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Transcript of an interview with

John Fischer

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

## INTRODUCTION

This is an interview with John Fischer for the Parliamentary Oral History Project and the J.S. Batty Library of West Australian History.

John Fischer was born in Fremantle on 3 June 1947. He grew up in Darlington, Western Australia, where his parents kept a dairy farm. Equestrian sports were a formative influence on John's life, and he began playing polo at age eleven. After attending Darlington state school, John continued his education at Guildford Grammar.

On leaving school John Fischer took up a position as a junior accountant in the family firm of Hugo Fischer Pty Ltd. In the late 1960 John decided that accountancy was not to be his chosen career and spent some time working as a jackaroo on a sheep station in the Gascoyne Region of Western Australia and soon found himself employed as a station manager. He served as a member of the Carnarvon Shire Council and also as President of the West Gascoyne Pastoralist and Graziers Association. John married his wife Lindy in 1981 and they have two children.

During the 1980s John Fischer started a business exporting racehorses and polo ponies to Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei. He lived in Singapore from 1987 until 1991, then moved to Malaysia to help with the management of a polo club. During the interview, John recalls how his political views changed over time from being a strong supporter of the Labor Party in his early years to becoming a member of the Liberal Party in the late 1970s. He also provides insights into the influence of Malaysian politics on his political views.

In the mid-1990s, John Fischer went to Perry Lakes stadium in Perth to hear Pauline Hanson speak. After becoming angry at the hostility that was shown at the meeting, which he considered to be a threat to freedom of speech, John attended more meetings and decided to become actively involved in the One Nation Party. He eventually became a member of the Party's National Executive. In February 2001 John Fischer was elected as MLC for the Mining and Pastoral Region of Western Australia.

In this interview John provides insights into the organisation of the One Nation Party in Western Australia and his relationship with the other One Nation Members in the Legislative Council, Paddy Embry and Frank Hough. He gives his views on how he sees the relationship of One Nation with other political parties and his personal impressions of some key parliamentary figures. Through a review of some of his major speeches, John Fischer states his position on such controversial issues as immigration, Aboriginal policies, 'one vote, one value' legislation, regional funding, and law and order.

The interview was conducted by Ron Chapman on 23 September 2009 in digital format and extends over four hours.

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My name is Ron Chapman, it is Wednesday, the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September 2009, and I am carrying out an interview with John Fischer at his home in Gidgegannup, Western Australia. This interview forms part of an oral history project, which records the recollections of former members of Western Australia's Parliament.

RC First of all, John, I'd like to thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview.

**FISCHER** Ron, it's a pleasure.

RC Just to begin the interview, John, I'd like to ask you a few questions about your early life. Could you tell me when you were born, where you were born and a few things about your family - your parents' background and occupations?

**FISCHER** Certainly. I was born on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 1947, in Fremantle, actually. My parents lived in Darlington. My father had a dairy and a poultry farm in the hills there above Midland. My mother was a schoolteacher and a lecturer at TAFE. I grew up in one of those very fortunate areas and times, in fact, that wasn't really encumbered by wearing school uniforms or anything like that. I attended Darlington State School and I had a very carefree and happy childhood.

RC Could you just tell me what sort of things were you interested in as a child?

**FISCHER** Well, I think like all kids you follow the interests of your parents. My mother and father were both very, very interested in equestrian sports so I've grown up with horses all my life. Some of my earliest recollections of parties were of 10 or 15 little Shetland ponies and kids trying to sit on them backwards, frontwards and having a wonderful time. So my early development of sport and this type of thing was always very much centred on the equestrian side of things. My father played polo for a long time; he was a rather prominent member of the Western Australian Polo Association and played for Perth Polo Club for many years. I think I, at the time, was probably one of the youngest people ever to play polo in WA; I started when I was about 11. Some families have a family sport of tennis or cricket; our family sport was polo.

RC            Looking back, John, what do you see as the influence of your parents on your life?

**FISCHER**     I think one of the main influences was the unrestricted manner in which I was able to grow up to form my own thoughts on many things. Like most sons, of course, I have a huge love and respect for my father. He was a wonderful person; probably in a lot of ways a lot calmer and a lot more straightforward than I've been, but perhaps that is something, you know, a lot of people look back on. Look, we just had a very open, very happy family upbringing. In those days I think you were a lot more fortunate than today; there didn't seem to be any pressures on us - I can't remember having any pressures on us. We grew up, as I say, with riding horses in the bush, going barefoot to school and absolutely loving every minute of it.

RC            Your parents, what were their political views? What was their political orientation when you were young?

**FISCHER**     They were supporters of the Labor Party and my mother was a very, very strong Labor supporter. I think Dad was certainly not anywhere near as politically minded and I think he was probably much more open across the board, but in those days it seems to me in my recollection that it was very, very much either the Labor Party or the Liberal Party. My mother, as I say, was certainly far more inclined to follow or to be involved with the Labor Party.

RC            Did your mother take an active part in politics?

**FISCHER**     No, but a lot of our friends (a lot of our family friends) were active in politics, on both sides of politics, actually. I remember my father and Dave Brand were quite good friends but, having said that, it still seemed to me that my mother was the dominant influence in politics within our family.

RC            Just for the tape, John, what were your mother and father's names? What were their names?

**FISCHER**     My father was Peter Hugo Wilson Fischer and my mother was Winifred Jessica Fischer.

RC            Brothers and sisters - did you have ...

**FISCHER** I have one sister, Carolyn.

RC Where did you first attend school, John?

**FISCHER** At Darlington State School, as I alluded to earlier, it was in those very, very care ... I mean there was only 100-odd children at the school and they came (there were no school buses) ... My sister used to regularly ride a horse to school and keep it in a little paddock just over the road. Darlington today is still ... you can still reminisce and see that through the structure of the village and how it's grown. But certainly everyone walked to school. Of course, when I was very small there was still a train service that ran from Midland up through to Mundaring, that type of thing, but that is a very, very early memory. I can remember my grandfather going to work and that kind of thing - they all caught the train. It's a tragedy that those things have disappeared actually.

RC What year was that? When did you first attend Darlington (did you say) State School?

**FISCHER** Well, it would have been 1952, I think.

RC And after that where did you go to school?

**FISCHER** After I finished primary school I attended Guildford Grammar School and the ... I mean I liked that too, but it was a big change. Now my son goes to Guildford and my father went to Guildford so we've had a bit of a family history with them in Guildford.

RC What are your impressions of Guildford Grammar School?

**FISCHER** My son, who is now 21 years old and at university, he loved Guildford a lot more than I did. I think Guildford has become a magnificent school and it's certainly improved out of all range since I attended it. I think it is an absolutely magnificent school at the moment but I think, you know, my memories of it were probably not as good as my son's will be.

RC            When you were at Guildford, John, what subjects attracted you?  
What subjects did you like?

**FISCHER**     I was always very strong on subjects such as history, biology, geography. I scraped through on mathematics and English, that type of thing, but I was far more interested in history, geography and biology. I was an abject failure at chemistry; the explosions always came at the wrong time as far as I was concerned.

RC            My next question was going to be what subjects did you particularly dislike, but I think you may have answered that, so I assume that's maths and chemistry?

**FISCHER**     I think I didn't really dislike them. Guildford in those days, as I said before ... I think my son's memories certainly will be much better. I think the standard of teachers is far higher than they are now. It is now a much different school. I would've loved to have done well at chemistry but that was not the case, and a lot of that of course was my own fault.

RC            What about sport; did you take part in sport at Guildford?

**FISCHER**     Yes, I loved sport. I've always been very keen on sport - Australian Rules football, cricket, swimming.

RC            So you took part in...

**FISCHER**     Absolutely, yes. Played sport on every occasion we could.

RC            At Guildford, can you recall any particular teachers or personalities there who, say, acted as your mentors or helped you along the way at that time during your school days?

**FISCHER**     I think there were several. There was one ... Our housemaster was a fellow I've always looked back on as a person who was influential on a lot of boys. I called him ... Well, his nickname in those days was Ali but his surname was Barber. He was the housemaster of Woodbridge House there. The headmaster, old taffy - David Lawe Davies - was a person that I think everyone who attended there certainly looked on with pride that he was our headmaster, to be quite honest.

RC Can you remember any particular anecdotes from your childhood, not necessarily school days, that you might like to recall?

**FISCHER** There's probably quite a few. I lost my pants once when a clown pulled them off while I was swinging from a safety rope in the circus at Darlington, but most of the things that I can recall probably don't do me a lot of credit, although that was quite funny. The circus had come to town and I think I was about nine or 10, because it was well before I went to Guildford. When the circus camped on the oval for three weeks, of course all the kids would go down there every afternoon to help feed the elephants and all that type of thing. I got to know one of the sons of one of the clowns and we became very friendly so I spent a lot of time down there. On their opening night when they put on a show for the Darlington population, you had to jump on a horse and stand on it as it went around the ring bareback, but as a safety measure they put a belt around you with a rope that went to the top of the tent and the other end was held by half a dozen clowns. Because I was well known to have a reasonable riding ability everyone expected me probably to do quite well, but I jumped on and the clowns pulled me off and as I swung across, one of them reached up and pulled my pants down. As I sailed across, unfortunately, I went right across the top of where all the girls from Helena College were sitting so it's something that took a while to live down [laughs]. In fact, I think a lot of people who perhaps think of Johnny Fischer as a naughty little boy often regard that incident as one of the classics.

RC When did you leave Guildford Grammar, John?

**FISCHER** In 1964.

RC Looking back on your time at Guildford Grammar, what do you see as your main achievements there?

**FISCHER** Probably an underachievement. That sounds rather brutally honest but I liked some of the areas of the school but I wasn't at the time particularly sorry to leave.

RC Before you left school, what were your ambitions then, just before you left Guildford?

**FISCHER** Unfortunately, I was one of those boys who grew up ... I would've loved to have been a vet but I really can't stand a lot of blood. I wouldn't have really liked the operating side particularly, so it seems strange that I'd say that, but there is a lot of things to do with horses and animals of course where you don't have to operate and that type of thing. To be honest, when I grew up a lot of my father's friends were country people. As I said, I grew up on a small dairy farm and I guess I was always rather interested in going up north to a station, but that didn't occur immediately because our family, my grandfather and that, also had a well-established business in Perth, Hugo Fischer Proprietary Limited, which was based in Subiaco; it was in Hay Street in Subiaco. They were leather goods, safety goods manufacturers and they were originally saddlers, and when I left school I went and worked there. I went on through TAFE to do a junior accountancy course and I didn't really like it very much. I thought I would when I first went there, but I didn't think my future was to be in the city behind a desk.

RC Just reflecting, before we leave your schooling, John, how do you think your education influenced your future careers or your career path, or did it influence it in any way?

**FISCHER** Well, I remember when I was 10 years old my father said to me, "Where do you want to go to school, son?" and I said, "Well, I'll go to Guildford, Dad, like you." He said, "Right, well I'll tell you one thing," (because he was very straightforward like this) he said, "I'll tell you one thing, boy; the only thing you'll learn at Guildford is how to think for yourself because no-one is going to teach you anything." And funnily enough there were three or four teachers there that actually taught Dad. I think Dad was there in about 1927 or something, but I mean that's not a bad thing either. I sound as if I'm a bit critical of the school and I'm really not. As I said, I think it was probably something lacking on my part that I didn't buckle down and get into it a bit better. But it certainly did teach you to think for yourself, Dad was certainly right in that way.

RC I know it's probably early, but by the time you left school, had you formed any sort of political views at all?

**FISCHER** Very much so; I think even back when I was at state school, I remember having political arguments. I was very much a supporter of the Labor Party

in those days, I guess very much influenced by my mother, and I remember having a lot of arguments. I had a very strong background too and certainly was very vociferous, I guess, in what I thought was right.

RC In those days we're talking in the late 1950s, the 1960s, what Labor Party figures impressed you?

**FISCHER** Cocky Caldwell still actually remains the person who I've utmost respect for. I think it was a tragedy he never became Prime Minister of Australia. He was, unfortunately I think, there at a time when television took over and I think that probably kept him out. But I was a great supporter of the Labor Party, you know, in my youth.

RC You briefly touched on employment after you left school; I'm just going to ask you about that. Would you just like to explain the jobs that you had after you finished your education?

**FISCHER** Certainly the first job, as I say, I went as a junior accountant at Hugo Fischer Proprietary Limited.

RC How did you get this job?

**FISCHER** Well, it was obviously through the family company et cetera. My father hadn't worked there because he didn't like it ... He had worked there but he hadn't stayed there; he went off and went farming. But it was run then by my uncle, Leonard Fischer, and I went there I think mainly because I always held my grandfather in very high esteem and Hugo Fischer's was always part of our family history et cetera. But I didn't particularly like it and I left there. Actually I took a year off then and went working my way around Australia and I came back and went up into the Gascoyne as a jackaroo on a sheep station.

RC What sort of time was this? This would've been the late '60s, wasn't it?

**FISCHER** In the late '60s is correct, yes. I think it was round about 1967. I went up and I worked as a jackaroo on Marron Station for a long time. The station was owned by Doug and Mara Craig and their daughter is now my wife.

RC            You met your wife on the station then?

**FISCHER**    Yes, I did. She was quite a bit younger than I am. She was going to school and of course they all have to go to boarding school et cetera, so she used to come back to the station on holidays and that.

RC            What other jobs have you held since that time?

**FISCHER**    Well, Doug, my father-in-law, died when I was 21, so I ended up managing ... I ran Marron for the next 14 years. I was a member of the Carnarvon Shire Council. I was president of the West Gascoyne Pastoralists and Graziers Association and I was on several other government transport committees. In 1980 I left Marron just prior to Lindy and I getting married, and I actually took some horses for a company called Austrex to Sabah in Borneo ...

RC            That was around 1980, was it?

**FISCHER**    Yes. During all that time I'd been up north I'd continued with my love of equestrian sport, polo in particular. I took some polo ponies to Sabah and I actually through that started a business with a partner of mine, Patrick Dawkins, called Fischer Dawkins and we exported a lot of racehorses, a lot of polo ponies. I used to go up to Singapore as a hired player. When Singapore held a major tournament they would bring people in, one or two people, to play for them, so I often used to go up and play for Singapore. During those years I played polo in Brunei a lot. I actually was invited by the Sultan to take a WA team up there on one occasion, but I've played there on various other occasions myself. So I played polo professionally and I had a livestock export business. We sent a lot of horses into Singapore and Malaysia, into Dubai, mainly polo ponies but racehorses as well in some areas, Singapore and Sarawak.

RC            So where were you actually living then? Where were you operating your business from then?

**FISCHER**    When we were doing that I was operating out of Darlington. My parents ... We still have property in Darlington. We operated out of Darlington for shipping. We also shipped a lot of horse feed and that type of thing, veterinary gear.

RC I just want to ask about your family. When did you actually get married, John?

**FISCHER** In 1981 on the 17<sup>th</sup> of October.

RC Do you have children?

**FISCHER** I have two children: one is 21 years old, a boy, Hugo; and a daughter, Imagele, who's 16.

RC Just for the interview, what's your wife's name?

**FISCHER** Lindy.

RC Lindy.

**FISCHER** Lindy May.

RC The business you've just been speaking about overseas in Sabah, does that continue, or have you finished overseas?

**FISCHER** No, I still have some very close associates over there. In 1987 I was in Singapore playing for Singapore in one of their big tournaments. They asked me to ... because I used to stop in Singapore all the time flying to ... Generally, I would go up to Sabah and Sarawak and places on the stock boat, we would unload et cetera, I'd be there for a while, and come back through Singapore, so I played a lot of polo in Singapore as well. In the late '80s the Singapore Polo Club asked me if I would go up there full-time as a polo professional and a polo coach, and after discussion with Lindy we decided we would, so I lived in Singapore until 1991. Whilst I was there I was approached by Royal Pahang Polo Club in Malaysia and asked if I would go up to Malaysia and help them transform their polo club. The Sultan of Pahang was the Agong of Malaysia at that particular time. I couldn't do it because I had a verbal contract with Singapore, which I certainly wasn't going to break, but they very fortunately were prepared to wait until I'd finished at Singapore so I then went to Royal Pahang, which was based in a little place called Pekan on the South China Sea. We really did transform the polo club there, certainly with the money and the

intent of the Tengku Mahkota, who was the son of the Sultan, and myself. We ended up having a 450-horse polo club there and the best polo club in South East Asia. We bought a lot of horses in Argentina and there were some very, very big tournaments held up there; probably outside of Argentina, some of the biggest tournaments in the world.

RC One of my questions, John, was which of your jobs before you entered Parliament gave you the most satisfaction, but it sounds from what you're saying that your involvement in equestrian is the satisfaction.

**FISCHER** Playing polo is pretty hard to beat; I mean, it shakes up your liver and it develops an excellent thirst so you can't ask for much more. I played polo but I was also the general manager of Royal Pahang. It is a very, very interesting operation. We had teams in England, the Philippines, Hawaii, Argentina, the US, and it was a very, very interesting time and you meet some fantastic people.

RC Are you able to tell me who you met? Any personalities, if you like, who you met over the years?

**FISCHER** I've met Prince Charles. I've met Mohamad Mahathir from Malaysia and quite a few Malaysian politicians, of course. In fact, Malaysia in many ways had a big influence on my political thinking, especially Sabah. I was really fortunate, going back a couple of years, when I was in Sabah that Salleh Harris was the Menteri Besar, or the Premier of Sabah, whom I got to know very well and I found him a very, very interesting person. He was the head of a party called Berjaya, so it wasn't actually part of the Malaysian UMNO political organisation and it was a Christian party. It was very, very interesting to see the way they operate their politics.

RC How do you think the Malaysians, or Sabah particularly, influenced your political views; in what way?

**FISCHER** I think both Sabah and Malaysia or in fact Malaysia in general, because Sabah of course is part of Malaysia. Sabah is very much like WA, in my view, as far as our own federation goes; it's lightly populated, it's a very wealthy little state and it's very far removed from most of the action, as we are in Perth in regard to Canberra-Sydney access.

I can't say I actually liked Mahathir as a person, but I had a huge respect for him. He wrote a book called *The Malay Dilemma* regarding ... He was actually kicked out of UMNO for his views when he was a young fellow and then came back and became, as we all know, the leader of Malaysia for a long, long time. He had an incredibly difficult job because he had seven sultans that were above the law and, as well as that, he had a lot of racial conflict to contend with. To top it all off, he had a situation where the bumiputras, the actual Malays themselves, were roughly about 50 per cent of the population, yet did very, very badly financially and economically within their own country. Mahathir straightened a hell of a lot of that out. Keating I know called him recalcitrant and all that kind of thing, but he was a much, much smarter man than Paul Keating ever was because ... Well, I don't have much time for Paul Keating; in fact, I don't have any time for him at all. But I don't think Keating could've held a matchstick to what Mahathir did over there; I mean, he reduced the power of the sultans and by tough action, which wasn't always favoured by the majority, he brought the bumiputras up so that they are now reasonably in control of their own country. He kept illegal immigration down and at the same time he kept the economy, which was mainly run by Chinese, in check and gained a lot of support from them as well. I happen to think he did a fantastic job under extremely difficult circumstances.

RC            So you could say it was his policies then, that impressed you and sort of coincided with your own political views at that time?

**FISCHER**    Well, I don't think they coincided with my own. They certainly impressed me but they impressed me because I found myself living in and looking into the habits of a country that was totally different from where I'd come from, and it amazed me how someone could hold it together to the extent that he did. As I mentioned before, history and that has always been a favourite subject of mine. After the riots in the early '60s in KL and that, which were very, very severe, there were people running around with machetes and chopping heads off and all this kind of thing. In fact, to his great credit, the current Sultan of Johor actually travelled through the state of Johor telling everyone to keep their machetes and pahangs in their cases and that there wasn't going to be any slaughter, like there was in some of the northern states. So for Mahathir to be able to grasp all that and put it together, I think deserves a hell of a lot of credit. The way he did it and some of the methods he used ... as I said, I have met him on occasion; I think he used Australia as a whipping boy. I didn't particularly like the man personally but had I been a Malay, I think I would've loved him. But on the other hand, those times are changing now and I happen to

think Anwar is a pretty good guy too. The tricks and trials that Mahathir used against Anwar are absolutely unbelievable and unheard of. They just don't get published when they happen in Australia, that's all, unless it's against One Nation.

RC            Just going back to Australia at this time, John, over the years which Australian politicians have impressed you? You said you had no time for Paul Keating, I just wondered if there were any on the other hand that you were impressed by?

**FISCHER**     I think just before that I'd just digress back to some who didn't impress me. When I was in Carnarvon I was chairman of the pastoralists and graziers association. I happened to chair a meeting with Malcolm Fraser. I don't think I've ever met a more self-arrogant man in my life. I mean, I certainly wasn't in favour of Gough, but the arrogance that Fraser displayed was just to my mind unbelievable. I often wonder how on earth Australians could've had a Prime Minister of that character. As a Liberal Party politician, in my view, he was a total failure and I'm sure the only reason he got in was because of the catastrophe within the Labor Party and there was no other choice. It really does make me worry about Australia's future when we put people like that in charge of the country. I think, look, there are some very, very good politicians, both federal and state, but there are some that aren't worth paying with buttons.

RC            Who would you see as the good ones?

**FISCHER**     I think our ex-immigration minister, and I just can't think of his name at the moment, was excellent, a very good guy.

RC            Ruddock?

**FISCHER**     Phil Ruddock; I have a lot of time for him. If you go back in the past, I mean obviously I thought that a lot of old Black Jack McEwen's policies were right and I think it's a pity that we've discarded them because it certainly hasn't been to the benefit of Australia or anything like that. I think a lot of Australian politicians actually get there and forget why they're there after a while, but that of course is basically the fault of the electorate. I don't think we pay enough attention to who we have as politicians and who we have directing the country.

RC How would you change that?

**FISCHER** Well, I've thought about it on several occasions actually, as far as the length of time that you can spend in Parliament, but I think the only way to change it is through citizens-initiated referendums. As I say, I've given a lot of thought to the length of time people may spend there, but I don't think all the bad politicians are the ones who have been there for a long time, although I think certainly you can outdo it; you can outlive your usefulness. But I think citizens-initiated referendums are the main thing that we need to bring in here; it's the only way that people will ever get back control of the country and get it going in a reasonable manner, because certainly at the moment it's ... If you go back to the time when we were elected, to the 2001 election, the Labor Party weren't put in because of any great feeling that they were going to do a better job than the Liberal Party; it was just people were totally sick of the Liberal Party, so it's not really a very good omen when you start voting for someone because the other bloke isn't any bloody good, you know.

RC Before we move on to your involvement with the One Nation Party, John, I just want to ask: did you take any active part in politics during your early life before One Nation?

**FISCHER** Certainly, I was a member of the Carnarvon Shire Council. I can't remember the years; I think I was there for about eight years. I also actually stood for the Liberal Party for pre-selection in 1978.

RC Where was that; was it Carnarvon?

**FISCHER** It was Carnarvon. It was well before I was married but, as I say, I've always had a very strong interest in local, state and federal politics.

RC Were you a member of the Liberal Party, I'm assuming?

**FISCHER** Yes, I was for a while.

RC When were you a member of the Liberals?

**FISCHER** Well, it would've been the mid to late '70s.

RC            Just reflecting back, you said you'd formed some political views when you were at school or even earlier. You said you were a supporter of the Labor Party and now you say you were a member of the Liberal Party. I am interested in how your political views changed over time. Why the change from initially a supporter of Labor and then moving towards the Liberals?

**FISCHER**     I think as I grew older I grew a bit wiser; well, I certainly hope that was the case. I found in my early years up north, I think union power ... I mean things like bananas being shipped from Carnarvon to Perth and the cost of the ... In fact, a group of Carnarvon growers organised their own ship. The reason that it couldn't be done was because the union power on the sea board was so strong it virtually prevented it. I mean these guys were trying to make a living and then had to put up with ... Don't forget there wasn't a bitumen road north of Geraldton to Carnarvon until 1963. It is very, very difficult to make a living in some of these places when the government allows these outside organisations to operate against you. I'm certainly a supporter of an independent workforce. I'm not anti-unions but I think unions for a long time had too much power, and I think the country can get into a lot of strife there, as it can with self-regulation. We've seen lately some of these big companies regulating themselves and, you know, playing as the umpire as well. It's absolutely crazy. I think both forms of political parties or governments in the relatively short past haven't been doing their job by allowing too much privatisation. I think it was a disaster, for example, that the Commonwealth Bank was privatised; I think it took away the umpire and it allowed banks to go ... I mean the minute it became a shareholders' operation of course, the Commonwealth Bank became just as bad as everyone else. Whilst it was government-owned it may have been running at five per cent above top efficiency, but it kept everyone else honest. I just think we've made a huge mistake in a lot of these ... in some of those areas. Self-regulation is one equally as bad as union domination. We certainly haven't got the right mix.

RC            So your view has changed really because of your maturity, can we say this?

**FISCHER**     Yes, I think ...

RC            Your view has changed over time because as you said, you got older and wiser.

**FISCHER** Absolutely and, look, I think if you have an interest in politics and what goes on around you, I think you're going to change all the time. I mean I've often tried to evaluate which political party I believe is going to do the best for the state or for the country, in fact. Most of the time I come away extremely disappointed that they're both equally as bad as one another. I think it is probably a good thing that there was a change of politics on a federal level but I don't ... I would find it very hard to vote for the Labor Party at the moment because of the financial crisis the country is going through; I think they're extremely irresponsible in that and I think they spend their money in the wrong way. We may be alluding to this later on, but certainly as far as Indigenous Australians go, the amount of money that's been spent there has been totally and utterly wasted, and there is a failure by people to have the courage to face up to what needs to be done.

RC Thank you, John. I propose now to move on to your involvement with the One Nation Party. Are you happy to continue or would you like to have a break?

**FISCHER** No, I'm quite happy to continue.

RC When did you first become interested in the One Nation Party, John?

**FISCHER** When I returned from Malaysia to come back here permanently ...

RC When was that, if you don't mind telling me?

**FISCHER** I think it was about '93 or '94. I'd come back once or twice and then I...Pauline's comments were making headlines over her dismissal from the Liberal Party for the seat of Oxley and then how she went ahead and won it and one or two of the things that she got up and had to say. I thought these are probably pretty close to being home truths for a lot of Australians and it's certainly not something that, politically, many people get up and say. I'm not sure of the time, but she came over here with, and I can't think of the fellow's name ... He was a Liberal Party member of Parliament from Wanneroo or somewhere; I just can't think of his name now. But he organised for Pauline to come over here and they had a meeting at the basketball centre down at Perry Lakes, which I attended with a friend. We thought we'd just go along and hear what was to be said. There was a huge crowd of people there. We just pulled up there, a bit naive, on the side of the park and started moving in towards the centre to go and get a seat and listen to what was going on. I couldn't get over it:

half the people weren't going inside, they were lined up outside, spitting on people and abusing people and all these, you know, elderly Australians. I got very angry about that because regardless of your views, I happen to believe that you have the right to say them so long as you don't hurt or harm anyone else in the process of doing so. If you didn't want to listen to what Pauline had to say or if you didn't agree with it, you didn't have to attend. But I mean these people were actually there attending ... You know, they were spitting on you, as I say, they were physically abusive. That side of it didn't particularly worry me but the concern that some of the elderly people who had come along, as I say, made me extremely angry, and it was really because of that that I went along to one or two other meetings just to see exactly what was going on. There were some very good people involved in One Nation in the beginning in Western Australia, in my view, and ...

RC            Can you recall the people who stood out for you?

**FISCHER**        Probably one of the people who stood out most of all ended up becoming a colleague of mine in Parliament, Frank Hough. I have a huge amount of time for Frank. There were, of course, a lot of other people who were dissatisfied across the board, so thought they would try something new. But in general in the beginning, you know, in the formative years of the party in WA, I think most of the people who initiated the building of it were genuinely concerned about the way Australia was going, both state and federally, and decided that it was definitely time for a change.

I guess the influence that I inferred from Malaysia was the fact that you could in Australia actually go out and say what you wanted and have people come along in a stable situation to be able to listen to you, whereas in Malaysia those kinds of things were very much engineered and that type of thing. I was really angry about the fact that this was now occurring in Australia, and why was it occurring? I mean we've always been a people that generally you can get up on your soapbox and say what you like. What was it that this woman was saying that was so antagonistic to so many people? And of course the answer as I found it, as I believe, later on was a lot of the ... I think I said in my maiden speech, I remember it well because one of the points that were really driven home ... One Nation wasn't vilified for what it stood for; it was vilified because of the threat that it caused to the two major parties, because it was the first time in Australia that I think we suddenly had an awareness that you didn't just vote for the Labor Party because Mum or Dad did. Hold on, things aren't, you

know, the king's got no clothes on; what the hell was going on? It was the first time that had ever happened in Australia. To the great shame of the other two parties, they couldn't see over their bums on leather seats to allow it to happen. I think we're going to regret it for a long, long time.

RC           What impact did Pauline Hanson's maiden speech have on you? That was in September 1996.

**FISCHER**     Well, very little to be quite honest; very little because I'd heard it all before. I mean Graeme Campbell said it much more eloquently in the eight or 10 years prior to that. That's also part of the amazing thing; all these things had been said by various other people, which doesn't detract from the admiration I have for Pauline's courage in getting up and putting it all together and saying it. It drew a lot of attention because, hold on, here's this little red-headed sheila getting up and saying it and putting it all together. You know, when big tough Graeme Campbell or someone else had said certain things, they ... But hold on, this woman's got up and she's the one that just got kicked out of the Liberal Party and all that kind of thing, so I mean it was very much a media-built hysteria. But it was a good thing in many ways and it's such a pity that it never finished because had it not been for Pauline, had it not been for someone who the media could focus on and belittle and bully and carry on about, then it probably would never have got up off the ground anyway.

RC           You probably answered this next question, John, but why do you think Pauline Hanson's maiden speech was so controversial at that time? You've just mentioned the media and various other things.

**FISCHER**     Well, the media, of course, the fourth estate has a lot to answer for in this country but ...

RC           But why do you...

**FISCHER**     I think a lot of it actually goes back to Queensland politics, in my view. Queensland being Joh country and this type of thing and there was an actual run-on kind of thing that Joh Bjelke being what he was and having their voting system and that kind of thing, for Pauline to have come up, been kicked out of the Liberal Party and standing for the seat of Oxley, yet the Liberal Party still took all the money from that election, believe it or not. I mean, it is just so corrupt and unfair, it's unbelievable.

I digress to say that. But I think the fact that Pauline then won and it was a seat held by the drover's dog for such a long time that to get such a swing in a seat like Oxley that had been a Labor Party seat for so long, initiated by a woman who was flamboyant in her own right, but certainly by what she had said, by what the media had built up as so inflammatory, to have then won and I think then people thought, "Right, well when she gets up"...and a lot of people ...I mean it struck a chord with a lot of people. As I said, when others have said it in the past; it was a dull match. When Pauline got up and said it, it exploded; it was very bright in as far as attracting people to it.

RC            My next question was actually: why do you think One Nation appealed to people at that time? You're saying that it was partly or mainly Pauline Hanson; the fact that Pauline Hanson had said these things.

**FISCHER**      Look, there's no doubt about the fact that One Nation got to where it was because of Pauline. There's also no doubt that she had some very good people. David Ettridge and David Oldfield were both very smart fellows and in my view, too, very honest and straightforward Australians. They were actually well ahead of many of the people that they were competing against in the game of politics, and the methods that were used to try and bring them down certainly showed the desperation of the people who were against One Nation at that time. Look, I don't think Pauline was ever meant to be Prime Minister of Australia or anything like that, but she had the courage to stand up at the time, she had the courage to be able to draw the media, and a lot of it was very disparaging, I might add, for her and put her through it. She was a very tough little girl to be able to stand all that and she did remarkably well, but in the end it failed because I guess the pressures were just too great.

RC            So what were your impressions of Pauline as a person - Pauline Hanson?

**FISCHER**      Pauline and I aren't particularly close, you know, through various things that evolved, but as I say that certainly doesn't stop the admiration that I have for her. I think it took a remarkable amount of courage to do what she did. I'm extremely sorry that it wasn't pulled off with the ... that perhaps she wasn't smart enough to take it right through to the end.

RC Broad question, John, but how would you describe the One Nation Party's broad political philosophy?

**FISCHER** Well, I think if it is reported honestly, I think it would make this a much better country to live in.

RC Why is that?

**FISCHER** Because I think it is totally fair to everybody. I think it stops us being a nation of tribes. I think with multiculturalism and immigration we're going down the wrong ... I mean Australia is an immigrant, even going back to the Indigenous, you can't use the word Indigenous in that case ... but the Australian Aboriginals came here 30 or 40 000 years ago so I mean everyone has come here at some stage; it is merely only a matter of time. But I think one of the great tragedies of Australia was our loss of manpower in the Boer War and the First World War; all the good guys who just went away and died and fought for the British Empire. I think Australia would've been a much better place had we had a larger base to work on, but I don't ... I've got nothing personally against Lebanese people or anything like that but I do think if you go to a particular suburb in Australia and you can't read the street signs et cetera, I think it's ridiculous. I think people who come here should come here (and I think I've said this in speeches before) to be Australians not to be people from somewhere else who happen to live in Australia. Why we don't take ... you know, history repeats itself all the time. I don't think it's a hassle or I don't think there's anything wrong with being nationalistic to the extent that you want your country to be able to survive.

RC How would you answer allegations that One Nation was a racist party, because that allegation was made, as you know, several times?

**FISCHER** Oh, absolutely, yes; absolutely. I think a lot of it was made by people for ulterior motives, not a hundred per cent ... A lot of it was made by people with ulterior motives. A lot of it was made by people following the, you know, the baying of the hounds that the media put up. I think a lot of it was made by people who haven't got a clue ... who never, ever read a One Nation policy statement and so took one-liners and said, "Right, well this is it". But I mean there's no doubt that the two major political parties conspired together to influencing people in Australia, and with the help of the media, that One Nation was off the rails, was off the track. I mean some

of the media reporters that I met during that particular time, they didn't have a clue about what they were reporting about, but they were writing what they thought people wanted to hear. As I say, I don't have a lot of respect for a lot of people in the media. There are good people, but there are some shockers in there too.

RC            Why did you decide to join the One Nation party?

**FISCHER**    If there's one particular reason, it was seeing old people spat on ... old people who'd worked all their life, they were Australian, they'd paid all their taxes, and some of these yahoos that didn't have enough brains to work out what the hell was going on, sitting there. That to me was a division within my own country which I think is absolutely abhorrent.

RC            How did you first meet Paddy Embry and Frank Hough?

**FISCHER**    I met Frank through a connection obviously with One Nation, a phone call. I met him at a meeting in Gosnells. Paddy Embry, I can't really remember where I met Paddy. I think he came into it sometime later.

RC            Did the three of you join the party at the same time?

**FISCHER**    No. I think I was the first. Frank would have been very close on my heels, and Paddy came along some time after; I'm not sure.

RC            How do you see your relationship with Paddy and Frank?

**FISCHER**    My relationship with Paddy certainly became strained.

RC            Why was that?

**FISCHER**    I didn't find Paddy to be a team player. I think Paddy was more interested in where Paddy was going, and I think, quite frankly, he was probably a little bit embarrassed at times to be a member of One Nation, whereas Frank, I had the utmost respect for. Frank Hough to me is, as the old saying goes, if you needed someone in the trench with you, I couldn't think of a better bloke to have alongside me.

RC           Once again, I think you've probably answered my next question, but what persuaded you to take an active part in One Nation?

**FISCHER**     Because I looked into exactly what it was and I thought that it needed a bit of help. I thought someone needs to stand up and say basically what's going on here is correct. If people want to spit at me and that kind of business, well they can, but I happened to believe in what One Nation said, and what it was about. I didn't do it lightly. I'm very regretful of some of the outcomes from One Nation, but I'm also very proud that I had the courage to stand up and say and do what I did, and I'd do it again tomorrow. I think politics is ... I learned a lot whilst being in politics, and sometimes bashing your head against the brick wall is only good when you stop.

RC           Do you think One Nation sparked your participation in politics or would you have become actively involved in politics anyway?

**FISCHER**     Well, as I said, well before One Nation I'd actually stood for pre-selection for a seat in the north west. I mean, I loved the north west, and I still do. In fact, whilst I was a member of Parliament I made several speeches on what I considered to be the inequality of how money is spent within this state and what happens in the north. I think we're well and truly behind the eight ball with our support for the north of this state. In fact, I really believe that WA, for the benefit of the people who live up north, should probably be split in two and become ... I think there should be a northern state and a southern state, because I don't think in the past we've had people who are capable of running the whole kit and caboodle, and I still don't think we've got them now. Basically at heart of course I'm a very strong secessionist. I most certainly would have had Lang Hancock's backing, if he'd still been here, for the secessionist party. I probably would have been right there amongst them. From all inquiries that I've made, it's virtually legally impossible without a civil war, so the next best bet I think is to divide the state and let the north of this state be run properly.

RC           Why do you hold such strong secessionist views?

**FISCHER**     Well, there's a lot of reasons actually, but basically ... in fact the reasons come on board all the time. Our quarantine laws at the moment, for example, are being weakened all the time within Australia itself. We're very fortunate here in having the Nullarbor as a boundary gate, because it certainly helps protect a

lot of agriculture. It certainly shouldn't help protect our dairy industry and that type of thing, but because of the free trade between states and that type of thing, our dairies are off and on memories all the time depending on how the rest of Australia is allowed to operate. In 1953 when they took the railway line, for example, from Port Hedland to Marble Bar, when they removed it, they promised that within two years there'd be a bitumen road. That road was finished in 2005, I think. And that is what the north puts up with all the time, and Western Australia to the same extent. The Pilbara develops roughly about 28 per cent of Australia's export income and gets the equivalent of \$1 in every \$800 spent back up there. It's absolutely ridiculous. The Kimberley is totally under-developed. Its ability to grow and flourish has been stymied by every state government, and every federal government, since Australia was formed. Have a look at the time it took to put a railway line ... when they actually got the railway line through from Adelaide to Darwin, it was too late; other forms of transport had changed so much. But it would have opened up the country to a huge extent. What we've been doing ... we used to have a railway line to Meekatharra. Why didn't they improve that and go on to Newman, for example? In fact when it was mooted to extend the railway line from Malcolm north of Kalgoorlie to Newman, one of the arguments put forward was that it would take away business from Kewdale. Well, that would have been a good thing, not a bad thing. So, city-centric politics.

RC I would just like to move on now to your active involvement in One Nation, John. In what ways did you become actively involved?

**FISCHER** Well, I think initially through support and attendance. When One Nation was expanded to a board of five directors at a meeting at Rooty Hill in Sydney which I attended, I was elected as a West Australian representative. I then became vice president, and I then took over from Pauline and I became president, and Pauline resigned. It was in 2003 I think.

RC I suppose you would have attended public rallies?

**FISCHER** Oh, absolutely.

RC Why do you think the rallies became violent ... some of the rallies became violent?

**FISCHER** The violence ... I remember a big one in Rockingham. We had one in York where the town hall was absolutely packed, and I would say half a per cent or one per cent of the people there went along there specifically to create trouble. There are certain groups around Perth (I can't remember their names) who just came along to make trouble. Their ideological views were a muddle. I don't think they even knew what One Nation actually stood for. But they would hear snippets. They would be given certain messages et cetera, et cetera through the media, who always harped on enlarging individual points, so they'd come along. In general I don't think most people were angry or violent about One Nation. I mean, 105 000 people voted for One Nation, over 10 per cent of the people in Western Australia. Over 10 per cent of the people in Western Australia aren't going to run around being violent. In fact most of the people who did so [voted] were country people who actually had the time to sit back and weren't influenced to that extent by the media. In general, country people aren't really the lemmings that city people are and they have a bit more time to think for themselves.

RC You mentioned the role of the media quite a lot, John. Could you give me your overall impressions of what you think the role of the media was in One Nation or the hysteria that was generated?

**FISCHER** Well, initially of course it was probably responsible for One Nation growing to what it was. Millions of dollars worth of advertising were being given free. And there's no doubt at all that, as I said before, without that type of attention, something like that wouldn't have grown. When Graeme Campbell made virtually the same speech in Parliament, no media reported it at all and it went absolutely nowhere. So without the media attention in that way, you were going to get nowhere at all, and that of course makes the old adage of any publicity being good publicity rather true. Being involved to the extent that I was, I got very sick of the media always incorrectly reporting what was going on, and there's no doubt they did it with a definite intention.

RC What was the intention?

**FISCHER** Well, I think the intention was influenced by the major political parties, or in actual fact by the heads of media. Kerry Packer was reputed to have said, "Kill the bitch", meaning, "Don't say anything more about her whatsoever; wipe it out". I've also been led to believe from other areas that he wasn't totally against a lot of what

she was saying. But the media had a self-driven hysteria, and it sells a lot of papers for them in that type of business. I think there's actually a bit more to it than that. I do think there were a lot of favours asked for and repaid by political parties. Once they realised what they had created and the damage that it was going to do to two political parties, they had to suddenly turn around and do something else about it, and by doing that, they vilified her ... vilified the whole ... They tried to make Pauline look absolutely stupid. She helped them on occasions, of course, but they denigrated the party to an extent that was just absolutely ridiculous. Frank and I, I think, oversaw something like \$3 million worth of court cases. We never lost one, but it cost us such a lot of money that in the end you had nothing left to go anywhere. In the political system, the way Pauline was treated in Queensland is absolutely abhorrent to anyone (or should be) who looks at Australia and thinks we have a fair and just justice system. It was an absolute joke.

RC            How was she treated in Queensland?

**FISCHER**    Well, I think she was treated extremely badly over the several issues that they took her to court on. That of course was brought to a head when she was exonerated. David Ettridge in many ways was the same. You had people who got up and really vilified what was going on, people like the ex Supreme Court judge, Ronald Wilson, getting up and talking about racial issues. Look at this guy's history! These are people who've sat there and done nothing. You see this all the way through. You can see it with members of Parliament in our own state, Western Australia, the trouble in some of our country towns with disadvantage to Indigenous people caused by over-reliance on alcohol and this type of thing. It's been going on for years and years and years. I can remember pulling into Halls Creek, and it looked like a line of ants just travelling back and forward from the grog shop type of thing at the hotel. There are people up there who've been a member for that area for 25 years and never done a thing about it. Yet when I get up and say I think we ought to cut their grog off and start saving these people, they'd get up and call me a racist. I was actually out there promoting ideas to save lives, and these people, through their lack of action (the Tom Stephens of this world) did absolutely nothing for 25 years and then had the hypocrisy and the temerity to stand up and say, "Well, you're a bloody racist", because what you're actually doing is promoting something that will in the end save lives.

RC Just running on from that, John, what are your views, then, on the Howard Government's intervention in the north of Western Australia?

**FISCHER** I think it was probably one of the most courageous political acts that they could do, because I think it's absolutely necessary that some form of action be taken. It won't evolve by itself. If you're reliant on alcohol, it doesn't matter what colour or shape you are; you are reliant on alcohol. Look at the problems that Alcoholics Anonymous and people like that go through. You don't have to be classified as coming from one particular racial group to be a drunkard and an alcoholic, but you do need, whoever you are, a hell of a lot of help to overcome it, and we're not doing it. At the moment we have a system, in the Central Desert, for example, where we have a football mentality out there, which isn't going to help anyone in the long run either, although I love to see the kids [play football]. The idea of putting swimming pools in these communities was fantastic, because put a bit of chlorine in it, it was the best way the kids got a bath and cleared up their eye problems and all this kind of jazz. When I first thought of it, I thought well, what a stupid thing to do, but then I started to think about it and said hold on, this is a brilliant idea. But there's no-one to blame for what's happening up there except ourselves. You can't even blame the old blackfellas, the people who are there, because they've never known any different. The only people to blame are the bloody parliamentarians who've been sitting on their backsides up there for 20 years bloody straight and done absolutely nothing, and the people down here who are so city-centric. The same thing's going on now, though, all the time. I could get into a million arguments, I guess, about selling gas and all that type of business, and who's going to get the jobs and all this kind of thing, but whether it's FMG or whether it's anyone else, they come out in the newspapers et cetera et cetera about how many Indigenous people they're going to employ and all this kind of business, and it's absolute rubbish. And as for the Kimberley Land Council and people like that, they're a disgrace,

RC Quite a few of these issues, John, that you're just speaking about I'm going to actually cover when we talk about your speeches in Parliament.

**FISCHER** Certainly.

RC I would just like to ask, your support for One Nation, did your family support your views and your membership of One Nation?

**FISCHER** I think my father did. And as I've said before, he was pretty apolitical. I think when mum really got into it, she understood why I was doing what I was doing, but as I said she was a very strong Labor supporter, and it would take quite a bit for mum to change her views.

RC Looking back, did your support for One Nation have any immediate effect on your family? Were some people antagonistic towards your family?

**FISCHER** Absolutely.

RC How did that occur?

**FISCHER** I had to get a silent phone number et cetera. I'm extremely sorry to say that it reflected on my son on occasion when he was at school, from certain people.

RC Are you talking about bullying here?

**FISCHER** Snide inference. But yes, there's definitely a price to pay. But in general it was always behind the ... what I did find, actually, other than in a rally, where the antagonists had a little bit of self help and that type of thing, I've never actually ...sorry; only on one or two occasions did anyone actually ever come up and front me on a singular basis.

RC I want now, John, ask you some questions about the organisation of the party. How was the party organised in Western Australia?

**FISCHER** It was a very straightforward, I think, typical organisation, from the president down to the elected committee representatives, then out to the different branch areas. We had branches all over the state, from Kununurra to Esperance, and we had very regular meetings, to which delegates were openly invited. Most of the business was done at full delegate meetings, not just state executive meetings. On reflection, I think it was perhaps a little bit too open. I think that was one of the things that brought [about] our downfall. But of course under the philosophy that we had, when we initiated open meetings ... as I say, I think that's one of the things that probably brought about the disintegration a little bit quicker.

RC           Why was that? How did that happen?

**FISCHER**       Because we allowed everyone, virtually, to come in and have a say and take a general consensus, and whilst in theory that's very good, in practice it doesn't work very well, because as we grew and expanded we had a lot of people that .... well, we had people that would come in for reasons alternative to what the party was initially set up for, and by giving these people a say I think it weakened the core strength of the party.

RC           How did the organisation in Western Australia differ from other states?

**FISCHER**       Well I think it was much more professionally run in Western Australia. Most of our problems, having taken into account what I said in regard to having large meetings all the time, what I mean by that was I think the executive should have concentrated a little bit more than it did, but certainly in Queensland, where most of the strife always started from, I think there were a lot of people there that were dissatisfied. They seemed to attract a lot of people that were dissatisfied with the political system in Australia, so you got, to put it quite frankly, a lot of nutters in there. They certainly weren't attracted by the philosophy of One Nation. They were there because it was something different. And right now they'll be somewhere else, because it's something different, and they'll probably bugger up whatever they're in as well. But Queensland ... unfortunately it started very well in Queensland. As you recollect we had eleven people elected to the Queensland Parliament. In the same election, the Liberal Party had three; keeping in mind, of course, that the National Party is the main sector of the coalition in Queensland, and it's a single house Parliament; it's not bicameral like we are over here. But unfortunately it started to spin out of control in Queensland, and that had a big influence on New South Wales. I think basically South Australia and WA were pretty stable most of the time. All the major hassles that came about and led to the demise of David Ettridge and David Oldfield, came out of Queensland; certainly not out of Western Australia.

RC           Yes. You mentioned before about the strife in Queensland. How did this come about, the downfall of David Ettridge and David Oldfield? You said it occurred out of Queensland. Why was that?

**FISCHER**       There were court actions initiated in Queensland that were totally and utterly spurious, but the court allowed them to go through. It certainly splintered the

party to a great extent. There became fights over money and people being compensated, whereas we had none of that in Western Australia at all. And we ended up having people ... well, there's no doubt that the Liberal Party were involved. It's alleged that Tony Abbott was the person who was behind a lot of the instigation of the court cases against us in Queensland. I think David Ettridge and David (I can't think of his name now) handled themselves very well actually.

RC David Oldfield.

**FISCHER** Yes, David Oldfield. I think they both did a tremendous amount towards setting up the party in a very good manner, with a very strong form, but unfortunately the divisions that were instigated in Queensland spread pretty rapidly.

RC How do you see the relationship between One Nation in Western Australia and the federal organisation?

**FISCHER** Well, initially it was very strong. Western Australia and South Australia were very solid in their approach. As I say, most of the dissension came out of New South Wales and Queensland. That eventually led to Western Australia running a branch on its own.

RC Could you tell me what offices you held in One Nation? I know you said that you were a vice president at one stage. If you can just recall for me what offices you held in the party.

**FISCHER** Initially I was the executive Western Australian member. I was then the vice president, and when Pauline resigned I became the president, and we then had a lot of problems with Queensland and New South Wales ... or the problems with Queensland and New South Wales really came to the fore after that stage. Prior to that, within Western Australia itself I was a member of the Western Australian executive.

RC Were you involved in policy formulation?

**FISCHER** Very much so.

RC How were you involved?

**FISCHER** Both in developing it ... Frank Hough and myself were very involved in developing the Australian policy for One Nation. In fact, the policies that we printed and came forward within WA were adopted Australia wide.

RC When I interviewed Frank Hough earlier, he showed me this publication entitled "One Nation Moving Forward Overview", a policy document. Were you involved in the production of that document?

**FISCHER** Yes, I was. Frank was then the national director, as it quite correctly states here. Yes, there were several people involved in it. Frank had a very strong involvement in it, but the whole executive was involved in it to a certain extent, and certainly we also went outside to look at ... we didn't just sit in a huddle ourselves. We went outside to get different views, and certain people that we had a lot of respect for, we invited their commitment as well. But this particular "Moving Forward" overview was certainly driven by the national director, Frank Hough, at the time. But as I say, our working relationship was extremely close at all times.

RC Are there any further comments on that document? How it was produced?

**FISCHER** Well to be quite honest I'd have to go back ...

RC I'm just interested ...

**FISCHER** ... I generally worked off the much smaller policy document that expressed, as I say, both my own and One Nation's views.

RC In broad terms, John, how do you see the political relationship of One Nation to the other major political parties?

**FISCHER** In broad terms, as I said in my maiden speech, I think the election of three One Nation members was the first time in WA political history that someone ... that an organisation that was not to the left of the Labor Party had been elected, so that automatically puts us more in alignment, of course, with the Liberal Party. I can understand why the Liberal Party became very concerned about the emergence of One Nation. After all, as I said, in Queensland we had eleven people elected to their

three. And in many areas I think the Liberal Party in WA was seen to be going downhill. It had no authoritative leadership. I think after Charlie Court there was a considerable gap, and I think the Liberal Party were very concerned about that. Certainly their team blue, which is the group that seems to run the place, I think were very concerned about where they were going to end up, and they decided ... I think they thought if they gave preferences to One Nation, they would lose more than they would gain. I still maintain that they were totally wrong in that, because in the meetings that Frank and I held with the hierarchy in the Liberal Party we made it very clear that we would not give them preferences unless they exchanged them with us. We asked for preferences in only three or four seats. For the rest we said that they could make up their own mind. And we did that because in realistic terms we were initially aiming to try and get control of the upper house, or the balance of power in the upper house, and had we done that, of course, I think it would have been a major move for a permanent establishment for One Nation. We failed, on advice actually that I regret to this day that we took from the Liberal Party, but they were ... as I did mention (it kind of comes back to me) in my maiden speech, the Liberal Party in their stupidity (and that's what it was) actually allowed the Labor Party to win that election. I think it was Peter Walsh who said the Labor Party vilified us on the swings but picked the vote up on the slide type of thing, you know. We could not allow the Liberal Party to treat us with that disdain, and so we carried out the threat ... or was it a threat? We told them what would happen; and it did. But I think they were very, very silly. I think people like those that I mentioned in my maiden speech made some colossal errors. The Liberal Party were like any other party, I guess. There are some very good people in the Liberal Party, but there are also some pretty shonky ones as well. I think they made a very serious mistake, and I think it's going to cost them for a long time. I don't think the influence of One Nation has totally faded out of it, because I think people recollect exactly what it was like to be able to say, "Righto, I am a nationalistic Western Australian. Why the hell would I wish to outdo something that is beneficial to this state?", you know. I think the latest economic ... in fact even in Victoria, looking at the internet just recently, the same thing in Victoria, the bastion of the Liberal Party in Melbourne, that are straight out of the One Nation textbook as far as Chinese being allowed to come in and buy up all the good houses with no intention of ever living there. All these things will come to fruition. History replays itself all the time. What's happened in England will happen here unless we do something to stop it. It doesn't mean to say that what we do here is detrimental to any one group of people. It just means that if you want to be an Australian, be one; if you don't, live where you want to be.

RC            Before we move on to talking about your parliamentary career, John, I would just like to ask a couple of questions about One Nation, general questions. What do you see as the impact of One Nation on Australian politics?

**FISCHER**     One unfortunately that's not true to the cause, because, as we've spoken about before, the media imbalance that was actually given to what One Nation was all about. I think the old term "redneck" et cetera et cetera is going to be splashed around, and it's used by the left of course as a scare tactic. The Liberal Party, because they're too weak in many situations to actually stand up to what is going on in Australia, will contribute to that, to their own detriment. The Labor Party unfortunately have definitely played the politics a lot smarter, both state and federally in my view, federally especially. They've become so close in many ways to the Liberal Party yet they still retain their traditional basis because unfortunately there's still a lot of people that vote for the Labor Party because daddy did. And it's going to be very difficult for the Liberals to overcome that. I think we'll see ... well, I'd like to think that we would see a rise in independents, but unfortunately they will probably be carried out of that conservative side of politics rather than the Labor side of politics, whereas the Liberal Party ... they had the Labor Party on the ropes 10 years ago, and since then they've clawed their way back and I would say now the position is rather different. I'm not all that sure that it's going to be very good for Australia's future, but that's what we've got.

RC            So during the period of One Nation, what was its impact on the political scene, if you like? What impact did it have on the two major parties?

**FISCHER**     Well, in many ways, you know, it had an impact that was certainly not intentioned. I remember in a speech (I think it was my maiden speech) that I mentioned about John Howard collapsing at the knees because of positions that he'd taken and been given a good thrashing regarding immigration (a good thrashing from the Labor Party). Because he didn't want to bring that up again, he kind of came out against what One Nation was saying, although it was very similar to what he'd been saying in the past. So once again the Labor Party picked it up on the slope and got it on the swing as well. I think it probably, in the long term, because of the failure of One Nation, has hurt the cause of nationalism in Australia. That's something I probably regret as much as anything that I've ever been involved with in politics, that that's occurred.

RC            Why did the One Nation party decline?

**FISCHER**     Look, there's a lot of different clauses to be put into that answer, not the least, and I don't like saying, "Oh well, the big boys tried to give us a hammering" all the time, because if you're in the kitchen you've got to stand the heat, but that had a big influence on it, and it had an influence outside of the control of the people who were trying to direct One Nation. As I said, I have a lot of respect for David Oldfield and other people who were involved in running One Nation, but the job was very, very difficult. It could be said that perhaps One Nation grew too fast for it to be able to control the actual input of what occurred in many areas. I think there's a lot of truth in that. I think it would have probably been better if we'd had a less meteoric rise. I think we could have kept a lot of the problems better at bay were that the case. I think those of us who were at the top of it have to take some blame as well for allowing that to happen and not having the foresight to be able to see that perhaps we should concentrate on smaller issues rather than try to do it to the extent that we had, but, having said that, it's very easy to look back at the time. There were so many people urging us to do that, "Who am I going to vote for if you're not there?" and this type of businesses. There was a lot of support in that direction. But as I say, I think in the long term what evolved is probably regretful for the cause of nationalism in Australian politics.

RC            You resigned from the One Nation party in June 2004. Why did you decide to do that?

**FISCHER**     Because, to be brutally honest, I couldn't see myself succeeding in trying to get Queensland and New South Wales into line. However, to be fair to myself, I don't think anyone could have, because I don't think the people who were causing instability over there had any intention of letting them come into line. New South Wales was in two totally separate camps. Queensland was then run by people that, quite frankly, in any form of business I wouldn't have wanted to be associated with, people that I had no respect for at all, and certainly people that I don't believe had the best interests of not only the internal side of the One Nation politics but I don't think they had the best interests of their state or anything. I think they were there as total individuals. We certainly did have the support from South Australia, but they had no political ... at that stage there was no... Sorry. There was only one Queenslander left in Parliament, and it didn't look like they were going to have any

success. In fact, I think they were intentionally trying to bring the party down. I think that was the result of the expansion that I mentioned before. It happened too quickly and we had people in there that were either driven by a different ideology or people who had merely got in there to do as much as they personally could for themselves. Whereas, if I may say so, in WA I think Frank and I had the best interests of what we believed politically would be for this state and for the party.

RC            Yes, John, I would like now to move on to talk about your parliamentary career from 2001 to 2005. Would you like to have a break before I go onto this session?

**FISCHER**    Yes, okay.

RC Continuing the interview with John Fischer. John, I'd like now to ask you about your parliamentary career between 2001 and 2005. First of all, what motivated you to become a politician?

**FISCHER** Well, my interest, I guess, stemmed initially through local government, being a member of the Carnarvon Shire Council, and I've always felt that it was a good idea that if you had something to say you should be able to do it in a public forum and compare your ideas with other people. So further involvement in political parties I think was merely a step on from my initial concern, whether it be politics as far as state or federal or whether it be politics within the industry I was involved in, such as I was President of the West Gascoyne Pastoralists and Graziers Association.

RC What were the circumstances surrounding your nomination for the Mining and Pastoral Region seat in the Legislative Council in the 2001 Western Australian state election?

**FISCHER** Well, I've always had a great affiliation with Carnarvon. I've always felt that Carnarvon was basically home town. I spent a long time up there, as I've previously mentioned, a member of the Carnarvon Shire Council, plus I ran a sheep station out of Carnarvon for 14 or 15 years, which my in-laws owned, along with several others. The Craig family has always been very involved in the West Gascoyne area. So that, through my involvement as well with the Pastoralists and Graziers Association, the north west to me was really home base. In the past I've been a classifier for the Australian Stock Horse Society and the area that I covered there was virtually from Geraldton to Darwin. So I have a lot of affiliation with the north west of Australia.

RC What motivated you to stand for Parliament?

**FISCHER** I think in the vain hope that I could change some things that I saw for the better. I've always held the view that the north of Australia was rather under-capitalised and certainly ill prepared for what may well come in the future. I love the area up there and I think there's a lot of things that should be done and I wanted to see whether I could influence some of them.

RC           What were the particular things that you felt strongly about at that time when you thought you could make a difference?

**FISCHER**     Well, look, there's a lot of issues from opening up the area, I think I've mentioned before, whether we extended the railway line from Malcolm up through to Newman to open up the interior of the Pilbara and the North Gascoyne. But there's a lot of other issues. I think when you go to places like Port Hedland you see it. Port Hedland was initially an old pastoral town and it's grown now to be one of the biggest ports in the Southern Hemisphere, yet the infrastructure there is absolutely terrible. I think the fly in, fly out philosophy that's been applied to these areas is wrong. I understand that it certainly can't take a 100 per cent change, but these towns, until we do change that, until we have some establishment of continuity of people living there, there are always just going to be work huts where people earn their money, but they don't actually put anything back into the country. Port Hedland, for example, until you can allow people to retire in Port Hedland, so that grandparents can see their grandchildren et cetera et cetera , you're not going to have a true infrastructure. I fully accept that there are the older groups in the community that were there when it was a pastoral town and that type of thing [who] certainly look at it differently. But for people going up there on a fly in, fly out basis, it is just too expensive for them to be able to stay there. If you want to retire there the fact is that you need air conditioning in country like that, where in summertime it is over 50 degrees et cetera. The cost of electricity up there is absolutely ridiculous and the government should be subsidising that. And the government should be putting in to make sure that these towns become established in a way so that you can have continuity of school and continuity of general family structure. Unfortunately with the fly in, fly out it affects in so many ways. I mean, it stops social activity because people work 12 hours straight, they die for the next 12, and as soon as their shift's over they're onto a plane and back to Perth. We're making a lot of money out of that country up there, but we're putting absolutely nothing back into it and we're certainly not leaving a social structure that will be in any way beneficial to pass on to our grandchildren.

RC           How did you run your election campaign, John?

**FISCHER**     Probably with nowhere near as much economic input as I would've liked. But I was fortunate that Pauline came over.

RC           Pauline Hanson?

**FISCHER** Yes. I was fortunate to have Pauline come over and we did a very extensive trip throughout the north over a two or three-week period. We went to just about every major town and held meetings in every major town. The normal advertising et cetera, et cetera took place. But basically it was mainly through personal approach. I spent a lot of time up there, which I enjoyed because I love the area. But I went to as many places as I possibly could to give people an opportunity to know what we were talking about, and of course having Pauline with me on occasion was a great drawcard.

RC What do you think were the main factors that contributed to your success?

**FISCHER** I think without doubt it was, in general, the fact that people would no longer associate government policies with their life - with what they're doing. In so many cases, especially in the north when you're away from the city hub, the stupidity of some of the decisions of government and how it affects you ... the cost of a flight, for example, to Kununurra. I read something the other day that actually brought it out. It was a letter. I think it was in *The West Australian*. I can't remember the exact figures, but I was with my chap who'd just been to a holiday in Bali. The paid holiday in Bali, flights to and from, amounted to something like \$190 or \$200 or something. It was extremely cheap. The taxi fare from where he lived in the northern suburbs, too and from, was roughly the same cost as [the fare] he had to Bali. People in the north suffer these inequalities all the time. I'm not sure exactly what the current cost to fly to Kununurra was, but for me to fly to Kununurra, which was a very important part of my electorate, I had to leave at five o'clock in the morning, fly to Broome, wait for another plane to get to Kununurra. So the whole day was virtually taken out in travelling. Now it's a long way away and I accept that, but the cost was astronomical. The cost to the WA taxpayer for me to do that was astronomical. An individual could have had a holiday wherever they wanted overseas for what it cost me to get to Kununurra and back. I remember being at a meeting in Derby, a transport meeting, and a public servant got up and said, "It should be user pays." I could have throttled the guy. User pays? It's ridiculous. Those flights up there should be subsidised. Your journey on a train from Rockingham to Perth is subsidised. Bus transport is subsidised. It's city centric. For the people who live in the bush, they can't afford to come and see the grandchildren if they live in Perth. It's just too goddamn expensive and it takes far too long to drive. User pays is fine in some instances, but when

you're looking at a state that's spread out to the extent of Western Australia, the government, I believe, have a responsibility to make it a bit more equal.

RC How did you feel personally when you were elected to Parliament?

**FISCHER** I felt a great thrill and a great challenge and, I must admit, a little bit surprised, but I looked forward to it with a lot of enthusiasm. It was a very challenging little enterprise that had taken place for us to get there. I certainly didn't have a feeling of relief or anything like that. It was another step forward and a challenge with what we had put in front of ourselves. I think I was really happy that Frank had got in in the Agricultural area, and I was also glad that we got a third member in the South West.

RC What are your thoughts on the impact of preference allocations on the 2001 election outcome?

**FISCHER** I think it was absolutely incredibly wrong. The preference votes were ... I mean I just can't see how it worked out that Mark Neville's votes that went to me and then on a second preference ended up ... because of my preference went to Robin Chapple, when he had Robin Chapple last on the ticket. I think it's wrong. I think it's absolutely wrong. And it surprised me that the Liberal Party took such a pathetic attitude in not taking it to court to fight it. They were very reluctant to do so. In fact it was me who spoke about it in Parliament. The Liberal Party never said anything, yet they lost one of their own people. If this is meant to be democracy and your vote is meant to count, Mark Neville had the Greens last, yet the votes that came to me and spilled over after I'd got enough to get a quota, because they went through me and I hadn't put the Greens last, they went to the Greens, totally against what Mark Neville or anyone else who had voted for Mark Neville wanted. And I think it was just absolutely atrocious. I'm still stunned by it, that that's a system that we operate under, because it's totally wrong.

RC Why do you think Richard Court's Liberal Government was defeated in 2001?

**FISCHER** I think because they lacked the courage to get out and really tell the people what they were going to be about, and I think people looked at them as being a little bit slippery, to be quite honest.

RC In what way?

**FISCHER** Well, I think people got a little bit tired with the Liberal Party being there; of the hierarchy and the infighting that was going on at the time. I think there was a lot of dissension from people. I don't think things like the Bell Tower or the Convention Centre ... I haven't come across anyone who thinks the Convention Centre is a good idea in the situation where it is. It's certainly spoilt the view. And as for the Bell Tower, I think it's just a total waste of money. They were two things that actually I did mention, I remember, in my maiden speech. It's another city-centric thing. They build these monuments to themselves, but certainly the people of the north never get the chance to use them or benefit from them.

RC To what extent, John, do you think One Nation's policies coincided with those of your electorate - with how the people were thinking in your electorate?

**FISCHER** I think very, very strongly. Look, it's a huge electorate. I mean, virtually we were going from Salmon Gums to Faraway Bay. As we know it, I think it's actually the biggest electorate in the world. But had we been able to get our message across, then I think we would've increased our margin quite considerably at that particular time, because Government at that time ... there was a lot of dissatisfaction around at that time, and One Nation benefited from that. A lot of people voted for One Nation without really understanding what we were about, but really because we were something different. As I've mentioned before, one of the few regrets is that we couldn't get our message across properly and that, of course, was a lack of finance. We were tied up in court cases all the time and that's where all the money went instead of being able to put it into being able to spread the word, so to speak. I am sure today if I picked up our policy book I would still agree with everything that's in it. And I totally refute being a racist. I've probably spent more time with Aboriginal people and lived overseas in South East Asia and I'm a life member of Sabah Polo Club, Singapore Polo Club, and in Malaysia. Quite frankly, I wouldn't have spent that time there if I didn't like people who were different from what I am. When I lived in Malaysia, I didn't sit there and demand steak and eggs every night and all this kind of thing. It was Malaysia, so I lived as a Malaysian did, and I enjoyed it and I loved it; absolutely loved it. All we're saying is, as I've said before, "If you want to be Australian, fit in. You can speak whatever language you like, but you have to be able

to speak English. You have to be able to communicate, because whether you like it or not, if you're going to come here, we are an English-speaking country."

RC           When you first entered Parliament, John, what sort of reception did you receive as a member of One Nation?

**FISCHER**     Pretty cold, actually, pretty cold. The Labor Party ... there're some absolute troglodytes in the Labor Party. You'd never employ these people outside. The reason they're in Parliament still confuses me today actually, to be quite honest. A lot of the Liberal Party had very mixed feelings. I must admit, I think in the time that I was in Parliament certainly members of the Liberal Party were generally in front of what was sitting opposite in the Labor benches, although there were one or two really good people in the Labor Party. You know, it goes back to what I said initially. I think too many people in the Labor Party come through the union movement, have never worked for themselves, have never gone out and really taken a good chance on something and known what it's like to be a failure and recover from it. In general, I think the Liberal Party has a better quality of people.

RC           Did you encounter any personal animosity towards you?

**FISCHER**     Oh, yes, absolutely. Tom Stephens called me a Nazi and all this kind of thing, and that's from a guy that in my view has achieved virtually nothing in 20 years in Parliament. He wasn't alone. I don't look back with distaste on that. Rather, I look back on it with how low some of the actions of these people are, really looking after their own, as I say, backside on a leather seat rather than looking to what would benefit the state and the people in it.

RC           Who helped you when you first entered Parliament? Were there any particular figures that you can remember?

**FISCHER**     Yes, one or two. The President of the Council was extremely helpful; Laurie Marquet was also a very ... Laurie was very straight in my view, regardless of what happened to him further on. George Cash gave me a lot of advice, of which I am very, very grateful. I found him to be a person I hold with very high respect. Norman Moore. I respect the way they carried themselves and I certainly respect the job that they did in Parliament for their party.

RC How did you find the parliamentary staff?

**FISCHER** In general very, very good. As I say, Laurie Marquet was ,through all the time that I was in Parliament, extremely helpful.

RC What are your views on the make-up of the Legislative Council after the 2001 state election, given that the new composition comprised 13 Labor, 12 Liberal, one National Party, five Greens and three One Nation members?

**FISCHER** Well, were I to have my time again I would have changed our preferences to make sure there wasn't five Greens. Although, having said that, I respect the position that they put forward. I just think in many cases they were wrong, but I'm nowhere near as anti-Green after being in Parliament as I was before I went into Parliament. So maybe that says something that I hopefully have learnt something there. Although I've been accused of it in the past, I've never been a great supporter of the National Party, well anyway not since Black Jack McEwen on a federal scale. State-wise I think the National Party have failed very badly actually.

RC How was that?

**FISCHER** I think they've let down the people that they represent. I don't think they've gone to war. Politics isn't about being nice. Politics is about winning what you think is best for your constituents. On too many occasions the National Party have done what's best for their individual members to keep their backsides on a leather seat. Certainly if I was back involved in areas like the Pastoralists and Graziers Association I wouldn't be having particularly good things to say about the National Party. Just lately they've probably improved a little bit, but I'm rather sceptical about the outcomes of their revenue for regions and this type of business, because I think they'll revert to looking after themselves once the pressure gets on.

RC John, what did you see as the role of the three One Nation members; that is, yourself, Paddy Embry and Frank Hough?

**FISCHER** I've always seen, both as an individual and collectively, our main reason for being in Parliament was to put forward for support the views of our electorates and to promote a beneficial outcome for those people in the long term. I think that is what we tried to do. In general we were pretty solid in our approach on

that. I think it's necessary to keep a calm head, but to look things in the face and see them for what they are and to be able to speak out about it. And as I say, in general we did that.

RC            How did the three of you work together in Parliament?

**FISCHER**    In general I think we worked together pretty well. Frank and I especially, it is fair to say, had a very, very good working relationship. Paddy and I, as I say, saw things differently on occasions, and that caused a bit of hassle at times. When he resigned from the party without giving Frank and me the courtesy of what he was going to do was a very self-surviving role. I think a lot of other people saw it that way as well. I have a regret of those actions and I told him so. It's not that I didn't think he had the right to resign or anything. We had all spoken about it and it was a matter of when we were going to do it. The fact that he tried to do it I think was ... and then as I say tried to join the Liberal Party was a bit disappointing to me. I always thought Paddy was a little bit embarrassed perhaps that he was a member of ... Paddy would have loved to have been, and would have been a very good politician too, had he been a member of the Liberal Party. In all fairness, it was very, very difficult being a member of One Nation.

RC            In what way?

**FISCHER**    The fact that you definitely had everyone against you. There weren't many friends in Parliament. I didn't go to Parliament to earn money or make friends. And I am extremely grateful, as I've mentioned before, or thankful, that Frank Hough was a very strong character and a very good support. Paddy was very eloquent and had a genuine desire, I think, to do the right thing in politics, but when it came to the really racist stuff and all this kind of thing that really got to Paddy and I think he would've rather been some place else from time to time.

RC            So during the time that the three of you were in Parliament were there any really strong areas of conflict between the three of you?

**FISCHER**    No, no, only with the issue that I've mentioned. Apart from that, I have great respect for the views that they both held. I regret the conflict with Paddy, but that's the way some of these things happen. We can't look back on it. You just go forward, and it's probably more of Paddy's decision than mine.

RC           John, in your maiden speech on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May 2001 you said that, "The three One Nation members were elected in spite of and in the face of a campaign of vilification and deception by the two major political parties in particular." What did you mean by that?

**FISCHER**     Well, the racist taunts, of course, the Nazi party connotations and all this type of business. If you look back on that period of time and look at the publicity of that that they held, I mean it's unique in Australian political history. I don't think there's been any party that's ever been critiqued to the extent that we were, and untruthfully as well. There were a lot of things allowed to be said about One Nation that were totally and utterly untrue. I recollect that there was some issue of someone (I can't remember who it was now) in the Liberal Party saying, "You've got to read *Mein Kampf* to understand what we're about." What absolute, ludicrous rot. I get quite wild about things like that sometimes really. I probably need to go and take a little bit of a walk and cool down. I don't think anyone would've ever said that to me face to face and got away with it, because I take great exception to that. As I did mention in my maiden speech, what One Nation had the courage to say was virtually what is correct, as I say, if I look back on all those things now. I would be more than prepared to debate anyone on my views on racism or anything like that. I don't hold them back from anyone.

RC           Why do you think, if what you say is correct, the two major parties, ie, Labor and Liberal, were out to vilify One Nation?

**FISCHER**     They were very, very concerned. I mean, after all, they're the old players in the ball game and they ganged up on the new bloke. There's no two ways about that. The Democrats and Greens, okay, were small players as well. The Democrats became non-existent. But the Greens at that time were small players, and they were, quite frankly, to the left of the Labor Party anyway. A lot of the Labor Party ... I think Jim McGinty actually orchestrated the Greens beautifully. They said a lot of the things he probably wanted to say, but didn't want to bring the Labor Party into contention by saying it. As I've said before, the Liberal Party were at that particular time not up to the decisions required to be made in regard to what was going to benefit them in the future.

RC           Also in your maiden speech, John, you argued that globalisation and native title legislation have both had a detrimental effect on the Mining and Pastoral Region of Western Australia. Could you elaborate on that?

**FISCHER**     Well, certainly the native title legislation had a ... that has held up development in some areas to such an extent that it's probably going to take us years to recover. Globalisation is quite blatantly and obviously a falsity. You can't have a level playing ground. If you've got 124 countries doing something or making a particular product, somebody's going to start underselling. We seem to have accepted globalisation in Australia as what's necessary, yet we want a level playing ground for agriculture. Our grandchildren will look back on the people who've organised this kind of thinking in Australia as total morons and fools. We've been through the Doha meetings for level playing fields for agriculture and all that. Everyone kept coming back and saying, "We're making headway." We're not making headway at all. It's an absolute joke, and it's crippled the Australian agricultural industry; absolutely crippled it. Yet these people who are making these laws and rules are meant to be on our side. Yet when you ask them to be accountable, they're all down in their burrows. No-one's going to stand up and say, "Yes, I said that was a good idea", you know, boom, boom, boom, when it's an abject failure. Some of the results on the agricultural community have been absolutely disastrous. And they're getting worse. It's not getting any better. The subsidies ... that's why I mentioned Black Jack McEwen earlier. We had subsidies on a lot of these things. We don't have any tractors made in Australia virtually anymore. We've lost all our secondary industry - our manufacturing industry for these stupid, goddamn decisions that some of these parliamentarians or academics have pushed through. It's absolutely crazy. You've got to wonder who they're working for or who they're trying to ...

RC           John, we were talking about your maiden speech when you argued that globalisation and native title legislation had both had a detrimental effect on the Mining and Pastoral Region of Western Australia. Could you tell me what your thoughts are on that?

**FISCHER**     Well, to carry on that one, yes. Look, native title, of course, has become an industry of its own, and in doing so has been extremely detrimental to mining by holding up tenements. I think it's put a very strong brake on development within the state. Globalisation, as we referred to earlier ... I mean globalisation is really detrimental in general. There is no way that 116 or 124 countries are going to

all operate on the same level. I did make a point, that I've just missed now. [pause] As I said, I missed a point on globalisation, but as far as agriculture goes and level playing fields et cetera, Australia has suffered dramatically from what in my view is a ridiculous attitude that Australia has taken in regard to a free and level playing field. It will never happen. Countries like Europe and America, and I mean this is being emphasised as we speak, have agriculture as one of the main industries that they won't let go. These people in general, especially throughout Europe, have all starved during wars in the past. They are not going to let their agriculture slip out the door, and they will subsidise it to ensure that that doesn't happen. We, on the other hand, put no subsidies on and make our farmers compete with everyone else in the world. Although they are, in general, the most efficient farmers in the world, our agricultural industry is suffering dramatically. A very good example of that is what is happening to our cereal crops right at the moment. We have had one of the best seasons Australia has ever had, or certainly in WA for a long time, yet because of the dollar and the fact that America and Europe subsidise their grain crops, we are looking at getting \$222 a tonne for a crop that costs you \$340 to produce. I mean, farmers are suffering dramatically. In a season like this they should be doing extremely well. It can't be wrapped up in just a couple of sentences, but Australia's support of these policies has been very, very detrimental to our agricultural industry.

RC            John, I would like now to cover several issues that you raised in your speeches in the Legislative Council. Your speeches reflect One Nation's strong stand on immigration. To what extent, if any, do you think One Nation influenced the federal Liberal government's immigration policies?

**FISCHER**    I think it influenced what they said about their policies far more than what they have actually done. I think the current federal government immigration policies are far too lenient. I think the country is going to live to regret it. The lifting of restrictions on illegal refugees is drawing more and more comment in the paper all the time. How you can be an illegal refugee that goes through, yet live in another country et cetera, et cetera, on your way here astounds me. We have a federal government at the moment that doesn't seem to care very much about that kind of thing. It's not so much these people coming here that would disturb me. It's the way that they live when they are here. As I said before, what people do in their own homes, what language they speak, as far as I am concerned is their business, but it does concern me that we have enclaves et cetera of people that don't assimilate into Australian society. I would like to see how many Lebanese are in the Australian Army

at the moment, or any South East Asians for that matter. I'm not totally against immigration. I just think we need to slow down. I think we need to slow down; I think we need to stabilise our workforce, especially after this latest economic world breakdown. I think we ought to look after the people who are Australians before we start offering our largesse to others. The fact that we support generously overseas aid to some countries in particular is absolutely ridiculous. We don't get anything from it, yet we have in WA a health system that's crumbling and all that type of business. I just think we need to look after our own before we start poking our nose into overseas business. I think [it would be better] if we take a bit of a break on immigration and make things settle down in Australia and make sure we are looking after the people who are here legally and have chosen to become Australians.

RC            In a speech on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September 2001, John, you questioned the way native title legislation was being implemented in Western Australia, with large amounts of money expended for little productive outcome. What are your views on how successful outcomes could best be achieved for Aboriginal people?

**FISCHER**    Well, it's funny, but what I was saying then, and what I was being vilified for saying, now seems to be the flavour of the month actually. The money that has been spent in the north on communities has, in general, been totally and utterly wasted. Until we are prepared to actually bite the bullet, and I am not talking about another Stolen Generation or anything like that, and take families and put them in a situation to ensure that the children are going to be educated, then we are going to have this trouble all the way along the line. The best thing of the lot there is that any dole money or dole incentive should be given to the females, to the mothers; the fathers should not be allowed to have it. I don't care what colour you are or what nationality you claim to be or anything, I think it should be given to the mothers because mothers in general will look after their children better. If you go to places like Roebourne (and I am sure that there are probably one or two places in Perth with people of not necessarily Indigenous background) that are notoriously bad, and have been for 30 or 40 years, where, in some cases, the only meal children get is what they are given at school. They go home and their parents are drunk. I mean, if you go through Kununurra, what a beautiful little town, yet at five o'clock in the morning the shire has to go through and clean everything up. We're just kidding ourselves. Why we don't have the courage to face these problems properly has got me beat. While you have these people who are trying to make an industry out of the misery of others, and while we take notice of people like that, we are never going to get anywhere.

But, unfortunately, someone is going to have to bear the brunt of change. I think people in Australia in general are waking up to it. The Noel Pearsons of the Indigenous world certainly understand what needs to be done. They don't want to see their race die out, because that's what's happening in Roebourne and Halls Creek and places like that. They're either dying out or you have kids that grow up to be absolute nongs with no hope of living in this world whatsoever. I remember Graeme Campbell said to me once (I think it was at Warburton), an Aboriginal lady came up to Graeme and said, "Why aren't you helping our children?" or something, you know, to the line like that. Graeme said, "What's actually happening here is that until you can get an outcome where your children don't just stabilise; by making your children go to school we are actually helping you, but that help won't continue unless there's something to do after you've left school." It's a huge problem, but you're not going to appease everyone. You're not going to make everyone happy. If you say, "Right, these kids have got to go to school" or "Now you have to move and you go and work on this agricultural project or work on something else". You've got people like the KLC; you've got the green environmental movement that are stopping some of these projects. One of the great tragedies was the cessation of the cotton trials in the Kimberley. Quite frankly, there's a lot of country there between Broome and Port Hedland that is terrible pastoral country. It's got a stack of water and will grow veggies and things like that, and if you don't use it for that it's probably good for nuclear testing, but it has fantastic supplies of water close underground. The cotton industry was trying to establish a 200,000 acre experimental plot there, and the Greens environmental movement, Environs Kimberley, stopped it happening. All those people from La Grange or Bidyadanga would have had a job, because of the labour in cotton; it is not a matter of chucking a sackcloth over your shoulder and singing "Mamie". They drive tractors and dig ditches; it's a very advanced mechanical process. All those kids could have had a job because the result of those cotton tests was that it grew cotton better than anywhere else in the southern hemisphere, so you could've closed down stations like Cubbie station and places like that in the Darling, ceased them and let the water back into the river to revitalise the Darling, and the cotton industry could have come to Western Australia, on country. What we were talking about up there was one third of the Pindan country in the Kimberley. The Environs Kimberley and those other morons out there were saying, "You can't destroy the bush to that extent." Do you know how much country is burnt in the Kimberley every year? It is probably 50 times that 100,000 acres; in fact, more than that is burnt every year. Until you get a bit of honesty in the approach and that type of business, we're never going to get anywhere.

RC            John, in a speech on the 29<sup>th</sup> of November 2001 you opposed a motion to ban United States warship visits to Western Australia, and on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 2002 you strongly agreed with Australia's support for the United States military action in Iraq. Why do you think Australia's alliance with the United States is so important?

**FISCHER**    Once again, if you look back in history, in the Second World War our alliance initially with Great Britain did not do us a lot of good because they were not there. They were looking after themselves when it happened. I happen to think that Australia should have a nuclear deterrent, and I think we should be standing on our own two feet. But, in the meantime, when the line's drawn in the sand I know who I'd rather have on my side. I think the only people (not that I would say that I would trust them explicitly) ... but America has been a very strong ally of ours for a long time. I think that the New Zealanders did the wrong thing when they cancelled their part in the ANZUS Treaty. I happen to think that history is going to repeat itself at some time, and I think we need someone else on our side, but I would prefer to see Australia stand alone. To ban warships and that type of thing from coming into Fremantle is, in my opinion, absolutely ludicrous. Number one, it's probably good business for Fremantle itself and, number two, it shows that we do have a respect, and a healthy respect, and a willing participation with our neighbour. As far as the Iraq war goes, I guess my view on that may have changed a little bit since then, or since what we've all learnt. I think it would appear that America created the devil in Saddam Hussein. I would still go along with America on that. I just wouldn't necessarily go along with Australian participation in it any more. I think the quicker we get out of there the better. Perhaps it was all about oil. It obviously appears that it wasn't about weapons of mass destruction. But, having said that, who knows what Saddam would have done. He attacked Kuwait. Quite frankly, it wouldn't really have disturbed me if America had just taken over Kuwait and let Iraq go. I have no wish either way to either dominate or defend any Arab nations.

RC            In your speeches, John, you describe your political philosophy as that of a nationalistic politician or a conservative nationalist. What do you mean by that? Is that how you saw yourself?

**FISCHER**    Absolutely. I mean, as a nationalist, yes, I happen to think it's the job of politicians to make sure that the people they represent get the best they possibly

can; not at all costs, by any means, but in general. I think I also said that I was a federalist and not a centralist. I believe that, first of all, we look after the people who put us there, quite frankly. As I say, I think Australia should internally look to its own a little bit more before we start transgressing into overseas adventures.

RC            Those definitions that you gave yourself, a nationalist politician or a conservative nationalist, do you think that's how the One Nation party also saw itself?

**FISCHER**    Very definitely, very definitely.

RC            On the 16<sup>th</sup> May 2002 you introduced the Young Offenders Mandatory Sentencing Amendment Bill into Parliament to remove the loophole whereby juveniles might escape a custodial sentence after three strikes for home burglary, and on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 2003 you spoke in support of the introduction of capital punishment of offenders for certain heinous crimes. Why do you think it is so important to adopt a tough stand on law and order issues?

**FISCHER**    I think probably the best way to answer that is to say: well let's have a look and see what the situation is right now? We have crime that is absolutely rampant. We have people that have no consideration for the work and effort that others have put in. Perth statistically is one of the worst cities in Australia. Northbridge is a no-go place after 12 o'clock at night. I think delinquency has probably always been a problem; there are more people now and it's more evident. But there is also less control. I happen to think that we should bring in the cane, the rattan. I think when people are given the cane or the rattan all their friends and that should be there when it's given to them, because nowadays you have a mentality [of someone] that goes to court and gets off and comes out being a hero. I'm not talking about a first offence or anything like that. I happen to believe Singapore's got it right. I've spent a lot of time there. You can do anything you like in Singapore so long as you don't hurt anyone else; and, if you do, you're given the cane or the rattan. I think it'd be a bloody good idea to bring that in here. People say, "Oh that's barbaric." It's not barbaric at all. Have a look at the old ladies who are beaten up. We just have a system here. There's one that happened in the Swan Valley not so long ago that got a lot of headlines, where the old fella was protecting himself and at one stage the police were going to take him to court for firing a shot. I mean [it was] absolutely crazy. But those offenders should've been given the rattan and everyone in their family should have been forced to go in there and watch; girlfriends; or if there was

one in a group, then the whole group goes, and see how tough they are then, so that you don't get respect after committing crime. As far as the death penalty goes, for certain heinous crimes, it should be applied, in my view. I think there are certain things that you do [that cause] you to give up the right to exist in your community. People like the Birnies and that kind of thing, they should have just been put down straightaway. The problem of course, and I fully accept it with the death penalty, is that courts get it wrong, and we will probably tend to get it wrong even more so in the future because courts are under so much pressure to work. The judicial system needs to be changed, in my view, in this country. I happen to hold the view that judges should be elected. I don't see judges as above the social strata, and I certainly don't see them as setting the rules for a social strata. There are some judges, in my view, that are so totally out of kilter with the rest of the community they don't deserve to be there. When I say that capital punishment should be introduced it's very specifically under the situation of where there is heinous crime of no doubt or of no conflict. That's often the case. If 12 good men and true get it wrong from time to time, then that's bad luck, but it was also pretty bad luck for my mate who died in Vietnam when he was 18 because he was conscripted by the bloody government, and he had no say in whether he went or not. Had he not gone, he would have been locked away in jail and had a black mark against him for the rest of his life. There are some things in life that are tough.

RC            John, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 2004, during a debate on regional and rural Western Australia infrastructure funding, you said, "... this Labor Government has not shown during its term that it fully understands or comprehends the requirements of regional and rural Western Australia and the development that is required to sustain the engine room of the economy of this State." In what ways do you think the Labor government failed in this regard?

**FISCHER**        Certainly, along with the federal government of the time as well, the fishing restrictions that have been put on out of Broome, for example. I am talking about the demersal deep-sea fishing, where we are really just setting it up for the Indonesians to get a decent catch, is one example. I think the other example that comes to mind immediately for me is what I referred to before about the sustainability of some of these towns, as far as having people retiring in these towns and setting up. Rather than them being labour camps, I believe the government (both Liberal and Labor) should have done a helluva lot more in the housing department and in enabling the cost of inhabitants to retire in the towns that they've lived in and grown

up in, and in fact to entice more people to live up there, and to entice them to be able to stay there; so it means cheaper electricity and a cheaper flight structure for individuals (not for companies) in and out of Perth. That of course goes back to federal government involvement. It comes from tax concessions; it comes from the return of royalties into the regions and how they are spent.

RC            In November 2004, John, the three One Nation members in the Legislative Council voted against the racial vilification bill. What were your objections to this legislation?

**FISCHER**     I can't recollect the exact comments, or the exact wording of that bill, but I think my main concern with it was that it was just in my view over the top as far as what you could and could not say. I happen to believe in free speech, and I think any impediment on that should be very warily brought in. My feelings on racial vilification, without going back to the exact wording of that bill, is of course there should be some protection, but I think it should be very limited, because people can get a very misconstrued idea. I mean, you can say to someone, "You're a Pommy bastard", and you can actually mean it as a compliment. There are many instances in Australia where those types of things can be misconstrued. Of course, there are other blatant inflammatory comments that can be made as well. But, in general, I think we can have too many rules on this type of thing. I think it inflates the problem; it doesn't decrease it because you will get people who don't understand the actual meaning of the word when it's expressed. And, of course, a lot of this is because a lot of people in Australia now (a considerable amount of people) speak a different language. They don't communicate in English, so they lose the meaning of the intonations, or the emphasis that you put on particular words. It's a funny thing, but it's like in America these days: there was a very interesting case not long ago by an actor, a guy called Cramer, who was in the Seinfeld comedy show and he was taken to court for racial vilification in a sketch that he did. He went through some of the things that actually occur in America about, why is it that only white Americans are racist. You can have black colleges, but you can't have white colleges, and all these kind of things. The explanation that he was giving was actually quite true. But I would much rather see Australia not get to that. I would much rather have everyone understand that if I call my mate a Pommy bastard, it actually might mean that he's a bloody good bloke, but I could use it in the same term with a different intonation and it would be an insult. It's very hard to take those kinds of things to court and prove them right or wrong.

RC I'd just like to ask you now, John, about the one vote, one value bill. In the debate on the 28<sup>th</sup> April 2005, you said you were unable to support "this divisive and inequitable legislation". Why did you oppose this legislation so strongly?

**FISCHER** I think it's totally out of kilter. Number one, if you have a look at the Senate, which the old fellows in Australia were smart enough to put into the Constitution; I think in Tasmania to be a federal senator you need 22,000 votes; in New South Wales you need something like 374,000, or it may even be more. I am not exact on the figures. I know in WA you need about 160,000. There's certainly no equality in that. But it was put there so that Tasmania, who would not have as many seats in the House of Reps, would still have 12 senators from Tasmania, and they would have a fair representation to be able to look after the interests of that state. I think in WA the fact that there was only 10,000 people in an electorate in the north compared with perhaps 30,000 (my figures here are just out of the sky) in a city electorate has to be qualified by the fact that the representative of that city electorate can ride round on a pushbike and see all his constituents, whereas the representative for a seat like the Pilbara has got no chance. It would take him months to get around to see everyone, because it's such an extended and divided area. Fly in, fly out means that a lot of people are working up in the north on mine sites and that. They don't vote up there. A lot of them vote because their family and their homes are in a suburb of Perth. That really makes the objective, in my opinion, a bit different as well. As I say, I'm totally opposed to the fact that people that live within the city have so much control on the voting power of the state. As Abraham Lincoln once said: you can burn down every city in America and the country will rebuild itself, if you burn down the country nothing will happen—you're finished. Really, all the work, all the money, all the export dollars don't come from Hay Street; they come from the Pilbara and Kalgoorlie, and I think the people who concentrate their efforts out there should have a vote equivalent to that.

RC From June 2001 until January 2005, John, you were a member of the Standing Committee on Public Administration and Finance. Have you any observations about your work on that committee?

**FISCHER** I remember in most cases I have the feeling that it was very incomplete. A lot of the issues that we looked at, in my recollection, never really came to a head. I remember we looked at the situation with the Joondalup council.

That certainly merely brought forward the issue that the council did no credit to themselves or their ratepayers. I'm not sure that it's probably changed to any great extent. But other than that, I don't have anything specific to add to that.

RC And also, between June 2001 and January 2005 you were a co-opted member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges. Can you say anything about your work on that committee?

**FISCHER** To be quite honest, no, there's nothing really that I'd add on that. I think in general we looked at various issues that I think were necessary to have as guidelines and that type of thing, which I think is obviously essential, but there was nothing outstanding that I believe has stuck with me to any great extent.

RC Reflecting back on your time in the Legislative Council, how do you see the relationship between One Nation and the other parties; that is, the Labor Party, the Liberals, the Greens and the National Party?

**FISCHER** How did I see the relationship at that time?

RC During your time in Parliament.

**FISCHER** We probably had a cursory affiliation with the Liberal Party to some extent. I think in general we were the backbone and they were the jelly-bone in a lot of situations. There are a few occasions when I agreed with what the Greens were about. In the Labor Party in general there were one or two people that I had respect for in the Labor Party. Kim Chance I thought was a very good member of Parliament. Nick Griffiths: I didn't always agree with what he had to say but I think he did it in a very genuine way. I think what he said was genuine and honest. I think probably the smartest man in the Labor Party was the President, John Cowdell, who I had a lot of respect for. I think he was very fair. I always had the underlying feeling he was directing a lot of what happened in the Labor Party, although very fair in his adjudication of what went on within his own field, so I have quite a bit of respect for him. But I'm afraid to say in many cases in the Labor Party, I think they were people put into a job. I think our democratic system could do with a few very strong, very good changes at the moment. As I've said before, I've always been a very, very strong supporter of citizens initiated referenda. Every political party in virtually Australia's history at some time or other has always supported it. It is just that when

they get into power they realise that they'd be giving a lot away, so the powers-that-be within their party certainly put the kibosh on it. It was in the Labor Party profile for years, but they never ever instituted it. When you consider that the oldest democracy in the world has had it, Switzerland, and there are various other places that have it, I think the arguments against it, that it would clog up Parliament and that, are pretty spurious. I think you'd only have to use it once or twice before you'd let individual members of political parties know that their constituents were going to throw them out if they didn't vote the way they wanted. That, I believe, is what parliamentary representation should be all about. I always had the feeling that in the Labor Party there were two or three guys behind the counter pulling all the buttons.

RC            Which party, then, do you think, John, that One Nation would have been most closely aligned to politically?

**FISCHER**    I'm glad to say that on many occasions I don't think we were closely aligned to any of them, but, overall, to the Liberal Party.

RC            I just want to ask your views now on some prominent politicians in Parliament. What are your views about Geoff Gallop when he was Premier?

**FISCHER**    I think he was weak. I always thought Geoff Gallop, if you'd met him in his academic role, would probably have been a nice fellow, but as the parliamentary leader and a performer in Parliament, I think he let himself down.

RC            In what way?

**FISCHER**    Obviously, I didn't agree with some of his views. I think he could've been a much stronger and much more effective leader of the Labor Party. Having said that, I accept the fact that I'm not intricately aware of the machinations and divisions within the Labor Party. It certainly is apparent, I guess, because of his medical history, that that played on him very strongly. But, as I say, I think Geoff Gallop would probably have been a nicer..., not much nicer, but I think I would've had a lot more respect for Geoff Gallop out of Parliament than I did for him in.

RC            What about Colin Barnett when he was Leader of the Opposition and now Premier of Western Australia?

**FISCHER** I didn't have a lot to do with Colin Barnett. I can't say that I believe he's the answer to the Liberal Party's problem. I think during that period he seemed to me to be a very angry, frustrated little man, as Leader of the Opposition, and that's always made me rather suspect of his ability to be Premier and leader of this state. I don't think there's any doubt that "Colin's canal" cost them the 2005 election. I think it turned a lot of people in the north away from the conservative side of politics, and I think he displayed an arrogance that turned most Western Australian voters away from Colin at that particular time.

RC If you had a choice, who would you nominate to lead the Liberal Party?

**FISCHER** During my time in Parliament?

RC During your time in Parliament or even now.

**FISCHER** Well, I'm not sure of the reasons why George Cash eventually moved from the lower to the upper house. Certainly someone of the stamp of George Cash in the lower house I think would've made an excellent Premier of this state. Certainly not someone I would say should've been the leader of the party, but as a performer in Parliament, and certainly as a speaker in Parliament, Foss was unbelievable.

RC Peter Foss?

**FISCHER** Peter Foss could literally get up and talk about anything at any given time, and do it sensibly, well and amusingly. George Cash was a very good performer. Norman Moore I had a lot of time for. Norman I think was a very sincere and very straight guy. They were people, even though I didn't agree with what they were saying, I respected the way they said it. As I said, Kim Chance and Nick Griffiths fell into that category as well.

RC Who did you see as your fiercest opponents in Parliament? From your speeches it would seem to be the Greens.

**FISCHER** It varied from time to time. I think the Greens because, as I said before, people like Jim Scott and that; I respected the way he put his views across, but I didn't necessarily agree with them. There were several people in the Labor

Party who I didn't have much time for, who, in my opinion, reverted to personal vilification (people like Tom Stephens and that), but I don't know. I didn't go in (I certainly try not to; I hope I don't); with any individual dislike of people. Derrick (I can't think of his second name now), but the Liberal Party member for North Metropolitan with Peter Foss was a very good speaker and a guy I had a lot of time for and a lot of respect for, but we didn't agree on everything all the time. We had a couple of clashes. The clashes that I remember were ideological, not personal.

RC I'm mainly thinking ideological here. It's just that from your speeches you seem to have had a lot of political differences with Greens members. That's just an observation.

**FISCHER** I think you're definitely right; I think we did. But there was a little bit of humour in that, too; the fact that you know when the issue's coming up that Robin's going to get up and say something that you think is absolutely outrageous ...

RC Is that Robin Chapple?

**FISCHER** Robin Chapple, yes. Robin would get up and say something, you know, outrageous, so you'd have to interject. But, in general, as I say, I respect the way they put their case forward. On occasions, I wondered why they thought the way they did, but that's their right. In actual fact, it's probably a good thing that they do, because at least it opens up the discussion, and people, if they're willing to follow it, at least get a good open view of what's going on. I would much rather see that than have someone get up and have no difference of opinion whatsoever.

RC In June 2004, John, you and Frank Hough resigned from One Nation, [and you] became an Independent. How did that occur?

**FISCHER** The initial differences within the One Nation party certainly occurred a long time prior to that. Frank and I, I think, stuck it out as long as we could because I believe if you're elected to represent one sector, it's not a thing that I in general support, giving up and changing parties and things like that. I think you're letting down people who put you there for a particular reason, without knowing you, but they knew the party you were from. But it became an untenable situation as far as Frank and I were concerned. And I believe we had to remove ourselves from some of the things that were going on within the party. In my opinion it had been taken over by people who held views completely different from what we'd initially started off as, and

certainly the ones that Frank and myself espoused, even as far as the policy booklets and things like that. We had people in the party actually gaining support for being ridiculously radical.

RC           How were they radical?

**FISCHER**     In the views that they were putting forward and in the issues that they wanted brought up. My views on immigration and that type of thing have been reasonably forcefully put forward, but they are my views and they were the views that we'd accepted as members of One Nation. It got to a stage in One Nation federally that it was virtually impossible to talk to some of these people. Both Frank and I (Frank was national director at the time; I was the president) decided that we didn't want to be involved in that clique and we felt the only honest option was to resign. I did it with a large amount of regret. I still regret it to this day that One Nation wasn't more successful in establishing itself, because I think it definitely had a part to play in Australian politics. As I mentioned earlier, I think the fact that it has failed to such an extent is very decisively against any progress for a national movement in Australia.

RC           Why did you decide to become an Independent and not join the New Country Party like Frank Hough and Paddy Embry?

**FISCHER**     I think it was a fairer representation for the people of my electorate to say, "Righto, look, sorry about this but I'm out of One Nation. I'm not doing it to jump into another political party or anything like that; I'm going to be an Independent. What you see is what you get. I will remain an Independent." I think Frank was right in the New Country Party because of his electorate in the agricultural area and the very good people that he had standing with him but I didn't see that as overflowing into the mining and pastoral sector.

RC           During your time in Parliament, John, how well do you think you represented the Mining and Pastoral Region in the Legislative Council?

**FISCHER**     I think I represented them very well. I think I put forward a lot of views that deserve a lot more airplay than what they get. I certainly spent a lot of time in my electorate. There are probably certain issues that, if I look back, I could have pushed a little bit harder.

RC           What were they?

**FISCHER**       I think the issue of growing rice in the southern Kimberley-Pilbara area was one issue that still should be pushed a lot harder. The benefits of that would certainly help to ease many labour problems for Indigenous people and that type of thing. I've always been a big supporter of damming the Fitzroy River. I would have liked to have seen a little bit more on that issue because I think it would have opened up a lot of the Kimberley. I think those things will happen in the future, even though dams don't seem to be the flavour of the environmental month at the moment. On the Diamond River Gorge with a smaller dam, you'd have twice the size of the Argyle and I think it would open up areas. As I say, I think it will definitely come in the future. Even if it didn't go, I think there should be more plans put forward towards these kind of things because I think the development of the Pilbara and the Kimberley has just been totally shackled by lack of projected forethought and this type of thing. Some industries have been allowed to flourish. Some industries have been allowed to die. The lack of abattoirs for the cattle industry up there is a tragedy in my view. When Wyndham was operating as an abattoir, most of the product was sent to the east coast of America as hamburger meat. It cost more to get it from Wyndham to Fremantle than it did to get it to the east coast of America. These kind of things have got to be overcome. You have to be able to service that really important part of our country. A lot of it should be preserved for the natural beauty that it has, because there are some absolutely gorgeous areas up there. Mining should be developed up there, but I think it should be developed in a construed manner so it doesn't all open up at one time and that kind of thing because, quite frankly, we don't have enough people to service it at the moment and I think some of it should be kept for our grandchildren.

RC           What do you consider to have been your main achievements in Parliament, John?

**FISCHER**       I think to honestly represent the people that I did. I don't know that, as members of a very small minority party, we achieved what we would have liked to have achieved. But I think the format of the institution dictated that more than the work effort that we put into it. I'm afraid I tend to look at the glass being half empty rather than half full. Certainly, had we had a balance of power, we would've had a much better legacy than what we did. There are a lot of issues there that you are unable to get through. The frustration felt by the Democrats when they brought that

euthanasia bill in in 1992 and it's never been put before the Parliament, they're the frustrations of a minority party and that's probably best exemplified by that. Robin's having another crack at it now. He may be able to swing a bit of lead over the Labor Party, not that that's the particular issue that I find most important; in fact, it's certainly not, but that was just an example of how difficult it is in a minor party from time to time.

RC           What were some of your own frustrations in the One Nation party in Parliament?

**FISCHER**     Mine were probably dissimilar to Frank's. The frustrations that I had were all related to within my own electorate, certainly the progress made on health and educational issues with underprivileged people within our electorate, the fact that it was very hard to get the federal government to take any notice of some of the indiscriminate fishing that occurs on the north coast of Australia. People say, "Oh, well, that's a federal issue" but it's not; it's directly related to the people of my electorate who lived and worked in the industry. Those two issues I find very strongly still underdone. I think development of towns like Karratha and the fact that there's a land shortage in an area like ... Because of land tenure, land title and all this kind of business, you end up with a shortage and a development hindrance for a town like Karratha, which should be the size of Bunbury, with all that's going on there, and yet you can't go and buy a block of land. I mean, that's just bloody stupid, the fact that the government never had the guts to say, "Right, we're going to legislate; we're going to do this." It is absolutely crazy that these situations occur. Port Hedland, you can't get a house, you can't live anywhere in Port Hedland because there's just not enough bloody room; there's no bloody development, and the development in South Hedland is so atrocious. South Hedland is the pits and it should have been a booming, nice clean suburb and they did it all wrong. It's easy to criticise, but someone has to do it.

As I said before, one of the biggest frustrations that I found in Parliament was nobody was accountable for anything. I happen to believe in being accountable for what you do. It's like governments selling some of their ... They want to get rid of the power, get rid of the rail, get rid of the water, all this kind of business. Governments are meant to be there to run certain institutions and they do it regardless of whether it's a profit or a loss system, as I referred to before. Whether the trains make a profit or not, they still have to run every day of the week at certain times so that the population

can travel around so that you can go to work and all this kind of thing. It's not a matter always of user pays. But we seem to have governments of both persuasions that want to get rid of everything. And the reason they want to do that is, in general, they're not smart enough to look after them. We have public service bodies that are just ... One of the best things that the Liberal Party have done is say, "Right, we're not going to employ you. Anyone else, we're going to sort out this problem and make it work." I find it absolutely incredible that there's 30-odd (I don't know whether the figure's right) public servants who make more money than the Premier. I think that is bloody ridiculous. The Premier, regardless of whether he's on your side of politics, regardless of whether you like the bloke or not, is responsible every morning, every morning, when he gets up. Some of these public servants, we've never heard of the buggers and they're making two and three times the amount of the Premier. It is ridiculous. How do we let ourselves get into a situation like this? How do we let ourselves for a guy who's running Qantas get a \$10 million payout when the bloody Prime Minister earns \$300 000? Absolutely ridiculous.

RC            Why do you think you lost your seat in Parliament, John?

**FISCHER**    In all honesty, I don't think it was because I didn't work hard enough. I think it was because, as an Independent, it's very difficult to continue to get ... although we put out a newsletter of everything that I ever said in Parliament. I think a fair bit came down to Colin's canal in the end. I think it tipped everyone totally against a conservative side of politics, and I think I copped a bit of flak on that. But, on the other hand, I think a seat that big is very difficult to hold for an Independent. There were certain issues that perhaps we weren't as directly involved in. I think the Greens got a kickback, although Robin lost his seat. The Greens lost that seat as well. I think a lot of it was about environmental issues.

RC            In your final speech in Parliament, John, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 2005, you said you did not believe that this state can afford further radical interferences by groups such as the Greens any more than it can from fanatical religious movements. Do you still hold those views?

**FISCHER**    Very much so, especially with the religious movements. I unfortunately think we're following the mistakes of Great Britain and other areas that have allowed ... I have a big concern about, not that I'm religious myself, but I think Muslim fanaticism is going to be a very big concern. I've said before I think people who come

to live in Australia should want to be Australians. Other people can say to me, "Why should you dictate what kind of Australians we are?" Quite frankly, I don't even see that happening. I see a lot of people coming here...from Lebanon. I think we should have let the Maronites in here, not the Muslims, because at least they have something in common with us. As far as their religion et cetera goes, their Christian religion, to have people come in here and then go back and fight in their own country and this type of thing, that's even happening with Somalians and people like that. I just think we've got it totally wrong. I don't see any problem in looking after the heritage and the future for our children. I think we're letting it slip.

RC            In that speech you also voiced your fears regarding the impact on Western Australia's agricultural sector of free trade agreements with nations such as China. How do you see that now?

**FISCHER**    Hopefully, we might be waking up to the fact that there is danger in these type of associations. I think we need to put a lot more protection on our agricultural industry. I hold a great concern about the (what would you call it?) vertical integration of agriculture into shopping centre businesses, into the main suppliers, Coles and people like that, where they buy in bulk cheaply at the expense of Australian product. Articles have been printed recently that tell us that in 2025 and 2030 we're going to be battling to feed ourselves. How absolutely ridiculous! We've let ourselves get into an economic situation where we send our farmers broke, and they're the most efficient farmers in the world. Governments are the only people who can control this kind of thing. Companies won't do it because they're looking after their shareholders' interests and that kind of thing. But at the same hand, that is not necessarily what's best for the Australian population. I think it's great that we have some of these big German supermarkets and a couple of American ones looking at opening up in Australia because that kind of competition is good. We're restricted at the moment to Coles and Woolworths. IGA is there, of course, but they're a totally different situation. I'm totally opposed to the dairy industry being subject to the forces that they are. It's like 24-hour trading. They tried it in Victoria. When they sent the corner shop broke, they suddenly decided that "Hold on, this isn't very good. We'll go back to nine to five because there's no competition." You can't legislate to allow people to make money, but you can certainly legislate for the overall good to the community.

RC            What were your feelings, John, when you left Parliament in 2005?

**FISCHER** To a certain extent, one of sorrow. As I said before, if I didn't miss it to some extent then I should probably never have been there in the first place. To me, one door closes, there's always another door open. I didn't go into Parliament to get a job; I went into Parliament because I felt strongly about certain issues that I wanted to speak out about. Certainly, disappointment was the fact that, having spoken out about it, nothing else ever happened or I was unable to influence as much change as I liked or as I would have preferred. But as far as leaving Parliament, really, it's had very little effect. In fact, in a lot of ways it was a relief. I missed five years. I'm very strongly family orientated. I missed a lot of my children's parties, sporting issues, all that kind of thing, which I really enjoy. I loved the time I had in Parliament. I think I'm lucky I didn't win another term in a lot of ways. I think I've probably had a more enjoyable life because of it. But had I won, perhaps I would have been able to do a few more things that I wanted to. I think a lot of people spend far too much time in Parliament and achieve absolutely nothing. I've always been of the opinion that parliamentarians should be paid more but it should be more difficult to get in there and people should be under more scrutiny when they're in there, more personal scrutiny. I think that's why you take the job on. I don't think there should be such a thing as "no comment" in Parliament because you're put there to respect someone's views and I think you ought to get up and say it. There's several parliamentarians that I know of that hardly ever spoke in Parliament. What the hell are you there for? That, I guess, is probably what turned me against the Labor Party, the fact that it's much easier to be a member of Parliament from the Labor Party point of view than it is from the Liberal Party point of view because if you go through all the people that were in Parliament with me on the Labor Party benches, when they didn't get re-elected, they went back to their union job of \$70 000, \$80 000 a year, so they probably dropped \$20 000 or something like that. But the Libs don't come from that kind of background. Theirs is more a self-promoted journey so they've got to go back and in many cases start again. It's a lot harder, and I put myself in that category. But, mind you, I was aware of the challenge and the choices and I took them willingly.

RC Since leaving Parliament, John, have you taken part in any political activity?

**FISCHER** Yes, to a small degree. I have various friends within the political scheme of things. I met with a group of people for quite a while, thinking about instigating another party or trying to start another party and, I might add, without any

intention of taking a parliamentary role myself because I think with my background, it would probably be detrimental in the overall view of things to ... Whether it's there or not, the mud sticks, and I'm quite happy with that. But I think in the formation of a new party, the way that I would like to see the party go, it wouldn't be beneficial for me to be standing as a candidate, and, in fact, I don't want to. I have no ambition to regain a seat in Parliament whatsoever. It's a bit of a "been there, done that" thing. It's very difficult to get anything done through Parliament, even if you're a member of another party. As Joe Poprzeczny says very succinctly and correctly, we don't have a democracy, we have a ballotocracy. I remember having a discussion and an argument with an ex-federal member, John Hyde. In my opinion, he was speaking a load of rot. But as I said to him, "You were totally constrained within the rules of what your leader wanted you to do." He denied it vehemently. I said to him, "Did you ever cross the floor? Did you agree 100 per cent with everything because I can think of a few things for your electorate that you shouldn't have gone along with at all?" Really, that's the basis of it. Certainly, in the Labor Party, but even in the Liberal Party, if you don't go along with the hierarchy, you're not going to get pre-selection, so what are you going to think about? Are you going to think about your backside on the leather seat? And that's why we need citizens-initiated referenda, because if an issue is of such concern to your electorate that a certain percentage of people will sign a petition (and it must be a realistic percentage, of course) that issue should be put before Parliament and debated. It doesn't mean to say it's going to get passed, because there may well be reasons not out there in the public view where it shouldn't be passed, for national security or whatever. But it does mean that it's going to get presented. And if the argument against us is spurious and your representative still votes on party lines then you're going to get rid of him next time around or he's got to do some damn good explaining to the people. That's the only way you're going to bring political parties under the control of the people. As we mentioned before, to use the argument that you would bog down Parliament and that is ridiculous because you only need to have it there and for it to be used once or twice and someone kicked out because they go against their electorate and I think you would have people standing up and saying, "I know this is party policy but I'm going to vote for what my electorate want." What a change in government that would bring.

RC                    How do you see the future for Western Australia, John?

**FISCHER**        I think it's going to depend very much on the future for the rest of the free world. In general, I think we've got a pretty healthy situation. There are, of

course, things that I'd like to change. I would have liked to have seen the gas brought ashore rather than be put on Barrow Island and all that type of thing because I think it would have been better for the state of Western Australia. It would have given us control over it; whereas now it's not in international waters but it's certainly well and truly off there so there's very little scrutiny and that type of thing that will occur there. I think the extra distance of a pipeline is minimal in comparison of what we're looking at. There's always going to be little issues like that that I think are incorrect. I'd love to know exactly the deals that the gas is going to cost India and China and I'd love to compare it with what the people of Western Australia are paying for their gas. Generally, I don't trust governments to do the best thing for people. As I say, a lot of it is determined by keeping a backside on a leather seat, which I think is very unfortunate and that's why I think there should be far more open scrutiny of these things. The Freedom of Information Act in this state is a joke. Every time I went to it (I went to it regularly) it was costing money or else they would just tell you that "No, we're not going to tell you." I think for a member of Parliament to get that answer stinks.

RC            Before we finish the interview, John, are there any further comments you'd like to make or issues you'd like to discuss?

**FISCHER**    I'm sure there will be when I think about it later. For the amount of time we've been sitting here, for us not to have covered it, I think you've raised most of the issues that I now recollect of my time in Parliament. I think probably the one issue that's closest to my heart now, which I would continue to try to give as much airplay to as possible, is the issue of citizens-initiated referenda. Unfortunately, I don't see that gaining much success. I think the powers that be or the manipulation of politics in this state will stop that ever occurring. So we live on in our little dream democracy. Unfortunately, I think a lot of the things that we do really develop the "greed is good" theory and that type of thing. I think those things are rather sad. I think probably in about 2050 we'll look back and wish we'd done things in a far more open and more beneficial way. We have to be very careful in a lot of the things that we've perceived to be good, in actual fact, do come to fruition in that aspect, the environmental issues. I'm not a greenie by any means, but I certainly consider myself an environmentalist. Some of the mistakes that we've made in the past, like conditional purchase farming and that type of thing, where the cocky had to clear all the land and that type of thing, that's only 50 or 60 years ago. So it hasn't taken long to come back and hit us that a lot of those decisions, although made with good intention, were

wrong. I think we have to be very careful on the way we handle development in the Kimberley, for example, to make sure we get it right, keeping in mind the necessity for benefits and for development, because if it's not developed, it may well be taken off us. Stranger things have happened.

So anyway, I think politics is a healthy sport and I think it's a pity that more people don't compete in it because it'd give us a much better and broader overview. I get a bit pissed off and angry actually. I don't know that people should make their whole careers in politics. I dread the fact that we'll ever become like America: because your name's Kennedy, you're a politician and all this kind of jazz. I think that is a disaster waiting to happen to us and I hope it never does. I think healthy competition for political seats is very important. Of course, the opportunity to get up and say what you believe is very important. And we came very close to losing that.

RC           All right, John, I'd like to once again thank you very much for giving your time to carry out this interview.

**FISCHER**    Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW