



THE ADELAIDE R E V I E W



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Profile: Matt Clemow

Three years after leaving the state government, Matt Clemow is helping shape the future of Adelaide with his roles as the general manager of Committee for Adelaide and co-director of Property & Consulting.

Before founding Property & Consulting with former Property Council boss Nathan Paine, Clemow enjoyed an eight-year career in government as a media advisor and chief of staff after working as a journalist at the *Sunday Mail*. He left government in 2013. Property and Consulting began more than a year later in May 2014 and he replaced Tim Horton as Committee for Adelaide's general manager when Horton returned to Sydney in July of that year.

Clemow is Committee for Adelaide's (an apolitical group that aims to drive capital investment and community growth in South Australia) only staffer. Its volunteer board includes influential figures such as Bespoke Approach's Ian Smith, Parwana's Durkhanai Ayubi, motivational speaker and author Gill Hicks and World Vision's David Paterson.

Committee for Adelaide will soon be on the hunt for a full-time Chief Executive to "take that next step".

"There are many opportunities, so we need to resource accordingly," Clemow says.

“Our hope for the Committee is to play a constructive bipartisan voice that takes the argument further and adds benefit to the argument rather than throwing petrol on it. That’s what Committee for Melbourne’s been able to do and that’s what we want to do. And, I would argue, that’s what we have successfully done on a small scale during the last two years.”

A major aim of the Committee is to target population growth as the former journalist believes population growth “drives demand and demand is the one thing that drives most other things”.

Clemow is currently in Europe on a Committee-organised tour visiting nuclear sites with a broad group of industry voices investigating the benefits and challenges of increasing South Australia’s role in the nuclear fuel cycle.

Clemow, who grew up in a horse racing family, “fell into journalism” while still in his teens.

“I had no idea what I was going to do after school. I did work experience at a horse racing paper [*TABform*] because I figured it was close to the racing industry.”

Then TAB was sold. The paper closed. And the work of the paper rolled back to *The Advertiser*. Clemow approached Melvin Mansell (former editor) to work for the paper’s racing section. Mansell agreed, kind of. He wanted Clemow as a news cadet, away from the sports desk. At 19, he was a ‘*Tiser*’ cadet.

“It was a really good place to be,” Clemow says about his early days as a cadet at the ‘*Tiser*. “It was in the old building. At that point you had features, sport, police and courts as your cadet rotations and the [*Sunday*] *Mail* was a rotation. *The Mail* was the first thing I did. So once I finished the course I was sent to the *Mail* and did five months there.”

Clemow returned to the *Sunday Mail* after spending time as a court reporter for *The Advertiser*.

“Phil Gardner was editor by that point, and I just really enjoyed the Sunday newspaper. I thought we had a really good group of people.”

In January 2005, the horrific Black Tuesday bushfire roared through the Eyre Peninsula killing nine people. Clemow and fellow journo Leisha

Bond [née Petrys], as well as two photographers, drove up on the Wednesday to cover the worst bushfire in South Australia since Ash Wednesday.

“On the Saturday night we were driving back to Adelaide from the memorial service and had a really bad head-on crash. Leisha and

I got hit by a drunk driver outside of Tumby Bay and she got airlifted back [to Adelaide] and was in intensive care for a week.”

Patrick Conlon was Emergency Services Minister at the time and was made minister for the bushfire recovery. Clemow was 22. Conlon's office organised counselling for the young journo. Three months later, he wasn't coping well after the accident and decided to work for Conlon.

"It was a forced change," Clemow says. "In terms of sliding door stuff, there's no way I would have taken a senior job then because I was happy at print media. I enjoyed what I was doing. It was great, but a life circumstance meant that a lot of things got thrown up in the air. I wanted a challenge and Patrick was good enough to hire me."

After six months holidaying in the UK, he returned to work for Conlon in late 2007 and the transport budget of 2008 that included the tram extension project. Then there was a reshuffle. Jennifer Rankine got Weatherill's old portfolios: Families, Ageing, Housing and Northern Suburbs. Clemow then became Rankine's chief of staff. Working for Rankine was where he decided he would like to continue working in the housing space.

"It is very hard to change someone's life circumstance without housing," he says. "We did some wonderful things with Catherine House [an organisation that provides accommodation services for women experiencing homelessness] and hearing all these speeches, such as everyone is two successive life events away from homelessness... On the other side, I liked it as an economic portfolio."

Clemow was Rankine's chief of staff until after the 2010 election. He planned to stay on as her chief of staff but Conlon was handed responsibility of the Adelaide Oval redevelopment as Minister for Infrastructure after Kevin Foley led the early work as Treasurer.

"He [Conlon] said to me: 'Will you come back and run my office and look after Adelaide Oval?' "I had an incredible time working alongside Patrick. I think most people agree it [Adelaide Oval] would never have come to fruition - of herding footy and cricket together - if it had not been for the early work of Kevin and then the work of Patrick and Rod [Hook] and our office. Just the agreements were so weird. Football would only accept 20 years, cricket would only accept 80 years but they wanted the same documentation. How would that work? In the end it was Patrick's idea to give them four lots of 20 [years]. That's why they've got licenses rather than leases."

Conlon's portfolio started to include property and Clemow began to work more closely with Paine, who was Property Council SA's Executive Director.

"We did policy things like the stamp duty exemptions, working with [John] Rau on the rezonings, the extension of Bowden and the formation of Renewal SA. This gave me a natural property fit."

It was during this time that Clemow decided to leave government but he didn't want to return to media.

“I wanted to do something in the affordable housing and property sector based on the government experience that I had to that point. That was going to happen at some point before 2014, and then Conlon resigned at the start of 2013 with John Hill and everyone else at the same time.”

These retirements meant Clemow moved out of government earlier than expected in January 2013 but as a former staffer he had to wait 12 months before he started Property and Consulting, which he did in May 2014 with Paine.

According to its website, Property and Consulting specialises in the “delivery of strategic advice to property owners and developers, businesses, local and state governments and government agencies and not-for-profit organisations”. Its clients include Hindmarsh, Renewal SA and Knight Frank.

“We operate a government relations company that does all of Lend Lease’s work and other large clients like that,” Clemow says. “That’s quite a traditional offering, I guess. It’s been around for a long time and will be around for a long time. That’s why we’re registered on the Lobbyists Register. We meet those integrity standards and that [lobbying] is a part of the business.

“A larger part of the business is that we have enormous tracts of land around Adelaide that families or businesses have accumulated over time. People want an understanding of what their opportunities are for those sites.”

Clemow says a strong focus of their business is the renewal of the Housing Trust stock.

“We can’t just leave it there as it is. I think everybody is probably honest enough to say that the days of enormous capital from Whitlam-esque social housing capital injections or even Rudd nation-building capital injections [are over]. The very fact that that’s happened twice in 44 years is a sign of how regular it is and how often it happens. We need a new way to renew stock and the only way to do that is to get as many people involved as you can. The government’s changes to renewing our streets and suburbs and Renewal SA, that’s where our business is largely focussed – the opportunities around that.”

Property and Consulting also co-own a media company called The Press Gallery with the marketing group Metric. Clemow says that even though he has a media background, Property and Consulting did not want to go down that path, so they approached Metric, which is run by Melanie Scott and Bec Marshall, to co-invest in a new media company.

“They were keen to support the idea and we were fortunate enough to have an arrangement with Leisha [Bond], she’s a co-partner and co-owner.

“The Press Gallery is Leisha’s company, we are co-owners. She’s the managing director. She’s doing a really good job. It’s kind of lovely that all these years after the accident we are back working together.”

Given that his roles at Committee for Adelaide and Property & Consulting are about shaping this state's future, to Clemow, what does ultimate success for this city and South Australia look like?

“Ultimate success is being completely fine if someone leaves the state because you know there's no risk of them not coming back at a point when they want to. That's what success looks like,” the former media advisor and journalist says.

“I don't believe it's a bad thing for any South Australian to leave. If we have that moat mentality we're in all sorts of strife because we're not attracting people. And that means we don't believe we're in a fight for people and we don't believe we need a competitive advantage.”

commiteeforadelaide.org.au

propertyandconsulting.com.au

thepressgallery.com.au

Photos: Jonathan van der Knaap