on an interview panel and you can decide.

AY A very big interview panel.

WATSON Yes, it is. And it's interesting because over the years I've asked around about how other political parties do it and there's quite a range of ways, including having a selection committee and the buck stops there and you'd have to persuade that committee that you're the best person, and that's it, really.

AY Now, Jim Scott became the candidate for South Metropolitan [1993] and was successful. What was then involved in that electioneering? Were you back to your grassroots? Were you doorknocking? How was that approached?

WATSON Look, more probably the sort of public meetings, the town hall meetings, and getting on the radio. That success in South Metro was built on a strong core of supporters and members in Fremantle. Fremantle had a strong alternative, and continues to have a strong alternative, population. When I say "alternative", I suppose the community that is thinking about sustainability, is thinking about how we live as a community and all those kind of things. Our support base was strong there. But, interestingly enough, we also ran very close in North Metro as well in that election, and we were within an ace of getting two

members in that 1993 election. But my memory was I was involved in the North Metro area and the South Metro campaign was fairly separate. I mean, the regional ones were not exactly autonomous, but there was a lot of organising in the local area and obviously successful in getting Jim into the Legislative Council, where [chuckles] I would guess it was quite a shock to suddenly find himself in the Parliament on his own. The Legislative Council is a very, certainly then was an incredibly conservative place. I believe Jim was supported by a number of the Labor Party people who could see a kind of a fellow traveller, I think, in Jim and he certainly found his feet there and enjoyed, I believe, the fact that he could talk on whatever subject he wanted because, in fact, he had all the portfolios [laughs]. So he was able to tackle a whole range of issues in there, but of course without any kind of formal arrangement with the ALP or any balance-of-power situation.

AY What about your personal experience, because we have to correct something you said last time when you said you [laughs] ...

WATSON I ran for six times.

AY It must've felt like six times. It wasn't.

WATSON No, it wasn't. It's funny. Three.

AY Three times.

WATSON That's right. It says something.

AY What was your experience of running again and then missing out again?

WATSON Oh, well, look, I ran in Forrest, in the federal election for the seat of Forrest and then in the next one was—

AY The next one would've been the '93 state election.

WATSON In '93. Sorry; that one I ran ...

AY But you already had attempted a federal seat.

WATSON Yes, in '93 I contested for Cottesloe. My memory is that we got a healthy 10 per cent of the vote there. So in my sense, it wasn't a negative experience, because the whole thing was about getting as much of a percentage of the vote as we could and building our profile and having our policies and issues out there. So even though I didn't win, I wasn't expecting to win against I think it was Colin Barnett probably, still or even at that point. But it rattled the cage a bit, I think, that the Greens could in the western suburbs get a respectable one in 10 of the people voting for us. That's not to be sort of sneezed at, really. So it was a kind of building up was my sense. The actual campaigning was fairly intensely concentrated into five or six weeks. There wasn't a huge amount that needed to be done before that, so as long as you were ready to jump to and put in 100 per cent of your energy at that point, that was what it took.

AY Were you happy with that outcome in that election?

WATSON Yes, I was, yes. I think the fact that we got in double figures was the highest we'd ever got, so for a lot of us, I think it was this sort of sense that we're going to do this gradual build-up; that's how we'll get to where we need to be and eventually get the numbers. I think, in retrospect, that was good. I had some conversations with people who were in the Democrats and done a sort of comparative—they kind of rocketed quite quickly up to quite high levels, but then, of course, ultimately, had a fairly spectacular end as well. I think the fact that we had to work really hard and work really hard at our team work ultimately has been beneficial, even though it was frustratingly slow at the time.

I think probably it's worth saying that back in 1993, I didn't really have this burning ambition to be a member of Parliament, so it wasn't as though I went, "Oh, that's disappointing; I'm not a member of Parliament yet" sort of thing. It was like no, well, I'm out there to be a public face for the Greens and to raise consciousness in the community about the issues that we want to talk about and if our vote is increasing and not going backwards, then it's kind of ticked all the boxes, because I had plenty to do. I wasn't actually looking for a job [laughs].

AY Let's look at what you were doing, because your building career previously had been out of the metro area.

WATSON Yes.

AY How did you establish yourself?

WATSON In the metro area?

AY Yes.

WATSON Word of mouth, yes, and women's networks. That was quite a strong thing. So I started doing a few jobs and, as I say, I never advertised and I would get people ringing me up and saying, "Can you?" I think probably the fact that I was willing to do a whole range of everything from putting on a back extension to hanging a door, so the projects tended to be more variable in Perth. But it was plenty to provide an income and keep me occupied.

AY Well, you had plenty to keep you occupied, obviously. What was the reception from the mostly male builders in the Perth sort of area?

WATSON Well, it was kind of a bit different from doing building in Albany, because you were dealing with a whole broader range of suppliers in different areas and those kind of things. So it was different, but I think also there were probably, inevitably, more women in Perth doing some degree of building work, so it wasn't quite as unusual. I couldn't say that I ever experienced any hassles in Perth.

AY How did you juggle your workload between your paid job and the Greens?

WATSON Well, you don't have a social life [laughs]. Well, yes, by and large, when I wasn't working during the day, I'd be going to meetings in the evening and the weekends. But that pattern had been developed for a long time, so I thought, for me, that was normal to be, I guess, politically organising when you weren't working. That's what you did really [chuckles]. That's not to say that I didn't have holidays or other things, but generally that was the focus, building the party, building the vehicle for the political movement. That's the way I see it, and creating or be part of creating a political force that would be resilient and operate along the principles that we had identified and that the Greens around the world have identified, like participation, nonviolence, consensus and talking.

A quick aside: I can remember having a conversation with a Liberal in the Legislative Council who is now a senior minister, and I was explaining how one of the different things about Greens is that we made decisions by consensus, and I explained the process. His eyes lit up and he got so animated, and the next thing he pulled over three of his colleagues and said,

“Do you know the Greens do this by consensus? Do you think that’s a good idea? Don’t you think we ought to do it?” His colleagues were literally rolling their eyeballs. But it’s interesting, because consensus is something that works and it’s more inclusive. I’m not saying that other political parties never use consensus, but as the default and, with very few exceptions, the only way of making decisions that actually sets a different bar. Anyway, if I can excite the Liberals into thinking that consensus might be an excellent idea, that’s great [laughs]; I love it.

AY Excellent idea, but what about downsides to it? There must be some downsides to this.

WATSON Oh, yes. If it’s conducted poorly it can be very frustrating. Somebody did say consensus is like we’ll all sit in this room until we’re all so bored silly that we’d agree to anything, and I’ve certainly heard people criticise consensus as the sort of lowest common denominator. So, it has to be coupled with really good facilitation and goodwill and trust. Those are the things that take a bit of time to develop up. Yes, consensus can also be blocking; that’s the downside. An individual, a local group, can say, “We feel so strongly about this we’re not going to allow this decision to be carried forward.” That has happened in the past. It doesn’t happen anymore that I’ve seen for a very, very long time in our organisation, because we’ve developed ways of refining the process to try to resolve those problems. We get pretty good at resolving conflict, which in itself is a good thing; it’s part of our nonviolence.

So, yes, the downside of consensus is that it can take longer and that it can be opaque, because most people are used to the old model, which is: I have this proposal; somebody speaks in favour of it; somebody speaks against it; we’ll vote, and that’s the end. But, of course, the downside of that is that you, in many instances, have a vote where 49 per cent of the people want it and 51 per cent don’t, so it doesn’t get up, and that 49 per cent are really annoyed. Whereas, at least with consensus, you try and leave a meeting, everybody’s been heard; it means that people are generally not undermining the decisions, not white-anting decisions that have been made. It’s not perfect. Humans aren’t perfect either, but at least we are attempting to adhere to that principle and not using the sort of coercive or aggressive ways of, in effect, trying to bully people into taking a certain position.

It was interesting. I was speaking to a Greens friend on the weekend who had previously been in the ALP and he was talking about mutual people that we knew who had expressed

an interest in being ALP candidates at some point, and they were rung up and said, “Don’t put your hand up; we don’t want you.” Well, you see, one of our principles is that anybody can nominate. It’s actually in our constitution: you have a right to nominate. It’s up to the group whether you get in or not. It would be absolutely outrageous to have somebody getting on the phone and basically saying, “Sorry, we don’t want you.” I suddenly thought, “My goodness, how do they make those decisions?” Maybe that says something about that particular way of organising. It doesn’t seem very democratic to me. Maybe they don’t do that anymore; it’s quite possible. I don’t know. I’m not suggesting that that might still be the case, but certainly that’s how they did do it.

AY Again, going back.

WATSON Yes, sorry [laughs].

AY No, that’s fine. Where was your emphasis? Was it in building the membership base or in successfully getting someone into the Parliament around about that time when you did ...

WATSON We were building the membership and building the capacity and the cohesiveness of the group. Really, in those days, the election side of things—apart from policy development and being election-ready in that sense—happened in short, sharp bursts. We were, of course, doing things like keeping an eye open for people who might be good candidates, so having an eye to the election in that regard, but not much organisational stuff that was election focused. That really happened once the election was called pretty much. You know, the gun was fired and right, okay, now we’d better do all this kind of stuff. It was a bit nail-biting, but that was how it was. It’s not like that anymore. We actually now, having bedded down the processes and the relationships and those kind of things, can actually spend a lot more energy doing ongoing campaigning and strategic work.

AY How did you go about building your membership base?

WATSON Well, from a very low starting point, just things as basic as saying to existing members, “Can you go out and talk to five other people and ask them to join the organisation?” For a long time we had an enormous number of people on a larger database who were supporters. Interestingly, some of them were in other political parties, but they would support us when it came to an election and would even vote for us, even though some

of them were, as I say, in other political parties, which may seem a bit strange, but perhaps the sort of people who would vote one way in the lower house and then vote for us in the upper house. So, drawing on that sort of database to say to those people we'd really like you to become a member.

AY How were you getting your message across as to what your policies were, what you stood for?

WATSON Probably things like local community papers; that was sort of our bread and butter, because apart from when there was actually an election campaign on, we had very little opportunity to get space in the statewide paper or TV or radio. Obviously Jim Scott was able to do a reasonable amount from the Parliament, because he had an office and he could do media and he gave us a public face in that way, and there was quite a lot happening in the federal arena. We were focusing on the grassroots in terms of the person to person and perhaps a little bit of local media, and then it was, probably, the federal arena that was giving us a platform.

AY Jo Vallentine had retired in, I think, '93.

WATSON '92.

AY To what extent was she involved at a local level with you? She had a lot of experience, of course.

WATSON Jo is a friend and a mentor to me. I always found Jo very inspiring and motivating. At a party level she took quite a step back, I think she was a little burnt out and wasn't very involved in the party organisational matters. Yes, she, on a personal level, was very supportive and a good source of advice, but was a bit burnt out by the whole experience. She had a pretty tumultuous time from starting out with the Nuclear Disarmament Party right through to when she stepped down. She had to deal with a lot of fractiousness and a lot in the Parliament itself being, again, the sole voice and an activist in the Parliament. She actually didn't play a huge role in the party-building stuff in the '90s; behind the scenes, yes, but not up-front.

AY What about you, though? You kept putting your hand up.

WATSON I did, yes.

AY What was your approach then, coming into the next election, '96, '97, when you'd missed out twice?

WATSON The preselection process for the candidate for us for North Metro was quite strongly contested. I think there were seven other nominees, and people had realised, of course, that it was potentially winnable, and that, of course, changes the dynamic. It's interesting. There are those of us, not just me, but others, who had been putting their hands up regularly to do the candidate role when we knew very well there was no chance of ever getting elected. There was no job at the end of this; there was no promotion in sight kind of thing. Once things were perceived and realised that they were winnable, it brought out other people. They said, "Oh, now I'll nominate because I might actually get in." That was an interesting phenomena, and that continues to be the case that a slightly broader field and slightly different people will put their hand up if they think there's actually a possibility of getting in. My memory is that I got the nomination fairly convincingly. I don't think there was actually huge competition, and again, partly because I'd already done it a couple of times. I'd shown that I was willing to do it and that I hopefully had done it reasonably well. So, yes, then I was the candidate.

To be honest, even at that point in time, I didn't really contemplate what it would be like if I did get in; the what-ifs. Also, to bear in mind that particularly in this election the Democrats were exerting quite a push into WA. They'd existed in WA with senators, but a push to get state seats, and that meant both of us competing for being the third political party. Sorry, I'm sort of discounting the Nationals at this point because they were pretty small, but in terms of Labor, Liberal and is it going to be Democrat or is it going to be Green, we were very strongly competing over the same ground on the same issues and seeking the same coverage. That made the competition pretty hot.

I do recall, I think it's the only time that I actually have been on the front page of *The West Australian* was during that election campaign because the Australian Conservation Foundation, actually the head honchos, came across the Nullarbor and had a media event and said they encouraged people in WA, if they wanted to vote for the environment, to vote Democrat or Green. At that point I saw red because I'd been an ACF member for 10–15 years; I had an environmental science degree; I had been very active in environmental campaigns; and the Democrat candidate was a lecturer in tax law who, as far as I knew, had

never done anything for the environment. So, I basically made a public statement that the ACF ought to get their facts straight or disappear back over the border, and that got front page of *The West*. That was all right because *The West* likes to have something that's controversial and see those greenies beating each other up. That made it a fairly challenging election for us to have as much exposure of the issues that we wanted to talk about that were identified with us rather than being identified with the Democrats. In fact, of course, that played out in the vote, and in North Metro the count for the last two positions, six and seven, took quite a while, and the Democrat candidate Helen Hodgson got in and I thought: That's it. It's all over red rover. I'm not going to get in. So I was pretty unimpressed by that [laughs]. But then, ultimately, after about a week's counting or so they said that I'd got in, interestingly enough, with a large chunk of assistance from the then Independent member Reg Davies who directed preferences towards myself and the Greens, and that was a substantial chunk of vote that came our way.

AY What made North Metro potentially winnable, particularly, as you've just said, you were up against Democrat candidates as well, so you were querying each other's pitches in a way?

WATSON Yes, exactly.

AY Why did you believe that it was winnable?

WATSON Well, it was a seven-member seat and so the percentage for a quota to obtain a seat was lower than the others that were five-member electorates. The South West and North Metro were both seven-member seats so they were identified as being most likely, in terms of, off a primary vote—by that stage I think we were on about seven or eight or maybe something like that. We didn't have to go as high as if we were trying to achieve one-sixth of 100 per cent. We were going for an eighth of 100 per cent; that's the way the numbers go. Yes, and I think the fact that we'd gone very close last time.

AY What were your processes again?

WATSON Sorry; and I should say that we also had a strong membership base in North Metro too, so that would seem to be three factors that were weighted towards us being successful in North Metro.

AY Your personal electioneering processes: letter drops, doorknocking? How did you go about it?

WATSON Yes; leafleting, some advertising in local papers in particular and radio adverts. I think in those days we couldn't afford TV—and we can only afford a little bit these days—and public meetings. So, the local media, lots of dropping things in people's letterboxes (one or two items in every letterbox if we could), and then handing out the same sort of material at public places. But, interesting enough, that's actually quite hard to do, especially now, because most public places are not actually public places, like shopping centres or car parks; they're all owned by the corporations and they won't have you handing out things on their property. So, places like train stations or where there's still high street shopping; those are the sort of places where we would be out.

AY What were the issues that you'd identified for North Metro that fitted with Greens policies?

WATSON That's a very good question because one of my memories then, and I think it's still true, is that North Metro is actually like a microcosm of every issue in the state. Even if it's an issue about mining, a lot of the people who work in that sector all live in North Metro. So I think it's fair to say that we campaign on statewide issues rather than on saying this is something that's specifically important for North Metro. Because, with a few exceptions, what's applicable to North Metro is applicable to quite a lot of the rest of the metro area, again with a few exceptions to that. You know, in effect, you're going to be talking about those metro-wide things if you are representing North Metro, and that North Metro also has quite a high proportion of the tertiary educated, relatively higher-income people who are actually voting for us if they are thinking about their grandchildren and if they have understood the environmental consequences of how we operate in Western Australia as European settlers. So there was a natural audience to speak to in North Metro, I think. My memory is that we focused on the big issues for the state rather than, I don't know, marine debris on Cottesloe Beach or something that was a bit more specific; it was the big picture stuff.

AY What were some of those big picture stuff?

WATSON The standard ones that people vote on: health, education and the economy; those with our particular slant on where we should be going in that area. Then I think it is fair

to say we did campaign heavily on environmental issues, because, particularly if people make the difference between voting in the lower house and the upper house, and what is the reason why you would put a different emphasis on your representative in the upper house? Well, it might be: okay, we've ticked the box for that crew to look after the structure of the economy or that we're going to get health funding, or whatever it is, but where are the areas where we're actually a bit concerned? We're a bit concerned about logging in the forests or over-fishing or protecting endangered species or that we are worried that the standard of public transport in Perth has declined and we would like to see it raised, or that we need to be moving away from burning coal. Those were the sort of issues that were being discussed, certainly in some circles and in the more forward thinking—I'm disinclined to call them intellectual elite, but any community has got its subset of people who've got the time and the capacity to be sort of thinking forward. My first electoral officer always used to talk about Maslow's hierarchy of needs and once your basic needs were met then you start thinking about what are the other things that really affect the quality of our lives and are going to ensure that we live in a safe and pleasant way. So, those are the sort of things that you try to talk; you try to people's sort of concerns for a bigger picture.

AY What about any federal issues? Were any of those playing out? I'm thinking that '96 was the Port Arthur massacre and gun control. Did that flow over at all? Probably not for North Metropolitan.

WATSON No, not for North Metro. I think, again, probably that would have—the fact that we took a lead role in gun control in Tasmania probably would have been known to some of our voters, and there's always this debate about how much people differentiate between state and federal and local issues and therefore know that that's something that's federal and even if I vote for this person here it won't make any difference. I think, for our voters, they do make that difference. I made the point, and I think that we were being publicly viewed through a lens of what our federal parliamentarians were doing and so that did give us that exposure. And that can work both ways; sometimes it helps and sometimes it doesn't. Native Title, the Mabo¹⁶ stuff, I'm just trying to think where that was in terms of timing. I think that'd probably just happened.

¹⁶ The Mabo Case was a significant legal case in Australia that recognised the land rights of the Meriam people, traditional owners of the Murray Islands in the Torres Strait. The Mabo Case challenged the existing Australian legal system on the assumption that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples had no concept of land ownership before the arrival of British colonisers in 1788 (terra nullius) and that sovereignty delivered complete ownership of all land in the new Colony to the Crown, abolishing any existing rights that may have existed previously <http://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/mabo-case>

AY '97 we're looking at the apology for the stolen generation.

WATSON Yes.

AY Mabo was before that.

WATSON Yes, it was probably about '93 wasn't it? So, not really in people's consciousness three years later. The electorate really only remembers what happened two weeks ago, by and large [laughs].

AY What did it feel like when you did get those results and then you did know that you were going into Parliament? How did you feel?

WATSON [Laughs]

AY What was going through your mind?

WATSON I probably shouldn't swear on your tape [laughs]. How about, "Oh, crikey!" That'll probably do it. Well, I have to draw the analogy. It's probably one of those bits of mythology that might have gone down in history, but when Jo Vallentine realised that she'd got elected and her small team went, "Oh no! I think we've overdone it [laughs]; I think we've got you elected." We didn't feel like that. We were very elated. We had a great party. I remember it because it happened here and we had people who stayed all night and we just sort of celebrated. For me personally, what did I think? Look, I thought, this is exciting, we've actually managed to do this. I knew I'd have a bit of time to actually plan the transition because this was a very early election. It was in December '96 and we didn't take our place in the Legislative Council— Chrissy [Sharp] and I who joined Jim, until May the next year. That was a pretty weird period actually between being elected and actually getting in there. So, yes, there was definitely a sense of excitement. It was definitely a sense of what can we actually do now, because I think it didn't take us too long to figure out that we also had the balance of power but not in our own right, shared with the Democrats. And, again, so that was another sort of factor that coloured that particular election.

AY Who was your campaign team?

WATSON Well, June was the campaign manager, and there were probably about half a dozen other people who played really key roles whether that was helping with the media or

the logistics. I can certainly give you some names if I refer back to that, carefully filed away; all the documents from that election will be there. So, yes, there was a sense of anticipation and excitement, there's no doubt about that, and a sense that in a relatively short period of time now, in retrospect, we had gone from polling three per cent to seven to actually being in a position where we could win seats. I had never been in the Parliament or any other Parliament before the actual point [chuckles] when I went in to get the induction, so I hadn't contemplated exactly how formal—it's like working in a museum in a way because it's an historic building; it's got all that sort of gravitas and conservatism seeped through it. It's a workplace unlike any other and I hadn't even given that a thought about what that would be like. In fact, the first time I went there to go and actually have a look and see the Parliament functioning was during the last few weeks of the Liberal control of the Legislative Council and of course the IR laws; they were trying to push those through. So there was a picket line across the front of the steps of Parliament House, which I didn't want to cross [chuckles]. I thought, this is interesting. This is going to be an interesting life. But I spoke to the people on the picket line and said, "Look, I am absolutely with you blah, blah, blah, but I do need to just go in and talk to somebody here. I'm not going in to ..." [chuckles]. So, that was my introduction to Parliament, was crossing the picket line.

AY You're sounding more and more like a reluctant politician.

WATSON Well, look, I had never really—I was dealing with what I was dealing with in terms of promoting and growing the Greens and doing everything I could, I feel, to bring about social change and to save the planet. Then I suddenly went, "Okay, now, I'm actually going to be a member of Parliament. Oh, this'll be something different." But I'd never spoken to a parliamentarian, apart from, as I said, Jo, but Jo's experience in Parliament was as an activist in Parliament, not a parliamentarian in the more standard sense of the word. Sure, I'd spoken to Jim but in a way Jim Scott was similar. He was a slightly mischievous, rebellious sort of Greenie who was in the Parliament. But to be fair I don't think he engaged much in the details of committee work or the standing orders, because he didn't really need to or there probably wasn't a lot of benefit for him to do that. So, yes, it was all very new and I thought—well, I was excited, but it was not the sense that this is all my aspirations met, because I thought it's going to be challenging.

I was aware that there was a lot of very conservative blokes in Parliament. I knew enough about it to know that [chuckles], and I had probably, through my growing up through political activism, had a fairly critical view of what the Parliament represented and what it could

actually do, because it tends to maintain the status quo. You've got to remember the Legislative Council had been in conservative control all the time that it had been in place in Western Australia and so there was a little bit of trepidation. In fact, it took me at least 12 months before I felt comfortable to actually even speak in the Council. I tend to learn by watching and waiting and observing and not speaking until I think I've got it all sussed out [chuckles]. In fact, it wasn't until the then President George Cash kindly came up to me at one point and said, "I've noticed that you're a bit reluctant and a bit nervous or whatever. Just stand up and start speaking and do stuff, because that's your right. You're a member of Parliament and if you're not doing it quite right I'll tell you and that will be all." George was great like that. I had a lot of time for George Cash because I think he was a very good President and he recognised that I was actually quite intimidated by the whole place or didn't quite know how I could be in there.

AY We'll find out next time.

WATSON It's just like *The Arabian Nights*, isn't it? Not quite, but you know [chuckles].

[End of GizWatson_6]

GizWatson_7

AY This is a further interview with Giz Watson and today is the 15th of December 2015, and it happens to be just a few days after the signing of the Paris agreement on climate, the COP21 agreement¹⁷. I'm putting you on the spot now, Giz, because I'm interested in your first response to this agreement, which has suggested limits of a 1.5 degree rise in temperature. Is this achievable?

WATSON Well, my first reaction when I got the news on the radio or online that an agreement had been struck—And there was obviously quite a lead-up in the last 24 hours. It's always like that with those sort of things [chuckles], you're sort of teetering on the brink of complete falling over or getting something through. So, my first reaction was an immediate sense of relief that an agreement had been made, and then, of course, it's what's actually in the detail is the next question. I was excited that the process had come to what everybody, or most people, were describing as a positive conclusion. And the fact that we have a

¹⁷ The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is an international environmental agreement on climate change. · The 21st annual Conference of the Parties (COP) was held in Paris in 2015. · This Climate Conference is more commonly known as COP21

commitment of a target of keeping global warming to 1.5 is better than could have been hoped by a lot of people. I feel that we have drawn a line in the sand, and it is a growing sense of relief and, potentially, excitement that we might now be globally turning our mind to this problem. And it's such a complex arrangement to put in place, when you're dealing with nations that you've got to have sufficient trust, you've got to have sufficient capacity to hold everybody accountable. It's a challenge to a lot of nations because they want to continue economic growth, all those things. I mean, the fact that there was sufficient goodwill and urgency to actually sign up on what is hopefully the watershed agreement is pretty extraordinary. It's taken a few days for it to sort of sink in, I think. I haven't read all the analysis, but certainly from particularly my colleagues Richard Di Natale and Larissa [Waters], who were both in Paris, they're sounding the right note, saying that this is a big step forward.

I think probably the challenge here in Australia is to have some honesty around our targets, because what really disturbed me is just before Julie Bishop went to Paris, there was this bizarre statement that we were going to meet the target by 2030. That was very quickly debunked as being misguided and muddled at the least, but plain wrong, especially if the target is achieved or attempted to be achieved by just stopping land clearing [chuckles]; I mean, we should be doing that anyway. So we've really got to move to close down the dirty coal-fired power stations, that's the most obvious thing, and not export coal into the global market; it has to stay in the ground. That is where the battlelines are going to be drawn in Australia, and we have no excuses, really, because we've got extraordinary solar resource; we've got extraordinary wind resource; we've got the technology; we've got the know-how; and we're a wealthy country, despite what anybody else might say [chuckles]. So, we've got all the things that we could contribute significantly. And I think the population are ready for it. Talking about these storage batteries, which are going to be a breakthrough in terms of solar technology, apparently WA is likely to be targeted because the community, they get it, and for financial reasons have had huge support for PV. We're a likely candidate for trialling these batteries, which is great.

AY Do you believe that there's enough political will, at a Canberra level?

WATSON No. I think that the conservatives, and I say "conservatives" from all three of the other political parties, have to be led screaming and kicking on this one. The more forward-thinking people, and I would put Julie Bishop and Malcolm Turnbull in that category, do get it. And I think the other phenomena that's going to play out very strongly is that people

are, for example, choosing photovoltaics for financial reasons, and as long as the market isn't readjusted to hugely add another burden on people who choose to do that, which is, unfortunately, what the state government is contemplating, then there's a certain momentum that's unstoppable. I think within the renewable energy sector people are optimistic that you've come over the hump, as it were, and the momentum to move to a large percentage of people getting their energy from renewable power is going to happen anyway.

I'm probably more concerned about big things like the stationary coal-fired power stations, which have still got a lot of time to run and it's just too easy to just keep them running, and so there needs to be—Either they have to pay for their CO₂ emissions, so that's why you still need a price on carbon in one mechanism or other, and that, you know, the human health impacts of coal are more and more evident. The people of Hazelwood know this very well. What are we going to do to help the farmers make adjustments and transition to a drying climate, because if you have large swathes of the country that become unable to produce an economic crop, what are we going to do about that? So, we really need to start dealing with those adaptation mechanisms, particularly here in the south west, because we are drying out faster than almost anywhere else on the planet. And you can see it. I was down there last week and the forests are showing the impacts of that already.

AY Do you think global agreement and targets, as we've seen in Paris, are the best way to tackle climate change at a global level?

WATSON Yes, they're an essential component, I think. It's such a fascinating conundrum because it requires cooperation at a national level. It creates a unique challenge to people on the planet to work cooperatively and to actually carry through an agreement and put their national interests, at least to the side not put them away. So I think it wouldn't work without an international agreement, but also it won't work unless individuals play their parts as well and take ownership of their power that they have to consume less, live differently, and not have such a heavy footprint on the planet. I think both those levels are absolutely critical. I guess you could argue, in a political system such as a command economy like China, when some international agreement gets made, everybody gets directed about how they're going to do things [chuckles] and it's a very quick way to have a population change its behaviour or production methods. But most people don't think that that's the best model. It doesn't have any rule of law [chuckles] or democracy or free speech. So that's the downside of having a system that is directly driven from above. It's great to respond to a crisis, but it has some other fundamental flaws. So you need awareness and ownership at the community

level. And that, of course, is what has by and large driven the leadership to have to respond, that this isn't going away and people are going to continue to insist that our leaders do actually take a leadership role in this crisis.

It's so very close to being too late [chuckles] and, who knows, it might arguably still play out in such a way that it's certainly too late for island states or the low-lying area of Bangladesh and other parts of Asia. We are already responsible for putting in train changes that are going to happen. Because of the lag effect in the system, we're going to see some huge changes anyway in the next 10, 15, 20 years—50 years even. But if we can at least pull it back now and not increase the load, and wind it back, then I think there's some chance that we might get ourselves out of this mess, which would be pretty exciting, especially for those of us who have been talking about it since the '70s. I love it, actually. I have to say that the other morning I woke up and I thought, oh, right; now they get it, and how much we were ridiculed and told that we were just crazy hippies and that we didn't know what we were talking about and, you know, it wasn't right to scare people unreasonably. Well [chuckles], someone's got to be awake and alert to what's happening in the world on that big scale, and a lot of us were, and are. So, it's a good outcome. Let's see if we can make it really work.

AY Let's go back to those early days when you were a lone voice in some respects. 1996, 1997, talk me through that period where you'd been elected but you hadn't taken office. There was a sort of a hiatus period there. What did you do with yourself?

WATSON [Chuckles] Well, first of all what happened with that, there was an enormous amount of excitement and energy that we had finally made a major breakthrough into the Legislative Council and we were going to have three of us in there, and I think we'd probably already done the figures that this was also going to be balance of power, albeit shared with the Democrats. So those supporters and members who were following this closely were very keen to get started, the planning, what we could do, and ringing up regularly and saying, "You need to do something about this." So there was this extraordinary shopping list of issues and concerns that needed to be addressed, with absolutely no additional resource to address them. One of the fascinating phenomena of becoming a member of Parliament is that you get all your resources, that is, your staff, your office, your stationery, your electronic equipment, on the day that you're sworn in [chuckles]. Even a week would be handy as a bit of a transition. So you literally rock up with a pencil in hand. I guess, mostly it was containing that level of enthusiasm. I found it actually made me quite anxious, because it was like this image of doing a wheel spin in the car park; you're sort of really revved up [chuckles] but you

can't actually go because they haven't dropped the flag yet. I'm not actually a hoon, by the way [chuckles]. It's an image that came into my head. You've got a lot of ideas going around, a lot of thoughts about what could be done and whether we could introduce legislation on this or do that.

I still had to work, because obviously you've still got to support yourself until you actually get into the job. It was probably one of the most stressed times of my life. I didn't sleep well, because my mind was just chewing on all the—I had no idea exactly what it would be like. I did go up to the Parliament once. I thought I should go and have a bit of a look and see what it's like inside. I'd never been inside the Parliament before [chuckles]. I'd protested on the steps on quite a few occasions, but I'd never actually gone inside. The day that I chose to go was quite near the end of the previous Legislative Council and it was during the period of the industrial relations legislation; Kierath's legislation, if I remember rightly. So the public gallery was being occupied [chuckles] and there was a picket line across the front of the steps at Parliament House, which caused me a dilemma because there's no way I wanted to cross a picket line, but on the other hand I thought it would be useful to go and have a look around. So I spent a good few minutes explaining to the people on the picket line that I was supportive but I needed to go inside [laughs]. So that was an interesting introduction. That was the first time I actually went into Parliament, and then of course on the day of the inauguration and all that ceremony and carry-on that happened a bit later.

AY What did you make of the Parliament when you did go in and when you were sworn in [chuckles]? What did you feel you were walking into?

WATSON A museum. It's interesting because, again, not having given it a lot of thought, the building obviously is a historic building and needs to be maintained as a historic heritage of European settlement in Western Australia, but it doesn't lend itself to a modern-day workplace. In those days, there were people in offices or sort of semi offices in the corridors of the various wings of the Parliament because there wasn't enough space, and that was only getting more acute as the years went by. It wasn't resolved until the—At that time there was a residential, I guess, caretaker, and he and his family lived in part of the building, so that was a chunk of space. But not long after I got in, that was changed and that space was used for Parliamentary Services. But the Parliamentary Services people, when I was there, were in these sort of little cubbyholes set up in the corridor, which was really difficult working conditions.

The chambers themselves are sort of magnificent in their own sort of way, I suppose; lots of heavy jarrah, quite nice stained glass, but it's a really heavy feel. It's very formal; it's like going into a court, which, I suppose, is the closest equivalent. Parliaments and courts have got similar sorts of intentions to convey gravitas. I think that's what it's about, impressing the peasants that this is where it all happens [chuckles]; this is where the power resides. I think that's what it's about, and that's a tradition that's been there since Parliaments were first set up, I'm sure. So it was a bit of a strange workplace. I'd never worked in anything quite like it and I don't think there are workplaces that are comparable, again apart from perhaps the courts, and with its own rules, which are quite unique. I took a long time to really study those and work out exactly what they all meant. It also gave me some sort of throwbacks to my early schooling days. So I felt quite intimidated in that space. I felt quite sort of anxious about doing the wrong thing or being in the wrong place at the wrong time, because there were all these signs that'd say, "Members only here", and you can't go there and you have to bow if you do this. There's a lot of that sort of formality and rules, and I always have a sort of an ambiguous attitude to rules [chuckles].

I think it's fair to say that I probably spent quite a lot of the early maybe even 18 months being quite reluctant to stand up and speak or actually contribute to debate, because I wanted to really be sure about how the system worked and what I was meant to do before I said anything. That's kind of the way that I've learned things. I remember at the time that George Cash was the President and he came up to me in one of the breaks and said, "Look, I've noticed you're not saying a lot and you're a bit sort of maybe a bit nervous", and he said, "Just stand up and say, 'Mr President, can I talk about this?'" and he said, "I'll tell you if you can't do that; I'm not going to tell you off", or whatever. So I suddenly went click, "Oh, okay [chuckles]; I'm allowed to just ..." because I could see other people doing that. They'd just sort of stumble to their feet and start talking and I'd think, "Well, that doesn't look too good", but, apparently learning on the job was also quite acceptable. He was a very good President. He was very even handed in terms of saying, "You're elected. Your voters, your constituents, have got you here. You have as much right to participate as everybody else, just because they've been here longer."

AY It was new ground for you, for the Greens, because the major parties all have some kind of a mentoring process, and they certainly have enough experience to welcome in new members and show them the ropes. But you had to figure it out for yourself, I suppose.

WATSON Yes, I think that's right, and I think that was partly why I was a bit reserved to start with. So obviously Jim Scott had been in for four years ahead of Chrissy [Sharp] and I joining him. He certainly knew the basics but he hadn't probably engaged in all the aspects of parliamentary work. He had seen himself as speaking on issues on behalf of his constituents but probably not so involved in the legislative work, in the detail. And of course once we were clearly in the balance of power, apart from anything else there was an obligation, because our vote on everything could matter one way or the other, could determine the outcome of a piece of legislation. Of course, bearing in mind in balance-of-power situations that probably about 80 per cent of the time the Labor and Liberal Parties vote together of a mind on motions or bills, so the opportunity for exercising the balance of power is quite limited. It has to be something that you can persuade one or other of the parties that there's some room for movement. But there were some significant issues, obviously, where we could and also where we worked closely with the Labor Party for a legislative outcome.

But just to go back to that issue about induction, [chuckles] the actual formal induction was supposed to be, I think, a day when you were shown round and where you get your paperwork and who's who and all that kind of stuff. Well, it for some reason got reduced down to about an hour, I seem to remember, which was a quick trot around the building. We were basically shown where the chamber was and where the toilets were and the dining room and the bar, other important features of the building [chuckles]. We were provided with, my memory is, a pad and pencil and a telephone; there was no electronic equipment or anything sophisticated; and a desk. That was it; left to it, basically. The other interesting thing is they had a little (I am talking about the little cubbyholes up and down the corridors) cubbyhole where you went to get your stationery, which was a bit like school, where you sort of went up to the sort of little room at the end where they'd hand out the pads and sharpen your pencils, literally [chuckles]. It was kind of quaint, but it felt so—it was a time lag, you know, like the rest of the world had sort of moved on somewhere and Parliament was still operating on a much sort of slower, older model. It took quite a while for the electronic revolution to hit Parliament.

I have to tell you a quick story about the funny thing about getting laptops for members, because members were arguing, "This is the technology that's used these days. We can't operate without a laptop; they're always things to have." There was a lot of resistance, and from some of the conservative members, who said, "Well, I don't know how to use a laptop. I don't want to learn how to use a laptop. This will put me at a disadvantage. These other

members are going to have these whiz-bang bits of communication and all the rest.” I remember the Vietnam veteran, Graham Edwards, is it?

AY Yes, Graham Edwards.

WATSON Who was in a wheelchair. He had lost both of his legs in a landmine incident. He said, “When they installed heaters at the bottom of our seats in the chamber” (because it gets really cold in winter; the chamber wasn’t designed for comfort either in the heat or in the cold) “I didn’t argue that we shouldn’t have foot warmers because I don’t have any legs” [laughs]. So that became the sort of analogy. Just because you don’t know how to use a computer doesn’t mean that you should stop everybody else from having one. He was great. He was quite an extraordinary [laughs] contributor.

AY He was a character.

WATSON Yes. So I thought that was a great analogy.

AY When do you think this was that you got the laptops in? Can you recall? If not, we might come back to that.

WATSON Yes, it might even have been in the second term, like 2001 or something like that. I seem to remember that there were quite a few years when we were really just dealing with—I mean, we had computers in our offices, but we didn’t have laptops allocated to us for quite a while.

AY So not early adopters?

WATSON Not early adopters, no; quite reluctant adopters in lots of ways. It’s an extraordinarily conservative institution, and so change is always questioned and looked at from every angle before it’ll be considered [chuckles]. I guess cost was another thing. That’s one of the ongoing issues, I guess. I got involved in the running of the Parliament. Upper house members often are the ones that are on the Parliamentary Services Committee, which is the group that decides if we’re going to refurbish the chamber, how we do it, and the running of the place. Because it’s got to be maintained as a heritage building, with all its limitations, even just doing wiring and things in a building like that is a nightmare. At the same time, people are really critical of the Parliament, but it does need a major additional

build, basically. But it's like pulling teeth. Nobody wants to give parliamentarians more money. I mean, it's not us, but anyway.

AY Your office space was fairly crowded. Who were you sharing with?

WATSON Up at Parliament House, each party would be allocated—in our case, we were allocated a room, so Chrissy and Jim and I shared one room, only it was one of the larger rooms, but, nevertheless, once you'd put your desk and your chair in, it was pretty minimal [chuckles]. In some respects, it was not a bad system, because, again, there's a comparison which is actually to do with the federal Parliament. When the federal Parliament was in the old building and it was quite crowded and people were literally bumping into each other all the time, there was a level of kind of camaraderie and exchange that happened, whereas once it went into the big new space, that whole atmosphere changed. I think the WA Parliament is similar. You're definitely rubbing shoulders with people all the time and bumping into people, apart from occasional altercations which led to black eyes [chuckles]. Someone, apparently on the threshold of the dining room, took a biff at someone. I think that's about the only time it's come to that that I'm aware of. I think it was Tom Stephens and Phil Lockyer or somebody like that.

AY And it was deliberate?

WATSON I believe so. Tom used to show off the little scar on his lip where he got it [chuckles].

AY You don't know what the argument was about?

WATSON I don't remember [chuckles]. By and large I think there are advantages in that close proximity and shared facilities. There always seemed to me some sort of informal rules around it, like you tended to not take your arguments into the dining room. That was [chuckles]—no raised voices or argy-bargy to be had in the dining room. If you wanted to do that, you apparently had to step over the threshold [laughs]. Watch out you don't get biffed as you go. Yes, things like that that you sort of observed and realised that there were rules of engagement that were going on, not written down, but just understood. Yes, that sort of opportunity to have informal conversations with members across all the political spectrum I think is a good thing. It constantly reminded you that we're all human beings in this and probably what we have in common is more than what we've got in difference. Yes, that's the

flip side of having, say, a large new facility which would function better. It's more probably that it would be better for the staff than us. I mean, the Hansard were in tiny little cubbyholes up on the top floor in summer, boiling hot and doing intense work. If you go up and visit them up there, it's pretty basic conditions. But the staff do an amazing job given all that.

AY They do indeed. Now, you've talked about feeling a little bit of trepidation about getting up and speaking, but eventually you did have to deliver your maiden speech.

WATSON Yes.

AY We're going to pick that apart in a second, but what messages did you decide to deliver and make a conscious effort to put into your speech?

WATSON Yes, so the first thing is that I hadn't realised that there was such a thing as an inaugural speech. Not long after getting there, probably the President or somebody, or maybe one of the clerks said, "We're scheduling when people are going to give their inaugural speeches." I more or less said, "Well, what's that?" So, anyway, basically, it's your opportunity to introduce yourself, often to thank people who've been influential or helped to get you elected, then perhaps foreshadowing issues that you're wanting to engage on, changes you'd like, that kind of thing. I think it's fair to say that we did have a sense of the historic moment that this was in terms of the change for the Legislative Council and the numbers of Greens in the Parliament. I remember June and I sat down and talked about what were the key things. So, the speech was, apart from of course thanking and acknowledging people who helped me get there, and a little bit about me, but not much, was laying out the need for a revolution and deliberately choosing that rather provocative language and trying to tease that out. And for me it was about flagging the depth and range of changes that the Greens feel are necessary for us to live sustainably and peacefully on the planet, because to date, really, all the indicators are that we are not living sustainably and certainly not peacefully. There is ongoing conflict at personal and national level, right through. Nothing's changed. So, yes, it was the idea that we needed to revolutionise the way that we thought and the way that we acted if we were going to, basically, survive and thrive.

AY Yes, that was the point I was going to make is that you actually couched it in revolutionary terms.

WATSON Yes; well, I wanted to make sure people were listening [laughs]. I am a child of the '70s [laughs]. Revolution in our days was actually a very positive and exciting and energising concept. I don't mean revolution in the sort of Bolshevik sense of the word, just in terms of the depth of change. It's also on a personal and a kind of spiritual level as well as the more tangible practical level.

AY Interestingly, and importantly, you chose this maiden speech to declare to them that you're a lesbian.

WATSON Oh, yes.

AY How big an issue was that for you, and why did you decide to have that ...

WATSON To do that?

AY Yes, exactly, in your maiden speech?

WATSON Well, yes, again, we discussed this at length beforehand. So, in the election, I had said on a number of occasions in a number of public forums or in publications that I was a lesbian and I was going to seek to have social justice and equity for GLBTI people on my agenda and, I guess, champion those issues. So, because we are well aware that in society, and it's getting less and less, which is really good, there is that sort of behind the back of the hand whispering and denigration and undermining and speculation about sexuality, about whether somebody is having an affair, all those kind of things. So in the political arena, it's sort of seen as being potentially a high level of interest and can be used by one's opponents to run you down or undermine you. So I thought, okay, let's just put this straight on the table so that there's no sense that I'm being anything less than 100 per cent open about my sexuality and the importance of that, because, on the one hand, it's a very private thing, and I think I say that in my inaugural speech, but on the other hand, given the politics around sexuality and discrimination, it's important that those who feel they can stand up and say in public, "Yes, that's me; that's fine and let's get on with it" sort of thing. Once we made a decision that that would be stated—It's interesting, from the research that I've done, it seems I was the first lesbian in any Australian Parliament to actually do that, just get up and go "bang". That doesn't mean there weren't other lesbians, it's just it was ambiguous or we don't know or, you know, for some people it is actually not that black and white [laughs]. There is that whole issue as well. Gender identity, sexual identity, for a lot of people is a lot

more fluid. I just think that if you're in the public realm that you should really be as open and transparent as you can be, so people know who you are. People have said, "Did you get discriminated against because of that?" And my response is always, "Well, I was a Green, I was a lesbian and I was a woman" and —and I was a builder, and that's probably a bit odd, too. But people could have had views about me based on any one or all of those things and it didn't bother me one way or the other. I guess I feel I know who I am. I'm quite comfortable with who I am.

It also I think presented a little bit of a conundrum for some male members in the chamber. June made the comment, observing debate, that the blokes often didn't know quite how to deal with me because I didn't behave in—I wasn't going to perhaps react in a stereotypical feminine model and so it confused them a little bit I think, threw them off their game. But one of the things I did do and I would have done no matter what is that largely for my own kind of personal reasons but also for my adherence to nonviolence is, I won't engage in denigration of your opponent or that sort of slanging, teasing and carry-on and goading that is often associated with that adversarial parliamentary debate. With very few exceptions, I generally just don't play it. So I think also on that level it was sort of here's somebody who's not going to play by that particular methodology, so I think that was another reason. It was different.

AY It's a brave thing to do, particularly, as you say, you were approaching the whole parliamentary system with a bit of trepidation.

WATSON Yes, yes.

AY So, how did it actually feel, delivering that speech and acknowledging that you're a lesbian?

WATSON Oh, no, very good, and to be honest I didn't personally think that that was the most controversial aspect of the speech, if you see what I mean [laughs].

AY Not at all.

WATSON I just kind of slipped that in there with everything else. I felt really good that on behalf of the gay and lesbian community they could have someone who they knew was one of them and there to represent them, so I felt that's great, I put that on the table and flagged that you now have a gay, a lesbian, person in the Parliament, and if you want to say

something nasty, which they did later on in debates, you're talking to me, you know [laughs] which kind of changes the dynamic. If you're talking about people who aren't in the room, it's a bit different when you actually require—It's a bit like having an Aboriginal person in the debate and displaying the sort of prejudices and ignorance that people hold about Aboriginal people. They're a bit more reluctant to do that if there's an Aboriginal person looking at them, so that's the analogy.

AY You made it clear that, you said, you're a proud member of that community, so you weren't just speaking for yourself, you were speaking for that community.

WATSON Yes, absolutely. Yes, I wanted to flag that, if I could, I would like to be seen as a champion for the community, because you know that there are so many people who are feeling that they were basically second-class citizens, at the very least, in our community. They were discriminated against in work; they were discriminated against in having families. Often they were not out, so fearful about their family and their work colleagues finding out. You've got to remember that still, for gay men, it was a criminal offence to have a male partner unless you were 21. A lot of older gay and lesbian people had lived all their life in a kind of secret shadowy way, and somebody needed to be saying, "This has to change; this is wrong and it's damaging and it's nothing other than prejudice that's holding this in place." I think we've come an enormous way since then. It's not sorted entirely, but it's a big difference. I think it was the beginning of some major shifts, and I'm sure we'll talk about it later, but the changes that we had in the laws in WA were significant and wide reaching. We'll always acknowledge the work of Jim McGinty in pursuing that and working closely and respectfully on those issues, and I think we made a pretty good team.

AY And you're right, we will come back to some of those things, but going back to some of your more controversial comments in your maiden speech, you must have rocked the conservative side of the upper house when you took a swipe at economic rationalism.

WATSON Yes, yes.

AY Now, you said that it is an indicator of economic health. You said that's morally bankrupt, ecological suicide and naively short-sighted.

WATSON Oh yes, they were fighting words.

AY Absolutely, they are revolutionary words. Let's unpick what you meant by all of that.

WATSON The best short analogy, for which I thank my good friend Scott Ludlam, who's one of our senators, is saying that the only other system that is based on multiplying and continuing growth is cancer [laughs]. So, economic rationalism says that unless you're increasing your turnover, your profitability, then you're going backwards. It's based on a growth model that says you either have to increase your production and therefore generate more income, or get more money for your product. And what economic rationalism doesn't take into consideration is what you're consuming to drive that growth. So spending more money faster and faster actually will show up on the books as being a good thing.

You know, wars are actually good for the economy, and so that's what I mean about there's no moral lens being passed over that. It's like everything is about pursuit of generating more wealth. I hope that people are getting to understand that that doesn't actually make them happy and eventually we run out of widgets to make whatever it is that we're going to consume, unless you've got a system that closes that loop back again and consumes less energy in the production. So, it might have been a bit revolutionary then, but it wasn't new. This stuff was being talked about in the '60s and '70s, questions about growth economics. And I suppose for me, having grown up in that sort of political thinking and reading and the politics of the '70s is that how conservative had we got to by the end of the '90s where the neo-conservatives had basically dominated the debate in the US, in UK, in Europe, in Australia, and so anything that suggested feeding the beast of the economy wasn't the main game in town was seen as being loopy, but, you know ...

AY Would you place the past tense on that or would you consider that that remains ...

WATSON The dominant paradigm? Yes.

AY The concept that markets and money do everything better than governments?

WATSON Yes, I think unfortunately it still is the prevailing paradigm, and I think that's because the other side of this is that it's connected with the politics of fear, and the fear of not having enough and the fear of, if you don't keep up at least but ideally get ahead of the

pack, then you'll actually be in danger. So the neoconservative model is also associated with an aggressive global political stance, so you have to create enemies and you have to keep the populace compliant and fearful. I mean, that sounds a bit Orwellian, but I think that's about where we've got to, and then you create systems where people have to work so hard, such long hours, that they haven't got much space left over or time or energy to do the analysis of what's going on. They're just like on this treadmill. And then you combine into that people who get a tertiary education and then they've got this huge debt, so the whole system, the structural components are quite different these days.

And underlying all of that is that all the wealth; the fact that there's more wealth and food and minerals and whatever available to us than ever before, it's just that it's not being shared around, in a way. You only have to look at the actual figures in terms of how the wealth continues to be concentrated in fewer and fewer hands and that's in lockstep with this sort of economic rationalism. You've got to produce more and those who have the advantage, unless they're really inept, like Clive Palmer, will continue to hold that advantage, because they've already got most of the cards in their hand. And unless you have a democratic governance that says we need to play a role in providing fairness and redistribution, then that will just continue in the way that it's going, but most people think, oh, my gosh, that's socialism, like you couldn't possibly do that. If there's one thing that comes out really strongly from where the other political parties are, they think that the role of government is to step out of the way and let business get on with it, and I think the heresy they see is if you question that business doesn't always know best and that business won't find a solution. So, you have the papers, the media, promoting people to lead the state, for example, who have come from the Chamber of Commerce. I don't have any problem with having Chamber of Commerce, but that's a pretty limited worldview. What it says is we think businesspeople will know how to run the community, or govern the community, and I actually think it's not the right model.

There's not enough key performance indicators, like social harmony, like trust in the community, like confidence in the future, those sorts of things that make us feel good about who we are and how we're living. Look at Bhutan: gross national happiness has got to be worth looking at as a sort of performance criteria, because ultimately having more money or producing more widgets doesn't make people happy. It might for a while, but it isn't going to see us live happily and sustainably. It really isn't.

AY We'll come back to more Greens' concepts on economic management as we move through, but I just thought I would ask. This was 1970 when "Nugget" Coombs¹⁸ said, or he questioned, the waste of natural resources for short-term profit. That was back in 1970, and I just wonder how you respond to that? I think it would be something you would ...

WATSON Yes, absolutely. As I say, it's not as though these concepts and these challenges hadn't been pretty thoroughly debated in the '70s; it's just that they kind of got shunted to one side. I mean, some of the early Greens sort of activism was around things like green bans in New South Wales, and it was about not destroying bushland to put "development" over the top of it. The warning bells have been sounded for a very long time. Even, for example, the issue of WA native forests, which I've had a passionate interest in ever since I got to look at them in the '70s. You look at some of the statements made by early foresters in the '20s and '30s, they're saying, "Unless we take action to replant and actively cultivate some of our amazing hardwoods, they're going to be, what, at least economically not viable, and possibly not even ecologically viable." I mean, they were there; they could see it; and everything that they said has turned out to be true. But we tend to, because the—it's seen as being lazy and negative to suggest that development and progress are not the buzz words that they are. You've just got to unpack what they actually mean. What does progress mean if it just means that we've got more cars on the road and people have got newer four-wheel drives to drive the kids to and from school? I mean, that doesn't equate to progress in my view.

AY It's a big question.

WATSON Yes [chuckles]. Less suicides might be a better one, or actually not. Look at the discussion that's happening now at last, and hopefully it will continue on for a while yet, on domestic violence; this ongoing war that's happening in our suburbs, in the houses, between people we know, and until very recently, everybody kind of went, "Oh, I don't really want to know about that; that's the private sphere." But what makes people that angry and that unhappy that they'll do that? What are the values that we've got in our community? So, again, it's interesting, I was just thinking that that issue of violence against women in their own homes is something again that I was working on in the '80s, and we saw some changes in the Parliament, which were good; but if we don't get that right, how can we say that we're a healthy community, that we even are a community? The debate is driven by fear of other, fear of Muslims and fear of boat people. The worst terror is actually the one that's in your

¹⁸ Dr HC (Nugget) Coombs was an economist and former Governor of the Reserve Bank.

house and isn't going away [chuckles]. Seriously, if you talk to women who have survived domestic violence, it's pretty profound and it's kind of like a dirty secret that sits there behind the glossy image.

AY Back to your maiden speech—

WATSON Sorry, yes [laughs].

AY Because you also talk about Aboriginal people. I'm thinking about the things that you felt important to include, and you did feel that important to include in your maiden speech. Why?

WATSON Well, absolutely, being well aware of the injustices that have been wrought on Aboriginal Australians, the fact that, you know, basically Europeans invaded, occupied the country, treated these people as though they were fauna in both a legal sense and a practical sense. I mean, it's interesting. Probably now I might have a slightly kind of softer view in terms of that they just didn't understand what they were looking at or what they were seeing, and Aboriginal people were hard to engage with—It's the least [chuckles]—that's the most mitigating thing I could say. But we basically took their land, we poisoned them, we shot them, we then broke up their families; and admittedly some people, given the lens of the 19th century, thought that this was what you did; it was just a continuation of colonial thinking from other places where the English have colonised. But I guess it's a deep sense of how extraordinary Aboriginal culture is, the longest continuous culture on the planet, living in extraordinarily harsh conditions, through extraordinary environmental changes, if you think about the things that have happened over the last 60 000 years, and that they are still often unseen, partly because the numbers are low.

I remember when we first came to Australia and we went out visiting, going to see I guess the hinterland, the agriculture area, the south west, the north, and there were these tin shanty towns on the edge of the towns. We went, "Oh, who are they?", because you didn't even know when you came here that there were these people—I don't know whether that was a common experience—and for me, and for many, it's a fundamental injustice that we haven't adequately acknowledged or dealt with in our cultural background.

It's interesting, one of the opportunities that I had when I was later a member of Parliament you get to go to citizenship ceremonies, which, quite frankly, are pretty boring. I'm not quite

sure what I think about citizenship as a notion, but anyway, they were an opportunity to talk to people, and particularly at that point where they were, I guess, considering what it was to be an Australian citizen. There were three things that I would always talk about. One was that Western Australia had a black history, in probably several meanings of the word [chuckles], and that it was beholden on us to actually know about Aboriginal culture and to recognise its ongoing survival; two there was this amazing thing outside of the metropolitan area which was called the bush, full of extraordinary plants and animals which you wouldn't see anywhere else on the planet. What was the third? Gosh, I can't remember. It was probably about biodiversity, that the south west of Western Australia is this sort of extraordinary place.

So, yes, I felt completely that that acknowledgment of the damage that we've caused to Aboriginal people needed to be part of a statement. And again, in retrospect, some of the debates on native title and other things I think probably I was a little more reserved than I actually probably wanted to be, in terms of saying these are the terrible things that have been perpetrated on Aboriginal people and we should feel ashamed about this, we should acknowledge it at the very least, and that there's a lot of work to right those wrongs, and it's reflected in things like the number of Aboriginal people who are in prison.

AY You also talked about the co-existence of native title and pastoral leases on crown land. So, how was that? Has that been successful?

WATSON Well, I think probably that was in the context that the debate nationally was still very much around native title, what rights that would confer. It was, on the one hand, a hope that it would rectify or address native title rights with our European system of law and what that would actually mean in terms of land use. It was an incredibly difficult and exhausting debate both at a national level and at a state level because the powers that be weren't going to give that much [chuckles], to be honest. So I think my understanding, talking to a number of Aboriginal people in the last sort of six months is there's a deep sense of disappointment about native title, and one of the things that it has done is to divide communities, too, between those who could argue or prove their traditional connection to land and those who couldn't. It's exacerbated family feuds. It's made winners and losers. But, on the other hand, I still think that it was necessary to at least give the requirement to be consulted on future acts on Aboriginal land, which is what in effect was the sole thing that came out of that. Has it been effective? In very few cases, probably. The Miriuwung–

Gajerrong is one which I think probably should be held up as a—that's the group that have ownership over the area of the Ord, so the East Kimberley, I think.

AY What marks that out as being a success story?

WATSON Well, that they actually were able to successfully make a claim over the bulk of the area that they considered was their traditional country, and that they have been consulted and engaged in the activities that take place on that land. Whether it's perfect, no, probably not. But given that there are a lot of cases that are even less successful than that—the south west land and sea one is going to be a test also, because I know within our—Members in our party who are Aboriginal and are Noongar, there is huge—both ends of the spectrum on that one [laughs] in terms of whether they think it's the best deal and it's the best we're going to get, and we should be grateful and accept it, or whether it absolutely shouldn't happen.

AY Now, you finish your maiden speech. How was it received?

WATSON Well, it was pretty hard to gauge, because everybody does the polite—there's a clap and there's shaking hands and slapping you on the back and welcoming you, in quite a sort of formal way. I think obviously it's nice to have friends and colleagues and members and supporters in the public gallery; so the tradition is you deliver your speech, and then you go and celebrate the occasion, which was really nice. I think it was more a relief that I'd done that bit; I'd put on the record what I was about and what I envisaged might happen in Parliament. I think the other point that, not so much in terms of issues but in terms of methods—I think I made the point that I intended to work in the spirit of cooperation, but at the same time there were very clear lines that need to be held. I think, again, it's one of the things that the Greens sometimes get criticised for is that we don't negotiate; we're too hard line. I guess I wanted to flag that, one, there are certainly things that one needs to be hard line about, and the classic always is if there was a referendum on the death penalty, we'd have the death penalty back. I happen to think that there's some higher order criteria and principles here. But that's what I understand; people often say in politics that if there was a public referendum, people would want the death penalty back.

AY What are they basing that on?

WATSON The sense that the community really doesn't have a deep-seated sense of principles of rights. Again, it's interesting, because one of the things that I tried to progress through the Parliament was a bill of rights. It's that high-order stuff that I think is lacking a lot in the general public discourse in Australia, whereas in somewhere like Europe, which has had wars and things, people kind of get that having the state killing people is not actually [laughs] morally very defensible. But it was not something I would like to see go to a referendum. But, on the other hand, I guess I was also flagging that a fundamental tenet of nonviolence and consensus is that you will seek to find solutions that are win-win and to listen to your opponent's point of view, to respect your opponents, and that I was flagging that that was my *modus operandi*, I guess. And it was a comment about the normal adversarial sort of assumptions about Parliament, that it's about winning arguments, it's about beating your opponent down, being clever and tricking them and all that kind of stuff, which of course does work [laughs] but the end result is, you know.

AY You talk about collective decision-making and involving the community in decision-making, and a revolution in ethics. So you flagged all of that?

WATSON Yes, yes, because I think—I guess I have a sense that a lot of decisions made within a Parliament and in terms of legislation are based on relatively shallow, pragmatic sort of things, and that played out in a lot of the debates on criminal law, which Parliament deals with quite a lot, and because it ended up that I took on that area, there was always a lot happening in that space, and it seemed to me that it was always, often, not always, a lot of it was quite hastily conceived, did not think through, and certainly did not have any kind of ethical base. So there wasn't an overriding thing, for example, that it's not a good idea to just continue to incarcerate larger percentages of the population. I would have thought that would be a fundamental principle. How do we keep the prison population to its absolute lowest?

There's some research that suggests in terms of people who are really bad and beyond any kind of—and we need to be protected from, it's about, one or two per cent of the population. Everybody else has got some story about how they got to be where they are. I think that whole thing about justice and incarceration and what it actually does is—so much more work needs to be done on that. I find it really engaging, because it does go the heart of can people change and how do they interact with a community and you've got alienation in a community, if they can see no hope of fitting into the community as it is, or getting a job or getting a meaningful job, then actually, the logical thing is to do this, to offend or to break the law.

AY From the other angle, though, is it an example of the politics of fear?

WATSON Yes, absolutely. And it was one of my frustrations even with friends in the Labor Party. You could have a very good conversation with them off the record about what they thought about this, but they said—in fact, I could tell you a conversation with Jim McGinty on this, when he was the Attorney General at the time, the famous three strikes and you're in legislation, which was passed during the Lawrence Government by the Labor Party. Carmen [Lawrence] reckons it was when she was out of the country [laughs]. I don't know whether that's true or not; it wasn't rescinded. So, under McGinty, there was a public review of the operation of that act, and my memory is the results of that review said it wasn't really making much difference to offending or anything else. So I read the report, got very excited and went to see Jim and said, "Here's the opportunity. You just say 'We now have the evidence to say that this is wrong'". He said, I think, I could almost quote, but something like, "Well, every now and again you have to throw a bone to the rednecks." What I took from that is it's not worth the fight. And I found that really disappointing, because I'd worked a lot with Jim on a number of really good initiatives.

In fact, 80 to 90 per cent of the initiatives that were important were done respectfully, and we won the debate. But that one, I just went, "It actually doesn't make any sense." But that was the populism aspect, and I just think that's where particularly the Labor Party has really fallen down and they are now at a point where they really don't know what they stand for, because you have to stand up and take some leadership and say this law goes too far and it's not being effective and therefore we're going to take it away. You might wear a bit of flak from the Howard Sattlers of the world for a couple of days (a couple of weeks even) and then you move on, because politics is a very—it moves along, too. So, anyway, I just thought that was a lack of courage and a lack of integrity in some respect.

AY I think we'll end on that note and find something happier for next week, shall we?

WATSON [Laughs] Okay. All right; good.

[End of GizWatson_7]

GizWatson_8

AY This is an interview with Giz Watson. Today is the 23rd of December 2015, and we're again at her house in Floreat on a very hot day.

WATSON Only 39; I don't know [chuckles].

AY Now, last week we've got you into Parliament and you've delivered your maiden speech, and in that election there were three Greens members and two Democrats, and that gave you the balance of power in the upper house.

WATSON Yes.

AY And this was a new, and no doubt unhappy, idea for the government. Can you recall how they responded to you?

WATSON Well, they were fairly sceptical, I suppose, about what we would be able to do and who we were and, you know, sort of the interlopers, the newcomers. I think it was a fascinating place to start working in in 1997. You've got to remember that this chamber had been conservative dominated for I think it was 103 years, ever since it was established, and when you look at the history of the Legislative Council it was the sort of landed gentry who set it up. You had to have land and you had to be male and you had to be over 21; all those kind of things. And I'm not suggesting that in 1997 it was still like that, but the history of the place meant that it had been, by and large, a kind of gentlemen's debating club, because the conservatives were always going to win any vote in that chamber and the Labor Party knew that. When it was Liberal dominated, it was a rubber stamp for the government of the day, and when the Labor Party were in it became a blocker for a whole lot of legislation. So, the very first thing is that the rules of engagement, I suppose, and how the business of the house was organised hadn't had to be that closely considered, I suppose.

The government of the day would introduce bills in a fairly random manner, as they were allowed to under the standing orders; they could say, "Well, we're now going to debate this bill or that bill", and apparently that wasn't uncommon, so, apart from anything else, that was a huge disadvantage to anybody who wasn't in the government. But we did work hard at the very outset to suggest some ways of organising the notice paper, of giving reasonable notice of debate on bills, because what was obvious is if the government did continue to play that

way, we could make it very difficult for them by talking at length, and talking at length was seen to be, or is, the sort of accepted way of frustrating the progress of legislation and can be quite effective as a method. But we were pretty keen to have a fair method. One of the things we tried to introduce was a preliminary categorisation of legislation so that each party would give a preliminary view: "Is this a bill that we are likely to support, it won't take very long to debate?" providing the government the opportunity to pick and choose the timing to suit the energy and the various ministers who were available and all those kind of things. So it was tense; there is no doubt about it. I think probably the people who were most excited were some of the members of the Labor Party who suddenly realised now that they were going to play all sorts of high jinks, which they might have thought about before but weren't going to be effective because they didn't have the numbers, and so they were trying to encourage us to do that with them. I think to an extent we did, but, on the other hand, it struck me pretty quickly that there was the politics of the debate, but then there was, I guess, the orderly business of Parliament, and I suppose I'd decided fairly early on, on behalf of the community, that it was better that we had a Parliament that worked and did actually not waste time.

The level of disrespect for the Parliament is already great enough, and so I felt that efficient and organised parliamentary time was good, because, honestly, if it's not organised in a way it can be incredibly chaotic and tedious for everybody, and that doesn't really make much sense. So we did that, but we also did make sure that we tried to exercise as much power as we could with those new changes, and it's ironic; it wasn't really until right at the end of the 16 years I was in the Parliament when I spent 18 months, nearly a bit more, on one of the parliamentary committees, reviewing and rewriting the standing orders, where eventually we put in place that smaller parties would have, for example, unlimited time to speak on a bill, because in those days it was only the lead speaker from the formal opposition. That may not seem like a big deal, but sometimes, if you've got an important piece of legislation we felt very strongly that the smaller parties should have those sort of opportunities as well.

AY Did you have the ability to speak at all?

WATSON Yes, as did any member. That is the standing orders of the Legislative Council. It's interesting. Some of the tensions were around the order in which you speak. Back in the day it was the minister would read in the bill, then the opposition lead speaker would speak, and perhaps some other members from the opposition, and then the bill would be put to the vote. So it was a competition between ourselves and the Democrats as to who

spoke after the formal opposition, and it used to annoy me a lot, because there was three of us and two of them, that more often than not they'd get to speak next, and often we'd be repeating the same sort of things because, as I say, policy-wise we were very parallel in our positions. So there was sort of that level of rivalry between ourselves and the Democrats as well. The President eventually figured it out and it would go one time to the Greens, one time to the Democrats. It may not seem like a big deal to anybody else, but it was about asserting that we were a party who were wanting to say something in the Parliament, and we wanted to be respected for that. So, [chuckles] it was interesting, as I say, because I'd come from the non-government sector, not-for-profit sector and being an activist, where the whole modus operandi is to share information and to be transparent and helpful and accountable and all those kind of things, whereas, of course, the political realities are somewhat different, quite a lot different to that, and so sharing ideas with your political rivals often could result in them saying, "Well, that sounds like a good idea. I think I might just do that myself", which I learnt fairly quickly wasn't going to [chuckles] either be satisfactory or really indicate the work that the Greens were doing. You know, this was actually Greens' ideas that we were talking about.

AY So, are you suggesting that you kept things close to your chest in a way that you perhaps hadn't done before, or felt that you needed to keep things close to your chest?

WATSON Yes, absolutely; absolutely. It took me a while to figure this out, but, yes, as various members would say, not telegraphing your punches. One of the balancing acts, I think, of this workplace is you want to do what you can to build trust, because ultimately you get better results and it's a more pleasant way of working and honest way of working. But every now and again you don't tell everybody everything. I mean, even to the point that you will find a question without notice that's given to a minister is one you just had a conversation with somebody about, about three hours ago, and you go, "Hang on a sec. I was going to ask that question." So you realise that some things are better kept to yourself until you actually want to choose to air them, and that was a bit of a lesson for me [chuckles].

AY In that first Parliament from 1997, what were some of the major issues where you did have to think very carefully, where you really did exercise a balance of power, where it really did matter, between you and the Democrats?

WATSON Well, I think the first one that came up that was obviously going to be of great interest and importance was the native title issue. That led to the Labor Party proposing

a select committee on native title. Tom Stephens¹⁹ at the time, I remember, came and asked whether we would support that, and we obviously did support that, as did the Democrats, and I then became a member of that select committee. In fact, I remember that was another case where I felt strongly. It was a three-member select committee, from memory; yes, they're usually three, yes, or was it? Anyway, the critical thing was that Helen Hodgson from the Democrats wanted to be on the committee and I did as well. She was pretty forceful about that, and then I went away and thought, oh, well, it doesn't really matter. Then I thought, no, no, it does matter. There's three Greens; there's two Democrats. We have the numbers and we should be on that committee [chuckles]", and that's what happened, and Helen joined the committee as a participating member, so she was still on it. I'd been dropped in the deep end of a very complex area of history, politics, law, and what was happening at the time. I know that Tom Stephens was very keen to use the select committee process to try and bring some of the more conservative members across to a different position by showing them, for example, how treaties and other settlements in Canada were working. We actually travelled to Canada and met with—well, it was a very intense period of meetings and travel. One had the sense that it was making a difference at the time, but when it came to the vote on legislation, it would appear not to have made any difference, so it was a little frustrating, I have to say, that the little that was provided by native title really didn't expand as a result of that inquiry, but, look, I think it was a good try [chuckles]. I still would argue it was well worth doing.

AY So, even though between you and the Democrats you did have that balance of power, you were not able to really have that bill go through in a form that you were happy with.

WATSON That we were happy with? No. It didn't shift it far enough as far as we were concerned.

AY But did you feel you had made any gains with it?

¹⁹ Labor politician, Tom Stephens was elected to the Legislative Council in 1982 for North Province. Elected for Mining and Pastoral Region from 22 May 1989. Re-elected 1993, 1996, 2001. Elected to the Legislative Assembly for Central Kimberley-Pilbara on 26 February 2005. Seat abolished in the redistribution of 2007. In 2008, he was elected for the Pilbara in 2008. Did not contest the general election of 2013.
2013[http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Parliament%5CMemberlist.nsf/WAllMembersFlat/Stephens,+Thomas+\(Tom\)+Gregory?opendocument](http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Parliament%5CMemberlist.nsf/WAllMembersFlat/Stephens,+Thomas+(Tom)+Gregory?opendocument)

WATSON Not in the kind of—not in the strict letters of the law, no. It might have shifted some attitudes a bit, but I didn't feel that, probably, it made a huge difference. It would be interesting to know what others thought about that, but I didn't feel that really, after all that, it had made a huge impact on the bill itself.

AY I would like to talk about committees because you put your hand up to rather a lot of them.

WATSON [Chuckles] Yes, over time I did.

AY Over time you did, but what was it about the committee process that appealed to you? Why were you putting your hand up?

WATSON Well, interestingly enough, I think one of the major influences was talking with the then Clerk, Laurie Marquet, who was a formidable Clerk and was a great advocate of the committee system, about the work that could be done in committees, the importance of the committees for the Legislative Council, and really that the Legislative Council was the place where committee work should be done. It was one of his things that he thought there shouldn't actually be so many committees in the Legislative Assembly and that good work could be done in those committee reports that could influence the outcome of legislation. The decision about going on committees happens fairly early on in the proceedings, and being relatively new I hadn't really even thought about it very much, about which committee. So there is a sort of bargaining time that happens at the beginning of the Parliament where the committee chairs are decided and who's going to have the numbers on which one. Now, the legislation committee was always considered to be a government-dominated committee, but what appealed to me about that one is that it, at the time, was dealing with most of the interesting and substantive bills that came before the house, so it was a chance to really put full scrutiny onto those bills and to engage the community and the stakeholders, because it struck me that the Parliament's role was to really engage those range of views before we passed it. Basically, the house was second-thought; what the stakeholders think about this, what are the potential unforeseen consequences, et cetera, et cetera; how is it working in other jurisdictions if it is copying something else? So, yes, it was a chance to get in behind that legislation well beyond the sort of set piece debates that happened in the chamber, and we did some great inquiries, really interesting stuff.

AY So what is the process of a committee for people who do not know? Who initiates a committee, and then what is the committee's role, and how does it then report its findings?

WATSON So the Parliament has a number of standing committees that are written into the standing orders and they have been established, I guess, by agreement of the Parliament. By and large, they maintain whoever is in government, so you have a legislation committee, public affairs, finance and estimates, delegated legislation. I think there are about five, from memory, and I guess there is the privileges committee and the parliamentary services committee, so maybe more like seven. A couple of those are joint house committees; delegated leg and services are both joint house committees. As I say, there is a conversation usually between the leaders of the parties early on about expectations of numbers on the committee, whether it's going to be a government-dominated committee or a non-government dominated committee. So, for example, the committee that I chaired for eight years was the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, and in the standing orders it said that this would be a non-government dominated committee, which I think is correct, because you're basically scrutinising department spending and government budgets very closely, so I think it makes sense that the government doesn't have the numbers on that. That led to some interesting conversations about whether the Greens could ever—Well, we were always considered not government, so I suppose [chuckles] that's sort of why I kind of had a permanent spot there, in some respects.

Arguably, for some parties and for smaller parties it is quite an effort to provide members to go on all the standing committees and select committees if they arise, too. That is partly why I think I ended up being on so many, because if there are only a few and you are a party with the balance of power, then the committees reflect that. So when the finance and estimates committee was established, we were in the balance of power, and I realised that it would make sense for us to be on the committee and I also thought, "Well, if I'm going to be on it, then I'd like to chair it", because by that time I'd had eight years in the Parliament so I thought I probably had the experience to do that. So yes, that is why that came about.

I suppose I think in some ways that the work that the Parliament does for the community is best reflected in the work that is done in committees. It's interesting, most people wouldn't even know that that is what we do, and all that work goes on behind the scenes.

AY That's why I'm interested to—you know, the processes, to enlarge on the processes and how the committees work, because it is, in a way, a little-known function of the Parliament.

WATSON Well, the other thing I think is important to realise is that most standing committees, the objective is to work by consensus and to have a report that's produced by that consensus process. For me, it was absolutely my way of working, too, and it's quite forensic. I mean, in terms of finalising committee reports, you go through word by word maybe up to 20 different iterations of a report, so it's pretty intense and I quite like wordsmithing, so if you've got a bit of a feel for that—It became a bit of a running joke, actually; if there was a question about the grammar or whatever, then, "Whatever Giz thinks [chuckles]." So, you know, I think I probably improved the grammar in some of the reports. But seriously, it's quite a challenge because what you're trying to get is members to take off their party hats, by and large, and problem-solve. We took a lot of evidence, so we've got listen very carefully to the veracity of what you're hearing and then weigh that and put it in.

Committee reports are very intense pieces of work and huge credit to, particularly, the staff who work on those to record all the different views and then reflect that, with our assistance, but reflect that in writing. And most reports do agree, but the frustration is sometimes when it comes down to the actual debate in the chamber, it doesn't necessarily mean that the parties are going to change their positions. It was interesting, because again, the Clerk was very keen that one of the things we could do is produce reports in a legislative-drafted form so that the chamber could just say, "We accept the recommendations of the committee", and so you'd have a bloc motion where—And in some cases, we did that with some complicated areas of legislation, because we'd already done all that work and we just said, "Here are the set of amendments that will meet the recommendations of the committee; we recommend that the house take those on board", and in some cases that's what happened. I think that's a good process, but—

AY What did the Parliament think that in general?

WATSON It depended on the subject [chuckles]; it depended on the subject a lot. I think, again, the thing about legislation is that probably 70, 80 per cent of it is pretty uncontroversial and everybody agrees that what we want to do is to produce or amend a law that works best for the community, so there is a common objective. In those cases, when the

committee has done the forensic work to check out unforeseen consequences et cetera, why not just take that as done and accept it? But yes, other areas?

AY I am thinking of the select committees here rather than the standing ones, which are expected, but the decision to bring together a select committee, who decides that there is that issue?

WATSON Oh yes, that's interesting. Well, somebody has a bright idea and then tries to gain support from the other political parties for that committee. There were a number of occasions, quite a few, when we were in balance of power, and usually select committees are established by the opposition, so for whatever the conservatives say about the Greens in terms of we're just the far left and we always vote that way, there are four select committees that I can think of off the top of my head that were initiated by Liberals that we supported, because we would assess them in terms of, "Is this in the public interest? Is this a good use of parliamentary time and resources? What's the likely outcome? Is it going to produce something that will be constructive? Or, is there a very clear case of trying to bring something out in the open?" One of the select committees was into the raid on *The Sunday Times* by the police, which was a really crazy select committee inquiry because it was so complicated, but we felt that it was in the public interest that more light was shed on what actually happened on protecting the—Or any question that the media were being politically targeted should be investigated, and even if it is to exonerate the government of the day and say, "No, you didn't have anything to do with it"—In fact, in that inquiry we found out very early that there wasn't any smoking gun; Jim McGinty hadn't suggested it. I think Norman Moore at the time was a bit disappointed, but at least we all agreed—[chuckles]. Was it Norman? It might've been George Cash, I'm not sure, but whichever the Liberal chair of that committee was, anyway. Nevertheless, we had to go through with the inquiry. But there was one on advocacy for children, there was one on children in foster care, there was the one on *The Sunday Times*, there was the one into the Minister for Education and what she knew or didn't know, and all of those, the Liberals approached us and said, "Will you support it?" And we thought, in each of those cases, that there was good reason, and I would still argue that they were good inquiries. Likewise, with the Labor Party, we supported the native title select committees; I can't remember which others, but—

I think select committees are a very effective way of focusing on a particular—Terms of reference is everything; if the terms of reference aren't well constructed, then you end up

with a dog's breakfast, but yes, I enjoyed the work in select committees as well, although it's a lot of work, because they're smaller committees.

AY I think it was Scott Ludlam, actually, who said that people left their political allegiances at the door. Was that your experience?

WATSON By and large, yes. One of the other things about committees is that the minutes and the conversations within committee are in confidence, and that became the subject of an inquiry at a later point in another select committee, but not one that I was on. I think people were willing to even be critical of perhaps their own party policy, so more considered, more like, "Here's a job that we need to do, let's see if we can find some mutually useful recommendations." It's quite funny because, of course, it's not surprising that within political parties it's not all love and peace and light. Sometimes people on committees are quite pleased to be able to have a go at the minister of the day or whoever it was, because they weren't in the right faction or whatever it was, they had some longstanding disagreement which they were quite happy to see X or Y wear the heat for, and that was quite amusing, but you'll notice I'm not naming any names because I don't think it's actually particularly constructive to, even in retrospect, sort of spell that out. Never assume that there's that much love lost; there's just as much rivalry within parties as there is across parties, absolutely, and probably in some cases, more [laughs], which is human behaviour, I think, but I guess ...

AY To what extent does this apply to the Greens?

WATSON Well, I mean, I think being a smaller party—Any group that gets larger, you're more likely to have differences of communication and diversity and all the rest. We worked pretty hard to agree on things. Being a party that makes decisions by consensus, both at a party level and at the parliamentary level, you have a lot of chance to air what you do and don't like; you have a lot of chance to stop things if you're really unhappy. The thing with voting in whatever the circumstances are, if you get 49 per cent of the people who vote no and 51 who vote yes, those 49 or a certain percentage of them are going to be working very hard to claw that back or undermine the decision, so I think that's also a product of that culture, myself. I'm not suggesting that the Greens always agree on absolutely everything and that we never make mistakes and we're perfect, but I think we generally work hard to understand and work with each other. Part of our ethos is to work at depth with each other so that if there are differences we try and deal with them rather than play them out somewhere

else. It's part of the commitment to nonviolence, apart from anything else [laughs], and conflict resolution. It seems to me that if you're not able to resolve and work respectfully with your colleagues, your most immediate colleagues, then you really ought to be reassessing what you're doing, I think [laughs].

AY Back to these committees for a second, would you normally have a time frame ...

WATSON Sorry, can I just throw in another little funny story?

AY Please.

WATSON Well, one of the things we used to get teased for is that we hugged each other, as you can imagine, and I remember once being in the dining room, it was probably the end of the year, at the Christmas party, but there was a group of Labor members standing around, talking to each other, and I came up and said, "Oh, you lot look like you need to do a big group hug." The look on their faces, they all said, "Oh my god, we couldn't possibly do that, we'd all be looking for the knives in our backs afterwards [laughs]." So even hugging can be a bit subversive, and I was only half joking [laughs]. Anyway.

AY Well, they had self-realisation anyway.

WATSON They did [laughter].

AY I haven't a clue what my question was.

WATSON Sorry, Anne, I've thrown you off your question.

AY Time frames for the select committees: were you normally at the outset given a time frame?

WATSON Yes, your reporting time.

AY A reporting time. Was that a constraint at times?

WATSON Yes, it was. Part of the requirement of moving a motion to establish a select committee is to have a reporting time. I guess that makes sense because you could just ramble on for a very long time otherwise; go down all sorts of rabbit holes. So there was a report date. Now, one of the ironies was that you could always get up in the house and move a motion that the reporting date be extended [chuckles] so that was always in the back of your mind. And I never saw that knocked back if there was a genuine request for another couple of months or something like that. It wasn't something to stress about, but it did focus your mind. Also, what was a realistic amount of time? A number of those select committees were established and given very short reporting times and that, apart from anything else, put very unreasonable stress on the staff and it ran the risk of making a mockery of the system. So you kind of had to gauge exactly how long you thought it was going to take, how far you were going to extend your calling of witnesses and those kind of things; were witnesses going to come willingly or were you going to have to subpoena them [chuckles]. Those kinds of things can extend the time needed to conduct an inquiry. And yes, sometimes you do have to do that; you do actually have to require witnesses to appear. It's not optional, unless they make themselves absent out of the country, which is another whole story.

AY Funding for the select committees: did you feel that you had adequate funding to do the job, to get the job done, in most cases?

WATSON Just about [laughter]. I remember the select committee I was on with Barbara Scott on the advocacy of children and we wanted to have a hearing (I can't remember who it was with), but we thought it was appropriate that we offer them some sort of refreshments, and we were told that there wouldn't be enough money for them to have a plate of biscuits [laughter]. I thought that's a bit rough. Look, there was always negotiation about—we couldn't have an unlimited number of select committees. To an extent it was limited by the staffing resource. A lot of conversations were had with the Clerk about what was realistic and what could be done. I think it was reasonable. I mean, you could argue that Parliament ought to have unlimited resources, but I'm not sure that that's right either.

AY I'm thinking about, for instance, native title, where you travelled to Canada. What guards against a committee just taking a junket?

WATSON Going off on a jaunt?

AY Yes.

WATSON Not much, to be honest [chuckles]. There was one committee inquiry that I declined to travel overseas on, because I did think it was a junket. I didn't make anything of it in a public sense; I just said to my fellow committee members, "I can't see the value in visiting Germany, England and the USA to look at forensic evidence, basically DNA. I just don't see it. I don't see that that's going to add anything to what the report will say about DNA testing." So, I just didn't go. I obviously saved the Parliament some money by not going and I still think that was the right call. But I could have stepped that up a notch and just said, "I don't think this committee should travel overseas because I think it's a junket." Look, members quite often would joke about junkets and how many frequent flyer points they could notch up. There's one member who was absolutely top of the wazza on that one. Look, I don't think ultimately it earned a lot of respect for that member. There was another member who said, "Oh come on, Giz, be a corrupt politician", to which I said, "No, I don't think so [laughter]." And it was sort of a joke, but it wasn't that much of a joke.

AY Who was overseeing the allocation or the use of funds? Who had oversight?

WATSON Ultimately the President would have something to say if he thought that Parliament was overdoing it. As I say, the Clerk and the Clerk's office had a fair amount to do with it because he was allocating the staff, the travel budgets and those kinds of things. I think there was certainly an element in some of the committee work that was about rewarding people with a little trip here or there (not a lot, to be fair) and it seemed somewhere in that process it got clamped down on a bit. It was something that I would take to the Clerk or the President of the day and say, "Look, I don't feel comfortable about this", without naming names or whatever, but I would just say, "I don't actually think that this makes sense to spend the money this way." Now, whether that made any difference to anything, I don't know, and it's always a judgement call. I think the other end of the spectrum is the sort of public perception that everything that parliamentarians do by way of committee travel is a waste of taxpayers' money and it's just sort of a skiing holiday on the side or something. That's not the case at all. In fact most of the committee work that I've done with fellow committee members, whether that's travelling to the eastern states or, in a couple of cases, to New Zealand or around the state, are fully occupied, intense periods of work, with very little spare time. I mean, if you wanted to take time off yourself and go somewhere, I guess you'd got your airfare paid for, but it didn't happen much. The other thing is that people go on these trips and then they don't attend the meetings; there was a bit of that too [laughter]. There was one member, who was a member of One Nation actually (no; I can't

remember) one member who wasn't there for very long, I think one term, who was notorious for wanting to go on committee travel and then he wouldn't actually attend the meetings, he'd be off somewhere else doing goodness knows what.

AY So, no checks and balances?

WATSON I guess it's up to the chair of that committee to raise those issues with those members. I never had to do it as a chair, because the finance and estimates op committee didn't travel anywhere so that wasn't part of our brief. Look, I think there is a little bit of, "We're important, privileged people and we're allowed to sort of take the benefits." There was an instant in Sydney I remember, with the Standing Committee on Legislation, where we went to The Rocks for lunch and a couple of members were competing on how many dozen oysters they could eat, you know, on parliamentary expense. I don't like oysters, so they said, "Can we have yours [laughter]?" I thought, "Oh dear, these boys are behaving badly." Just little things like that where, you know, is that a hanging offence? Probably not, but it would play into people's perception of power and privilege and exploiting it. I mean, it's not in me to do that kind of stuff, not even if you know that nobody would ever know and you'd get away with it or anything like that, I'd just go, no, it's wrong. You've got to stick to a higher principle. You can't hope to defend the institution and the role of parliamentarians if you aren't scrupulous yourself, really.

AY Let's look at the other side of the coin and some of the hard work that was done on committees. Let's look at, say, the hours you would put in. So, you're putting in your hours in the house, and then how much of your time would be allocated to this committee work on top of your other work?

WATSON Well, probably about the same amount again. The main thing with committee work was an enormous amount of background reading, material that you would need to have, ideally, read and understood before, for example, you had witnesses in, so you could ask relevant questions. That responsibility obviously goes up another notch if you're the chair, because ultimately the buck stops with you. If the committee runs out of questions, it's down to you to conduct the proceedings. So, yes, there was an enormous amount of reading. There was a lot of deliberation in committees, so long hours both in gathering evidence, but also in writing reports. It was interesting. One of the things that was developed in the committee system was some statistics being kept of different committees and how many hours they sat, how many reports they produced and the size of the reports. They are not

necessarily—You could produce a fantastic report in 50 pages or a really rubbish one in 300, but there were some criteria about indication of the amount of work that was being done. Certainly, the committees that I was involved in were up there in terms of hours. One of the things that really was very sad to see was that the legislation committee in the last term when I was there was basically not doing anything, which I find deeply wrong. I think they did one report.

AY Why was that?

WATSON The legislation committee does work that is referred to it from the house, so if it is moved that a bill goes to committee for inquiry, that is where it goes. Its other job was to review outdated legislation. So, if bills weren't being referred from the house, it didn't have anything to do. Apart from anything else, the Parliament had introduced a process whereby committee members get paid more because they were on a committee, and I think it wasn't right that committee members were being paid for doing nothing, whereas other committee members were being paid for doing a lot of work. I actually was on the side of arguing that we shouldn't be paid more for being on committees; it should be part of your parliamentary work. But, anyway, that happened, so people obviously competed to be on committees, but some of them were getting paid for not having to meet. I think that legislation committee had done some excellent work over the years with all sorts of people on it and it was a waste of that resource. I don't know what's happening in this Parliament, but it virtually did nothing. I would quite regularly move that bills be referred to the Standing Committee on Legislation for further inquiry and the government would never support it, so it never got up.

AY Moving away from committees for a while, in that first Parliament that you were in, holding the balance of power with the Democrats, you, with three members hadn't achieved party status, so how did that affect the work that you could do? Did you feel disadvantaged by that?

WATSON The main disadvantage of not having party status was there was an additional resource that came with having parliamentary party status and that would have meant that we could have engaged more staff. The interesting thing was, we argued long and hard that we should have that status, and we argued with the Gallop Government and then later with the Liberal government that we should, but it wasn't until we gained the member for Fremantle that we actually got that for a short period. It also affected some of the speaking rights in the chamber. Those were the main things. I think what we really felt is that

we were receiving the same resources as government backbenchers, individually, and were doing the job of a whole political party, so we did feel we had one hand tied behind our back in that regard.

Sorry, I should say one of the other things is that we did make the case that with the balance of power, we felt that we had an obligation to look very closely legislation because how we voted was going to make a difference and, therefore, that added a level of workload to us that also meant that we needed extra people to just deal with the legislative load. Ultimately, we did get a position for one person to assist specifically with the government's legislative program. It didn't really progress our party outcome, but it meant that the Parliament was, I guess, better served by having an additional person advising us on legislation.

AY Would you say that you would like the numbers of members reduced to achieve party status or the same allocation of resources and funds, or is it more a question of the extra responsibility in a situation like having the balance of power? I guess, the government could argue, "Well, they want to have party status, but there's only one member." So how would you like to see that work?

WATSON I am trying to remember exactly what the standing orders say, but my memory is that the standing orders for the Legislative Assembly set, I think, if you had three members, you would get party status, but in the Council, it had to be (I don't know) five or six of something.

AY I think five.

WATSON Yes, five, and I think you had to have one in the Assembly as well, because that's why we only got it when we got Fremantle. So, we argued why it was different for the two houses; that was one of the points that we made. Look, I think it's a bit arbitrary what number it is, but I think if a party has three members either in the Assembly or the Council, then they should have party status. Out of the whole budget of the Parliament, it's not a huge amount. Again, from memory, I think that the party business, if you have party status, is actually funded from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, not the Parliament, so then it's the decision of the Premier of the day. I'm pretty sure we made the case that it really was the Parliament's business, not the Premier of the day, because that becomes a bit political, surely [chuckles], and it ought to be in the standing orders and therefore the Parliament should say, "We're going to rule that if you have three or more members in either house,

you're a political party." That would have helped One Nation, you know. Our politics were completely poles apart, but I don't see why they shouldn't have also had that assistance when they had three, but they didn't remain three for very long [chuckles]; they soon became two and one [laughs].

AY So, you were quite happy for your opponents to have the same standards?

WATSON I think you've got to be fair about that. That's one of the things about sort of the whole checks and balances that the Parliament represents. It was always raised when there was any consideration of bending the rules or changing the rules, that what goes around comes around, and sooner or later the government will be the opposition and the opposition will be the government and the Parliament has to work fairly for both sides. Certainly, the Council is about checks and balances on the government of the day, and so the weighting has to be towards non-government parties, I believe. That's the way that Westminster systems are meant to work. The upper house is not just a duplication of the lower house; it's got to serve different functions and, hence, committees being important; hence, the scrutiny being owned by the non-government parties, I believe.

AY Again, moving away from this, but what we haven't talked about is your electorate. In those early days you were new to the electorate, of course, to North Metro. It's a diverse area. How did you get to know your constituents and how did you balance their different needs?

WATSON Yes, that's right, because we just talked about the actual work in the chamber, the legislative workload, then you've got the committee workload and then you've got your constituents. That's pretty much the three chunks of time that I sensed you need to divide yourself fairly evenly between. So, North Metro, yes, to me is a microcosm of all of WA, apart from the agricultural hinterland, the sort of wheatbelt area, which has got its own identity. North Metro contains everything from the leafy suburbs of Nedlands and Peppermint Grove to Balga and places that are really doing it pretty tough, and the sort of outer edges, which are right up to Two Rocks and those sorts of areas, the sort of mortgage belt. I have a sense that everybody's in it, and a lot of people who work in mining, for example, of course live in North Metro. The coastal strip is densely populated, well, densely for Western Australia [chuckles], which isn't that dense actually. So in terms of knowing the electorate and knowing who was there and what their passions and interests were, you had to know everything about the state, I thought. So when we were designing and tailoring our

messaging to North Metro before the election, that was the real challenge. Who are we talking to? Is it the people in the western suburbs? Is it the people in working-class areas? What are the communities of interests? They varied, really varied, and so we nuanced that message a bit between those different places. Once I was elected and getting to know more about the who's who of North Metro, I was very fortunate that the electorate officer who I employed had been an electorate officer for a long time before. She'd actually worked for Fred Chaney initially when he became an independent and for Reg Davies who was Liberal and then went independent in the Legislative Council. She was an absolute gem, Carol, because she had lots of networks and connections in the community. We sat down and made suggestions about going out to meet various organisations and to introduce myself to them. I should say also [that Carol was] an absolute gem in terms of understanding how Parliament worked. She had been very, very engaged in Parliament; she knew how the system worked and who the people were. If I had any questions I could [chuckles] say, "What do I do now?" [chuckles], so that was great.

We basically went out and met with a lot of the non-government sector people, whether that was education, health, disability, social services, all those kind of people who I felt strongly needed a voice and that we would be a voice for them in Parliament. Notably, I didn't go and visit the Chamber of Commerce and Industry or the mining association because I felt like they already had people who were representing them in the Parliament (quite enough) so I was looking for that intersection between the people that we had already been working with as a political party; so, of course, environmentalists, people working on social justice, people working on Aboriginal justice issues, deaths in custody for example. Going and meeting one on one with all of those sorts of groups and finding out what they were experiencing in North Metro.

Then there were the more geographically-based Rotary clubs and those, sort of, on that level. But also once you become a member, there're quite a few people who contact you and say, "We'd like to meet you and introduce ourselves and tell you about our group." So there was no shortage of—In fact, we were flooded [chuckles] with people who wanted to talk to you, again not the least because we were going to be in the balance of power. I think those who were following the game realised that the Green representatives were going to be in a different situation than we had been in '93 with just Jim Scott in there. We probably also heard from more mainstream groups like the AMA and the Pharmacy Guild, depending on what the issue was at the time. They knew that they were going to be needing to talk to us. So, yes, it was a pretty huge explosion of information.

AY What were they talking to you about? What were the issues? Many and varied, obviously, but—

WATSON Many and varied—Well, some of the ones that struck me at the time was (and it wasn't a surprise to me actually) for example, in the area of family and domestic violence. The situation where (and sadly it's still not hugely changed) for every two women who seek refuge on any given night in Perth, only one of them is going to find a place because there're just not enough refuges available for women, and I just thought that was pretty fundamentally problematic, leaving women and children unsafe regularly. So kind of really focusing on some key social justice issues like that. What else? What was coming up at the time? Actually, I can't remember exactly if there were any standout issues that we were being lobbied on. Nothing's springing to mind, to be honest.

AY And it probably would spring to mind if there were any really major ones, but nonetheless you're getting a lot of information coming into you. People are coming to talk to you because they want you to do something. How do you juggle all left those competing demands?

WATSON I think as I was saying earlier, one of the strange phenomena is you don't receive your office or any means to carry out the job until the day you actually go into Parliament and then you can set up your office and, bang, go for it. I had an excellent electorate officer in Carol Hutchinson, so in terms of the mechanics of organising meetings and times, I felt like we had a very orderly approach to meeting with people and taking it all in; we completely had that covered. Very experienced in dealing with constituent enquiries, that process of—Because usually what would happen is if there was a constituent who had issue, Carol and I would meet with the person, or people, together and I'd often be asking questions and she'd be taking notes; occasionally, she'd ask questions as well. Interestingly enough, she was a trained social worker, so that was also a really complementary skill and training to have.

Each issue was a problem-solving exercise. What is this issue? What more information do we need? What can be done? What is realistic? Also, what the person themselves hoped to get out of the meeting? Interestingly enough, one of the things with the Greens is because we didn't at that stage have any members in the lower house, we were also receiving considerable constituent inquiry, which normally doesn't come to upper house members

because they get directed to their lower house member in that particular area. So we were, sort of, in some respects, [chuckles] getting another layer of work which wouldn't been expected of Legislative Councillors, and, of course, not surprisingly there were people who were fighting on environmental issues that wanted our assistance to raise those issues in the Parliament or to call for an inquiry or whatever it was, and there were plenty of those. Even if you just looked at say something like the protection of urban bushland in North Metro, which was something that I worked long and hard over 16 years for, there were multiple places and cases and areas that were under imminent threat of being bulldozed, so that in and of itself was a lot of work.

I think you have to pace yourself because I think there's a danger that you get overwhelmed by individual concerns and issues that people want to raise. Often by the time they are coming to see their MP, they've tried a lot of things, so they can be quite intractable issues. Family court issues, child custody issues, housing issues, those were three that ...and probably some of the criminal justice issues, were enormous, an endless list of people who had been wronged or hadn't received the outcomes they wanted. We had a very strong policy (I had a very strong policy, as did my staff) that we gave everybody a hearing. Whether we could do anything further for them or whether we were going to be able to take any further action remained to be seen, but we never turned anybody away to my knowledge. I think that is the role of the parliamentarian: you are there to listen and to advise even if it's something that is not in your powers to change. I mean, some of the issues were federal issues; some of the issues were local government issues [chuckles]. We seemed to get a lot of local government issues that ended up—Air quality, for example; smoky chimneys or unpleasant odours. That's an interesting area because the whole psychology of that is extraordinary. That can use up an enormous amount of time and energy, but people are looking for assistance, for someone to champion their cause.

AY Had these people sometimes not had any joy from local government and had then come to you?

WATSON Exactly [chuckles]; or from other MPs, yes, or they were trying to seek help from multiple MPs at the same time, so sometimes we'd just say, "Are you actually dealing with any other offices? It's not that we're saying we won't deal with you, but at least we need to make sure everybody's not doubling up on the work." It's complicated having three tiers of government and knowing who does which bit and what the laws say around each of these particular issues. Often it's just, as I say, it's almost like a citizens' advice bureau [chuckles]

kind of approach. We very much took the attitude that we wanted to be open and as helpful as we could. It didn't matter who they voted for; they were our constituents in North Metro and we would try and help them. I was very fortunate to have very capable, hardworking and astute staff right throughout.

AY What was your relationship then with the other tier of government, with local government? To what extent did you liaise with them?

WATSON I had a reasonable amount to do with quite a few local government jurisdictions in North Metro, as you could imagine. We certainly overlapped on some policy initiatives. I remember that one of my passions (and continues to be) is reduction of the number of feral cats and unconstrained cats. I fairly soon realised that that was actually managed by local government and that provided quite a challenge because there's a huge range of local governments. But it meant that I communicated with each of those local government areas and sought their opinion and asked how they could see legislation working. And also in the area of trees, protecting significant mature trees in the local area was something that people were very passionate about. The number of phone calls we got of people saying, "There's a tree across the road and they're just about to take a chainsaw to it; come out and throw yourself around the tree" (laughs). That seemed to go with the territory. That's a local government issue too about whether they do or do not have a policy on protecting trees.

AY To what extent would you approach local government about your trees?

WATSON Oh, well we did, both on cats and on trees. There was an initiative out of Nedlands council, a while ago now, to have a model tree policy, which was about protecting the leafy green suburbs of Nedlands. It seemed to be a pretty good initiative because other constituents from right around North Metro had been trying to look after the trees in their neighbourhood, complicated by the fact they were on their neighbour's property, or it was different if they were in public space et cetera, et cetera. So once this policy was in place, I then sent it to all the other councils and said, you might like to consider doing something similar; so you kind of put things on the agenda as well. Energy saving is another one where local councils can be really very proactive too. I also found with local government that they're more accessible. I mean, there's a range of local governments [chuckles]. Just recently, the whole debate came up again about local councils; are they political or are they not? It's a badly kept secret that some councils are obviously full of Liberal members and some are full

of Labor members and some are a mixture. Both those parties use local councils as a training ground for members who are aspiring to go into state politics. I think it's about time we just said, "That's how it is", rather than somehow go, "This is impolite; we don't want to politicise local government." Well, it's a bit late; it's already been politicised for a very long time. So the tree policy in Nedlands was knocked off by a very concerted effort by [pause] Barry? No, Hassell, Hassell?

AY Bill.

WATSON Bill Hassell, that's it, not Barry. Bill Hassell. He mounted a team of stalwart Liberals, so basically he got the majority back on Nedlands council and got rid of the tree policy. So, there is party politics in local government, there's no doubt about it. But Greens' policy is that we see that local government should actually be playing a stronger role because it's most connected to the community. Again, like Whitlam, if he were to start afresh, you'd have local government, which is a small local regional government, and you'd have federal and you'd do away with the state. I don't see that happening [laughs] because history is going to conspire against that.

AY That horse has bolted.

WATSON Yes, well and truly, I think.

AY I'm thinking, just to finish up today, is there a grassroots element to local government that is appealing to Greens?

WATSON Yes, absolutely, because a lot of the solutions we see in terms of sustainability and building local community work from the bottom up, so the initiatives like establishing precincts and community watch or community-protection type actions within local communities, growing local community gardens, making a street safer, traffic calming; all of those kind of things; planting trees so you've got a cooler microclimate, lobbying for safer cyclepaths. It's all those kind of things; how we see the community exerting its best model of living together. A lot of those decisions can be made at the local council level. You can have a local council have great initiatives like cat management, like a policy on local cyclepaths or walkways for kids to get to school and they can set an example for other councils. That sort of being able to have a little microcosm to try and live more sustainably and more cohesively. People can relate to it at a local level because it's dealing with people

who are just up the street or who they run into at the shops. Once you start getting into the state level or the federal level, it's "all those people over" there and they get painted as being politicians and they're all a bit self-interested and all the rest. I think we believe that if you want participatory democracy, you have to work on the structures that provide participation.

As much as I talked about the committee work and saying that the parliamentary committee work was about providing participation for stakeholders and community and individuals, at the living local level, the participation is going to come because you can work with your street to plant trees, or to grow more veggies or to lobby for street lights that don't use ridiculous amounts of energy. There's a fascinating—No, I won't go—(That's an interesting little sideline.) Basically, local councils want to have energy efficient streetlights because they pay for the power bill, but the infrastructure (I think this is how it works) is state, so to put in the energy efficient bulbs, they don't want to do it. But it's like a renter; it's like that relationship between renter and the landlord doesn't want to put in installation because he's not paying the bills. There's those interesting sort of intersections that if we get right would make an enormous difference. Local government is vibrant. I mean, it can be completely stacked with real estate developers. I don't know that we're quite as bad as some other places, but it swings around. It is an opportunity for people to engage much more directly in the elements of their lived-in environment. In the last local government elections, we've deliberately put much more effort into encouraging and supporting green-minded (they don't have to be members; some of them are members) into local government.

[End of GizWatson_8]

GizWatson_9

AY Today is the 3rd of February 2016 and this is another interview with Giz Watson and we are at her home again.

Last time you spoke, we were talking quite a bit about committees and, overall, how do you see the effectiveness of committees, both the standing and the select committees?

WATSON Yes, I just did a little bit of homework to refresh my mind about the number of committees and a sense of what was achieved in each of them, because I was involved in a lot of committees [chuckles] over a 16-year period. I think to touch on select committees first, the two that I think probably had tangible outcomes were the one on the advocacy for children, which was a committee chaired by Barbara Scott, one of the ones where we supported a Liberal member's initiative. I think that set the groundwork and some good community and stakeholder input for the establishment of legislation to have a children's commissioner. So I think that was a worthwhile inquiry. It was reasonably lengthy, but I think it contributed to the final support for and form of the legislation, which I think now the community, those in the sort of child protection sector and people from the different political sides of the debate, think has been quite a good initiative, not the least because there was a fantastic first commissioner in Michelle Scott, who did an excellent job. So it's that combination of having good legislation to frame it and to empower it and having a good person doing the job. We certainly put in a fair amount of time and energy and it was Liberal, Labor and Greens thinking about it together and kind of thinking about it from the point of view of what's going to be the best thing for children and really taking our political hats off pretty much

The other one was the inquiry into the police raid on *The Sunday Times*, which was an interesting one because it seemed at the outset that it was the Liberals hoping to find a smoking gun with Jim McGinty's hand on it, I seem to remember, as the then Attorney General. So we agreed to support the establishment of that committee again, so that's one of the other ones where the Libs got our support, because the level of public interest around the issue of protection of journalists' sources is very high. It's an ongoing discussion and, certainly, at that point in time, the laws that protect journalists weren't there, basically. So we felt that it was a good one to get running. It got bogged down in being very forensic about was this person standing there and how could they have done that if they were there. I felt like I was in a police drama at one point. Nevertheless, what it did is raise

the issue of journalists' capacity to decline to reveal their sources, and I think that again developed some cross-party common ground in terms of the importance of that principle. So there was legislation that came through after that, a little while after. But we'd had those conversations, I guess, feeling out the position of the different political entities behind the scenes on that committee, and that was useful.

Probably the other two that I'd highlight is I was on the Standing Committee on Legislation for eight years and I really enjoyed that committee, certainly as a new member, because in those days the more complex legislation, legislation that had sort of interesting aspects to it, whether that was forensic evidence, using DNA, all those matters got referred to that committee. It was a very good way to engage stakeholders and to have the Parliament as a place to do that consultation that ought to happen with any certainly new area of law, and it allowed us to gather evidence from other Parliaments and all of that kind of stuff. That was an excellent committee and I am reminded of the advice of the Clerk, then Laurie Marquet, because he was a great and passionate supporter of the committee system, having experienced New Zealand where every piece of legislation has a committee process and automatically gets referred, and there is a process of specific stakeholder engagement. If it's a bill in health, then these will be the stakeholders who will be asked to come in and give evidence. So it's a much more thorough and spelt-out way of ensuring that the community have had a chance to have their say and to critique and to ask questions. I agreed with what he was saying in terms of that as a democratic process. We never quite got there. I know it was one of Laurie's things; he always wanted an automatic referral of legislation to the legislation committee. It didn't happen. It was quite a big resource commitment to do that.

The final one would be just to touch on the one that I chaired, which was the estimates and financial operations, and that one is interesting because the way that estimates are dealt with by Parliaments varies from Parliament to Parliament. For the period leading up to the establishment of this standing committee, the financial matters of the state were dealt with at the annual estimates hearings when Parliament would suspend for a week and we'd use the parliamentary chamber and it was a Committee of the Whole of the Legislative Council, and members [chuckles] would come in with various degrees of preparedness to ask questions of the public service. Sometimes, quite frankly, it was almost farcical because there was a sense where we had to do this, we have to scrutinise the public servants, but nobody really had done much homework into what they were going to ask them, so there was this sort of random bunch of unrelated sort of lines of questioning [chuckles].

A lot of members saw it as an opportunity to take a week off. So George Cash had an inquiry into the operation of the estimates process in the Legislative Council and came up with a number of recommendations, which was including establishing this standing committee, which I ended up being the chair of. We had a number of things that we wanted to achieve. One was we had ongoing hearings, so we had departments in right throughout the year, and we mixed up the really big ones, like education and health and those sort of ones where a lot of members had an interest and some of the others that, in a normal annual estimates hearing, would never get called in, statutory authorities, you know, the port authorities or local government authorities. We had a process of consulting all the members and saying, "Which departments or statutory authorities do you want to call in?" and we sort of ranked that, so it was as democratic as you could [make it] to make sure that members of the opposition and members of the government could have a say on who got called in. There was more wanted than we had time for, but we had a very packed agenda.

We had more hours on this than any other committee in the house. Of course, it's a committee that's really the creature of the opposition, because it's about questioning the executive. I was very keen in order to have members get something out of that committee and to feel like they were doing something that was rather than just the mundane, the sort of work that the Auditor General does, because, again, our terms of reference had us regularly consulting with the Auditor General and working much more closely with the Auditor General, which didn't happen when you just had annual estimates. That meant we could kind of dovetail inquiries he was doing and not duplicate stuff or perhaps give information to him, and he'd give information to us. So I thought that was a really good synergy, and as far as I know, I don't know whether other Parliaments do that. But encouraging members to think of something a bit more exciting to have on the agenda did have consequences [chuckles]. There was the infamous case of two members of the committee who were being lobbied by equally infamous lobbyists Noel Crichton-Browne and Brian Burke to get up an inquiry into the iron ore industry. Unless you want that whole chunk, it would take me a little while to tell that story, but it all sort of ended in tears, basically, because unbeknownst to me and, I assume, other members of the committee, the Crime and Corruption Commission was tapping the phones of Brian Burke [chuckles]. So there was then an inquiry into whether there'd been a breach of confidentiality on the committee, which had consequences for members.

AY It might be worthwhile talking about it a bit because I'm wondering whether there's a sense of vendettas taking place sometimes with bringing people up before the

committee to explain, and whether those authorities asked to come and explain. Was it keeping them on their toes? What from the other perspective was happening here?

WATSON In a general sense, yes, there was a bit of that, and I think as chair one had to be kind of trying to be as savvy as you could about that, because for me the challenge was to be fair to all involved. Yes, it's a parliamentary committee. The parliamentary committee has the right to ask whoever that they require to come before us; that is its strongest power, to subpoena people, and we did when necessary, to call for documents, all of those kind of things, to hear evidence in private. It's like a royal commission; the same sort of powers. The penalties if people don't do the right thing still remained problematic. In fact, I was on the standing committee to try and sort that out too, the penalties for contempt of the house, because I think, from memory, where it stood at that point, it was the only one where you don't get sent to jail [chuckles], so that seemed to be a little extreme. So there was sort of a consideration of the penalties.

I think the thing is an opposition is always going to have an eye to which department can be discredited or which minister can be discredited for something that's not—so you're always looking for that little edge. Frankly, it doesn't matter who's in opposition; that is the role of the Parliament to do that, as long as I felt reasonable evidence could be made that there was something to chase, not too many wild goose chases really, because that doesn't do the committee any good and it doesn't do the standing of the Parliament any good. So it's a sort of fine line. I mean, over the eight years that I chaired that committee, I think it was fascinating how different the cultures are in different departments. Some were incredibly open and willing to expand on information, which can be a bit of a trick actually to buy up all your time and you don't get all your questions in [chuckles], and others were incredibly defensive and minimalist. So the cultures in the different departments had quite an impact on the nature of the hearings, and getting that measure of allowing members to ask challenging questions without completely being inhumane to witnesses. It's a fine line, and some public servants make an art form of evasive answers. It's very frustrating.

Yes, look, that committee I believe was able to do some very thorough work in terms of closely tracking not only the budget, but also the expenditure. So we could call a department in and say, "Okay; you budgeted for this. Now we're 12 months down the track and we need you to tell us which programs you did do and which you didn't." We tried to have quite a tight follow-through on if we thought there were things that needed checking on.

The other advantage, of course, of a committee is that you've got the resources of some advisers, some very skilled staff. Particularly, there was a decision to engage a forensic accountant, so if you think of the way that departments were being scrutinised by a random (well, not random; they're members of Parliament [chuckles])—but of a range of skills and expertise and interest and how much homework they've done, compare that to having a planned agenda about following the budget cycle, following what Treasury's doing when they're announcing this, when they're doing that, and having staff who can do a lot of the preparatory work behind the scenes, a much, much more powerful committee than a Committee of the Whole House. So I mean I hope that history will reflect that that committee was effective and we were able to make a contribution to the required scrutiny of public expenditure.

AY As a Green politician, was there a certain amount of irony in the fact that you were chairman of it? Did it help your credibility as being economic managers that you were able to effectively do this, do you believe?

WATSON I don't know that anybody kind of has ever really joined those dots up. I have to tell you the funny story about how I got to be chair. At that point, when we were informed that the committee was going to be established, we were in balance of power and so I thought, "This is an important committee. I can see that. I can see the terms of reference it's going to have and I can see that it's got the capacity to keep the government of the day honest." That's something that we're passionate about. I thought, "We really need to be on that committee; one of our members needs to be on that committee", and I kind of looked around and thought, "That's probably me", because that was the way the numbers were. So I thought, "Well, if I'm going to have to do all this work, I think I'd like to chair it." I'd been deputy chair of the Standing Committee on Legislation. One of the things that I have done not only in the Parliament and in my political career, but before that, I've done a lot of facilitation, so I consider myself a fairly fair chair in the facilitation style of chairing rather than the more directive style. So I went to the Leader of the Opposition, Norman Moore, and said, "Look, this committee's coming up and I'm just going to ask you directly would you support me being the chair", to which he said, "Oh, that's very interesting, because I was having trouble thinking that I'd support a Labor member to be the chair because that's really—it's going to be an opposition-dominated committee, right." So he said, "I can't think of anybody better to do it, actually" [chuckles]. So I said, "Thanks; that's great. Thanks, Norman." And then I went to Kim Chance, who was the government leader in the house and had a very similar conversation. And he said, "Well, I was having trouble thinking who might do it, so I'd

be really happy for you to do it.” Perhaps that was a recognition that I had eight years of committee experience and I’d been in various committees and, I guess, the senior members in the other political parties had worked with me in various circumstances. So, yes; it wasn’t difficult [laughs] actually.

I enjoy the challenge of facilitating processes, so as much as I am the first to admit I am not a formal accountant, I am not a financier—but I’ve run my own business for 12 years. I know how to run a business. I know how to balance books and I can read figures and I can add up [laughs]. But the actual chairing of that committee is more about fair processes and being thorough and even-handed, and sometimes about having a firm hand for your own members, who can get fairly feisty if they think they smell blood; they sense a twitch in the witness and they kind of pounce. On a number of occasions I had to say, “Look, that line of question is out of line.” I mean, it’s that sort of fine line between being firm, being persistent, but not being aggressive.

AY It’s being fair.

WATSON Yes, it’s being fair. Yes. Sometimes, afterwards, I got an earful [chuckles], but grudgingly I think members said, “Well, at least you were fair. You would apply that whether the member was from this party or that party or whatever”, which I think is accurate.

AY Now with all your experience on committees, how well does it work? Are there reforms you’d like to see to the process?

WATSON One of the things that we wanted to do with the estimates committee but we never really got to because it was a bit too big of a job was to not only have a process of asking members of Parliament about which departments or statutory authorities they’d like to call in for questions, but have a broader consultation with the community; a bit in the same way that the Auditor General’s office is open to input from the community if they’ve heard something or seen something. To an extent, the Auditor, because the Auditor is working closely with that committee, is probably mostly fulfilling that role, but if you’re trying to ensure that the Parliament is relevant and accessible to the community then maybe something like that ought to be considered.

There’s the whole question of resourcing. To me, it remained reasonably opaque about how much money was available for this committee or that committee. I know when there was any

sort of rumours that someone was going to move to establish a select committee, the Clerk and other people would get a bit twitchy because they're going to want to know how are we going to pay for this. I mean, they had a budget and they had to divide it up and they had so many staff, and if you had a select committee they usually had to pull staff from somewhere else. It's not likely to be something that's going to be popular in the public eye to say more money needs to be spent on parliamentary work, unless the case can be made that it's going to provide better legislation, better scrutiny. I still come back to this thing about being able to have professional assistance. That doesn't mean that the professionals are running the place, but we, on occasions, sought formal legal opinion, because the nature of the questions were such that even with the legal capacity among members and among the clerical staff in the House weren't adequate. I think there ought to be more consideration of the pros and cons of that.

AY This is coming back, if I can interrupt a sec, to funds. Looking at the funding, say, of select committees, is it then possible for the government, I suppose, to put the kibosh on a select committee that they don't want to get up?

WATSON By standing on the hose?

AY Yes.

WATSON Yes, except the sort of lead time is a bit longer than that. My understanding is that there's a budget allocation annually, and, therefore, out of that; so they'd have to know ahead of time [chuckles]. I think there was always, in the time I was there, a stoush between funding made available for the LA, the Legislative Assembly, versus the Council [chuckles]. The Council felt, and the book said, we were not funded in the same way. Again, I'll go back to the Clerk, who I think is experienced and knowledgeable because he was comparing between other Parliaments in the commonwealth as well as his own experience. He said, "The committee system is really a system that is established for the upper house of the Westminster system, whereas in our Parliament there are a lot of standing committees in the Assembly." The feeling was that that had got kind of co-opted fairly early on in the process and that if there were to be more resources going to committees, it should come to Council. There were a couple of provisos on that though, because we're only a 36-member Council. I mean, not everybody was in the same situation as me where I was covering so many bases, but there were a number of members who were on at least two committees, and it was hard

to imagine that many of them would want to go on another one if another one were established or whatever.

But it's so funny because it also played out in the most trivial of ways. It's like a standing joke that the morning teas that they had at the LA's committees—they had fresh scones and jam and cream, and we got Arnott's Assorted Creams every time [laughs]. It was just like, "Well, aren't we the senior house of the Parliament, and how come we're not getting any scones [laughs]." I remember the select committee that Barbara Scott was chairing, the advocacy for children. We wanted to invite some stakeholders in, and Barbara said, not unreasonably, "We should offer them some morning tea [chuckles]." We were told there was no money for that. I remember Barbara and I went to the kitchen and ordered some scones and got them ourselves. So, sort of silly, trivial, little things like that, but it is a point of tension. That is just an indicator of that almost pettiness at that level. A government of the day probably prefers things to be managed in the lower house and not in the Council.

AY Although you say there's a limited number of committees that upper house members might wish to sit on, and it might be more feasible for them to be in the lower house, does the lower house, do those parliamentarians, actually have the time to devote to it?

WATSON That's the question, because there's meant to be more emphasis on their constituents and looking after their electorates; yes, sure, and I think that's right. And we are the house that reviews. We used to say the house of second thoughts [laughs]. So that more detailed review and assessment of likely impacts of legislation, for example, more reasonably fits the purpose of the Legislative Council.

AY So, overall, if you were asked your advice on how the system could be improved, I'm wondering would you, for instance, recommend the New Zealand model? What would you say to someone who said, "How can we improve this system?"

WATSON Well, I probably would recommend the New Zealand model in terms of formal process of the passage of legislation through the house.

AY Why? What are the advantages?

WATSON There is an automatic public consultation. Now, governments of the day will argue, depending on the bill—they might have a public consultation/stakeholder engagement process prior to the bill being drafted, or, once its drafted as a green paper, they might consult on a green paper, but generally the answer would be, “Oh, Parliament is the place where these things get debated and where the public view is.” Well, it’s not, actually. It’s all through the voices and the interpretation of the members. And some of them did it really well (some of us, some of them did it really well) but others they’re not really interested in what the community thought about this or that, especially at the speed at which some things were put in, particularly legislation in the area of criminal law. It was always, not always, but a lot of them came through with an enormous amount of, sort of, political steam behind them. There’s no way you could argue that the public had even had a chance to consider what the implications were. So, yes, definitely referral to a committee. Now, that doesn’t necessarily mean that all pieces of legislation would therefore have to do a lengthy process, but it should be open for public input, and if nobody wants to have any input, that’s fine; it can go to the next stage.

We did work early on, on a process of parties categorising legislation as it was tabled, so if it was seen to be uncontroversial and not complex, then parties like the Greens and the Democrats were quite happy to say to the government of the day, “We’ll only need five minutes to say something about this bill. We’re happy to give it, more or less, a green light through the house”, and that we saw as a way of helping the government order their business. But generally they weren’t interested in doing that, and I don’t know why. I mean, we were trying to be helpful, actually [laughs], so we can identify, okay, this bill is going to take a long time because there’s a lot of detail in it and there’s a lot of community concern about it and it’s controversial, so we’re not going to give that a green light; we’re going to say that this will take some time, and you can pick and choose what you bring on, depending on that. This sort of happens in an informal way, but we thought that some sort of more formal system would work. The one thing I should say about the comparison with the New Zealand Parliament, of course, is that’s a federal Parliament, so that’s one of the differences; it had the resources of a federal Parliament. But, still, I think the principle is right.

AY Is there the time to do this, in the allocation of time, to actually consult with the public, or would this hinder the process?

WATSON Yes; it raises some interesting questions. One of the common perceptions from outside the Parliament is that Parliament’s job is to pass legislation as efficiently as

possible, and one of the key performance indicators is how much legislation has the Parliament passed. Well, my reflection on that is if it's (I'll say it) crap legislation and you pass 300 pieces of it, that's not an advance for anybody, really. So, I'd rather have 10 really useful pieces of legislation that are well considered and have good consequences than 300 other bits. So, the actual quantum isn't a good criteria, I think, and it's whether a bill has had thorough scrutiny, including input from interested members of the public, stakeholders, academics, people who might actually know about this area. And it's very random whether bills have any of that sort of input. It depends a little bit on how much of a political sort of impetus there is behind it. Sometimes they deliberately haven't got that input because—I did the criminal law portfolio for the Greens. The number of times I would ask a question of, if it was the Attorney General in our house, or whoever had carriage of the bill, "Have you had comment from the Law Society?", who you would have thought were fairly key stakeholders, and they're not exactly a radical bunch, but they are knowledgeable, and, "Oh, no, we wouldn't ask them" [chuckles]. Well, you know ...

AY Was there a reason given?

WATSON Oh, I think it was sort of laziness, really; almost an arrogance. That was one that just jumped to mind where regularly that level of input wasn't sought or even welcome, perhaps. I think the thing about "Is there time to do this?", there was always the argument that if a bill was moved to go to committee referral, it was seen as putting it off, delaying it, as a tactic. It was seen as a political tactic to sort of try and bury something or make it grind away somewhere out of sight of the public debate. There's a bit of that, sometimes. Then you have to look at the terms of reference for these committees, because if the terms of reference say that the house has to give support for referral of a bill to a committee, then it's going to reflect the will of the house, and often, certainly in the last term I was in the house, I regularly moved for bills to go to the Standing Committee on Legislation, but they'd always be defeated along party lines, because there clearly had been, somewhere, a decision that the government wasn't going to consider any standing committee inquiries into legislation. I just think that was plain wrong. I know for a fact that there were parliamentarians from the conservative side who also agreed that that was wrong, and that they should have—We had a duty to the community to put legislation through that extra level of check. I mean, not the least that there might be something that was badly drafted; unintended consequences; we might need to look at precedent, you know, they did this in Queensland and it was a disaster; or whatever it is. There are good politically neutral reasons for legislation to be put under a microscope, because once it's there, not much gets revisited, and often legislation wouldn't

even have a review clause in it. That was one of my favourite democratic amendments, a review clause.

AY Could you see a way around that, if the government of the day really does just want to move it on and they've got the numbers?

WATSON If they've got the numbers, the only thing you can do is try and raise public concern about it and have it debated in the media. But you kind of say "legislation" and most people just glaze over. But perhaps there are some—I think, maybe the bill that's in the house at the moment for restricting people's right to protest seems to have been—some of its head of steam has come off. Now, you never quite know whether it's because there was public angst or opposition to it, or whether even somebody else had a quiet word with somebody and said, "Look, we don't think this is actually a terribly good idea" or "Have you thought about this?" So things sort of get dropped down the notice paper and you don't necessarily know, unless you can go round and ask some strategic questions, exactly why it's just mulling away down there. But part of the art of knowing how the system, the Parliament, works is to be able to kind of get a sense of that; what's the politics behind why that's now been moved?

And some things just languish entirely. There was a bill, when the Liberals came in this last time, to save Royal Perth Hospital. There was a public petition and it was a very simple one. It said, "Do you want to save Royal Perth Hospital?" I mean, who's not going to sign that, unless you actually knew about the Reid review, which had assessed the whole needs of the state in terms of hospitals and strategic decisions and all that, which was an excellent report. It said RPH should have its functions reduced, but it didn't actually suggest that it was going to be closed. So it was a very mischievous thing, right. The Libs were right behind this campaign that said, "Save RPH", and of course everybody who ever had any connection with RPH signed the petition, and lots of others. And then, when they came in, they had this sort of dilemma, how do you actually put that into legislation {chuckles}? What does that actually mean? Because it's purely a political decision, really. Hospitals aren't open or shut because of legislation. So they drafted just the most inadequate bill. I remember we had a briefing in my office and my senior research officer said, "What are the consequences if the Labor Party gets in and they close RPH?" Nobody had an answer, there were no consequences, so it was a completely useless piece of paper. That quietly made its way down the notice paper and never came on. So who knows whether that was enough for them to go, "Oh, really {chuckles}." Sometimes those sorts of things, where something has been drafted for a very

political purpose and there hasn't been good technical or pragmatic sort of analysis, that won't work. It's a nonsense actually.

AY Moving to something slightly different but maybe there is a connection, question time: how can minor parties make best use of question time, given that you are really an upper house party? I know that's not your intention but that is the reality of the situation. How can you use that?

WATSON You're thinking because most of the ministers are in the other place so you can't question them directly?

AY Yes.

WATSON Again, one of the other changes that did come in over the period I was in the Parliament was that there were more ministers in our place. In fact that's another issue in terms of committees. If someone becomes a minister or a parliamentary secretary, they're not available to go on committees, so that made the pool even smaller, and that was controversial. I would suggest that the reason we had so many ministers in the Council is that they had a pretty shallow pool of talent and they were looking to find someone else. I do not know whether they did, but anyway there were ministers in ours. I think they were certainly strategically planning to use that. The Attorney General, Michael Mischin, was in our house, so we'd target questions to him directly. But it didn't make a huge deal of difference. I guess you can actually eyeball the person who is responsible, but with the questions without notice of which some notice had been given, they've gone past the minister and been ticked off anyway. All you're getting is it being read out by somebody different. The only time that you miss out is if it's a question totally without notice. Strategically, there are times when that was really handy, if you wanted to really pull a surprise on somebody and get them backfooted. We always (and I think it's probably common practice) saw questions as having two elements. One was that sort of issue of the day where you could get a nice line for the media and they might follow that up. That was definitely one of the objectives. But also strategically using questions on notice, and we had more questions on notice per head than any of the other political parties because they were actually about gathering statistics and hard information rather than the political cut and thrust really. Because, I guess, we were fairly much into the detail of things, we used questions on notice pretty comprehensively; huge numbers of questions on notice in multiple parts. In fact I've had some public servants say, "Oh, stop doing that [laughs]. We never get any work done, and we're always answering

your questions.” But interestingly enough that also became an issue, that various ministers started to say, “I’m not going to answer those questions. It’ll take up too much of the department’s time.” There’s an interesting dilemma: is that a reasonable answer or not? “This is just merely frustrating and mischievous, this line of questioning, and therefore I’m not going to instruct my department people to answer it.”

AY But some questions are mischievous.

WATSON Yes, that’s right [chuckles]. And who should decide whether it’s in or out? Other ministers, in my experience, were—I think because the boot had been on the other foot, they were very clear that Parliament’s job was to provide answers and they would make sure that you got them.

AY Could a minister get away with that, saying there isn’t the time for people to answer this question?

WATSON They did. If the answer is, “I’m not willing to allocate my department’s resources to answer these questions”, that is the answer, so you’ve got your answer. You might not like it. I can hear the President saying that ringing in my ears, “The member’s got their answer. You might not like it but that is the answer”, but the minister is not going to give you an answer. We’ve tried (again going back to the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations) having ministers called before the committee and being asked directly, “Will you answer this question?” That’s a pretty high stakes game that one. You don’t want to play that card too often. Again, because of the binary nature, still, of the major political parties, they know the boot will be on the other foot at some point in time, so that’s a bit of a check and balance on excessive behaviour [laughs]. What’s good for you in opposition, you’re going to find when you’re in government you’re going to have the blowtorch applied in exactly the same manner. They will bring out the *Hansard* and say, “This is how you did it, so let’s ...”

AY Let’s go back to the role of the minor parties for a second. How much of a hindrance do you think it is that you are only in the upper house in the state Parliaments?

WATSON We’re not. We’re not in the lower house in WA at this point but we are in Victoria and New South Wales.

AY I'm thinking you can perhaps compare and say: is there a tangible benefit to having people in the lower house?

WATSON Absolutely. That is very much our objective, unlike the Democrats who saw themselves as the specialist of the upper house in "keeping the bastards honest". Our slogan is we want to keep the bastards out [laughs]. Come on, there is an advantage clearly of being in the lower house. One of the most tangible ones is that the majority of the media attention is on what happens in the lower house, so you can ask exactly the same question in the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council and the one that's asked in the Assembly will be the one that gets carriage. We had some experience of that when we had a member for Fremantle. We would strategically pick questions for her to ask, even though we could just as easily ask them in the Council, because it was likely to—the journalists are sitting there listening to question time; not that they didn't listen to ours. The timing of the questions in the LA was more favourable for media (earlier; two o'clock, I think) whereas ours were at four. Media cycles say that that's a bit late in the day really, unless it's a real juicy one, in which case they'd want to know what the question was going to be ahead of you asking it and what you anticipated the answer was so they could prepare the story in case you got the answer you wanted. Anyway, there was that issue about having the ear of the media and certainly the key ministers are still going to be in the lower house. For all those reasons in question time, yes, having somebody on the floor there is good, and of course to drop in the question without notice of which no notice is given. You can land a real doozy. One of the interesting things was we contemplated, and did to some extent, have some cooperation with the other—when there was a Liberal–National government in, some cooperation with the Democrats and the Labor Party about the lines of question so that we weren't doubling up on ourselves. Probably people will be aware although it's called a question without notice, you have to submit it earlier in the day to give the minister a chance to get it answered and tick it off. So you'd already pretty much decided what your question was going to be, because you'll only get one, maybe two, if you're lucky, in any session. That was the thing that was done very fairly. Presidents got very fair about allocating who had a question and then it's your turn and it's your turn, because people get pretty fired up if they think they're being ignored. Instead of us all asking the same question about Royal Perth Hospital, you say, "If you're going to do that one, I might do something else." But that requires a fairly high degree of trust and cooperation and communication. But ideally that's the way to do it. One can do it within a party, obviously, saying "I'll start with this question; you follow up with that one", and you can see a set piece coming on.

AY Let's move on to that a little bit with your colleagues, because I think the issue of the Greens' plans to have someone elected to the lower house is maybe a conversation for a bit further down the track because I'm sure there are some ideas there. With your other colleagues, with three of you there in that first Parliament that you were in, how did you work with your fellow Greens?

WATSON First of all to say we were very excited to be a team, and I know Jim Scott in particular because he had had four years on his own [chuckles]. He was glad to have a couple of mates to hang out with. We were just really testing out what we could do in the Parliament. I think it's fair to say Jim was effective as kind of a free-ranging agent on a whole range of things in the Parliament, but the fact that there were only three of us but we had a shared balance of power meant that we could be a little bit more planned about, "Okay, could we do this, could we do that?" I think that probably was one of the reasons why preparation was made and support was garnered for establishing a specific standing committee on ecological sustainability because people in the conservation sector and the more broader community could see there was a possibility that the numbers would change in the Legislative Council and the balance of power would not be held by the conservatives for the first time in 103 or 106 years, whatever it was. There was a lot of anticipation. The terms of reference for that standing committee had already been discussed and support had been sought from the Labor Party as well. When the numbers fell the way they did, that was moved fairly quickly. Chrissie Sharp of course became the first chair of that committee, which was a good feather in her cap to start in a Parliament and chair a parliamentary committee (the first woman chair, I think, for a standing committee in the Council as well) and being in the subject area and terms of reference that we wanted. That standing committee was able to do some important inquiries. One was into GMOs; they inquired into the issue of workers' health in Alcoa. What else? They were inquiries, I know for a fact, would not have happened if we hadn't been kind of in the driving seat with those.

AY This was chaired by Chrissie Sharp. To what extent did you and Jim Scott actually provide any material support or involvement with that particular committee?

WATSON Certainly the one on modified organisms, my memory is Jim was a participating member, so he actually participated in that inquiry. He's from the wheatbelt too, so he had a particular interest in the farming aspect of it. That was also open to not just us but other members who may not have been permanent members of that standing committee.

Standing committees usually had five members; sometimes they had seven. The dynamic of five seems to work better than the dynamic of seven, I have to say [chuckles].

AY Why would that be?

WATSON I just think the sheer numbers. I've been on both and I think everybody decided that seven was a bit cumbersome. Interestingly enough, because standing committees are huge, I've noted, looking at the numbers on those—I'm not quite sure how they worked that out. Yes, it was open to members to ask to be participating members and in almost every case that's accepted by leave of the committee. I was refused leave to be a participating member. I'm just trying to remember what that was in. I must remind myself of that; something I was refused leave to be a participating member on.

AY What motives would there be to refuse that? Why would it happen?

WATSON They might think you are driving too much of a particular agenda, that you might be disruptive on the committee. I don't know. It's still up to the chair of the committee to call the shots. The chair of a committee has got sort of the same mirror powers as the President does in the chamber. It's sort of like a subset of that. But I guess the dynamic of working with a team of five people is if you're a really hardline chair—I can think of, now that I've raised that subject, in the last Parliament there were a couple of committees where they were really badly chaired and they were dysfunctional. You can end up with a dysfunctional committee. The chairman of committees is meant to be able to assist in sorting those things out, but not always.

AY Going back then to what was clearly a very good committee with the ecologically sustainable development, what did you see as the really important things that did come out of that in those early years?

WATSON Well, the GM crop free bill, which became law (and this government is seeking to repeal) was a good outcome. It was a lengthy and very thorough process, certainly, to bring the ALP to a position of a precautionary approach on GMs. The bill does not automatically make all of WA GM free, but it does provide a legal framework for that being the starting point. It has been largely now eroded by the change of government. It did not, for example, introduce strict liability. You now have a case of the organic farmer who

sued his neighbour (the Marsh case) for contamination by a GM crop. We argue that the bill should have said that the liability rests with the grower of the GM.

AY Was that a failing in that?

WATSON Maybe it was a political thing that, yes, within the legislation that it was not in there, yes. But I have a memory that the ALP was not going to go that far, even though they could understand the logic of it or the safety that it provided. It was a bit like the legislation (which wasn't anything to do with this committee) on uranium mining. Both GM and the uranium mining, when the Liberals came in, with a stroke of a pen, it was all opened up. It didn't have to come back through the Parliament. There was no parliamentary revisiting of the issue.

AY Was that because the bills had not ...

WATSON They hadn't been constructed in a way that was rigorous. If you want to put in place greater barriers, then you actually need to put them in law. I can remember the then Premier, Alan Carpenter, saying, "No, no, I want this election to be about the fact that I personally stand against uranium mining, so I don't want it in legislation because I want it to be ..." I know, that's actually what he told me. I go, "Yeah, that's really not going to work." Funnily enough it didn't. That's what he told me: "I want to make this personal; I want them to vote for me because they don't want uranium mining, whereas, if I put it in law, it's already done so they won't vote for me." Odd, I thought. "Odd" is the nicest thing I can say about it [laughter].

AY Right, well now that you're discussing other parliamentarians, the first Premier you had there was Richard Court?

WATSON Yes.

AY How did you find him as a Premier? How did that government function, in your opinion, comments about—and the leader, the President of the upper house at the time?

WATSON Yes. Well, I have to say for that first Parliament I think I was fairly preoccupied with finding my feet and working out what the parliamentary task was and what

the task was within the electorate. Yes, obviously we had a bit to do with the Premier of the day, but not that much. I personally quite like Richard Court; I think he's a kind of a likeable individual. I wouldn't have agreed with his policy positions, but he is personable. I have to tell you one story about Richard Court, which was, I think, an indicator of his character. If you remember, of course the belltower was his big thing. There was a bunch of people out at Bolgart (Bogi, Bogine—I'll think of the name of the place in a minute) in sort of the eastern wheatbelt, an hour and a half, two hours' drive out of Perth. Because there was this sort of public backlash against expending money on a belltower and it was a white elephant and whatever, they decided that they would construct their own belltower out of whatever they had lying around on the farm; an old windmill and some coffee rock and whatever. They were clever because they invited members of Parliament to contribute to the construction. The woman who was behind it, you just couldn't say no to her so I contributed my 50 bucks or whatever for a bag of cement or two to put this thing together. When they constructed it they had this opening ceremony out in Bolgart (I think it was Bolgart) in the middle of summer (flies, hot, dusty) and they invited the Premier. Now, to his credit, he went. We all sat in the seats in the blistering sun with the flies, and he was called upon to speak and he gave the most delightful, appropriate sort of speech. There he was being ridiculed to the max, but he took it in good spirit and played along with it a bit. So I thought: No, that's a good a bloke. Whatever else I think about him, I thought that was a pretty decent sort of way; he wasn't spiteful or angry or, you know, he just kind of played along with it. So that was an example.

My memory (and I think I'm correct) is that in the Council George Cash was the President; yes, I'm pretty sure. Now, I've got a lot of time for George; I think he's a very good parliamentarian. He is very experienced and a strong supporter of the committee system, so I learnt a lot from George over the years. I would have to say that we've worked really closely on lots of things about how do we make the Parliament work, what's the role of the Parliament, what's fair, how do we change standing orders, how do we have committees work well, and I've found him thoughtful and fair. He was a very fair President as well. I found him intimidating at first, but then I kind of realised he wasn't really quite that bad. Interestingly enough, my first experience when I went into this as my workplace is that it sort of sent me into this sort of terrified schoolchild persona; I just thought: Wah! What's this place? I was very anxious about standing up at the wrong time or saying something that would get me in trouble and all that kind of stuff. I spent about 18 months watching very closely, just observing, and I felt I hardly said anything. And I remember, because George said to me during one break, "I just want to have a chat about—you know you're allowed to stand up and seek the call and to speak, and if you do something and it's not quite right I'll tell you. It's

okay; you won't get into trouble." This was a real breakthrough for me that I realised I could actually ask: is this how I do it? So he said, "No, it's fine; ask me, I'll tell you what the rules are." So I think maybe this is also one of the things about not being in a long-established Labor or Liberal Party where I don't know how much they induct their members and coach them along about what's actually happening, but certainly we didn't have that at all so any advice was coming from the clerical staff, and the Clerk himself was always keen to give us a lecture about this, that and the other. You'd go in there to ask a simple question about how to ask a question on notice, and you'll come out two hours later having had a lecture on the Constitution or the separation of powers or the American Revolution. Great; good stuff [laughs]; very knowledgeable. So, yes, I found the working relationship with some of the members easy, and then others, really I think I was very—it was so different to what I'd been used to in terms of my work. I was pretty shocked, as you know, about how different these people were to me in all sorts of ways: background, what they thought was important, how they viewed the world. And certainly with the conservatives in power that sense of, to be frank, "born to rule; this is the order of things and we're in charge". But of course that was a bit tinged with the fact that, of course, now the Council wasn't entirely theirs. Some of them took a long time to recover from that, if they ever did. We had some fun, particularly, sort of egged on by some of the Labor Party members who'd been there for a while, testing what could be done now that we did have some power.

AY Now, as well as being new in the sense of this new party and suddenly there were three of you there, there was also the fact that there weren't an awful lot of women, or hadn't been in the upper house up until that point, and all of a sudden two more of you are there.

WATSON Yes.

AY How did you find that experience of being one of the few women in the upper house?

WATSON Yes, well, my initial—it follows on from my comment about what a different work environment it was, what a different group of people I was with. I'd worked in the building industry so I was used to being either the only or one of very few women so I didn't fundamentally have a problem with that dynamic. But to be with a bunch of very—A number of the members in the Council at that point in time had been there a long time so they were senior, they'd probably be in their 60 or 70s, retired farmers with fairly limited things we had

in common, let's put it like that [chuckles]. A very different view of the world. I mean, like feminism would have been—I might as well just have said you were a heretic. I think really in terms of any understanding of the sort of revolutions that had happened in the world in the '60s and '70s, I felt like there was this little musty corner of Western Australia that hadn't sort of had the curtains drawn for a while [laughs]. Someone described it as sitting there polishing those great big leather seats. So, yes, I think culturally it was a big challenge for a number of those men to have women occupying space. It wasn't actually in that Parliament, it was the one after, but I remember one young Labor member came in (a young woman) and one of the conservative men made some comment about, "Oh, she's just a silly little girl", or something. I was livid; I was just livid. That was just—I don't mind the cut and thrust of a lively debate, but patronising, ageist, sexist, you know, stuff like that I found deeply troubling.

There were occasions with staff when—it's a tricky balance because you can't be seen to attack your colleagues openly, but a couple of the women staff I'd say afterwards, "Were you comfortable with the way that that member spoke to you?" (the same sort of thing: patronising, ageist, sexist) and they'd say no, and I'd say, "Well, I'm just letting you know that if you want me to do anything about it I will take it to wherever it needs to go. I don't think you should have to put up with that. That's really not—it's outrageous, really." It's one thing for them—if they'd said that to me, I would have [laughs] you know, I would have dealt with it, but if it's staff members they're not really able to do that. They're in a really difficult situation. So, yes, it was great, that sense that there were more women who came in and we were generally a younger age group. We even had some meetings. I think it was in that set, the parliamentary term (it might have been the next one) that a number of women (not just in the Council, but also in the Assembly) decided that it might be an idea to have like a networking meeting and inviting all the women who were members. That was an interesting exercise. How quickly women dropped their political allegiances and talked about the challenges of having kids and having to be in Parliament and the stresses on their relationships and marriage break-ups. Ten minutes later, over a cup of tea, we kind of got to know about each other in a way that if that forum hadn't been created it wouldn't have happened, I don't think. So, there was a sense of supporting each other and solidarity across political party lines.

AY I find that interesting, what you just said, because, presumably, it had been a bit of a men's club and still was a men's club.

WATSON Yes.

AY So, almost like a defence mechanism, I wonder whether the women felt it necessary to rally together. Did you have a sense of that or was it a genuine networking for its own sake?

WATSON Well, I think it started out as being the latter, that it was—I can't remember who initiated it; it could well have been Louise Pratt, a young Labor member. I think it was the sense that if you come from working in organisations that are women-focused, that's not an unusual thing to do, is to sort of say, "Okay, how are we going to be supportive of each other, how are we going to discuss the challenges of being women in a workplace?", whatever the workplace is. I don't know how much it happens in the Parliament; I know there are a few more so national events where women parliamentarians came together as well. So probably women of the left were the ones who initiated that, but they weren't the only ones who attended. Yes, what came out is that it would be good if there was more looking out for each other's backs and solidarity. Yes, I think that opened up that dialogue. There are women, particularly in the conservative mould, who just don't buy that model so they don't even see it as—I just love that argument about, "Of course, we're all here on our merits", this is the conservative women because there's no quotas and there's no sort of—So if you suggest that there's any other way of doing it, then somehow it's like—downgrades their importance, because they're the few that have got in there on their merits; they've thought they must be really important [laughs], if you know what I mean. It's an interesting argument. I've seen it run out on occasions, and I go, "Oh, really?" But, yes, look, I think probably this came out even more acutely, depending on what was being debated at the time. There were some critical debates that were had in that period. The abortion law reform happened in that period. As much as that created solidarity between most women, the fracture lines were Catholic/non-Catholic, and so there were men who were absolutely equally passionately pro-choice. But, yes, look, it was a sense of comfortable—It was like a men's club. That is no surprise. Parliaments have been described in that way often, and I think there's an inertia. It's a very conservative place to start with. It started out as a group of blokes who were colonial landowners, and like creates like. It's quite hard to crack open something that's already established in that way. So, it was a leisurely debating club, really. I mean, some of them couldn't even muster a debate, but they were there because they had the numbers and they had the support of their party or they'd probably been loyal to their party and they were rewarded with a comfy seat really, not to put too fine a point on it [chuckles].

AY I'd like to come back to the whole idea ...

WATSON Not all of them, I should say.

AY No, I'm glad you qualified that [laughs].

WATSON [Laughs]

AY I'd like to talk about affirmative action, but not now, on another occasion. But just to finish up today (and this may be a question that you don't feel you've got enough background in other businesses and workplaces to comment on) I am wondering whether you that that sexism, whatever, ageism (everything else that you witnessed and you gave the example of) was out of touch with the rest of the community at that stage? Would that have been unacceptable, and the way sometimes women staff may have been treated, would that have been unacceptable in the community? I guess what I'm asking is: was the Parliament operating in its own little time warp, and was it out of step?

WATSON I think I'd have to say yes. You make a reasonable point; I've not got experience of a whole range of workplaces. But it's hard to imagine—there might be other areas where there was a similar time warp. Sometimes people say that the court system (the legal system) has that similar inertia. But we are talking about '97 and '98. We have been through the '70s and '80s. The changing attitudes to women and acknowledgment of women's equality has touched most people, but, yes, I think there was a sense that—not exactly they could still get away with it, but there was a sort of a pomposity, whatever the word ...

AY "Pomposity" is the word you're looking for.

WATSON Yes; is that the word? There were elements of that. My theory is that if people are elevated to, sort of, status, perhaps from very humble, not broadly educated or worldly beginnings, when they've got that spot they're really going to hang on to it because—I'm not suggesting that it's illegitimate because it's not, and the Parliament's meant to reflect the broad community, but it's like they've got no—they don't want to know about anything else. There's this sort of closed sort of attitude. Again, it was hard to put your finger on it most of the time, but it came out every now and again in little comments and things that were said in debate. You'd go, "My goodness, that's how you see the world? Oh, right, well that ..." and part of me, over the time, realised that everybody is the product of their accumulated life, knowledge, how far they've extended themselves, what they've thought about, what

they've not thought about, what they've chosen to—I mean, if you've been—I'll go as far as to say that if you've been growing wheat out in the eastern wheatbelt for 50 years and then you spend the last 20 years of your life sitting on a seat in Parliament, you possibly haven't got very broad—I'm not thinking about anybody in particular, I just have to say to be very clear, I haven't got any picture of somebody in my mind, but that's sort of an example. You haven't read widely, you haven't been touched by challenging ideas or forward thinking sort of “what's happening to the planet?” kind of thing, or how do we treat women; that kind of stuff just hasn't impinged on your world. So it's not surprising that some of that was there; let's put it that way.

AY Would you go as far as to say they were out of touch with their electorate?

WATSON No. Unfortunately, they probably weren't out of touch with their electorates; they were just out of touch with contemporary thinking [laughs]. As I say, the Parliament's meant to reflect the constituents. Well, yes, I think probably they would be within a sort of a zone that would be seen as being acceptable in some of those electorates.

[End of GizWatson_9]

[GizWatson10]

AY This is another interview with Giz Watson. Today is the 17th of February 2016.

Now, this is something that you were not personally so involved with; it was more Chrissy Sharp who had carriage of this particular amendment. But the misuse of drugs amendment in 2000²⁰, I'd like you to talk about this as its importance to the Greens.

WATSON Sure. I guess in the area of managing drug use or regulating drug use, the Greens have always had a different view about what's working and what isn't, and that's not to say that others from the other political parties on occasions have spoken on this issue quite strongly as well, and I recognise some people in the Labor Party are quite strong about this. But we have a policy position that the first principle in dealing with drug use, whether that's prescription drugs or drugs that are illegal, currently classified as being illicit, is harm minimisation, and secondly that all the approaches to do with both criminal law and other regulation need to be based on evidence and have clear objectives. The popular debate and the conservative debate about drugs is that drugs are terrible, harmful things and evil people use them and criminals make money out of them and that's really all you need to know [chuckles].

Now, those of us who certainly were around in the debates in the '70s know that it's not that simple. Humans have been using drugs in all sorts of ways, shapes and forms throughout history, and if you bother to take any kind of informed view about mind-altering substances, then you have to ask questions about what is appropriate for the state to intervene on, why should the state intervene, what's happening here. We've always argued that the criminal law has some very significant penalties to deal with people who are dealing in drugs, and we're not really interested in changing that, but if you look it's interesting because just this last week, the Greens had a web seminar talking about the latest statistics in terms of drugs and who's getting caught for possession or charged with drugs offences. It's not surprising, really, but it's very telling, I mean it's something like 80, 90 per cent are users of cannabis, very little prosecution of the big end or people dealing in what can be argued are drugs that have significantly more harm.

²⁰ Private Member's Bill introduced by Dr Christine Sharp: [Misuse of Drugs Amendment \(Cannabis Cautioning Notices\) Bill 1999](#).

We have felt that we need to lead this debate on taking a realistic and harm-reduction, evidence-based approach to drug use. And it's not necessarily popular. It's not necessarily a vote winner. But the community, those that work in this area and those who have family and relatives who are affected by drugs, know that simply criminalising users is not going to alter anything very much, and it's also incredibly ineffective, and even the police will acknowledge that charging many, many people with minor cannabis possession is a waste of their resources. That's why when we have had the debate here in Western Australia, when we finally did come to an agreement with the Labor Party on a more sensible approach to cannabis, that that was actually being quite effective. But, not surprisingly because of the politics of this, when the conservatives came back into power, they automatically changed it and they ran a really simplistic argument that wasn't evidence based.

So, yes, we will continue to raise this issue, like others that are perhaps politically sensitive, and I would put in that category issues like sex work and the regulation of that and the involvement of the police in that, and also probably the debate about voluntary euthanasia. Now these are all areas where we have thought long and hard, have clear policy directions and are unafraid to argue them, because we think that the role of the Parliament is to deal with some of these thorny issues. I can well recall conservative colleagues sort of rolling their eyeballs and hoping that we weren't going to have to talk about this because, I don't know; was it because they might have to do some research or is it because they are wedded to a really simple narrative that actually isn't based in fact? Yes, so a lot of the debate in the Parliament was like that. It was drugs are evil, kill people, and they do kill people, but so do a whole lot of other things [chuckles]. Human behaviour is such that people are going to continue to want to experience mind-altering substances. One of my favourites was always to remind members that the biggest drug problem in our community is alcohol; and let's name it and let's put in our legislation "alcohol and other drugs" rather than "drugs and alcohol", because alcohol is definitely a drug [chuckles] and has a significant impact, economic and personal.

AY You say that these contentious issues, that the conservatives and maybe even sometimes Labor would run away from them in a sense. As Greens, then, you're not afraid to talk about them. But do you think that it's a case of fools rushing in? Do you think that you maybe harm your votes in a way?

WATSON It's a really good question, and, look, I think there's probably a lineball call on that. People would advise us don't talk about drugs because then everybody'll think, "Oh,

yes, the Greens want to legalise drugs”, because the nature of public discourse is so truncated and simplified. That’s why I say, really, people working in the sector, working in the health sector, in the drug rehabilitation sector, really thank us for what we do, because someone has to say this system is broken and we need to do something different. But is it a vote winner? No, it probably isn’t, but that’s our choice, I guess. Look, we certainly wouldn’t go to an election campaign and say our first objective is to, you know, because you’ve got to think about what are the issues that impact on where they’ll put their vote, and the sort of, I guess, more considered voter probably already knows that we are going to continue to advocate either quietly behind the scenes or by introducing bills for these changes.

But, no [chuckles], these issues don’t win us votes. I’ll give you another comparison. I put a very significant amount of my time and energy in the Parliament to the issue of incarceration of Aboriginal people, which is a national scandal, but it’s not a vote winner [chuckles] tragically. Quite frankly, most people don’t care, and they don’t even want to know about it. But, for me, that doesn’t mean that I won’t raise that issue time and time again, because somehow the debate has to be in the public arena and has to be constantly brought back up until these injustices are sorted out. If it means that we don’t necessarily get a popular vote, I’m willing to wait, to be quite frank [chuckles]; wait for the rest of the debate in the public realm to come along to where we think it should be.

AY Going back to that misuse of drugs amendment in 1999–2000, I suspect that you’re still waiting there, aren’t you?

WATSON Now, I have to confess that it wasn’t my bill, but my memory is that it was defeated²¹, and so in the immediate sense we weren’t successful. But if you then look slightly ahead to when the Labor Party came into power in 2001, then we were able to have another conversation with the Labor Party and say we think that drug law reform is something that we can come to an agreement on, and so you did see, under McGinty in particular, as the Attorney General, the legislation to decriminalise the possession of two plants grown at home for your own use and an increase in the amount of cannabis that you could actually have in your possession, and allowing police to deal with it as a cautioning system and an educative approach to encourage people to not use. Look, from what I’ve seen of the review of the operation of that approach is that it was working and the police were happy because they weren’t spending all their time running around having to process minor cannabis possessions.

²¹ The bill passed the Legislative Council, but failed to pass the Legislative Assembly in 2000.

Even if you think cannabis is a dangerous drug and ought to be somehow stamped out, one of the arguments is that it freed up the police then to be able to tackle amphetamines and, hopefully, catch the suppliers. Nobody wants bikie gangs involved in any sort of commercial enterprise, particularly not illicit drugs, but that's what happens when you set the system up as we have. I know cannabis users say, "Oh, well, now I'm going to have to go back to buying my cannabis from the chain of people that originate in a bikie gang; I can't grow it in my backyard anymore." Surely that's not a good outcome [chuckles]. But it's such a simplistic thing. It's like tough on drugs; we will stamp them out. You see conservative states in the United States [are] now realising that that just isn't working and there's senior police speaking out and saying, "This is a nonsense; it's a waste of resources and it doesn't work."

AY A lot happened after that election but before we get to the next one, that period from when you were elected and until the election of 2001, what do you think the impact of the Greens was on the Parliament, because it was the first time you'd had three members and had any sort of control?

WATSON Yes. Look, I think most significant was the fact that now the Greens and the Democrats were part of the Parliament and in order for the business of the Parliament to run smoothly, there had to be a serious readjustment of the negotiation and the communication between political parties, certainly the leaders or the Whips of the political parties. That wasn't automatically an easy change. There was some resistance and some gaming of it to try and see, from both the Labor and the Liberal side, how these new set of circumstances were going to play out. But it meant that we had to seriously do a lot of preparation before we debated legislation, and I think that has got to be a plus. I mean, the Labor members told me that it was not unusual prior to '97 that they wouldn't even really be told what bills they were debating on any given day. So one of the things that came into play was that we would get a list at the end of the sitting week to say "These are the bills that we anticipate we would like to debate next week." At least that gave us some preparation [chuckles] to be able to be ready to respond to those bills.

There was nothing in the standing orders that basically says that the business of the house is in the hands of the government. But if the government wanted to play it that way and bring something on with no notice, and the Greens or the Democrats or even the Labor Party might not even have the correct person in the house to debate it, or that person wouldn't have got their research notes or their speaking notes, and so therefore we would respond by

throwing every trick that we could to delay debate. So, we would suspend standing orders or move a motion that the bill get put to committee and take the next afternoon to debate it. The interesting thing about the standing orders is that they do have some checks and balances internally, so once you know what the options—they're designed to facilitate the participation of the opposition as well as the government, so they're quite clever [chuckles]. I have to say in one of the select committees I was on, we spent almost two years reviewing and rewriting the entire standing orders for the Council, [chuckles] I'm not sure what evil thing I must've done in a past life to have deserved that. But it does really make you think about how those checks and balances have been designed and tested over time. So, yes, look, what happened is that the government realised that a process of discussion and cooperation was going to actually facilitate the smooth running of the house, and we did get there, but it took at least a couple of years.

AY Was it something that you managed to insist on or push through that you had sufficient warning or notice to do your research?

WATSON Yes, it was, and, I think, to be fair, it was a combination of ourselves, the Democrats and the Labor Party, because all the non-government parties, it was in our interests that we were prepared. I think, apart from anything else, it was in the best interests of the community that the business of the house was managed fairly and kind of logically. I mean, very occasionally the Parliament will decide to do something a bit tricky, push something through really quickly, or that kind of thing. But this new agreement, I guess, which was never formally written down (we tried to get it formally written down but that wasn't going to wash) meant that we could work together in a respectful way.

Every now and again, there was still the opportunity to do something a bit sneaky, like you always had to watch for what happened. At the end of November just before Christmas, something suddenly is so urgent and it just has to go through. The one I remember particularly was a bill to remove a heritage building off the list, which came through late one day; somebody said, "Oh, we just thought we'd put this through. That'll be okay, won't it?" I said, "Well, I haven't even had a chance to look at it." I mean, I literally had overnight to find out that it was a very dodgy bit of legislation and that the Labor Party and the Liberal Party had both combined to decide that they were going to just kind of flick it through without much notice. I can't remember exactly how it happened, but, anyway, basically the bill did go through, but there was quite a lot of noise around it, and ultimately, over a period of about 10 years and just plugging away at it, that heritage building is still standing, and down to the

Greens, basically, and a very vigilant and keen few community members. So, that's the sort of thing [chuckles] that still kind of slipped in under the radar if you weren't really vigilant.

AY So that's to do with processes, but is there legislation, are there things that happened during that period from, say, '97 to the election of 2000 that you look back on and say, "Yes; I'm proud of that; that wouldn't have happened without us"?

WATSON I don't remember any. Actually, I should say, because we were always teased about this ("we" being all the non-government parties) there was one bill which we actually blocked and it wasn't passed, and it was the deregistration of the Hairdressers Registration Board [chuckles], which is obviously a significant piece of legislation. But it was the one where we decided, "Nope, we're not going to pass this one." It became the butt of many jokes about how we'd flexed our muscles in the Legislative Council. So, no, to be honest, I can't remember any significant other amendments or bills that we were able to significantly amend.

AY What about native title?

WATSON Well, yes, you see the native title one, ultimately, honestly, I think was reasonably disappointing. It was a huge debate. It was a huge issue to suddenly be confronted with quite early in learning to be a member of Parliament. I mean, the sort of size of the bills was about several inches thick. The select committee into native title, I had considerable hope that that would impact on the final shape of the legislation, and whether it impacted on any of the conservatives in terms of their position, I'm not sure that it did, really. So that was actually a bit of a disappointment. The Native Title Bill really ended up not giving Aboriginal people very much at all. [Phone rings] Do you want me to just ignore that?

There were some interesting debates, but I don't remember thinking, "Yes; we've scored a win." One of the things to remember, certainly with legislation, is even if we made extensive amendments in the Council, it still had to go back to the Assembly. I believe there were a few things that flip-flop backwards and forwards, whereas of course in the next Parliament we had the opportunity to have a much more planned and considered approach in terms of what legislation we were going to work with the Labor Party on.

AY Let's get to that one then. When the election was called, you were no longer a newbie; you'd been there a while. Talk to me about that experience of going into that election. Having found your feet, it would be a very different experience, I'm imagining.

WATSON Yes, it certainly was. It hadn't really struck me until the election was sort of upon us but, having spent four years doing the job, I realised, of course, that this election was going to be kind of a bit of a report card, arguably, how well were you going and did people think you were doing a good enough job that they wanted you to continue on. I realise that's sort of a simplistic ... It's not the only factor, but certainly I felt, "Uh-oh. Now, one, I've got more to lose, and, two, I'm being judged in a very real sense for my performance so far", which is absolutely what the democratic process is about [chuckles]. I was very aware that in '97 in north metro there were two non-major members, myself, and Helen Hodgson for the Democrats. All the kind of political analysis said it was unlikely that we would both get re-elected, so it felt like a pretty keen competition between the Democrats and ourselves in north metro.

So, yes, it was pretty high-stakes, I felt, that election. On the one hand, I was feeling reasonably confident in terms of having put a lot of effort into building connections into a lot of organisations and networks, so I felt like I'd done quite a lot of the legwork to be known. Apart from what you're doing in Parliament, I mean most people don't really pay that close attention to whether you amended line 52 of the blah de blah, and neither do the media, so most people don't get to know that. So what you need to have been doing is working with your community organisations and assisting them and advocating on their behalf. That's where in fact the Greens, even though we are Legislative Councillors, often had to play the role of lower house member as well, because certain sectors and organisations expected us to be their main voice in the Parliament. So, building those relations, maintaining them, and listening to that input was critical in terms of whether people thought that you were a good person to have in the Parliament and therefore worth voting for. Interestingly enough, some of that is sort of on a personal level and some of it's on a political level, so there's that sort of combination of how good a member you have been for your constituents.

AY Certainly, you'd made inroads. As you say, you'd come to know people and you'd been working and advocating for people. So I wonder what the process of electioneering was like for you and whether you'd changed what you'd done before?

WATSON Well, to an extent. I mean, one of the things I remember we did make was a, "What have the Greens achieved", but like I was saying earlier, we couldn't actually say we'd defeated this bill or we did that, because those wins hadn't really been achieved in that way, but we had shifted the debate in a number of areas.

AY Right; back to your electioneering. How did you approach that? What did you actually do?

WATSON I suppose the basic techniques were similar. We'd letterbox quite extensively, so a lot of volunteers and supporters would go out and put basic information leaflets in letterboxes. Bearing in mind that we electioneer with very little money compared to the Labor Party and the Liberal Party and the Nationals, so we've got to be quite clever in how we get those messages out. Radio was quite heavily used, and a little bit of TV advertising was about all we could usually afford. But look, to be honest, I think one of the factors was the sort of word-of-mouth that people had. It's interesting. Although you'd think that we might be recognised for what we were able to do in the Parliament or how effective we were there, the core thing that came back to me is the number of people who said "I rang your office", or "My friend rang your office, and you were the only people who actually took the time to listen to what we had to say and gave us a fair hearing and made some suggestions about what we could do." I'm sure any member of Parliament could give examples of that, and of course lower house members do that much more as their core work. But Perth is still quite a small place and I think that sort of community service, I suppose, was recognised that we were making a huge effort in that regard. That, as much as anything, was my staff and my excellent electorate officer who was doing a lot of that work. I wouldn't want to underrate the importance of the constituent work. It's the way to kind of reassure people that there is an interface between the community and their concerns, or even an individual and their concerns, and the Parliament.

AY What were the issues that were exercising people's minds? What had you noticed were the issues, or what were the main issues going into that election?

WATSON Some of them are going to be probably common to any point in time, housing, lack of, lack of affordable housing; all the sort of community service provision things like provision of mental health services. Some of the stuff was actually more in the bailiwick of local authority. We didn't actually have the capacity to deal with them but at least we could say, "You might want to speak to this councillor because they can help you." So it's as much

being willing to be a reference point on a huge range of issues. People mostly come to their members of Parliament when they've run out of all the other options, so you often end up with quite complex and intractable sort of issues. Family Court matters was another one where there was a huge amount of dissatisfaction, and criminal law matters.

I was fortunate that I had excellent staff who could deal with that sort of range of issues. I think that's the thing. I mean, I had some insight that not all members had that kind of attitude. They felt that the constituents were actually a bit of a time-wasting ... and they can be. But the art, I think, or the service that we're meant to provide, is to provide that interface between the ultimate decision-making body, which is the Parliament, and the community. It doesn't take long for them to figure out if they're just being fobbed off or given a very short shrift. I think that was a key component of getting re-elected, being seen to have done the work.

AY Now another thing that was happening, or had a couple of years before, was the rise of One Nation, who were also fielding candidates, and the Greens had more candidates, I believe. I'm wondering how you felt going into that election about this phenomenon, One Nation.

WATSON I think, probably like most of those of the left in progressive politics [chuckles], we were appalled and quite concerned at what that was reflecting. Someone like Pauline Hanson and a political party forming around her, her personality and her views, obviously touched on something in the Australian public. Part of it, of course, is the deep dissatisfaction with Labor and Liberal, the fact that they were seen to be sort of professional politicians and out of touch and all those kind of things, not sort of in touch with the battlers, I suppose. In a democratic system, the Parliament reflects communities' attitudes and views. Whether it's Clive Palmer or whether it's Pauline Hanson, we will experience these sort of phenomena. I think what was so extraordinary was it just exploded and then ultimately disappeared fairly quickly as well, as I say not in the least because John Howard, when he became Prime Minister, absorbed most of their policy positions and cut the ground out from underneath One Nation as a party. In the WA Parliament, yes, they achieved representatives in ag[riculture], mining and pastoral, and in the south west. Yes, well, we could talk a little bit about what an interesting phenomena that particular team was but ...

AY Well, let's get them elected first [chuckles]. What I'm asking too is, because the Liberal Party was ousted, was there a sense of disenchantment? Was there a sense of change in the air?

WATSON I think there must have been. The main push for change, I suppose, that I was particularly aware of was coming from the part of the community that was concerned about environmental outcomes. That was, of course, the big push to end the logging of old-growth forests. There was a significant, well-organised community campaign to have that issue front and centre leading up to that election. I should also acknowledge that, of course, when there is a key environmental issue, whether it's James Price Point or old-growth logging or something else of a high level of community concern, the Greens do well in those elections, because otherwise the environment is virtually not on the radar. People are not voting, by and large, on environmental issues. That is not the vote-decider for them; it will be taxation or health or education, or one of those kinds of thing. But if there is a really high-profile campaign, then people go, "Yes, in this election, I'm really concerned that we should stop chopping down 600-year-old trees and turning them into woodchips and I'll vote on that." If they're an informed voter, they know that they can use the preference system and actually still have the power to say, "Out of the major parties, if my first choice does not get in, I want to have Labor ahead of Liberal or Liberal ahead of Labor." If people take the time to understand the system, they know that they can do that. So I think 2001 was one of those elections. I think the Libs had had a few terms [chuckles], and that was the other factor it seems to me.

AY Did you campaign hard on old-growth forests and to what extent do you think it helped you?

WATSON Well, I certainly did and it is argued that the debate was won in the western suburbs, even though it's primarily the south west in terms of land-use issues. The decisive shift in attitude was in the leafy suburbs, and by and large run through *The Post* newspaper, to its credit, because *The West*, of course, had interests in logging [chuckles]. So, yes, even though that wasn't my portfolio, it was Chrissy's portfolio, I certainly used that as a strong reason why voting Green was going to achieve that outcome. If you think about it, in that election, I think I'm correct in saying that's when we had Liberals for Forests, and those other ones came in as well, so you saw a splintering off of the Liberal vote and that, I think, would have had an impact in terms of reducing the vote going directly to the Liberals. That was unprecedented, as far as I know, in WA history that you had senior Liberal people like Dame

Rachel Cleland²² saying that we've got to stop logging old-growth forests and you had people like Janet Woollard²³, who ultimately got into the Parliament with the Liberals for Forests to start with. There was a fairly significant change in the air, I think, and that would be the issue that I would've had most awareness of. There possibly were others, but ...

AY If we get to the election day now, and the votes are coming in and they're all being counted, what was your response to the success of the Greens and to the ousting of the Liberal government?

WATSON [Chuckles] I have to be honest and say that my first reaction was relief, because my memory in the tally room on the night is that it was fairly clear that I was going to be re-elected. I didn't have to have the agonising weeks of wait while they counted and did all the distribution. Not that I got a full quota; in fact I never did in all the elections that I re-contested. I got very close in the last election, but not quite close enough. So, yes, a sense of relief that I would be able to continue on in the Parliament. We certainly enjoyed the excitement that was there that the Labor Party were going to be in power. I can remember we actually went over to the Labor Party celebration. It was really funny. They finished really early; I couldn't believe it. They were all going home at 11 o'clock. Anyway, we went and found somewhere else to party [laughs]. So we had our party and then we went to theirs. There was quite a sense of excitement. I guess, at this stage though, we didn't know how the balance of power was going to play out. It was obvious that One Nation were going to have seats in the Parliament. Of course, with Robin Chapple in Mining and Pastoral and Dee Margetts in Agricultural, that came down to preferences because their primary votes were actually quite small, so they were elected on the second preferences of One Nation voters, ironically enough. So there was obviously a huge vote against the old parties, against Labor-Liberal, and even the Nationals. The Nationals took a pretty good ... a lot of that One Nation vote came from what would have traditionally been their voters in the country.

AY Before we look at the wash-up and the breakdown, Robin Chapple and Dee Margetts—let's talk about them, who they were and what their appeal was, because both of them were in mining and pastoral areas and agricultural.

²² Dame Rachel Cleland (1906-2002) was a community worker and conservationist
<http://trove.nla.gov.au/people/459150?c=people>

²³ Dr Janet Woollard was the MLA for Alfred Cove 2001 - 2013
<http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/memblist.nsf/WAllMembersFlat/Woollard,+Janet+May?opendocument>

WATSON [Hissing noise heard] That was me letting my tyres down. It was me taking my lid off the soda bottle, sorry [laughs].

AY It's another hot day.

WATSON Sorry, I didn't realise it was going to do that [laughter]. Sorry; Dee and Robin?

AY Yes, Dee and Robin; let's talk about Dee and Robin and why they were in those particular seats and what they were bringing to the Greens and to the ...

WATSON Well, Robin, to start with, had lived and worked in the Pilbara for quite a lot of his working life. He had been a councillor in Port Hedland, I think, rather than South Hedland. So he was an obvious choice to represent us in the north. That was his area, and he'd done environmental work up there as an environmental consultant as well. Dee had, of course, been in the Senate and had been the Green representing the whole state, so we felt that she would be a good candidate for Agricultural because she had been working with people in the Agricultural Region in her capacity as a senator, particularly on issues like competition policy and the economics of agricultural production to the global market. So she had pre-existing connections and relationships in the Agricultural Region. I mean, to be frank, I think we really knew it was a long shot to think that she would get elected in Agricultural, so therefore it was an extraordinary outcome that both she and Robin got up off, as I say, a relatively low primary vote.

AY That was going to be my next question. Honestly, were you surprised—pleasantly so, of course—to find yourselves with five members?

WATSON Oh, no; I think it is fair to say that that was better than we had thought we would do.

AY To what do you attribute the success of Robin and Dee?

WATSON Well, to be honest, there was such a significant backlash against the old parties that it played right through to supporting the Greens as well. It was sort of like, "Well, we're not going to vote One Nation. I don't want to vote for the Labor Party or the Liberal Party. They're all kind of the bad guys. So, who else is on the ticket?" I'm not suggesting that

it's quite that random, but it was clearly a protest, and we were seen as being part of a better option than the Labor or Liberal candidates. I don't know how many One Nation voters [chuckles], how much they understood the system; I don't know. I mean, who were those people who voted One Nation that time and then didn't? I don't know. I don't know what their anticipation was, and I'm trying to remember what it was, why, for example, the Court Government would have been so on the nose or so unpopular. I know there were some things like the Bell Tower, but I don't know that that was seen as being a huge sort of issue. In retrospect, I thought Court's Government was relatively moderate. But I'm afraid I can't remember exactly what else would've been playing out in 2001.

AY One of the curious things to me is that in Mining and Pastoral, and Agricultural, One Nation candidates also won seats.

WATSON Yes.

AY So in those two regions, they have voted a Greens' member, and then they have also voted One Nation, because One Nation had three people elected, and the third was in the South West, which was where the old-growth forests issue was playing out. Can you explain why this might have happened, apart from just the protest? Is that sufficient to explain it?

WATSON I think it has to be sufficient to explain it, really. In some of those areas, they got 20 to 30 per cent of the vote, so it was whopping. I can remember they definitely felt that they should've got a second person up [chuckles] rather than their ... See, a lot of people who voted for One Nation, one, didn't follow their how-to-vote. I mean, if they'd followed their how-to-vote, there's no way they would've put Greens two, and the Greens certainly were telling everybody to put One Nation last, so it wasn't as though there was some arrangement between ourselves and One Nation at a political party level. It was purely about the voters, who decided that they wanted to send a message to Labor and Liberal, and Nationals.

AY So effectively they were going against the preferences that you had chosen and that One Nation had chosen.

WATSON And that One Nation had chosen, yes. That's right. There must've been something in the water [laughs].

AY Back to the Greens, had you got an increase in your margin then?

WATSON Yes, the primary vote went up; I can't remember how much, but it did increase, yes. I'm just trying to think whether I got in at number six or number seven. Anyway, it was an increase on the primary vote that I'd had before.

AY So what was the mood of you Greens? What did you do once you discovered you'd got five of you there? What was your thinking?

WATSON Well, we had a number of outcomes that we would like in a supportive Parliament; obviously ending old-growth logging was one; I think revisiting the drug law reform, certainly the issue about reforming the voting system, the one vote, one value; all of these things that ultimately were worked on collaboratively with the Labor Party and introduced, we were part of that sort of thinking. I guess also we were hopeful that we'd be able to actually be introducing more legislation of our own, because with five of us to share the workload we would be more likely to be able to do that. One of the ones that I'd been encouraged to introduce was legislation to manage the number of cats, which might sound rather trivial but actually is quite significant in terms of biodiversity conservation in Western Australia; and I introduced a bill once in that Parliament and then the next one. Interestingly enough, ultimately one of the Liberal members in this last Parliament took it up and actually carried it through. So it was sort of an idea that eventually took hold and got support, so that's good.

Nuclear issues was the other one, to actually have WA have a legislative impediment to mining uranium, and I tried bills on that several times but never got enough support. The Labor Party always sort of said they supported it, but they didn't quite like what we'd written; so, yes, unfortunately that never got over the line. So, yes, there were things that we thought now that we have the balance ... But, bearing in mind that we also were with One Nation members there, that it was going to be an unusual Parliament, and we were kind of mindful how that might play out as well in terms of them being obstructionist. But I think it's fair to say that the way things actually played out, they didn't quite know how to do that. I mean, they didn't have that many opportunities, and I think they ended up being quite frustrated about what they were and weren't able to achieve, and ultimately couldn't hang together as a team, either, for very long [laughs].

AY Yes, because two of them ...

WATSON They split apart, yes.

AY Exactly.

WATSON Yes. I don't know whether they ousted the third, but, yes, they didn't have the internal dynamic to work together; they really didn't.

AY So it is clear that those three didn't have the structure and the cohesiveness of a party. So what did the Greens do? What did you do as a party now with five members? What did you do to create or maintain that structure and that cohesiveness?

WATSON Well, actually, one of the things that we were really keen on, and we thought we had a really good argument for, was to argue that we were now a parliamentary party and to try to be recognised as a parliamentary party and to have the additional resources that flow from that. We embarked, fairly early on, on a process of negotiating with Geoff Gallop to have us recognised, and it was exceedingly frustrating and ultimately unproductive, which was very disappointing for us because we thought that was a good argument.

So, yes, I guess probably the first thing was that the Labor Party were very much on the front foot once they figured out what the numbers were going to be, and I remember we were invited to a meeting with the Premier, Geoff Gallop, quite early on, where he was keen to put what the Labor Party was thinking about doing, and asking what we could work together with. But ultimately, a lot of that detailed conversation was with the Attorney General, McGinty, because he was the sort of engine room for a lot of those legislative changes. I really enjoyed working with Jim McGinty, 90 per cent of the time, and I thought that he played a very fair and reasonable role and an important role in most of those progressive changes, whether it was the voting system or the old-growth forest resolution.

AY What about Geoff Gallop as a Premier? How did you find him?

WATSON Well, he was clearly excited and energetic about what was laid out, what possibilities were in front of him, and I think we had very high hopes that that could perhaps have a broader impact than what it did. I suppose some of the things, like urban planning and getting energy settings right, all those kind of things, we weren't, I think, able to push things along as quickly as we would've liked in some of those areas. They were the standout

legislative changes, but there were other areas that perhaps weren't as progressive as we thought they could be. So-called law and order was the other one. In our view, there were a lot of problems in the criminal area and WA statutes that they just didn't want to look at or revisit. In fact, they tended to run, still, a fairly strong law and order kind of view and policy.

AY And yet they did have a drug summit fairly early on.

WATSON They did, that's true, and probably the area of drug law reform would be one they were willing to look at. I suppose the one that's in my mind was the so-called three-strikes legislation, which continues to be a glaring anomaly that should never have happened, and it seems to me that at that beginning point, we probably could've just taken it away. But, look, you know, I had that conversation many a time with Jim McGinty, and it was never high enough up the flagpole, I suppose.

AY Just going back to straight after the election, I'd like your response, because you have said before that although there's a perception that the Greens' natural allies would be the Labor Party, you made the point of saying that you supported Liberal bills just about as equally. What was the feeling in the Greens when Labor was voted in? Did you feel that these were people you would be able to work more closely with?

WATSON Well, yes. I think we had an expectation that we would have more wins in the areas that we thought were important. Interestingly enough, Dee Margetts, who had been in the Senate, had a more jaundiced, perhaps, view of the Labor Party [chuckles]. Given her experience at a federal level, she wasn't particularly excited or trustful that they were going to be a big improvement. I'm not sure that it played out that way. Look, I think the thing about working with all the political parties is that if your criteria is, "Is this issue a policy area that we think is important; it has a high public interest; what possible outcomes could it produce?", treating it as kind of a policy area or an idea independent of which political party is raising it. That is why we supported an inquiry into the advocacy of children and into the treatment of children in foster care, not because a Liberal put it up, but because they were both important issues and the Parliament is about providing the opportunity to have those sort of inquiries and to be able to use the resources to get better legislation in those areas. But I think it is fair to say that we had a hope that the Labor Party would be more attracted to the progressive areas that we thought were important, and to a large extent that was true.

But it's an interesting thing about the kind of ownership of things, like who wants to have their stamp on having achieved this, that and the other. Certainly, with the old-growth logging and the legislation that came through there to protect significant areas of state forest, the Labor Party really wanted to say that it was theirs, they'd done it, and the Greens virtually didn't exist, which was extraordinary, considering the actual grassroots community campaign we were absolutely integrated with. I mean, the plus is that if they have that level of attachment to it, then they're not going to wind it back, and it was a bit the same with the gay law reform, which I should also touch on, of course. That was the other one that was, I guess, pre-prepared that there was an expectation that if the Labor Party got in, they would be making changes there.

AY There are five Greens in the upper house but there is no leader of the Greens. Why is that?

WATSON In WA in particular, the Greens have always felt that we want to model shared leadership and we don't have within our party, at the party level, a leader. We have co-convenors who share the role of heading up the party. What we want to model, in the spirit also of consensus, is that channelling a lot of focus and attention into a "leader" creates a certain structure for an organisation, and we have always been about shared responsibility and sharing the role of being spokesperson. So what we did is the parliamentary group had long conversations about who would take what portfolios and what responsibilities, apart from, obviously, each member being a spokesperson for their region for regional matters; and what were the portfolio allocations going to be, minded that some portfolios we might think are really important but virtually never get debated in the public realm, and others get a lot of debate in the Parliament and the public realm but might not be the ones that we are most excited about [chuckles]. For example, for some reason—I'm not sure; lost in the mists of time—I ended up with the portfolio of criminal justice, police, prisons and that area, which is huge. I actually really enjoyed working in those areas. It was very challenging, but a huge legislative workload because a lot of legislation is in that area and requires quite a lot of scrutiny.

To go back to the question of shared leadership, we tried to ensure that each of us had a relatively high profile and a number of portfolios where we could be speaking publicly, and to raise the profile, raise the issues and share a team approach to what the Greens were doing in Parliament and in public life. That's all well and good, and I have to say that by and large over the years I still think that that's a good approach and it gives everybody the opportunity

to be in the middle of public debate and be representing the views of the Greens. Where it gets problematic is that the media, bless them [chuckles], want to speak to your leader; "What do you mean you haven't got one? Change that straightaway, please; it's really inconvenient [chuckles]." I'm channelling Anne Burns at this point in time [chuckles], "Oh, for goodness sake, grow up and get yourself a leader." The problem is that they want one phone number, and they want one person who they can work with and get to know and all those kinds of things. I can understand it from that perspective, and plus it's the standard model; it's how things are done, and don't be so difficult [chuckles]. We're not the only organisation on the planet that's ever done things differently, and there are certainly other Greens' organisations internationally and other organisations that don't have A Leader.

But it is problematic, and one of the things that sort of arose out of that is that if we didn't appoint or anoint somebody, they would. So it used to change around a bit, "Who's the leader today?" In fact, that was one of the Leader of the Opposition, Norman Moore's, favourite expressions, because he didn't know who to talk to either, so he come in and say [chuckles], "Are you the leader today?" to whoever happened to be there, and of course we'd say yes. So, look, it's a live debate within the Greens still, and there are pros and cons, but in the Greens (WA) and in the parliamentary team there still is not a parliamentary leader. The only time that it became a reality or was required was when we did achieve party status. The way that the legislation is written is in order to get the resources that have been decided that will be allocated if you are a parliamentary party is via the leader's office. So we had to fill out this complicated little agreement that said I would be the leader of the Greens for the purposes of that act, and that was it, so not to be referred to in any other context [laughs]. That kind of meant that we got the money, and it sort of snuck in a bit, and I think probably over time it snuck in a bit because I'd just been there longer than the others. But I was fairly rigorous in reminding whoever it was that that position doesn't exist in our organisation, and we, hopefully, all could show leadership and demonstrate that it was something that could be shared.

AY How did you divvy up the portfolios, then? Who got what?

WATSON Well, negotiation and consensus, of course, but starting out with, "Which of the ones do you think you've got the passion for?" Passion and enthusiasm is definitely the main consideration, and knowledge base, and making sure that the sort of less desirable ones are shared around with the ones that people really want [chuckles]. So there was a bit of a sort of bargaining process. It was actually remarkably smooth to come to an agreement

in that particular team about who was going to do what. It did change a bit from time to time. We would always review it at the end of the year to see whether we wanted to adjust it. In order for people to be able to do the job well and to have a good chance of getting re-elected, they need to get as much profile as they can, so if it turned out that the portfolios that you'd agreed on weren't getting much oxygen, then we would adjust them. Sometimes things were heartily fought over; if somebody really wanted to have planning, for example, I'm not quite sure why [laughs], but that's an example, or transport [laughs].

AY Just to finish up today, and still hanging onto this discussion about consensus decision-making and not having a leader, and whether it is workable when you have, say, a bigger group of people. For instance, the Australian Greens have a leader and a deputy leader, don't they?

WATSON Well, we have a parliamentary leader.

AY Oh, a parliamentary leader.

WATSON But of course the "parliamentary" bit always slips right out the back door because the media want to have a leader. Look, I think most people in the party, and it's hard to speak for 14 000 people, let alone all our supporters as well, accept that if you do have the role defined, then it's also easier to have checks and balances and that kind of thing. So I think the fact that it's formalised and there are some rules around it now, most people are comfortable with. But you'll note that in the latest iteration of the deputy's role, we have co-deputy leaders, which I have to say I am sure is a Western Australian contribution [chuckles] because that is how you begin to introduce the notion that you can have at least shared leadership between two people. The Greens in New Zealand have had that all along, always, and it's never been considered to be that odd or contentious. We at a party level also have co-conveners; I'm one of the co-conveners of the national party at the moment. I have to say that the workload is such that having two people do it is almost essential.

I could probably spend quite a long time discussing the pros of having shared leadership, too, because it does mean that you need to consult; you're less likely to do things like captain's picks because it's not just you. Even when we have people occupying this parliamentary leadership role, they're still very minded about being team players, and that's so much at the basis. Look, of course it gets harder the bigger the team; just the sheer

dynamics of the communication and those kind of things. But it's one of the challenges that we're hoping to continue to meet.

AY To what extent do you feel that you're pigeonholed into these roles because of the rest of the community's expectations?

WATSON Oh very much, yes. This is the model, it doesn't matter whether it's a footy team or the corporate world or other politics, who is the leader. As I say, it's a much broader philosophy that we embrace, which is about working together in a more cooperative and equal way. That is the antithesis of the hierarchical leadership model. Feminist politics worked very hard on this. The trouble is, it's sort of slipped back off the agenda a fair amount. The emphasis is always on the disadvantages of not having a leader, rather than the advantages of seeing leadership as a composite of roles that can be shared. That's how I like to see leadership. We would like everybody to display leadership. One of the advantages is that if something happens to your leader then you aren't suddenly devastated because there's nobody steering the boat, to use a sailing analogy [chuckles].

But it requires the community to think differently about—it's sort of like the hero model. The hero model is that there will be the outstanding leader who will make all the wise decisions and hold it all together and be a shining light. The fact is that most of them fracture and fall over because it's just incredibly onerous to be in that position. So it's also a sustainability model. The analogy I always used to have in my head in terms of shared leadership, or the visual that goes with that, is that when geese fly in formation they have strong flyers up at the front to break the air, to create that movement in the air, but when they get tired they drop back and the others move forward. So you have this constant changeover. So, okay, yes, you might have a lead goose or swan or whatever it is—I'm not quite sure which bird we're talking about—but they know when they need to step back and have somebody else shoulder the load. So it's as much as looking after the people in the front line as it is about sort of attributing too much to that role.

AY Nice analogy. Good place to stop.

WATSON Okay.

[End of GizWatson10]

[GizWatson11]

AY This is another interview with Giz Watson. Today is the 15th of March 2016. Let's take our minds to 2001, which is what we were talking about last time we spoke. I remember you saying that leading into that 2001 election, that old-growth forests was, unusually, a community concern and an election issue. So, with the election of the Gallop Labor Government, what did happen with logging?

WATSON Yes. So that election and the lead-up to that election did see some mass rallies in the city. There was clearly a large community swelling of opposition to the logging of old trees in the south west, and the Labor Party had gone to the election with a commitment to ending old-growth logging, so, when they did come in, to their credit, they started to consider what that would take. The actual legislation that created the new reserves took a little while, but there was, and to Judy Edwards' credit as the environment minister, a pretty swift indication that this was going to be sorted out. To a large extent the victory for protection of the forests in WA was significant, because in the history of the efforts to protect native forests right around Australia, there were still huge tensions, particularly in Gippsland and Tasmania, and this political solution was seen to be significant for the whole country.

One of the biggest hiccups in this process was, of course, going to be the definition of what "old-growth forest" is. And it remains the case today that forest conservationists say that we never agreed to that definition, because the definition means that even if a very small number of trees in, say, a hectare of forest had been sawn down at any time, then it wouldn't meet the definition of old growth. So what you saw, even after the significant additional state forest was put into conservation, there were areas where local communities were still saying, "This is significant forest. Yes, it's got one stump where somebody took out [chuckles] something to make fence posts back in 1920 or something, but the rest of the ecosystem is in really excellent shape, it provides great habitat, and we shouldn't be knocking it down." So we've still got a situation here in the state where (much to the community's shock and surprise) we are still cutting down trees that are hundreds of years old, whether they are jarrah trees or whether they are karri trees. There are certainly those of us who feel we haven't quite finished the business there. And when you take into consideration the additional information we now have about carbon storage in forest systems, the impacts of global warming and the fact that native forest logging is not earning the state any money; in fact, it is probably costing the state money, we really need to put an end to all logging in native forests because the job wasn't quite finished at the time.

AY Why did you say that it probably costs the state?

WATSON This is one of the issues that I pursued for many years through the Parliament and through my estimates committee. The products that we produce from native logging are woodchips from karri to make cardboard and paper; very low value, and at the moment, the market has become more and more flooded with chips from plantations globally. It's a global market with big plantations in China and South America, so the value of chipping karri is very low, and, indeed, of course we are still chipping blue gum from plantations as well.

Woodchipping was sold to the public as a way of saving the waste from the sawn timber business. But we now know that there are significant and whole trees that get chipped; it's not just the twigs and the bits that are left over. In fact, it never was; that's just not an economic model, and it was never what they intended. The second thing is with the jarrah, the bulk of the jarrah is sold ... some sawn timber, not much. Simcoa²⁴ takes jarrah for charcoal in their process of making silica, and firewood. So there is very little sawn hardwood being taken out of those trees. Unfortunately, this government has gone back to using jarrah for railway sleepers, which is also a very extravagant way to use a magnificent hardwood.

The cost of going in there and logging and managing it and managing the extraction to prevent dieback, all of these kind of things, is borne not by the Forest Products Commission but by other state agencies like the Department of Parks and Wildlife. So it is really hard to get to the true figures about who makes money and what for; even to get true figures about how many people are directly employed in the industry. Of course, the industry, like most, is also working to make itself more cost efficient by more mechanisation, less people; those kind of things. So it is an industry that will run out of steam one way or another. It's just a question of how much damage it's going to do to the remaining forested areas before it does run out of steam.

There were questions raised about the alleged profits made by the Forest Products Commission, and I think there's still a story in there to say that, at the most, we might be making a few million. But what are those forests worth if you leave them standing up? If you did the full account of what they do in terms of producing oxygen, storing carbon, keeping the south west of the state cooler, all of those things are never put into the equation. So the

²⁴ Simcoa Operations is an Australian based company that produces silicon.

economics of logging the remaining areas of decent timber—and I think the other factor which perhaps isn't understood clearly is that, particularly with jarrah and the eastern jarrah, where the rainfall is lower, it does not regrow. It is not regrowing to produce anything like the system that was there before we started logging it, right? Karri is different. Karri is regrowing, and if the rainfall does hold up, it could continue to do that. So you've got a devalued system once you've gone through there and logged it anyway.

AY Was the legislation then not strong enough to have allowed that very narrow definition of an old-growth forest?

WATSON Yes, that would be our argument. Now, I seem to remember that the commonwealth might have had some involvement in setting that definition, because I think it was set nationally. I'm willing to be corrected on that. But it was a big bone of contention when the discussions were being had between the Greens and the Labor Party about how we protected native forest, and that there was always going to have to be some degree of compromise between our position, which was that we needed to transition rapidly into plantations and not log native forest anymore at all, with the Labor Party wanting to maintain some form of logging sector. And initially it wasn't so bad. In fact, we had some sympathy, because they said, "If we are logging these jarrah and other significant hardwoods, let's have a high-value furniture industry." That's a kind of acceptable use of some of that hardwood, so at the very least again a high-value product. Having been a builder and a carpenter myself, I mean jarrah is the most extraordinary timber. It should never have been used for all the things that it's been used for. It's such a waste of what was described as western mahogany by the first [chuckles] Europeans who cut it down and had a look at it. When you know the history of the extraordinary amount of timber that they pulled out and exploited, you realise what was here before, then you realise exactly how precious are the bits that we've got left, and they're under pressure from *Phytophthora*²⁵, from a drying climate. So, if we're going to cut any of them down, very loosely, they ought to be used for high-value furniture or craft wood. It did start that way, but that sector really wasn't supported adequately by the government and it didn't take off.

AY Was there a need, though, to mollify the timber industry; to make sure that they were still in business?

²⁵ Dieback is a symptom of a *Phytophthora* infection, and affects more than 40 per cent of the native plant species and half of the endangered ones in the south-west of Western Australia.
<https://www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/management/pests-diseases/phytophthora-dieback>

WATSON Oh, look, I think, yes, that the Labor Party wasn't quite ready to make a full transition which would have seen all the mills closed up in the south west. They did put in place, I think it was a \$15 million package to make a transition to recognise that there was access to fewer areas of forest under their legislation. Interesting enough, now, years later, when I was down in Manjimup campaigning for the south west seat, you hear the stories about people who took the compensation and are still in the business. So, there wasn't kind of a lot of monitoring and follow-through in that regard and that has created some bad blood. Even people who are pro-logging go, "This isn't right, people being compensated", to basically get out of the industry and then start up again in a slightly different section. They might have been falling and now they're trucking, or they might have been trucking and now they're falling. It still needs some sorting out, there's no doubt.

AY What was the public reaction after this, because I went on the Forest Products Commission's website and it all sounds wonderful. I'm quoting here. It says, "In 2001, Western Australia became the first State in Australia to cease logging in old-growth forests." You've just indicated that that's not entirely right. So, I'm wondering what the public perception was at the time. They'd been concerned about the logging. Did they have a sense that it was all sorted?

WATSON I think so. I don't wish to take away from the conservation sector, from the Greens and from the Labor Party in achieving a major milestone, a major breakthrough, in terms of significant additional areas into the conservation estate. The creation of the Walpole wilderness area is world-class. But what was still going on was wasteful and unsustainable practices in native forests. People on the ground; it was their bit of bush just near them which was still on the logging plan and they were still seeing huge trees going out on the back of trucks, said, "How does this add up?" It is an issue in that the momentum that was there for this big change had dissipated because people thought, phew, we've done it; we can relax now.

Let's remember how much was actually going on. There were protest camps in a number of areas of forests; there were celebrities lending their support and climbing up on tree platforms. It was talked about widely, so there was a lot of energy behind it and I think people just kind of wanted to believe that it was sorted, and I can understand that. It would be a neater answer or a neater kind of thing. But the issue of the continuing felling of significant trees and other management practices mean that the forests are not safe; not the least that

this is going to be an ongoing controversy about the use of fire in forest areas because the research says that far from making us safer, the use of fire as a management tool can in fact increase the risk of further bushfires and that when you are making some comparison that we are imitating what Aboriginal people did in terms of using fire to manage the landscape, they weren't using incendiaries out of aircraft and burning across thousands of hectares. So, that's a really live debate and it needs some sensitivity, of course, because bushfires are incredibly scary and dangerous things. But we know too, with a drying climate, that we are going to be dealing with this more and more, or having to confront it. There isn't a lot of point having "saved" all this forest to then see it burnt at such regular intervals that it becomes a greatly reduced ecosystem and that is a big concern.

AY What work would you like to see being done now within the Parliament to plug up these gaps, I suppose, in a lot of ways?

WATSON Yes, well, one of the things that is currently part of the solution is to have modern biodiversity protection legislation. Interestingly enough, this government has introduced a bill on biodiversity conservation, which, among other people, I'm looking at and trying to figure out whether it is going to be a great improvement or whether it doesn't do very much. I'm a bit inclined to the latter at the moment, unfortunately. Again, one of the big debates in the forest is that because the protection of flora and fauna comes under a very antiquated act, the Wildlife Conservation Act 1950, most states in Australia in the '80s and thereabouts introduced contemporary biodiversity protection legislation. This state has languished on that. In fact, it's one of the things that the Labor government is to be blamed for, for not completing the job. They had eight years in which to do it. They got as far as excellent consultation and drafting of the proposal. I believe they got as far as actually drafting the bill but they never introduced it into the Parliament. One of the last bills I introduced into Parliament was a bill to deal with the most urgent aspects of biodiversity conservation.

The 1950 Wildlife Conservation Act doesn't protect fauna. Numbats, black cockatoos, to an extent woylies, animals and mainland quokkas are dependent on forest ecosystems. But there's no legislation that protects them from activities like logging, fire management or any of those kinds of things. We've argued, and I think this is part of the unfinished business, that you need to have legislative protection mechanisms for binding the Crown so that if the Forest Products Commission is issuing licences to log in certain areas, that logging cannot be inconsistent with wildlife protection, especially when you are talking about critically

endangered species and we know the numbats are critically endangered. There are probably less than a thousand left in the wild. That remains a matter of conjecture about what impact logging has on numbats, but it's unlikely to be anything good [laughs]. But because the information isn't collected and because the legislation isn't there to require that to be considered, it's been down to conservationists and public pressure to say, "This isn't being done; we're not protecting these native fauna in the forests."

AY But you say there is a biodiversity legislation?

WATSON There's a bill in the Parliament at the moment which is due to be debated this year.

AY But you feel that it isn't strong enough?

WATSON No; it's seriously deficient. I'm working with the WA Forest Alliance; in fact, I'm secretary of the WA Forest Alliance at the moment, and we have been seeking some legal advice on the bill. It would certainly appear that whereas it does some good things like increase fines, takes them back into the sort of contemporary realm of fining people for breaching the law around protection of flora and fauna, it leaves an enormous amount of discretion to the minister. It doesn't, for example, require the minister to have a scientific advisory committee, which is one of the things you'll find in other contemporary biodiversity legislation. It's a specialised area of science; you need to have that advice. So you don't have a requirement for that sort of committee, let alone a requirement that the minister has to take any notice of that sort of information. It's unclear exactly how it does bind the Crown, so we feel that it hasn't adequately addressed that question. What else? It doesn't have clear objectives as to what the purpose of the bill is. We know that in an act, the objectives are really important, especially when anything's challenged in court or you need to refer back to exactly what it is that this bill is trying to do. We've looked at legislation in the ACT, for example, and they have a good set of objectives. Why can't we have something like that?

One of the reasons that a biodiversity act has been so delayed in WA is that we understand when the ALP had a bill drafted, it was at the stage where it was being discussed with other departments—mining, agriculture, fisheries; those kinds of people—and that was where it got stuck because, you know, those sectors don't want to be restricted in their activities, to be quite blunt. And that's what we're talking about. Planning is the other one. The Swan coastal plain is part of the south west biodiversity hotspot. It's a hotspot because not only is it mega-

diverse, but it's also under threat. If we increase the size of Perth, which is projected to have another 1.5 million people by something like 2050, I think it is, where are we going to put them? How much more bush are we going to knock down in the metropolitan region and the Peel region? Without some sort of biodiversity protection legislation, you don't have the strength of law to require the consideration of the importance of the biodiversity. So, it's a bit depressing but I think it's a really important component of good environmental protection.

AY You mentioned the ACT then, what do the other states do?

WATSON I haven't looked at all of their legislation in detail but we know that the majority of them put in place legislation 30 years ago almost—20 or 30 years ago. Now, it is not perfect, obviously, because there are still issues with, say, logging in the East Gippsland, but it has provided a greater protection than we've had here. We still languish on that one. Back in the Parliament when Chrissy Sharp was in there, she introduced a bill to simply bind the Crown in regard to fauna, which was quite a simple bill and the Labor Party could have just agreed to it.

AY I was about to ask you that. So what's the state now?

WATSON She tabled a stuffed numbat, I think it was, in the chamber to demonstrate what it was that she was wanting to protect [laughs]. She had permission to table it, just for the day [laughs]. It was pretty funny actually [laughs]. I don't know what the numbat thought about it [laughs].

AY Was she successful?

WATSON No, unfortunately, she wasn't, which was, again, one of our challenges because in the kind of general debate, the ALP didn't disagree with us, but didn't want that legislated solution. I can't even remember exactly what their argument was, probably that they were about to introduce a more comprehensive approach because they were forever holding out this carrot; "We've got this biodiversity conservation bill and we're just about to bring it into the Parliament." But it never got there and, as I say, it was eight years. That's a long time. As part of one of the last bits of work that I did in the Parliament I introduced biodiversity conservation priority reforms, I think it was called, which tackled about four or five of the main areas. Again, they weren't going to support it, which was very frustrating, but you've just got to keep going. I use my other example, which is that I introduced the cat

management bill two or three times into the Parliament and, always, it was too difficult or didn't get enough support. But to their credit, the Libs have put through something very similar. So, eventually, some of these ideas do eventually stick. That's not a political sort of bill; it's not a left-right bill; again, it's a biodiversity conservation initiative because of the impact of feral cats and, not insignificantly, the cost of thousands of unwanted cats in the state. It was sort of a common sense bit of legislation.

AY Another issue in 2000 the Greens were looking at was, of course, drugs; the use of drugs in the community. Labor did have a drug summit in 2001, and I'm wondering whether what that summit came close to achieving what the Greens wanted.

WATSON Yes. I was just having a little refresher on that to remind myself because I wasn't actually involved myself; it was a community summit in 2001. Bob Kucera was the then health minister who was supportive of it. But I know we were also very much pushing for that behind the scenes. It came out with some good suggestions. It certainly, I believe, laid the groundwork for the Labor Party's later position where they introduced a cautioning system for cannabis. They allowed the growing of two plants on your own property for your own use, and it increased the amount of cannabis you had to have in your possession before you were actually charged. Those policy settings that were then introduced into legislation flowed largely from that summit. It gave the impetus and the cross-sector mandate, I suppose. Roundtable summits and those kinds of things can be really powerful in the parliamentary setting.

I'm reminded of one that I was asked to facilitate/host on family and domestic violence, and restraining orders in particular. At one particular point there was quite a crisis in the not-for-profit sector that supports women's refuges and providing services for women escaping violence and they were coming up against a kind of a bit of roadblock within the minister's office. So they said, "Well, how about we get a bit of a higher profile community sector forum where this issue can receive the attention that it needs?" I said, "Sure". So we had a parliamentary roundtable and the minister was then obliged to turn up; not obliged to, but it would've looked a bit funny if she hadn't. The feedback I got from the sector was that that was very useful. Sometimes, using the status of the Parliament can be something that members can do.

Similarly, I did a breakfast on the issue of hearing loss in Aboriginal kids, which is an ongoing and awful situation, which not only is a health issue, but, as a quick aside, as you are

probably aware, with children if their hearing is affected at a really early age they can't learn because they're not getting the information. Their brains don't wire up in the way they should. And often with young Aboriginal kids, the damage to the ear goes undetected because they have this issue where they don't feel the pain in the same way, which is another problem. So often their eardrums burst and so they have permanent hearing damage. And all of this is fixable by proper monitoring and basic public health things. This is not the first time; this issue has been going around since the '60s, '70s, '80s, but it was brought to my attention because I was also dealing with justice related issues.

One of the things that struck me was that they did research on Aboriginal men in Darwin prison, and 80 per cent of them were profoundly deaf. They said it was likely they were charged and convicted without even hearing what was [happening]. This was something, of course, that a lot of them had had since they were kids. I was also approached by Telethon Speech and Hearing and they were really keen that there was more talk among decision-makers about this problem that was fixable if there was adequate resource and political will. I said, "How about we have a breakfast at Parliament House? You can talk about that and I'll see if I can get a member from each of the political parties to sponsor the breakfast so it's not seen as being a Greens breakfast." So I did that with all women, interestingly enough, from the Nationals, Liberals and Labor, and, I think, an Independent as well. It was a significant thing. I saw members of Parliament in tears seeing young Aboriginal people talking about what happened when they got their hearing back; when things were fixed, or what their experience of the justice system was. It was a pretty powerful thing and the media were there as well, so they could then talk about that. Yes; the Parliament can be a good platform for raising awareness.

AY You created that platform in this particular instance with the breakfast. What was the result? Did it flow through to legislation?

WATSON No, not legislation, because that's probably not an issue that has a legislative solution. Not everything can be fixed by changing laws. It was more funding and prioritising. There was a commitment that came from the women who were at the breakfast and were in government that they would pursue it, and to an extent, they followed through with that. I guess the point was to say that this is an issue that needs attention and it's so easy for it to just be over there somewhere. But I wanted to particularly make the linkage between the cost and where that cost was borne and by whom, because the research was saying that it ends up being in the justice system, and you end up having kids who are in

remand or in detention, and the cost of that is phenomenal, let alone the human cost or any of those kinds of things. The cost to the state budget is—you know, you will pay at some point and it gets magnified. There was also a sense that health-related things can be a kind of lever into seeing people's condition, if you see what I mean. In this case, we are talking about disadvantage and a low socioeconomic sector, but health is something that's quite levelling. You find that if people have had experience of cancer or something, it puts them into a more human communication. It's a leveller, I guess, is what I'm saying. It was interesting, because one of the members who had lived in the Pilbara and had a son said, "My son got an ear infection and I was able to put him on a plane and get him down to Perth overnight, and they fixed it and he was fine. I can relate to that. If this child had been Aboriginal, if I hadn't been able to do that, so I know how these things would have a profound impact." It kind of resonated with her own experience. She said, "Yes, I will do what I can to try and get more attention to this program or funding." Unfortunately, often what happens is that something else happens [laughs].

AY Did the funding happen?

WATSON There was some increase initially, but I believe that, say, 18 months later it had kind of gone back to where it was. That's the frustration. These things often need more than one attempt. The challenge is that there are so many examples of issues like that, that desperately need attention. It's how you decide which one you're going to put your energy into. Somebody pointed out to me—they were doing a *Hansard* search—and they said, "If you search 'imprisonment and Aboriginal people', your name (my name) comes up more than anybody else in the entire history of the Parliament." Because I did, and it's not a popular issue; It's not one that's going to be fixed easily, but it remains a huge matter of injustice that isn't getting any better, and it didn't get better under the Labor Party, either. It's shameful, really. If I was to think: what's the unfinished work? That's one of the big chunks of unfinished work.

AY Unfinished work for the Greens, or more for you personally?

WATSON Both, I think. Both. I think it's fair to say we, probably more than other political parties, are deeply concerned about some of these complex, interrelated social challenges. I'm thinking about asylum seekers and refugees. It's not a popular topic. Your advisers would say, "That'll sit over there, somewhere out of the way", because it is something that people find hard to have enough information to make a clear view on. It

evokes fear, it evokes racism potentially, all those kinds of things, so it's messy and it's not all within our control. It's a global issue. But if we don't, as a human race, actually tackle it—I think there are 60 million people at the moment who are displaced, seeking refuge, either internally or outside their own countries, and that's only going to increase, so how do we manage this in a way that is human and compassionate?

It's the same with people in prison. Most people don't want to know about people in prison. It's a neater narrative to say, "They did wrong, they got put in prison. Do the crime, do the time." Conservatives in Parliament would say that to me: "Oh, come on. Don't you know? If you do the crime, you do the time." I'd say, "Oh, yeah, right; sure. How about that time you were speeding and you didn't quite get caught? Was that fair [chuckles]?" Anyway, I think, yes, we as a subset of the community are drawn to the more intractable and complex challenges. I love it. I think they are some of the best debates, but people do not necessarily vote for a representative or a party that is wanting to do that. A certain percentage of people will, obviously. We are now consistently getting one in 10 people vote for us, which is remarkable considering our enemies are many and well resourced, and have been singing our demise ever since we put our heads into the arena. Those polls have got us on 14 per cent. Sorry, I'm getting into a bit of a ramble here but [chuckles], I think what people actually vote on are economics, health, education; those core things. I guess what I'm saying is, yes, we have, I believe, a very solid position on those things, but we're also the political party that has the courage to deal with the tricky questions, too.

AY What I was sensing from you with your concern for Aboriginal people and people in the prison system were your Quaker leanings coming to the fore there, and to what extent that fits with the Greens' philosophies.

WATSON Well, certainly in Western Australia we have a heritage in our green representatives of commitment to tackling questions of crime, justice and imprisonment, what we are trying to achieve by imprisoning people and prisoners' rights. Jo Vallentine has a strong commitment there in her work after being in Parliament. She teaches alternatives to violence in prison, so it's consistent with a commitment to nonviolence. Of course, Christabel Chamarette, who took the Senate seat after Jo stepped down, is a prison psychologist, or has worked with people, men in particular, in prison. I think my interest in crime and justice goes a long way back, and yes, certainly my mother's Quaker philosophy. The Quakers were activists in prison reform for many centuries. I can think of a Joan Baez song about prisons, *There But For Fortune*, which is a very powerful song about why people end up in prison;

their lives go wrong and they take the wrong fork in the road. I'm not saying that for everybody; I think there's a statistic that there's only about two per cent of people in prison who're really, really bad and dangerous and therefore we need to be protected from. But the bulk of people who go to prison are going to come back out again and, therefore, unless you've got an objective in mind, and really that's at the forefront of your policy in the Department of Corrective Services, for example, then it's not surprising that people come out and reoffend. The rate of recidivism with Aboriginal people is, I think, about 85 per cent. It's horrendous, and there are all sorts of complicated reasons why that is.

If you remember, there were riots in the prison and then there was an inquiry, which was actually a very detailed inquiry, and one of its first recommendations was you can't have a department that doesn't have an objective, and then it went on to say some other things. That recommendation was completely ignored, completely. Nothing ever happened out of that. They didn't then go around and say, "Well, maybe we need to amend the legislation to give the Department of Corrective Services a set of objectives to work to", because it doesn't fit with the other narrative that the other political parties want, which is that this is about punishing people, zero tolerance and all that rubbish that is the rhetoric that punishment somehow works. Well, some punishment works; there is a place for punishment, but you'll need to tackle the much more complex problem about why people offend.

AY Let's go back to ...[laughs].

WATSON How did we get there from native forests [chuckles]? Somehow. But I feel very strongly about it, and I feel that we constantly accept that more and more people have some family or friend link with someone who's been in prison, because we keep on imprisoning people for more and more things. There has to be a better way of doing it. It's incredibly expensive, apart from anything else. So with that review and that report, the thing that the government of the day jumped on straightaway was building the \$13 million upgrade of the fences in the medium security prisons. What that really meant was that all medium security were now going to be like high security, so you almost did away with that second tier of prisons [chuckles].

AY I'm going to stay with that for a minute now. Inevitably, coming towards election time and the law and order issue raises its head. It seems to me there's a perception with the major political parties that that is a strong community concern and therefore people must want higher fences.

WATSON Yes, so how do we respond to that? I think there are a number of angles. I think the one that probably resonates with voters is kind of not the highest-order argument, but it is that it just becomes a bidding war. It's a bidding war that costs us an enormous amount of money. You only have to say how much it costs to keep somebody in prison, and for a juvenile it's even higher. If you look at the projection of the prison population and the construction of prisons, it's profoundly depressing. It's basically a steep line heading up. This was one of the models; one of the fundamental challenges of that approach to law and order that was tackled in some of the more conservative states in the US, like Texas for example, where they did the sums and they said, "We can tell you exactly how much we're going to be spending in 50 years' time on prisons and what percentage of the population is going to be in them, and what it'll cost." They actually went, "Hold on a sec", and then they did this process where they worked out where people who were offending were coming from and instead of spending the money (this gives me goosebumps) on planning to invest—because they knew they would have to—in a new prison, they took that money and they spent it on education, health and housing in those areas where the bulk of the offenders were coming from, and guess what happened? They didn't need to build a new prison. That's the justice reinvestment model. Nobody did it out of the kindness of their hearts. They weren't being soft on offenders or any of those kind of things; they actually looked at the economics and said, "It'll be incredibly expensive; we'll have to not have other things if we keep going this way."

We talked about that in the Parliament and the Labor Party also, to their credit, spoke strongly about that. Paul Papalia, I remember, spoke about it in the Parliament, and I believe that justice reinvestment is now part of the Labor Party policy. So we do make some ground there, but often those things have to be developed fairly well before they get put out on the public stage because the major parties need to be able to feel they've got the backing to take a different route. So I have some hope, in that regard, that we might go somewhere else.

There's a process where the offenders and the victims and their families are all brought to conference; I think it's called restorative justice. Yes; it is called restorative justice. There's justice reinvestment and there's restorative justice, and that is about saying that we've put all these people in prison, but by far the majority of them are going to come back out, and what do we actually want? We actually want them to reintegrate, not reoffend, and for there to be some sort of reconciliation. That's what the restorative justice model does and it works particularly well in Aboriginal communities. It's worked well in New Zealand with Maori communities as well.

We know that there are other ways, but how do you bring the voter, the community, along to a more complex, a longer term and more integrated approach? I think it's probably something that particularly people in the media and investigative sort of journalism need to play a strong role in, because it's the individual stories; it's like the refugee issue. It's the individual stories about how an individual found themselves in this circumstance that led to this. Occasionally some of these things will be really starkly illustrated. If you remember the debates around the three-strikes-and-you're-in legislation, there was a kid in the Northern Territory where they had similar legislation who stole a can of coke and stole an ice-cream, and the next thing he was in jail. I mean, any reasonable person is going to say there's something fundamentally wrong with that.

Of course, one of the things that I used to always raise was the removal of judicial discretion. There's a reason why we have judges and magistrates and the judicial system, and that is to be able to apply judgement to the individual circumstances of each offence and each offender. It's a pretty fundamental thing, but time and time again, governments of both persuasions have taken that out. Also, removing the presumption of innocence, or reversing the onus of proof so that you have to prove that you weren't there, or whatever the argument is. You get to the extremes where now there's a bill in the Parliament which is seeking to inhibit, if not prevent, peaceful protest by saying that you can be charged with possessing a "thing". There's no definition of a "thing" [chuckles]. How have we got ourselves to this point? What's this about? It would actually be laughable if it wasn't so serious.

AY Let's go back to 2001 because another issue that's very close to your heart and the Greens is gay law reform. The Gallop Government did bring in the Acts Amendment (Lesbian and Gay Law Reform) Bill 2001. I wonder how you respond to that and what it achieved.

WATSON This I would rank pretty highly with a success story of the time that I had in the Parliament and it was also a success story for the community and for the level of cooperation between the Labor Party and the Greens. So Jim McGinty, as the Attorney General, had carriage of enacting the policy and again, to his credit, he approached myself early on and said, "If we're going to do this comprehensively and cover all the areas of discrimination, we should assess what those areas are and we'll start by setting up a community group with full representation to look at those areas of discrimination." So we worked together to decide who would be on that group and it was a great combination of a

cross-spectrum of people from the gay and lesbian community, transgender community and the broader community. That group—yes, I was on it too, I think—we produced a report which laid out all the areas of discrimination for gays and lesbians in WA. It ranged over hundreds of pieces of legislation, everything from the Cemeteries Act, which is one that always sticks in my mind [chuckles], to issues to do with access to your partner if they're in hospital, issues to do with adoption, and issues to do with discrimination under the Equal Opportunity Act. There were the kind of broad-scale ones and then there were a multitude of areas where individual acts needed to be amended.

The big deal, the first round of legislation, included equalising the age of consent because that was a significant area of discrimination. It also created a clear provision in the Equal Opportunity Act for a person to be able to bring a case that they were discriminated against. The other major chunk was to have same-sex relationships recognised in the same way as de facto heterosexual relationships are recognised. That was by amending the act that gives you all the definitions, the Interpretation Act; that is it, the Interpretation Act, to basically say that de facto would now include same-sex couples. It was not without its controversies, interestingly enough, because there are a number of areas where some of the jurisdiction is federal and some of it is state, so it was the case for a while that because your partner was not recognised under federal tax law, you'd have, say, your state legal rights, so things to do with social security and one of the things about being recognised as de facto couple then, if you are in a relationship, then social services know because they might want to change your payments, and those kinds of things. But the tax didn't change so you couldn't claim your partner as a tax deduction, but anyway. There were those sorts of things that still needed some work at the federal level, which came later. So it was pretty exciting because basically WA made a shift from having some of the worst legislation in Australia to having the best; it was better than New South Wales, it was better than Victoria in terms that it provided equality for same-sex couples and individuals. We were the first state to provide equal access to adoption and putting your partner's name on a birth certificate if you were sharing parenthood. Those things were a significant shift.

The bill was fiercely opposed by certain members of the Parliament. It was a long and intense debate. Members exercised their right to use their full speaking time. There were several overnight sittings to accommodate that and it was a mixture of kind of exhilarating support from some people and appalling bias and personal vilification from others, not personally to me, but personal to gays and lesbians in the state. But the kind of thing always in the back of your mind was that we were going to have the numbers to pass the bills, only

by one, so we had to be very alert. There was a moment actually, when the bills were brought up to the Council and read a first time, that Barry House, who is now the President, moved that the bill not be read a first time. That was the first time I'd ever heard anybody basically say that this bill should not even be debated. He moved that the bill not be read a first time so that meant that there was a division at that point. Of course, the tactic was to try and knock it out before it even got any further.

It was a very tense few minutes because what happened is I was in the chamber but I looked around (maybe I was just outside the door, but anyway, I was close) the chamber and realised we were down one; one of my Greens colleagues had not made the division. I thought, "Okay, that's it. Okay, we've now blown it." It was so important for the Greens to get this through and we had been working on it for months and months and had enormous community expectation and someone had missed the division. Well, ironically enough, one of the One Nation guys also missed the division, so the numbers were still ... We won that division by one. But that was a salutary lesson in the discipline of attending the bells. The Labor Party, to their credit, they were all there and I know for a fact that not all of them supported the bill, but once their internal party vote had been taken, they had a position and they stuck to it.

I remember having a very energetic conversation with the then Labor leader in the Council, Kim Chance. We were talking about consensus and what a great system consensus was and he said, "Well, you realise that if we had consensus within the Labor Party, these bills would not be going through because it's on the majority and not everybody has to agree." That got me thinking; I thought, "That's interesting. So maybe there are times when a vote isn't such a bad thing" [chuckles]. So yes, it was draining; it was exhilarating. We had lots of people in the gallery, both for and against. People were abused and tempers were frayed and all of that, but there were also some amazing speeches. I remember, in fact, it is interesting being reminded about Bob Kucera with the drug summit. He'd been a policeman and I was sitting either in the public gallery or at the back of the Assembly to listen to some of the speeches. As I say, I didn't really know what people were going to say until they got up. He gave the most thumping speech about what an amazing group of people he'd met. I didn't realise he'd worked in liaison with a gay community when he was in the police and how dare people be saying all these awful, derogatory things. He was amazing, really. So that was nice, when you hear somebody saying, "This is my professional experience." He gave them what for, those who were being totally unpleasant. Unpleasant, it was just an ignorant vilification, basically.

AY I wonder how this affected you personally; how you felt about sitting and listening, and whether there were any personal attacks.

WATSON Yes, it was hard. I guess again, I could hark back to a Quaker concept of “bearing witness” sort of. I thought one of my roles in this debate as an out lesbian in the Parliament, and I don’t think there were any other gay or lesbian people in the Parliament at that time but I could be wrong. I don’t think there were. No, Louise Pratt, sorry, I should ... Louise Pratt with the Labor Party. But if you’re going to be saying these horrible, outrageous things, then I’m going to sit here and you can know that I’m listening. Whether that modified or reduced or I don’t know, I mean, I think it might have done in the Council a bit. I think people felt a bit embarrassed [chuckles] some of the things that they were saying ...

Although I have to tell you one funny story. When it came up to the Council, the bill, one of my colleagues said, “I think we should wear pink when the debate comes on as a sign of support for the bill”, which I didn’t like because I can’t stand pink, but anyway, be that as it may [laughs] it was a nice idea to show solidarity. I remember in particular Jim Scott had this most lurid pink jacket I’d ever seen in my entire life. Robyn McSweeney, on the other side of the house, happened that day to come ... The Labor Party people joined in with us, so there were quite a few of them with pink cardigans or jackets or whatever, scarves. Robyn McSweeney happened to choose that day to wear a pink twinset [chuckles]. About halfway through the day, she suddenly tweaked that all these people on the other side of the chamber were unusually wearing pink. She asked somebody and went, “Oh my god, [laughs] everybody’s wearing her pink.” So at the end of the day she felt necessary to make a personal explanation that she wasn’t actually ... It’s funny because Parliament’s not a visual thing. If she hadn’t said anything, it probably would’ve gone unnoticed. So it’s worth having a little look at *Hansard* at the end of that date because it was hysterical. She was trying to explain how, “It doesn’t really mean ...” Anyway, yes, look, it was hard. I think, not at the time but afterwards I think I found it emotionally a bit draining and saddening; I suppose, sobering. It’s like when that bill was passed and we moved on to the next thing and all the people who’d been saying really nasty, derogatory things were like business as usual, “Oh, how you going?” It’s like they didn’t see it as being that it might have been personal, if you see what I mean. I felt that, so I don’t quite know how they made those separations in their heads but I had to then turn around and almost pretend that they never said it, and just work as usual. That was a bit challenging, I have to say. But to be honest, you put it from your mind, you move on to the next thing. I mean, I just kept on reminding myself, “Well, we got it

through and it was a slow process but all that horrible stuff is on the record now and people can see what you actually ... And if you didn't think that, then why on earth did you say it [chuckles]?"

There was a concern, too, that with the next election or the point at which there was inevitably going to be a conservative government come in that there would be a winding back or a repeal of the bill, but there wasn't. That didn't happen and it's one of the things I would probably credit Colin Barnett with. I think he didn't want that to come back on. My sense is that his own understanding of that area of discrimination shifted a fair bit because his debate on it, when a similar bill was introduced by the Democrats, was different to the one on the Labor Party bill.

AY Do we still have a way to go with reform for gay and lesbian people? I'm thinking too, this year, federally, we're looking at bringing in legislation. Now, the Marriage Act is a federal act. To what extent can state legislation affect what is happening federally?

WATSON The federated system is complex in that regard and I should just say, to finish off on the success of that bill, the other thing that really ought to be acknowledged is the enormous work that the Gay and Lesbian Equality (WA) did in advocating and lobbying and people going to speak to their members of Parliament. There was a lot of work that had been done to prepare the ground and to do everything to persuade members to support the legislation. It was a classic case study of a community campaign combined with the right political combination in the Parliament.

The Labor Party, again to their credit, had introduced legislation (I think it was even in the '70s) but this was about the fifth attempt and four of those previous attempts had been from the Labor Party. They should be credited with having done that and also credited with, particularly Jim McGinty, whenever we acknowledged, 10 years after the bill had passed, we had an acknowledgement of 10 years, he always stood shoulder-to-shoulder on that and he said, "I did it with the Greens; the Greens did it with us." It's interesting because that's often not the case. Old-growth logging, as far as you could hear from what's said publicly, it was the Labor Party that did it; we were never there. Really? But sorry, to go back to the question about what the federal marriage ...

AY Looking federally at marriage equality.

WATSON The marriage equality issue is not going to go away. It's very clear that it's right up there and continues to—even today what's happening in the federal Parliament—it needs resolving and the Parliament's the right place to do it. With the issue of marriage being a federal jurisdiction, when John Howard came in and his government changed the Marriage Act to say that a marriage was between a man and a woman (of course, before it hadn't actually stated that) then our legal advice on that was that actually created the possibility for the state to legislate in that area that had then been created, which is the question of whether a same-sex couple can get married. Professor George Williams gave that advice to us and, hence, at the moment we have a bill in the state Parliament here which is being drafted by my colleague Lynn MacLaren. It hasn't come on for debate. Always the challenge with non-government business is to actually negotiate the time to debate it and whether that's going to happen any time soon, I'm not sure. Meanwhile in the federal arena, of course, the thing has got kind of complicated by the argument that this should go to a plebiscite. I think it's a total distraction and I see that just yesterday someone's costed how much that would actually cost the taxpayer; it's over \$500 million. It's just a tactic by the conservatives to try and delay an outcome. I mean, I think a plebiscite would be successful but why don't we just debate it in Parliament—it's not as though this isn't a matter that's been thoroughly debated in the community. Yes; let's just have a debate in the Parliament and deal with it there.

AY Going back to Lynn MacLaren, then, what is her bill attempting to do?

WATSON To make same-sex marriage legal in WA.

AY I'm not quite understanding how it can circumvent the federal Marriage Act?

WATSON Well, I think that would be the interesting part [chuckles]. My understanding is the legal advice is you could pass such a law in WA where a same-sex marriage would be recognised, or be required to be recognised, but if that couple travelled interstate, I think they would still no longer be a couple [chuckles]. So of course it's not ideal, but the argument is this is how you progress the debate, and if sufficient number of the states legislated in this way, then it would make the commonwealth law a bit of a nonsense. It's an interesting one, because there's no doubt that if one's arguing for full equality, then there are no arguments against providing marriage equality.

There are other areas where I think we need to be putting our energy, I guess, as gay and lesbian activists. People are still experiencing, young people in particular, disproportionate

levels of mental health issues and suicide and those sorts of things. So one of the ones that I think is really unfinished business is how we actually deal with adequate curriculum and anti-bullying initiatives in schools. It's interesting, because there's been this push by the conservatives against the Safe Schools program, and, hopefully, that inquiry is going to say that this is important in terms of protecting vulnerable young people who are questioning their sexuality, and also reducing the risk of suicide and other things, particularly kids who are isolated in the country. I made the point, I think it was at the end of my speech on the gay law reform but it might have been actually when I finished up in Parliament. I said "If one child grows up now and knows it's okay to be gay or lesbian, then that's been worth doing because the feeling of being a second-class citizen, of being discriminated against and unwanted, is pretty overwhelming for young teenagers, and particularly if they're out in the country where there's very little support or role models or any of those kind of things."

AY I think that was my question. At a state level, what else can you do to improve on that original legislation of 2001? What work still needs to be done? You've identified the bullying and the Safe Schools.

WATSON I think bullying and Safe Schools, because I think the information that we get back, we being sort of gay and lesbian activists, is that there are still lack of support and services for gays and lesbians in the school environment. If it's part of a bigger anti-bullying program, that's fine. But don't hide it. I think that the education department has dragged its heels in terms of adjusting its curriculum, and it's probably not just in terms of gay and lesbian sexuality but in terms of sex and sexuality full stop. I think it's kind of gone into a conservative sort of approach to good, peer-based education, which is kind of the stuff that works.

I think there's more that needs to be done in terms of transgender people, in terms of intersex people. It's still the case that an intersex baby is being assigned a sex. They are complicated areas, but also, thankfully, being much more debated in the public. You see some quite extraordinary personal stories, particularly on the ABC of course, which is great; that's what people—the general community need to be exposed to some of this. Because it's actually stuff that a lot of people just don't think about [chuckles], it's just not on their radar. But there are certainly some legal impediments in that area which should be adjusted. We knew when we did the major reforms that we didn't fully address protection of transsexual people, particularly if they hadn't transitioned. So there's more work that needs to be done there.

Other service provider areas, like seniors; my partner, June, is actually working right now doing that kind of work. So when the laws were changed, sometimes it's easy to think okay, we've done that; tick that box, but, of course you've got to change the culture and the operation of instrumentalities and agencies whether they're private or public. As I say, I think the education department has been dragging its heels, because it's generally quite a conservative culture. And there's such a strong level of angst around children and perpetrating the myths about paedophilia, for example; whereas we know that 85 per cent of these offences are committed by men who consider themselves heterosexual. That's the research. I don't think that's changed. That's the evidence.

But, yes, in the aged-care sector also, just briefly, one of the things that the research showed here, and it was some cutting-edge research here in WA, is that often with older gay and lesbian people if they go into aged-care facilities, they often hide their identity from their carers and from the institution. So they basically go back into the closet, and they're afraid, some of them also because they've lived most of their life with, say, gay men, with the risk of criminal penalties hanging over their heads. So there's quite a lot of evidence of them then languishing in these aged-care facilities and having to hide their identity, which also has significant consequences not just for their mental health and wellbeing but also their health provision as well. So there's some money that's currently available from the federal government to provide training in the sector, which is good. So those sorts of initiatives need to be funded.

AY But that legislation—going back to 2001—at the time was pretty progressive.

WATSON Yes, it was.

AY How did you feel about that? You were satisfied ...?

WATSON I was incredibly satisfied that we, with a couple of exceptions, hadn't shirked any of the tricky bits, and we now have—there was a little rush of, particularly lesbian couples, having babies, some of whom I see these days and they go, "Be careful what you wished for [laughs]." So, yes, access to reproductive technology was quite at the forefront. We have a gay couple who adopted a child. It's cutting edge, and the sky hasn't fallen in. In fact, I think there's a much, much broader public debate about attitudes to gays and lesbians. You see sportspeople coming out. That just wasn't happening 30 years ago. So there's a

momentum there, which means that (again I come back to young people) when you're growing up and you're working out who you are and what you feel, you can look, "Oh well, there's so and so, that rugby player, and he's a great bloke and he's gay and that's okay." Martina Navratilova was my favourite back in the day [laughs].

[End of GizWatson11]

[GizWatson_12_1]

AY This is another interview with Giz Watson and today is the 22nd of March 2016. The first question, Giz: given the timing of the state election coming up next March, have you put your hand up?

WATSON Not for the state, no. As of last night, we have put a pause on our preselection for the state positions, because of the events of the last 48 hours. In the federal arena, we have decided that we need to focus on getting our federal team up and organised and probably working to a July the 2nd polling day. But with that in mind, I have nominated to represent the Greens in the seat of O'Connor, which is an interesting seat because it includes Albany and Esperance and the lower half of the wheatbelt and Kalgoorlie; in fact, quite a large chunk of the wheatbelt. Because I'm now spending a chunk of my time down in Albany, I have offered to be that candidate and I'm assuming that that process will be concluded in the next week, because there's nobody else who's put their hand up at this stage [laughs]. It's quite a big gig, O'Connor.

AY I was about to ask you about the process that goes into that.

WATSON Sure. Within the Greens, it's got several steps to it. First of all, we have an election campaign committee which is selected from the membership and that committee considers which seats are priority seats. If it's a priority seat, then there's the thorough process of preselection. Nominees put in their application form. It's quite a comprehensive set of questions they have to answer. They have to do a meet-the-candidate or meet-the-nominee session where members can ask questions and we also have a process where any objections can be raised in private. Then what happens is that every member is provided with the application forms and they get to vote on that full information.

We don't have a selection committee like some other political parties do. We empower our members to vote for which candidate they want and also we have a provision that if—the ballot paper always has “seek other candidates”, so, in effect, even if there's only one nominee, then the membership can say just the fact that so-and-so put their hand up and nobody else has yet, we don't necessarily have to accept that person. There's quite a few checks and balances in it, and I think it's critical that you have a really rigorous preselection process and that you have people who are going to be competent and reliable candidates and, if elected, would be able to do the job. So, yes, it's a pretty rigorous process with

O'Connor because it's not been labelled a priority seat. The process is slightly reduced, so, same thing; I'm required to put in an application, but there isn't a formal ballot. We will ballot our members in O'Connor, but by way of an email. Same thing; they can then come back and say, "Yes, support" or "No, seek other candidates". Depending on the result of that, by the end of next week we should know whether they want me to do it.

AY What information are your members given to help make this decision?

WATSON The application form, which is the highest threshold, is the model. So questions about your skills, education, work, how long you've been in the party, have you occupied certain roles in the party, what are your communication skills like, how do you deal with stress and conflict, as a sample of the sort of things that we ask our candidates. Are there any skeletons in your closet is another one, not because that's necessarily going to be a game changer, but, as a party, you need to not have any surprises. Politics is full of intrigue [chuckles]. The more things are anticipated, the better. But, I mean, we always have a joke that quite a few of our candidates, and even our members of Parliament, have had an active history of civil disobedience. Jo Vallentine's one; I'm another; Paul Llewellyn was another. We used to joke that actually having been charged with something was a plus, not a negative, for a Greens candidate. Nevertheless, it's important that those people who we're asking to support us for nominations know that and know that there's a big difference between having been charged with obstructing a bulldozer and charged with some other criminal matter which has a different flavour to it.

AY What's this going to mean for you personally over the next few months? It's going to be a very long election campaign by all accounts.

WATSON Yes. Certainly, all the commentators are suggesting this is one of the longest; I think about three months. The kind of stark reality, having run in a number of seats in a number of different elections, is there's not a huge amount in terms of particularly these country electorates. You'll have some meet-the-candidate functions, usually put on by the chambers of commerce or the development commissions in the various areas. Working with the local media is probably the most important. Big challenge, O'Connor, because there's Kalgoorlie, which is probably the biggest chunk of the population, but then there's also Albany and Esperance and the more rural parts of the community. I'm looking forward to talking about sustainable agriculture, talking about what's happening with climate change,

talking about how communities are taking up renewable energy, how the environment's going out in their neck of the woods. Those are the sort of things.

Yes, taking our message to a rural electorate and also listening very carefully to the issues that are affecting them out there, because a lot of emphasis these days is on metropolitan campaigns because that's where the bulk of the population live. I've long felt that the Greens have a very strong link with having solutions for how we do agriculture more sustainably in the state and I genuinely want to be part of that conversation. What I find is when you go out into the country regions, not all farmers, but there's quite a few who know that and they have made significant changes in the light of reduced rainfall and rising cost of fuel and chemicals and those sort of things, so I think it's a great part of our state. It'll be a pleasure to engage with the issues that affect O'Connor.

AY Where is your support at the moment, do you see, in O'Connor?

WATSON In O'Connor? We've got a strong membership base on the south coast in Denmark and Albany. We have a smaller base in Esperance and considerable support in Kalgoorlie, not so much in the bits in between, the less populated bits.

AY With an interest in sustainable agriculture, what are those farmers, what's their opinion of the Greens and their policies, do you believe?

WATSON It's a fairly conservative community. We shouldn't kid ourselves that the farming communities—all sorts of social studies and research shows that they are quite conservative in their thinking and slower to change than some other sectors. But, on the other hand, they're also key land managers of a significant portion of the state and they know what's happening on their own land and are often looking for innovation and change, or a certain portion of them are. I mean, the Landcare movement is an interesting example of that, because not everybody took it up. There was an enthusiastic sort of uptake of maybe a third or a bit more of farmers, and it's the same in any sector when you're trying to adjust to changing conditions. There'll be those who will respond quickly and take it up and then they become the sort of model for others. So, yes, there are farmers out there who we've been talking to and working with for quite a while now, but it's a sector that will take a while to change what it's been doing for—in fact, in the scheme of things, it's not a huge amount of time—certainly generations. If you think it was only in the '70s that we stopped wholesale clearing of massive areas of the state—a million hectares a year was the catchcry, so it's

quite a big turnaround to now be saying, “Well, maybe we actually need to revegetate part of the landscape. Actually, maybe we need to” We have moved away from ploughing the land and breaking up the topsoil into direct seeding and those kind of methods, but there’s still a lot more to do. Things like getting carbon back into the soil and the potential there, the elusive oil mallee which floats there just over the horizon would be ... it’s been trialled; it just never quite got a critical mass. But the potential’s enormous. It’s a way of producing fuel and other products off country that have very low rainfall and poor soils, but it needs a little bit of assistance to get it up and running, and that hasn’t happened for a while. So those are the sort of things that I think are exciting, even energy farming. Farms provide the opportunity to harvest off their land wind and solar resource, and I’m sure there’s more that we can do with that.

AY I wasn’t going to ask about federal politics, but given this development, I feel I just need to ask you one question and that is: at the end of last week, the Senate was debating legislation about preference dealing in the Senate, and the Greens supported a government’s bill, quite controversially some would say. And the Greens have been accused of self-interest; is it self-interest?

WATSON No. The first thing to know about changes to the Senate voting process, which is in essence what has now passed, is that a bill very similar to the one that’s passed was introduced into the Parliament by Senator Bob Brown for the Greens roughly 15 years ago, I think. It hasn’t been reported this way, but we would say that the Liberals have actually adopted our policy position, because we’ve been pressing this through Bob, through Christine, through Senator Lee Rhiannon for a decade and a half. The Liberal–National coalition have supported it because—I’m minded of that line from, I don’t know whether it’s Shakespeare or not, “Who will rid me of this troublesome priest?” isn’t it, or something like that? Their problem is the crossbenchers and an unwieldy Senate make-up and, of course, the principle that a significant number of micro-party members were elected off tiny primary votes. I think what we’ve seen in the last federal election is a real clear indication that the system was broken. When you have ballot papers that are longer than this table—this table, by the way, is about a metre and a half, say ...

AY Bedsheet size.

WATSON Bedsheet size. Apart from anything else, a practical challenge of counting. I spent three and half weeks on the recount here in Western Australia, so I saw a lot of these

enormous pieces of paper. So there's the practical side of it, but the main principle is that if you vote for, let's say, a party that says they're the Motoring Enthusiasts and then someone—the preference whisperer in this case—has worked out a way of gaming the system so that those votes then get redistributed through a complicated system of channels and end up electing somebody from the Christian right, which has got nothing to do with motoring enthusiasm, you've got to wonder how that actually reflects the voter's wish.

There's a much simpler system now. You can just put six—you need six places. Put the number in the box 1 to 6 and that will indicate who you want to be elected and in what order. So, yes, there's been a strong push by the crossbenchers, or most of them, and the ALP, which has played a very strange, I believe, hand in this debate. Because you've got to remember that prior to the bill, there was a Senate inquiry that came up with the unanimous recommendation for this legislation, which was signed off by the ALP as well. But when we got to actually debating the bill, the ALP, for their own reasons, had decided to attack the Greens and attack the bill, and they were quite divided within their own ranks. But that's about their powerbrokers losing the black art of preference swaps and preference negotiations, which will be a consequence of this bill, and I think it's a consequence that the general public think is good. The perception that we're doing things with the conservatives, yes, that's something which has had some impact in terms of people often deal with impressions rather than the detail of it. So the impression is what are the Greens doing working with the Libs so closely, or the coalition. I guess the answer is it was our idea in the first place and they've taken it up rather than vice versa. There are many examples where we have agreed with the right side of politics. We probably more often agree with the left side of politics, but not exclusively. And it does seem a little galling that the Labor Party's having a go at us when they vote with the coalition 80 per cent of the time. We vote with them maybe 10, 20 per cent of the time. So, it's just classic political fun and games, really, I suppose.

AY It is, but what of the charge about self-interest, that more Greens are likely to be voted in with the new model?

WATSON The first thing to say on that is for some reason, apparently, self-interest isn't an issue for the other political parties. They're always doing things that are actually about their self-interest. Yes, I think there's a bit of mud being flung around in the hope that somehow self-interest will be something that we're accused of serving here. But the independent political analysts like Antony Green, and George Williams has been commenting on as well, have said basically the Greens might end up being in pretty much

the same place as we are at the moment. In fact, if we go to a double dissolution, we might lose a senator or two, but we might gain a couple elsewhere. As I say, we've been arguing and putting this type of legislation up for 15 years because of the principle of it. And whether that means that we are going to disadvantage our own position, well, we think the principle of a fairer system, one that the voter can understand and that clearly reflects the voter's intent, is the right principle to adhere to. If we ultimately lose out, then, one, I'd be surprised but, two, we've still done the right thing. And it also is inaccurate to say that it completely wipes out all the small parties, because legitimate small parties, and we made very sure that we had amendments in the bill that ensured that the amount of registration that you pay if you're a small party is kept at a—there was an attempt by the coalition to make it significantly higher that would've made it harder for small parties to get started, and if you're a legitimate small party, you can still be in the race. It's just these tiny one-issue, a lot of them front parties that have interrelated membership that we think are rotting the system.

AY Is it the tiny party or is it the distortion of someone's vote in a sense that someone has voted for X, Y or Z, but not realising where their preferences might be going?

WATSON I think they're both problematic. I think the issue with the micros is that you know so very little about them because they don't have a set of policies that you can kind of look at and read and go, "Well, if I voted for that person, I would expect them to vote this way on that bit of legislation and to have these sort of initiatives." You don't really know much; sometimes it is just basically a name. I mean, I have no idea what a motoring enthusiast does apart from like driving cars or motorbikes or whatever, or maybe anything with a motor. How are they going to represent me in the Parliament? How will they vote on the issues that I care about? I have no idea of how I'd assess that. I think what's happened in Australian politics, and to some extent not just in Australia, but people have got very disillusioned with the two parties that currently form government, the Lib-Nationals and the Labor. So it's a reflection of their frustration; they'll go, "Oh, yes, Sex Party; that sounds great. I'll put 1 in their box [laughs]." Of course, you know, well at least the Sex Party does have some policies; I'll give them that. So you can read what you would expect to get. But with the way the preference deals have been done, you might vote for the Sex Party, which has got some fairly libertarian views, and end up with a Family First senator. So, how is that democratic? We could talk about this all afternoon [laughs], or I could, sorry!

AY We'll come back come back to WA, and I think we should go to Geoff Gallop now and his passion for electoral reform. When he came into power, he was very clear about

wanting to have electoral reform, specifically the one vote, one value. How close was his vision to what the Greens felt on the issue of one value, one vote?

WATSON Pretty close. The discussion and the way that the issue played through was that we agreed with the principle that in the lower house, every person's vote should have the same weighting, I guess, because prior to the changes, a country, rural members or rural community we were just talking about in effect—how can I explain this in simple terms? You might have in the city 3 000 people electing one member, those figures aren't right, but just for the sake of the argument, but in the country you would have 1 000 people electing one member, so in effect the country person has three times the power, and that was the situation. I think that's the sort of proportions we're talking about in its most extreme. We accepted that argument and it was also very much part of our policy position that that need to be changed.

Now, where it got more complicated is that there was a strong debate within our own membership and our own parliamentary team that the country people, if you did one vote, one value across the board, upper house, lower house, would dramatically lose their representatives. One of the arguments was, in the same way the Senate elects a fixed number of senators from each state regardless of the population of that state, that we ought to treat the regions of Western Australia in that same way. Look, I have to say it was one of the hardest debates we've ever had in our party. There was the debate about the conflicting principles. We had a very strong commitment to deal with the kind of inequities of distance. Western Australia, for those who are not in the metropolitan area, having any real access to your representatives is hugely challenging. It's a little easier now with electronic communication, but that's no substitute for actually seeing someone face to face. The arrangement that was arrived at was that we would support an upper house model that said the regions would all have six representatives; so, six regions and six representatives. That meant that North Metro, where I was, would go from being a seven-member electorate to a six, as did South West. I think, from memory, the other metro ones came up from five to six. It's not perfect by any stretch of the imagination, and of course the problem came even more starkly with Agriculture and Mining and Pastoral, where the upper house members there are elected by very few people. I know what you're going to ask me: was this a good idea [laughs]?

AY Yes, that is what I was going to ask [laughs]!

WATSON Yes, it's a very reasonable question. If someone was to say, "Is there something that you would have done differently or you regret about not finishing properly?", I would have to put this in that category. It was a tough call, because you have to remember that we had two members who were representing rural; sorry, three in fact. You had Robin Chapple in Mining and Pastoral, Dee [Margetts] in Agriculture and Chrissy [Sharp] in the South West. I know that they felt quite conflicted in that once you're elected, you're also elected to represent those people, so you've got this tension between the principle of equal representation, the principles of having some allowances or concessions for the challenges of large distances—and there were other sort of compensations, of course, that could be brought into that—and this idea that the upper house should be constituted under a different formula to the lower house. I think there were some mistaken hopes, or assumptions perhaps, and one was that those people in those country electorates would somehow reward us for our altruism, which, of course, on reflection, hasn't happened to any significant degree, and I actually think that was very naive.

I do think that what we have done is left the upper house with a high likelihood that it'll continue to be conservative dominated, unlike when we were talking just a few minutes ago about the federal arena, because the analysis there by the independent political analysts is saying that this fear that it will become conservative dominated doesn't stack up in the figures. So, yes, I think we have stuck with the system that weights the views of rural conservative communities in the Parliament, and I would certainly rather it wasn't like that, but maybe this ties in with my putting my hand up, and that's my punishment [laughs] putting my hand for the seat of O'Connor! I do think it's only a matter of time, and, you know, this is my long game is that I do believe that we will gain considerably more support in the rural areas in Australia. Some of the results in recent elections, such as the taking of Ballina from the Nationals—not a dissimilar area to, say, Margaret River or that sort of part of our state in terms of the community and land management issues—I'm in it for the long game. We've set ourselves a much longer task by doing it this way round [chuckles]. Also, to be honest there was a challenge for us to maintain our own ... Because we make our decisions by consensus, so we all consented to this outcome, but not without considerable reservations.

AY I'm interested in how you did arrive at consensus where you had people with different opinions in different electorates. This must've been one of the more challenging aspects of consensus decision-making, surely.

WATSON Absolutely.

AY How did you achieve it?

WATSON After many a long discussion. I guess the process is we look at what we've already committed to in our policy documents and that's when it becomes apparent that you have conflicting principles. It doesn't matter how much time and energy you put into formulating policy, these issues arise; I mean, the world's not perfect. You can't write the perfect set of policies and then just go in and roll along with them; you've got to deal with these—neither of the principles or policies are wrong; it's just they don't mesh nicely. Okay; so you end up with that situation, and then we had several general meetings of the membership where members were encouraged to attend and debate and advise the parliamentary team what they wanted us to do. We took considerable academic advice, precedents, other models, discussion papers, and of course debated it with others in the other political parties as well. I mean, the Labor Party on more than one occasion asked us to revisit it; that this was going to be problematic for us in terms of our numbers in the Legislative Council, which ultimately turns out to be true. Various models were put to us to say, "If you don't like this one, how about this one?"

AY But this was their bill.

WATSON Yes, yes, yes. Well, even after the bill was enacted, so, the Legislative Council was set on our requested model, they came back privately several times to say, "Can't we have another go at this?" Look, you have to remember that the whole thing was a very close vote. There was an issue of a tied vote in the Council and it resulted in the negative, which is what happens if you have a tied vote, and then there was a whole question about whether the President should vote and what the standing orders say about that. My memory, and I think I'm correct, is the only way that it was ultimately resolved is that one of the Liberals voted for the changes. He was basically kicked out of his party for that. Alan Cadby was his name. I mean, talk about principle. He said, "No; this principle is correct. No, I'm not going to toe the party line." That was the end of his political career pretty promptly after that.

AY So, along with this particular Liberal, how much of it was altruism and how much were you shooting yourselves in the foot, or both?

WATSON I think when we came to consensus that this was the position we'd take, there was a sense that we were doing the right thing for rural Western Australians, but, as I say, I've never had one of them say, "Thanks very much; that was a good idea", because, of course, they were still dealing with and angry with the fact that they had less lower house members and they were kind of, "Who cares about the upper house, basically. Where the government is formed is the bit that we're really interested in." I guess what we were part of delivering is two-thirds of the job, but not the rest. I don't think it was so much that we went into it with our eyes closed; I think there was a degree of over-optimism, as I say, that we would be rewarded and return a member in the Agricultural Region. I have to say that our vote in Agricultural Region actually went down, not up. So, far from being rewarded, we actually were seen as the baddies [chuckles].

AY With hindsight, how could it have been improved? What would've been a better outcome, because it seems to me as though the government gave you plenty of opportunity ...

WATSON They did, yes.

AY ... to come up with amendments that might have worked better to your advantage? You had plenty of time to think about it, even though you've admitted it was extremely difficult with your ...

WATSON Yes, no; time wasn't an issue, and as long as ourselves and the Labor Party combined had sufficient numbers in the Council, we could've, in theory at least, revisited it later on. I've forgotten what the question was now [laughs]; sorry!

AY Hindsight, and how it might have been done better.

WATSON Differently. I was certainly attracted to some of other models which would have given more councillors in the three metropolitan seats, so I think it was maybe something like nine members in the metro seats and five in the—so it would have been an increase in the number overall, but the less populated regions would not have had the same number as each metro. Look, I think the other thing that over the time that I was in the Parliament I realised was that the argument was that in the metro members have access to their representatives really easily; they only have to drive half an hour and they can go and talk to them. But the other side of that is that—and plus there's 10 times more of them, so it

doesn't actually necessarily improve your accessibility, because you're ultimately limited by what you can fit into any given day. I've worked in the community sector in the rural centres and I know that if you come into town and you've organised the meetings, you can see in the space of a couple of hours everyone you need to see in that place, because that's the nature of those communities. And, as I say, electronic communication now has kind of quite radically changed the question of accessibility. So, look, I hope there will be a day when we will adjust the model again and I also hope that we will continue to grow our engagement in those rural communities so that people will support us more, but we've got to have people in those communities to be doing that.

AY As it stands now, though, our upper house is really not providing the same checks and balances, I suppose, that the Senate perhaps does with more variety and independence in it.

WATSON That might be about to change; sorry [laughter]! Snookered you there [laughter]!

AY That is an argument for not necessarily the micro parties but for Independents. But, presumably, in WA it is harder for Independents to get into the upper house.

WATSON Not in the country.

AY But you were saying that it was more conservative dominated. You've effectively delivered ...

WATSON Most of the Independents, unfortunately, are conservative in our current system.

AY That's true.

WATSON I mean, what we've seen in the sort of 25 years that I've been closely engaged in parliamentary politics, as opposed to more general lower "p" politics, is a sort of shrinking of the left-wing independent and minor parties and a proliferation of, as I say, the sort of Shooters and Fishers, sports enthusiasts and people whose policies, if they have any, are more to the right than the left, which has also been an impact, if you look at the Senate

again, on how the preference negotiations and arrangements have been able to elect more conservatives, because that's how the deals have been done. So someone might think they're voting for somebody that's a bit, maybe, neutral, but they end up with somebody who's really quite on the right of politics. I'm not sure that the Senate is doing ... You said the Senate is doing a better job of reviewing. I mean, the Senate has always had more resources. I'm not sure that it's so much the make-up of the Senate that makes it an effective house of review, to be honest. I mean, yes, we have always accepted and supported the principle that diversity is good. Even if you've got some Independent or small-party members who might be to the right, I mean they are still probably, to an extent, reflecting what the community wants, so that's a democratic system, but when they're getting in there by quite tricky means, that's one question. It's interesting; one of the arguments about "Oh, well maybe the micros aren't so bad because in fact when they've got in there, they've thrown up some quite surprisingly capable people". I was only listening to Jacqui Lambie last night on Q&A, and she's an interesting mixture, because some of what she says is very sensible and some of it's just out there, but she certainly calls a spade a spade and there's nothing wrong with having somebody like that in there. But that was by chance, not that anybody really would've known that that was what you were going to get. I think it's been very reasonably compared to a lottery.

AY She was the one who compared it to a lottery.

WATSON She was [laughs]. And, as I say, she's a rough diamond but I kind of like her, and she's not intimidated and she's got some life experience under her belt. I mean, some of her comments on race and those sorts of things are appalling and show a level of ignorance and a lack of insight; that's the nicest thing I can say about it. But there is a chunk of the Australian population that are like her; quite a chunk [laughs].

AY But as you say, that was more

WATSON Chance, rather than

AY Chance, yes.

WATSON Yes, that's right. So I was just going to say I think just the question of whether the Legislative Council is doing as good a job as it could, I am certainly—yes, I agree I was disappointed in the last term that I was in the Parliament and what I've seen over

the last two and a half–three years, particularly things like the demise of the committee system. For all the last four years that I was in the Parliament, the Standing Committee on Legislation was doing an excellent job and an important committee in reviewing significant bits of legislation wasn't getting any work; so no bills were being referred to it. Not only were members being paid for something that they weren't actually doing, which is one thing, but lack of—the full capacity of the Council wasn't being realised. So those are the things, I think—and maybe you could argue if there was a different mix in the Legislative Council and the numbers were slightly different, maybe the government of the day wouldn't get away with that because that's basically what it is: the government of the day saying, "Well, we don't want the house of review to be doing what it's meant to do." So it's blocking behaviour, but who would be best at changing that? I don't know.

AY I think that's what I meant with saying it was going to be conservative dominated; it doesn't probably matter who dominates, but it was maybe doomed to become dominated and therefore not have sufficient diversity in it.

WATSON I think there's an element of truth in that. That's all I can say. I'm very sorry; I won't do it again [laughs]. I confess.

AY Jim McGinty, at the time

WATSON I probably won't have a chance to do it again either [laughs]. Sorry, it's actually not a laughing matter, but it is something that if I was to go back, wind the clock back, I would have been more stronger and vigorous in my arguing for consensus in another direction.

AY Right. Now, Jim McGinty, at the time, said it was a great day for democracy in WA. Was it?

WATSON Well, it was, yes. It felt like a real victory and we were really delighted to have been part of that. It was a very hard-fought and narrowly won campaign. I guess we were also keen to bring the community along in understanding what the change was and the significance. And one of the things we insisted with Jim McGinty was that we have a parliamentary inquiry to go out and talk to people about what the changes would mean and what they would look like. And I can tell you they did not want that all, but we required it to happen. We went through a very painful process (I was on the committee) going out and

having public meetings, in effect. And the Labor Party members would sit there and they would do the absolute bare-bone minimum. They did not fight for their model, because as far as they saw it they had the numbers and why were we putting ourselves through this pain; it was a simple principle and we should just get on and pass it. I guess we had a bit more of a hope that it would engage more people in the debate and get more support for the bill. In fact, that probably wasn't true, because for most people this stuff's pretty obscure. It's not education; it's not health; it's not how many dollars I'm going to have in my pocket. So, that didn't work terribly well, but, yes, I think full credit to the Labor Party for having persisted to seek these changes and having ... I can't remember how many times they tried it before, but considerable.

AY Yes, it was; it took them some time. Jim McGinty also said he was very pleased with this (when he got it through, obviously) that it brought WA in line with the rest of Australia, with everyone having an equal say in electing governments. Would you agree with that comment?

WATSON Well, certainly in the lower house, where government was formed, it did create a level playing field in that it was one vote, one value where a person had the same ... A number of people would elect their representative, whether it's 10 000 or whatever, but you didn't have 2 000 electing one bloke and 20 000 electing one representative as well. So, yes, it was the right thing to do. It took a long time for WA to get there. It took us being in the Council at the right time to do that and, again, by a very slim margin. As I say, I'm sure that the critical vote was the Liberal who crossed the floor. What a brave man.

AY What a brave man. Let's move away from the esoteric to the bits that people don't want to think about and things that are popping up in the media in the last couple of days. You touched on it last time, and this is the Biodiversity Conservation Bill. Now, there's criticism of it saying that the WWF [World Wildlife Fund] and also the Environmental Defender's Office, and I think others—oh, and the conservation manager for south west Australia. Anyway, they are concerned that it gives too much power to the environment minister and that there's far too much discretion for him to do what he wants to do and that that is dangerous; they want the bill abandoned. What's your understanding?

WATSON So, the history of this is that WA has languished without contemporary legislation to protect wildlife, whether that's plants and animals. Biodiversity is the scientific term for looking after the natural environment, in effect. It's particularly significant because

the south west of Western Australia is one of relatively few global hotspots for biodiversity. A place becomes a global hotspot by having a significant diversity in species, but also that it's under threat. So we know (and in fact I was just revisiting my speech from the bill that I introduced on this subject in 2012) that 18 animal species have known to have gone extinct in Western Australia since we were taking records. And there are a number of other species, in the hundreds, that are listed as endangered and threatened. The protection of these species is currently primarily covered by an act that was passed in 1950, and passed for the purposes of managing the taking of wildlife, so, hunting in effect.

AY So despite the fact that it's called the Wildlife Conservation Act of 1950?

WATSON Yes, exactly; it's gorgeous, isn't it. Its whole language is about taking, so it's about access to. So I guess even in the 1950s, they were recognising that some things were under pressure and they would have to have a legislative approach of restricting the taking. But it's archaic language, incredibly limited. It was coming at it from that legal perspective. The Labor Party had, for seven years when—in fact, Geoff Gallop was in, he came in with a promise to introduce modern biodiversity legislation. Perhaps the only kind of sop I could give is there was a fairly ambitious legislative program which they had to get through and maybe that one kept on slipping down the list, along with the human rights bill, which was also promised [laughs]. So, in the seven years that they were in and they had the opportunity to, they did a good community consultation, a good, broad cross-sector discussion paper, and they drafted a bill, but it never got to the Parliament.

When the Barnett Government came in, they said that they would introduce contemporary legislation, so, tick; they have introduced a bill and kicked that debate off. But the bill is wholly inadequate to the task and arguably isn't much of an improvement on what the situation is at the moment. So it's not perhaps so much that the minister has too much power, but has too much discretionary power.

Secondly, this is an area where research and scientific advice is critical because these are the people who can advise the minister as to what is actually happening with the ecological communities or increased threat levels, or whatever. There's nothing in the bill that requires such an advisory committee to be set up, let alone for the minister to have to take any notice of it.

Also, as I understand it, this is the first bill that I've ever seen that actually enables or allows the minister, in certain circumstances, to tick off the extinction of a species. He actually says that in his interviews. There is a provision that if it's in the national interest or whatever, the state's interest, the minister can actually sign off and say, and the example I'll use is one I'd been involved in many years ago in the Cape Range region next to Ningaloo Reef. In the cave systems there, which are extraordinary relics of rainforest, which once was in that part of the country, we're talking millions and millions of years ago, there's these stygofauna²⁶, which are cave fauna. Yes, those; you've got a picture there, that's right. He used this example that he would, in some circumstances, consider that signing off on a stygofauna going extinct would be acceptable if there was—what have we had at Cape Range Oil and Gas is the main one that's been flagged— a land use or an activity that could severely impact on these organisms. So, yes, he can actually play God. He can say, "That species; you're not important enough. Sorry, we're going to put a wellhead above your cave" and that's it, for example [chuckles].

AY Does he have to justify this action in any way?

WATSON No. Well, not in terms of required written reasons for et cetera et cetera, as you would, say, in a judicial setting. Sometimes what they would say is you must set out the reasons that you've come to this conclusion. But no, as far as I'm aware, the bill doesn't require that. Look, it's good that it's got increased fines; the fines for the taking or damaging of threatened species are wholly inadequate. Interestingly enough, I have just revisited the bill that I introduced in October 2012, which was to deal with what was called "priority reforms". The Biodiversity Legislation (Priority Reforms) Bill 2012, I think, from memory, was to increase the penalties and also to ensure that in the listing of endangered species, that was the other thing that really doesn't work well, because it's an incredibly cumbersome and slow process, that there would be some requirements for specific times frame to do that, so things couldn't languish on the minister's desk or department desk for years, which is often what happens. So we're at a critical point where we could get some good legislation but it isn't going to look like what this bill is like.

AY What happened to your bill? Do any of the elements of it make an appearance here with the current bill?

²⁶ <http://www.subterraneanecology.com.au/knowledge-publications/about-stygofauna>

WATSON Only the increased penalties.

AY Right; which are quite substantial ...

WATSON Yes, about 10 times.

AY ... about \$500 000, yes, and up to \$1 million for corporations. This is looking at illegal sandalwood harvesting.

WATSON I used an example in my speech that somebody who was sufficiently evil could go down to Two Peoples Bay and shoot one of the last—I think there's about 80 Gilbert's potoroos²⁷ left on the planet and they're all down there, pretty much, they could shoot one of these animals and only be fined \$10 000. That was a nonsense in this day and age and, yes, they picked up on that. The penalties are going to be comparable to other legislation, so that is good. But, again, the bill doesn't even have objects that reflect what is expected in the modern day and with a biodiversity hotspot. We argue that the bill should say, "The purpose of this bill is to protect the biodiversity of WA" and if you put that object in, I don't think then the minister would be able to suddenly write off a stygofauna or two, in effect, play God.

Look, we're hopeful; this bill is probably being debated right now, actually. Yes, at about two o'clock on Tuesday, the 22nd of March, the debate's come on. We are hopeful that if the bill could go to a parliamentary committee, that we could mount a good case for changes. The bill was developed without any consultation with the scientific or conservation sector and, to be frank, as far as I understand the reason that the ALP's bill languished in a drawer and never got into the Parliament is that the consultation with the other really powerful sectors in our state (mining, development, as in land developments and urban development) didn't want it to happen so probably, it was quite a good bill [chuckles].

At the moment—and it might be the last because I could go on about this for a long time—the other thing that is missing in the current protection is that our forests can be logged and even when there is clear evidence that it's impacting the habitat of numbats or ringtail possums, or knocking down trees that've got hollows for black cockatoos, which are also listed, and their level of critical endangerment is going up, the Crown is not bound on this matter; the Crown is exempt. So anything that a department does is not required to take into

²⁷ Gilbert's Potoroo is Australia's most endangered mammal <http://www.potoroo.org>

consideration the protection of our wildlife. It's such a nonsense. Arguably, this bill is going to correct that but what is not clear. The wording is quite confusing; even the lawyers are a bit unclear about what they actually mean. The minister's argued that it will bind the Crown, but then there's no penalties.

AY So, effectively, it doesn't. The Environmental Defender's Office has issued a white paper on it. One of the things that they are critical of is that there's no mandated public involvement in the process. There is no provision at all, which is what you have said, in the bill for the existence of an input of a scientific advisory committee that has independent expertise regarding a species or a community.

WATSON We would argue that the legislation needs to establish such an advisory committee to set some parameters around the sort of people that should be on it and then to say that the minister must take into consideration the advice. The minister's still got ultimately the power to decide because that's the Westminster system; it's not that unusual for ministers to have the last word. But if the minister is required to have an advisory committee, required to listen to their advice and, thirdly, if he wants to dissent from that advice, provide reasons why, those are some very public ways of ensuring that the case needs to be made. If a decision is going to be made not to protect a species or not to take certain actions, against a scientific advisory committee, then the public can get to make that judgement themselves. At the moment, they don't know; the minister just says, "I've decided like this" and, quite frankly, given the sort of environment ministers we've had under this current government, they're very junior in the whole cabinet process. They're always going to be outweighed by economic considerations and that's the pattern in this state, unfortunately, with a few notable exceptions [chuckles].

AY You've said that, as we speak, this is possibly being debated, discussed. What do you think is the likely outcome?

WATSON Look, I think probably it'll be passed through the Assembly relatively quickly. I believe the Labor Party are opposing the bill; whether they move amendments is yet to be seen. Then I think the next thing is to try and persuade the Legislative Council that if you want good, modern legislation that has the support of the community, then you need to remember the part of the process that says the public need to be part of this discussion and really, they haven't. The bill was introduced before Christmas and it's the first time anybody in the conservation sector had seen that bill. And it's complicated. It's complicated legislation

and three or four different, independent legal advisers have come to a slightly different view on it. So, at the very least, the principle is the Parliament shouldn't pass legislation that is unclear or the result of that is going to be in question. Because a simple media release from the minister saying it's all great doesn't really [laughs]—no, this is a very serious business anywhere, but it's particularly serious in Western Australia, and there is a high level of knowledge and interest in the community. I won't say EVEN in the metropolitan area but people have in the last 20 years or so really come to understand about the value of remnant native vegetation in the city: the birds that it brings in, the cooling effect, just the flowering plants; and people will fight hard for that. This bill is coming in at the same time as there's a big push to, I guess, draw a line in the sand with how much more of the Swan coastal plain is going to be cleared and put under urban development. And there's a big push to clear a lot more, so people are pretty angry. If the Barnett Government thinks this is going to be a feather in their cap, which is what they're trying to say by having, as I say, being the first time that comprehensive biodiversity legislation has been introduced in the Parliament, then they might be in for a rude shock because a lot of people don't like it and don't see it as fixing the problem.

AY Is there enough community awareness about this bill, do you believe?

WATSON We're working on that at the moment [laughs]. Well, it's building; let's put it that way. And I think, really, just the last few days, is when it's starting to get some media attention. But we're really hopeful that that media attention will grow. And, again, just this morning, there's a group of eminent scientists who have also come to the conclusion that this bill is wholly inadequate; the likes of Professor Stephen Hopper, who's probably one of the most eminent biodiversity scientists in the state. So I am hoping that somebody might listen to those who are knowledgeable in this area who have the scientific training and experience and credibility. We're talking about people who have spent their whole life studying and talking about the wonders of our natural environment here. Unfortunately, I think part of the problem and challenge in this is we're a very urban population, and steadily so if not increasingly so, a lot of people don't even get out, not even into their local bit of bushland or out into the areas of forest and other places, so they almost don't know what it is that's been lost out there.

AY Do you believe people need to be out there to see it to care?

WATSON It really helps. If you've seen a numbat, and I have—I honestly would probably burst into tears just thinking about it—they are the most beautiful little animals. Or red-tailed black-cockatoos are stunning animals; they are incredibly intelligent and incredibly interesting animals. They live for a very long time. They mate for life. They always nest in the same places. They are part of a very ancient and continuous system. So, yes, I think people get moved in a certain way if they can go out in the bush. I think probably [laughs] part of the challenge, of course, is a lot of our animals are quite hard to see. You can spend a lot of time looking at a log looking for a numbat that you thought you saw about an hour ago [laughs] who might or might not still be there. But the various animal refuge places do provide an opportunity for people to have a bit more of a close-up, and the zoo, too, to its credit, does a great job with endangered species. Yes, so the fact that they're either a bit cryptic or nocturnal goes against them a bit. Pictures help [laughs]. They are very charismatic and, look, I kind of joke, but we also have an obligation to ensure the survival and not just survival but hopefully the thriving of these animals and plants. It's not just because we think that they're cute or not. I firmly believe that we don't have a right to continue to impact on, by our activities, in a way that's going to send species extinct. We've done massive damage to the numbers of mammals in Australia by land-clearing, agricultural practices, primarily logging, burning, clearing for housing, just broadscale landscape change. So it's about time we said, "I think we've done enough damage". And what we've got left, we should really treasure for its intrinsic value, not because I think it's cute. You see this has come back to the stygofauna. I was involved in the campaign about protecting the stygofauna from various proposals up in the Cape Range region. Look, they are singularly unsexy. A lot of them are kind of—there was a blind cockroach, I think, was my favourite. Is that a picture of the blind cockroach? Looks like it.

AY Who could tell?

WATSON Who could tell [laughs]. Oh, that might have been one of the spiders.

AY It says it's a stygofauna.

WATSON A stygofauna; that's the generic term for it, so underground fauna.

AY Oh, I see. It's not attractive.

WATSON I don't think it is, no. Most people would not find it attractive [laughs]. But it's this fundamental principle: why do we think we have the right—well, we've certainly got the power to do it—but is it right to unpick the web of life, to use another analogy? And that maybe brings in a bit of human self-interest, but the intricate relationships between all of these organisms and how that holds together a system that actually supports us, once you get that and you understand that, then everything's valuable. And, sure, we've modified systems; we've favoured certain animals and we've got rid of others [laughs]. We like the warm ones that give us milk but we don't like the ones with big teeth that [laughs] might chase us. Anyway, this is a longer philosophical conversation, but I guess what I'm saying is we have not only a personal obligation to look after animals and plants, but also an international obligation. I think our international reputation is at stake. People come to Western Australia because it's got this—some people, a significant portion of our international visitors, love it because they can see unusual animals, unusual plants, which they can't see anywhere else in the world. So, there's an economic incentive as well.

AY There is, but, in purely practical terms, over the coming weeks and months with the diversion of a federal election, what will the Greens be doing about this bill?

WATSON Moving for the bill to go to a committee to give it time to be understood and for all of its aspects to be thoroughly examined, and mounting a community campaign or supporting a community campaign to send the message very clearly to the rest of the Parliament that much as we'd like modern legislation, this one isn't going to do it.

[End of GizWatson_12]

[GizWatson_13]

AY Today is Thursday, the 14th of April. We are here for another interview with Giz Watson in her home. Last time we spoke, you had been, you said, coerced into nominating for O'Connor.

WATSON Oh, yes [chuckles]. Oh, my arm is feeling very twisted.

AY What stage is that at?

WATSON Yes, now I am the endorsed candidate for O'Connor. It is a fascinating electorate. It's huge, right across to the South Australian border and now, with the change in the federal boundaries, it also extends across the west considerably further, so it includes places like Collie and Bridgetown and Manjimup. Part of it feels like the same as the constituency I was working with in the South West campaign, but of course it also includes the goldfields and a big chunk of the wheatbelt. I guess what I think I'm doing there is I'm saying people in O'Connor should have a choice. I'm saying that the Greens are the opposition to the coalition. Nobody should be under any misguided view that there's much difference between the Nationals and the Liberals because when they are in a coalition at a national level, they lock step. So if you want a choice, the Labor Party is unlikely to run a real candidate out there because they're very pragmatic and don't do that, whereas we would say if you want an alternative, we understand issues about sustainability in the agriculture area. We've got exciting things to say about solar goldfields initiatives, about carbon farming and all the sort of things that are on the horizon and that give me goosebumps. For me, it's an opportunity to talk about those things, and, look, we're under no illusion that we're likely to suddenly win the seat but, on the other hand, we are the party that says doing things business as usual is problematic. We want to particularly talk to the innovators and the people who can see that some quite substantial changes need to happen. So, yes, I'm looking forward to it. I'm not quite sure how I'm going to fit it in along with everything else I'm doing, and I'm going to be running the campaign out of Albany.

AY I'm wondering what effect this will have on the state election for next year for WA Greens. Is it going to stretch you too far to manage this election, which, of course, you were always going to have to fight, I guess, this year?

WATSON The earlier it is the better, obviously. The current indications are that the smart money is with July 2. All the commentators I've read are indicating that that is where we're heading. That, in a way, puts a better distance between this federal election and the state one, which is going to be in March because it's fixed term.

AY Is a double dissolution, though, likely? Does that place more pressure on you or more work for the Greens?

WATSON Not really, actually. A lot of the practical tasks are still the same. You've still got to have people go out and talk to the constituents and be on stalls and polling booths whether you've got one or two of your senators up for re-election. We have no problem with having a double dissolution election, and, in fact, of course it halves the quotas, so we're feeling pretty good that we are more advanced in our organising than we've ever been because we've been reading these tea leaves for a while that we need to be ready for a July election, and we already have selected all our house of reps candidates and people are keen to get started. I think some people are waiting for the actual formal announcement of an election. But I don't think it's any harder for us to run a double dissolution; it just slightly changes, well, it ups the ante in terms of everybody's out. Nationally, we kind of think that that is going to have swings and roundabouts. We might be under more pressure perhaps in South Australia but we feel pretty comfortable that we will be okay here in WA. I think the last polling had us very close to 15 per cent, which is what you need to get both your senators up. Yes, and there's just great energy. People are really keen to get out there. We had Richard Di Natale in town on Tuesday and filled the town hall, so that's pretty good when you haven't even called an election yet.

AY Right, back to state politics.

WATSON So the enthusiasm doesn't wane. I have to say it's rather tragic but it just keeps going [chuckles]. You'd think I'd know better [chuckles].

AY We'll ask you later about whether you're going to stand for the state Parliament if you're not successful in O'Connor; perhaps you will be. We'll leave that one for the moment.

WATSON We'll see.

AY One of the things that we touched on earlier is the fact that as a party without a lot of people in the Parliament, you don't have mentors and you did touch on the importance of some of the other people like the Clerk of the upper house in mentoring you. Laurie Marquet²⁸ is one of these people who is someone that you respected a lot but who then fell from grace. I know you'd like to talk about that.

WATSON Yes, yes. It's sort of almost like a Greek tragedy, you have to say. For those who knew Laurie reasonably well, he was quite a theatrical person so [chuckles] sometimes you wonder about these things. Absolutely, when the Greens went from having one member (in the 1993 election we had Jim Scott in there, and then myself and Chrissy Sharp got in) and we were also in the balance of power along with the Democrats, so it was quite a different ball game and we needed to understand procedures in a way that Jim hadn't really had to be quite so across. I hadn't realised that, of course, the Parliament included the staff who worked there and the Clerks of the Parliament in the Westminster system are actually quite significant sources of information, advice. If you want to try and introduce a bill or a motion, the timing of things and all of those technical things, it's their job to provide impartial advice to all members of Parliament, which is a pretty powerful role and, I know it's probably true in a lot of Parliaments, it was always called the "Clerk's Party". So there was the Greens, the Labor Party, the Liberals and then there was the "Clerk's Party" [chuckles] so you had to get things past the "Clerk's Party" as well. I think it was a bit tongue-in-cheek.

Laurie had been not only a really professional adviser but also supportive in the role of being a friend, I think, in recognising that we were new in the Parliament and we didn't have a big team to surround us and all the rest, and certainly took us under the wing in terms of lengthy lectures about separation of powers and parliamentary systems in other countries, like the French system, which is different, and the American system. So I felt like I was sort of doing Politics 101 somewhat belatedly. I think the thing that I wanted to touch on is that, as you say, the falling from grace was a pretty shocking period. I think it's fair to say that those senior members in all parties in the Legislative Council who worked closely with Laurie, when the news broke that he had been—one, that he wasn't coming back to the Parliament; two, that he was unwell; and three, that he'd been charged with—actually it didn't happen in that order.

²⁸ In August 2005, Laurie Marquet resigned as Clerk of the Legislative council after twenty-three years.
[http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/intranet/libpages.nsf/WebFiles/chronicles+jul+dec+05/\\$FILE/chronicles+jul+dec+05.pdf](http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/intranet/libpages.nsf/WebFiles/chronicles+jul+dec+05/$FILE/chronicles+jul+dec+05.pdf)

We were aware that he was unwell, so that was in itself disturbing, but then that he was charged with embezzling funds from the Council, I think there was an enormous sense of disbelief. That played out, I suppose, and one of my concerns about that process was being aware of the powers and the role of the Corruption and Crime Commission and that they were likely to become involved in this because it would come under the definition of “corruption”. Having again spent a lot of time debating and considering that piece of legislation when it was debated through the Parliament and receiving a lot of advice through Laurie Marquet, who was very knowledgeable about these things and very insistent that the Parliament should be the highest law in the land and that nothing should impinge on the Parliament’s right to govern itself including penalties, including rules and all those kind of things. He was quite adamant that the CCC having a reach into the Parliament was problematic. So one of the questions that came up for me was: If the CCC were involved in this investigation, were they searching the Parliament for documents? Were they bugging the Parliament for further information? I could never get a direct answer about that, even from the President. I thought that was quite problematic because, as far as I understand it, the Parliament should not be subject to that. There are very strict rules about confidentiality in other aspects of parliamentary work, committee work; no photographs are to be taken inside Parliament, you can’t wander into another member’s room and look at their drawers and look into their files or whatever. Some pretty strong protocols and standing orders that were challenged if the CCC had officers who were actually operating within the Parliament, which is quite likely that they did. So that was the first thing.

Then the other thing that happened was when Laurie became unwell, I asked if I could get in contact with him to see if he wanted someone to visit him and see how he was, because, you know, as a friend basically. He was happy for me to go and visit him, so I did go and visit him at the hospice, which is actually conveniently close to where I am here. I became aware very quickly that his mental processes had profoundly deteriorated. I had been told this by the Acting Clerk who was kind of the go-between in this process. I am not medically trained but it was obvious to me that he wasn’t able to think coherently. Then I started to think about this, and I should actually also add the other thing that crossed my mind was that it was quite likely that his room was being bugged. Independently I came to that thinking.

AY Why did you think that?

WATSON Because I knew that the CCC was involved and I knew that's the sort of thing they do. Yes, it transpired that that's what they were doing in his hospice and that he also had an entrapment laid out in his hospice as well by someone he knew as a friend who came in to pose, to suggest that he could obtain some drugs for him or that he could—you know, here is a man who is clearly mentally unable to think straight, I don't know what the actual technical term is, but

AY What condition was he suffering?

WATSON I am not sure of the actual name of it but the closest comparable condition is Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, which is mad cow disease, which causes lesions on the brain, so scarring, and parts of the brain start to not function, misfire, and it's a gradual process. I understand that the person who has it knows that it is happening. It would be distressing for anyone but particularly distressing for someone who valued their intellect and their mental capacity very, very highly. Anyway, when I went to see Laurie in hospice, I actually made a point of talking to him outside, unlike Moira Rayner²⁹ who came unstuck by talking to him inside, and that whole unfortunate choice she made between honouring her friendship and dishonouring her formal role in the inquiry was quite an extraordinary set of circumstances.

AY And she came down on the side of her friendship.

WATSON She did. That's what she says she did. She basically warned Laurie that his phone might be being monitored and then he ceased using his phone; therefore, they were able to put two and two together. She wasn't actually ultimately—she was charged but I believe the DPP decided that it wasn't in the public interest to pursue that prosecution.

So I suppose for me there's some really legal, ethical questions around this whole case. Why was someone who was unwell and maybe had been unwell for a quite considerable period—because when I pieced it together, looking back, Laurie's behaviour had become fairly erratic before he actually left, I just thought he was tired. That was my impression. I am not a doctor but who's to say that his mental deterioration hadn't got to a point where he was not thinking

²⁹ Moira Rayner is a senior lawyer who has been Acting Commissioner for Equal Opportunity, WA, 2002; a commissioner of the WA Anti-Corruption Commission (2002-2004) and an acting (occasional) commissioner of its successor, the Corruption and Crime Commission (until 2005) She chaired the Law Reform Commission in WA; was Commissioner for Equal Opportunity for Victoria; a Hearings Commissioner for the Australian Human Rights Commission; and an Acting Anti-Corruption Commissioner. <http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE5662b.htm>

straight in terms of deciding, “Oh, well, what I need to do is to have some drugs to keep me going in the job”, which is what I understand to be the case. So he took amphetamines to keep him going because he didn’t want—I guess it’s sort of covering for his condition. To me, that would be a very strong mitigating matter. Now, who knows, because you can’t kind of re-create it retrospectively, but I think he does deserve the benefit of the doubt in that regard. However, he was pursued, he was further embroiled and entrapped, but, ironically enough, in none of this investigation was anybody else charged. You’d think that if there was somebody who was supplying amphetamines, then all of this effort to investigate should have found them. Apparently it didn’t, and for the life of me, you know, you’ve got to wonder why that is.

Meanwhile he had to suffer the stress of having his property confiscated under the proceeds of crime act, which in itself is a controversial bit of legislation, which we opposed. If you think about the name of that bit of legislation, “proceeds of crime”, the inference is: “I’ve made money in some way that’s corrupt or selling drugs or doing something criminal. I’ve bought something with that money; therefore, that asset should be confiscated so the state can use that because it’s a proceed of crime.” Well, actually, what it does is that it allows the state to confiscate property that you might have had for years; nothing to do with the \$27 000 or whatever it was that he is alleged to have embezzled. I know for a fact, because we’d been out to visit Laurie on a couple of occasions out to his house, he was absolutely—it was his whole dream. It was his kind of other side of what he did when he wasn’t in Parliament. He had this amazing replica Italian country villa set in a sort of “woodland setting” and it was his pride and joy. Here’s a sick man who then gets his most important, probably the only major thing that he has that is important to him, taken away from him. I just went, “That’s pretty tough.”

On top of all that, I think there was a sense that everybody was keeping their heads below the parapets. As soon as there’s any political mud that starts flying around—it’s not just with Laurie’s case but I’ve seen it in other cases where people keep their heads right down as though they never ever met them. How does that work, you know? Don’t you have the courage to sort of say this person deserves to be treated fairly? It doesn’t matter what side of politics they are coming from. I just don’t think he was treated fairly. I think whereas when he died, in all other circumstances you would have expected a very large and respectful congregation to be farewelling him, and as it was the Greens all went. All the Greens MPs went and there was, I think, a couple of representatives from the other parties, but the number of parliamentarians who would have worked closely with Laurie, would have benefited from his professional advice and probably would have counted him as a friend,

they didn't turn up. Some of them have said, "I didn't want to have my photo taken at that." I think we need to be a little bit more courageous and stand up against and defend. It takes a little time to explain why this arguably may not be fair. There's much more behind this than an exciting story about someone who's gone off the rails and done something bad. It's like sort of magazine-level journalism. I know there was a couple of journalists, quite senior journalists, I felt, who behaved badly over this affair too, including trying to sort of jump over his back fence and take photos of him. So it was a nasty period and it left me feeling very sorry for Laurie and his partner and for the fact that it couldn't have been dealt with more maturely.

AY Do you have a sense that your fellow parliamentarians understood that his illness might have had something to do with the embezzlement, something to do with the drugs, or did people not take the trouble to understand?

WATSON Well, look, I think it was further complicated by the fact that the condition, as I understand it, is often associated—it's one of the conditions that can develop if you're HIV positive. Because Laurie was a gay man I think that was the additional stigma and so they kind of really didn't want to know about that either or they did in an unhealthy kind of way, I suppose. So there was that element in there as well and I would have the impression that most people did know what the sort of condition was, but I could have been wrong. Information flies around that place in no time [chuckles]; that's how those places work. You try and keep a secret in the halls of Parliament, it's pretty hard [laughs].

AY Looking, though, at the processes and what actually happened: he has embezzled money. Who should have investigated that? If it wasn't the CCC, who should have been responsible for it?

WATSON The Parliament—it's Parliament's money—and the police.

AY Within Parliament, who within Parliament?

WATSON Well, that's a good question. Yes, I am not aware of what—I know what you'd do to investigate other members; you'd establish a select committee and you'd take evidence one way or the other. I assume you might have to have kind of almost like a select committee of his peers, which would be Clerks from other Parliaments. I don't know whether there's any precedent for that, and that might have been part of the problem.

I also don't have an issue with the fact that it was a police matter. I think it was rightfully a police matter; it's stealing and it would certainly appear to involve illicit drugs. We could go into what we think about illicit drugs, but it's another reason why, you know [sigh], the problem with criminalising people who use certain substances. If Laurie had drunk himself silly on whisky, yes, it might have had the same result in terms of his competency at work. He might have died just as quickly and he might have stolen money to do that, but it was the fact also that it was an illicit drug and they are very expensive so, you know, he made no secret of the fact that he used drugs in his younger days. He lived in San Francisco. He almost made a bit of a joke of it. In fact, if you look back at his history, he was once caught with some marijuana coming through customs at Perth Airport. Well, that was pretty dumb [chuckles] but it became a joke.

He still got the job at the Parliament. He was quite open in lots of ways about these things, and I am not defending someone embezzling large chunks of money and it was obviously a premeditated thing. It's not that he kind of went to the till and helped himself from the cash. He actually set up a company to channel money into and, clearly, that was wrong. But was he thinking clearly? Was he capable? Was he actually already incapacitated by his condition, that he wasn't—arguably he might not have been culpable. I don't know. You'd have to have expert advice on that; you'd have to have some sort of medical assessment.

AY Do you believe that the Parliament would have investigated fairly and do you believe that they might have done a better job? Can the Parliament investigate itself? Is that one of its roles?

WATSON Certainly in terms of my experience and what I've understood about members policing each other or regulating each other, I've seen members who have basically lost their seats because they've been found to (well, that was controversial in and of itself) be trying to set up committee outcomes inappropriately with an external source. And when that external source was Brian Burke and Noel Crichton-Browne, again, the CCC were bugging those phones so that's how they knew that members of Parliament were also involved in this process. But that's an interesting case study because the outcome of that was that the Parliament came down very heavily on the two members who were directly named, as it were, and I couldn't find a precedent anywhere in any other commonwealth Parliament where that had been treated in that way. I believe the outcome was like that because if the CCC were not happy with the way that the inquiry proceeded and the

outcome, they have the capacity to call it in. So they are always kind of looking over the shoulder, and I think that's wrong. Of course, the ultimate judge of parliamentarians is whether they get re-elected at the next election. Both those people didn't get re-elected, so you could say the system worked. Yes, look, arguably they were there for another year and a half or whatever it was, but, you know [sigh].

AY This assumes that the public knows what's going on and does it need something like a CCC to ...

WATSON To cast more light on it?

AY Yes.

WATSON Except the CCC doesn't always operate in the light of day. That's one of the issues with the CCC and they would argue when you're dealing with some matters, you need to have privacy provisions. And in a way it's not dissimilar to the way the parliamentary committees operate. The parliamentary committees can hear evidence in private, they can subpoena witnesses, they can call for documents. They have pretty substantial powers in terms of personal liberties. Although, interestingly enough, if one of your witnesses is in Singapore and says, "I'm not actually able to be in Western Australia", there's another interesting question. So the guy who ran the company who was running the Peel Health Campus was based in Singapore. So you've got a Western Australian health matter, a high level of public interest, and the private company that runs that campus, the CEO, says, "I'm a Singapore national. Sorry, I am not interested in the Western Australian Parliament." Very interesting.

AY And that then becomes the end of the matter?

WATSON Well, lawyers exchanged letters for quite a while and then I think the thing that really stuck in my throat was his lawyer sent, I can't remember the name of the guy, a letter, after we had concluded our inquiry and tabled our report, and said, "Oh, my client is now able to meet with you if you'd like." I thought you might as well have kind of done the whole single finger [laughs]. It was very much like that. I thought this is one of the problems, a major problem, with private corporations, multinational corporations. I mean, Nauru and what's happening there is another one: how do you manage cross-borders when companies can skip around where they like? They're outside of the governance structures and the

powers of elected Parliaments. That's a slight, sort of tangent, but it's all related to the question of powers of the Parliament, whether things are done in a public way.

So, you could argue the CCC is there to probe. Its powers are to deal with misconduct in the public sector and, if you remember when it was originally established, it was all trumpeted about having the powers to deal with organised crime. Now I don't know if you can think of a single organised criminal that has been brought to justice by the CCC, I can't, but they had a pretty good field day in various departments and I was involved in another one of those. That was a report that was done about the education department and whether the education department was dealing adequately with allegations of sexual impropriety between teachers and students. So I chaired that select committee and it was because the CCC had tabled a report that said that they weren't happy with the way the department was doing it, and the then opposition, which was the Liberals, said, "Well, the Labor minister should have known. It was her job to know that this was happening in her department and she didn't." So there was an interesting inquiry into what she knew, what she didn't know, how she would have known and all that kind of stuff. But that also involved the CCC.

AY And how did you work with the CCC in that instance?

WATSON They were just one of the witnesses that we called in. They are perfectly professional in their way and cooperated with the committee, so there weren't any complaints about that. But there are times when, for example, the tensions between them and the police are absolutely palpable. Again, if you look at the Select Committee into the Police Raid on *The Sunday Times*³⁰, an interesting one for a whole range of reasons and, again, the Greens, we gave the numbers in the house to establish that select committee. I just point that out because often the conservatives say the Greens always do everything with the Labor Party. Well, that one was an opposition-dominated select committee when the Libs were in opposition, similarly the one with the Department of Education.

I made the assessment that the public interest was very high on both of those matters, even if there was a political agenda to try and find a smoking gun. Both those inquiries, after the first hearing, it was obvious there wasn't a political smoking gun. There were all sorts of other chaos [laughs] that we uncovered and spent months investigating. But the reason I raise that

³⁰ In April 2008, police raided a *The Sunday Times* to try to find the source of a story on what the state government might spend on advertising in an election year.
[http://parliament.wa.gov.au/Parliament/commit.nsf/\(Evidence+Lookup+by+Com+ID\)/E9801F584F3ECDEC48257831003C1075/\\$file/sy.all.080630.tro.004.ko.d.pdf](http://parliament.wa.gov.au/Parliament/commit.nsf/(Evidence+Lookup+by+Com+ID)/E9801F584F3ECDEC48257831003C1075/$file/sy.all.080630.tro.004.ko.d.pdf)

is those hearings where—so the police wanted the CCC to raid to get the information from *The Sunday Times* and they considered that it was a CCC matter, not a police matter. The CCC said, “No, but we’ll reserve the right to keep an eye on you and see how you go.” Right? So you probably remember; it got pretty much a shemozzle, the whole thing, of course. Pictures were taken and so it became quite a big media story in and of itself. In the hearings we would have the CCC called in to give evidence and all the senior police would be sitting up the back taking notes and then the next witness would be the police and all the CCC are sitting up the back taking notes. And because you’re sitting out the front chairing this committee, you can tell there’s no love lost between these two groups.

The other fascinating thing—and I know it’s come out now with the various reports on the operation of the CCC—is there’s a fairly steady stream of senior police officers going into the CCC and then going back into the police service. So I understand the need for a high level and a powerful body that can deal with corruption and organised crime; I just wish that they would actually focus on that. It’s been really powerful in New South Wales, what they’ve managed to do in terms of donations, and so I do understand and support the need for that. But be very careful about how those powers are granted for an unelected body to influence the Parliament. I have to say, the Parliament ... part of the deal in establishing the CCC was to establish a standing committee of parliamentary oversight. I was told very frankly, “This is one committee you’re not going to get on.” They’ve never had a problem with me going on any other committee but, “You’re not going on the CCC committee.” So that’s interesting. And the CCC committee, of course, was/is privy to a lot more information than will ever become public, perhaps not a problem, but it does say how is parliamentary oversight actually happening there. I mean, to his credit, Nick Goiran, as chair of that CCC joint committee, I think does quite a good job.

AY How would you then like to see the CCC restructured? You sound as though you just think it has (a) too much power and it wields it inappropriately sometimes.

WATSON Sometimes.

AY But you are acknowledging that there might be a need for a body like the CCC?

WATSON Yes. Look, I mean, corruption in high places is quite hard to track down, to get into. It often takes leaks of information. The Panama leak of documents is huge, not that that’s related to a CCC, that’s a whistleblower. But it’s a real tension between whether you

give more powers—because one of the arguments is you give more power to the police; to have a more powerful police. The trouble with that is, then, who polices the police? Interestingly enough, yesterday I was at my annual panel, which is about the sex work sector, which is another area which I kind of got drawn into looking at the laws in that area. This is actually second year medical students at Notre Dame University, and they have a panel to tell or to educate future doctors about what are the sort of questions you'd need to know about people who are actually doing sex work and their public health. That's the driver.

The reason I bring that up is that one of the things that the police do there is they keep a database of all the sex workers in the state, even though it's not illegal to be a sex worker. So I think having some organisation that has the power to investigate the police is really important. When there was a royal commission in this state, this is going back a while now, one of the things that that royal commission did not do is to allow people who had anything to say about prostitution in the state, sex work, because it had long been the containment policy, which is an unwritten policy which protects certain brothels and shuts down others, and certainly shuts down anybody who is operating in a public place. That royal commission didn't allow people to give evidence in private. So what I know from people in the sector is that everybody was way too scared to give evidence in public, that people had been intimidated, and we all remember Shirley Finn. Not a single police officer in this state has ever been prosecuted for corruption. That royal commission said, because they didn't actually get any evidence from the sector, that, as in other states, it is certainly a perception of potential corruption if you have the police, who are basically running the brothels, which is what they continue to do. So that's a bit of unfinished business. We actually drafted some really great legislation, got it through the Parliament; it hadn't got the royal assent. Alan Carpenter called an election and it was one of the ones that just disappeared out the backdoor after an enormous amount of work, sorry. But that's an example where you do need another organisation that can investigate the police.

AY But is it the CCC?

WATSON Or is it a—I don't know, a parliamentary—you could argue that a parliamentary select committee has the powers to do that. It's interesting. The Parliament's always been rather nervous about doing that. There was the one, which is coming back to my mind. Reg Davies was involved in—one of my predecessors in North Metro. And I think that was a pretty difficult inquiry, I believe. It's interesting because what happened, because, just to touch on that, when I got elected the first time, Reg ran in that election as well with his

son and had already said to me that he wanted to give preferences to the Greens. He said he didn't want to give preferences to the Democrats because he couldn't stand Cheryl Kernot. So people make decisions [laughs] for all sorts of reasons. I was the beneficiary of preference flow from his vote, and that's what got me over the line the first time. And, interesting enough, there was a sort of acknowledgement that he would like me to continue to work on police matters. So, we certainly did, I guess, inherit, in a lot of ways, a lot of police whistleblowers came to my office. Not that there was a lot of them, but those that were came to my office.

Also because Reg's electorate officer, when she finished working for Reg, came to work for me, so she was the contact. So, yes, I guess I got quite a lot of knowledge and information about problems within the operation of the police service in WA. And I mentioned Shirley Finn, and you've got the mint swindle. Like any police service, like any group of people, there are going to be those who abuse the powers that they've got. Police have extraordinarily high powers and they've only been given more and more under successive Liberal and Labor governments. And I remain concerned about that, but I'm not that enamoured with the CCC. Now, maybe if I'd been on the standing committee overseeing the CCC I might have had a bit more insight into it. But the Parliament recommended changes to the CCC act, and to my knowledge that hasn't happened, because there was no political agreement about how those changes should take place.

We don't hear so much about that, at the moment, that you'd notice, so I'm not quite sure what's happening there. I assume they're probably still ticking away doing their stuff. And I've got no problem if they really are going to deal with some of the nasty ends of organised crime and violence in this state, but they haven't done for whatever reason. And I think the public would hope that that would be ... again, perhaps we haven't got that much organised crime in this state; I'm not sure. It's very hard to get an accurate measure on that because it's one of those areas that's wheeled out as a fear-inducing factor. I remember—sorry, this is triggering all sorts of connections.

There was another inquiry and I remember it was early on because Peter Foss was on the Standing Committee on Legislation with me and we wanted to get information about bikie gangs. I think it might have been—what would have been the legislation? It was going to have an impact on bikie gangs, so the police were keen to impress upon the members of the committee how interconnected and dangerous all these bikie gangs were not only around Australia but also internationally. So, they came into our committee meeting with a very large

sheet of paper with little diamonds and circles and arrows going all over it and the font of the descriptors on these little stars and circles was about, like, 6 point, so you couldn't read it [chuckles]. It was just a little kind of squiggle. We said, "That little triangle there or that star there, what's that?" "Oh, I can't tell you [laughs]." What this chart was, hypothetically, about how these unnamed organisations were linked to each other and I remember Peter Foss and I just looked at each other and cracked up and thought: that's excellent evidence [laughs]. We couldn't use it, of course, because it didn't actually illustrate anything. That's the dilemma when something has to be so secret that you can't actually show us, but you want to impress on us that it's something that we need to act urgently on. Sorry, you're going to have to trust that we're parliamentarians and we know our job and tell us or don't bother.

AY I'm still trying to pin you down on that: do we trust politicians then to be the watchers?

WATSON To investigate ourselves?

AY Yes.

WATSON I would come down on the side of yes, because I think that there are a number of checks and balances and, of course, the media is a very strong watchdog in and of itself. It doesn't always get it right, but it's certainly keen to look for information. I think that the select committee process to investigate members, I've seen it actually do its job, not without its sort of costs. Interestingly enough, it was an enormous stress on the parliamentarians that were on the select committee, so the ones who had to judge their peers found it pretty hard as well. I think because the role of parliamentarians is so different to what most people do, that the public will probably say, "No, no, we ought to have somebody else looking at parliamentarians", because we're all shifty so-and-sos and not to be trusted. We have to declare our financial interests. So, quite a large list of—you have to declare annually interests in property, shares, all that kind of stuff. So, that's there available on the record.

Where we get our money from in terms of donations to parties is quite rightfully on the public record too. We would actually argue that needs to be made more thorough and that's one of the issues that we've been pursuing at a state and a national level, but, rather than having to report that once a year, you should actually do it when you receive it. Then certainly in an election period if you receive a donation over a certain amount, we would argue the amount

should be reasonably low, then it should be a kind of online publication. As soon as you've actually got it in your account, then whoever's thinking about voting for you can go online and say, "Okay, well, Joe Smith received \$100 000 from the casino. That might affect how I vote." But, in fact, that data is not published until after the election, which is all a bit too late really. Well, not a bit; it is too late. So more could be done there. Again, we wrote papers, we tried to introduce legislation about capping political donations. The public funding went through, so we do have public funding at the state level, which is good, but our argument is if you've got public funding, then you should be reducing the private donations. If you want to get influence out of the political system and out of influencing the decision-makers, then you should either cap it or make it equal. So, that's more work to be done there.

I think if you did those things, then people might have more confidence in their MPs. So, I'd come at it from that angle, because some of the work that we do as parliamentarians requires us to keep private. There is information I've got which I can never reveal, witnesses that we had before our committee who were heard in private and the record's in the Parliament, but it's not going to be released, and I think that's appropriate. But members need to take that very seriously. My experience is most members do take that role seriously. And if you're involved in corrupt behaviour, it's quite likely to be in the public realm, rather than within the Parliament. So, it's subject to other scrutiny, you know, if you run into a few parked cars, for example, that was fairly public.

AY That would probably do as an example. You mentioned earlier that you had problems with the Criminal Property Confiscation Act.

WATSON Yes.

AY What would the Greens like to see?

WATSON Okay. So, we have an issue with pre-emptive actions and, in effect, what that law has done has meant that you haven't been tried and convicted of an offence, but meanwhile, you don't actually have to have been convicted to have your property confiscated. In the case of Laurie Marquet, he was charged with quite a considerable number of charges, embezzlement and probably perversion of the course of justice and a whole range, but he wasn't actually ever tried and convicted. So, the fundamental principle that has been offended there is your presumption of innocence.

I have to tell you one of the most shocking things I ever heard in the Parliament was a debate, in fact, between my colleague Alison Xamon and the then, and still, Attorney General Michael Mischin, who at that stage was relatively new in the Parliament. I can't remember what the debate was, but the principle that we were discussing was the right to presume that a person is innocent and Alison was making a very firm point that that was a principle that we thought was really important. The Attorney General said, and it's on the *Hansard*, "What? You mean all those murderers and rapists, they've got a right to the presumption of innocence?" And she said, "Yes, until they are actually convicted [chuckles]." What? I can't believe I just heard that. It was absolutely extraordinary. This man is a lawyer. He was DPP; he was a prosecutor for the department. Anyhow, that's just some of the things you contend with.

The point is with the confiscation of assets, I think there's a bit of support for an argument that says, "If you have unexplained wealth, that there's a reasonable suspicion", that's the sort of bar; there's different bars in criminal law, "that you have purchased that asset or obtained that asset with the proceeds of crime", possibly we could entertain that, but it's still pre-emptive of the presumption of innocence. What has happened with this is that the assets that can be confiscated are not limited to those that are clearly linked, you know, that you bought it after they think you did the crime, right? So, you have a situation where a house might be confiscated in the case of, I think, Laurie Marquet is a good example. He had owned that house for a long time before he ever allegedly committed an offence. But the house was confiscated. So, it couldn't possibly have been the proceeds of a crime because he already had it. So, at the very least it's a sleight of hand to suggest that it's the "Proceeds of Crime Act". If it's the "Confiscation of Assets Act", that's a different thing. Now, we also have cases where someone who is, say, a young person who's still living at home is charged with a drug offence and their parents' or grandparents' house is confiscated. Just on any assessment that seems profoundly unfair and especially if, say, these people are—well, it doesn't matter if they're poor or not; it's their asset.

To be honest, apart from filling the state's coffers, I'm not quite sure what it's meant to achieve, other than deterrence effect. If the concern is that somebody's going to skip the country, there are other ways of dealing with that, or go interstate. There's long been ways of stopping people at the border, they're not always effective, or whatever, but I think what's actually behind the whole thing is freezing assets makes people—in effect, it's almost like a handcuff because they can't do much if their assets have been frozen. I think it's also potentially an additional punishment. Again, it's an additional punishment prior to a

conviction. I'm not sure what happens if they are not convicted. Say, their case is dismissed or they win the case, do they get their interest back?

The other one that was in a similar category was the confiscation of vehicles. I don't know if you remember the hoon legislation³¹. I think it's the only time that Paul Murray from *The West Australian* has said nice things about the Greens because he actually noticed that I was the one who predicted exactly what was going to happen with this, because it was the case where somebody was driving a Ferrari, the young boy who was servicing it or something, anyway, and the Ferrari, which belonged to a doctor, or maybe it was a Lamborghini or something, and this caused outraged because it was this sort of valuable asset of some upstanding citizen. It was a very badly drafted piece of legislation, at the least. We opposed it outright, again for the same principle, but it was done in a hurry, it was very political, a populist sort of law and order bill, sounds great: lock up their cars. But don't write it in such haste that you're going to confiscate a car that you end up punishing the owner of the car, not the driver.

AY But going back to property, if a person is convicted then, what should the deterrence be from profiting from crime, which is what this is about; it is supposed to deter people from profiting from crime.

WATSON Well, I mean, you can structure a law that makes substantially high fines for that particular offence, whatever it is. I don't think that it is correct to pre-emptively take something away. I'm trying to do an analogy with something else. What would it be? We think you're about to steal that car, no, that doesn't quite work, because with criminal investigation, you can actually act to pre-empt a criminal offence. The police could actually arrest somebody if they thought they were about to steal a car, so that is not a good example. I'll try and see if I can think of one. Remember I'm not trained in law, I just kind of learnt this on the job and had some good schooling from various people and debated a lot of criminal law and talked to the law association and other people, but the principle is that you should be innocent until proven guilty. It's the obligation of the state to make the case, because the state has all the resources to bring a prosecution against an individual. You have a right to be represented in court, all of those kind of things, and the punishment should adhere to principles of proportionality.

³¹ The Road Traffic Act 1974 was amended by the Road Traffic Amendment (Hoons) Bill 2009 because of community concerns over organised street drag racing and reckless driving, commonly known as Hoon driving <https://www.gotocourt.com.au/traffic-law/wa/hoon-laws/>

So, you shouldn't make a hugely disproportionate penalty for something; you've got to look at how the penalties match up with other jurisdictions that are similar. Often with the Standing Committee on Legislation, we'd look at the penalties in the other states. But there was something else that just jumped into my head about that one there, the proportionality issue. It'll come back.

AY It'll come back; all right. I did want to talk about a totally different area. Public health was something

WATSON Portfolio areas, yes.

AY It was one of your many. Why a particular interest in public health?

WATSON Family sort of connections and sort of culture, as much as anything else. So, my father was a GP. My mum was a public health nurse and a nurse before that. My younger sister is a nurse—works in Aboriginal health, sexual health, school health—and my other sister is a psychologist. So, it's sort of in the blood a bit. In fact, I wanted to be a doctor more than anything else. In those days, you couldn't get into uni unless you had a really high mark; there were no other criteria. I just missed out by a couple of points and that history then took me somewhere else.

The Greens, and it reflects my own interest, are interested in a holistic approach: How do you have a healthy community? How do you prevent unwellness, not just disease but also unwellness? How do you keep people happy? I think it's such a challenge for us as a community and certainly one we're not getting right at the moment, and mental health is probably the most glaring and frightening area where the indicators are all going in the wrong direction; still people aren't happy and continue to manifest dysfunction and unwellness and misery. So, yes, I feel quite passionate about trying to get that right.

I was pretty involved in the antismoking pushes and, again, worked really closely with Jim McGinty on that and enjoyed the work that we did on that, put the state in a position where we had some of the best legislation in the country, have led almost the world in terms of decline in tobacco use in young people. So, I'm really delighted to have played a role in that. I feel it's such important work and it's long term and often what happens, governments don't pay such close attention to those things that have got a 10, 15, 30-year horizon.

Hearing loss and ear health, particularly in Aboriginal kids, I did quite a lot of work trying to raise the profile of that issue. It's not new, but it desperately needs doing differently.

Sexual health was the other one, and this is an area where political advisers and all the rest would advise you to run a mile from this one, because it's not going to win you any votes and it's sort of an intriguing area, but it's not one where you really want to go. But, in our view, the Greens' view and my view strongly is that issues around sexual health and those who choose to sell sex is not going to go away and the way that it's policed and regulated in this state is an utter legal nonsense. I was reminded again just yesterday talking to this panel, which included a public health nurse, one of the brothel owners, one of the workers and the outreach organisation which represents sex workers. Currently, the police allow a number of establishments to operate in this state. They turn a blind eye to their operation, in effect, because as much as it's not illegal to sell sex, it's illegal to live off the earnings. So, if you are a driver or a receptionist or a security person who might work at Ada Rose's, for example, which was the example down at Fremantle where we were, then you are actually breaking a law. But the police know; the police regularly go and talk to people.

The police in fact, keep a database of all the people who are offering sexual services in the state, if they can; they've got a complete database. In my view—and I've raised this in the Parliament; if I was still there I would continue to raise it—is totally inappropriate, is the least I can say about it, for the police to maintain a database of people who haven't broken the law. It's as straightforward as that. You name me one other area where the police keep a database of people who haven't actually broken any law of this state. Of course, if you want to go then to this question of perceived corruption if not actual corruption, certainly two of the speakers at the session yesterday say they had been coerced by police, they had been put under pressure to provide sexual services, they had been exposed in front of their family that they were doing sex work, so it's a very powerful database to have and they use it. There's no doubt they'd use it. Why would you want to have it if you didn't?

I've said in the Parliament and I'd say it again: it's a blackmail list for the rest of their lives. Even if 95, 98 per cent of the police service are totally aboveboard and would never dream of this doing this kind of thing, there's obviously some that do and will and apart from anything else it's the principle of it. So, it is about human rights. It is a breach of human rights for those people to be harassed into providing that information to the police and because there's no regulation around it, how can they be sure about who might have access to the database,

what they can do with it, how long they can keep it et cetera? We know in areas with privacy requirements in legislation, it's quite strict about what data is kept and how long it's kept for, who can have access to it, how it's secured. Can you have access to it yourself? Can you ask for your record to be deleted? According to the answers that the police gave me, "Yes, of course, you can; you just go and ask them." Yes, right, sure. So, it's really a chunk of unfinished business, in my view, and I'm quite ... Most political parties run a mile from this; they don't want to know about it. They just hope it's quietly going on somewhere else.

It's not that pretty either. One of the things that happened when we did—the Labor Party and ourselves got together and we decided we would have an inquiry and then we would draft legislation to put through the Parliament. I had women come to me, totally scared, and said, "Look, I can't be seen coming here. I have this information about police and what they've done", including murder. And what do you do with that information, really? I mean, they weren't just talking about Shirley Finn. So, where do I take that information? The CCC maybe; I don't know. But there is an element of fear that has been around in WA for quite a long time. Whether it's still like that, I don't know. I'm not in a position to do that much about it, so I'm not kind of going around asking the questions, but I certainly will always speak out for the human rights of everybody, including people who choose or who find themselves in a situation where they are selling sexual services, whether they are a drug addict or not, or whether they're doing it because they want to get through uni. All of that is not my business. My business is whether they are treated fairly. If they're not actually breaking any laws, they ought to be left alone, basically.

AY But what about their health, health issues?

WATSON Well, interestingly enough, and the public health nurse who was sitting next to me reminded us again that the level of sexual health in sex workers is actually higher than the general population. I'm not saying that that's 100 per cent foolproof; there are probably some people who would engage in risky behaviour. But because of peer support and peer education from organisations like Magenta, which the conservatives drastically defunded at various points in time, it's in the self-interest of those workers to maintain their health. It really becomes quite problematic to work if you're not well anyway so they argue, "It is in our own interest and don't patronise us about keeping ourselves healthy. We know more about identifying risks than"—they looked around the room with this bunch of medical students—"probably some of the unsafe behaviour that some of you might be participating in." So, you're more at risk going out to the nightclub, really. And one of the good things that we got

through the Parliament, again with the Liberals, was that it's an offence not to use a prophylactic or to request sexual services without. A bit hard to enforce, but it does give the workers and the management the power of the law behind them to say, "It's not just me saying that."

AY That was going to be my question: can you effectively legislate?

WATSON Well, we looked at the New Zealand decriminalised system where there is still regulation, but the police aren't involved unless there's criminal activity. My argument there is criminal activity happens in casinos and nightclubs and all sorts of places: why should it be, and this is one of the things that police wanted in the legislation, the right to walk into a sexual establishment whenever they want to without a search warrant? It was interesting, because it was right to the eleventh hour that the Commissioner of Police actually said, "No, we won't insist on that", and that was a real breakthrough. If they suspect that there are drugs on the premises or that somebody's being coerced or someone's underage, then they get a search warrant.

AY I was thinking about health still, so if there is legislation, can it be effective in helping with health issues?

WATSON Our approach, looking at it primarily as a public health matter, was to say, "What we want to do is ensure the minimum risk and the maximum health outcomes for everybody involved in this, whether you think it's a good idea or not and/or whether you have ethical or philosophical or value questions about people selling sex." So you tackle that first, and some of the things that we debated at length were —well, one of the things was mandatory testing. Apparently, one of the things the clients when they ring up, the first thing they say is, "Are your girls tested?" So from a public health perspective this is an interesting one because, yes, the standard model is that they do a whole range of tests every three months, right? And the workers are more than happy to do that anyway and they keep that information. It's not given to their manager, which is totally appropriate, because that was the other thing: who should have that information?

As the public health nurse said, you could test clear now and then tomorrow morning, you could test positive. So, even a test is no guarantee. But then you could argue there's no guarantee if you are having casual sex with somebody you met at a nightclub, actually. So, what you've got is kind of a nineteenth century view of sex workers as this sort of dirty,

diseased, terrible thing, whereas, in fact, the research, the actual evidence of interviewing people, and there's been good research done in Australia, indicates that that's a bit of a mythology, really. I mean, yes, you've probably got an elevated risk with someone who's a drug user, but that would be true whether they're a sex worker or not, about HIV and those kinds of things. It's not that they're a sex worker; it's the fact that they might be an intravenous drug user.

The level that the state should intersect in what is, in fact, private activities is a very interesting one and I don't think we always get it right. What we put through was a sort of minimalist regulation. So, the regulation would be by the health department. The only thing the police would have to do with it is if they suspected criminal activity, in which case if there's criminal activity in that house down the road, they're going to go and get a search warrant. It doesn't matter whether someone's selling sexual services there or whether they're fixing cars. Why does it matter? Why should they carry on with what has been an informal arrangement? As I said to the group yesterday, since white colonisation of Australia, this is what came with us [chuckles]. And it's always been either the soldiers or the police or the rum corps running these operations. I think it is about time we came into the twenty-first century and said: Why are we regulating this? What are we trying to do here? I trust the public health system to be frank and honest and tell us if there was a problem.

[End of GizWatson_13]

[GizWatson_14]

AY This is another interview with Giz Watson. Today is the 26th of April 2016 and we've been talking about public health. Now, we were talking about decriminalising sex work. Before we go on to the other specific issues, it occurs to me that a lot of the things with public health are quite emotive, maybe even subjective sorts of things to deal with, so how do you come at a position and how can you be fairly confident that you're speaking for your electorate?

WATSON Yes, well, some of the more challenging public health questions do have the elements of ethics and principles and the question of how much it's the role of the Parliament to legislate in that area, so how much regulation ought to be prescribed in law or not. I mean, that's partly why I have really enjoyed the debates around those areas, because I think that's when you really have to think and put a lot of effort into collecting the evidence and discussing it widely. One of the things that we do as Greens is have a very extended and lengthy process of developing our policy positions on some of these areas. For example, our policy on supporting voluntary euthanasia took a long time to be discussed through our membership because there was a range of views, and to come to a consensus position on what we should take forward as policy took quite a while.

It is also worth pointing out that we have in our constitution the right for any MP to dissent from policy, which is interesting because it's peculiar to the WA Greens; sorry, it's not peculiar to the WA Greens, but not all state-based Greens parties have that. In New South Wales, their MPs are bound by their policy and they can't take a different position, but in WA we allow MPs the right to dissent if they choose. Interestingly enough, it has never been used. So we would argue that's quite a good system. So on the kind of health issues like, I guess, the issue of dignity in dying, voluntary euthanasia, that is an ongoing discussion in the community and a drive in the community to actually have some clarity in the law because when you look at the evidence, it's clear that end-of-life decisions are being made by medical professionals all the time, sometimes with consultation with the family or whatever and sometimes not, so decisions are being made about at least hastening peoples' death. So, I think that polling would indicate that the community want to have laws that prescribe or give people the choice to have more control about when they die and the circumstances in which they die. It is not an easy area for legislation. There is no question about it that it's fraught. It presents huge challenges in terms of ensuring that there are adequate limitations, checks, penalties; all those kinds of things. But having said that, I don't think it's a debate that we

should shy away from, so we have introduced in the state Parliament here, twice introduced, a private member's bill on voluntary euthanasia, neither of which have been successful, but it does bring that issue back for discussion.

The other piece of legislation that I was more closely involved in was the advanced health directives, which are the so-called living wills, which again it's related, but it's not a bill for voluntary euthanasia. It was very clearly not going to be that, but what it does do is go part way to providing people with a legal framework that gives them more certainty about their circumstances if they become incapable of making a decision; so, you know, what medical intervention they allow or don't allow and who they want to make decisions for them. So, again, that was quite a lengthy process. It went through a parliamentary committee inquiry. We heard a lot of evidence from health professionals, from palliative people in particular. I think it's ended up being a reasonable law. My question, and I don't know because I haven't seen a review of its operation, but how many people have actually taken it up is the interesting question. My sense was it's not being sort of actively encouraged that people do this, but if people are looking for more certainty, then the information is there and they can access it. So I don't know. I would be interested to know whether the advocates are pleased that it's there or whether they think it doesn't go far enough.

AY What were the experts of palliative care, health professionals, saying to you in that committee?

WATSON Well, I mean one of the things, not surprisingly, was that they didn't want the bill to be a back door to voluntary euthanasia, so the recommendation from the committee that flowed through into the legislation said things like if a person is in a medical emergency and it would appear that they might be trying to take their own life, then nothing in this bill prevents the medical staff from acting to save their life. Because there was a thought that people could fill out one of these forms, lodge it, the next day decide that they would take an overdose or something like that and that their instructions had said, "Do not revive", so that would have created an opportunity for people to use that protection in that way, but that was deliberately ruled out.

Yes, look, I mean, there was some good conversation about the practicalities of people when they're in those situations of trying to anticipate what might happen, so we also built in a degree of subjectivity that if the directive had been made a considerable period of time ago, that circumstances might have changed considerably, so that if you, for example, at one

point in time were diagnosed with something that was anticipated to be terminal and fairly quick and then by some circumstances or new technology or new drugs are not in that situation anymore, you don't want to be left with a living will that says, "Don't revive me if I have a heart attack or something", but you might be in quite a different set of circumstances and quite happy with how your health prognosis was.

AY It is a minefield, as you said. So is legislation designed to help the palliative care experts in that situation, to give them some framework for the very difficult work that they do? Is that one of the objectives?

WATSON Yes, look, I think it's a helpful tool in that area of end-of-life choices and there certainly was support from palliative care to have such a law in place. It's interesting because what happened in our investigation was we discovered that it wasn't actually accurate to say that there was nothing in place already, because you could make a stat dec [statutory declaration] under common law directing your wishes and you could give verbal instructions to your next of kin and all those kinds of things. But it was recognised that having something in writing that was lodged in a place so that in the case of an emergency it could be accessed quickly, that that was definitely an improvement. Otherwise, you're relying on trying to get in touch with somebody who might not be available and all those kinds of things. And again, I would be interested to know whether that system, that maintaining of the data in a single place, has actually occurred, because it seems to me if that hasn't, then it's not actually much of an advance at all; it's still a file that's sitting in somebody's filing cabinet and may not actually be available as quickly as it's needed.

AY Voluntary euthanasia is much more contentious than this one. What is the Greens' position on voluntary euthanasia?

WATSON Well, as I say, after a considerable amount of debate within our membership, we have a policy that supports voluntary euthanasia, obviously, or not surprisingly, including provisos for tight controls on that and safety provisions. I don't know; perhaps we are the only political party that has a stated position. I know when it's been debated in the house the couple of times that I was involved in it, there is support across all parties and it's one of those areas that actually doesn't divide neatly into political party positions; it divides usually between the Catholics and the non-Catholics. On life and death questions, the Catholics generally vote as a block for a conservative position. That was the issue with voluntary euthanasia. Stem cells and those kinds of areas too is one that they felt very strongly about.

AY Looking at voluntary euthanasia, I'm wondering is whether the Greens get together and come up with the consensus view and/or are you consulting with the community?

WATSON Okay. Our process of policy formation is any member or any working group within the party can propose that we should have a policy in a certain area and then usually a small group of people will start something, draft something, and that undergoes a very lengthy and vigorous conversation, both face-to-face and online. But we will also include peer review. A policy like that would have gone to palliative care people, to medicos. We like to ensure that it's gone through fairly thorough scrutiny by those who know the area best, whether that's voluntary euthanasia or any of our policy areas. It might take a bit of time. It's interesting, again, over the years looking at the policy documents from other political parties, I think more and more you see political parties have very minimal policy statements. They tend to not write stuff down at all. My best example is the Nationals going to the state election with a single A4 piece of paper that said that they would bring royalties to the regions. I remember asking one of their senior members, because I had a copy of their previous policy document which was literally about half-an-inch thick and was about as comprehensive as ours, and I said, "So, why aren't you still working on these policies?", which said all sorts of interesting things, and he said, "Well, times change". It's interesting.

But we do put a lot of energy in, and that's partly why people—one of the reasons they particularly enjoy being in the Greens is that we enjoy the rigours of the testing out of policy positions, whether its environmental, social justice, health or whatever, and really thinking about what we underpin our actions with. I mean, other people have criticised that and said, "Well, if you go down to that level of detail, then people are going to be able to find something to criticise or perhaps lift out of context", and that of course is a risk, but I would rather that we be very clear about what it is that we are advocating for and show that we've really thought about these things. I mean, it might be the fact that we've got a lot of tertiary educated people in our organisation as well, but I think that's a good thing.

I just met with our former Greens leader Christine Milne last week. We were discussing the renewable energy stuff and how being ready with a fairly thought-through framework for how we'd moved rapidly to a much higher uptake of renewable energy in Australia was what she had ready to put on the table exactly as the moment came. One of the things that we are always looking to do is try and think a little bit ahead of the game and say, "Okay, if the

circumstances arise, have we got a plan which we can put on the table?" Whether it's for voluntary euthanasia or whether it's for something as complicated as rapid transition into renewable energy, there it is; we've already kind of done the work. I'm not saying that other political parties don't do that, but I was impressed that in that circumstance we were well and truly ready to introduce that.

AY That's just deviating a little bit from health, but just to get this ...

WATSON It was a bit.

AY No, no. I'm just interested in checking this process with you about what happens within Greens in terms of coming up with a policy. So if a group of Greens members decide something is a good idea, is it scrutinised by other Greens?

WATSON Absolutely. So the process is we have our policy working group. Often it would happen that somebody would approach maybe one of the MPs or the state office and say, "I think we need to expand our policy on the issue of domestic violence", which is actually a real case of what happened recently. We mention the need to tackle domestic violence in our policy on women but we don't have a standalone policy in this area, so the policy working group considered that and said, "Okay, why don't you write something and we'll look at it?" That then gets drafted up in a sort of standard format and the policy working group discusses that online; wordsmiths it, adds bits, take them away, whatever. When they have finished their job and they think it's ready, it's cooked, then it's presented to the whole of the membership for approval, so it's balloted. Sorry, the other step before you get to that is the peer review, so it would go past stakeholders and people who are knowledgeable; academics who might have particular skill in any particular area.

AY And domestic violence was actually the issue I was going to come to. Well, let's talk about that now, seeing as how it's popped up. So what is the Greens' position on legislation to try to improve the situation with domestic violence?

WATSON Yes, so I've had a fair bit to do with this issue both before I was in Parliament and when I was there. It's one of those ones where I guess you've got to say: how much is it that the laws are inadequate, or how much is it that they're not being enforced or resourced to be enforced, and how much of it is about community attitudes, actions? I'm certainly of the view, and I think generally it's fair to say the Greens are of the view, that we

shouldn't legislate just for the sake of it. It's a pretty heavy hammer and it doesn't help in all circumstances. In fact, with particularly conservative political parties, there is a tendency to over-legislate, I believe, and to get the headline, "We've fixed this! We were tough on X, Y, Z". You can fill in the missing word; the template's there. The interesting thing is most people think that's fixed it, that's whatever the problem was, even though as we know with new laws they play out in the courts and sometimes they get challenged and sometimes they don't prove to do what they said they were going to do or they might have unintended consequences, so it's a very simplistic view, particularly in the area of law and order.

So I think my sense with the area of violence against women—domestic violence is mostly against women and children—is that it is a community attitudinal change that really has to happen. I think we're beginning to see that now play out with sort of higher profile people speaking out. The example of sportsmen speaking out; people who have standing in the more masculine side of our community saying that violence against women is unacceptable. The other issue is resourcing. I'm sure it is still the case, and has been for a very, very long time, that for every two women who seek refuge from a partner on any given evening or any given day, one will be turned away because there aren't enough places in refuges now. Refuges are a kind of unfortunate but necessary component to provide that immediate safety and were very much pioneered by women in the '70s, that we needed to [provide] the very basics: women needed to go somewhere where they were safe and to go there quickly, safe and their location unknown. So I certainly put a lot of energy into trying to increase funding for refuges.

The second part that doesn't or hasn't been working as well as it should, is the operationalising of the interventions when domestic violence occurs. So the police's attitude, their processes, their response times, their follow-up and all that kind of thing, I think there have been some significant improvements in that. That was a big breakthrough because the evidence was that police not taking the matter seriously was a huge impediment, one, for women feeling that it was worth calling them in the first place, and for them to actually follow through rather than just go, "Oh, it's a domestic", which is the line that was so common. So I think we did see some progress. The particular part which I worked in the Parliament on was the changes to restraining orders, which is also a significant legislative tool. Well, it doesn't actually restrain the offender but it provides penalties if they breach. And this is also the whole issue about restraining orders. If someone is going to go and breach a restraining order, if they're caught, there are significant penalties.

What we worked on was also expanding the grounds on which you could seek a restraining order to include things like stalking and psychological intimidation, which wasn't on the books at that point in time. That was a working group set up by the then Attorney General Peter Foss and it was across the political parties. I think we came up with a good report to Parliament and that eventuated in improved restraining order provisions. I certainly had feedback from people working in the area of DV that they were really happy that the Parliament had made those changes. So, yes, the law has its place, but it's also community attitudes and actually resourcing this and ensuring that it is operationalised by those who are in those positions, whether it is the police or the courts. There's a long way to go.

I was reminded whenever there was the law and order debate about, the example I use is, there's a lot of play on poor elderly people who might be assaulted in their homes, and "home invasion" is a very emotive term. Obviously, they are terrible things and very damaging for people, but if you look at the statistics of violence against the person, apart from the fact that the majority actually were young men beating up each other, the next big chunk is women and children being assaulted in their own homes. It is much more uncomfortable to talk about that and why that's happening than the sort of moral outrage that goes along with people who might assault a pensioner or somebody who is clearly unable to protect themselves. It is sort of an underbelly issue and it needs to be brought out time and time again. Fortunately, at the national level it's got a bit of momentum.

AY It has, so a lot more work to be done. One of the areas—going back to public health—that you were interested in was chemical sensitivity.

WATSON Yes.

AY And I'm interested in that one; the impact of environmental practices. I note that you said that it was a particular problem in WA. Why is that? And what is the issue? What's the problem?

WATSON Environmental health is an area where we've been again, I guess, leading the debate. The impact of chemicals, mostly artificially created chemicals, is sort of a growing area of knowledge. With the explosion of all the man-made chemicals that we now have in our environment we are beginning to see some of the consequences. One of them that came to my mind or came to my attention by constituents was these people who suffer from multiple chemical sensitivity, which is usually caused either by chronic exposure to a certain

chemical or a sudden catastrophic exposure. It became a bit more of a case study, I suppose, because of the number of people who were manifesting this condition in association with the air pollution from the Wagerup bauxite refinery, which I knew about—I mean, I knew about the Wagerup bauxite refinery fairly well, actually, having opposed its construction in the first place. But one of the things that we said would happen, given the location under the edge of the Darling Scarp, is that you'd get inversions of pockets of air.

So, yes, there was a growing number of people who were talking to me about their experiences in the areas around Wagerup. Some of them worked for Alcoa, some of them were residents not necessarily associated directly with the refinery. And it's an awful condition because it means you have to be, in the worst cases, you have to keep yourself isolated from a whole range of modern-day chemicals, from perfumes to obviously things like tobacco smoke, but things that to a normal person would not cause any reaction. I established a support group, which included quite a few people who were actually suffering from the condition, and discovered that one of the problems is that the condition is not recognised as a medical condition in Australia. Therefore, their access to treatment and even to people believing that they are suffering the things that they are is very restricted by that.

I worked with a number of doctors who were of the view that this was real, what these people were experiencing, and that there ought to be better treatment for them or better management of their health conditions, but that someone ought to take responsibility for having created those conditions in the first place, but it is very, very hard to prove. I mean, one of the reports that came through Parliament was on the operation of Alcoa's refineries and air quality was one of the things that was highlighted, but it's never been able to find the smoking gun. This is exactly the problem with chemical poisoning is to know exactly, to be able to have a causal link back to the workplace or wherever the incident occurred. Interestingly enough, it was similar with some of the workers in the Kimberley who were exposed to agricultural chemicals. They were spraying, I think, for the council or one of those things. Similarly, they developed the same symptoms so that they become hypersensitive to very small amounts of other chemicals. And they were never really provided adequate compensation or justice. A number of them died before it could get to that anyway.

That example is one where, I guess, the individual, smaller members of our community were up against some huge forces of multinational companies and in-house doctors and a health department that really didn't want to know about it. It might only be such a small handful of people, but, nevertheless, for them, their lives were almost unliveable. Working with them

closely you really got a sense of that; how extraordinarily distressing it is. Because one of the arguments is that this is all just a psychological condition and there's nothing wrong with them at all. I tell you what, if I was suffering from all the symptoms that they were, it would be enough to drive you crazy anyway, if you see what I mean, because you are so limited in what you can do in terms of, like, you can't go on public transport. The worst case is you're sort of trapped in your house.

I guess the other link that we worked on was these people were very sensitive if their local councils were doing any spraying in the area, whether that was weed control on the streets or on the ovals, so that led to quite a lot of questions about those practices and whether the councils could use other non-chemical methods of controlling weeds, so we put a bit of energy into that but also putting chemicals on large public places like ovals, how much, what the impact was. Again, it was partly because for these people with heightened sensitivity, it was a serious problem for them if they were exposed to that.

AY What is the place of the legislature? What can Parliament do to be effective to help the situation?

WATSON Well, Parliament provides the opportunity for a member such as myself to ask questions directly of the minister—the Minister for Health—which is useful in terms of trying to tease out what we can do to improve the situation. It does provide the opportunity for members' statements. I think there would probably be on the *Hansard* a couple of times when I would have spoken about multiple chemical sensitivity, because it is little understood. Those suffering from it really appreciated the fact that there was something on the public record. And inquiries, I guess the one into the impact of the refinery was —there was some very useful evidence that was gathered there, and you could see in that the contrast of some doctors' understanding of the situation for the sufferers and others being really very dismissive of it. So, I guess, that's all on the record now. Hopefully, it also provided pressure back for the company to think again about its practices, not least that it might need to install some more significant scrubbing equipment in its pipes, its chimneys, but I don't think it's entirely gone away, unfortunately. I think it'll no doubt come back as an issue.

AY One of the issues seems to be that it's not recognised as a medical condition.

WATSON Yes, that's right.

AY What's the situation in other jurisdictions, in other places, that you're aware of?

WATSON I'm a little rusty, but from memory, there's certainly European jurisdictions that recognise it as a condition. The impact there is, I guess, a number of things. One is that doctors then are trained to recognise it and to take it seriously, that hospitals and other places provide a room where, if someone is brought in an emergency—you see at the moment they might be exposed to all sorts of chemicals in the hospital which will actually make their condition even worse, so they need quite an added level of sterility in the environment to manage that. Chlorine, for example, is one of the ones that can affect them very badly. Of course, in terms of any insurance or disability-type support, without that recognition, they really struggle to get the support that they need. Interestingly, the majority of them seem to take the course of moving to the country and moving right out away from any chemicals and that seems to be the only way that they can get reasonable quality of life, but that's pretty drastic, especially for your family and everything else or your job is in the city. I think getting through that barrier of resistance to having it recognised is probably the critical one.

AY Right. Another work in progress.

WATSON Indeed; yes.

AY Something else that you stood up and said more must be done to help people living with dementia, for example. What did you have in mind?

WATSON [laughs] I was going to say, hasn't that sort of—I think, if I'm remembering correctly, that was a member's statement. I think that was triggered by the fact that I'd just had a briefing from the Alzheimer's association and they had shown me some predictions of the trajectory of dementia. It was pretty scary because not only was it increasing in older people, but also manifesting in younger people. Thirty-five seemed to be a figure that stuck in my mind. Yes, I guess I wanted to flag that it was much more urgent than certainly I had been thinking. It's a condition that's not well understood and I think scares people quite a lot. It's fascinating, actually.

I just yesterday watched a *Catalyst* program on the use of music, not to deal with people with dementia, but the impact of music on people with dementia in terms of it seems to contact part of them in a way that nothing else does. Just to give you a quick thing, there was this scene where this person was sitting there in a very distressed state, put on the headphones, played music from his youth and he completely changed. His whole demeanour, he was alert, he was singing along. It was quite extraordinary. I think the medical system has the potential to be a bit overwhelmed by these sort of numbers and the seemingly hopeless nature of the condition, but I think that there are some pretty exciting things happening in understanding how brains work and how we can access parts of the brain that might give people at least some respite or some sort of quality, which at the moment so many people seem to be just trapped in this kind of terminal sort of place. I had long assumed that somehow if you were demented, you would be happily out of it, but in fact it doesn't seem to be the case now that I've seen that with friends' parents and things like that. They're not happy. They're really in a rather angry, anxious, depressed state.

AY What I was going back to I think this was your valedictory speech. I am just rifling away looking for it here.

WATSON Right.

AY I think you also commented on the fact that you'd had some personal experience of it with friends. Now I'm thinking that a couple of years have elapsed and there seems to be more talk about dementia. It's like violence against women and children. There is much more talk about these in the community now and I wonder whether you feel that this is useful.

WATSON Absolutely. I think it really is, one because it's increasingly impacting on people's lives, whether it's a relative or themselves. Because of the increase in the rates and people living longer of course, it means that we're going to have more people living with dementia. As I say, I think because it's being talked about more, there's less stigma around it. It's like any mental condition. I think it's a huge area where people are, the community are, often fearful and anxious about if this is going to happen to them or their family and friends. If we could do more to understand mental health conditions, it would be huge, because it's highly stigmatised. People are afraid of it and afraid of living with it or having to deal with somebody who's suffering from some mental ill health, but when we look at the statistics, almost everybody has some connection with this, some impact on them. I just think, as a

wealthy community, we ought to be able to be doing better and to hopefully be a bit more innovative. Less relying on drugs to just manage or sedate people would be good, but it's obviously harder; it's more of a challenge [chuckles].

AY Let's move onto something that I was going to say ought to be less challenging, but isn't: women in Parliament. Over your years in Parliament, you would've seen more women come into the upper house. What is the Greens' position on women, because I know that you traditionally have more women as candidates?

WATSON Yes, we're doing our bit to bring the balance back. Our basic position is that the Parliament should reflect the broader population, and we know that the broader population is just over 50 per cent women, because women live longer, among other reasons, and that we have a requirement in our constitution to ensure that women are at least 50 per cent in our elected roles and in our office bearer roles. It's interesting; we don't actually have a quota or a formula in that way, so it's still a discussion for debate about whether we should have a quota. And it's quite topical at the moment, because one of the interesting things, I think as political parties grow and become more successful, is that more men seek to be candidates exactly for the reason that now it's worth them putting their effort in because "I might win" [chuckles], whereas a lot of us were doing it because we wanted to raise the issues and we wanted to give people choice and we thought it was important. But now that there's a more tangible possibility of a prize at the end of the effort, then men are more willing to put their hands up, interestingly. We predicted this would happen, and it is. Yes, certainly in the Legislative Council, in the time I was there from '97 through to 2013, we went from having some of the lowest percentage of women to almost 50–50. That changed the culture of the Council, there is a figure which is quoted that once you get over a third of your membership is women, then it'll change the nature of the group, and I think that's probably true.

AY Yes, I spoke to Barb Scott and she made the comment, looking at the Swedish Parliament, I think, exactly that point that once you reach a critical mass of women parliamentarians, the kind of legislation that is enacted, the culture of the Parliament, actually changes. And I wonder how you responded to that.

WATSON Yes. I mean, I couldn't say that I saw that particular aspect being illustrated. We still had the same kind of preoccupation with law and order and that sort of legislative drive. So I would argue you'd need to change probably the proportions in cabinet specifically

if you wanted to do that, because that's where I think that decisions are made about what will be. At any given point in time, there's probably a list of legislative imperatives, and which one is going to reach the top. I think, yes, probably in terms of some of the committees of inquiry that might be true.

I'm reminded that there was a select committee which Barbara and I were on—and Barbara moved to be established—on the advocacy of children. Yes, I think, by and large, it was the women who were driving that agenda. And, similarly, the issue of children in foster care was another one that was driven by Robyn McSweeney and became a select committee, which I was also on. I think it's not okay, though, to say just more women per se is going to fix everything.

I've just come back from a week talking about women in leadership. Of course, we were reminded, in discussing, if we just end up with more Bronwyn Bishops or Margaret Thatchers, we are actually probably going backwards, not forwards. So, gender isn't everything [laughs] to have, some good principles and policies as well. I'm not sort of completely locked into the "We'll just get 50 per cent women", I'm not locked in at all. "then Parliament will be a good place." One of the things that happened while I was in the Legislative Council was there was an initiative for women parliamentarians to meet together as a kind of support, well, just to see what would happen if we got together. In fact, Louise Pratt was the one who initiated that. And it was quite interesting to see how emotionally supportive for each other women were willing to be across political divides. That was good; that was nice to know that there was a degree of support and solidarity.

AY Were you countering an old boys' network? Does that exist?

WATSON Oh, absolutely. I mean the Parliament is an incredibly conservative place and change usually comes quite slowly there. And one of the things about any organisation, however it's established, will create a certain inertia, and inevitably the Parliament in Western Australia was a bunch of mates of Governor Stirling, I seem to remember, who kind of [laughs] sat around a table and decided that they needed to—well, I think they wrote to the Queen and said could they be made the responsible governing body for the state of Western Australia. You know, men of influence, all obviously European, all landowning, that was the genesis of the Legislative Council. And this is also the challenge, I think, for the older political parties. By and large, they were established almost wholly by men. So men tend to think other men will—if they're looking for somebody to mentor and to come after them, most of

them will look for another bloke; and that's what they do, as well as all the sort of systemic gender bias. But, yes, they're comfortable around more of the same, basically. And that's why I think—I wrote a bit in one of the publications for the parliamentary—whatever it is; the books about people in Parliament.

AY Women parliamentarians?

WATSON That would be one of them. Yes, it was a question about how do you get more women into Parliament. I said, well, I think you've got to go right back to the culture within each political party, because if the culture is not, and the processes are not, attractive to women and inclusive, then you're not going to get women attracted or included; or you'll get the ones that are really incredibly determined to get in there despite whatever. So that kind of pitches it a bit as well; you kind of get the Margaret Thatchers then, in my view.

AY The major parties are either noticing it themselves or they are being pressured from outside to include more women or to have more women.

WATSON Except for Tony Abbott's [laughs], but anyway—oh, he's gone now; okay.

AY I was thinking of that. But where do you stand, then, on the merit versus quota to get more women in the Parliament?

WATSON Yes, sure. Yes, and I've heard that argument played out on both sides, particularly women in the Liberal Party. Of course, if your argument is that it's on merit, they feel very important because, obviously, they're very meritorious to have got where they have against the odds [laughs]. And, yes, of course, a strict quota system could be that a woman will get preselected just because she's on the list without any particular qualifications. I think you deal with that, firstly, by this issue of culture and process, and you seriously have a good gender understanding driving your processes, so you know that if you don't make active efforts to include women, to have your meetings at times when they can attend, that you've got child care, that you've got all of those external factors dealt with to allow women to participate, then to ensure that women feel as eligible as men, because one of the interesting things is a lot of women have to be tapped on the shoulder; they don't necessarily recognise that they might make a good candidate or a good member of Parliament, and so the process of tapping women on the shoulder and saying, "Have you thought about doing this?" So, all of those things. Then you've got a pool of candidates who are ready to go. I still am a little

reluctant to go with fixed quotas because it just seems a little too prescribed somehow. I would rather think that it's a matter of seeking out, recognising good women and giving them the opportunity, whereas if you leave it and you don't actively do that, then you're going to get a majority of men who'll put themselves forward, just because in our current culture and time that is still what men will do.

AY You say that the Greens naturally have attracted more women or that you have, essentially, a bit like a quota system in place.

WATSON We started out with pretty much gender equity in our formation. That's why I go back to this sort of notion of how groups, political parties, start out. We were strongly steeped in the feminist thought, feminist approach. I mean, if you look back to some of our early minutes of our meetings, gender was discussed and how women were going to be—the constitution reflects feminist values. I mean the decision-making, which is consensus, and we're the only political party that uses consensus, is much more a way that women, in an informal setting, will make decisions. And I'm not saying that men don't use consensus, but it's more of a tool that women have used in feminist politics and attitude to leadership. All those kinds of questions were hotly discussed and embedded in our policies and our way of working.

I think we set off on the right foot when we didn't have to wrestle the power from a male majority at the outset, and there were some very strong women at the beginning. There's people like Jo Vallentine and the team that worked in her office; a bunch of very strong women. Certainly in WA that beginning has had a big impact on the way we've gone forward. Certainly, it's always discussed when we are looking at candidates for winnable seats; who are the women who are going to be able to step up to do the—it doesn't mean we don't think about the men. Obviously at the moment, we've got gender balance in the state Parliament and in the federal Parliament, one man and one woman. We seem to manage to do it, but it is a matter of having the debate, I think. That's the best way to thrash it through.

AY You were making that sound a bit as though it was happening by osmosis. But I was looking at a quote here from Lynn MacLaren, who was saying, "Our strategies", talking about strategies, "encourage women". And I was just wondering what those strategies might have been, but you've probably just talked about those a bit.

WATSON I think those are the things that I was touching on in terms of recognising that women, capable women and skilled women. They often think that they aren't capable enough or they haven't done enough or they're not as good as, but by any kind of objective measurement, they're equally as good as a number of the male candidates who would be quite keen to put their hand up. So, I guess it's making sure that they're asked and they're encouraged, and it's making sure that they are enabled to participate through, say, things like child care, the times when we meet and all those kind of things, because you can easily exclude women in a kind of quieter almost casual way. I mean, maybe other political parties think of these things too, but those are the kind of strategies that we have engaged and we make sure that we put energy into adding skills to women, too. Again, things like public speaking are often things that women find really nerve wracking, but most people can develop skills to be quite good at it.

AY You've talked about not just Greens' women but women in general making up a good proportion of the upper house. I know you're thinking about the federal election at the moment, but thinking ahead to next year's state election, what plans do the Greens have to put up candidates for the lower house and to have women candidates?

WATSON Oh, well, we will certainly have candidates in all lower house seats. We've well grown to the point now where we contest all seats at every election. There was a time when we didn't have the finances to be able to do that, but we're still increasing in terms of our membership numbers and our financial resource, which is great. We will be putting strong women candidates in favourable seats. We would love to be able to win Fremantle again, for example. We've won it once and so that has, I guess, broken that mould. If this federal election campaign is anything to go by, where we've got a very strong and capable woman running in Fremantle for us in the federal seat, I think we'd be looking to do the same at the state level. And other of the inner city areas are becoming within our reach. I mean, we've seen, because of what's happened in Melbourne and in Sydney, that the progressive vote, the Green vote, the younger vote, is there for us, whether that is Perth or Swan or Fremantle, and it's just a matter of time before we will have seats in the lower house in the state Parliament. I'm absolutely convinced of it, despite the regular detractors who are saying, "The Greens are going to fall apart" or "This is the end of them." None of those things have ever been true.

AY No, they're not true, but Perth, Western Australia, is not Melbourne and Sydney, Victoria and New South Wales; it's traditionally quite conservative, as we know.

WATSON Oh, yes, sure.

AY How much steeper a hill to climb is it?

WATSON It'll just take us a bit longer. Yes, sure, that's because probably quite a lot of the progressive and younger members of our community go to Melbourne and Sydney [laughs]. Yes, look, well, I'm always heartened by the fact, if you look back, WA is the only place on the planet that elected a senator on the single policy of nuclear disarmament, in 1984. I've been asked quite a few times before: how did that happen? I said I don't know; maybe it's the kind of balance to the more conservative and wild west sort of view of WA that there must be quite a strong element of people who think like the Greens. That was manifested in that vote, and we continue to grow, maybe not as quickly as some of us would like. We're not going anywhere fast. I think, particularly when people realise that with a drying climate that Perth needs to be thinking very seriously and very quickly about how we have a liveable city, a bit like what I was saying earlier.

We have the best plans, the most integrated plans for what that would look like and how we could do that quickly, than any political party. I think if we could get that message and talk to people about that in a way that they could consider that, then they might go, "Yes, well, look, that's the sort of city I would like to live in." So, some of our policies and thinking about how we live in urban areas I think has got a lot of appeal and is equally applicable to Perth than Melbourne or Newtown. So, I'm optimistic. I remain optimistic [laughs].

AY Quietly optimistic. I want to come back to next year's state election, but first of all I think I'd better let you concentrate on the federal one for a few more weeks yet. So, thanks for today.

[End of GizWatson_14]

GizWatson_15

AY This is another interview with Giz Watson. Today is Tuesday the 16th of August 2016 and this is the first time we've met since the federal election, so we've got a few things to talk about. I wanted to start by saying I was reading a quote from Richard Di Natale and he said, "The party suffered in the Senate because voters treated us as a major party." So, where do the Greens belong: mainstream or your traditional activist base?

WATSON Yes, I think that was a very insightful comment because as much as the ultimate wash-up indicated that, yes, we did lose some votes in the Senate, it actually wasn't the kind of disaster that the media were very quick to label it. In fact, we retained all our senators apart from our second senator in South Australia, Robert Simms, who unfortunately wasn't re-elected, but, to be honest, we had very little hope that he was going to be because of Xenophon's rise, among other things.

One of the suggestions is that voters are now treating us like a major party and I think we are probably on that cusp. For some voters, we are too much like a major party. For other voters, they like us because we are becoming a major party, and I think it's a fascinating crossroads. First of all, I guess you've got to ask: What are people saying when they think you're a major party? Does it mean perhaps that they're taking us more seriously? They realise that we're staying around—we're not going to disappear like the Democrats—and that we can organise like a major party. For all those reasons, I'll take the compliment. I think it's good [chuckles] but if it means perhaps that we're seen as mainstream in our thinking, in our policies, that's an interesting question because there are certainly some people, probably some of our members, saying the party's becoming less radical, and that might be true. I would suggest that our policies haven't changed. We might be emphasising different areas slightly differently, but my argument is unless you can have a conversation with voters, unless you can bring them along with you, there is a small proportion of people who will vote for a political representative who's radical. Particularly in Australia, which isn't a terribly political country, and particularly in an ongoing, largely conservative community sort of atmosphere, being radical or being perceived as being too radical will certainly limit your vote.

The way I like to see it is that we are being recognised as a force to be reckoned with, to have that capacity. This is the first election that I felt that we were getting almost equal billing, certainly for the first couple of weeks, in terms of in the national media. My experience in O'Connor was that I was treated exactly the same as the other major party candidates. I say

myself, "I'm from a major party." I think that's the right answer to that question, but that doesn't mean that we don't have ongoing plans for major overhauls of the way we do business, major changes to how we look after the environment and huge changes in how we structure industry, but you have to bring people along with that. If that means that we're seen as being a bit more moderate, I haven't got a problem with that because I know my agenda hasn't changed and I know that the policy settings haven't changed either.

AY Do you think the community has changed so that your policies, which have stayed focused and the same essentially, are now more widely accepted and now more mainstream? Is that an element?

WATSON I think that's certainly true in terms of the understanding of environmental issues whether that's the big ticket like climate change. People understand that renewable energy sources not only make sense environmentally but they also are economically competitive. I think the sort of level of knowledge in the community has caught up with some of the policy positions that we take. There are other areas, for example, let's say the issue of managing addiction in our community or mental health that are not clear left politics, right politics; they are actually about how do we, as a community, deal with health issues and deal with people's wellness. I think in some of those areas people realise that we are passionate supporters of preventative health, particularly having Richard as our parliamentary leader there's an emphasis on that too now. Doctors are seen as being relatively conservative people. As he said himself, he hasn't been on a blockade in the Frankland or tried to stop the logging of forests, but that doesn't mean that he doesn't have some strong views about these things. Certainly, how people perceive our party is always going to be affected by who the public face is, and, yes, he's different, and some people think he's too conservative and some people think he's too radical. Maybe we've got it just about right [laughs].

AY To continue to grow you've got to build your support base. Who are you trying to attract? Who are the new voters that you want to attract both federally and at a state level? I think we could focus more on the state level.

WATSON I guess the one that probably is obvious is younger people, first-time voters. We find that there's a level of idealism and passion in that sort of 18-plus age group that are excited by the ideas that we talk about, excited by the fact that we're not business as usual. So, we continue to grow that support base and talk to people in high school who are about to vote because there's that sort of energy, which is very compatible with a lot of the things

we're saying about how the world is. Then, interestingly enough, if you switch to the other end of the spectrum, you've got retirees. A significant proportion of them are sufficiently wealthy that they're not having to worry about working, or I guess if they're retirees, they're not working, but they've paid off their mortgages and then they're thinking about their grandkids. So, a significant portion of our membership continues to be people who are over 55, over 65, who come with a lot of experience and time to volunteer and are deeply concerned about what the planet is going to be like for their kids and their grandkids. They're an area that continues to grow for us, but I think we're also attracting more and more young professionals who often work in industries like IT and are innovative, think internationally. They're looking for a political party that is global and that can join the dots between whether it's refugees or global warming or trade, even. They see the big picture and they're not happy with the policies that are being offered by the other major parties. They are probably the main ones I can identify off the cuff, as it were.

AY Again there are commentators saying that you're trying to take votes from traditional Labor voters. Is there something in that?

WATSON If we are to increase our vote, it's got to come at the cost of—it could come from people who currently aren't enrolled. So there's another whole group of people who are deeply disaffected and feel powerless, and, in fact, it's a group that, traditionally, you'd think they would lean towards voting Labor. But as Labor has become very similar to the conservatives in their economic policies, in their sort of welfare policies—not the same, but they've shifted to the right— they continue to feel disempowered and disaffected. They're not an easy group to talk to, because they're often really angry and hard to sort of define in that sort of sense of how you talk to them, but they are people who come to us. So to say that we're trying to take votes from the Labor Party—I guess that was one of the big debates during the federal election about, you know, you shouldn't run against that nice Tanya Plibersek or you shouldn't run against that good leftie Albanese. My answer to that is maybe they shouldn't run against us [chuckles]. If you really want a left-leaning representative, then the Greens are obviously the party of choice.

But having said that, it's unfortunate that those inner-city battles are between the left of the Labor Party and ourselves. Where we target our efforts is based on research about where people have considered and are most likely to shift their vote, and that's done by doorknocking and speaking to people directly. So our research says that is where we are

likely to gain votes. The fact that those people at the moment might be voting Labor, in some respects, is kind of not our business, if you see what I mean.

But, then, you've got to look at other seats like Higgins, for example, where we were seeking to unseat a Liberal. We don't mind [chuckles]. I guess you've got to unseat somebody. It's worth remembering there was quite a period of Australian history where ourselves and the Democrats were in this situation. You'd either get a Democrat or a Green, or very occasionally you'd get both, but usually it was one or the other. We were accused of attacking the Democrats. I don't remember them being accused of attacking us. All I can say is that we do our research, we ask the voters. Basically, you're asking them what the issues are that they're interested in; are there issues that they can be persuaded that we've got the best policies and we've got the best candidates? Yes, there are, and some of them are going to be Labor, but some of them are going to be Liberal. Seats like Ballina, some of them are actually National Party voters, so they're all going to have to watch out. I mean, of course we'd love to be able to gain the support of all those people who don't even bother to enrol, who are feeling so marginalised or angry, or a combination of both, but, unfortunately, that sort of marginalised voice tends to vote for parties like One Nation. It's a sort of a global phenomenon, I think, that's happening at the moment. There's this sort of anger which is not really clear about where it should be directed, but it tends to be being picked up by very conservative nationalist sort of political parties, and I think it's a very dangerous set of circumstances.

AY It's a big issue.

WATSON It is [chuckles]. It's exercising our conversations quite a lot politically.

AY Let's stick to more local things. What was your experience with the federal election personally?

WATSON Yes, yes, yes. I actually really enjoyed this election. There was something kind of liberating about knowing that I was very unlikely to win [chuckles]. I ran in the House of Reps seat of O'Connor, which is a very interesting electorate. I hadn't run for that seat before. The first time I ran in 1990, I ran for the seat of Forrest, which I guess is not dissimilar, but O'Connor is fascinating because it's a huge electorate, bigger than New South Wales in its extent. It includes the goldfields. It includes a significant part of the wheatbelt. It includes Esperance, the south coast and now parts of Manjimup and Bridgetown and that

sort of agricultural area, so quite diverse communities of interest. So I enjoyed the challenge of communicating with each of those communities slightly differently, because they're not all interested in the same things. The main focus was on a number of meet-the-candidate events that were run in different places, whether that was Esperance or Kalgoorlie or Albany or Mt Barker. Yes, look, I felt very comfortable in presenting quite different points of view to the other candidates, whether that was arguing that we needed to have a more humane approach to refugees or that we really do need to take climate change seriously. Yes, no; it was good.

As I was saying, at the federal level, I felt that the media were actually very even-handed this time and we got a very good share of the media. In fact, interestingly enough, when we did our evaluation at the state level, O'Connor got more media hits than any of the other lower house campaigns. Perhaps there was a little bit of a bonus in that I already had a public profile, so I think that might've helped, and there are a lot of different media outlets across O'Connor. It was good. We achieved our objective, which was to take O'Connor up into double figures. I said I think we need to get over 10 per cent. We went from 6.8 to 10.34, which I thought was pretty good. In fact, it was actually above our national average by a little slither, and that's in a conservative farming and mining community. was a lot of hard work. It was a lot of driving, but it was ultimately encouraging to me because I think we have to really re-double our efforts to talk to rural Australians and to talk about why we have got some exciting things to say about sustainable farming and the use of renewable technology and transforming the agricultural sector as well as the cities.

AY Well, that brings us neatly to a state election next year. In your work in O'Connor and also, as you said, what people are telling you about who your voters are and what they're looking for, so looking towards that election, what are the major issues that you've identified?

WATSON One of the ones that all the candidates were reminded of very strongly was the challenges of telecommunication. This is a federally funded issue, but, nevertheless, it impacts across the board on all agricultural businesses, access to health services, all those kind of things. You're not going to have a totally equal quality of service between, say, the Perth metropolitan area and remote areas of the wheatbelt, but, nevertheless, there's an enormous amount to do to bring that telecommunication capacity up in the country. It was interesting; I was listening to Radio National when I was driving in the country just last week that there's a suggestion to have kind of like wi-fi an area of about 100 square kilometres, so

you'd actually boost your capacity. I thought there's some interesting innovation that's available now which could make a big difference, because I think what's happened federally with the rolling out of broadband is a mess; it really is. It was always going to be more expensive than what was suggested. So that's a crucial thing for a rural community.

Ironically enough, it was quite hard to talk about or to emphasise the impacts of climate change because, in fact, a lot of the south west is having its best season it's had in 100 years. That doesn't mean that the long-term trends have turned around; in fact, that continues to be the prediction. But to talk about changing and diversifying agricultural practice—still big issues of salt, still big issues of the decline of waterways, all those kind of things—that will continue on. So one of the things that we've identified is talking to some of the groups of farmers who are now getting together to do these innovations themselves so we know what they're doing and we can share ideas.

What else? Local employment; I mean, there's still this issue that the young people are still leaving agricultural areas and are heading to the city for study and then often for work. Providing meaningful and diverse work in our rural communities is a huge challenge. The average age of Western Australian farmers is still something like 58 or 53. With the other candidates it was interesting, one of the things we were discussing is what are the ways to keep young people in the farming community. One of the suggestions was you actually set up the opportunities for them to test out whether they want to be farmers, so maybe just lease some land and try it out, whereas at the moment, it's so expensive for young people to actually buy in. It's a very high-risk thing and unless they actually inherit it from their parents, it's pretty hard for young people to get into farming. We all agreed that that sort of innovation of maybe having a subsidised lease so that young people could actually live on the land and experience farming would be a good thing.

And, of course, the other one: there's a lot of discussion about the economy and the GST and how broke things were and how we needed to get more share of the GST, to which I replied, "Look, if you want to look at what's wrong with the Western Australian economy, then you have to look at the fact that we've been riding on a boom that was always going to change—whether it would completely collapse or just slow down—and the main determinant of the Western Australian state budget is the global price of iron ore. Unless we diversify our economy and become less reliant on a limited number of minerals, then we're always going to be in trouble. So, let's get a bit more real about downstream processing, about value-adding our food that we produce, rather than just shipping 80 per cent of our wheat straight

into bins and overseas.” We don’t only mine minerals; we mine our land as well in that respect. So, what are the ways that we can produce much more valuable and varied and more nutritious food and then sell it to the world or sell it locally?

Those are the sort of things that really interest me: how we can do that and who do we want to be talking to, to have those ideas happen? Again, I find in a lot of cases we have a lot of things in common, particularly with the National candidate who had quite innovative ideas about, say, dealing with addiction. Our policy differences were relatively small. So, yes, it’s always interesting when you actually get out there on the podium with these people.

AY You were talking about the economy and economic matters just then, and something that’s usually levelled at the Greens is that they don’t have an economic policy or it wouldn’t be much chop if they had one. So, do you have a policy prepared and ready to go for this state election coming up; and, if so, roughly what are the major features of it?

WATSON Well the short answer is no, we don’t, because obviously we prepared policy initiatives for the federal election, but different areas of responsibility. The federal stuff’s tax and GST and those kinds of things. I mean, the basics are still going to be the same: it’s about diversifying; it’s about innovation; it’s about making large business pay its fair share of tax. I mean, it’s very interesting this current push from Brendon Grylls to take more money from the mining sector. He’s being accused of being too green, which I thought was quite amusing, probably really riled him up.

But the reality is, yes, the mining sector exports most of its profits overseas, but you need to be very careful about how adjustments are made; you know, you don’t want to rock the boat so hard. So, yes, careful thought about that and I guess the usual sort of questions about how much you continue to invest in health and education because, you saw this in the federal debate, we argued that it’s not a cost; it’s actually an investment. You can look at education and say it’s a very costly thing to do but, on the other hand, if you don’t invest in that, then you’re going to reap the consequences. So I don’t have our thought-through, blow-by-blow for this state election because it’s still seven months off, but we are right now in the process of reviewing all our policies. It’s about that sort of time frame—about six months out from an election—and I am sure we will be presenting some clear thinking about how the state’s economy should work.

AY Has the Prime Minister already stolen a march on you with his GST floor? He's been here; is he electioneering?

WATSON Oh gosh, yes; absolutely. I noted the response, I think I was reading it yesterday, from a number of other states who are very unhappy that WA [chuckles] is apparently going to get some special consideration. The interesting thing with the GST is that there's a sort of lag in the system. So what I understand is that in a couple of years, it will be adjusted anyway. I think the Prime Minister's statement about GST is blatantly about propping up the state Liberal Party because it seems to be in trouble and any political analyst will tell you that it's hard to win a third term and that's what they're trying to do. I think Colin Barnett is looking tired whatever way you look at it. If, for a moment, it could be considered sort of independent of the political party in government at the time, if this was a Labor government that had taken the state into this serious situation of debt, they'd be being beaten up left, right and centre by the conservative media. I gather there's a bill about to be put before the Parliament for an additional \$1.8 billion loan, so the level of debt is not going away any time soon. So, yes, they're in serious trouble, and I think Malcolm Turnbull has been persuaded to throw them a bit of a lifeline. But I think most people will see it for what it is. Quite frankly, let's hope we have a change of government because there are quite a few significant issues riding on this state election, ones that I've fought hard on. I would like to see some changes and those changes will only be brought about if the ALP win a state election and go to that state election with some very strong policy positions.

AY And what are these things that you've fought hard for that you'd like to see?

WATSON Preventing uranium mining in the state. It's interesting, that's a decades-long campaign, and despite the fact that we've had the Liberal government in with a position of supporting uranium mining, there still haven't been any mines actually opened up in WA. That's because, among other things, the market for uranium globally is very low, where it should be. I note that with Yeelirrie, the EPA have just declined to give it environmental approval, so that's a real fillip to the conservation movement to protect endangered species and having won that argument with the EPA. So uranium mining is one. Getting a final end to logging of native forests. I understand the ALP are likely to take that sort of policy to the next state election, so there's uranium, there's the logging and also fracking. Currently, the state Labor Party opposes fracking. Those three things are very significant and if we had a change in government, I think we'd see changes there. We might also see the Beelir wetlands saved, because, again, the Labor Party in the state have opposed that extension of Roe 8

through the wetlands. I guess, any election, there's quite a few things riding on it, but this one, for me, there's significant environmental issues that are hanging in the balance. So we will be in there contesting very hard and raising those issues and, of course, seeking to get our representatives elected.

AY So if you're saying that a Labor government is going to be a lot more sympathetic to the things that the Greens care about, does this mean that you will continue to fight on a seat-by-seat basis with them or concede seats almost to them?

WATSON No, no. No, we will continue to run candidates in every lower house seat, because it's interesting; the converse is, or the other side of that approach is, what the Labor Party have done on occasions, and still does, is they sometimes don't run a candidate. Then any electorate's got a portion of people who are going to want to vote Green or Labor or Liberal or National or whatever it is, and if there isn't even a candidate they can vote for, it makes them very angry. I just think it's positively insulting to the electorate not to offer them a Green candidate. For a number of elections now, we've had candidates in every seat. So, yes, we will be competing, and we'll compete against all the others in effect [chuckles].

AY There was criticism at the federal level that you spread yourselves too thin by contesting every lower house seat, so resources were spread too thin. How do you counter that one?

WATSON Yes, it's an interesting part of the election strategy and the planning. First of all, we make an assessment of how winnable seats are and then there's sort of like a second tier, which is we recognise that we're not going to be able to win this one in this election cycle, but it's one we want to build up to. Then there are the ones like O'Connor, where you go, "No, no; we're probably a long way off winning that one." So we don't put many resources into that. Resources and people are allocated on that careful research, and so there's a temptation, I guess, to push yourself out as far as you can and then there's always this sense "Did that spread your resource too thin?" I'm not convinced. I think if there was any misjudgement perhaps, it might've been that we didn't talk enough about the Senate. So when you look at the result in a number of those inner-city lower house seats, we had swings of up to 10 per cent. I mean, you know, significant.

We actually achieved our stated outcomes, which was: okay, we would've loved to have won a couple of those seats, but one is now within about half a per cent of actually falling to us,

there is another that's sort of within one, another within five per cent. So we've taken them into that winnable territory for next time. Our results actually, apart from the fact that we didn't tip a couple of those lower house seats over and win them, were very good. I'm hoping that someone sooner or later will do a better analysis of the actual figures, because we ran the biggest campaign ever and I think we would've liked to have retained all our senators; we only lost one.

AY Let's go back to the state issues at the moment.

WATSON Sorry. I should just say it also was a really unusual election being a combination of a double dissolution and a new Senate voting system, and I think history will indicate ultimately that that produced some anomalies. Sorry.

AY No, no. I was thinking that we talked a bit about O'Connor and what the people there might be, what you've identified are the issues for them. What about your city and bigger regional area voters? What has your research indicated are the important issues for them and how will you try to address those issues?

WATSON The doorknocking that has happened recently, and is still ongoing now that we're kind of rolling straight into a state election, indicates that job security is a big one. Health and education are always significant issues for people. But also, people are keen on having more liveable cities, whether that's better planning, better public transport, better green areas, all those kind of things. People, when you go out and knock on their doors and talk to them about what they'd like to happen differently, it's how liveable the city is. I think Perth is changing but I think there's a lot of people who'd like it to change more rapidly. It was interesting to note at the last state election, we had long run a strong line on a light rail infrastructure for Perth. The first thing that the Liberals ran out with was, "Well, we're going to do the light rail to the airport." We were a bit taken aback to say the least. We felt like our kind of key policy area had just been co-opted, but, of course, on the one hand, that's a bit annoying, but, on the other hand, it's a good indication that we're probably on the right track. Then, of course, nothing happened. History now indicates that it never was going to happen. There never was that money. They never really meant that. This is the frustrating thing. I think they read the mood right that people were keen to have a more liveable city, have a more sustainable city, but a very cynical bit of politics really and linked with the level of frustration in the community about congestion. If you'd ask people what really is irritating them, it's being stuck in their cars for much longer than they want to be. So the answer, we

say, is a much more efficient public transport system that actually gets people where they want to go in reasonable times, and then we could actually see this work, certainly for the bulk of the metro area.

AY Looking at some of the less immediately personal issues that people might be thinking about, are they thinking about the bigger issues: climate changes, refugees? Is this engaging them at all, the electorate, do you think?

WATSON I guess I'd have to say probably not enough. I certainly, with the issue of refugees, think it's the nature or the consequences of putting people offshore and trying to paint it as somebody else's problem. We haven't seen the end of this story, though, by any means. Thank goodness for progressive journalism that's actually going in there and telling the horror stories of how cruel and extraordinary it is to be locking people up indefinitely to send a message. Look, that's got a long way to run. It is rather depressing. I think people would rather it wasn't their problem; they'd rather wash their hands of it and hope that somebody else will get that sorted. Maybe it's part of being an island culture. It's interesting.

We were talking briefly before about Europe, but Europe's got such a different history of migrations of people at different times and conflicts creating refugees and people moving around or being forced to move around. On the one hand, that kind of heightens it but, on the other hand, at least people kind of more recognise that this is part of history and what happens if you have conflicts, and that—what is it at the moment? There is something like 30 million people globally on the move, displaced out of their country, and there has to be global ownership of the problem. That's why you have things like refugee conventions. That's why you have global agreements on these things. But I do think, yes, your average person would rather somebody else thought about it, not them. It's like it's just too hard.

AY What about climate change? Are they engaging with that, because that is an issue that affects people?

WATSON Well, I think, yes. That is much more affecting them in their lived experience, and I think the science that's been presented is so overwhelming and unequivocal. They see difficult images like starving polar bears and melting ice caps, and that, I think, does give people, at the very least, a sense of unease that, you know, maybe this is something I should be doing something about. Look, I think one of the promising things is that you have some great uptakes of the solutions by people. So solar rooftop in Western Australia is fantastic, as

it should be, because we have such an extraordinary solar resource, and the cost of them has come down considerably. I understand from the sort of climate sceptics that they're a bit sort of perplexed that people have just sort of voted with their feet, but it makes sense. I think those arguments are being won, and I think that the business cases are carrying those things forward and will continue to, whether it's storage or more refined solar technology, more accessible, cheaper; you name it. I think that is coming; whether it comes fast enough is another question [laughs]. But I think people are willing to make changes, but probably, frustratingly, not the really big ones, like choice of cars to drive or how many cars they have; all those things which are also significant contributors. But, again, if the technology is developed and it's at a reasonable price, people will make the change. It's just whether it happens quick enough [chuckles].

AY Now, the last election wasn't the Greens' finest—the last state election.

WATSON No, it wasn't. It was sad [laughs].

AY I didn't want to put it like that.

WATSON I'll put it like that [laughs].

AY What plans do you have to improve that? How are you going to engage people better and more successfully?

WATSON Well, I think, just to reflect briefly on the last state election, there were a number of factors that were beyond our control which made it an additional challenge to get our vote up where we wanted it. But we were just talking before about some of the key issues that we would want to see highlighted in the lead-up to the state election: uranium mining, logging, fracking and public transport. Ironically enough, if the Labor Party is also talking about those kinds of issues and emphasising them, it actually lifts our vote, too. So, the key thing for us is to get the issues we want onto the agenda. One of the things at that last state election was environmental issues really just weren't anywhere on the radar, and we can do as much work as we can to talk about those issues to try and get them on the media and get them out there and talk to people about them, but you've got to have that momentum.

If you look back to 2001, when we did very well, it was on the back of an end to the old-growth logging. So I'm hoping, planning, that we will have some key issues like that, that will give us the momentum. You could argue that these are all kind of standard green issues, but you've got to give people a reason to be thinking about the issues that we consider are important. That's as much making sure that the public discourse is in that groove, because if all that's being talked about is, say, the state of the state's economy, which it might be, then that becomes more challenging. But, look, what we have got in place and what we will be doing better than we've ever done it before is street-based organising; going out, talking to people and presenting a public face of the Greens that says, "We're people in your local area and we want to hear what you're concerned about and do you want to talk about what the Greens are about?" It's beginning to have quite a significant impact in terms of having very targeted campaigns to certain areas. So we have the research that says this particular small part of, or this subset of, this suburb has got a lot of prospective Greens voters and we'll go talk to them. So you don't use your energy talking to people who are very unlikely to change their mind. If they've always voted Liberal or always voted Labor, then you go for the lower hanging fruit [laughs]. I mean, you can't knock on every door, certainly not realistically, so you've got to have a plan. I think we're more evidence-based and more trained and greater numbers, and those things pay off.

AY In terms of getting your issues, the issues that the Greens consider important, into the public debate, I think at a federal level the two major parties hijack the debate, so the kinds of issues that you were talking about just didn't get up in discussion. Now, what do you do about that?

WATSON It's very hard. One of the things, and I guess maybe O'Connor is a good example because some of the issues that we were wanting to talk about aren't normally debated in the *Countryman* or the *Farm Weekly* or whatever, so we did put a lot of work into social media, Facebook pages, and circumnavigating the standard media outlets and going straight to people. The kind of model with social media is you get this person to be interested in reading what you're saying, and then get them to invite 30 of their friends, and then one of those friends asks another 30, so it's a sort of a snowball effect. Again, using the recent election in O'Connor as an example, we grew a Facebook page significantly over a couple of months, yes. So, talking to people in suitable bite-sized pieces about things they're interested in, using the technology, like YouTube clips, and humour and other ways to get people's attention, and being cleverer with the free resource that you've got. I have to say that I was heartened by the ABC's coverage; I thought that they did a really good job. That was a bunch

of young regional producers and program people. It was, to me, quite different to my experience running in the country before. So that was good, and I thought that they did a great job.

AY What's your expectation? We saw One Nation come up surprisingly in the federal election, and some of the same issues: people who are disgruntled, anti-globalised, fearful of jobs and things like that. Are you expecting to see that in this state election?

WATSON Well, it'll be interesting to see, because I guess we've been here before with One Nation in the state, and they had three members who were elected into the Legislative Council who weren't re-elected again. So, with the demise of Palmer, at the moment, anyway, there's this sort of chunk of voters who, as we've sort of said, are disgruntled and angry; they're kind of fearful of change. They don't like others very much, whether they're Muslims or Aboriginal or whatever; there's this sort of hate brigade at its worst, perhaps. They're going to—a lot of them do—look for a party like One Nation or the Shooters and Fishers or one of these. I don't know, I think in the next six months we're going to see a bit of what they're going to say in the federal Parliament. I think it's one of the interesting, and one of the best aspects of democracy, is that you can't have it any other way; people actually did vote for these people.

Whether they knew what they were going to get or what, I'm not sure, whereas before the changes were made in the Senate voting, where people would just put 1 in a box and the party would decide how the preferences went, people actually put 1 to 6 above the line, including quite a lot that put 1 to 6, one of those 1s to 6s was One Nation. So, I think it's quite likely that they'll be around, but whether the voting population will have had a bit of insight into some of the crazy things they actually do believe—it was very interesting watching Q&A last night with the climate change denier being roundly corrected. That was my experience in the state Parliament with One Nation. They got plenty of oxygen for whatever they wanted to talk about, and it didn't take long for people to get bored or just realise that they were—well, lack of policy was the other thing, no coherent policy or solutions. They knew what was wrong, but you ask them about how to fix it or what might be different, and there really there wasn't much there, other than more kind of law and order agendas. Thinking people know that that isn't the solution.

I think they're going to be around for a while, and one of the things we're thinking as the Greens is how do we engage the broader public debate. This goes back to sort of what's

happening not just in Australia but globally about fear and marginalisation and anger, and try and be a voice of reason in that sort of debate because it can get pretty dangerous. It's getting pretty dangerous in lots of ways. It's one of the reasons I'm in the Greens. We believe in conflict resolution and nonviolence and actually working through difference, rather than the kind of black-and-white model, which is, "We'll just introduce another anti-terrorism law or we'll just ..." Obviously that's been working really well, not [laughs].

It feels like times are getting more dangerous, not less, and we would like to be part of that, changing the public debate around difference and this is interesting because it's not just refugees and racism and anti-Muslim sentiment; it's also the disquiet around whether we're going have to a plebiscite on marriage equality, on same-sex marriage. That was quite a strong issue in the federal campaign, too, and, yes, it could be a very nasty time in terms of people kind of being sanctioned to be able to say whatever they think. One of the strongest reasons that I think the plebiscite's wrong is that it's going to be, for young GLBTI people, very unpleasant, because somehow everybody's allowed to say all their prejudices and carry on. Anyway, so it's sort of dangerous in that sort of social justice area as well.

AY Let's look at you personally. Now, big question: what is your role going to be in the state election?

WATSON In the state election, well, as of very, very recently, I have finally put a line under being a candidate again. I must say, after having had some fun and success in O'Connor, I kind of got a rush of blood to the head and thought: oh well, let's do the south west; let's go back and have another go at winning the south west for the Greens. But, look, I've thought about it long and hard, and I thought, really, we need to have a generational shift. I want to be backing younger candidates to get into the Parliament. I'm nearly 60; that's probably enough, really. I think that I feel I've got more to offer staying outside of the Parliament at this point in time, in terms of mentoring, training, encouraging and advising young people who want to get into it. I'm really enjoying that. I've had quite a few conversations with people talking about what it's like if you run as a candidate and what it's like if you go into the Parliament. And that's fine, that's good. You've got to know when to hang up the boots or whatever it is—hat, boots, hat. Whatever it is, hang up something [laughs].

AY Either or both?

WATSON Either to both, yes.

AY So officially what is your role?

WATSON I actually haven't determined that yet, but I'll probably assist in the campaign for the south west, whether that's a campaign manager or just part of the campaign team. And, yes, I might end up doing what I did in the federal election, which was assisting with the logistics, because I like that side of things too. As you know from my varied career paths, I like practical jobs. It's somehow satisfying to see all your flags trotting out to the polling booths and doing it well. We do a much more complicated sort of process than the other political parties, because all of our materials we reuse and retain and store them away and then bring them back out again; whereas the other parties generally get reams of plastic and throw it in the bin at the end of the day. Those are the two things. I'd like to be doing some more capacity development in the south west, so I've got plans to talk to some different interests (farming interests in particular, sustainable agriculture people) to really build that connection. Because once we've gained our foothold in the inner city, we need to be gaining seats in the country; it's a different constituent. But there are very strong synergies and I think I'd like to continue with that. Whether that's doing landcare work down in the south west and working with those sorts of communities, catchment restoration; I love that kind of stuff. It's still all political, as far as I'm concerned. It's about integrating the community at that sort of grassroots level into the decisions that happen at a state level; linking it up.

AY Do you want to do a bit of crystal ball gazing and predict what you think might happen?

WATSON In the state election?

AY Yes, in the state election.

WATSON I haven't really fully turned my mind to it because I feel like I've only just dusted myself off after the federal election.

AY We can come back to that.

WATSON Yes, maybe. It might be in idea, because I literally have just sort of finished writing my report and putting all the toys away [laughs]. The election doesn't finish on polling

day because now, particularly with the new voting process, we scrutineered for nearly three and a half weeks, and that started at six in the morning and we weren't finished until 11 o'clock at night. That was quite exhausting actually, but ultimately I think useful and successful. I haven't really quite turned my mind to the state yet.

AY We'll come back to it.

WATSON Very good.

[End of GizWatson_15]

GizWatson_16_edited

AY This is a further interview with Giz Watson. Today is August the 25th 2016.

Now, we left last week's interview with you contemplating the state election coming up in 2017. What are your predictions? What do you think the make-up of the next Parliament will be?

WATSON Yes. I think my sense is that we'll have a change of government. It's very hard for a government of any flavour to win a third term, and, to be honest, I think the Premier's looking a bit tired [laughs], and the recent arrangement, or suggestion, with Malcom Turnbull that they're going to adjust the GST to favour WA some more or to tip it back towards WA to me was a lifeline thrown to somebody who was flailing around. I think that's a sign, too, that they're concerned, and I don't think that that sort of promise will be delivered on in any way because there are too many other states [laughs] that are going to be really upset if that happens. So I think all the indicators are that the Labor Party is on the ascendancy.

I think that from the Greens' perspective we have high hopes that we will regain some seats in the Legislative Council. We have expectations that we will do well in seats such as Fremantle. Whether we can actually win it, we haven't yet decided that strategically whether that's one of our aims, but it's certainly a priority seat. So, yes, the outcome in the federal election for us was pretty much status quo. We slightly dropped in our Senate vote but the House of Reps vote increased quite significantly in some areas. So that's given people renewed energy and we're just going through the process of selecting our candidates. I would like to see the Greens (obviously we'd like to, but we'd hope that we would) get four or five back in the Council. Then, of course, it all comes down to who else is in the mix and if there is a balance of power possibility there, and that, I guess, is a segue into the make-up of the Legislative Council as it is now legislated for.

I've had to say that I think we made a mistake in establishing a six-by-six model. I understand the principles that we were pursuing and, if you take a very long view, then it might well work out that way. I realise that what we created is—in the same way that the Senate provides a certain number of representatives no matter what the population of the state is, it's based on that principle. Part of the differences between the two houses is that their composition should come from a different basis. However, what we have done, and it's

been played out now for quite a while, is basically set it up for the Nationals, very nicely, thanks very much, not that they've ever thanked us for it [laughs]. I should write to Brendon and point it out. Yes, basically there are those country seats which are dominated by Nationals voters, and I think we really seriously underestimated how kind of rusted-on those intergenerational voters for the Nationals in particular are, so they have a disproportionate representation compared to their statewide vote, quite significantly. They have been able to have a big influence in policy in certain areas over the last quite a few years in the state. Fascinatingly, royalties for regions was our policy before they enacted it. We agree with the policy, but I guess we would have some question marks about the implementation in terms of it's quite a tricky thing to implement. It's fascinating to see now Brendon Grylls being heavily criticised for having a policy position of trying to get more money out of the big miners. Again, [laughs] it would be a policy that we agree with entirely; we just don't think he's actually going to be able to achieve that the way he's going.

To go back to the state election, look, I think we would like to be able to represent most of the regions in the state and we certainly historically have done well when there's been a swing to Labor, 2001 comes to mind, and if we can have some significant environmental issues in the public debate, then that will be also advantageous to us, because even though we have policies across the board, we are primarily still recognised as being about good environmental policy, which we have. Of course, climate change remains THE most challenging, THE most urgent issue that is confronting us, but often it slips down the agenda because of the more obviously pressing things to people, which are jobs, health, education, the immediate things. That's the dilemma of a global, huge, rumbling-on crisis: can we get enough attention on it that it'll actually turn the situation around.

AY We saw that in the federal election that the issues of climate change didn't really get a look-in in the debate, particularly from the major parties. What can you do to get that debate happening in the community and therefore with politicians?

WATSON Yes. It struck me, having been campaigning in the country for the federal election in the seat of O'Connor, that a good season is not the time to be talking about climate change [laughs], because everyone's "Look out there: the crops are looking great and we've had the best season for a hundred years and what's climate change?" So that doesn't help the argument. Some of the core things, I think, to bring the debate back to, is that we have to make a transition into a low carbon economy, and actually we are well positioned to do that. Thank goodness for Radio National that they have excellent

presentation of where technology is taking us and that the economics of moving to renewable energy are beginning to stack up really strongly. I think it's having people see it as an opportunity rather than this negative thing. If we want to keep up with the rest of the changes that are happening in the rest of the world, then we need to be on this issue of shifting the economy. I think our challenge is to present that as a package. I think we've done well in some ways to date, arguing particularly urban planning issues, public transport, greener suburbs, increased dense nodes where you can build community. We've been at the forefront of presenting that sort of vision for Perth in particular, particularly thanks to some of the great visual work that Senator Scott Ludlum has put into that. That sort of stuff really excites people and they'd rather talk about the opportunities that come out of responding to climate change than being told again that there's not going to be enough water and we're going to have more bushfires. So I don't think we're doing too badly in this regard, but is it enough. Is it a vote changer? Is it something that people would want to get behind, is probably the key question, but also, of course, to see other political parties taking on some of our policy positions. On that I would say that the Labor Party here in WA is a case in point. I mean, they've moved now to be opposed to fracking, they maintain their opposition to uranium mining and they have quite a strong policy about protecting the native forests. So I think they might also be introducing some of these topics into the debate, which is a plus, and it might mean that we get some actual significant outcomes that if we do have a change in government we might actually see the necessary structural changes.

AY Assuming there is a change of government, how will you, the Greens, work with that different government and where do you think the priorities will be?

WATSON Well, yes, there was much hoo-ha and carryon during the federal election about how everybody said—the Labor Party and the Liberal Party said, “No, we won't come to any arrangements with the Greens”, you know. My experience in the state Parliament here is quite different. By and large, we had a really positive relationship with the Gallop Government. We achieved some significant legislative changes and policy changes. We didn't agree on 100 per cent, but then that's not surprising, we are different political parties. So I would remain positive about the role that the Greens can play if there is a change of government. Whether that's key work that we can do in committees, whether it's a balance of power situation that remains to be seen, but as long as the Labor Party here in WA I think have more progressive policies than they do at a national level, then I see that as a fertile ground for getting good outcomes. I don't think we are contemplating any formal agreement. Quite frankly, we don't see the need for it and I don't think the Labor Party would be looking

for that either, but that doesn't mean that we don't have good working relations and can get some good outcomes.

AY Let's move away from 2017 and look backwards. With all the years you spent in the upper house, some of your observations and reflections: let's look at, say, the PR [proportional representation] system³² and what you think of that. Would you change it, for example?

WATSON Well, our policy is that we should have PR in the lower house as well and that, again, this sort of first-past-the post in the lower house means that the barrier is very high for us to break into the lower house. Of the comparative models, I think the New Zealand one has a lot going for it. But of course that's not a federation of states, it's a federal system, so we can't make a direct comparison, but something akin to that is something that we would like to move to in the lower house.

AY Some of the criticisms, though, of the PR system are that it's costly and time-consuming to administer and that it does allow minor parties more of a say, which naysayers would say could create instability in Parliament.

WATSON Well, yes, this is an interesting debate in Australian discourse, but look at Europe. Many countries have Parliaments made up of multiple parties, particularly the Scandinavian countries. I noticed, interestingly enough, when I was in Canada, some of the provincial governments are not dissimilar. I mean, the one that sticks out in my mind was in Yellowknife, where you had 11 different nations of the First Nations' community, 11 different languages, and they all were in the same Parliament and they sat in a circle and they had translators to understand what each other was saying. There's no suggestion that that was

³² Proportional representation is the voting system used in the Western Australian Legislative Council. To be successful, a candidate must receive enough votes to reach a quota (not an absolute majority) which is based on the number of formal votes and number of candidates to be elected. Electors mark their ballot, allocating preferences to their preferred ranking for all candidates. A successful candidate must achieve a quota, calculated using the following formula:

$$\left(\frac{\text{Number of formal votes}}{\text{(Number of MLCs to be elected + 1)}} \right) + 1 = \text{Quota}$$

Subsequently, if the quota is not reached the candidate with the least number of votes is excluded and their votes redistributed according to the second preference shown. This process continues until a candidate reaches a quota.

Candidates, who receive a number of votes equal to or greater than the quota are elected immediately. Any votes of these elected candidates, which are surplus to the quota, are transferred to the remaining candidates at a reduced value known as a transfer value.

<https://www.elections.wa.gov.au/vote/voting-systems-wa>

somehow unstable or problematic. So I just think it's actually a bit of kind of lazy throwaway sort of thinking. Maybe it's because we're also so sort of sport obsessed in Australia, so everything's about: do you go for the Dockers or the Eagles? So people can't quite get their heads around maybe there's something other than that team or that team.

I think any analysis doesn't show that it leads to instability. Yes, it requires more negotiation; yes, it requires a longer time because you've got to consider a whole range of views. I mean, one of the things that was noticeable in the Legislative Council in '97, when we had the Democrats and ourselves and the Nationals and the Liberals and Labor, was instead of having two speakers on any bill, Labor and Liberal, and possibly a Nationals (the Nationals didn't actually speak on everything by any stretch of the imagination), you actually then had five, so your time to pass legislation was expanded. But that's not necessarily a bad thing. I mean, it all depends on what you view the purpose—and maybe this is where we might be heading with this line of questioning—of the Legislative Council is.

Now over many years I have seen a significant number of bills rushed through the Parliament, particularly in the so-called law and order category, criminal justice area, that shouldn't have been rushed through because the consequences are significant and a lot of views weren't properly considered, whether that be from the legal fraternity or wherever. So to have a performance criterion that says number of bills passed, you see it often. Annually, the media will do this, "Oh, well, they're so lazy; they've been sitting around and they've only passed 20 bills", or whatever it is, "It would be much better if they'd passed 80 or so." Well, look, if it's rubbish legislation [laughs], I don't agree. Just to have more laws or amending more laws doesn't make us a better or happier community. In fact, sometimes it can have the opposite effect.

But there's this sort of imperative to be seen to have done something, and particularly in, again, the law and order arena. The public's level of interrogation of this is often really low, so just to have said that the government will introduce a bill to do blah, the rest after that really isn't of interest to the public; as far as they're concerned, it's done, sorted, right. Well, I think the role of the Legislative Council is to interrogate what the consequences are going to be; what the cost is going to be; is there another way of doing it; perhaps legislation isn't the best way of resolving this matter; and it's certainly going to have unintended consequences. The one that stuck in my mind [laughs] was the so-called hoons—remember the hoons bill?—where not long after the bill went into law and became an act, I think it was a young mechanic driving a doctor's Ferrari or whatever it was, something flash, and the doctor lost

the car [laughs]; the car got confiscated. I can remember Paul Murray, who's not usually a huge fan of the Greens, pointing out that I was the only member in the Parliament who actually figured out this is exactly what would happen and completely challenged the police minister's view of the way the bill was structured.

So that's full credit to my research staff to have done the work and found out exactly what was likely to happen, and I guess it was gratifying in a way to be able to say, "Well, yes, and it did." But that's just an example of poorly drafted and rushed legislation, whereas a proper committee inquiry would at least have laid all that information out onto the public record. It would have slowed it up enough that perhaps there might have been some second thoughts. So I think that what's been so disappointing of late is that particularly the legislation committee has just been totally emaciated and not doing any work, unless that's changed of late. But certainly in the last period when I was in the Parliament, it didn't get any bills referred to it at all.

AY Giz, do you think the public, though, are going to be supportive of something that takes longer? So supposing we had PR, for example, in the lower house as well, all the sorts of things that you're talking about, more debate, more time to nuance, to look at laws, especially law and order as you've mentioned, do you think the public are going to tolerate that?

WATSON Well, look, I mean, I don't know that they feel that too much time is taken up in the Parliament. I think what they think is that there's a lot of frivolous debate and time wasting. Of course, the rules around timing and who can speak for how long and all those kind of things are an interesting sort of tension, because on the one hand the Parliament is the place where, in a democratic society, things do get debated. I know in the Legislative Council here there was very strongly a feeling that we didn't support using the gag or the guillotine to cut off debate, and that was across all the political parties. Different in the Assembly. So I think that's where perhaps you can make the differentiation between the role of the upper house and the lower house. Again, maybe I was well schooled by the Clerk, by Laurie Marquet, but I think that the committee system should be more thoroughly used. That actually doesn't buy up time in the house. If you get a good committee inquiry and you get a consensus report or a majority consensus report, that can be actually moved en bloc in the Parliament. Now, some people feel that's not right either because then you don't get the full debate laid out on the *Hansard*, but the committee reports are a fully public report as well. Interestingly enough, it's an enormous amount of work. If I kind of added up the hours that I

spent actually in committee work, it's kind of a hidden workload for members of Parliament. Most people think, "Oh, well, Parliament wasn't sitting; therefore, you were off sitting in a deckchair somewhere", when in fact the committee goes on most of the time and has a lot of extra hours outside of actual sitting times.

The other thing about committee work is that I kind of tried very hard to have the processes match the Greens' principle of participation. For example, with the estimates and financial operations committee, we thought for a long time about would there be a way of kind of getting questions from the community about particular areas of governance and financial operations. Quite complicated, but, again, in the New Zealand system they have specific stakeholders that get consulted on each topic. I think that's how you make the Parliament more relevant and more porous to a broader community input. I do remember it being said, though, that a lot of their committees were also always in public. Very few of them were held in camera. But, apparently, that could lead to a situation where the public participants, kind of was a bit more of a showpiece, so they kind of played up for the cameras. That's the other side of it that might occur.

But if you want to kind of make the Parliament something that people have more respect and ownership for, I think you've got to make it more accessible to them. It's kind of obvious, really. And I don't think we've got that right yet, not the least that I don't know how political or politically interested the general public are. I mean, they're quite happy to throw rocks, but when you kind of go, "Okay; how would you like to do this? What's your answer?" I think we were making that comparison with someone like Pauline Hanson who has attracted a significant vote again of angry people. But when you say, "Okay, I'm voting for Pauline Hanson because I hate the Family Court" and she says, "Yes, the Family Court gets it wrong and hurts people", but doesn't say what the alternative is, that is a very kind of shallow and reactionary bit of politics. So we'll see how that plays out, but that's the problem: how well you can engage people in understanding the complexities of some of the things that we actually are tackling in the Parliament, some of which are best dealt with by, say, legislation and others which are best dealt with by other mechanisms.

AY Let's look at the Legislative Council and where you see its role. It's variously described as the house of review to probe and check the administration of the laws through a committee system, which of course you were a very active member of; to force government to justify their policies; to require government to negotiate with interests outside their normal

channels and maintain oversight of the government's regulation-making power, and, of course, to represent a different quantum of interests because of the different voting system.

WATSON As I say, if we brought the balance back where the committee work was done in the Council, I think that would make that difference again. It has been pointed out, though—because I think WA is unusual with quite a significant number of committees in the Assembly as well—because the numbers in the Council are relatively low and haven't changed for a long time, each Council member is actually representing a significantly larger number of people than when it was first envisaged. If members are going to operate on one or two committees, if some of them were ministers or parliamentary secretaries, that compromises their ability to be on committees, so the numbers are very tight. I probably was unusual in the number of committees that I was on at any given time [laughs]. I think the max I was on at any given time was five, as well as the parliamentary work itself. I wouldn't recommend it [laughs]. Yes, so it is the time available. Maybe that's an argument that we need to have more Legislative Councillors. It is always unpopular to suggest that we need more parliamentarians, but I actually think we do need more in the Legislative Council, which will then create a problem because the building's not big enough. The population of WA continues to grow at apace. I think actually more representation, more representatives in the Council, would be good, and a stronger committee system.

AY Looking at some of these others, where do you see the focus? You know, the house of review, checks on government? How do you prioritise those different functions?

WATSON Yes. I mean, it's interesting to look at the Westminster tradition and what the role of the upper house is in that tradition. Again, I'm not actually recommending that [laughs]. When I went to the UK, I was quite shocked to realise that the House of Lords—I realised that there were the hereditary lords and that Blair had sorted that out to a large degree, but I didn't realise that with the House of Lords, the lords were selected by the Commons, not elected by the people (not a shining beacon of democracy, funnily enough [laughs]) and also expertise based. That was the other fascinating thing; you've got somebody who was an astronomer or whatever. So they've obviously got a different system there.

I think that the long, hard look is probably the key thing, and the taking off of political party hats as much as possible. So kind of problem solving and trying to take a broader, statewide, multi-vantage point view of an issue. Some of the most satisfactory work I think I observed

and was part of in the Council was, for example, the inquiry, frustratingly slow as it might have been, into advocacy for children. I think we've ended up with a pretty good system. Interestingly enough, four women on that select committee looked at how we might best provide advocacy for children and young people in the state. When that was carried through in legislation, not everybody got everything they wanted, but I think we ended up with a pretty good model. And then we had the benefit of a good appointee in Michelle Scott as the first commissioner. That was good work, and I think that's what the Legislative Council should focus on.

Holding the executive to account, it's got to be that one. That's why the estimates and financial operations is a critical role for the Council to apply that scrutiny, because the executive, the Assembly, is where the house of government is always going to have the numbers, no matter how finely balanced, to express the view of the executive. That's what they're going to do. The Council's got to provide that critique and that avenue for real scrutiny. So the power of finance committees in the upper house to subpoena people, hear evidence in private and all those kinds of things are paramount, otherwise—I was going to say there is no check and balance. I guess there's the Corruption and Crime Commission, but that's at a particular level, and, well, not without its problems, too [chuckles].

One of the fascinating things is all the power plays that become apparent when you've got two houses of Parliament, you've got committees, you've got the Corruption and Crime Commission, you've got the police, and to some extent the power that the media has. How do all those things interplay and what is a good system of checks and balances that are independent of the government of the day? I was very much engaged in that, thinking about how the Parliament is the ultimate power and voice of the people and that the upper house, the Council, plays a significant role in maintaining that, whether that's by making sure that our standing orders are contemporary, to some extent that interchange with the Corruption and Crime Commission was something that I was very much involved in, and should any other body, whether it's the police or a corruption commission, be able to search Parliament? Well, I don't think they should, or bug Parliament for that matter, or require papers to be produced et cetera, that kind of thing. Of course, that continues to be touched on. It's come up again in terms of the federal Parliament and documents and who's going to see them and the role of Parliament being able to exercise its privilege to say that these documents are the property of the Parliament. That's really powerful. It should help, it should engage, it should facilitate whistleblowers. It doesn't always work out that way. I certainly would be very

cautious about recommending that people become whistleblowers, because often it ends up badly, even though what they are exposing is also significant.

AY Does the privilege of the Parliament, though, affect the transparency that people are looking for?

WATSON Oh, yes. That's a fascinating conundrum, too [chuckles]. The first thing that came to mind was—I can't remember which previous WA government used to—the story about wheeling documents into cabinet and giving them the cloak of protection of cabinet and then wheeling them back out again. I think that was probably under Burke or one of those earlier [laughs], maybe Charlie Court. I can't remember. That's a slightly different matter. Look, I think it's important that the Parliament is able to receive information in confidence and make that judgement about whether that material should then become public. It's been the source of a great deal of debate and consideration and advice: what's in the public interest and who should decide? My default position, and I think the default position of the Greens, is that as much as possible should be there for the public and the media to examine. But sometimes you are also protecting whistleblowers or people whose reputation or family might be affected by them being known publicly in connection to a certain matter. It comes down to you just have to trust that—it's hard, isn't it [chuckles]? Who do you trust [laughs]?

AY Well, who do the public trust?

WATSON Who do the public trust? That's right. Well, generally, they don't trust politicians. With no offence to members of the media, there were some members of the media that I wouldn't trust that much either [laughs], present company excluded. To hold out any particular subset of the community as the most trustworthy is a little tricky. It came up with a discussion about shield laws for journalists and protecting the sources and all that kind of stuff. Yes, it's also really changed with everything being so available on social media now. The whole question of privacy is a much bigger discussion. Virtually everything now is public.

AY It's not so much privacy; it's more accountability, isn't it?

WATSON Yes, that's true. They are related but not the same. In my experience, there are very few occasions when a committee or the house itself might decide to keep something private or privy to within the Parliament. I don't think it was to obscure accountability. In my

experience, parliamentarians were pretty clear that they were about holding people to account. It's interesting too, because some of the areas where that becomes sticky were around commercial-in-confidence, for example. So when you have a government that enters into private-public partnerships with private prison providers, for example, or healthcare providers, we had quite a few tussles with getting to all the detail of contracts and how money was expended because the private provider would claim commercial-in-confidence.

Our committee, the estimates committee, and the Auditor General would often join forces to try and get underneath that and get that information out. You know, it's public money that's being spent. I think that one hasn't been taken far enough, to be honest. We would like to see that information much more available to the public. Yes, that would be an area where we would say the accountability isn't fully exposed; not for want of trying for people like myself or the Auditor General. We've had very good service from Auditors General. Yes, that's not so much the Parliament obstructing that; it's actually more to do with the private sector, to be honest. So, I guess what I'm trying to say is that I think that parliamentarians take their job fairly seriously in that regard, in terms of transparency and accountability, and often are willing to drop their political allegiances to do that; often quite critical of their own colleagues, certainly in private. I think I would actually say that I feel reasonably comfortable that that job has been done pretty well.

AY What about the other roles of the Legislative Council as we just listed through a little while ago? In your experience, over your years there, how well does the upper house do its job?

WATSON Well, I think it could be better. I haven't been there for the last three years, so things might have changed. I think there is a proportion of the people that get elected into the Council who see that as kind of almost like their retirement plan, so they've been loyal contributors to their political parties in various ways and a seat in the Legislative Council, certainly historically, and I think probably to some extent it is still true, is seen as a reward, because, if it's a safe seat, you get number one on the ticket. I'm not pointing my finger at anybody in particular. It's almost like you could see that once they got in there, they sort of like give a sigh of relief, "Oh, right, okay, now I'm okay" [chuckles]. Maybe people could work a bit harder and take it a bit more seriously, I think. There was also some frustration that people felt that they got in there and then they weren't able to talk about anything because their parties didn't want them to, or that wasn't the expectation. Yes, I think it might benefit from a bit of a review of the core functions. And if people really did get that being on a good

committee and doing some good work was a contribution that they could make, that would be good.

AY Are there ways that it could be improved, or is it just the function of the make-up of that particular group of people?

WATSON Yes, I mean, that exercised my mind a fair bit too. The Parliament is meant to reflect the people in terms of its representation, and it doesn't actually. Like the gender balance we certainly had pretty right for a while there. I'm not quite sure whether that's slipped back again. Then you've got age issues, you've got ethnicity and the various sort of components of our community who should have a voice in there. Of course, Aboriginal representation as well is another whole question, and whether you should actually reserve a spot in recognition of Aboriginal under-representation at the moment. Yes, and if you are going to represent the community, then you're going to get a wide range of views and backgrounds and experiences and knowledge base.

Again, I remember when I first got in and I was quite fascinated by this sort of ... Not that there's no selection criteria, but there's no job description. Like, are you going to be expected to be knowledgeable in political thought or management or finance or whatever it is? I remember having a discussion with one of the clerks at the time, saying I think it would be good if there was some sort of selection criteria. And he argued very strongly against that, and he said, "No, the Parliament is actually about being open to anybody who wants to put their hand up." He won me over on that, maybe [chuckles], but it can still mean that it's frustrating, I think, in that regard. Thank goodness that we have in the Parliament excellent staff with high qualifications and good assistance to members to do their job. I hadn't really even thought about that component, but you know a lot of the work that Parliament does is a credit to their professional abilities and extraordinary patience, apart from anything else [laughs].

I think because I've spent a fair amount of time over various work that I've done understanding facilitation and consensus, and realising that trying to write a consensus report, being the minute taker and the drafter of a committee report is a really challenging job. You're getting directions from possibly five different people. You've got to somehow record that. You've got to professionally deal with how—the chair is obviously running the process, but the staff have got to be pretty darn good to accurately reflect what's being said in committees, and almost without exception they're fantastic. They really are very talented

people and able to put up with, manage, or work in an environment with a bunch of politicians [laughs]. It's not everybody's cup of tea [laughs].

AY And especially useful to new politicians?

WATSON Yes.

AY What I want to ask you is, with the great benefit of hindsight, what would you say to that Giz Watson who walked into Parliament for the first time in 1997? What advice would you give her?

WATSON Look for possibilities everywhere. Sometimes the Parliament can be a very frustrating place because you feel like, certainly for myself, and I think it'd be true for any Greens, we come in with an expectation of wanting to change things, to bring in new issues, to change legislation, to shake the system up a bit. It's a very slow moving, conservative and moribund, in a way, workplace, but there are possibilities. There are always things that can be improved, and it doesn't mean that we're the be-all and end-all about improving things.

I didn't know anything about the committee systems. I hadn't any idea about the committee systems, but you think: okay, where can I make a difference? That would be probably what I would have advised: look for where you can make a difference; maybe not to spread yourself too thin, because there is a danger that you could stretch yourself and become less effective. But I'm not sure that that happened. I mean, the variety of roles that I took—and I think that was good because it was definitely stimulating and keeps you on your toes and I think the fact that we were engaged not only in good committee work and good inquiries whether holding the government to account, those sorts of things, and also looking at changing the standing orders. We took 18 months to review the standing orders. It might seem a bit boring to most people—and probably actually fairly impenetrable—but looking at the rules around the Parliament and trying to make them more contemporary, we made all the language gender-neutral. I think that's quite significant. There was quite a lot of willpower to actually stick at doing the job because it was a bit tedious.

Yes, I suppose I'm getting a bit rambling about what I would suggest to an incoming new member, but certainly take some time to observe before you make too many judgements about what is or isn't happening or what does or doesn't work. Sometimes, some of the traditions have stood the test of time and they actually work quite well. They might seem a bit

quaint, but actually there's a reason and it is all about building in checks and balances, very interesting subject. The separation of powers; that's one example of how you balance the executive, the Parliament and the courts and who can have the final say on what. Then the relationship between the community and the Parliament and companies and government departments; it's an interesting thing to get the balance right so that people are accountable, that things are transparent, but also not completely moribund, so rigidly held, that they can't actually function very well. So, yes, keep your eyes and ears open and take advice from as many places as possible. As I say, I learnt a lot from staff. If I was to say, "What do I miss about not being there?", it is actually working with them. No deference to my political colleagues, but the staff of the Parliament are extraordinary support for the whole democratic process that is often unseen by the public and I'd include in that all the kinds of advisers and people who work to have good laws. It's a fairly thankless task, but they, I think by and large, do a good job.

AY It occurs to me that, looking back to 1997, how much the Greens have changed in the sense that when you went into the Parliament, you really didn't have any mentors within your own party, but now ...

WATSON Not from a parliamentary perspective; that's right, no, no.

AY Not from a parliamentary work perspective, whereas now, new upcoming Greens, for instance, would have you. I wonder where you think the Greens are going to go in the future as a party in WA?

WATSON Yes, yes. It's an interesting thing because, as I was saying just a few minutes ago, we have a fairly, what would be described as a radical agenda compared to other political parties and I guess that was what I was trying to say in my inaugural speech and then when I did my final speech and tried to make that comparison. Like, can radical change be achieved through the Parliament? Frankly, no, I don't think so. That's not the nature of the Parliament, but significant change? Yes; and some of that's cultural and some legislative policy changes—sorry, I'll answer that properly in a minute. But I think also one of the differences that I hope I was able to make was cultural, about bringing the culture of consensus and nonviolence into what is normally, or more usually, seen as an adversarial place. That line between dealing with one's opponents respectfully and learning from one's opponents, of course—one's opponents teach you much more than one's friends—and building consensus. I guess that's why I was particularly attracted to the committee system

because it generally is a consensus, but some of that is kind of also not immediately obvious. But to have committee rooms that have tables that are circular is fairly revolutionary actually, because it used to be like a court set-up. That's something that I kind of actually initiated and kind of, apparently, it works. I knew it was going to work, so that was good [laughs]. Some of those things do have a lasting effect, I believe, I hope. You're just going to have to take me back to the question you were asking.

AY Just how you see the future and, really in that sense, the contribution that the Greens can make to political debate.

WATSON I think we will continue to advocate long-term holistic sort of solutions, whether that is the whole question about how many people we lock up and why as a community do we have this obsession with law and order. That's something which we will continue to bring good thinking to, I believe. Obviously, elevating the environment and sustainability is ongoing work. We haven't yet, as a community, figured out how we live on the planet without destroying it or consuming it faster than it can recover. We will continue to make those contributions in those sorts of policy areas.

I would like to think we will also continue to contribute to building respect for the Parliament, because, again, one of the things that really—there was one debate we had, I think it was about changes to the laws around restraining orders, and it's a delicate area, the whole issue of violence in our community. The way that that debate was conducted in the Council was very effective, respectful and constructive. I remember the adviser who had carriage of the legislation came up to me after the debate and said, "Thank you so much. That was what I expected the Parliament should be like in terms of taking seriously this area of policy and respectfully debating amendments. It was considered and it was evidence based and, thank goodness, you have restored my faith in the Parliament." So, that was really nice to get that sort of feedback from a public servant who obviously had made the comparison between the debate in the Assembly and the debate in the Council [laughs].

So I suppose what I'm saying there is that I think we, hopefully, bring serious minds to matters. I'm not suggesting we've got a monopoly on that, but I think our approach is evidence based. Maybe it's because we, at this point in our history, are not the government of the day. Some people would argue you've got the luxury to perhaps argue a more pure position. I don't see that there's anything wrong with that. Those questions should be raised, and if we're the party that's raising that, then that's good. I think we will continue to do that

and sooner or later we will be in government in one way or another. My argument is, and I think the vision for the Greens is, either we will be in government or some of these ways of being in a democracy, of working respectfully and thoughtfully with each other, will become so much part of the way everybody else does it that, quite frankly, we can go off and do something else, which is fine [laughs], because quite a lot of the parliamentary work is fairly mundane. It's not to say that it isn't important and doesn't need doing, but I would also like to think at some point that we don't respond to everything by thinking that legislation is the answer, because certainly it just continues to reinforce an adversarial approach to so many things; again, think law and order, think justice.

Maybe if we taught kids how to resolve differences as a fundamental part of their schooling—in fact, little kids are pretty good at it [chuckles]—then we wouldn't have a community that was so violent and argumentative and adversarial. You've got to, kind of, look at embedding those changes at a much earlier point, I think. It's the same with respect for the environment. I guess I feel now that that work inevitably happens outside of a Parliament, but it would be nice if the Parliament, one of the questions it would ask is: is the solution to this particular question legislation or not? We'd do ourselves out of a job, in a way. No, but there'd still be plenty of laws that need to be adjusted. But, again, looking back historically at the number of bills that a Parliament dealt with, say, in the early 1900s compared to what we deal with today, lots of bills, complex, interrelated legal matters, we've made ourselves a bit of a conundrum, I think. I'm not suggesting that we go totally minimalist, but I just question if we do overdo the amount of legislation that we put into the public realm.

AY We have ranged far and wide in these discussions; far and wide [laughter]. Just to finish up, is there anything that you would like to reflect on or mention?

WATSON Well, it's been quite an adventure [laughs]. Yes, I have really learnt a lot doing the job in Parliament. It's hard work. Maybe it's as hard as you make it, I suppose. There's plenty to be done in this sphere and I certainly would encourage people to consider it as a job they might like to do, as long as they don't take it too seriously—that might sound somewhat strange—but I [chuckles] see it as one of the places that you can make a difference and you can change and you can contribute, but it isn't the be-all and end-all. It's an important forum. It's a pretty reasonable way of having a democratic say, but it shouldn't be seen as the only way. But it has to continue; Parliament must continue to question its relevance and the level of respect and why the level of respect might be not very high. Some of the things members of Parliament can fix themselves, but maybe not all of them. We live

in a much more complex and faster-moving society than ever before. What role a Parliament plays in that is worth pondering.

AY What about for you personally? You've hinted a bit at mentoring. Maybe you're going to be an elder statesman for the Greens [laughter].

WATSON Less of the elderly, please [laughs]. Yes.

AY Where do you see the future for you?

WATSON Yes, look, I'm certainly keen to share experience and to mentor and advise, if that's what people would like. Yes, I still see myself being very much part of the democratic processes and some of the, I guess, deeper ways of working. I see my direction being towards how do we deal with conflict and dispute and difference in our community, part of which is what Parliament does, but the other part is what do we do as humans with each other and within our community. I think some of the anger and—what's the word?—disempowerment that people are feeling is coming to a crescendo, not just in Australia but internationally. There's something broken in the way that we are as community. We need to be thinking quickly and creatively about resolving that. In effect, what we're potentially seeing is a resurgence of fascism, and that is very scary, very scary. What do you say to counter the sort of fearmongering, racism and anger that people are expressing, lashing out with? And some of that anger is quite legitimate, but some of it's misplaced too. I think there's always good work to be done. I'm actually moving some of my energy into working with the Greens internationally and growing the strength and capacity of Greens parties internationally.

AY Giz, thank you so much.

WATSON Yes, no, it's been great; it's been absolutely wonderful and I've enjoyed it very much.

AY So have I. Thank you, Giz.

WATSON Cheers.

[End of GizWatson_16_edited]