

## Tribute to Gill

### Memorial Event for Gill Owen

Held at Ofgem - 17 July 2017  
Organised by Sustainability First

by

**David Green**

Thank you all very much indeed for coming.

For me this evening is a touching tribute to all that Gill achieved. It is recognition of the many barriers she broke through to bring her commitment to consumers and social justice to the Boards of competition and regulatory bodies both here and in Australia.

As I said at Gill's funeral, how does one sum up the almost 37 years Gill and I spent together – especially when you are married to someone The Observer once called 'The Vinnie Jones of the Competition Commission'.

Our journey together started when we met whilst we were both working for Newcastle City Council. Gill had returned to Newcastle after doing her degree there and then working on a kibbutz in Israel, and I had moved to the City having initially worked in Durham where I had done my degree.

In 1980 Gill and I married at the Civic Centre in Newcastle. It was sadly to the same offices that I returned to register Gill's death last year.

Today is reflection of all that Gill achieved in her professional life. Yet to me, and our friends, the Gill we knew was someone with a ready wit, an encyclopaedic knowledge of the music of the 60's, 70's and today *and* who could sing a lot of it from memory. . It was after all Gill who set that tradition that NEA always had a good disco at its annual conference. Gill was also someone who loved visiting new places. Many of the pictures I have of Gill show her looking at a guide book. Friends who shared our home at various stages of our lives have said how they always remember laughter, music, and shared meals

It was when we got married in 1980 that there was an early sight of Gill's ability to find an apt response to a view she did not agree with. We had been ushered into the Committee Room at the Civic Centre to be married and the Registrar said to Gill 'sign the register for the last time in your maiden name'. Gill then made a

characteristically pointed comment and a burst of applause came from the back of the room.

It was also in 1980 that we founded Keeping Newcastle Warm. In 1981, with the late Robert Davies, we then set up what is now National Energy Action. Gill was its first Chief Officer and laid the basis for much of what it does today. In 1983 our career long association with Australia began when the State Government invited us over to help them set up at local home insulation project in Melbourne.

Yet it was when we moved to work in London that Gill's career really took off. Gill gained a doctorate from Birkbeck College and became one of the first women to be nominated by the then Department of Energy join the then MMC. She went on to serve on the Commission for 10 years. Sir Derek Morris, the Chairman at the time, recalled *'she was a very able and staunch member of the Commission. She had such a calm and personable air that it was easy for those across the table from her to unexpectedly find themselves at the business end of a very sharp mind and penetrating approach'*.

So it was when she was one of the Commissioners who blocked the BSkyB takeover of Manchester United, that the Observer described her as 'The Vinny Jones of the Competition Commission'.

Gill also had another dimension to her career – for a period of time she ran the national re-cycling charity, WasteWatch, and I am delighted that three of WasteWatch's former directors are here this evening.

In 1997, when the new government set out to reform the regulatory structure of the utilities, Gill's experience both as member of the MMC and also as a former Adviser to the Commons Environment Committee, stood her in good stead. She was invited to join the founding Board of what became Ofgem, and went on to serve two terms as a non-executive director of Ofwat until we moved to Melbourne in 2012.

Gill also became the Deputy Chair of the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group, working both with the late and much missed Peter Lehmann and more recently Derek Lickorish, and developed a long-term association with Sustainability First.

We had talked from time to time about working in Melbourne and when, in 2012, we had the opportunity to do this, it was Gill's association with Warwick Business School and then UCL here that created the basis for her senior roles at both Monash University in Melbourne as well as the UCL campus in Adelaide.

In her first two years in Australia Gill quickly took on an impressive range of roles. She was a founding member of the new Consumer Challenge Panel that was announced by the then Prime Minister Julia Gillard and which was designed to bear down on the cost of power networks in Australia.

She also became a regular adviser to the Australian Energy Regulator. With the change of Federal Government she was appointed to the Advisory Board for the new

Governments Energy White Paper and was one the first Ministerial appointees to the Board of Energy Consumers Australia.

It was when we were living in Melbourne that Gill had her first seizures which quickly led to her being diagnosed with a Glioblastoma Multiform – a particularly aggressive and nearly always terminal form of brain tumour.

Gill was clear she did not want it to define her and across three neurosurgical operations and extensive chemo and radiotherapy in Melbourne together we organised each day to enable her to carry on doing the work that was so important to her.

We returned to Bedford in early 2015, and typically Gill was supervising a PHD student in Australia up until her fourth and final operation in May 2016. I am pleased to say he has now submitted his PHD

On the day after last year's referendum we went up to Newcastle to stay with some longstanding friends. It was after an emergency admission to the RVI that we learnt that Gills tumour had mutated and regrown just 4 weeks after her last operation at Addenbrookes. Gill was clear with the medical team that she wanted to stay in the Newcastle. With our friends support we were able to do this and Gill benefitted from a well organised NHS community based palliative care system.

Gill died peacefully with me at our friend's house early on 27<sup>th</sup> August last year. Her funeral in Newcastle reflected her pride in her welsh heritage with a distinct Welsh and Australian flavour, aided by a number of our friends from Melbourne being there.

I returned to Australia and New Zealand earlier this year to see family and friends who had not been able to attend Gills funeral.

Whilst I was there, a seminar and dinner to recognise Gill's policy work was held by the State Government in Victoria. The academic community in New South Wales also launched a new prize that has been named after Gill. Next year there will be a joint event in honour of Gill hosted by the Australian Energy Regulator and Energy Consumers Australia. Here NEA has launched a student bursary scheme named for Gill.

Thank you to all those who worked with me at what was the UKBSE, for the support you all gave both Gill and I from the time of her initial diagnosis, and to me since she died. Friends here, in Newcastle, Bedford and Melbourne have long been a close part of the life Gill and I had together. All your constancy and support is very much appreciated.

Gill's tenacity and her commitment to social justice are now being well marked by this lecture. To me it is fittingly hosted by Sustainability First and here at Ofgem's offices. I am particularly grateful to Martin Cave for agreeing to give this lecture in honour of Gill.

Martin, not only did Gill have a huge amount of respect for your work – but also the subject you have chosen - represents one of themes that both Gill, and I, have followed across our careers. Thank you

I am now pleased to hand over with thanks to Judith both for organising this evening's event and for the support she has given Gill and I across the challenges of the last few years.

Judith is going to speak about Gill's work with Sustainability First.