**Lunch with Lois Ransom**

**Facilitator: Rosa Crnov**

Welcome all to the monthly lunch with leaders NAPCaRN session with Lois Ransom.

And I'm just like to do a little bit of housekeeping before we kick off and I've just ask people to turn off their microphones, please. Thank you for attending of course. Just to let you all know that we are recording this session as well, so if you have any issues with that could you please let us know.

If I could just start off by acknowledging country and acknowledging the traditional custodians of the lands on which we're meeting, that for me is the Wurundjeri people here in Greater Melbourne. I acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution that they make to the life of this city and the region, and I extend that recognition to the traditional custodians of all other lands on which our participants and guests may be gathered today and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples attending today's session.

Lois Ransom PSM is obviously our speaker, for the day, really looking forward to hearing from you Lois. I have been asked before we get Lois to give her insights on her leadership journey, just to provide you, maybe a few minutes worth of insight into my experience of leadership. I'll give you a hopefully an abridged version that you'll perhaps find interesting.

In terms of my leadership journey and who I am, I guess it all goes back to those early days and how you formed. I'm the first born of new migrants to Australia post second World War from the former Yugoslavia, Croatia as it's called now. I come from a non-English speaking background working class family. My parents came out is economic and political refugees. I grew up in the inner West of Melbourne and if you know Melbourne at all, it's an incredibly diverse place, particularly where I grew up even back then and today it's even more diverse. I was educated in the great Australian State School system. Incredible opportunities that I had, and one of the things that I've learned on my journey is that you really should embrace opportunities that you’re given. I went through school was, took on various leadership positions, because I think that was just one of the things I did because of my temperament - I’m an extrovert - like to get into things, and I see it in my children, to be honest.

I went to high school to the local state school as well and did various bits and pieces and I guess the sliding doors moment for me and everybody would have this in life is, was university. I knew I was going to university, but I wasn't quite sure whether I do an arts or a science degree, and obviously I went down the science route. I am Victoria's Chief Plant Health Officer. There was an opportunity there, I did my undergrad, then I heard about it a PhD scholarship in Canberra and I thought ‘oh, it sounds interesting. I wouldn't mind leaving home and I wouldn't mind living interstate’. So I moved to Canberra and I did my PhD at the Australian National University and CSIRO. That was a fantastic experience. Great supervisors, great peers, great culture, and by the end of that I thought, you know, I don't know if I'm going to stay in research, but I need to give it a go. Then I went to California for about four years and did a post doc. I worked with the Great Californian industries that were out there, worked with wonderful people out in the field, supporting stakeholders and industries. Great leaders out there, both in industry and in the university system. At the end of that, I knew that I wasn't going to stay in research, and I certainly didn't want an academic career.

I wanted to work with people, with stakeholders, I did a graduate Diploma of Education by correspondence from Charles Sturt University when I was living in California, just as a back pocket thing, because I am a bit pragmatic and I was really worried that I wouldn't be able to get a job coming back to Australia.

So I did my high school teaching rounds and then I had another sliding doors moment where I had to make a decision, because on the same day as I was offered a job in Australia to work with Agriculture Victoria, I was offered a job to be a high school teacher. That was a pretty tough decision for me because I love teaching. I actually like teenagers. I'm a bit strange that way, particularly the sparky challenging ones, I think they're great to work with. Anyhow, I made a decision and I went to Agriculture Victoria and I'm still with them. I've had about five or six positions working with them. I started off in a little bit of research, then I moved into leadership position looking after a centre for the Department. Then I did strategy and investment finance─which was really a different thing for me─project planning and then I moved into biosecurity about a decade ago, working in risk in plant pests and diseases and here I am today, the accidental Chief Plant Health Officer for Victoria. It wasn't a grand plan. It's okay to have a grand plan, but this is what I've learnt, that leadership and getting to this point in life is not a straight, narrow path, you will meander and that's okay.

What I learnt is that you have got to decide what matters for you, so that means prioritising, and that you can't do it all. Because I think it's a myth, and I don't want to sound defeatist ─you can do it all, particularly if you're, a woman and you want a family─I have a family and I did that, but not full time with work et cetera. So you know you, you compromise, you may compromise, but that was the right decision for me.

What I've also learned is you need champions, and you need a manager who supports you, who is your greatest ally, who will give you opportunities, ask you what you want. I've been very lucky in my career, particularly these last twenty years or so, because I've had people who championed me. You need a network of people, and if you're lucky, it won't just be at work, it will be outside of work as well, so you need a support network. You have also got to learn to pick your battles. I certainly, in the job that I have now, I could be fighting on all fronts quite frankly, but I try to avoid it at all costs.

To finish up, before we hand over to Lois, there are common traits and personality traits that all the great leaders that I've worked with have. All of my former bosses, and current boss, they are trusting people. They've let me get on with things. You can't be a micro manager if you're a leader. If you are being micromanaged, then look - I think micromanagement is death. I don't know how people cope with being micromanaged. Good leaders are trusting, they empower you and they let you get on with work and to make decisions, obviously within, appropriate realm, that's what they do.

They're also great listeners. They're interested in what you have to say, they're not dictatorial. Listening is hard, you know, actually really listening, that's something I've learned to do I think as I've in my career, to listen. And great leaders are patient - and for me that's a work in progress, you know, because I'm not patient. Not in my private life. Not at work─I just want to get on with things─don't wait till tomorrow, do it today. Sometimes you just got to take a step back and say no, just stop─put it away─so I'm learning. And great leaders are honest and that's a really tough one. Being honest about, you know, how they're─not just how they're feeling and being vulnerable about who they are, being honest and open, but it's about providing feedback as well and it can be really hard to provide feedback, particularly when it's challenging feedback. It's learning how to do that in a safe, respectful manner so people trust you and you can still maintain a really good relationship.

And then finally, these great leaders are empathetic. It's what I call kind leadership and I think it's always been there but I think in this age of leadership, it's something that's really emphasised a lot. It's acknowledged as being really important─it's not a weakness to be kind and gentle.

I'm going to leave it at that, and it is my pleasure to introduce Lois Ransom PSM─Public Service Medal, in case you don't know, that's very important.

Lois, for people who don't come from plant health or plant biosecurity, is a legend in our world. You are Lois, you are modest, but you absolutely are. In the blurb attached to this invitation it says Lois has worked in all aspects of plant health more than thirty-five years and in pathology diagnostics, surveillance, et cetera. Lois has developed policy, she has implemented policy at State, National and International levels. She has chaired the Commission of the World Organisation Plant Protection, better known as the─I always forget this acronym what it stands for─it's the IPPC, the International Plant Protection Convention, and she's held several other key roles in international fora.

Since Lois's retirement in inverted commas in 2019, she's completed a diverse range of advisory and consultancy projects across plant health risk management, operations, policy and regulation.

That doesn't do you service that introduction, Lois so I'm just going to hand over to you now and just ask you to give us an overview of your leadership journey and I might even chip in with questions from time to time if you're comfortable with that Lois.

Lois  
Yeah, I'll look absolutely. I mean, one of the things that we can all do is talk about ourselves endlessly, and I know we've got a limited time available, so if I start running on feel free to interrupt either of you is fine. Needless to say I am absolutely chuffed to be invited to speak and hopefully there will be something for everybody in what I'm going to say. I guess reflecting on Rosa’s introduction, my journey into leadership has been more of a zigzag, but with a technical touchstone. The plant pathology, plant health has been a factor all the way through. I must admit, when I got to chairing the IPPC Commission and looking out at four hundred and fifty people from one hundred and eighty countries in the world, I kind of had to pinch myself and say, ‘well, how did a little city girl from Christchurch in New Zealand end up kind of ruling the world?’.

It zigzagged from Christchurch to Davenport in Tasmania where I was a plant pathologist and then to Hobart and into quarantine, not literally, but biosecurity, and then up to Canberra. We did a stint in Japan doing market access negotiations and then back to Canberra where I sort of stayed into the biosecurity role, as the Chief Plant Protection Officer and then into Plant Import Operations, so conditions at the border but it all connected back to plant health, protecting plants. My latest bent that I've been niggling people about for the last couple of years is one health. Making sure that plant health is not forgotten in the one health global agenda which of course has become a little bit broader hopefully, since the pandemic, but it's still a little bit too focused on zoonosis for me. Protecting plants, why is that important? Well, if there's no plants, there's no life─and that's really the bottom line. With each of the moves that I made my horizons got broader and broader and broader. So from, the back fence and watching Country Calendar on every Sunday night at home in Christchurch, right out to the IPPC and having this global focus and beyond that to one health where everybody is involved in protecting the planet is a player. It's been a bit of a journey for sure.

So how do I become a leader? And I and I have to say interesting, comparing myself with Rosa.

I'm not an extrovert. I'm an introvert. I was always very shy and reserved, but when I got into the position in Davenport and I was the only plant pathologist really north of Hobart for most of the time I was there, it was like, ‘well somebody has to be a leader’.

When you get that badge of office behind you─you know you're wearing the DPI, Agriculture, whatever the badge is and you realize that you actually know more than other people. It gives you a lot more confidence to actually step up and say, ‘I know what I'm talking about’. Being a female, often if I was in the field with one of the other guys and talking to a grower, I'd keep a little bit quiet until it was my cue to speak and kick the dirt like everybody else. But you know, you get there and when I when I move to Canberra, one of the senior officers in the Tasmanian department called me into his office and he basically said, you know, when you're a leader, you know, an executive, not everybody will like you.

And I thought, well, OK, that's fine. I get that, mind you, this is from the guy that was known as the black rat from the time he was at university, so I kind of figured that I could take that with a grain of salt and basically I would do what I felt comfortable with. But in terms of traits, yes I agree, in terms of honesty, integrity and courage, they are the things that sometimes you've got to dig really directly really deeply too, to pull out.

So where to? Building skills, and I do pick up on your point about opportunities, there are opportunities out there. I think you know if you're born a leader, you lead in spite in spite of yourself, you can't help yourself. And I've seen this in a number of my staff over the years that, they put their hand up and they go for it ─and that's really good because for those of us that have to manage that, it's really great to have that support.

The other thing I've noticed is you need leadership at all levels. An organisation can't just run on the person at the top. You've got to have that leadership and the willingness to roll your sleeves up and bring people with you right through every level otherwise it just won't work.

In terms of mentors, when I was pregnant with my first child, I had a woman manager who had also been a mum and that was just so nice to have somebody who understood what you were going through and she didn't give me advice or anything but just knowing that you had somebody who had that connection was really, really nice, because otherwise most of my managers have been males obviously, working in a male field.

My first manager, Pat Sampson, he was such a lovely man, he was very gentle but he must have seen something in me and maybe because he was willing to give me opportunities. In fact, in face of the opposition from his manager, and I don't think it was bloody mindedness. He gave me my first opportunity to go to Hobart and sit behind his desk and do a limited range of what he did. But I guess I'll always be grateful for that because he was willing to take the punt.

Other role models? I had a manager who was very clever. If there was something new coming through, he used to have just a couple of sentences, you know that the concept and a couple of sentences, and he'd keep repeating it and repeating it and repeating it. Eventually, you know, this is kind of managing upwards and it's a little bit managing middle aged males, but eventually they believe that it was their idea. And so that gave you the platform to move forward, creating environment if a change, which I think is really important as well.

The other point I want to make is, you'll get advice and mentoring and guidance from all sources. My ‘ea’, Susan Kerns who was with me for the eight years that I was the CPPO was just brilliant. She'd been around for a long time. She was an absolute guru on governance and fantastic with finances and that was stuff then that I didn't have to worry about, but she was able to keep directing me and I learnt so much from that. So don't cut yourself off from everybody who you could possibly learn from, which is great.

In terms of leading to achieve, over probably the last 10 or 12 years I've become a lot more aware of the need to manage for outcomes. Because if you don't know where you're going, you're not going to get there. So creating a vision─I suppose maybe it was even longer than that, probably from Plant Health committee─What is the vision? Where do we want to go to? Why do we want to get there? Then separating that ‘what is it?’ from the how becomes quite a useful tool when you want people to be engaged and you can give them the flexibility to implement how they would like to. To their strengths, to build their teams, to delegate whatever, but with that end picture in sight. Knowing where you actually want to go─articulating that. A couple of times I've referred to the box of the jigsaw puzzle. So everybody can pick up the jigsaw box, they can see what the picture is and where they want to get to. That was incredibly important at the international level. When you've got one hundred and eighty plus contracting parties, it's all operated by consensus, so everybody has to agree and that becomes very tricky. There's so many languages that are spoken and often English might be their third or fourth or fifth language. To create that vision and picture is really the only way that you can manage. It was the same with Plant Health Committee, we─ all the States and territories ─had to agree, Australia runs on consensus. It's not always easy to achieve, but that's the objective. That's the outcome you want to achieve, and you want to move the agenda forward.

Thinking about things like what do we want to do, why do we want to do it and what will it look like? Moving people out of their day to day, we tried this once with a futurist and it was really not very successful because it's very hard for people to leave themselves, leave their day job behind and look forward. We gave it a go. I think they, if I vaguely remember, the scenarios we looked at were having to do what we currently do, but on half of the resources or something like that. So the normal governments scenario of more with less. The other one, it might have been a fruit fly one, I can't remember because that was always topical for us. But we just could not get people to leave their day job behind and really focus on it, so it wasn't, it didn't have any concrete outcomes but, as an exercise and going ‘okay, well, if you want to get somewhere, you're going to have to be a little bit more strategic, a little bit more forward thinking otherwise you won't get there’. And in doing that, one of the things that Anne asked me to have a talk about was achieving consensus and in getting people to agree to a joint outcome.

I remember years ago that was fantastic advertisement─and you can Google it─EDS cat herders. Basically there's these cowboys and instead of herding cattle, they were herding cats. And we played this at Plant Health Committee and I think everybody thought it was funny─I did─because that's essentially what we were doing was to try and get everybody and going in the same direction.

So what I learnt─a couple of things that were particularly useful.

One is building the vision─sometimes the world's not ready for where you want to go to or where you see from all of the inputs that you have access to the world needs to go. A general rule of thumb for me was it generally took about five years from the time I had a, what I thought was brought idea, to bringing everybody along and actually making it start to happen. But you sort of had to create the environment for that to happen.

When I was working in New Zealand, we had a guy we worked with who was forever saying ‘line the ducks, you have to get the ducks in a line’.

So as an aside, I actually had a salt and pepper shaker that were ducks, so I took those to work and sometimes they were lined up and sometimes they weren't. So that was a bit of fun that we had and even now when we, my colleagues in New Zealand, when we see some ducks we’ll send each other a photo and go, ‘there we go! There’s those ducks’. Getting the ducks lined up can take a lot of time. It has to be very conscious and sometimes it has to be planned and it will always have to be step-wise.

You can't get from A to B unless there's something like a political imperative and take everybody with you. Unless you can say, okay, we need to take this first step and then we go to the next one. And one of the things I learned from Plant Health Committee is it is really useful if you can't get agreement to what you want to do─to actually break it down into several steps. One of those really useful steps is principles. Agreeing in principle is really helpful because you get to identify what it is you want to do and what you need in a policy environmental sense to be able to get there.

So you're effectively creating the environment and then you can hand over that vision to people who you know are very good at, ‘we need to do the step and this step’ and work their way through it and it frees up everybody else to go, ‘okay well, what next do we have to do?’

Instead of everyone getting bogged in the day to day stuff, give it to the people who are good at it, they understand the vision. Trust to say, ‘okay, I trust you to get us from here to where we want to go’. And then the governance comes in, you know, project planning, the project management, the timelines and all the rest of it. That forms the basis of your business plan if you need to get some budget. So it's kind of all tied together, but the creating the environment, getting the principles and then okay, getting down to the nuts and bolts for the people who are good at that has really worked very, very well. Understanding what success looks like.

One of the things that I hadn't done very well─and kind of lived to regret it─was being so busy that I didn't take the time to let my managers know in sufficient detail what I was doing. Plant Health has always been a little bit of the poor relation, the animal health, you know, FMD's the big woo woo woo. You know, warning the Robinson thing, but there are some real insidious, nasty plant diseases that will have, you know, they're industry killers. FMD, yes you might lose a lot of animals, but it's a trait disease largely. Some of our plant diseases, like citrus greening, will kill an industry as Florida and the US is finding out and hopefully California doesn't go the same way, but I don't hold out much hope. Things like Xylella had a big impact on the olive sector in Italy and still moving through. That becomes really, really important. But to what I didn't do with my managers right up to the top was be really clear about this is what we're doing, this is why it's important and giving them those one and two liners that when they hear something they are able to say ‘yes, that's what we're doing’ or ‘I understand that's really important’ and it all comes down to them having confidence in you as well. So that when my job was restructured and I had to reapply for it and I didn't get it, I was pretty gutted and so I went to New Zealand for a couple years and sulked. It was really hard on my staff because they knew with what they were doing was really important. They could see the context that they were working in, then suddenly, from high they get this message that said ‘actually, we don't think you're very important’, which lasted for about a year when people suddenly started to realise that, well we actually need these people to do stuff and the world shifted again. It was really horrible and I felt so sorry for them, some of my staff were really traumatized and they're going ‘well what do we do now?’

And I just said to them, well, you know what you have to do, you've got the road map, you've got the picture, just keep doing it until someone tells you to stop. And they did.

**Rosa Crnov (DEECA)**

Sorry, Louis, I'm going to interrupt there because that's, you know, that's a test of resilience, isn't it? Of yours and everybody's resilience.

**Lois**

It is. But I'm still really pissed off, but anyway it worked out OK.

**Rosa Crnov (DEECA)**  
Well, maybe I shouldn't ask how you coped with all of that.

**Lois**  
Umm, how did I cope? Well, for a start, there was nothing I could do to change it. And there were a couple of things that really niggled, I guess one was at a realistic level, employing someone as a chief plant protection officer who had no plant health experience. You'd never do that to ACVO, ever─Chief Veterinary Officer─ever. So this goes to again, this perception that plants are somehow different, less important, lower profile, and that really, really niggles.

Having the job opportunity in New Zealand, where I set up, progressed or, facilitated probably more accurate, the development of the New Zealand equivalent of the emergency response deed, was actually really valuable and you know when you walk into a workplace─and I knew quite a lot of the NPI people from over the years─when you walk into a place and they say on your first day, ‘we're so pleased you're here’. I was really taken aback because I thought, well, how long is it since I heard that, you know, I barely heard it when I got home. Having them recognise the value of what I could contribute to them and where they were at was good for the ego and it was a bit of a balm, but as I said, I'm still really pissed off. Eventually everything levelled out and I think plant health is much more widely appreciated now. In fact, not long ago, I did some work with a group of senior ex vets including Gardner Murray, who had been the CVO all the time I was ACPPO and he said to me, ‘I have to apologize to you’. I'm going well, ‘who are you and what did you do with the real Gardner Murray?’ He said, he hadn't looked at plant health from the perspective that I was putting in that, if you don't have healthy plants, you don't have healthy animals, you don't have healthy people, you don't have oxygen. 90% of what we eat is either, you know, a herbivore or a vegetable or a fruit, so that that kind of puts that context there. I was kind of really pleased that he said that, and also extremely shocked, so that kind of goes to the messaging of what we need to be able to do around that. That was one of the harsh lessons that I had was, you know, you've got to manage upwards. You've got to have people know what you're doing. You don't need to be blowing your trumpet, but you do need to have them understand because they will become your allies, and particularly when you get into difficult financial situations or financial pressure because you want people to go into that for you.

One of the other things I learned about, creating the environment for change is writing stuff. People will talk about a lot of things but if you put it on paper and they have to look at it, and they have to read it and they have to make comments on it, it becomes much more concrete. I did a lot of this with the international stuff. There was a lot of talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, but if you wrote something down as a paper that went to the Commission, people had to read it, it had a format and it had to have recommendations. There was an opportunity there to say, ‘okay, here's the background to it, this is why I think we need to do something along these lines, and here's a series of recommendations that will actually take us along the pathway to achieving what we want to go and it was really important for the strategic framework that was adopted a few years ago, that's like the blueprint for the IPC through to 2030. We had to work back from adoption to say, well, which committees do we have to go through, what documents do we need, what's the time frames?

Because when you only meet once a year, if you miss a meeting, you're a year behind, so that planning becomes critically important. So yes, the pen is actually mightier than the sword in my experience. It doesn't take long when you've been writing stuff for twenty or twenty-five years to wack something together. There is a recommendation from the IPPC on managing biosecurity risks with food aid that actually came out of a conference with the Pacific. I said, well, it'll have to be in in a couple of weeks, I'm happy to write it down─took me about half a day, max─and they were all ‘this is really good.’ So it can be done if you know what it is that you want to achieve.

I think there's a couple of other things that are probably a little bit further, bit more nebulous. Managing in the technical space can be really tricky. We've got the science people who are very intense, usually introverts, love working from home post COVID, really hard to get them back into the office. You need an interpreter for what they're saying, but you need to be able to put that in bureaucratic speak. Being that interpreter, gives you the opportunity to manage in the messaging a bit, but it is really a tightrope walk on communications between what I'm hearing in one ear that the technical guru is telling me and then me translating it into what becomes practical and aligns with what senior management to hearing.

It also becomes really important in things like market access negotiations. So when you're taking the technical messages, translating them into what the other country needs to hear so that they can manage upwards. One of the approaches with that is to make it as difficult as possible for someone to say no. So, ‘here's the technical information, this is how it answers your question’. Unless you've got a really good argument as to why you can't accept that, that is technically justified, because that's the World Trade Organization rules, you have to say yes. We've used that domestically, we've used it internationally, within the organization as well ─ make it as difficult as possible for someone to say no. So I've done the cat hurding.

Achieving consensus or understanding where people are coming from, but also understanding that the people that we're dealing with ─ which is kind of up on middle management, if you like ─ they have to talk to their people. They've got to talk to the technical people and they have to talk to their managers as well. This is where the communication becomes really critical, as having it understandable and managing expectations, managing that we can't say no because all the questions have been answered. In a general sense, creating a network, diverse network, is really important because you never know when you're going to need some allies. You never know when you need to call on somebody for advice or for assistance, and networks need to be nurtured. They can't be one way. You have to be able to contribute something and that's where being a nice person helps, not screwing them over. Sometimes doing something from the goodness of your heart, because that then provides that two-way basis. When you retire and become a consultant, it's very good to be able to ring up people and say, hey, you haven't heard from you for a while, but I'm doing this little job for Victoria, what do you think about this?

It's wonderful to be able to bring up some old friends and have a good chat and compare things like, what they're doing, where they're going with their next trip, how are their grandkids and that kind of stuff. So when you're stuck at home, you know, staring at your partner of however many years, it's really nice to have someone you can ring up and have a chat with. And I've had some very long chats I have to say, but they've been absolutely wonderful.

Rosa Crnov (DEECA)  
Lois, can I just ask? Sorry, I'm going to interrupt your train of thought here. How would you describe your leadership style?

Lois  
I'd like to think it's inclusive, and I bring in people along because if you go it alone, you're going to end up on your own and someone's going to cut their branch off, and you're going to fall in a heap.

So bringing people along, I think, giving them an opportunity to contribute in this comes into the how. I don't know everything, I can provide advice, but if we want to achieve this, you tell me how we can do that. When we were given the task of reviewing all twenty six thousand or something or rather import conditions for Australia ─ plant import conditions ─ we had to be efficient. We had three years funding, my senior staff got together, I grabbed the whiteboard pen ─ which was my usual way of doing stuff, they used to just hand it over ─ and let them work it out, because they were going to have to do it. So being inclusive, being pragmatic, common sense, it's not about you as a leader ─ here's my getting into hot water ─ It's not about me, it's about us. It's about where we're going, because you live or die by the team. That devastation that my team had when I didn't get that job, but it was a real, really strong lesson for me. Listen and learn, okay? You don't know everything.

One of the great things I loved is when I came back from any of the meetings I had in Rome and, I had been out for a week, I didn't get any work done the first day I was back, because everybody had to come and tell me what they've been doing. And I thought that was absolutely lovely because, they wanted to share. And, you know, I'm sitting there thinking I've got actually other things that I need to do, but that was about the relationships, about being comfortable about having an open door. And really, it's all about being yourself. You spend so much time at work, you can't fake it forever. Sooner or later the real you is going to come out, wo it's probably better to put it out there in the first place.

I make mistakes, but I want people to be able to come and talk to me and feel comfortable ─ and a little bit of humour helps as well. We've had some extremely entertaining managers meetings ─ one of the guys, several of them I went with to executive training. They came back and said, ‘well, you know, if you're making a presentation, you have to do the Wonder Woman pose ─ you know, put the hand on one hip’. So when Anthony works was doing that in front of the, in the directors meeting it was absolutely hysterical. If anyone knows Ant, he's got such a great sense of humour and that really helps people to relate to each other and have a little bit of fun on the job as well.

Everybody has something to offer. When I moved into OCPO, it was a feeling newly established office, but it was known as the sheltered workshop. It had collected a number of personalities from around the place, and so one of the challenges there was to change the culture and to turn it into a high performing team. Really in plant health ─ we're kind of lucky ─ that there's so much to do. You can find a round hole for a round peg or a square hole for a square peg, but really it came down to saying to them ‘that's what I want you to achieve. How you go about that is up to you. I know what your strengths and weaknesses are, let me know if I can help, but basically this is what we have to be able to do’, and I have to say that life is a lot easier when people have confidence in you.

They were, generally be more comfortable letting you get on with it, and it's that micromanagement thing as well. Some of my more tricky managers, if you build that relationship with them, and they're comfortable, what you're doing and they trust you, they'll just basically let you get on with it.

And I think for some of my staff after I left, for them having to write things into a minute to get it approved, they found extremely, extremely annoying when they could kind of come into the office, stick their head and then say, ‘well, what do you think about this?’. That's that to edge sword around, you know, technical knowledge versus governance versus, feeling comfortable and confident with what you're doing and the people around you.

Rosa Crnov (DEECA)  
Lois, if you had to leave the audience with some key lessons ─ and I think you've already given us some fantastic insight here ─ just some key lessons from your experience what would they be?

Lois

Outcomes. Be really clear about what outcomes you want to achieve. Don't micromanage. Learn to trust people and use your networks. Create your networks because they will be very helpful and you will be helpful to them as well so you've got two things that you can do.

I think flexibility. You don't have to be locked into a process in terms of achieving those outcomes, let the people who do that best do what they do best. I guess one of the other things that has been really useful for me and the pathway that I've taken is having a well, my husband life partner who was supportive all the way through. He was a house dad for twelve years and when I came home from work and said ‘what do you feel about moving to Hobart?’, he got the paper and a pen and said ‘here write your application’. And then we ended up in Canberra, and then we were in Tokyo for three years and back in Canberra. It really is helpful if you've got somebody who's supportive, believes in what you do even if they don't actually know what you do, but is willing to support you on the way through and not having to worry about all of that stuff outside of the job when it gets really, really busy is kind of nice. He's a much better cook now than he was thirty three years ago.

Rosa Crnov (DEECA)  
Wonderful, wonderful. Win. Win. Ohh, Lois, that's been wonderful. Your sharing of your insights, your experience. If you're okay, we'll open it up to the floor for some questions.

Lois  
Sure

Rosa Crnov (DEECA)  
I'm sure there will be questions for you. Does anyone have a question? Free to speak up or raise your hand. Andrew Bishop.

Rosa Crnov (DEECA)  
Hi, Andrew.

Lois  
Ohh how far do we go back Andrew?

Bishop, Andrew  
A long way! I'm going to put you on the spot, Lois, what's the best place that you've worked?

Lois  
The best place… Ohh.

Bishop, Andrew  
Graphically I mean?

Lois  
I loved Wellington. I love Wellington. It's a great little place to live. I lived in a small community Island Bay, which is on Cook Street, and it was like a small community but Devonport was great. After we left Devenport we didn't find people in the mall to stop and have a chat to it was kind of like ohh you know it it's a bigger world. Tokyo was fabulous, not just for its location, but for being the top of the heap, if you like and in the work environment where I got to tell people a lot of things to do, which was really good. Canberra is a nice place as well and we're fortunate that our kids have settled around Canberra so we've got access to three grandchildren, zero to three kids in two years, so that keeps us busy. Really where you are depends on what you make it I think. We've been incredibly lucky with what we've been able to do, but by the same token, the opportunities are there, you've just got to be open to them and think ─ well you don't even think what if, it's like what would be interesting to do. Also, is that experiencing note to New Zealand, if you're not happy there's plenty of jobs out there. Give it a go. I was lucky in that case the Secretary gave me a couple of years leave without pay, there was one because I was closer to mum for a couple of years, and I said to him, with an option to extend? He went ‘no’. So it was two years, but we've been incredibly lucky and it's been a bit of a ride really it's been pretty good.

Bishop, Andrew  
Well done. Thanks Lois. Your office here at Sunnyrise is still the same.

Lois  
Probably is. Hopefully the files aren't there still, I think there was a lot of farm hygiene stuff left in Hobart, which is probably gathering dust.

Bishop, Andrew  
Very good. Thank you.

Lois  
Thanks Andrew.

Rosa Crnov (DEECA)  
Paco has a question.

Paco Tovar  
Hi Lois. Thank you very much. That's great presentation. I'm Paco with Australian Forest Products Association. A lot of your careers being based, working with government and trying to get a lot of change management happening in government, but I was sort of curious on your perspectives about bringing along industry along in the journey and whether there's something innately different that is involved in trying to bring them along or it's just along the same lines and that you experienced?

Lois  
I think the imperative around objectives and vision is absolutely critical, because if you don't and probably even more so, because you have such a diverse range of stakeholders, to an individual level. Giving them a sense of what you need to do because it's important for them is just as relevant for industry as it is for government. And in fact, one of the things that was really a great eye opener for me going to New Zealand, was the difference in the way the peak industry bodies work in New Zealand to what they do in Australia because they're elected. They're actually funded by levy, and they under the legislation they get to vote every six years, whether they continue to pay that levy and therefore fund the industry body. That actually keeps the industry body and particularly the exec officer, very focused on what's the benefit of the industry. Because if they don't, like the wool industry, they get voted out of existence, and that leaves that industry without a voice to government, and that's not really a good thing.

So I think the lesson is about what is important, the messaging around that, the visioning and the blueprints to get there are just exactly the same, but the language might be a little different because the direction you're coming from and those hooks to get people really focused and putting it in their own context is a little bit different.

In government you’ve got politics and ministers and senior executives, and in industry you have a very diverse range of individuals with different motivations. But at the end of the day they want to make money. One of the really important things I did within the Farm Hygiene Program in Tasmania ─which was thirty years ago because it was just before my daughter was born─is sustainability. A grower wants to have a property they can hand down to their families. You don't have a sustainable operation if you've got soil borne diseases that live there for twenty or thirty years. It's the same with on farm forestry. You want to have a viable forest that is going to provide that income, maybe not in your lifetime, but for your children and grandchildren. The motivations and the messaging is different but the actual approach, I think, is probably exactly the same.

Rosa Crnov (DEECA)  
Thank you, Lois. Anne has a question.

Anne Walters  
Thank you, guys, and thank you, Lois. That was delightful to hear. you reflect on your experiences. I was wondering, often when we're leaders, we have those moments that are a little bit of a shock for us or are those insights those self-awareness moments. I just wondered if you had any that you would be willing to share with us where you've kind of had that lesson that's been served to you that perhaps wasn't very nice, but really perhaps changed your approach to things?

Lois  
Well, you're cheating because we had a chat before… There was a very momentous occasion in Plant Health Committee, it was in New South Wales, and there was a really big disagreement between Queensland and Western Australia─surprise, surprise─around movement of nursery stock. It got extremely heated to the extent that I thought they were going to come to blows, which is not a good thing when you are chairing a meeting. So I'm sitting there going ohh \*\*\*\*, Ohh \*\*\*\*, Ohh \*\*\*\*, what am I going to do? Anyway, I said look, I have to think about this and so I deferred further discussion to the next day. What came out of it─I can't remember how we resolved it, we must have just deferred it for a bit─ we all agreed that we needed to have a dispute resolution process. I had been doing some work with the IPPC on their dispute settlement committee, so I thought, well, maybe there's something already there that we could use. That really started the process of, how will we deal with these suspects. There was a whole raft stuff, other States and their policies around potatoes nematode as well, that Rosa would be very familiar with and is not being resolved. Basically where we got to with it was, we can deal with the technical elements, but at the end of the day, if it's a political dispute it is political and it has to be resolved at different level. On this particular one, the flow on was when we went to dinner that night, everybody except Western Australia, was sat down one end of the table, so I, as chair, had to sit with my colleague from Western Australia because I thought otherwise nobody was going to talk to him. So you know, the things we have to do as Chair.

Sometimes I think it's just gut, you know, I may have had teenagers at the time, so it was kind of one of those situations that you just take a deep breath and go. ‘we're not going to resolve this, let's just take a little bit of time and then, as I said before, break it down into steps’. It was sort of a mediation thing, I don't think it was ever resolved, but hopefully now with you know focus on technical justifications and so forth, and the passage of time it might be, but it can be really confronting.

But I think what the hell am I going to do? We can't, like if the kids really bad, we're gone. Anyway, we scraped through that one.

Rosa Crnov (DEECA)  
Thank you so much Lois, I think we've got time for one more quick question from Roberto.

Roberto Barrero Gumiel  
Hi Lois, how you doing? Lovely to see you.

Lois  
Hi Roberto, I'm good and you!

Roberto Barrero Gumiel  
Great, thank you. Thank you for sharing with us your life lessons and your leadership lessons was really fantastic to hear from you and also from Rosa. I just wanted to switch a little bit the angle of the question, if you were to have a magic wand and allow you to go back in time, is there something that you would choose to do different?

Lois  
Probably, possibly, but I'd have to think about it. I think the reality is we are who we are and I think if I went back to the beginning, I'd probably make the same decisions because I'd have the same set of values, the same inate personality traits. I might be, a bit more diplomatic or tactful or I might, I think if I had considered the bigger picture earlier, that probably would have helped with some of the early stuff that I did. But you know, you know what you know, and unless you get exposed to something broader, you don't know what's out there. It's the old Rumsfeld stuff that we all love to quote and it basically comes down to exposure and that's what your networks can do. That's what visiting other people around the world, talking to other people and organisations, learning where they're coming from, what they're doing. I spent a lot of time connecting the dots. Somebody, over here is doing something that I think you probably be interested, have a chat to them, because there's parallels there. So yeah, maybe those things.

Rosa Crnov (DEECA)  
Thank you, Roberta. Thank you Lois. With that, I'm going to wrap things up. Lois once again, thank you so much for sharing your insights and experience it's been wonderful light.

Lois  
Thanks for the opportunity.

Rosa Crnov (DEECA)  
Thank you. Look, thanks so much and thanks for the attendees today as well. And I'd just like to remind people that in the chat, there's a link to a feedback form. It'll take you a minute to fill in. If you could please provide any feedback on the session so that we can, you know, keep building on these monthly sessions that would be helpful. With that, I'd also like to let you know that the next session will be on the seventeenth of November and it will be about grassroots leadership with an Indigenous Ranger panel and we'll get it, or I won't, but NAPCaRN will get out an invitation to people leading closer to the event. So once again, thank you all so much for your time. Thank you Lois.

Lois  
Thank you.

Rosa Crnov (DEECA)  
Please have a wonderful afternoon.

Lois  
Yes. Bye bye.