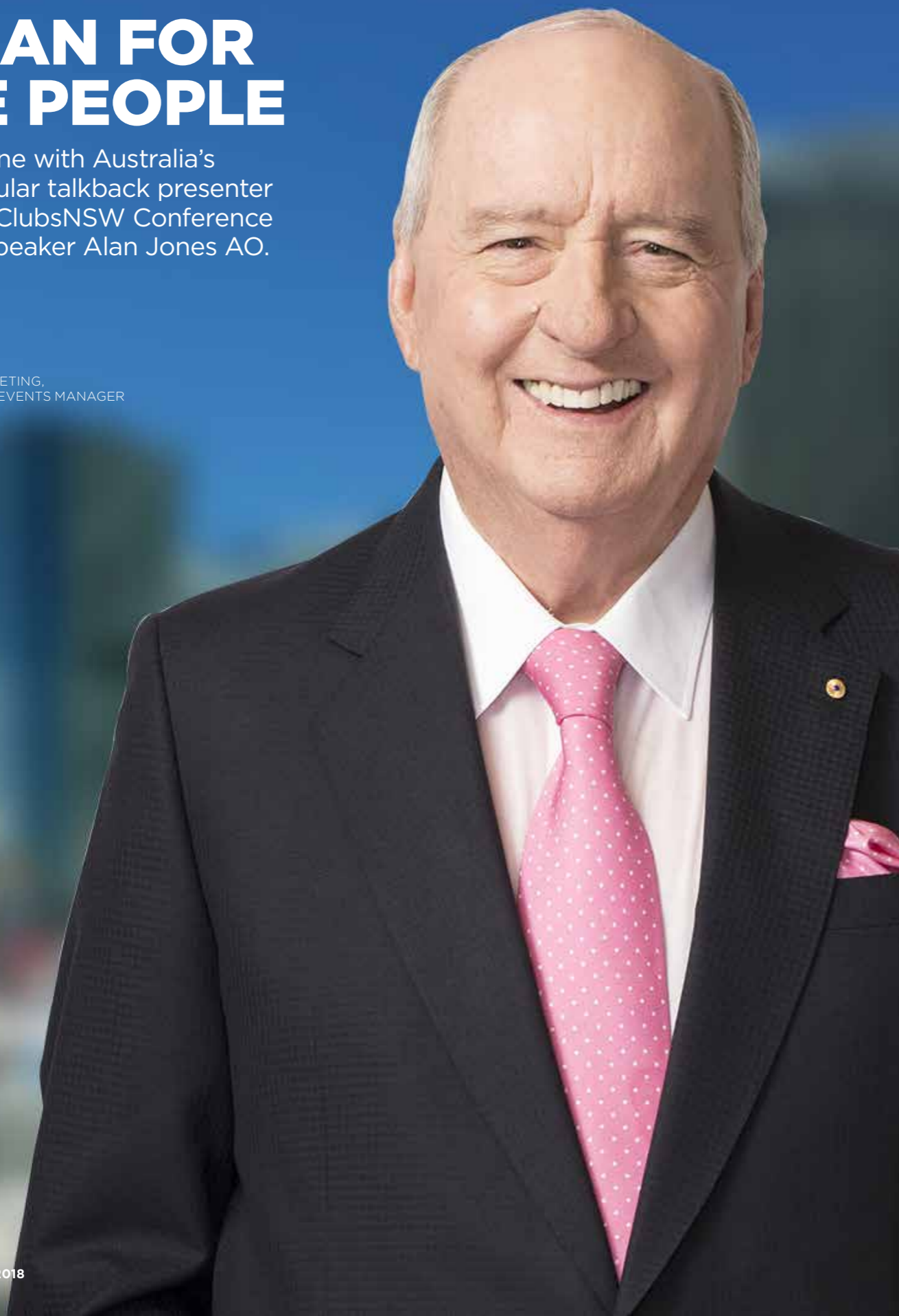


A MAN FOR THE PEOPLE

One-on-one with Australia's most popular talkback presenter and 2018 ClubsNSW Conference keynote speaker Alan Jones AO.

TRENT SUTTON
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You've been back at 2GB since 2001 and had more than 200 ratings wins. What keeps you motivated?

Firstly, I enjoy what I do. Secondly, I'm working with wonderful people, that is my staff. They've been with me for a long time, I think collectively over more than 120 years. And it's not about ratings but about intellectual rigour and maintaining contact with the community and serving the community, using the medium of the media to try to do good things and above all to inform and entertain.

You're known as a man famous for caring for and representing the people of Australia – where did your desire to be the nation's torchbearer for the everyday person come from?

I suppose I was lucky with my parents. They inculcated these values in me. Simple principles, help if you can and where you can. Don't over-promise. And always recognise there's someone far worse off than you are. If you have power, make sure you use it to lift rather than crush. And above all, keep in touch with the "ordinary man" because I was always reminded by my parents that I was one of them. None of us is any better than another. We may have different jobs and different responsibilities. Giving is a very selfish thing. It makes you feel good.

You took the Gillard Government to task on mandatory pre-commitment. What's your view more broadly on these sorts of proposed legislative changes?

Firstly, governments should get out of our lives and there are many, many instances of this. In relation to clubs, of course, it's in relation to gambling and the poker machine industry. It has always fascinated me that governments never have seemed to worry about people buying lottery tickets and raffle tickets, tickets to Keno or as we did all the time when I was a child in Queensland, tickets in the Golden Casket. We shouldn't be in the business of telling people how to spend their money or where to seek their pleasure. In many walks of life, people live on the extremes and therefore get themselves into trouble. That's true whether it's drinking or driving or buying a house beyond what they can afford or, indeed, gambling. We would hope there is a "safety net" for those people. Those basic principles are behind my challenge always to Federal and State Governments in relation to clubs. I'm sure you're tired of this preoccupation with the virtue-signallers in relation, in this instance, to gambling. The reality is clubs do an enormous amount of good work in the community. They give back to the entertainment world, in sport, in leisure, in hospitality – the list goes on. We should focus on that.

Local councils are increasingly dabbling in policies that are the domain of State and Federal Governments. What do you make of this unwelcome political shift?

When it comes to local government, the biggest crisis relates to the mess we've got ourselves into in relation to water. Once upon a time we all had a rainwater tank. You never thought of not having one. Then councils decided they could make money out of water so some planning nincompoop decided that we'd ban rainwater tanks.

As a result, water has been wasted. People experience shortages but more importantly and, worse, we are now charged appallingly for getting water from "government". They now control what water we have and how much we pay. And gambling is another potential victim of all of this. There will undeniably be people who suffer as a result of gambling, just as people suffer from drinking, from other social excesses and financial mismanagement. We hope that we're all there to pick up and assist those people. But it's none of the business of councils to be determining what should or shouldn't be gambling policy. Give some of these people a little bit of power and you can't trust what they might try to do with it.

You've been a long-term supporter of clubs, what is it about the industry that appeals to you?

I'm just fascinated and gratified by the tremendous work that clubs do. There are many people out there who can't afford air conditioning and can't afford pay TV yet can become a club member for next to nothing. You can then take your friends to the club, sit down, have a drink, have a good and affordable feed, watch pay TV on a very hot day, be in total comfort because the clubs are air conditioned. For so many, it's a home away from home. It's a meeting place. And of course, it honours the contribution that our men and women made in so many theatres of war. I love them.

What will be core to the registered club industry remaining profitable and relevant in the future?

In relation to remaining profitable and relevant, I think it's important not to fall into the pitfalls that swallow up many. There is no point in embracing change for change's sake. Obviously, the money has to be reinvested into the facility in order to meet the growing demands of customers. But it is a simple equation, isn't it? Whatever you provide: food, beverage, hospitality, entertainment and leisure for people in an increasingly time-poor world, clubs will never wither. But because they're almost an institution in our lives, we shouldn't take them for granted. ■

i To see the full program and buy tickets to the ClubsNSW Conference on Sunday, October 14, visit clubsnswconference.com