

# **ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

## **Inquiry into the CFA training college at Fiskville**

Melbourne — 27 January 2016

### Members

Ms Bronwyn Halfpenny — Chair

Mr Tim McCurdy — Deputy Chair

Mr Simon Ramsay

Mr Tim Richardson

Mr Bill Tilley

Ms Vicki Ward

Mr Daniel Young

### Staff

Executive officer: Mr Keir Delaney

Research officer: Mr Patrick O'Brien

### Witness

Ms Kirstie Schroder, director, operational learning and development, Metropolitan Fire Brigade.

**The CHAIR** — Thanks to Kirstie Schroder for coming in to give evidence to us today. Before we go to our questions and ask you a little bit about your role at the MFB I have to go through a few formalities to start the hearing.

Welcome and thank you for attending this afternoon. As outlined in the guide you would have been provided with by the secretariat all evidence at this hearing is taken by the committee under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 and other relevant legislation and attracts parliamentary privilege. Any comments you make outside the hearing do not attract parliamentary privilege. It is an act of contempt of Parliament to provide false or misleading evidence to the inquiry. The committee may ask you to return at a later date if there are further things we need to ask you. All evidence provided today is being recorded, and you will get a copy of the transcript to have a look at it to check for accuracy prior to it becoming public.

As I said we have a number of questions to ask you, but first I just want to confirm your role at the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. Could you give us an understanding of what your role is and how long you have been in that position?

**Ms SCHRODER** — My role is director, operational learning and development, at the VEMTC site in Craigieburn. I have been with the organisation for 28½ years, with the last 4½ years in training, but at VEMTC Craigieburn since VEMTC opened. The responsibilities there are the management of that site, management of the budget and the staff there, registered training organisation compliance issues and planning and scheduling of operational training for MFB, CFA recruit courses, other sector courses and commercial training where possible.

**The CHAIR** — So that is your title and what you are looking after, but in terms of the actual responsibilities you have — I guess where we are coming from is that we are doing an inquiry into the operations at Fiskville where a lot of MFB staff were doing training until it was closed, but also there is various correspondence where you seem to be a contributor to various committees and meetings involving the training of firefighters at the Fiskville site. Perhaps you could give us a bit of an understanding of your responsibilities when it comes to recruits and trainees and how that related to Fiskville.

**Ms SCHRODER** — With the training we have, we have a development team that develops the training in line with the training framework that we are obliged to follow. So what we will do with that is look at curriculum, both in this state and nationally and internationally to make sure that we have got our curriculum the way it should be for the learning outcomes that we are trying to achieve, and then we will look at the facilities that can deliver that outcome. From a VEMTC perspective that was the design brief for building the facility we have at VEMTC. So we have different teams, different areas, that look at development. We have an area that looks after delivery. We have an area that looks after corporate services and getting equipment appliances, getting all the PPC that people have to have to do the training that they do. In relation to Fiskville, when we were working from Burnley we did not have the facilities to do the practical training, and we used to use Fiskville and the Bangholme campus and at times the Sale campus for delivering the practical training for firefighting for recruits, and for officer courses as well.

**The CHAIR** — Okay, and so did you have any direct contact or line of responsibility or liaison with the Fiskville training centre?

**Ms SCHRODER** — I certainly did have some direct contact with Justin Justin just in arranging for training to take place. When we stopped training there, I had some initial discussions with Justin and email communication about issues on the site.

**The CHAIR** — Okay. Just in terms of coming today, you feel you are able to speak openly and freely separate from the MFB?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Absolutely.

**The CHAIR** — That is good. Okay, great. Thank you.

Just in terms of the CFA and MFB dealing with the problem when there was the discovery — I guess we are talking about the quality of the water, because that is, as I understand it, the issue that led to the ceasing of training as decided by the MFB —

**Ms SCHRODER** — Correct.

**The CHAIR** — Were you involved in or have an insight into the decision-making in terms of the MFB? We understand for example that there was a committee set up — I think this was raised or mentioned by Mr Peter Rau, where there was a task force, if you like, that was set up — to manage what was happening at Fiskville, because originally I think the training was suspended not completely stopped. Can you give us a bit of an understanding of what happened?

**Ms SCHRODER** — When the first article came out in the *Herald Sun* in December 2011, it was after that that the CEO established the steering committee to look at the implications for the MFB of what happened at Fiskville. So that steering committee was put together to look at those implications. Post that, between December and June 2012, there were courses that were run and scheduled. Recruit courses, I think 105 and 106 for the MFB, were scheduled to run at Fiskville and then one of our station officer courses was scheduled to run there in June 2012.

During that period of time both myself and Peter Rau communicated — I would communicate. Initially I communicated with Justin Justin, then Peter Rau took over the communication or liaison with Justin Justin and Lex de Man about what was on site, what issues there were with contamination. But it was primarily from a historical point of view not about the water at that point in time. In that lead-up to June it was all about historical contamination issues and what that meant for the organisation. There was a great deal of difficulty in getting that information. Training continued until 20 June 2012 when senior station officer Brian Rogash contacted us at operational training and said he had significant concerns about the water that they were using there. I spoke to Peter Rau, and I think Peter spoke to both Shane Wright and Nick Easy, the CEO, and it was decided that we cease training immediately until we could get clarification of what issues there were with the water.

**The CHAIR** — Sorry, I missed the name of the person who contacted Peter Rau.

**Ms SCHRODER** — Senior station officer Brian Rogash contacted us at operational training, and then I contacted Peter Rau, but I believe that senior station officer Brian Rogash also contacted Peter Rau.

**The CHAIR** — So prior to that time had there been any concerns expressed or any pressure from anybody that there were issues about the water quality and that something ought to be done before that?

**Ms SCHRODER** — No, all the communication up until that point in time was in relation to seeking information. There was not a concern articulated about the water, but there was a concern with what the contaminants were and the lack of information coming back about what those contaminants were and what that meant for our people.

**The CHAIR** — But the MFB did not really act on that issue?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Well, they had given assurances that all of the issues that were talked about in the *Herald Sun* article were historical issues and not currently on the site. And there was water testing that was provided at the time, and there were discussions about class A water. The issues were that people were saying that it was class A. Whether there was documentation that confirmed that it was class A, there were water reports that said the water was safe, so they continued to operate there.

**The CHAIR** — Okay. We have just got a couple of emails between Mr Lex de Man and Mr Peter Rau that we will give you some copies of to have a quick look at. They are not long ones. Did you come in a bit earlier, because we gave the same emails out.

**Ms SCHRODER** — Yes, I was here then.

**The CHAIR** — You were here then so you have probably had a bit of time. You are mentioning it as having had some sort of discussion. You are saying that there had been some toing and froing between Mr Rau and Mr de Man. Can you maybe give us a bit more detail in terms of this?

**Ms SCHRODER** — These emails would be in reference to us stopping training. The article that came out I believe talked about the MFB stopping training at the Fiskville site. So these emails were in relation to us trying to get information relative to the water at that point in time. As I said, 20 June was when we stopped, and there

was communication backwards and forwards with Justin Justin and Lex de Man and Peter Rau about water quality issues at that point in time.

**The CHAIR** — And you were saying just before that it was very difficult to get information from, I presume, the CFA about this issue?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Correct.

**The CHAIR** — Could you give us a bit of an example of why it was difficult or what happened?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Certainly I made several phone calls to Peter and sent several emails to Peter Rau to follow up with the CFA. Initially when the story broke back in December that very day I sent an email to Justin Justin requesting a whole lot of information, and Justin wrote back and quite rightly said, ‘You know, we are inundated’. That was not a problem. We knew that they needed a bit of time, but then Peter would follow up, and I would follow up with Peter asking him to follow up with Justin about how we were progressing with issues we had raised back in December. We were not getting any responses to any of that. To the best of my knowledge we still have not received responses to those particular questions we raised.

**The CHAIR** — Okay, they just did not return the call, did not respond to the email — just silence?

**Ms SCHRODER** — That is to the best of my understanding, yes.

**The CHAIR** — In terms of the email that Mr Rau sent — the same emails we are talking about — just for the record, the first email is from Mr Lex de Man asking Mr Rau if there had been any complaints about health concerns by trainees or any complaints about the colour of the water and so on. That was the twenty —

**Ms SCHRODER** — Fifth.

**The CHAIR** — Twenty fifth of June, and the reply on 27 June from Mr Rau was that there had not been really anyone who had made any mention of any health concerns after visiting Fiskville, although he noted:

... Mr Marshall’s recent bulletin stating that staff have indicated they suffered health issues but I am not aware of any being reported either formally or informally.

To your knowledge, is that correct, that there was not?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Certainly at that point in time there was no indication of any health issues that had been brought to our attention at all.

**The CHAIR** — So none of the staff had come up to say they had a rash or there was an issue?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Not at that point in time at all.

**The CHAIR** — When did the complaints start arising?

**Ms SCHRODER** — After the *Herald Sun* article there was a lot of discussion. The MFB have a system called MFB Safe and they ask people to put in any notifications of exposures. When this article came out in the *Herald Sun*, as you can imagine, it created a lot of discussion and people started to talk about their experiences at Fiskville and started to lodge MFB REIs or MFB Safe reports about their injuries or rashes or illnesses et cetera that had occurred in their past time.

**The CHAIR** — What would happen with that information? What does the MFB intend to do?

**Ms SCHRODER** — That generated, from memory, quite a few I think hundred reports that went to the relevant commanders, so chain of command-type reporting. You put in the report saying what you were exposed to, and it goes to your next in command, and then they act on it.

**The CHAIR** — Then in terms of acting on it, making a record of it?

**Ms SCHRODER** — There is a record of it, and if there was action to be taken. At that time we had suspended training, so that was the initial action, to look into: was it an accurate reflection? — so people had seen water that did not look right, it did not smell right, and they were concerned. We educate our people: ‘As

soon as you see a safety concern, raise that concern and we will investigate, evaluate what the risk is, and then make a decision about going forward'. So they did everything that we would expect of them.

**The CHAIR** — Just going back, then, in terms of who was aware of what. The MFB was not aware until the article in the *Herald Sun* about the water quality?

**Ms SCHRODER** — The second article.

**The CHAIR** — The second article in June. In December the year prior — 2011 — there was the article that exposed the traditional chemical contamination.

**Ms SCHRODER** — That is right, the historical chemical — —

**The CHAIR** — The historical one. Was the MFB aware of that prior to that article?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Not that I am aware of.

**The CHAIR** — Did anyone from MFB have any knowledge of then?

**Ms SCHRODER** — No. I should point out that that article came out at the start of December 2011 and I commenced work at training, even though I was an MFB person in other roles, in mid-September of that year. So I had not been involved with training very much before that. I am just speaking from — —

**The CHAIR** — What date, sorry, before?

**Ms SCHRODER** — September 2011, and the article came out early December 2011.

**The CHAIR** — Okay, thanks.

**Mr McCURDY** — Were MFB staff offered blood tests or just offered to register and say they had a complaint or an issue?

**Ms SCHRODER** — I do not have detailed knowledge of this, but what MFB have in our own system is a medical monitoring process where you can go off once a year and have your blood tests taken and it is checked for a range of things. They were certainly offered our own medical monitoring, and I believe they were able to register, but I do not know much more about — —

**Mr McCURDY** — Is that the MFB Safe that you were talking about?

**Ms SCHRODER** — No, MFB Safe is the reporting system.

**Mr McCURDY** — Okay.

**Ms SCHRODER** — We have a medical monitoring program that is available to all our staff.

**Mr McCURDY** — Were MFB staff eligible for the CFA's health surveillance program?

**Ms SCHRODER** — I could not answer that; I am not sure.

**Mr McCURDY** — If someone wants to be monitored, they can go through that due process, and that will get their blood tested, if that is what they want and if they have concerns about their exposure to PFOS or anything like that?

**Ms SCHRODER** — I am not an expert on the whole PFOS exposure, but I understand there are a different set of blood tests. The tests we have are a regular set of blood tests that test for a range of things. I do not believe at this stage that PFOS is included in those tests. However, our health and safety manager is working to develop a range of health practices that are associated with the PFOS testing, as I understand it.

**Mr McCURDY** — We have an email from Nick Easy, which I think we have a copy of for you, that went to all MFB staff, in December 2011. The second paragraph of that email says:

Employees should continue to utilise the medical monitoring program to assist in the early detection and treatment of medical conditions.

Which program is Mr Easy — —

**Ms SCHRODER** — He is talking about the MFB's medical monitoring program.

**Mr McCURDY** — Medical monitoring program. When was that established? Post?

**Ms SCHRODER** — No, we have had a medical monitoring program for at least 15 years, I would suggest; maybe longer.

**Mr McCURDY** — Okay, and it is still in operation now?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — I just missed an issue about the email, which is about where he talks about an agreed water quality standard and that that was going to be provided to you. Do you know if they did that — give you information about — —

**Ms SCHRODER** — You are referring to this email?

**The CHAIR** — Yes — sorry, I just missed the last paragraph of the one that I spoke to you about.

**Mr McCURDY** — Not the Nick Easy one.

**The CHAIR** — Sorry, I just realised that I was reading the last paragraph, and I forgot to ask you.

**Ms SCHRODER** — My understanding is that we received confirmation that the agreed water standards at Fiskville were class A water.

**The CHAIR** — Which is what you said before, okay. Thank you, sorry.

**Ms SCHRODER** — That is okay.

**Ms WARD** — Hi, Kirstie, how are you going? Thanks for coming to see us today. We are going to provide you with an email that you sent to Justin Justin on Tuesday, 6 December as well as a follow-up email that relates to this, sent by Peter Rau to Justin Justin on 20 April 2012.

**Ms SCHRODER** — Yes.

**Ms WARD** — In your email to Justin Justin you asked a number of questions about chemicals and contamination that related to the *Herald Sun* story. Mr Justin replied to say that the CFA would respond within 48 hours. Mr Rau's email, sent four months later, says it is a follow-up email to your original message sent four months earlier, and says:

...can you please confirm if all CFA training sites utilise class A recycled water as a minimum?

What are your views about how the CFA responded to the MFB's queries regarding the water and its quality?

**Ms SCHRODER** — To the best of my knowledge we did not receive timely responses to any of these requests.

**Ms WARD** — Do you have any views on what might have caused the delay?

**Ms SCHRODER** — I do not think that they had the information at hand to provide to us, and there was confusion about standards of water et cetera.

**Ms WARD** — Do you think there was a lack of clarity at the CFA around how to answer accurately?

**Ms SCHRODER** — I think there was a lack.

**Ms WARD** — I also provide you with a copy of an email sent by Peter Rau to Justin Justin at the CFA on 20 June 2012. You were cc'd in on this email. The final paragraph of the email says:

... at this time there is some uncertainty of the water quality I believe it is prudent that MFB not undertake any water related training at Fiskville until it is confirmed that the water is deemed to satisfy the requirements of class A water.

Was it the case that the CFA had not provided confirmation that class A water was being used when Mr Rau emailed in April 2013 such that the MFB was still unclear about this in June 2013?

**Ms SCHRODER** — That is my understanding, yes.

**Ms WARD** — Are you aware of any lead-up to this conversation? What is the backstory around this conversation and trying to sift through and work out what is going on?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Fairly constant discussion between Peter Rau, myself and members of the training leadership group about trying to access this information to give trainers and the students they were training some certainty about the class A water being used. It was fairly constant. At the MFB we have training subcommittees as part of our consultative process. I think it was regularly raised in those training subcommittee meetings to ask had the confirmation been forthcoming, and at no stage had it been forthcoming.

**Ms WARD** — So for quite some time there is a lack of clarity from MFB's perspective around what the quality of the water actually is and what is being used.

**Ms SCHRODER** — Correct.

**Ms WARD** — Today we heard for the first time around using collar temporary tanks from June 2012 until about October 2012. Was there any discussion with the MFB around the use of these tanks?

**Ms SCHRODER** — No; certainly not with myself. There was certainly no discussion with myself, and they were not shown to me when I visited Fiskville on 18 October for a site inspection.

**The CHAIR** — That was 18 October — —

**Ms SCHRODER** — 2012.

**The CHAIR** — 2012, yes.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — Thank you, Kirstie, for coming in. I would just like to provide you with a copy of chain emails sent between you and Justin Justin at Fiskville between 30 August 2012 and 4 September 2012. I will let you refresh on those. These emails are about the organisation of some MFB training at Fiskville in October 2012.

**Ms SCHRODER** — Correct.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — In your first email to Mr Justin, you wrote:

Could you also confirm that the water in use for training purposes is mains water and that it has the volume and pressure to facilitate the use of four trucks operating simultaneously?

Mr Justin's reply on 3 September said that the water being used at Fiskville is town water and that they have the ability for more than four appliances to be pumping at any one time. Can you provide a little bit more context to the nature of that email?

**Ms SCHRODER** — The discussions that were being had about the different dams and pits and how all of that system worked got to the point where people were saying that the safest way forward for MFB to be assured that water is safe is to use mains water. That was where the discussion got to — how do we assure ourselves that we have got safe water? Use mains water. So they started to move towards the use of mains water.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — Were you satisfied with the response that was provided at the time by Mr Justin?

**Ms SCHRODER** — We had some concern. From my recollection we had had some of our team do some calculations on the water usage and the tanks and how the backup water would be available, so there is still a little bit of concern — happy that it was moving towards mains water and of a standard that people would be comfortable with, but then it became a little bit of an issue about the volume of water that would be available and the pressures that would be available to run the training simultaneously.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — Was there any interaction at that time with WorkSafe from the MFB, or was it just directly with the CFA that you were corresponding?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Directly with the CFA.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — Just taking you to the MFB steering committee, the committee understands that you were on an MFB steering committee established by the CEO to manage issues arising out of Fiskville. Is that right?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Correct.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — Could you give us a bit of an overview of the role for the committee and what some of the outcomes from that were?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Nick Easy moved fairly quickly to establish the committee. There were a number of people: myself; Nick Easy; Shane Wright; the executive director people and culture, Danielle Byrnes; Craig Lloyd; maybe Chris Wiseman; and an external legal person. The committee was established to gather as much information as we possibly could to have a look at what the potential exposure was to our people, if any, and to prepare for the event if there was to be any litigation that arose out of this.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — So what was your role on that as part of that committee? Was it defined, your role on the committee?

**Ms SCHRODER** — No.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — Okay. Also to get an understanding about the decisions made and some of the operations, what was the general function of the committee, and was the committee responsible for deciding to return on 8 October 2012 to Fiskville for training?

**Ms SCHRODER** — I have checked my diary thoroughly and can only find one meeting that I attended of the committee, on 10 February, and at that meeting there was general discussion and some reports put forward that we reviewed, but they remained with the committee — we did not take them away — that indicated that we felt that the contaminations that were referred to were of more of a historical nature rather than a current nature. My understanding is the decision of the CEO was that we would continue training.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — So can I clarify, what date was that meeting and that decision?

**Ms SCHRODER** — 10 February 2012.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — So it only met once, that committee. It was not — —

**Ms SCHRODER** — I only attended one meeting, but I believe they did meet more than once.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — But more broadly in the context you were also liaising at the time with Justin Justin about training resuming and capabilities?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Certainly about booking in for other training, yes.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — Just going to capacity for appliances and the first tank on site at Fiskville, and the 240 000 litres in one of the tanks, would that be enough to run four appliances at any one time for the drills that you were undertaking?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Now we are moving into an area that is not my area of expertise. But the concern that we raised when we did visit the site and there was the 240 000-litre tank that had already been established and a second backup tank, and the occupational hygienists, Melissa Battisti, myself and Peter Rau went up there, were



that the filling of the backup tank was through a standard garden hose, and to fill 240 000 litres how long was that going to take? That was a concern for people more probably from an operational perspective, not having an understanding of flow rates and what have you on appliances. It was more about operations saying that they were concerned that that was not a viable option.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — Just going to the reversal of the decision up to 16 October, could you provide a bit more context around that? So from the 8th there is the decision to go back; on the 16th that decision is reversed. Can you give a bit more context to that decision?

**Ms SCHRODER** — On the 8th the decision is put out there to everybody through an email, with Nick Easy saying we believe that it is safe to return. There is a visit to the site, perhaps that day or the next day, I am not sure of the date, with Tony Martin and Mark Lyons, who have gone up there and contacted operational training and said, ‘We believe that the water filtration system is still being used to back up the water supply. We are concerned about this’.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — So that was primarily the reason for the decision being revoked? What was the process or decision-making undertaken by the MFB at that time?

**Ms SCHRODER** — My recollection is that after that visit the United Firefighters Union lodged a grievance to say that the water being used was not just mains water, it was still being tapped off the filtration system, and that they had health concerns for their members. That grievance was lodged with Fair Work, and we started to have discussions about those issues with Fair Work and through them assisting us in those discussions.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — What was the response from CFA, from the MFB’s decision to cease training? Was there correspondence between the MFB and CFA from your perspective?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Peter Rau certainly had some discussions with Justin and perhaps an email or two to say that we would not be proceeding with the training, and then we started to look for alternate training sites.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — So did you correspond at all with Justin Justin?

**Ms SCHRODER** — I do not believe I did at that point. I believe it was Peter who wrote to him.

**Mr RAMSAY** — Can I just ask on that: was the decision by the MFB made on the basis that the UFU put in a grievance motion because, as Tim said, the sequence of events, as I understand them, was that there was no indication from WorkSafe or anyone else that in fact the current reticulation of water was unsafe to firefighters. In fact two days after the UFU lodged a grievance regarding the use at Fiskville, independent occupational hygienists, Eva & Associates, concluded that the source of the occupational health and safety hazard that may have been a concern in the past had been eliminated from the current Fiskville firefighting training work practices.

So right through this whole trilogy of events there has been no indication from anyone that the water was posing a problem to the occupational health and safety of firefighters, yet the UFU says ‘jump’ and the MFB jumps. I am just thinking on what basis would they make their decision?

**Ms SCHRODER** — The UFU raised a grievance that the MFB is obliged to deal with through a particular process, but the MFB also had its own employees who were instructors and students at the time who were concerned about their health issues because they were concerned about the lack of communication and information that we had been trying to get — —

**Mr RAMSAY** — It was the lack of consultation perhaps that was the grievance more so than the science behind the water sampling status.

**Ms SCHRODER** — The lack of information that was forthcoming gave them a level of concern, and then when the two — the occupational health and safety representative and the shop steward — visited the site and made an observation that what was told to the WorkSafe people was inaccurate, it created a level of mistrust, I guess, in people that what they were being told was not reflective of what was happening at the site and that it was not actually safe.

**Mr RAMSAY** — What was the inaccuracy?

**Ms SCHRODER** — That the sole use of water was coming from mains and through the tanks, through the 240 000-litre tanks, not the dams and the pit. So the two members of the MFB who went up there as union representatives witnessed what they referred to us as the dam filtration system being used to back up the water that was in the tanks, which created the concern.

**The CHAIR** — Which I think is what Mr Myers also raised.

**Mr RAMSAY** — I will just check that because my understanding was that post June 2012 they were fully on a main, closed system.

**Ms SCHRODER** — That is not our understanding.

**Mr TILLEY** — I just want to qualify a couple of things that my colleague said earlier about blood tests. Probably what the committee may need is some advice on what those bloods are testing for specifically, so if we can chase that up?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Certainly, yes.

**Mr TILLEY** — So these are an annual blood test?

**Ms SCHRODER** — If you choose to. It is available to you annually. It is up to you to activate that process for yourself, so it is a voluntary health monitoring process.

**Mr TILLEY** — So on that note, is the MFB aware of any anomalies identified with any MFB firefighter that may have taken up the volunteer opportunity with those tests? Any MFB career firefighter that attended any training at Fiskville? Are there any anomalies identified from any of those tests?

**Ms SCHRODER** — I am not in a position to answer that. I do not have that information.

**Mr TILLEY** — Okay, who would be in a position to be able to answer that?

**Ms SCHRODER** — I would suggest the health and safety manager might have some information that is de-identified.

**Mr TILLEY** — Who does that mean?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Wayne Richards.

**Mr TILLEY** — Thank you. I would like to go on with some conversation about 18 October 2012. There is an MFB report that I have, and I do not know whether you are familiar with it or have it in front of you, but it is from a visit that you participated in at Fiskville — —

**Ms SCHRODER** — Melissa Battisti's report?

**Mr TILLEY** — Yes, that is it. So you are familiar with that? Do you need to have a look at it and refresh your memory at all?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Not really, depending on what — —

**Mr TILLEY** — Yes. They are pretty general questions. So you recall the visit?

**Ms SCHRODER** — I recall the visit.

**Mr TILLEY** — Okay. I suppose before asking any questions, would you like to go into some detail on what your observations were during that visit?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Of the visit? Myself, Peter Rau and Melissa Battisti went up and had a look at the site. I had similar concerns that both Melissa and Peter had in relation to the filling of the secondary tank, because as I said it was just a garden hose. There were issues around clean and dirty areas in what was considered or called the 'dirty mess' that present issues for the MFB. We were shown around the site. I want to say very clearly that

I think it was a well-intentioned visit and demonstration of everything at the site — nothing wrong there — and we were welcomed very well to the site.

But when we were shown around the site we were told that there was no foam anywhere on the site — that foam was not allowed to be stored on the site; it was not allowed to be used on the site. And then when we got to a particular storeroom area and the doors were opened up, there were containers of stuff. When we asked, ‘What’s that?’, ‘That is foam’. So it was, ‘Well, didn’t you just say that there’s no foam anywhere on the site?’. So it was not that anyone was trying to conceal anything, it was just, I guess, naivety in saying, ‘There’s no foam on the site anywhere’ and then showing you a storage of foam.

**Mr TILLEY** — Do you recall yourself what colour the containers were?

**Ms SCHRODER** — No, I could not tell you.

**Mr TILLEY** — Are you aware what type of foam it may or may not have been?

**Ms SCHRODER** — I could not tell you. There was more than one type, I know that, because when we asked the question, it was ‘the different types of foam we have’. So there was more than one type, but I could not tell you what type.

**Mr TILLEY** — But were they different colour containers or the same colour?

**Ms SCHRODER** — I honestly could not tell you. I guess I was taken aback with: ‘There’s no foam on the site’; ‘Oh, this is the foam we have’.

**Mr TILLEY** — Yeah, okay. Fair enough. Please, this is not having a shot at you. I mean, you have a significant expertise in training and those things, but when you went onto the site, looking at it in a technical aspect, what you were looking at, you had a full idea of what specifically you were looking at on the site?

**Ms SCHRODER** — We had a very thorough guided tour, by John, of the site.

**Mr TILLEY** — Yes, okay. There was nothing in your mind that you were confused about or misunderstood or — —

**Ms SCHRODER** — Nothing I was confused about. There were different arrangements in place to what we had at the MFB in terms of things like the mess area and the BA cleaning area — just different processes.

**Mr TILLEY** — Which probably leads me to my next question. When we are talking about two statutory bodies that perform similar or dissimilar tasks, whichever way you look at it, one of the biggest principles with both organisations is safety. Is there anything you can provide to the committee: if the CFA are continuing to train on site and they are using the same water, is there anything special about the MFB? Are they any different when it comes to issues of safety? Do you think one statutory body will continue to train its career firefighters and volunteers and not be able to train the other?

**Ms SCHRODER** — There should not be any difference. However, I am not in a position to talk about the CFA’s views on what information they had, because we were not provided with it, so I cannot comment. They might have had more information to make their determination.

**Mr TILLEY** — Can I ask: were you present during Lex de Man?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Yes, I was.

**Mr TILLEY** — So you heard that. Is there anything that you were uncomfortable about or is there anything that they detailed that did not sit right with you?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Not that jumps out at me.

**Mr TILLEY** — They would not, to say, when they were talking about water quality. From your knowledge and your experience involved with these matters, there is nothing that is contrary to what you believe or have been informed?

**Ms SCHRODER** — The only thing all of the discussion I have heard today does for me is makes me feel very comfortable that the MFB has gone to the extent it has in having a water treatment plant that makes sure we are using potable water and that no-one will be exposed to anything other than potable water in a training environment in the future.

**Mr TILLEY** — We are talking about the visit on 18 October 2012. At what stage was VEMTC Craigieburn up to? Where was it up to at that stage?

**Ms SCHRODER** — In 2012? We completed towards the end of 2013, so I think around about that time we were turning a sod only. I would have to check that because I was not involved, but I think around that time we were just turning the soil.

**The CHAIR** — Just for the record, you said that you were taken around by John. I assume that is John Myers, just so that the transcript has the name.

**Ms SCHRODER** — Correct.

**The CHAIR** — Sorry, Bill. I just thought we should tidy that bit up.

**Ms SCHRODER** — He was introduced as ‘Turk’, but I thought ‘John’.

**Mr TILLEY** — Straight off the sheet: after training at Fiskville was suspended, where did the MFB organise to undertake its training instead? Was there any prior preparation or was it as a result of a decision that was made?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Certainly in the interim period, from June when the station officer course stopped, between June and October, when we were scheduled to go back, we certainly reviewed a number of the other training facilities: Western Australia, even New Zealand, White Island in Queensland, South Australia, and eventually we had training at the CFA Sale site and the Esso Longford site.

**Mr TILLEY** — The next question that they have got here for us is a matter of finance, and I suppose with the training and the dollar figure. They are asking: how did the cost of training compare with the cost of training at Fiskville?

**Ms SCHRODER** — I have had a look through before I came today. I spent Australia Day looking through transcripts.

**The CHAIR** — Sorry about that.

**Ms SCHRODER** — And it is difficult when you are not comparing apples with apples. What I did was had a look to be able to give the committee some more reasonable idea. If you look at a week at Fiskville for practical fire training — —

The reason I am using the fuels example is because sometimes there is accommodation, meals and all sorts of things that can inflate prices. We do not necessarily do that. So if you look at a week of training at Fiskville and all the fuels and consumables, we were charged for the last course that was there approximately \$32 000 for those fuels and consumables. An 18.8-week recruit course at VEMTC, Craigieburn, for fuels and consumables is \$34 500.

There has been lots of discussion. From a financial point of view, the MFB put into place — and because we are in the middle of a catering tendering process I will not going to specific detail — overall a process that allowed the CFA to save \$160 000 in the provision of evening meals. The price that we are charging now to the CFA for lunch meals is 40 per cent cheaper than what the MFB would have paid at Fiskville, and CFA graduations are 60 per cent cheaper at Craigieburn than they were at Fiskville.

For the only items that I can pick up and do apple for apple, I have tried to give you an understanding of the cost. In the transcripts I have read, people have said it is double and three times the cost. I think that what that is referring to is perhaps accommodation, relocation of staff and things like that that have increased the costs. So it is not about the charges that the MFB are making.

**The CHAIR** — Because they are including the accommodation at Fiskville as opposed to at Craigieburn, where people do not have accommodation?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Yes, that is right.

**The CHAIR** — So you have itemised various sections. Very good, thank you.

**Mr TILLEY** — I think that covers this little section.

**Mr RAMSAY** — I have a couple of questions, and I just want to go back to the sampling issues. The question I have is in relation to evidence from Craig Lapsley, specifically at the 20 November 2015 hearing, that from October 13 — and I will quote this, so it is on the record correctly:

We became actively involved between two fire services to ensure that the water supply was an appropriate water supply for training to continue on the site.

That is a quote from his evidence. Do you have any knowledge about the involvement of the emergency management commissioner, as he is now, or Emergency Management Victoria in relation to that role? The second part of that question is: what is your understanding of the contribution made by the commissioner in resolving the disputes between the CFA and the MFB about water quality?

**Ms SCHRODER** — So you are referring to back in October 2012, did you say, or 2015?

**Mr RAMSAY** — I am referring to evidence provided by Craig Lapsley on 20 November last year in relation to his role in discussions between the CFA and the MFB in relation to the use of Fiskville for training.

**Ms SCHRODER** — At the time I was not specifically aware that Mr Lapsley was involved in those discussions, but I later became aware that he was involved. The outcome was that they were to use mains water. That was the discussion that Craig was involved in with our ELT members and CFA ELT members.

**Mr RAMSAY** — I ask that, and you will understand why I have asked that, because we have heard evidence from Commissioner Lapsley again that he wanted Fiskville shut down in 2012. Were you aware of this view? Did he share that view with you? Given what you have said, you did not have much of a relationship with Craig Lapsley on the issues around the two fire services, so you might want to proffer a view. Did anyone at the MFB also want Fiskville shut down at that time? Certainly Craig Lapsley indicated publicly that he wanted Fiskville shut down. There is no doubt that the UFU wanted Fiskville shut down, and the relationship between the UFU and the FFB, such as it is, you would expect the MFB to also take that view. From a conspiratorial sense, any reasonable cause to shut Fiskville down would be used by those people.

**Ms SCHRODER** — Two things: with the Craig Lapsley comment, Craig is an ex-CFA employee, who would have, I imagine, trained extensively at Fiskville and would have far more knowledge than I have of what goes on up there, how it operates and what has been there in the past. So if he has that view, he is entitled to that view. In relation to MFB and discussions, the discussion was never about shutting Fiskville down. The discussion was about making Fiskville safe. Was Fiskville safe to operate? The discussions that I had were not about shutting Fiskville down. Certainly there was a lot of hysteria, and people had those views, but when we got down to it, it was about having a safe work environment for people. If Fiskville can now be remediated and provide a safe work environment and all the key stakeholders can be given evidence that it is a safe working environment, I do not see that as a problem, personally.

We have a huge need in this state for more for training facilities for our emergency services sector personnel. MFB has been overrun with requests to train at VEMTC. We have already increased our capability out there. I think it was built to house 90 staff and 130 students. It is now housing about 160 students and 110 staff, and we are operating seven days a week and running recruit courses on four on, four off to try to deal with getting as much throughput as we can. The state needs the resources. That would never have been my conversation — about shutting it. It would have been about making it safe.

**Mr RAMSAY** — I thank you for that, but I have to say that I have sat here and listened to the evidence all day, and I have heard nothing that indicates the fact that the Fiskville site is unfit for use for firefighter training. In fact all the science and experts have indicated — by all reports, from WorkSafe to Wynsafe to Cardno Piper, on and on and on — that in fact the work that was being done in remediating and improving the water

reticulation system at Fiskville was an appropriate standard to have firefighters use the facility. The only area that I am confused about is the role the UFU has played in convincing the MFB to withdraw its training at Fiskville. The fact that Mr Rau — —

**The CHAIR** — You have just heard the answer to that — —

**Mr RAMSAY** — I do not interrupt you, Chair.

**The CHAIR** — I think you often do.

**Mr RAMSAY** — Please, give me the same respect. Mr Rau has indicated that in fact there were water quality sample reports that the UFU had but were not showing to the FFB in relation to water quality. You talked about garden hoses in the second tank. As you well know, they also backfill from the first tank, so there is a quick filling process. It is not just a garden hose in a tank.

**Ms SCHRODER** — Sorry, not to that tank, they did not.

**Mr RAMSAY** — Yes, I think they do.

**Ms SCHRODER** — When we were up there they showed us. We asked the question, ‘How long would this tank take to fill?’, and the answer was, ‘How long is a piece of string?’. When we pushed it a bit further we were told it would take anything up to five days to fill the backup tank.

**Mr RAMSAY** — I am just saying that the method of filling the second tank is not purely just by a garden hose.

**Ms SCHRODER** — It was when we visited the site.

**Mr RAMSAY** — I am saying currently or up until it was closed it actually backfills from the first tank.

**Ms SCHRODER** — Okay. I appreciate what you are saying. So they have made alterations.

**Mr RAMSAY** — Obviously there are areas of perhaps some of the activity around Fiskville you are not familiar with or aware of.

**Ms SCHRODER** — Absolutely, I am sure.

**Mr RAMSAY** — Perhaps you have drawn conclusions in relation to safety at Fiskville from other sources.

**Ms SCHRODER** — Well I have never been provided with any answers to any of my questions, so I cannot draw any other conclusion at this point in time.

**Mr RAMSAY** — But all the evidence we have seen and heard has not indicated from any of the science or experts that in fact the water quality at Fiskville used for firefighting persons on the hot PAD is detrimental to their safety.

**Ms SCHRODER** — You will form whatever conclusion you form based on the evidence.

**Mr RAMSAY** — You have not shown me any evidence either.

**The CHAIR** — She was not asked to provide information on that, so that is the — —

**Ms WARD** — We have had quite a bit of conversation around the culture at the CFA and how people managed, how training was conducted. I think we have had a very good history of the CFA, and we understand that for the most part it has been run on the smell of an oily rag and people have had to be very inventive and resourceful around how they have managed things, especially up at Fiskville. We have heard comments around the frustration that people can have with bureaucracy, with filling in paperwork. We have heard about the ‘can do’ and the paramilitary culture of the CFA and an incredibly strong desire to preserve the CFA’s reputation. Have you seen evidence of this and what commentary can you make on the culture of the CFA that you have seen?

**Ms SCHRODER** — I guess my time at the training college, where we have been exposed to recruit training of the CFA people, they are very — —

**Ms WARD** — This is at Craigieburn?

**Ms SCHRODER** — At Craigieburn, VEMTC Craigieburn. We work hard to collaborate with them to make sure that we have consistent methods of training and adhere to consistent WorkSafe environments in there. I have not got anything to offer other than everything I have seen. Different approaches — they do have a different culture to us, but that is their culture and I am not here to criticise their culture. It is a different environment. They have the complexity of 60 000 volunteers to deal with. It is just a different arrangement. Not better, not worse — different.

**Mr McCURDY** — In terms of when the *Herald Sun* story broke in 2011, there was enormous publicity about it. Some say it has been sensationalised. You used the word yourself ‘hysteria’. Do you agree that in some cases it has been sensationalised?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Which one are we referring to? The December one?

**Mr McCURDY** — Yes, in December.

**Ms SCHRODER** — When I say there was a bit of hysteria, there was. People were a bit panicked about: what does this actually mean? And until we get some real answers I do not know whether that is justified or not. I have never been there, other than the two visits I have had for a graduation and for the site inspection. Until people get, at the end of this inquiry, some facts and some evidence I think there will continue to be a concern. Once they get the facts and the evidence they may feel a little bit relieved about it — I do not know.

**The CHAIR** — Can I just clarify: that is the December 2011 on the historic contamination?

**Ms SCHRODER** — That is the historic chemical — that is right.

**The CHAIR** — Because there is then the June article, which is about the water quality.

**Ms SCHRODER** — Yes. That is correct.

**The CHAIR** — I just thought I would get that clear in my mind.

**Mr McCURDY** — What is your view of the culture of the training at Fiskville, from what you have seen and what you understand?

**Ms SCHRODER** — I have not actually observed. The day I was up there, yes, there was a recruit course training for CFA, but I saw it for 15 minutes as I walked past. I have not got a view about that.

**Mr McCURDY** — What about MFB staff, those who have trained there? Is there any feedback that has come through them towards the culture and the training practices?

**Ms SCHRODER** — The feedback is that they are different to us, that they do things differently to us.

**Mr McCURDY** — Yet Commissioner Craig Lapsley — and here is a quote — said that in his opinion the CFA:

... certainly see things in a more innovative way sometimes, but by the same token MFB is a very progressive and innovative organisation. They are not miles apart; they are just slightly different in their cultures.

**Ms SCHRODER** — That is consistent with what I am saying. They are different. The MFB, quite proudly, is the leader in developing training resources — and not just to give to the CFA but to give to other fire services around the country. They are more progressive, but I am not commenting that we are better than them. They are different.

**Mr McCURDY** — We are not miles apart, as he said.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — Kirstie, just to take you back to the 2012 era, did the CFA make you aware of the ALS report into chemical sludge in dam 1?

**Ms SCHRODER** — I do not believe I have had that.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — That found that there was a range of heavy metals, including benzene and other things, that was of concern. Evidence that we have heard before the committee was Justin Justin pleading with the CFA to remediate and that there was not an investment forthcoming. Acknowledging your obligations — your being the MFB — to maintain the health and safety of employees, MFB firefighters, and the fact that you were not made aware of this report and some of those concerns, how does that sit with you in terms of the decision made to no longer send MFB firefighters to Fiskville?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Obviously we would rather have all the information available to us, but when we are concerned that we have not got all the information we erred on the side of caution and stopped our people going there to make sure we could assure ourselves that wherever we were sending them they were safe. We went and did site visits at the other sites to ensure ourselves of that level of safety.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — Given these reports that were not made available to you that conclude this, what other option was apparent for MFB other than not sending their firefighters to Fiskville?

**Ms SCHRODER** — No other option.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — Following on the drums on site, the committee received evidence that you may have had a conversation with Peter Rau where he told you of some details about buried drums at Fiskville while he was operations manager. Can you provide any information about this to the committee?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Yes. Before I came here I spoke to Peter, because those conversations were in relation to the health impacts that Peter has had from his time at Fiskville. They were confidential personal discussions, but he is happy for me to talk about them, so I will answer that question. When we were having discussions about the impact that exposure at Fiskville had had on his health, I had asked him, 'How has this happened? What has happened to you?'. He said historically there has been stuff buried there — drums of crap buried there — over many years. God knows how that impacts.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — Was there any reference to that when you visited Fiskville?

**Ms SCHRODER** — No.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — So there was no reference then to it?

**Ms SCHRODER** — When Peter was talking to me, he was talking in a historical nature that years ago people used to donate — I think he used the word 'donate' — drums of all sorts of stuff for them to burn up there. People had no idea what it was. So he was talking very much in a historical context.

**Mr TILLEY** — Just on that point, you spoke earlier on the bloods and that they were on a voluntary basis. You have also told the committee that there are probably about somewhere in the order of 100 people who have made entries on the MFB safe — —.

**Ms SCHRODER** — I think more. Hundreds, I think I said.

**Mr TILLEY** — Hundreds? Okay, I stand corrected. Of those hundreds, have any of those people voluntarily submitted their bloods for testing?

**Ms SCHRODER** — I have got no idea. The last time I looked, 83 per cent of our workforce were participating in the voluntary health monitoring process.

**Mr TILLEY** — Does the 83 per cent include blood samples for testing?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Yes. But that is the standard health monitoring program. It is not specifically related to PFOS, which I understand — —

**Mr TILLEY** — No, I am not suggesting that. I am just clarifying that we do not know what the bloods are exactly tested for.

**Ms SCHRODER** — No. But I have got that down to get back to the committee on.



**The CHAIR** — This is just a clarification because I might have misunderstood. When the CFA was going onto mains water, were you sort of saying that there was a little bit of pressure from the MFB to have that happen so that it may not have happened? That is what I am just clarifying because I might have misunderstood. Prior to the CFA going onto mains water at Fiskville, was there some pressure from the MFB to go in this direction?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Yes, there was.

**The CHAIR** — So they may not have been considering other than there was — —

**Ms SCHRODER** — They may have been considering it, but certainly the MFB pushed for that to be an outcome for them to use mains water.

**Ms WARD** — In the conversations that you have had with people, like the one with Peter, did you hear about anything else buried at Fiskville or how they managed waste?

**Ms SCHRODER** — I think it was talked about before, and it might have been John who talked about it, just that dumping of stuff down the back of the property. In fact I think there was one occasion where Peter talked to me about the removal of some asbestos. Whoever the person was, and it may have been one of the PAD operators or John, said, 'We've found some asbestos, we've removed it and taken it down the back'. Peter said, 'No, stop. You can't do that', and the conversation was about money. Peter said, 'No, we have to do this properly. We have to get the people in and remediate it properly', and the conversation was, 'That will cost a fortune'. At the end of the day I think Peter had concerns that people would not voluntarily come to him in the future with information because they thought that it was a waste of money doing it that way when you could just get rid of it.

**Ms WARD** — How was the asbestos disposed of in the end? Do you know?

**Ms SCHRODER** — From the conversation I had with Peter, they had called in a proper asbestos removal company — a contractor that cost quite a bit of money — and had it done.

**Ms WARD** — That is good.

**Mr RAMSAY** — Can I just get clarity on that? So that was a conversation you had with John Myers?

**Ms SCHRODER** — No, with Peter Rau.

**Mr RAMSAY** — John Myers was not included in that conversation?

**Ms SCHRODER** — No. I said one of the PAD operators or it might have been the PAD supervisor. I cannot be specific on that. The conversation was three or four years ago.

**Mr RAMSAY** — Was there a conversation with any CFA personnel or was it just between Peter and yourself?

**Ms SCHRODER** — No, just with Peter Rau. In fact we talked about things like, for those of us who are old enough to remember, gully traps. Everybody just put everything into the gully trap and assumed that some recycling factory at the other end of it dealt with everything. So it was a lighthearted conversation about how people are now becoming far more educated about the impacts of chemicals and what we need to do with them. In the bad old days people lay out in the sun and got sunburnt; we now have education and we put things in place to deal with it differently. So it was in that context.

**Mr RAMSAY** — I appreciate that. It is just that in previous evidence today John was talking about some of the props that were located to the tip at the back of the south-west corner there. Certainly asbestos was not mentioned.

**Ms SCHRODER** — No, but that was the conversation I had with Peter. And they did not put it down there because he stopped them.

**The CHAIR** — Was there a time era that he was talking about? Did it happen in the 1970s?

**Ms SCHRODER** — No. This particular incident was in his time as officer in charge. They came to him and said, ‘Hey, boss. This is what we’ve found and we’re doing’ and he said, ‘Stop’. So it was in his time as officer in charge.

**Ms WARD** — Did Peter ever share with you his thoughts on Fiskville and what should happen at Fiskville?

**Ms SCHRODER** — Peter’s health, and it has been documented in here, has been compromised by his time at Fiskville. On occasions he has expressed that he does not want the place to continue in that vein. But they were confidential discussions.

**The CHAIR** — Perhaps we will leave it there. Thank you so much for coming in and answering all our questions very directly.

**Committee adjourned.**