

JUST FAMOUS ENOUGH NOT TO BE NOTICED

As told by
Michael Donovan

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1991 - 1998 Tourism | Environment | Advisory

*Risks must be taken because
the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing.*

The selection process for the CEO role at the BVCB was strange. I applied, did a phone interview, was short-listed but heard nothing for two months. In the interim I was generously briefed in detail about incentives, conventions, events and the politics of convention bureaux by Elizabeth Rich the former head of the Meetings Industry Association of Australia and already a good mate. I got *the good and bad 'oil'* on the national industry but in particular the way in which the industry operated in Queensland. This detailed snapshot and lexicon of *Who's Who* was gold.

Another friend, John Rowe, CEO at the Sydney Convention and Visitors Bureau likewise shared his perspectives plus many details on structure and the International Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaux whose Australian Representative Member was

David Hall, formerly of Adelaide but just appointed CEO at the Gold Coast bureau.

When the acceptance call did come, without any face-to-face meeting with the board, I was asked to start as soon as possible. I was engaged under a performance-based contract as a consultant. The Chairperson, Judith Maestracci had been the former CEO at Gold Coast Visitors and Convention Bureau, succeeded by David Hall. The Brisbane bureau was under the patronage of the Brisbane City Council and had direct relations with the Lord Mayor's office through an adviser, Mike Dart, reporting to Mayor Jim Soorley, a former Catholic Priest. With my appointment, Council released its annual six hundred thousand dollar funding support to the bureau which it had been holding pending a new CEO being put in place.

The operation of the bureau was an impost on Council annual resources. Council wanted to pass the cost of the bureau onto the industry. So talk of a 'bed-tax' to boost bureau international marketing capacity was a hot topic from my first day. On this matter I was to deal with Richard Joel, brother of Dr Michael Joel, my bicentennial chairman. Richard and I became good friends and I often sought his wise counsel. He ran the Office of Economic Development in Brisbane and was keen to include tourism in trade initiatives. We participated on three overseas delegations to boost Brisbane's reputation as a place to visit for convention business, trade and holidays.

Co-incidentally with starting my new role Hoyts Brisbane assembled a few of those left standing for a reunion. The Regent Theatre Bar saw a gathering of John Scott, Ken Kirkley, George Haines, Reg Ives, Des Adams, and Margaret Murphy. It was a night of tall-tales and reminiscing which I enjoyed immensely with wonderful people and good friends from years past.

Carol was thrilled with the prospect of living in Brisbane but having recently undergone a hysterectomy she could not fly to Brisbane to select a home. She trusted in me to do this. I selected one for rent in Chapel Hill. BHP Engineering did not wish to

lose Carol and immediately found a similar role for her in their Brisbane office. It was a promising start. While still recuperating, she packed up our North Sydney house, found a rental agent and planned to drive to Brisbane with Brig, our Corgi-Dachshund cross, named after my original pet, and two friends who would share the driving.

I gave them directions to the suburb, a description of the house and colour and the street number. Wrong colour and number. Duh! Thankfully, I had balloons on the letterbox identifying the two-story modern home with a large pool for summer and a fire-place for winter. Brisbane can get surprisingly cold in August. Carol loved the choice.

I was settling in nicely at the bureau but the organisation had challenges needing solutions. No strategic plan or business plan, lack-lustre membership services, less than adequate facilities, demotivated staff and a less than cohesive board under a dominant chair. Planning sessions and membership consultation started to get things on track. A move into the Town Hall suite of offices formerly occupied by the Lady Mayoress and staff set us up with a prestigious address and a close working proximity to important council personnel and to the Lord Mayor's office.

Changing staff roles around, challenging current staff expertise against a set of new recruits with different backgrounds and credentials all started to invigorate the business and perceptions around the bureau's role in marketing Brisbane. I took the view the bureau should not just market the destination but actively participate in and guide the creation of new experiences for tourists. It would do this by working on the development and introduction of a continually refreshed product inventory and by testing new offers. The board backed the move.

The bureau board comprised the CEO of Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation, Ken Rosebery; the General Manager of Queen Street Mall, attraction operator Ken Mander-Jones, businessman Ray Shaw, hotelier Phil Lee, General Manager of the Sheraton Hotel and cruise ship operator Josephine Tobias-Webb.

Shaw and I locked horns fairly quickly over his supply of goods to the bureau which, in my and the auditors opinion, didn't meet basic fiduciary and probity criteria for a director dealing with a company on whose board he sat. Also, it was shown not to be as good a deal anyway when prices were competitively contested.

With my previous entertainment background I also wanted to join with the arts community. My idea was to bring them into the tourism mainstream because the recent development of the South Bank precinct for cultural and entertainment activity following Expo'88 had huge experiential activity potential. Linked to this was the government's plan for building Australia's most modern and largest convention and exhibition centre as part of this expanding zone next to the Brisbane River.

I searched for new staff who could deliver on such initiatives. Naturally, there was push-back from current office-holders who suddenly had to work to keep their jobs. John England, George Parkyn, Melissa MacCourt joined the two current senior staff members, Ray Jepson and John Clark.

George came to the bureau from Dreamworld where he was part of the team behind the annual Coca-Cola Australian Music Awards. George invited Carol and me to the 1992 awards along with a bunch of others and held a private drinks party before the big event. George gave me the last special souvenir cap available much to Carol's chagrin, as caps are not me. During the drinks a guy strolled over to us and chatted to the side of the main group. He looked vaguely familiar to Carol but not me. As we were all called to the start of the awards ceremony he asked where he might get the same cap as I was wearing. I explained it was a limited edition and the last. He was disappointed being he was an avid collector. I offered mine to him. He graciously accepted. During the awards our new acquaintance was revealed as a star. George, who was backstage, reckons at the end of his performance Jon Bon Jovi thanked the crowd, took off the cap and waving it said, "and thanks Michael." He had asked George for

my name. I don't recall his thanks happening. I wonder if he still has the cap.

To bring the bureau membership on-board with the new initiatives, we beefed-up the monthly members meetings with expert talks on marketing and product development. Members were expected to deliver a 20 minute product and service overview to their peers in order to cross-promote and expand each other's knowledge of what was contained within and across the broad membership base. They received immediate feedback from their peers on how to improve their pitch. The process was very popular. Additionally, George Parkyn developed and ran a parallel program for bureau members needing to improve service quality.

Internal member satisfaction surveys showed the process added great value to the whole membership who started to learn from and build on each other's experience and expertise; a network within a network approach. So successful were these exchanges in cross fertilising connections and attracting new business, we were able to modify the membership cost structure a year later. Many members were able to segment and differentiate more successfully allowing them to compete less on price alone.

I was to use this experience and positive lessons in 1997 when advising the Sydney Convention and Visitors Bureau on options to reform their membership base.

As the proverbial new guy on the block, who was seen as shaking up tourism thinking, I was also seen as having no alliances; in other words, no baggage. I received a call from Bruce Edwards of the Queensland Premiers Department and was offered a brief to undertake an evaluation of the tenders for operation of the proposed new convention and exhibition centre on South Bank. In making my observations and recommendations across the seven applicants I proposed to government a separate tender for pre-construction marketing of the new complex would be appropriate. They agreed. The bureau submitted competitively and won the task.

John England ran the Tourist Information Booth in the Queen Street Mall with nearly 100 core volunteers who we could expand to some 300 for big events. John and I saw an opportunity to 'professionalise' information-staff education and content. Once this could become a normal part of bureau operating process we realised better trained and more professional volunteers could more easily step up and fulfil our concept of a one-stop-shop approach to information in the Mall. While traditionally the 'vol-lies' were happy to talk and suggest product and services to visitors, many couldn't sell, didn't like selling and didn't like handling cash. This had to change. It took nearly a year but we got there.

In February 1993, construction started on a new information kiosk in the Queen Street Mall to be shared by the bureau and Mall management. Having enthusiastic and capable Volunteer Ambassadors became essential. I set about writing a training manual for visitor information centre volunteers. Once completed, edited and signed-off by staff and a working group of members, the local Technical and Further Education (TAFE) provided facilities over several weeks so we could up-skill all volunteers with the new approach.

We also decided to connect the top ten percent of our ambassadors into the regular monthly members product briefing sessions. We had a two-way train-the-trainer approach to spread information dissemination across the network of volunteers and the members.

Like many groups that are basically left to run themselves, the volunteers had a clique of leaders who dominated and used others as serfs. Asking them to change their way of doing things was seen as unnecessary and a criticism of the effort they donated. Despite much talking, the leadership dug in and became an obstacle to continuous improvement.

We were trying to make the role of an information officer more interesting, updated with better and more diversified content and to provide a more professional service to visitors for which our members were paying. Much to the board's discomfort I rolled

the leadership, many of whom were long time friends of directors. John then did a terrific job with the new training material, new approach and more open minded volunteers.

We modified the core training materials and developed a course for taxi drivers but this failed to get traction owing to the difficulty of pulling them off shift to learn about tourism product when earning a living topped their order of priority. We were not able to get the bus driver course up either.

A new bureau business plan was in place by September 1992 and contained an initiative built around emerging touch-screen technology to place stand-alone interactive kiosks across Brisbane in places like the airport, bus and train interchanges, public spaces and main crossings in the CBD and suburbs. A big undertaking it was one which would expand our point-of-touch and after-hours reach capabilities. After all, we knew visitors wanted and needed information outside of our operating hours. The idea was ahead of its time. While it had nominal board support, other more pressing deliverables pushed the project into the background.

Some months after providing the new training, I was asked by Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation (QTTC) to write part of the marketing content of a set of training manuals for Queensland tourism operators. We did two versions. One for small to medium enterprise and one for the big guys. Published by QTTC, the booklets were popular and used for several years.

I took on the role of Chairman for what was then the Queensland Tourism Industry Association (QTIA). This connected me with the *Who's Who* of tourism in Queensland at a formal network level. Coupled with my committee membership, as Brisbane bureau chief, of the Regional Tourism Association (RTA), these provided excellent peer-to-peer connections. A great bunch of folk who, despite all being competitive, were always happy to assist and where one could have one's thinking challenged.

Inviting the arts community to become involved in tourism had not only opened a fresh sector of membership to the bureau but linked cultural content opportunities for conventions, exhibitions

and incentives to be included in bids just as I had done with UITP. This brought me to the attention of Councillor David Hinchliffe who chaired the Brisbane City Council Arts Board. I was invited to join. Some little time later I also accepted a directorship on the prestigious and long running Warana Festival Board. These roles positioned me to take on the Deputy Chairmanship of the inaugural Brisbane International Film Festival which still runs some 20 years later. The redoubtable Des Power of *Provisible* was Chairman.

For our first festival slated for 26 August to 6 September 1993 we wanted a big name. I re-opened correspondence with Roman Polanski. You will recall I had originally been in contact with Polanski over *In God's Name* and the musical *Quasimodo*. As it happened I was to be in Paris with a tourism contingent so he and I met at his Avenue Montaigne, Paris apartment. He initially agreed to come to Brisbane for the event but subsequently withdrew by fax in July due to a conflicting film schedule. I suspect it was more due to uncertainty around extradition to the USA on an outstanding warrant for statutory rape for which he subsequently apologised in a documentary.

Des Power had a vision around a set of long-term goals which might create various legacies from the film festival. Our sponsorship group took a model from the Cambridge Film Festival in the United Kingdom, where Steven Spielberg held the Cambridge Chair of Film, and Cameron Mackintosh held the Cambridge Chair of Theatre, both pulling corporate advantage to that festival worth ten million dollars annually. Des was brilliant at seeking sponsorship from corporates.

For someone with a complete lack of sporting prowess I found it funny I was asked to chair the Brisbane 1994 World Masters Games Promotions Committee by Games GM, Lois Appleby. I suppose it was because my organisational, public relations and marketing expertise were needed; not my dud bowling, ability to sink and not swim and lack of enthusiasm for most sports. So un-Australian and so un-Queensland, I know. My work for the games

forged a closer relationship between the bureau and Queensland Events Corporation run by David Williams.

The potential for a cruise terminal in Brisbane was mooted but didn't have great support from the likes of Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation or my chair. Given my efforts with Air New Zealand to hub at Brisbane Airport I saw cruise connections as part of building overall tourist number capacity using specialised bureau membership services. I pushed for and got sufficient support to plan and offer an expert industry conference which ran 3-5 November 1993. I think I can claim some influence in catalysing thinking about a cruise terminal for Brisbane. This came to fruition by the hard work of others and Des Power became chairman of the cruise terminal corporation.

As bureau chief I did a lot of travel domestically and internationally. These international gigs were in the company of terrific industry colleagues. Annually there are a large number of major international sales conferences and exhibitions which form a world circuit. The volume is in the thousands and potentially huge business. All bureaux attend. Some partner, as Brisbane did, while others compete. Hard work also means hard play and this group from Australia were no different.

One particular night in Chicago, following two days of selling at the huge McCormick Convention Centre, now renamed McCormick Place, it was my task to find a dining experience for the OZ group. I had heard about Shaw's Crab House on the lower level behind the Wrigley Building (yes, the chewing gum company). Some 20 Australians rolled up to an 8pm dinner booking to encounter Shaw's unique *wait-and-be-called* approach to bookings.

Brisbane, represented by me and Sandra Chipchase representing Sydney were the hosts. Back then, Shaw's made you wait in the oyster bar where you drank and slipped down oysters for an hour before being shown to your table. You must be in the bar when called or suffer queue slippage. No excuses, no arguments. Once we were seated the menu selection justified its reputation. Again, back then, a house specialty was wondrous seafood

speciality from Marseilles' *Bouillabaisse* but served in a *Veuve Clicquot* bucket. A huge serving designed to be shared around friends. The crab cakes are deservedly to die for. The event was a huge success for Sandra and me.

The tourism event we were servicing was IT&ME (Incentive Travel and Meeting Executives) one of the industry's biggest events on the annual calendar. The Australian contingent traditionally held a cocktail party for clients and prospects. One year, the entertainer was brilliant Australian flautist Jane Rutter. Following the formal event many of us stayed to socialise and Jane generously played on. Her piano accompanist also stayed. What followed was the worst set of sing-alongs you have ever heard. The only thing which stopped our murdering more tunes was the removal of the piano by the technical crew in the wee hours of the morning.

On arrival in Chicago some days before, one of my suitcases containing our marketing and sales display went missing. It was nearly midnight when I fronted the lost baggage counter behind a very tall elegantly dressed black man. He was not happy his bag was lost. I gleaned he had been waiting for news on its recovery. His language and physical demeanour to the black lady on this service desk was most threatening. She was polite but firm and he was sent away to wait "a couple more hours" as efforts were made to locate and return his suitcase.

I stepped up to the counter and pointed to the style guide featuring my bag and explained its purpose and sought assistance. The lady was accommodating, polite and efficient. She found my prior flight and bag were on their way to Paris. She arranged for the item to be taken from the Paris flight when it landed and walked to a return aircraft at Charles de Gaulle airport. I got it back before the event opened the next night.

I observed to her she had handled the previous complainant well and complimented her on her ability to stay firm and polite under his tirade. I casually asked whether she thought his bag would be found and returned to calm him down.

Her reply proves one needs to respect service staff as they have huge power over resolution of complaints. "Oh! I know where his bag is now." she said, "It's that one at the back," pointing to the rear wall heap of luggage. "It will teach him some manners to wait until I 'find it' when he gets back." Tired as I was the laughter between us both was an excellent tonic.

I travelled to Italy, Germany, Netherlands, England and on with this group of tourism professionals. It was an annual pilgrimage. On one occasion a group of us took a meal one night with the head of security of Milan airport who cleared a restaurant of dining locals for us; amazing abuse of position and not very kind. In Amsterdam I took the group to a roadside cafe – literally on an island strip between heavy traffic – for sensational pots of mussels in garlic and white wine, with cold beer and oven fresh bread.

The State government, not Brisbane City Council, issued tender documents for the construction of the Convention and Exhibition Centre on South Bank. I had advised them on specifications and facilities from the bureau's perspective. Apparently some content written by me and presented to a Ministerial Advisory Council on Tourism chaired by then MP Peter Beatty had impressed and to my surprise I was asked to provide an independent assessment of the three short-listed organisations. There was one clear, best operator on paper. Ogden got the contract.

I have previously mentioned that with some foreknowledge of what the new building would offer to the meetings, incentive, conventions and exhibition's market globally, I put a plan to the board for BVCB to undertake the initial pre-construction sales and marketing for the Centre. I had already recommended this to government as part of the review I had undertaken for Premiers. The bureau had won the job. My chair, Judith Maestracci, desperately wanted to go on the trip.

Ultimately, the mission was made up of just two, me and the bureau conference manager, John Clark. Only the two of us were necessary. Given Judith was fuming I sought the counsel of Richard Joel as to what was an acceptable team. He agreed two was best

to avoid any suggestion of a junket. I had powerful endorsement for resisting the Chair. Successfully delivering on the tender meant the bureau was to work even more closely with Richard and Mark Paddenberg. Mark went on to *Invest Queensland* and the *Innovation Centre* on the Sunshine Coast where I have retired. In August 1992, Nigel Chamier and Ted Edwards joined the OED Board and with Richard and Mark were supporters of combining trade and tourism. This saw us partner to Kobe and Nagoya for the Japanese markets and to Chicago for the US.

The Brisbane bureau's pre-construction sales and marketing engagement, directly with government on behalf of the eventual convention and exhibition centre management, got up QTTC's nose. QTTC felt they should be in poll-position. The bureau thought otherwise. We held our ground. This was despite QTTC CEO Ken Rosebery sending two of his top people in Stephen Gregg and Maree Tetlow to convince us to still be involved but by paying for QTTC to manage the relationships.

We maintained our ground and came out as equal partners in global public relations and marketing. The bureau's successes meant we had excellent currency to act independently in the eyes of George Street (State government headquarters) and Brisbane City Council. Jim Soorley in particular was always looking for 'wins' to promote his council. In effect, the BVCB was an agency of council as they provided the majority of our operational budget.

QTTC CEO and bureau director Rosebery spoke to Judith about his dissatisfaction with the outcome but she too held her ground because it gave 'her' bureau more influence. What I didn't know until the next board meeting was the State Treasurer, Keith De Lacy, had spoken to the Chair and mentioned he was hearing 'good things' about the revitalised bureau. When Judith dropped this at the meeting Rosebery backed-off. When the next trade trip to Japan was assembled, the Brisbane bureau was there beside big hitters such as the Gold Coast bureau.

For a solid month John Clark and I had talked ourselves hoarse selling a convention and exhibition facility building which wasn't

even a hole in the ground as yet. We had terrific visuals and a strong membership which could provide for or support every likely service any major nation or international event or association would need. We returned with some fifty million dollars in prospects on the books. These strong leads were passed over to the venue operating partner, Ogden, which had been announced during our sales and marketing trip.

The bureau membership was delighted with this outcome. The bureau team were demonstrating and proving their new capabilities and we had secured a firm relationship directly with the new facility managers. But an overall positive outcome wasn't the tone of the board meeting I faced as I stepped off the plane from this hugely successful trip.

In the background to all this work and my outside roles, wherein I could influence understanding and support for tourism at various levels, I had a chair who wanted more personal media exposure. Judith liked the limelight and I was ignoring her need. A couple of directors wised me up to her disappointment her status wasn't being offered as much opportunity for press and exposure as she thought appropriate. Judith also had her nose out of joint over my close contact with the Lord Mayor while she had a closer connection with the minder Dart. I had cooked for the annual Lord Mayor's office staff BBQ on one occasion.

I usually tried to clear my desk of Monday to Friday stuff in the relative quietness of Saturday afternoons. Similarly, it appears, with Soorley. It was not uncommon for him to drop in for an occasional casual chat dressed most un-Mayoral like in daggy shorts, bare feet and a t-shirt. He would catch up on detail; we'd gossip and discuss religion (he was a former Catholic Priest) and politics.

I would always tell Judith M about the conversations and highlight content important in her role as chair. Her desperate need was to be there. Her solution was to have a space created for her in the board room, an 'office nook'. After just one of her contrived Saturday attendances, Soorley never came back. I moved my 'empty-the-in-tray-day' to Sunday at home.

The AGM would be my first since assuming the role and acting to repair the business. It was the second AGM for the chair so some issues were matters occurring on her watch. I suggested to the chair she may wish to opt for a low profile, at least until after the Annual General Meeting in November.

An initial audit by KPMG in the previous year, insisted upon by Council to underpin their patronage, showed work was needed on better cash-flow management, basic internal controls and security upgrades to the computer systems among other more minor issues. These had been flagged to me during due diligence just three months before. I had worked hard to fix the problems. Judith backed off.

Happily a concept around creating an annual city celebration called Brisbane Day with annual awards recognising great achievement then popped up from council and I deflected Judith's attention further by encouraging her to be the bureau's representative for planning this event. Subsequently, the bureau organised and presented the inaugural Brisbane Day and I was master-of-ceremonies for the award presentations.

The AGM in November 1992 went well. The team were on top of the KPMG requirements plus we were resolving final issues with the office changes and fit-out. I thanked the team but also reminded them anything discovered or which went awry from now on was our responsibility. They took the hint and overall the next year saw marked improvements in service levels and accountability. Except for two employees, the rest sailed through their performance appraisals in May '93. One was asked to go and the other retired making way for new talent.

Just after the AGM gave us a clean report card another of my involvements, as part of a group contributing advice to government on the convention and exhibition centre project, came to an end when Queensland Administrative Services awarded convention centre construction contracts to Leighton's and Convex in May 1993. The announcement was to be attended by Judith Maestracci and myself for the Bureau and included Premier

Wayne Goss, Ross Dunning (Admin Services D-G), Tom Burns (Deputy Premier), Mal Grierson (D-G Public Works) among others. You could not have kept Judith away with a slab of concrete.

Surprisingly, one of the difficult things to get the board to decide upon was performance targets for me and the organisation. It took until July 1993 to settle on measurable and meaningful metrics. It was an important agenda item and just kept slipping until I forced the issue fairly aggressively which upset a few directors. With these settled, my annual contract was renewed. To the team's credit, when I reported on the state of play of the bureau at the October '93 AGM we were meeting the stretch targets set.

The 1993 bureau business plan picked up approval for the convention centre construction, and the appointment of an experienced operator. The plan required a shift in bureau membership focus towards servicing pre-sale bookings to fill the centre. The team's opinion was Brisbane needed to change focus towards a new prime market – meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions, known as MICE. It would be a five-year initial effort and transition us away from principally visitor based tourism towards the higher value MICE sectors. The team had correctly assessed Brisbane simply could not compete with the tourism gorilla called the Gold Coast. We didn't have the attractions, the huge budget and the Gateway Bridge syphoned off visitors from Brisbane Airport onto the Gold Coast highway.

Our strategy, to move to more of a business base rather than tourists, required a leap of faith by the membership. We needed them to allow us to reduce promotion to one part of their market and divert funds to create and build a completely new market segment in readiness for when the Centre came on line. Naturally, our decision had support from convention centre management and we started to work with the new CEO Bob O'Keefe to deliver the initiative through marketing and sales partnerships. Successive bureau CEOs seem to have delivered well on the initiative started here.

New to the role, poor Bob ran into a number of challenges as he hit the ground running. A deal with Accor for the convention accommodation hotel went wobbly. Shaky dealings with a company backed by Sir Tristan Antico and Kevin Jacobsen had to be cleared up. As did negotiations with caterer Sinan Bilsel, who wanted in-house food and beverage conditions to lock-in economic benefits but who had been over-ridden by the previous interim CEO Barry Flynn.

Back at the bureau we were challenged to provide new marketing initiatives which balanced this slow long-term shift in focus of Brisbane becoming a leading convention and exhibition location rather than second choice or a day-trip excursion by tourists to the Gold Coast.

A clever branding exercise for locations of interest outside of Brisbane was titled *The Great South East*. The branding was already quite well established. However, this did not prevent local political boundary politics and one-upmanship from challenging who should actually control the brand and its imagery which was a cute animated character, a honey-glider. This competitiveness distracted potential partners from engaging and maximising benefit under the brand. I saw an opportunity to widen the content Brisbane might offer through closer regional partnerships.

I had a devil of a time convincing some board members partnering was more productive than standing aside and ignoring good work or opportunity due to some perceived past slight. Old animosities, affecting some staff, were even more unnecessary hurdles. It took almost a year for parties on both sides to agree to come together and test-drive new co-operative marketing under an umbrella brand titled *Brisbane and Beyond*.

The *Beyond* part picked up the sub-branding of *The Great South East* which was already well recognised and remained unchanged but was to become part of a larger pool of product to draw in visitor and business interests. Years later, sub-branding competitiveness was to revisit me when trying to strengthen marketing on the Queensland Sunshine Coast. Little is ever new.

One person who actually got 'it' was Ipswich Cr. Paul Pisasale. However, dealing with another council raised its own concerns with the Chair. Over sensitive to perceived displeasure by Mayor Soorley and protective of our principal funding source, Judith had limited vision as to how to take on the big picture and convert it into wins for our patron, or better still, political cache. I pointed out both Ipswich and Brisbane councils were already engaged in partnering in changes to the large Transit Centre to benefit both their constituencies. She remained unconvinced and overly cautious. Soorley liked the idea but wanted first bite at any positive media.

In November 1992 I ran afoul of the chair over a promotion. While in Melbourne I was challenged by an afternoon tabloid that the only way Brisbane was getting a promotional story was if I walked across Flinders Street to the station in tropical beach wear *budgie-smugglers* and from this a photo spread was possible. We got front page. Judith felt I had denigrated the office of the CEO. The membership applauded my accepting the challenge and the outcome. It was a self-image challenge for me as I am not a good look in Speedos. But, call me a *media slut*.

Queensland politics is virtually unique in relation to what goes on, what is done, how things are done and what can be forgiven. In early December 1992 David Williams was appointed Director-General of the Department of Tourism and Racing by Minister Gibbs. Now I have no issue with David who is a modestly capable administrator but expertly cunning in the politics of survival. Following the meeting I was informed and took notes that the selection panel comprised Jim Kennedy, Bob Gibbs, Peter Coaldrake, Judy Carne and Erik Finger. All very senior, respected and independent of mind. Bob Gibbs was the only one in favour of David's appointment. No other vote counted and even the public servants in the minister's department were aghast with the confirmation. Barbara Absalom had been acting as exec-director for some time before David's appointment and was doing a fine job.

Backing up a little. Just prior to taking up this CEO role I had become aware, through Michael Rudny, conductor Jan Jensen of World Festival Choir was proposing an Australia segment in a world tour by Luciano Pavarotti. Outside of Sydney and Melbourne, Jensen favoured Adelaide where Bob Lett was my bureau equivalent. Rudny suggested Brisbane and had support from Jan Helga Trøen, Jensen's partner who felt Brisbane was a lower commercial risk.

The promoter mix included concert spectacular entrepreneur, Tibor Rudas, IMG, Channel Nine and others. It was very nice to have Jan and Michael want me involved but I declined other than promising to get Brisbane to pitch support for a single performance of the Verdi *Requiem*. I gave some advice, made recommendations, introduced people, suggested venues, checked some estimates for the promoter team but declined further direct involvement not knowing, at that stage, I would be in a position to soon get more involved through my new role in Brisbane.

My notes show Jensen planned a tour starting in London in March '94 with Princess Anne attending and concluding in Beijing with a performance of *Turandot* conducted by Vladimir Fedoseyev, the Chinese apparently having given consent to the production to be staged outside the Meridian Gate of the Forbidden City. The consortium was also scouting locations for other options for mega-event operas like *Nabucco* and *Aida*. I mentioned the Pratt exercise outcome.

In Brisbane, the thought of these options saw energetic responses from the likes of the Lang Park Trust offering its 42,500 seats with financial support suggested by Tony Gould that Professor Nell Arnold might broker to raise the six million dollars needed through her network. None of this got very far.

I discovered, again through Tony Gould, Kevin Jacobsen pushed to get into the mega-opera deal for *Turandot* in Brisbane via an introduction to Des Power and Professor Nell Arnold. His Jacobsen Group CEO, Kloof Selinger, was all over the deal looking for a way in. I even fielded a call which I referred on to Rudny,

from Angelo Puglisi of Ballandean Estate Wines offering to stage *Opera at Sunset* if maestro Pavarotti had the time.

When appointed to the Brisbane bureau I tabled the opportunity. My BVCB board instructed me not to accept any risk over the Pavarotti opportunity on behalf of the bureau but to generally support the single Verdi event. I revisited the paperwork and worked up a plan with David Williams of Queensland Events Corporation, Harvey Lister at the Entertainment Centre and Greg Andrews of the Department of the Arts. The Sheraton Brisbane would put the maestro up; the Bicentennial Entertainment Centre would be the venue; national choral organisations would be invited to form a giant choir and the Queensland Symphony Orchestra would play. The South Australian Orchestra subsequently played due to a conflict in engagement dates for the QSO.

Based on the experience with choristers in 1988 and wanting to protect their individual travel and accommodation investment I repeated a safety-net initiative by again working with Rudny to establish a trust account for all deposits and payments to be covered by the same travel insurance fund.

Despite my appointing a deputy CEO, from senior staff, when I travelled, Judith M moved into the office and took over. She could not overcome her need to be an executive-chair while two of us were overseas on the pre-construction convention and exhibition centre sales drive. Our staff was perfectly capable of doing their job under delegated authority without Judith directing every breath. Her style is very hands on. It was well known this had caused much friction between her as the former Gold Coast CEO and her own staff.

Judith naturally saw correspondence about the Pavarotti event. Somehow she interpreted the protection trust fund as me skimming the travel and accommodation pool. She called an emergency board meeting as I stepped off the international sales trip flight. I was called to the office instead of going home to rest and refresh. 'Evidence' was presented for me to explain what

I was up to. I dialled-in Rudny to verify his understanding of the purpose and rationale behind the 'bonding' of chorister funds. Despite counter evidence nothing untoward was going on, Judith pressed for an audit which I welcomed under the circumstances. It would be quick because the bureau wasn't handling any funds as directed by the board. She got no support with the directors being satisfied and understanding the process and agreeing the protection was a good idea.

Surprisingly, the Chair then sought a vote of no-confidence in me. There being no real grounds for such a motion, it didn't get a second despite her having set that up to happen. I subsequently found out Ken Mander-Jones withdrew his pre-arranged initial support for the motion after hearing the 'evidence' and the simple explanation. Demonstrably, the event had no financial benefit for me personally. The issue collapsed. Tactically, I stayed open to an audit but the board passed on the offer just wanting to bury their embarrassment I suppose.

Following this meeting one director, on behalf of a number, called me. Josephine Tobias-Webb passed on support from several directors and an apology for the actions of the chair. None of this was minuted of course. This is a classic illustration of division among directors and a weakness to act against a domineering chair.

The global announcement of a modified Pavarotti tour was made in early August 1993 and naturally included the Australian segment confirming Brisbane as the venue. Actually Brisbane had been confirmed to me some weeks before when issues with Adelaide made logistics too difficult to deal with. My bureau counterpart, Bill Spurr, called me and said he thought World Festival Choir would confirm Brisbane. I sat on the news to make the global announcement more special. I held a membership briefing on Saturday 13 August to outline opportunities for business and how to pitch for part of the action.

The event went ahead as planned but I had left the bureau through extraordinarily fortuitous circumstances as I will soon

describe. Sheraton and the venue sent Carol and me tickets, airfares and accommodation plus all transfers to the event but Maestracci refused us access to the after-show party hosted by the bureau. So Carol and I had drinks afterwards at the Sheraton with many of my former staff instead.

Figures provided to me as to the economic benefit from this event to Brisbane had it falling just short of one million dollars. Much of this would have been concentrated towards the bureau members.

Not unexpectedly relations with the Chair went downhill from here after her board defeat over this issue. Instead of pulling back Judith became even more directly operational with staff. The friction was palpable as they loathed her, had little respect for her but feared her. Judith was merciless with the 'wounded'. For example, Ad man David Greenwood's agency hit a rock and went under. David worked hard to pay everyone and get out from bankruptcy. In America such a recovery is a badge of honour and to your credit. Not in Queensland and not with Judith. I found she had a *black-list* and David went onto it. I'm sure I subsequently did too.

I wonder if Judith put herself onto her own list following the disastrous outcome of her management of the 1999 Science Fair endorsed by the prestigious Women Chiefs of Enterprise. National President Lorraine Martin and even Peter Beattie were scathing in their comments over the failure and waste of funds from sponsors and government on overseas junkets resulted in no benefit to the event which effectively closed the day it opened.

During one of my recent Pavarotti tour related calls with Michael Rudny I had casually mentioned the stresses with Judith. Out of the blue in May 1993 he called me with a request for me to contribute to a proposal involving tourism and the environment. His business partner, Michael Keating's partner Deborah Cartwright, a recruiter, had been made aware the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service NSW (NPWS) was about to tender for a consultancy under a NSW Treasury grant.

Treasury wanted to know what potential opportunities for internal fund raising might exist through a managed tourist access program within NSW NPWS. The purpose was to off-set part of the annual Parks and Wildlife Service operating costs. Rudny was assembling a team to submit for the work. Could I assist? I agreed to do a conceptual outline based on what the proposal was seeking to achieve.

At this time I was just helping out with ideas and Michael only vaguely hinted at more involvement by me at this point. By September however, the deteriorating relationship with the Chair was a warning the writing was likely on the wall. I proposed to Rudny a more active involvement and volunteered to write a wider scoped document for what was being considered and which also contained a methodology of approach. I did it, sent it and waited. There was no immediate reply. Some weeks passed until, in October, Michael called and invited me to Sydney for a meeting with undisclosed persons.

I took two holiday days and flew to Sydney. I had a meeting with Rudny and Keating to be informed on progress. Rudny and Keating were confident we were the front contenders for the consultancy. I asked to see the submission to get the full scope of the project. Imagine my surprise when the complete submission comprised my work, a wrap around, biographies on us three only and little else aside from some sketchy financials.

We then went on to meetings with an advisor to the Director-General of the NPWS, Bronwyn Boekenstein and a treasury official accompanied by the Service's Business Manager, Bob Costello. Next came meetings with legal representation over how a prospective contract might be structured. In-house lawyer Vivian Ingram represented Parks. Parks' external lawyers were Malleson's. Warren Scott of Coudert Brothers represented our interests. Warren's partner is famous sex therapist Bettina Arndt. It was plainly obvious from the way parties deferred to me during the meetings I was central to the talent mix and conceptualisation

of just how the whole project could roll out. On return to Rudny's office I renegotiated my involvement.

Bronwyn went on to be CEO Greenpeace with my referee help using a connection I had into Dunhill Management Services. She then became the CEO FoodBank Australia. In 1996, during her term at Greenpeace Bronwyn very kindly put me forward through Michael Green at Dunhills to be considered for a vacancy on the Greenpeace International board. While the role was filled by a better qualified overseas person, I made the shortlist and was interviewed by Anne de Wachter of ADW Communications who is the current Board Chair of Greenpeace Australia Pacific and was then on the International Nominations Committee. The opportunity gave me a nice feeling of recognition.

Rudny and Keating ran Sydney Business Travel a bespoke packager of top end global travel. They were deal makers and negotiators but had little understanding of the real scope of the task or the opportunity other than to put it crudely, they smelled money. However, they had cleverly negotiated an incentive reward clause which provided a reward payment if certain long-term new incremental revenue targets could be achieved by NPWS. Firstly, I didn't believe NPWS would ultimately agree to the clause or that they would have a counter out-clause when they came back. I preferred and wanted to see adequate financial reward up-front by way of fees. We both got what we wanted. Within a fortnight we were to receive a more comprehensive project brief to answer. Based on our response to it some firm reality might eventuate by way of a service contract.

I returned to the bureau to be quizzed by the Chair as to where I had been and what was I doing? I had taken two annual leave days which were well overdue. My response to the Chair's enquiry was it was private. As I had no firm offer over the opportunity I said nothing more.

What happened next was extraordinary. In early November, backed by the deputy-chair, the chair issued me verbal instructions

to refer and clear all day-to-day management decisions through her; to make no decisions at meetings until ratified by her; to not travel and to copy her into all correspondence. I requested a board meeting be called. The request was refused.

I called my legal contact at the Australian Institute of Company Directors and Margaret Standish at State Transit, both of who confirmed my view of events. Judith had taken on full accountability as an executive chair effectively transferring operational liabilities to herself. I provided a brief of the legal opinions to the directors including references to the 1991 AWA case decision by Justice Rogers and waited. What would the bureau board do? I played for time.

Now, I was not privy to the meetings and discussions held by the board in the interim but when I started to confirm the chair's operational instructions back to her in writing, thereby creating a legal record of events, her verbal instructions were rescinded. Wiser heads seemed to have prevailed.

A week later I needed to return to Sydney. I sent an email advising I was taking another two leave days off, no reason given. Travel was denied. I ignored it but sent a copy to the deputy chair advising it was personal and not covered by work related orders which I found untenable in any case. There was no reply.

I expected any Sydney meetings to be a continuation of negotiations. Imagine my surprise when we were offered to negotiate over the consultancy contract. A full day with accountants for both parties followed. Our side used Einfield Symonds. The next day we held a walking meeting with the NPWS Director-General Neil Shepherd near the Domain Park in the Sydney CBD. Privately, set apart from the others Neil asked me how I had come up with the name for our group.

Our submission had been sent in under an invented title *Nature Inherited*. I told Shepherd in creating our submission there had to be some legacy outcome from success. The title aimed to remind us the assets of the parks had to be preserved and conserved for future generations and so only activity which could be managed

in balance with the environment was allowed thereby insuring an inheritance was forthcoming.

The cover of the draft contract was initialled on the back seat of his car pending formal agreement when the lawyers and accountants finished drafting the decisions of the prior day. When that day arrived I was right. The NPWS had an escape clause counterbalancing the incentive trigger.

My actions committed me to leaving the Brisbane bureau. I called Carol who knew of the issues with the Chair and supported any decision I wished to make. After a celebratory drink I flew back to Brisbane.

Next morning at around 9.30am I called the staff together. Tension in the office with the Chair in residence was high. I was leaving one of the best teams I had ever worked with. They knew without my saying anything something serious was up. *"When do you start with the Olympics?"* This assumption was offered before I had opened my mouth. I had had a call from Bruce Baird asking what I was up to about a year prior. He talked about the potential for me to take up a role with the Olympic Bid Office but I wasn't interested. I had casually referred to the conversation with a senior staff member ages ago. Now it was dredged up to give credibility to an unknown.

Judith had been hunting for information from staff about my two absences and this titbit suddenly gained credibility. I just said I was about to resign and would give more detail after I spoke to the Chair. I called Judith for a face-to-face. She arrived with council's Mike Dart. I resigned offering two week's notice and an undertaking to complete the current redraft of plans under review. I gave no reason. *"When do you start with the Olympics?"* she asked. I just smiled.

Over the next week a board meeting was held. I was not asked to attend. I spoke to every staff member individually without revealing the task ahead in New South Wales. They all received a personal letter of endorsement. Even now, 20 years after, I am occasionally in touch with some of them. I value that these friendships have lasted so well.

At 3.00pm on 18 November 1993, I was asked to return keys and to leave the building. The media statement from the board through the Chair went very badly for them because Judith coloured events. As they say a grave is just a trench which has been taken too far. I demanded and got retractions and formal apologies. All so completely unnecessary. Our media consultant Lee Mylne told me afterwards the press asked some pointed questions of the chair, such as, *Why would anyone so successful at rejuvenation want to leave? Why has the board let it happen?*

The compliments from the members, staff and business leaders around town were much appreciated. The refreshed bureau had made significant headway in changing the way Brisbane tourism was perceived in the marketplace and against our competitors and peer sets. Under subsequent marketing leaders the city has achieved much. I'd like to think this team was part of a start to that change.

I took away some valuable lessons in dealing with boards and chairs and learned much about my own personal emotional tolerance limits. In January 1994, I was informed the staff, board, City Hall and Chair were having some difficulties getting along. Judith was not re-elected at the next AGM. In April 1994, Ken Mander-Jones telephoned and apologised to me for what had gone on. Others had also already apologised at the Verdi event.

Nature Inherited Pty Ltd was incorporated and the NPWS contract was to commence on 1 December 1993.

With her return to Sydney, BHP Engineering immediately offered Carol her old job back. As well as being the GM's PA, Carol helped run the staff Social Club and they desperately wanted her back to re-commence the good times.

We decided to renovate our North Sydney property after returning to Sydney. We engaged architect Jim Anderson to develop some conceptual designs for a renovation. I am pretty sure Jim had worked as part of the Jorn Utzon's team on the Sydney Opera House. He also understood the importance of maintaining essential heritage features of the original structure to conform to North Sydney Council heritage codes. I contributed

by way of a design for a floating floor separating what were to be an excavated lower ground floor and a suspended second level.

The original high pitch roof and high ceiling of the pre-1900 design allowed us to double the living space within the same overall physical envelope. We created a massive master bedroom with ensuite in the expanse of the roof cavity across two former downstairs bedrooms and the hallway.

The heritage building front had to be maintained and we conserved both front bedrooms; restoring them, including the original fireplace, original but electrified light fittings and original mouldings. But that is where any similarity to the architectural style of the period stopped.

Beyond this we also went down into what had been a spacious under floor foundation space. Above, my floating floor creation was held in place and suspended across six double sets of recycled masts stressed into the lower floor and upper ceiling. None of the floor sides touched the walls by a gap of fifteen centimetres creating the floating effect. The gap allowed for excellent air circulation between levels, permitted light from a ten metre skylight upstairs to filter down the walls and flood the lower levels of a building which actually faced east/west with no windows on the northern side. It took some structural design and engineering magic to pin and stress the floor to the walls but the engineers did it and it worked brilliantly.

We installed underfloor heating on the ground level and placed air-conditioning on the upper levels only. Depending on the season, this technique used convection currents to heat the upstairs in winter and cool the lower levels in summer.

The house design and installation techniques won an award for the architect. Obtaining approval for such a radical transformation took over two years as the Council could not get their minds around what was an innovation in terrace cottage conversion and renovation.

Eventually we won the battle but only by taking council to the Land and Environment Court, and proving collusion between certain parties to prevent us executing our grand design. Getting a

builder who understood what we wanted proved a challenge but eventually we had a contract and work commenced.

Carol and I rented in Artarmon during the construction period. Our beloved dachshund Brig passed away while we were away from West Street. He had been our love for 17 years and a star of the *60 Minutes* program 'Letters' segment. We kept his urn until we left to move to Noosa on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland years later. We left him in his favourite garden on the day we walked out of our home of nearly 28 years.

The press release announcement *Nature Inherited* had won the NSW NPWS contract fired-up my networks. Within days I was re-activating connections. There was no argument from Rudny or Keating I would lead the team. Hell, I was the only one with a complete understanding of what was happening and what had to be done.

To be frank, neither of the other Michaels really had any understanding of what the National Parks and Wildlife Service actually did. Further, they lacked any degree of sensitivity around indigenous issues. They both struggled with the concept of balance between commercial enterprise and the environment with the environment needing to be highly valued as a sensitive asset. But, give them their due, they responded over time and came to appreciate the meaning of inheritance in our objects.

Nature Inherited Pty Limited (NI) held the contract with NSW NPWS. In turn NI was owned by my company EMC and Radreel representing Rudny and Keating's interests. The initial NPWS contract ran for eighteen months through to 30 June 1995. We had a year to complete an assessment study, provide a detailed report and then to assist the NPWS initiate such elements they may want to action. The contract had provision for extensions which were to be exercised subsequently.

I appointed Paula Joss as our PA / office manager. NPWS nominated Gay Curtis as our liaison.

Several other experts such as Richard McLaughlan, Karen McBrien and a range of expert service companies like Manidis Roberts were used from time to time over the period of the work.

Keating pretty much ran his and Rudny's business. Michael K occasionally engaged studying financials but otherwise had minimal daily involvement once the NPWS asset register re-financing matter was wrapped-up and put into the Master Plan draft.

We agreed a Master Plan framework with NPWS and created the financial models by May 1994. Our draft preparation timing was fortuitous because Robyn Kruk was appointed the new Director-General that month. Robyn asked for a 'highly recommended' Top 20 list of opportunities. Under these we were to list secondary and tertiary level for further prospecting over time.

I had a telephone call with Neil Shepherd on 1 July 1994. He wanted me to know he was to brief Robyn about our services as part of the hand-over. While she would undoubtedly make up her own mind about the initiative and seek to test our credibility for herself, Neil would be endorsing our professionalism and me personally.

Our sponsor Dr Shepherd had been filling in as D-G of NSW NPWS. He also held the position of D-G of the NSW Environmental Protection Agency. Robyn Kruk's appointment to NPWS allowed Neil to return to his permanent role.

Robyn came with excellent credentials. I can't help but think her life partner, Tony Newbury (as a friend of Dr Shepherd's) plus the prospect of the upcoming State election, may have impacted on the decision to appoint her to the role. She got on well with Bob Costello, was supportive of our work, was accessible and used me to prepare speech content and occasionally write full drafts for the many speaking engagements she gave. Gay Curtis and I also prepared many Ministerial notes and even some *Dorothy Dix* items for Parliament. Robyn Kruk AM went on to a stellar career in the Public Service.

Ten-days after the original conversation, Neil called back and said the briefing went very well. We knew another NPWS executive, David Papps, and the Minister's office were keen to see

what might be possible from our investigation. We had indirect access to the Minister via mover and shaker Simon Baggs. Simon and I first met when he was with NSW Tourism as it was then known. For six years, he ran ATP, Association of Tennis Professionals, then created a unique events company, *Lateral*, which he owns today.

Shortly after and not unexpectedly, under a new D-G, our relationship with NPWS underwent a minor restructure. We reported and worked with the same contacts but focussed on a number of flagship projects and as already noted, a set of 'soft-options'. Our evaluation timescale was shortened with Nov '94 and Feb '95 set as milestones. This was in Aug '94. Wisely, Simon Baggs recommended *Nature Inherited* seek a funding extension from 1 July 1995.

The richness and complexity of the opportunities we identified indicated the need for significant knowledge transfer and new skills training across the Service would take more time than first provided for under the contract. NPWS were to add to the scope of our work a number of times as I will relate. Due to confidentiality I can't go into the full list of opportunities presented to NPWS other than to give some broad examples.

The NPWS added to our work and fees by commissioning *Nature Inherited* to prepare draft policies covering Bus and Coach Access; Retail Systems, Stock Control and Service; Customer Service; Tourism; a Public Use Strategy and Business Opportunities Guidelines. I was to also write and co-deliver a workshop on retail services to all parks where shops and souvenir booths existed. The positive take-up and feedback was very encouraging according to Gay Curtis.

Right from the start Gay Curtis turned out to be a terrific asset. A bit of a wild-card and a square peg in a round hole within the Service being bright, outspoken, energetic and fiercely protective of the Service's core values. She was a perfect fit to liaise on the effort needed in accessing people challenges, exploring possibilities, managing expectations and the formidable politics of

the Service. We got on very well with an open honest and forthright relationship. We could not have asked for more.

Within a few days of our appointment Gay had set up contact with department leaders across the Service – Leanne Wallace, Corporate Services; Field Services, Jeff Francis; Publications and Communication, Gaye Braiding; Information Technology, Frank Cahill; Cultural Heritage, Helen Clemens; Policy and Planning, Tom Fox and so on. There was good intent and a positive purpose behind all of these briefings and familiarisations.

Once I had internal contacts established Gay guided us to the field experts. Among an amazingly talented bunch of dedicated people one stands out for progressive thinking and a willingness to see what might be possible if balance and preservation could be achieved. This would be Ross McKinney. He didn't last in the bureaucracy, but while he was there we would always have very interesting 'what if ...' conversations.

Two others were great to work with, Gay's husband Jason Ardler, of aboriginal heritage, Jason patiently guided my enthusiasm at the right speed and tempo to get across the *Nature Inherited* message where it was needed among indigenous staff. The other was an old mate, Joyce Clague, who by then was with the Labour Council and had a program on Radio 2KY.

The NPWS was always strapped for cash to do projects, many essential to long-term conservation. Our contract, despite being a substantial Treasury grant, was regarded by those with underfunded projects as unnecessary and for which the funds could be put to better work internally if reallocated to them.

I needed to sell a vision of sustainable long-term outcomes which just might resolve their annual need for project support by a new source of reliable project funding. I made no promises but stressed meeting their needs was part of our overall aims and objectives. Not unexpectedly, the reception to my cautious 'if and maybe' was luke-warm. We had to prove ourselves.

One element of our Master Plan was a draft Public Use Strategy. This created quite a reaction. Despite this whole exercise being

aimed towards managed and balanced public-use; this having ministerial support and it developing options only for consideration, a special interest group of opponents inside NPWS were to push back in February 1995 to have *Nature Inherited's* work canned. Basically this group believed parks should be closed off to public use to preserve them completely.

The only thing they did succeed in negatively affecting was a supplementary submission for our contract to be extended by way of the creation of a Customer Service Unit within NPWS. However, this would be achieved despite the push-back at a later date as an internally driven NPWS initiative.

When authorised to do so, I spoke positively to the media about anticipated outcomes. In hindsight this was a bit too early in the timetable because it had the unintended outcome of igniting immediate requests to submit expressions-of-interest well before we actually had anything of substance to offer.

To react to the demand NPWS authorised NI to accept and hold broad expressions-of-interest from the likes of NSW Events Corporation, Sydney Convention and Visitors Bureau (SCVB) and NSW Tourism Commission and the Australian Tourism Commission (ATC), all seeing access to parks as offering potential to differentiate international bids for business tourism.

For instance, Elizabeth Dolan from the NSW Tourism Commission suggested offering the Japanese market high-end value-added park excursions with camping, guides giving Japanese language educationals, treks and bush tucker.

SCVB in particular was keen to see more relaxed access to the islands in Sydney Harbour. I encouraged SCVB to approach NPWS to consider some changes to island Conditions of Use in order to open up further opportunities to generate revenue for both organisations.

Prior to the Kruk appointment at NPWS, I occasionally met with Director Shepherd to update him and in April '94 the prospect of running a business case scoping study for the Sydney Harbour Islands had been put on the early agenda. He ask Bob

Costello and me to develop a brief which we did covering foreshores and parks; Athol Hall on Bradley's Head; Middle Head; North Head; Lane Cove and Ku-ring-gai (on waterways); Watsons Bay; Nielsen Park and Greycliffe House; Kurnell and La Perouse. *Nature Inherited's* contract was adjusted to cover and compensate for this additional work.

In early May 1994, I had been invited by Neil Shepherd to present to the NPWS Advisory Board. It went well and, based on our initial ideas as to possibilities, *Nature Inherited's* innovative thinking was encouraged.

Across the land based parks we identified a number within Sydney metro area where population density, access infrastructure and current buildings might be suitable for food outlets, even some restaurants, on a tender basis. Advising us were Sarah Stegley (a trustee of the Stegbar Foundation) and her partner Marieka Brugman of Howqa Dale Gourmet Retreat. They knew a thing or two about making out-of-the-way food establishments work. Sarah and Marieka were friends of Michael Rudny.

During January 1994 I had closeted myself away in the Hurstville head offices with past annual reports, audited statements, asset registers, policy documents and the like to absorb the beast. My analysis revealed a potential hidden treasure.

One of the first initiatives we proposed was for Parks to re-finance their equipment asset base thereby freeing many millions to be redirected to areas of need. The equipment asset base comprised fleets of aircraft, vehicles and a wide range of special purpose equipment all paid for in cash and owned outright resulting in NPWS being asset rich but cash poor. Once I pointed out the opportunity to free up capital to fund income producing activity Rudny and Keating took the opportunity over and developed a re-finance plan to be put to the market. The finance group Allco were the first to express interest in a re-finance package.

At the time the NPWS managed some seven hundred natural locations. *Nature Inherited's* focus was on over one hundred and seventy parks and reserves starting with the Royal National Park

south of Sydney which is reputed to be the oldest national park in the world. The remainder were remote land holdings, reserves and protected areas many of which are almost inaccessible but of great environment or heritage value.

The physical land area of the State of New South Wales covers some eight hundred thousand square kilometres. To cover access to this area requires a diversified land, water and air fleet. It is a bit of thrill to get to pick your choice of conveyance from an executive jet to a big grunt 4WD. Rudny and I did an initial scan of over fifty of the Service's prime assets in a series of on-site inspections. Further site visits by Paula, Gay and I took the number to over one hundred and twenty over the following two years.

Michael Rudny was an awful flyer. Nervous and a chain smoker, I had experienced him as a fellow passenger on international flights desperate to get into the air terminal building in order to light up to calm his nerves. So here we are in a jet attempting a landing in a remote location after very heavy rain. Within about 50 metres of the unsealed strip the pilot realised he may be able to land but a safe take-off was highly questionable. We aborted the landing and roared into the sky at an acute angle of ascent. Rudny nearly shat himself and is the only person I have ever seen leave fingerprints in the velour plush on the arm rests. The poor fellow was as white as a sheet, trembling and sweating. I used the incident with light-hearted cruelty for years after. He never flew with me again.

On one occasion when Paula, Gay and I were in the remote west of the state with me driving, we lost a rear tyre doing 130 kms per hour. It simply melted away. The car stayed steady and we stopped safely but Gay never let me drive a Service vehicle again on any inspection. Those safe driving lessons years before paid off. We hadn't crashed.

Over 1994 and 1995 I authored a five volume plan titled *A Five Year Strategic Plan to Promote Greater Self-Sufficiency in Conservation through the Commercialisation of some Operations of the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service.*

The word *commercialisation* upset some in the Service but as an attitudinal change was being planned, to value the assets of parks from a very different perspective and to deal with them as finite resources, I argued the word was appropriate as both a warning and an opportunity.

To validate the recommendations in the plan I commissioned independent surveys of park users, the tourism sector including the conference and events sectors, related government agencies and key decision-makers within the Parks Service. Internally, thinking was divided between some wanting change which offered both more satisfying experiences and those who wanted to lock more away from open access.

The survey results were encouraging for change to occur carefully. Responses supported the recommendations saying it was both desirable and possible to strike a sensible planned balance to bring the Service into a real world.

The Master Plan contained this quote from noted African environmentalist Baba Dioum –

*“We will conserve only what we love.
We will love only what we understand.
We will understand only what we are taught”*

This resonated with many who saw the benefits in carefully handled progressive change. I was to re-use the quote many years later in relation to establishing Queensland’s first biosphere reserve.

Selective user-pays and use of donation boxes to seek project support from the public for special initiatives were raised for consideration. User-pays is a political decision. We suggested donation boxes be a management decision where deemed appropriate. Tests at the Dorrigo Sky-walk proved the generosity of the public towards worthwhile projects. The soliciting of voluntary donations in support of projects could be done without much heat being generated.

Nature Inherited had modest interaction with the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife located at HMS Watson on Sydney South Head. It was headed by Executive Director, Alison Evans and chaired by Gilles Broinowski, whose dad John had been on the Hoyts board when I worked for Dale Turnbull. The Foundation was structuring and promoting a park admission pass as a fund raiser for themselves and benefiting each of the parks being used by the public. It was a good idea from a well regarded supporter of NSW NPWS so we were keen to take the idea further afield than just Sydney if they wanted to work with us. Alison decided to take the running on the initiative solo.

Overall one hundred and nine potential sources of income were identified whose implementation could be self-funded by unlocking underutilised cash tied up in the capital value of the Service's massive equipment fleet. Our conservative estimate was over time some \$15-20 million of new incremental revenue was available each year. Our contract target was \$10 million per annum.

Our plan forecast fifty-five short-term projects to realise income quickly and at little risk. We left it to NPWS to pick the Top 20. Next came forty-two medium-term activities. To be successful these required a fundamental change in approach to public visitation by some staff, a market segmentation plan and finally an attitudinal change in management's thinking to want to make all this happen. Finally, there were twelve long-term and more difficult but valuable changes needing political will.

A number of the projects allowed for the Sydney Olympics 2000 bid to be positioned as the Green Games. I met with Ric Birch for this purpose and renewed acquaintances.

If the plan elements were implemented the NSW NPWS would be the first such natural resources agency in Australia to create and manage its twenty-three million annual visitors to national parks as part of an integrated nature-based tourism estate.

The plan grouped clusters of parks in zones of interest and, for the first time, parks could come with a set of newly created

graphic code keys using international icon standards displaying the unique features of each park on directional and locational signage. These had immediate application on touring maps and in brochures. Vehicle GPS didn't exist at this time but the new icons were simple enough to migrate in due course.

This initiative effectively linked NPWS to the Tourism NSW Master Plan as established with Geoff Buckley a few months earlier. As the plan was being developed, I recommended some elements could be commenced before the plan was completed. These only required operational management to be authorised to implement them. Thirty-four 'soft' projects were given approval by the Director-General to commence from late 1994.

Our brief within the *Nature Inherited* contract allowed us to offer commercial advice across all aspects of NPWS operation where the public and visitors engaged with Service assets. As a result we assisted in developing criteria and standards for events and accommodation at the Quarantine Station on South Head of Sydney Harbour; early commercialisation guidelines, patent and marketing release security notes for the living fossil *Wollemi Nobilis conifer*; film and television agreements for the use of Sydney Harbour National Park islands for the production of such series as *Water Rats* and new standards for use and access by the public of Clark and Goat Islands. I also worked with Sheila Givers-Jones and Dan Heather of the NSW Film and TV Office to facilitate use of harbour shore parks and facility images for government and commercial location work.

With regard to the Wollemi Pine, Meryl McCracken who had worked with me at State Transit was now with the Royal Botanic Gardens Trust. I connected the pine guys to her. This connection of the two organisations proved beneficial to me when the National Botanic Gardens in Canberra needed a scoping study done to identify their own opportunities for new revenue.

If the Wollemi Pine is unknown to readers then here is the Wikipedia summary: ***Wollemia*** is a genus of coniferous tree and was only known through fossil records until the Australian species

Wollemia Nobilis was discovered in 1994 in a temperate rainforest wilderness area of the Wollemi National Park in New South Wales. In both botanical and popular literature the tree has been almost universally dubbed the **Wollemi Pine**, although it is not a true pine (genus *Pinus*) nor a member of the pine family (*Pinaceae*). The oldest fossil of the Wollemi tree has been dated to 200 million years ago.

US-based operator *Showboat* and Leighton Properties represented by Peter Stewart approached NI in June '94 and again in November of the same year to connect over a proposal to create a Sydney Harbour Casino on Goat Island. Conceived as a high-rollers club style casino it would attach to the six-star boutique hotel and restaurant we had shown as a potential development option for the island. Their proposal included an island heliport - the only item not to be included when the outline went forward. Issues over the Packer helicopter saga in Darling Harbour were just too sensitive.

These two organisations were not the only ones interested in the islands or parks. Mike O'Connor of The Peppers Hotel Group expressed interest and met with us. All such parties were made well aware any expressions-of-interest would be for NPWS to issue but they were put on the growing register of interested parties.

Due to the workload, I had to turn down an invitation to submit a price to replace the previous tenderer for a development in Yanchep National Park, Western Australia. The project had eleven million dollars in funding, all approvals covering four-star accommodation, a golf course, defined natural attractions for visitors and a partnering management plan with Conservation and Land Management. Damn!

Other offers arrived from the likes of Sydney Convention and Visitors Bureau's Tony South and his successor Jon Hutchison AM, where working with Sandra Chipchase and Veronica Antico (now Veronica Rainbird) was a delight due to their professionalism; Geoff Buckley for part of the NSW Tourism Master Plan and with Jack Giles who was introduced to me by Barry Cohen. Some of

this work I was fortunately able to 'bump' to later in the year. Pity to lose opportunities.

Jack Giles had connections to Robyn Kruk and kindly kept me up to date with progress on our plan's elements as NPWS struggled to realise the benefits. Apparently, Bob Costello and Robyn Kruk were risk averse around some of the recommendations especially where NPWS had to invest and cover some financial risk. I am led to believe their submissions to Cabinet and Treasury were poor shadows of what was actually needed to realise the plan's opportunities. Giles has connections to Richard McLaughlan. It is a small world.

Jack did international environmental consulting and project implementation as far afield as Bahrain, India and Dubai while in Australia he also tackled the Broken Hill Desert Wildlife Park project. He was good to know and generous with advice.

NPWS used *Nature Inherited* as a 'filter' for all manner of approaches seeking to utilise their landholdings and assets. One such example, where we were asked to give advice on use of islands and foreshore parks, was a planned visit by the Pope and ceremonies for the beatification of Mary MacKillop. I met with George Jaksic many times to provide recommendations to NPWS facility managers covering the potential use of facilities for such occasions.

From July 1994, Tourism NSW put *Nature Inherited* on a preferred supplier register based on our input to a proposal for a North Coast Eco-tourism Centre. From this I became involved in the earliest discussions on a National Eco-tourism Accreditation Scheme. I recognised eco-tourism, now also more appropriately called nature-based tourism, if done properly, could be a way to develop and manage an emerging sustainable growth-industry.

Taking a lesson from the prior response to media coverage of the contract announcement further implementation of projects happened quietly without further fanfare. NI and NPWS wanted proven runs-on-the-board before blowing the NPWS trumpet again. Even so word leaked that a range of test projects was

underway. This attracted the attention of American Express's Di Collins. Amex were sponsoring some speaker sessions at the Australian Tourism Commission annual conference in Adelaide. I was invited to present a paper on marketing and yield management of new projects in tourism.

In quick succession I received speaking invitations from Chris Brown's Tourism and Transport Forum (TTF) for which I did several engagements concerning terrestrial environmental management centred on tourism development; through a Tourism NSW referral I guest lectured at the University of Western Sydney for two semesters and became involved again with the Sydney District Business Association which had a tourism sub-committee. I also renewed my relationship with the NSW Enterprise Workshop Programme which was considering an intake from tourism organisations.

Based on my NPWS work I was to take my thinking about eco-tourism, as an advisory niche market for me, and convert it into action in June 1995. I enrolled at the George Washington University in Washington DC completing certification in Eco-tourism Planning and Management. This excellent education is provided by the respected Eco-tourism Society USA. The lecturer was the acclaimed Megan Epler Wood, the Executive Director of the Society. I did the course using the format of a compressed live-in for international students. I added a short holiday in Washington as I badly needed a break. I loved visiting the Smithsonian exhibits.

As I prepared to return to Sydney from Washington, a fellow course participant approached me and asked if I could spend a few days with him and his staff in San Francisco. He and others were working on the conversion of the former Military Police Academy, The Presidio adjacent to the northern access to the Golden Gate Bridge on Fort Point, into a conference, event and meetings centre with exhibit areas. They had little tourism, events or conference experience yet this was the brief.

I gave them three days of my time. We did a site inspection on day-one, conceptual brain-storming on day-two and pulled

together some initiatives on the last day for them to take to management. Our newly acquired certifications helped a great deal and I gained a valuable lesson in what was possibly ahead of me.

As mentioned, *Nature Inherited's* initial brief was sometimes added to by NPWS. One such addition commissioned us to undertake a substantial scoping study of sensible commercial opportunities for all Sydney Harbour Islands. In August 1994, *Nature Inherited* delivered a report titled *A Business Plan of the Sydney Harbour Islands and Cadman's Cottage in Sydney Harbour National Park*. Covering Goat, Rodd, Clark, Shark Islands along with Fort Denison (Pinchgut) and obviously Cadman's Cottage. Each resource was examined for expanded roles in events, tours, artistic activity, tours and the functions sector.

My experience with the Nimrod Theatre and annual Christmas holiday events for kids on Clark Island gave me a good feel for what could be proposed elsewhere across the harbour islands. The plan for Goat Island offered options for a new maritime themed set of complementary facilities and services including a specialist shipyard complex and yacht berths, a Barracks Pub, high-end accommodation and up-market restaurant, mini conference facilities, a waterfront promenade, harbour son-et-lumiere base, walks, history and architectural tours and display gardens.

I saw potential for the harbour based Sea Scouts to have a new island home on Goat Island along with a permanent display and support facilities for the restored ferry James Craig, with HMAS Hopetown and HMAS Waratah contributing to a very substantial naval display.

Nature Inherited proposed NPWS form a division to manage these water-based assets and develop *Natureland Tours – Islands on Sydney Harbour – a product of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service* to be located in a fully restored historic Cadman's Cottage in Sydney's Rocks area. NPWS had the talent to establish the unit in the likes of Peter Shadie, Robert Bird, Neville Burkett and Gay Curtis and set of advisory specialist companies for the technical challenges.

I have referred to the fact the *Nature Inherited* NPWS contract came with a bonus incentive clause. Basically there was a formula to calculate a percentage share of new incremental revenue generated and sustained by the new operations. A base-line income level had been agreed at the time of contract signing and above that, specific to projects, we shared in revenue. But the contract contained an out clause for the NPWS.

Even though *Nature Inherited* over delivered on all aspects of the contract including add-ons and extensions, in the end there appeared to be a lack of political will to get into the real meat of the opportunities. This is where the rich new incremental revenue sources would likely activate the incentive scheme. The contract didn't just leave implementation up to the inexperience of NPWS. There were provisions where we could be called upon to guide implementation to achieve the new revenue streams.

Twenty-four hours before the contract trigger date NPWS activated their out-clause. We were robbed of any opportunity to generate bonus income. This was the second time I had seen significant future rewards for hard work evaporate. I have never entered into an incentive contract since. There was significant tension between NPWS and NI thereafter, for a time.

Mind you we were very well paid for all the NPWS work. Unexpectedly, I got a terrific written endorsement from Bob Costello which was extremely useful in obtaining other government consulting work. It was accompanied by a request to provide a draft Olympic Strategy Proposal for Sydney Harbour National Park assets. Was this a partial make-up for exercising the bail-out clause?

To my knowledge our reports have been used to inform policy development by various tourism agencies, think-tanks like Tourism and Transport Forum, research organisations and environmental agencies nationally and internationally. Nice.

My reputation for innovative and creative advisory services was significantly enhanced through the NPWS experience. With no windfall to hold their interest, I bought out both Michaels for a

nominal amount and used *Nature Inherited* as my own consulting vehicle. I did well.

Incidentally, the relationship between Rudny and me had been strained since April '95 because I felt he wasn't pulling his weight. He was happy to take a monthly fee but to contribute less and less even when asked or pushed. Michael R had a short attention span and moved on to greener fields quickly. I had to shorten his leash by pointing out he had a contractual obligation to *Nature Inherited*, a fact his advisers confirmed. Even so a disinterested partner is a weight worth shedding if you can't turn them around.

The buy-out also removed concerns I had about Radreel. Some of those involved in providing content for the Master Plan were colluding to use their insider knowledge to pitch for business when it was released through tender or expressions-of-interest by NPWS.

I knew McLaughlan and Rudny had held discussions behind closed doors about how they might control new kangaroo cull licences, owning the proposed Mt Kaputar Springs water bottling enterprise and various commercial aspects of what was proposed for Goat Island, in Sydney Harbour. Remember, I could lip-read. All the offices at SBT were clear glass fish tanks and I sat only metres away. When I challenged Rudny he confirmed the discussion but agreed to take no further action.

Separation can be messy but it was all over at the *Nature Inherited* AGM in August. Michael got over it all and in late September he hosted a great lunch for the two of us at *Machiavelli's*. Generously, he spared no expense on wines. Two years later, for my fiftieth birthday he provided vintage Krug. He could well afford this. I believe Keating and he subsequently sold Sydney Business Travel to Flight Centre for many millions. Sadly, Michael R died in 2006. I had bumped into him in the street in Sydney a couple of months before and we chatted.

November 1995 was our twentieth wedding anniversary. Wanting something unique and special I bought us a binary

star system from International Star Registry. All make-believe of course, as the scientific community doesn't recognise the naming, but the registry holds it as *Donovan's Binary*. It appealed to my quirky sense of humour as a display of my great love for Carol. I am told the twin stars are at the farthest reaches of the galaxy although the known galaxy at the time has probably been exceeded as evidenced by Hubble telescope discoveries. I chose the twin stars because they were likely to be used as a navigation beacon. I am an avid Trekkie. Shame Carol isn't!

Meanwhile, Richard McLauchlan and his *Treskam* consultancy had won part of a contract subbed out by Ove Arup and Gillespies. He asked me to join his part of the overall team. Following some NPWS project work I subcontracted to him I had maintained a connection to Richard when he represented Benjamin Kahn in a take-over bid for Peter O'Brien's struggling *Underwater World* on the Sunshine Coast. Kahn had interests in Maui and Manly, Sydney aquaria.

This Malaysian based work was to assist a non-government agency titled *Malaysian Wetlands Foundation* develop a major environmental-based theme park on a sensitive Ramsar wetland site outside of Kuala Lumpur. The site included an abandoned tin mine common in Selangor. We proposed the brand name *Malaysia Wetlands Eco-Park*.

We faced the classic challenge of how to develop and operate a commercial activity in balance with restoring then preserving and conserving the surrounding natural asset. A team of several dozen international specialists were engaged on the project. From the science, education, themed and commercial points the client was over supplied with input. Our job was to bring the elements into a commercially real and practical plan for funding. Richard, as project manager for our part of the brief, was not entirely in tune with the sensitivity of the site or the project's operational requirements. Mark Fuller of Gillespies was great to work with and we remained in touch for many years afterwards.

As noted, part of the wetlands area was an abandoned tin mine with all the inherent pollution issues, plus massive, abandoned equipment was still on-site. These bucket-dredges were five to seven stories high with no hope of removal because doing so would destroy even more environment. Instead we proposed turning them into part of the attraction as seating for a giant IMAX Cinema along one wall of the huge pit.

Cyberjaya University across the highway was keen to play a role in site management, education and interpretation in and around marine studies focussed on the ponds and reed beds of the site. There was a resident population of indigenous persons whose needs had to be considered. We also had to tackle poaching of a colony of Sun Bears by the surrounding Malay population. Both the natives and bears were to be included, respected and protected as part of the plan.

The 'money-people' wanted action; local environmentalists wanted inaction and political interests wanted an attraction to support their conservation policy and Ramsar bid. Richard asked me to manage and co-ordinate these diverse positions while also contributing to the creativity for site transformation.

Whatever the final recommendations were to be, they had to provide a workable proposition for the client to consider and be funded. It was a pretty big challenge but achievable. There is almost a book in itself covering the whole project but my desire to hold reader interest will have to be covered by just a few tales from the time spent on the project.

I had first met Richard through mutual friends the redoubtable Murray McInnes and Chris Muir. I will make a momentary digression here concerning McInnes and Muir, et al.

With others, we owned a share of a development site in the vineyards of the NSW Hunter Valley. The investor group wanted to rezone prime land to develop the Hunter Provision Company as a food and restaurant outlet with accommodation well before such facilities existed in the region.

Unfortunately some investors needed cash and withdrew so the development application and other approvals were bundled

into the sale of the land. Our modified ideas, executed by others, now stands on the site. Had we gone ahead with the proposal the construction method should be adobe which would suit the area climate, raw materials could have been sourced locally and been a construction feature unique in itself and an attraction, apart from the environmental benefits. Murray had interest for the motel operation from the Corn brothers, Nigel and Leslie.

The Woollahra Queen Street Fair operated annually in up-market leafy Woollahra. One year Murray, ever the entrepreneur, wanted to have a stall. In November 1982, a small group of us and partners assembled some crappy products for a laugh. One was a bulk purchase of quality men's aftershave rebottled as *Sure Fuck* in a stylish gold and black box. Another was a rude hand-held paddle shaped sign with sarcastic messages in reverse type to be read the right way around in the rear vision mirror. The third was a reprint of a famous poster showing various stages of inebriation and recovery from the equally famous Bailie Nicol Jarvie Hotel in Aberfoyle, Scotland. I had requested and received copyright clearance for us to reproduce it for the fair with a share of proceeds for charity. Murray also had some obscene statuettes of horny Australian Goannas.

The stall was a sensation. We sold out and won the *Best Stall of the Fair Award*. We got well plastered that night.

Now back to the wetlands project. Richard has a quirky nature. His challenge, with the project and the multiplicity of teams and people, was a low threshold to pressure, impatience and some tension in dealing with non-Caucasian cultures. I got on well with the client principal Muralee Menon and his chief minder whom I never knew as other than Mahon. Both respected my ability to work cross-culturally to remove roadblocks.

Unfortunately, friction developed between Richard and Menon. As an outcome, the client replaced Richard with me as the on-ground liaison. Richard still held our part of the contract but operated more from Sydney apart from when he was required for major updates or reports. This worked well and things settled down between us all.

Our part of the overall team developed a Master Plan for an environmental theme park and education centre. Restoration and use of the wetlands would be achieved while also meeting Ramsar Principles. Cyberjaya would be one of many partners for research projects and studies. The wetlands environment was to be the subject of much study. Our plan suggested a partnership with Cyberjaya and others for installation of robotic underwater camera on cables in various ponds and in the underground river to observe the marine environment. Richard's connections to aquarium operators proved useful.

The client NGO was thrilled with the options and outcomes. So was I as principal creator and author. Richard and I were invited to present to a working group of the Malaysian Parliament. This would commence the process to source funding from big business, the World Bank and other organisations to make the development an international partnership project.

The NGO was confident of government support for a PPP approach – Private, Public Partnership on an international level. We had initially recommended this approach given the scope and size of the project. The government's share of the overall project cost was forecast at around three hundred and fifty million ringgit over five years.

The entertainment, education and on-site accommodation/hotel components which were just one part of the overall plan had input from James Ishii a Californian media and entertainment expert with access to investment funds from the likes of Disney and Lucasfilm among others. We planned for a Water Centre interpreting the lake and waterways system; a Peat Forest Centre; Aquarium and Aqua Sports Centre; an Amphibian Centre and the Tin Mine Museum, all linked to a new Cyberjaya Research Centre.

The site covered five thousand hectares, had two visitor circuits, one twelve kilometres and the other fourteen kilometres long so a road network and internal solar powered transport system plan was included. My transport background came in

very handy here. A million visitors a year were forecast by 2007. Naturally, I pitched and promoted it as a major new international tourist attraction.

Menon asked for 'out-there' ideas. This prompted my suggesting the sheer drop into the tin mine could form a natural IMAX wall with the huge excavator buckets providing a unique seating experience on the opposite side. We proposed a unique underground accommodation experience alongside a mining museum built into the wall of the pit. Menon approved the idea being included as an option to spark imagination. It did.

This might appear fanciful, even silly and, yes, at the time it pushed the imagination envelope. But, as it so happens, in 2015 an eighty metre high hotel built below the surrounding ground into an excavated cliff face opened in Shanghai, China; the same principle of using the physical space available but not conforming to expected visual perspective norms. Buildings usually reach skyward and don't go down cliff faces underground.

On the day we presented the report summary all teams were invited into a special room set aside for committee meetings and ministerial briefings. The room facilities were made up of a speaker's stage area with a long table, with classic Malaysian style colourful seating running down to a wall into which was set a huge mirror which reflected the scene back to the speaker. Richard introduced me to deliver the detail of our part of the overall project. All presentations went well. All were endorsed to go to the next stage.

Bureaucrats and parliamentarians left and we packed up our equipment. I offered to assist one of the workers carry a collapsible table we'd used for the site model back into storage. Behind the room ran hollow access corridors between the walls. We carried the table back behind where the mirror was located. Standing there was our NGO head, his political master and the Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad who had watched the presentation from a big chair. The mirror was one-way glass. I was introduced by Menon.

After a short exchange of pleasantries, there were a number of questions about the project followed by a robust exchange of opinions. The PM asked about my background which Menon surprisingly answered and knew quite well. The PM took his leave of us. Menon, his Minister and I started to walk out of the building together. The Minister asked if there was anything further he might facilitate to assist the project. Boldly, but maintaining a broad friendly smile as best possible, I said I felt I was constantly being impolite in pushing for catch up with outstanding fee payments to our team. Without any reaction he politely said he would enquire and we parted company. I felt immediately embarrassed personally and for the Minister. I had stated the delays were not with Menon. Once Menon authorised payment the Finance Department just sat on them and despite Menon's efforts we often waited over one hundred and twenty days for settlement.

Richard and I were accommodated at the KL Hilton. As I was about to leave for a meeting at 11 am next morning I was delivered an envelope with my own substantial outstanding invoices all fully paid up. Happily I wondered if all others had been also settled. They had not. I became suspicious and went to a branch of my ANZ bank in KL and paid for a special clearance. 72 hours later the Malaysian Ringgit crashed. The project died. 1997 was not a good year for Asia. In due course everyone got paid. I told no-one else of my early windfall.

When you work on such a big opportunity with a big team interesting things are bound to happen. At a dinner one night along with the team heads, one of the specialists suddenly realised we were very likely eating an endangered species of deer and frog. Our host was terribly embarrassed. On another occasion when cultural protocol required us to eat without cutlery, Richard just could or would not use his fingers instead he used his Amex card to cut and spoon food. The credit card's magnetic strip peeled off in the curry much to everyone's delight who were making the effort to conform to custom.

On another occasion the main group of foreign team leaders were lunch guests at the University of Malaysia. The various food stalls on the campus lawn featured a selection of international cuisine and, of all things Chinese, fried rat pieces. I told those who were squeamish about it that it was guinea pig which enticed some to try it. It is delicious. None of them challenged my declaration as they cautiously ate and enjoyed the treat. I had asked no tails be in the serving.

I don't wish to appear as though I am picking on Richard, but two other stories are too good not to relate. Richard wanted a massage. He said the Hilton had such services just outside. He asked me if I wanted one as well. We agreed to go after work that day. Why Richard thought the shop fronts under the side of the KL Hilton were part of the hotel is beyond me. Anyway, we had our respective massages which, as they concluded, had my masseuse ask if I wanted an 'ice cream'. Now during the massage her administrations in the groin area suggested to me this additional service was not confection or part of any Hilton chain endorsed offer.

I said "no" to any ice cream to which she smiled knowingly and patted my crotch. Just then I heard Richard, in the next cubical, exclaim 'Holy, shit!' Had he unsuspectingly said "yes" to ice cream?

Perhaps through a prior bad experience, or just suspicion, Richard would not drink the hotel tap water, nor as it turned out rinse his teeth in it. He feared germs or disease despite signs stating the water was potable. He had apparently ordered a case of small Perrier water to wash his mouth after cleaning his teeth. We had just arrived in KL, unpacked and were heading to have a meal. I rapped on his door to collect him to find him cleaning his teeth. Mouth full of foam he uncapped a warm bottle of water and, as I yelled out "No!" he took a generous swig.

I nearly broke a rib from the laughter of watching Richard's mouth explode with the chemical reaction of carbonated water and dental paste. He choked, spat, dribbled and swallowed

following the eruption which covered his mirror and him in bubbling froth. Perhaps he boiled a kettle from then on to get clean water but I didn't ask.

An example of how a simple decision can have far reaching, unintended consequences occurred through our need to protect the site and the resident population of beautiful Sun Bears. It was agreed the area would be fenced. The military undertook the task but also removed the local indigenous population thinking that making the area secure also meant no humans inside of the perimeter.

Surprisingly, it took lots of talking to make it clear the indigenous population had to be returned as we wanted them to protect the Sun Bear as official game wardens. To do this of course we knew we had to create a greater value in tourism to view the Sun bears than the native's love of their paw pads as food.

I wonder what went through the natives' minds when they were unceremoniously moved, spent a few weeks in a camp and then were returned home probably without any explanation. A vacation!

Between sojourns to Kuala Lumpur I was also lecturing a series in eco-tourism at Taronga Zoo, Sydney. The Australian Conservation Training Initiative ACTI sponsored the courses to train an emerging cadre of fifty-two tourism officers from South Pacific nations. I had written my part of the courseware and mapped it to conform to basic educational training standards aligned with AusAid requirements. My fellow presenter was Penny Figgis, then with World Wildlife Fund. Managed by Dr Deedee Woodside the initiative was well respected. We were invited to do the series in Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Thailand in October 1997 but funding didn't allow that to happen, unfortunately. The Sri Lanka brief contained a mini-scoping study mirroring my NPWS work.

The ACTI initiative ran until at least 2000 when Carol Shaw contacted me for assistance with more lecturers. I was just too busy for a five day course involving delegates from India, Vietnam, Papua New Guinea and South Pacific. I referred them to Gay Curtis, Jack Giles and Simone Tregear.

My presence in Malaysia for the Wetlands Foundation also facilitated a conversation with the Ministry of Tourism's Sharil Bin Saad during which he asked me to lecture on eco-tourism once the wetlands project was approved. Similarly I had conversations as far afield as South Africa where Mavuso Musomung, Director-General of National Parks, and Ken Haiden had heard of my NPWS work through Deborah Cartwright, Michael Keating's partner. Again a lack of funds to pay me prevented this going further.

ACTI delivered some of the series lectures in Sydney and others at a facility on Cape Tribulation in Far North Queensland. I recall being provided with a broom each night to deter crocodiles if they were ever encountered on the pathways as we walked to the accommodation from the conference facilities. I thought it was a joke at first until others told me they had had encounters with thankfully juvenile reptiles.

Carol reminds me on holiday in Fiji on a *Blue Lagoon Cruise* I had been unimpressed with the guided walking tour commentary provided by the cruise staff so I set off with several other guests in tow explaining interesting features and wildlife. The next stop more guests accompanied me than the guide. The next time the guide asked to join in and we shared the role. I showed him how to rework the way he presented his material to make it more interesting and relevant.

On this same trip I was given the opportunity to fish as the vessel cruised the coastline. A line was set with a small plank of wood attached to keep the hook and lure near the surface and 'running' like a fish. A barracuda took the hook. I successfully landed a metre long specimen. Quite a prize for a non-sportsman and hopeless fisherman. I proudly held the bleeding, gutted monster aloft. In doing so I turned and splashed blood and fish guts over several girls sunbathing on deck. All hell broke loose. Apologies were offered but not accepted. Despite the understandable hysteria and mess of earlier in the day, we all shared a terrific meal that night and the incident became less of an issue over coming days.

The courseware from the ACTI lectures was further refined and provided as adjunct material to studies in tourism by several universities. I was gaining good exposure which generated more engagements and fees. The skills which had won me *The Orator of the Year Cup* at school in 1963 were earning me a living despite my mother's prediction.

In 1992, at the invitation of the National Industry Extension Service NIES, I had been invited to participate in a special certification intake in *World Competitive Service*. I put my new qualification to good use some years later by partnering with a small team of consultants working with AusIndustry program director Terry Watson, offering subsidised business planning support. The aim was to grow the potential of small tourism operations to attract investment by assisting them achieve market-ready status. Our group comprised Satwant Calais, Terry, Albert Stafford and me. My earlier work with worker co-ops was of terrific value for the practical way in which I approached planning and advisory services to business owners who relied very heavily on energetic participation by their workforce.

My relationship with these guys was lucrative and reputation building. Satwant in particular had extensive government experience. My first work with Terry at AusIndustry was through their Cultural Industry Adviser, Amanda Lawson, developing a business plan for GAVALA Aboriginal Cultural Centre in Sydney's Rocks. GAVALA's Alana Rose wanted to develop the cultural centre as part of the renovation of Bond Store 3 in Windmill Street, The Rocks, Sydney.

The Sydney District Business Association (SDBA) commissioned me to redraft their model rules towards changing the Association's structure with a new constitution. I was commissioned to work on various elements of their planned rebirth throughout 1996.

More work offers arrived. I was engaged by Bronilyn Smith to complete her business plan towards a launch and promotion of a series of classes in self-defence titled *Defence Dynamics*. Bronilyn also created a sub-set of these for women travellers

titled *TravelSafe*. Bronilyn went on to success with the program in Japan, Germany and England (particularly *TravelSafe*).

My old mate Justin Macdonnell sought my help in developing a proposal to create a Cultural Tourism Centre on the old RAAF base in Dubbo. The proposal paperwork was well regarded and even resulted in a fine dinner at Parliament House with Andrew Peacock, Member for Kooyong in Melbourne. I have no knowledge as to whether the project actually went ahead.

More opportunity flowed from Tourism NSW in the form of consulting on various developments in the Northern Rivers district of New South Wales which I knew well from my worker co-op and parks experiences. In September 1997, Albert, Terry and I presented a planning and business leadership one-day workshop for tourism CEOs.

Back in Sydney I was busy for AusIndustry on an inbound tourism job for New World Travel International. Jeff Hakim needed to refocus his established business to take advantage of changes in the *HIS* Japanese student market. I advised Jeff for almost a year. More work arrived from the Public Employment Office for a case study and training modules. Michael Yabsley's CORPOL offered a three-month advisory arrangement.

I had asked the people at Dunhill to look out for something challenging and unusual but they reckoned I was almost unemployable because of my wide 'generalist' experience. Instead they looked for advisory and interim management roles matched to my skills. Rudny asked if he could put me forward for Presidency of the Australian Federation of Travel Agents but I was aware AFTA was a hornets' nest of intrigue and stayed clear.

I was now charging for speaking engagements; a small fee plus expenses to not-for-profits and commercial rates plus costs for government or business entities. I was putting a value on my knowledge and experiential capabilities. The fees didn't seem to deter many from booking me. The Manly based International College of Tourism and Hotel Management and Canberra based Australian International Hotel School at Kurrajong were particular

users of my services as a guest lecturer. I became great mates with the Canberra Dean of School, Michael Conlin.

Because of the volume of work on offer I set-up a well equipped home office suite on two levels of our rented digs in Smith Road, Artarmon. Paula Joss rejoined me. We were still renovating our North Sydney home.

Separate to the lucrative *AusIndustry* programme contracts, an interesting job was to look at ways to revive and make the experience of a visit to the Australian National Botanic Gardens ANBG in Canberra more interesting and thereby promote greater attendance. In late April 1996 John Williams requested I do a Commercial Business Appraisal on how to refresh the experience of visitors. The creativity in our approach to the NPWS brief appealed to him. My report contained options for new guided experiences, a people mover to make the hillside on which the ANBG resides more visitor friendly, use of new audio technology to tell stories and to explain exhibits. Working with lighting and sound expert Roger Foley, we devised a number of sound experiences to bring special areas to life as visitors walked through designated sections of the gardens displays.

One such area was a partially sunken self-sustaining biosphere representation of an ancient fern and palm habitat, of some millions of years ago, containing living flora fossil displays. Foley proposed using Japanese shadow puppetry, lighting effects and sounds to simulate the fleeting sense of giant insects, early birdlike raptors and dinosaur images just out of direct vision but within earshot. The techniques would have used motion motors and animatronics to spook and thrill visitors as they walked along the already established raised pathways. The attraction would come alive near dusk and run until closing as a special attraction.

Roger and I were to work together on a proposal for *Sega World* at Darling Harbour. His creativity was brilliant, simple and practical. Roger Foley has two other identities. Aka Ellis D Fogg aka Phileas Fogg. We also collaborated on a proposal for *Ghost Tours* in Sydney's Capitol Theatre.

My ANBG report recommended ticketing for admission and parking should become a combined standard feature using the latest new developments in magnetic strip reader technology. This would be a first in Australia for a public attraction. I also outlined how ANBG and the Australian National Zoo and Aquarium ANZ&A could partner to build a conference centre, with accommodation attached, on land adjacent to the Gardens. I picked up this idea from discussions over the proposed San Francisco's Presidio development. The facilities would also mirror similar services at Melbourne Business School where live-in educationals are conducted. The resultant positive revenue stream could fund a regular refresh of displays and fund new exhibits.

My contract was extended to add a scoping paper for the Australian National Seed Bank (ANSB) to establish an image publishing and licence service to both publicise the collection and create revenue streams like other image libraries around the world.

In the end, the opportunities offered to the ANBG were perhaps a bit too brave for the Director-General. Privately, he said he liked much of what the list of options offered but seemed to either lack the influence or the will to get a start-up project past his minister. Whether elements were subsequently adapted and implemented I don't know. Our team of advisory experts, used to independently validate options, agreed all the elements were possible and practical. If executed the ANBG could create world-class exhibits and operational efficiencies while building refreshed attractiveness and custom for the gardens. Increased revenues would then follow.

The ANBG's scoping study caught the eye of the Australian Museum's Executive Director of AMBS, Stuart Fereday. His brief to me was to provide visitor experience improvements through modification to staff / visitor engagement; identify potential new experiences to offer visitors and to conceive of or identify a flagship or icon project. The icon project proposed was an interactive display of Australian flora, fauna and marine life constructed on vacant adjacent land owned by the Gardens. The facility

would offer integrated conference and accommodation facilities. Canberra was short of new facilities so any new state-of-the-art facility would likely find good demand. The project required a partnership between Australian National Botanic Gardens, Australian Museum and the National Zoo and Aquarium all of which were in local proximity. That partnership and the imagination needed to fulfil the proposal was not forthcoming across the agencies.

Just as this engagement was completed I was contacted by the interim General Manager of the Canberra Theatre Company. David Lawrence had been given the challenge of evaluating options to integrate the theatre and other arts based enterprises to form a more effectively co-ordinated arts sector in the national capital. His Minister sought better synergies across the disparate arts administration groups, facilities and support infrastructure. Not surprisingly, the industry reacted angrily so the study outcomes were significantly watered down to placate the various sectoral interests.

Soon after I did this work, David asked if I had any interest in doing his job for six-months and then to slip into his role taking on the development of the Canberra Cultural Centre and the Square. Nearly eight million dollars was to be set aside from a one-hundred and fifty-million dollar land for equity swap. He was keen to put me forward to his chair Ian Meikle, owner of the Canberra Times, and the D-G of the Department of Heritage, Tourism and Culture Mark Baker. I said I would consider it. They flew me to Canberra for discussions late in August '96. However a faction on the board had other thoughts and blew the opportunity. Nice offer though.

By mid '96, I was being re-engaged by NPWS to develop the next stage of commercialisation for Bobin Head, Kurnell and Lane Cove national parks. The project manager was Jason Ardler. We were to work together for many weeks. Naturally with my prior work experience for NPWS Jason and I slipped into the challenges quite smoothly and positive outcomes followed.

In 2001 I was again to work with Graeme Worboys who, like Jason, was a former NPWS district leader. Graeme is now regarded as a world expert on connectivity conservation. It was because of his influence I participated as a recruit in the first induction of *Green Globe 21* assessors in Australia in 2001. But I had another purpose in gaining certification, that being to expand my capacity to be a Senior Adviser to PA Management Consultants Infrastructure Development Practice at the invitation of Group Leader Michael O'Higgins in the UK and John George in their Washington office. I also subsequently assisted Worboys draft an Environmental Due Diligence process based on a data registration framework I had developed for another piece of work completed with PWC.

In the second half of '96 I had undertaken the Australian Institute of Company Directors Company Director Course. On the night of the practical exam, three of us went for a beer afterwards. We compared answer notes. We found that we had each answered some questions differently so we felt sure we'd got it wrong. Not so. While answering differently our thinking was spot-on. We all passed. I gained my diploma and entitlement to use the honorific Fellow. I was also awarded an Order of Merit.

Fresh from these studies an old friend from Brisbane days, Lois Appleby, approached me to get involved on a committee for the Sydney Paralympics. We had a good lunch but I said no. I felt some sporting background or experience was essential. My friend Karen McBrien managed Louise Sauvage for a time so I had a reference point for looking at what was needed to work with sports elite. I didn't have it.

Gay Curtis called to update me on progress arising from the plan. Pleasingly NPWS were going to tender parts of the Goat Island plan, Yarrangobilly Caves House, some regional accommodation and the Sydney Harbour National Park Olympic Strategy and they were setting up a Tourist Services Marketing Unit.

As soon as these were released I was immediately contacted to advise Sydney Convention and Visitor Bureau and Tourism NSW

on aspects of their interest. I lost count of the many document reviews I did for parties submitting expressions-of-interest, tenders or proposals. As an example, one was an EOI for a casino on Christmas Island utilising its particular status as an Australian Territory and appealing to high-rollers from the Western Australian mines, Hong Kong and Singapore. The island is now infamous but for other reasons.

Another example was assisting a group, including old mate Peter Townley, develop a proposal for *Ghost Tours* in the Sydney Capitol Theatre. A great idea which was to use actors playing theatrical characters who relate interesting general theatrical stories or perform a spooky narrative, tell the Capitol Theatre story, tell quirky theatrical facts about actors and productions, all with special effects. While Peter had thought up the idea he lacked the overall expertise to execute it as a business opportunity. I thought the idea was a good one and would work. But I had so much other work on I had to keep saying 'no' to efforts to get me to take the idea over and implement it. I introduced them to Roger Foley to create lighting, image and sound-effects complementary to the various tour themes.

I pushed Peter towards Maisy Stapleton at Sydney City Council to possibly fund a trial out of Jobs Inc. monies and to push our contacts on the Capitol Theatre management team, namely, John Moulton, formerly of the Sydney Festival, and Peter Davis to give it a go. In the end theatre management wouldn't commit, citing, as a reason, their contracts with the major producers restricting other activity in the house. Producers like Cameron-Mackintosh do like to have exclusivity but surely this micro-business was no risk. I don't know John and Peter tried that hard in the end. The idea awaits take-up by someone.

Meryl McCracken, ex State Transit but now Botanic Gardens in Sydney, called me to work up an idea to use the wrought iron fence and Palace Garden Gate of the gardens along Macquarie Street as an outdoor public gallery at weekends. She initially called it *Little Bohemia*. But I believe this changed to Sydney

Montmartre to reflect more focus on the artists. I recommended Peter Townley be involved. Peter had created artists and craft markets at the Sydney Opera House down the road. I put down some notes and ideas in a paper for Meryl. And that, as they say, is history.

This one is worth expanding upon. Holroyd Council in Sydney's west wanted to propose a velodrome as their capital works contribution towards Sydney Olympics 2000. A capital investment pool for such bids had been created by the State government. I was commissioned to come up with options for the facility to meet Sydney Olympics 2000 specifications in the first instance and as a community asset afterwards. This secondary on-going use required consideration of multi-purpose, multi-functional elements to encourage activity from the community and promoters.

Working with Noel Corkery of EDAW we proposed a flexible venue configuration, one which could alter the contours of the arena floor in one-metre squares using hydraulics controlling a matrix of cubes. Insets and a cycle track overlay gave the velodrome configuration needed for the Olympics. The arena floor could also be sealed and flooded. A range of treatments or add-on surfaces was provided to facilitate different sports and activities up to and including dirt bike racing. The roof opened. Seating moved. The centre was to be fully cabled and connected for live broadcasting with full broadcast lighting rig available. Our report included post Olympic sales and marketing prospecting. We identified a wide range of organisations which might use the alternative functions of the building in addition to the core sporting functionality. The Holroyd Council missed out on the funding round so the facility doesn't exist. Pity.

Some of the ideas incorporated in the Holroyd proposal are not new. I stole them from what I had read about how the Romans creatively changed the arena of their amphitheatres for alternate uses.

Tony Herbert, the eccentric Irish owner of Total Tourism Group, is perhaps worth an expanded mention. A lovely, creative, hard

working and the most infuriatingly stubborn, porky-telling client I think I ever had. What possessed me to spend two years advising Tony over 4Kids.com, Sydney Pass, Privileges Card, Walking Maps and other projects is beyond me? Initially engaged to do a diagnostic under Watson's AusIndustry program, the work grew into product refinement and strategy. Tony never paid on time, never kept deadlines, never did what we had agreed but stubbornly survived. I loved to hate him. If it wasn't for his terrific staff particularly talented Sales Manager Stephen Ricardo, I doubt whether the relationship would have lasted. TTG is still alive and kicking as testimony to sheer persistence. Congratulations Tony.

Other work I was commissioned to do included: *Meetings Industry Association of Australia* with great colleague Executive Director Elizabeth Rich; *Wildwater Adventures*, through which I tackled my fear and did white water rafting to level three; *Southern Highlands Tourism*; *Queen Victoria Building Tourist Information Centre* with Caldis Cook Architects; *NSW Visitor Information Network* set-up with the Council of Tourist Associations of Australia representing some seventy groups nationwide; *Outbound Tourism Organisation of Australia*; *Hunter Resort (Hermitage)*; *Central Coast Tourism (Gosford NSW)*; *Halftix*, a revamp; *Tour Hosts*, an investor or exit sale strategy; *Great Big Events*, a diversification strategy for the Bowmans; facilitation of the business planning process for the *Inbound Tourism Association of Australia*; *Waratah Adventure Tours*, accessing wilderness areas; *NSW Bed Tax Rally* wherein I first met Scott Morrison now Federal Treasurer; and *Kurnell Information Centre*, a major conversion to interactive diorama style indigenous and early first settlement story-telling.

An amusing vignette on Morrison. Scott spent some time in New Zealand as head of tourism. Some say apparently not too popular with his staff who, when he left the agency to return to Australia, threw a good-bye party in his honour but didn't invite him.

My old stamping grounds in the arts never seemed to be far away. I did a board evaluation analysis for the Arts Council of

NSW; a spin-off strategy for Margaret Meagher for her publishing enterprise *State of the Arts* and a strategic and business plan and publications evaluation for the Arts Law Centres which was followed by a corporate identity and image plan for them. This work reconnected me again with Evan Williams of the NSW Department of the Arts, Philip Rolfe and Anna Waldmann at the Australia Council for the Arts.

From left field came a call from *Sydney Water*. The task was to facilitate a series of brain-storming sessions to challenge current service beliefs and to identify what potentially new products and services might be introduced to diversify *Sydney Water's* portfolio. Using principles suggested in a Harvard Business School paper titled, *How to Brand Sand* I guided these discussions and challenged perceptions.

For example, water for autoclaves in hospitals and surgeries should have specific properties removed so as not to damage the equipment or instruments being used. Pretty much just like we pass domestic tap water for ironing through a distillation filter bottle to prevent calcium build-up, which will eventually clog the iron. When commercial or industrial water is captured after use it needs either safe disposal or recycling treatment before re-sale. The team identified over 30 potential ways in which water could be specialised or customised for specific uses, collection, safe recycling and resale across their customer base. All were industrially based.

Think about the range of drinks now available covering hydration, health, less or more of this and that but you get the point. The sessions were wonderfully creative and a lot of fun. I facilitated engagement where no idea was silly, nothing was out of bounds and any idea that didn't find a slot now was reserved for later. I hear China is now marketing *diet-water*. Ha!

A big and very rewarding job was done for John Odgers of *Craft Australia*. Originating as a Strategic Business Plan, an element of which was to create an accreditation and quality assurance standard called *Craft Mark*. The Craft Australia members in

Sydney's Rocks area were the test locations for the launch and trial of *Craft Mark*. The organisation protected the name in all states in order to create a national quality and customer assurance standard. I worked with *Craft Australia's* agency *Clemenger Harvie* on the branding imagery and roll-out.

Craft Mark was launched 29 April 1998. Once introduced I used Paul Shea, former Marketing Director of KFC to conduct *mystery-shopper* studies to monitor brand acceptance.

This follow-up validation process was of interest to the Copyright Council and Australian Writers Guild for whom Paul and I undertook focus group sessions on their service levels and customer satisfaction.

Rolfe and Waldmann were particularly interested to tap into the thinking in and around *Craft Mark* to see if it could be applied to other elements in the arts such as textiles. John Odgers of *Craft Australia* cleverly connected with SOCOG's Craig Barker to include certified original craft items in the Olympic family gift bags. I wonder how it went in reality. In mid-2000 I hosted the first TTF Cultural Tourism Forum for Chris Brown with Justin Macdonnell and John Odgers as practitioner contributors to an audience of tourism heavies.

During this time my diaries show I knocked back six-month Interim Executive positions offered by Dunhill at *TransWater* and *Premier's Department* at fees of two-thousand dollars a day. What was I thinking? I had so much other work on and had commitments I wouldn't break.

Developing friendships within AICD resulted in my facilitating several AICD Annual Conference sessions. My roles included chairmanship of a number of conference agenda sessions and as a speaker. Nearly ten years later I co-led a high level study tour of Australian Stock Exchange ASX100 chairs and directors into China. More of that exciting undertaking later in 2005.

Much of the planning work I was doing involved application and implementation of various government programs. This presented

some engagement challenges with business owners, staff, unions and investors. I looked for what might assist my natural abilities to work with people and settled on a mediation course. I set about to become qualified as a Member of the Institute of Arbitrators and Mediators.

During 1996/97/98, I chaired the Sydney District Business Council, Tourism, Entertainment and Transport Committees and for about two years advised Maisy Stapleton and Nicole Sheridan on the City of Sydney Jobs Inc. employment initiative. A number of such committees existed under Council patronage to engage with the larger business community of Sydney towards briefing council and councillors on aspects of business challenges and needs. The networks this work opened to me were very useful. I had regular de-briefs with the then Sydney City Council CEO, Greg Maddock.

In February 1996, we had to move Carol's mum, Ruth, from her apartment in Dee Why, on the North shore of Sydney, to a care facility at Wesley Gardens. I had made myself unpopular a few years earlier with the family at Christmas in Melbourne where Carol's brother Doug lived during his Army service, by suggesting we needed to observe Ruth as she was exhibiting early signs of dementia.

The condition worsened and after several accidents we realised care was needed and made the appropriate arrangements. Ruth's best friend Stella was also in Wesley Gardens so the move was softened by her companionship. After we cleaned out her unit for sale it took us two years to use all of the many types of plastic bags Ruth had hoarded out of sight.

Financially we were doing well. Carol and I decided to invest in a harbourside property with potential views of Olympic activity on Sydney Harbour. A one-bedroom apartment in Blues Point Road, Milsons Point had a large balcony with excellent views of the Sydney Opera House under the Sydney Harbour Bridge. We snapped it up. Within a year we were offered a price which was

too good to refuse from an English merchant banker wanting a pad for the 2000 Olympics. Our superannuation fund did very nicely from the sale, thank you.

Our extensive house renovations were all completed in early August 1997. We moved in on the day of a great tragedy, the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. I am sure many of us all have a particular clear memory of what we were doing at the time of extraordinary events. For me, her tragic death sits alongside the JFK assassination, the Moon landing and walk, and Australia's winning the America's Cup.

Closing 1997 was an unpleasant little episode with State Transit. I wanted to tender to do a review of the bus advertising contract which Cary Budd and I had overhauled nearly seven years prior. I had been out of the STA for over five years at this point. I found the tender documents incomplete and lacking in essential information. I had sent a series of questions into Colin Menzies of Procurement but received no reply. I repeated the request. Again no reply so I formally complained. I rather bluntly pointed out the tender specification was less than adequate to meet the brief. I was told 'higher-ups' had 'black-listed' me from consideration.

Now, I had excellent relations with all old contacts in the STA. I had given Cary advice when asked and had good current contact with some senior management through my prior special report work for John Brew and UITP. What had gone wrong? John Brew had retired.

I didn't mind not getting the work providing good due process and fairness was evident. I upgraded the complaint by asking for an investigation. A very thorough investigation took place under ICAC. While no apology or admission as to fault was forthcoming from the STA, I had revealed improper process and significant inadequacies in the specification. A better qualified party won the work. Cary left STA soon after.

It was in the period 1995 onwards I ramped up work as a conference MC and facilitator of executive workshops. George Parkyn,

who had worked for me at the Brisbane Visitor and Convention Bureau, had built up a conference and event business cleverly called *By George*. He needed someone with a business background to add an extra edge to the facilitation and MC'ing of his events. I estimate since George, and soon afterwards Gold Coast events supremo Peter Sugg, gave me that start I've probably done over 70 national and international gigs.

The industry sectors I have now worked with cover medicine, national industry and executive associations, military and police, aviation, exploration and engineering, urban design and planning, health, local government, finance and banking, education, not-for-profits and charities, logistics, professional services and many more.

In 1995 alone I delivered papers at conferences, events and symposia on a diverse range of subjects like *Cultural Tourism* and an interesting one from left field *Geographic Information Systems-Conceptual Applications in Tourism for Visitor Engagement (UWS)*, *Science for Environmental Decision Making*, *Conservation Training Methods*, *Greater Self-Sufficiency in Conservation (ANZAAS)*, *Maintaining Yield in Tourism (TCA)*, *Sustainability of nature-based Tourism Enterprise (ITOA)* and *Tourism Financing Mechanisms (APEC NZ)*.

This subject material led in turn to my being invited as a judge of the *NSW Awards for Excellence in Tourism* and eventually being invited to be a judge of the *NSW Tourism Awards of the Decade* in 2000. I had already gained prior experience from judging the 1997 & 1998 NSW awards at the request of organiser Ron Beeldman.

The Technical College teacher training I was given in the 70s came to the fore when Macquarie University engaged me to deliver training to the MBA course in Marketing and Administration. I didn't have an MBA but my practical experience in the subjects fitted the bill for teaching a couple of modules.

During my whole career, I estimate I have given over three-hundred talks, lectures and presentations to business groups,

business schools, universities and government agencies on wide-ranging subjects, many relating to my roles and work. I continued to do this enjoyable work until 2013 and even structured a hypothetical for Sunshine Coast Council in 2011 for tourism and industry.

One memorable booking from George Parkyn was to present a lifetime achievement award to a guy who loved Douglas Adam's *Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy*. We created *The Book* containing a gold label CD set and scripted quotations from which I read, following which his boss presented the Book to him as a memento. I performed the role all made up and costumed in character as *Slartibartfast* the ancient *Magrathean* designer of planets and the fjord fiddly bits.

The hotel service lifts were occupied with catering so I had to go from makeup to foyer to function room across the public areas. It took me twice as long because I was stopped several times by Japanese tourists wanting a photo. They had no idea who or what I was, just that I was unexpected and different.