

# TRANSCRIPT

## ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into the CFA training college at Fiskville

Melbourne — 27 July 2015

#### 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

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Executive officer: Dr Greg Gardiner

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#### Witnesses

Mr Ian Ireland, lieutenant, and  
Mr Ben Hatfield, Ballan Fire Brigade.

**Necessary corrections to be notified to  
executive officer of committee**

**The CHAIR** — On behalf of all members of the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee, I would like to welcome all who are attending today and thank you for your participation. Before calling our first witnesses, I would like to briefly report on the work of the committee since the last hearings in Melbourne and the publication of the interim report. Since this time we have engaged a paralegal firm guided by consultant barrister Mr Peter Rozen and secretariat solicitor, Mr John Aliferis, to comprehensively and forensically go through documents released under the discovery process and subpoenas that we have been required to issue from various authorities and government departments. This is a long and arduous process, but it is but vitally necessary to ensure that we have all the evidence and all the documents to do the job that is required under our terms of reference. In addition, we have heard evidence from Mr Robert Joy in Tasmania, and a subcommittee of the committee travelled to Sydney to hear expert evidence regarding PFOS and other toxins and chemicals that may have been used at Fiskville.

Following media reports, in particular in the *Weekly Times*, we have received more submissions from more individuals who have been affected by the training and operations at Fiskville. Those submissions will be considered at future committee meetings. We are very aware of the interest in this inquiry and its importance to so many people who have had contact with the Fiskville training college. I further advise that the Andrews state government has advised that it will support and commit the resources necessary for us to do this job absolutely properly. We will continue to provide updates via press releases through the parliamentary website, and members of the public are most welcome to continue to be in contact with the secretariat if they have any concerns or queries. Thank you again for attending.

I call the first two witnesses from the Ballan Fire Brigade — Mr Ian Ireland and Mr Ben Hatfield. Before we go into introductions, I will go through the formal part that I have to read out. On behalf of the committee, I welcome Mr Ian Ireland and Mr Ben Hatfield from the Ballan Fire Brigade. All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the Constitution Act 1975 and the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 and is protected from judicial review. Any comments made outside the precinct of the hearings are not protected by parliamentary privilege. All evidence given today is being recorded, and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to go over.

Following your presentation to us, committee members will ask questions relating to both your submission and the evidence that you provide to us today. Committee members will introduce themselves, and after that perhaps you could give a brief history of yourselves and then we will go into the actual information.

**Mr IRELAND** — I am Ian Ireland, lieutenant of the Ballan Fire Brigade. I have been in the CFA since 1986 and also hold roles in the group as well.

**Mr HATFIELD** — Ben Hatfield, also a member of the Ballan Fire Brigade. I have been a member since 1999, formerly a lieutenant. I am still an active member.

**The CHAIR** — We have got your submission and we have read through that. Would you like give a presentation first before we go into questions?

**Mr IRELAND** — We certainly would. On behalf of the Ballan Fire Brigade, we would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to present at this inquiry today. With all the attention that surrounds Fiskville, we see two very distinct sets of issues that seem to be regularly blended into one. These two issues are the practices, or rather the historical practices, that occurred at Fiskville and the recent closure of Fiskville due to PFOS.

Historical practices at Fiskville — safety. We as a brigade put safety at the forefront of everything we do. If anything happens to the contrary, we are the first to speak up and say so. As stated in our submission, any exercise or event our brigade was involved in at Fiskville was run with the utmost consideration for the safety of the students. Instructors, PAD operators and Fiskville staff were always conscious of providing the safest working environments. However, we believe that if any trainees, instructors, staff, residents or visitors have incurred injury, illness or suffering from practices that were undertaken at Fiskville, then

those persons and their families should be entitled to the support and compensation that is appropriate to the individual's circumstances. We also believe that if any negligence is found, then organisational leadership should be held accountable.

Presumptive legislation. We, along with the VFBV and the UFU, implore the government to consider the implementation of presumptive legislation so that firefighters who have work-related illnesses can gain access to compensation that they may be entitled to.

I would like to talk now about the water supply to Fiskville. One item that has been discussed a number of times during the inquiry is the reticulated water supply to Fiskville. We would like to address this point using local knowledge. Prior to the CFA ownership of the site, the cottages and buildings were supplied by tank water only. In the late 1960s a private main was established jointly by Yallock estate and the CFA to provide water to the two properties from Ballan. The Shire of Ballan Water Trust took over management of this main in the 1980s. In May 1994 the Ballan water trust was dissolved and the assets transferred to Central Highlands Water. In 2000 a new supply pipeline was constructed from Lal Lal Reservoir to Ballan to improve the quality of water. Until the Lal Lal pipeline was constructed, Ballan was supplied from the local Colebrook reservoir. The water supplied from Colebrook was of very poor quality. It was brown, brackish and had a stringent smell. This water could not be used for washing without staining clothes. Residents in Ballan used tank water for drinking because of the poor quality of the water. This is the same water that was used in the residential accommodation and the cottages at Fiskville.

**Mr HATFIELD** — The recent closure of Fiskville. The most disturbing issue in regard to the closure of Fiskville is the complete lack of transparency in regard to why the facility was closed. We would like to highlight the following. It is still unclear who made the decision to close the facility, be it the state government or the CFA board. There has been no consistency in the reporting of where the higher PFOS levels are. For example, initially PFOS was reported to be in the drinking water, then PFOS was reported not to be in the drinking water, then PFOS was reported to be concentrated around the PAD and the hangar area. The initial reports of PFOS in the drinking water have created great levels of uncertainty and anxiety within our local community as that is the same source of water that our town drinks from.

The PFOS sampling test report from 3 March that caused the temporary closure and the sampling report from 26 March that caused the permanent closure have still not been released to the public, some four months later. It appears that no risk assessment or analysis has been conducted based on the water sampling results received on either 3 March or 26 March in regard to the areas affected or the activities that occurred in those areas. No formal investigation has been initiated into the source of PFOS or why these areas were missed in previous testing.

It appears the CFA has not undertaken a cost-benefit analysis that would cover, at a minimum, the budget costs to close Fiskville; the budget costs to close part of Fiskville and use part of Fiskville, supported by other facilities such as Craigieburn and the regional training grounds; the budget costs to condemn the existing PAD and build a new PAD; the budget costs to remediate the existing PAD; the budget costs to build a new training college; and what CFA budgets will be cut to address the above options. There also seems to be no analysis that shows the closure of Fiskville as being the most economic option. Prior to the closure, during the temporary closure period, there was no initiation of a transition plan for the current Fiskville staff. There was also no initiation to plan the transfer of operational training to other facilities.

It is reasonable to expect a responsible management team or the board to consider the following issues: the overdemand on other training facilities once Fiskville is closed; the impact on the progression and development of career staff given the number of courses scheduled at Fiskville at the time and the effect that the closure would have on proposed future recruit courses; the effect the closure of Fiskville would have on already stretched and under resourced district training departments; the effect on volunteers from a cost, time and health and safety perspective due to increased travel to regional training grounds; the short and long-term risks the closure of Fiskville would have on the culture, standard and quality of training for both career staff and volunteers, and the flow-on risks this may have to the communities CFA serves; and what consideration was given to the Fallen Firefighters Memorial?

Finally, why was the decision made in such a short time frame? Fiskville was already closed, all personnel were offsite. There was no risk to anyone being on site. Would it not be responsible of a board to initiate some of the previously mentioned points before announcing the closure? Further to this, why was this decision made when this inquiry was already announced to commence, effectively limiting the impact of possible recommendations this inquiry can make?

**Mr IRELAND** — Community impact. The closure has caused anxiety, hurt and frustration in the local community and across the Western District, particularly due to the issues of transparency, due diligence and governance mentioned above. The following are some examples of the issues facing our community post closure.

**Employment.** It is our understanding that 60-plus families from our local area will not have any work after the end of September. Some of these are husbands and wives. Ballan has a very small scope for employment. Fiskville spent approximately \$250 000 on the local traders in the previous 12 months. Local tradespersons provide many services to Fiskville, not limited to cabinet-makers, glaziers, plumbers, painters and electricians — and all these people are sole traders.

**Contamination and health concerns.** We as a brigade take great interest in the health and wellbeing of those in the community. We have been seeing much anxiety caused due to the issues surrounding Fiskville. The work and the outcomes undertaken by the Joy report indicate that in most cases the exposure to harmful occurrences due to the current arrangements at Fiskville was low. This helped to relieve the anxiety within the community. However, the recent closure and the events leading up to the closure have sparked anxiety, fear and uncertainty in the community again. This is not being helped by front-page stories equating Fiskville as a toxic dump.

People who own properties adjoining Fiskville and those in the Fiskville region are left in a state of uncertainty and concern. The name 'Fiskville' is a locality, not just the name of a training ground. Unfortunately these properties now are labelled with the same issues. The inquiry's interim report and recommendation has not helped this address this issue as now local farming communities are concerned about their own livestock being unsaleable, not just those of the properties adjoining Fiskville.

We implore this committee and the state government to as soon as possible implement a testing, monitoring, support and communications structure that provides access for residents to get the appropriate advice about their own health, the health of their stock and the condition of their land, without just making statements about it. We would also like to echo the VFBV statement: the subject matter experts, like Dr Roger Drew, need to be engaged to provide proper advice on the exposure levels and the risk that this advice is communicated to in our local community.

**Mr HATFIELD** — Impacts on training. There have been a lot of statements made in this inquiry about the negatives of training at Fiskville. We would like to provide some insight on what we have gained from our experiences there. As a volunteer firefighter, training is often restricted because of lack of resources and the availability of volunteers with more experience to guide and educate. Volunteers are expected to respond to the same types of incidents and emergencies as their career colleagues but the opportunity to train in a controlled hot fire environment is rare and has become almost non-existent for our brigade since the closure. Fiskville provided the opportunity for intensive training with all manner of incidents and scenarios, from structure and vehicle fires to road accident rescue and everything in between. Training simply cannot be done like this at a brigade level.

Firefighters were taught properly by very experienced instructors about how to best use equipment on their vehicles, how to respect fire and what it can do, the importance of teamwork and your role within that team. As you progressed in knowledge and skill, Fiskville allowed you to take on challenges and roles that you may not have access to in your brigade at the time; roles such as a crew leader and incident controller or operating specialist equipment. These learning opportunities and challenges are invaluable as they help inspire confidence to step up into these roles when required.

Fiskville allowed the opportunity to make mistakes in a controlled environment with clear and constructive feedback from experienced instructors. This type of experience cannot be taught. Fiskville facilitated the bringing together of different brigades and groups to share ideas, methods and equipment. Fiskville's strength is in the scenario-based training which gives rise to leadership, communication, information sharing and specialist skills that produces highly proficient firefighters, both career and volunteer.

The closure of Fiskville has caused a large upheaval within our brigade, our group and our district in regard to training. Recently members of our brigade, who volunteer their time around their own family time and work commitments, undertook a breathing apparatus course where the formal practical exam was to be held at Fiskville. After the closure, this exam was moved to Longerenong, just outside of Horsham. For our members this equated to a 2½-hour drive to Longerenong, 6 hours training and then a 2½-hour drive home — an 11-hour day for 6 hours training on a weekend.

Fiskville provided a number of specialist training opportunities, such as road accident rescue and fire investigation, that were only performed at Fiskville and still require a facility to be undertaken at now. As a road accident rescue brigade, we recently inquired of Minister Garrett about where we can undertake this specialist training now Fiskville is closed. In response Ms Garrett stated that, 'You should conduct this training on private property or at the station'. Where is the safety aspect of this statement in regard to our members?

**Mr IRELAND** — Remediation and reopening. We believe that Fiskville can be remediated and opened. From all reports, the accommodation, dining areas and teaching centre are all free from contamination. The main area of concern is the PAD. A new PAD could be built on another part of the 300-acre site. Done correctly, this would eliminate the water issues and create a decent buffer between neighbouring properties and the hot fire zones. This will allow classroom-based training to occur, which would be far more cost-effective than purchasing another property and building a new facility, which the CFA seems intent on doing. Regardless of whether Fiskville is opened or closed, this site must be remediated. We have taken up in our town of about 3000 people a petition supporting the opening of Fiskville. Currently we have 1750 signatures.

The new facility. The CFA has stated that Fiskville is closed and that it will build a new training ground in the Ballan area, and this was echoed by the emergency services commissioner, Craig Lapsley. The CFA has also informed the brigade that this new facility will have no accommodation, no specialist training, will not be a college as Fiskville is and that at best we will be looking at two to five years away. Provided the scene we have set with Fiskville, will neighbours want a training ground built next to them? Given these current restrictions, this new facility will provide limited employment for our local community, and at this stage it is uncertain it will provide the necessary resources to fix the training shortage caused by the Fiskville closure. Why are the CFA and the government intent on wasting taxpayers money when Fiskville could be fixed? Thank you.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you. I do not think anyone is happy that Fiskville is closed. I know we have heard a lot of evidence about the culture and the actual training that was provided. It is a very important foundation of the CFA. In light of the evidence that is coming out around, for example, the Lloyd farm and surrounding places, do you still see that there is a risk in terms of people's health and safety in working at Fiskville or training at Fiskville now? I am just not sure. Have you changed? Is it because there is not enough evidence or you have not been given enough information? What is your view? Has your view changed at all about Fiskville and its safety aspects?

**Mr IRELAND** — No. If you look at the local farmers or the farmers who have attended the inquiry, one of those farmers used Fiskville up until three weeks prior to this inquiry starting, running stock on it. How concerned was he then?

**The CHAIR** — It is not about the individuals concerned but the actual facts in terms of the amount of PFOS in their blood, in their livestock.

**Mr IRELAND** — Where is the PFOS?

**The CHAIR** — Okay.

**Mr HATFIELD** — I think in regard to your question — —

**The CHAIR** — I am not trying to argue. I am just sort of trying to get my head around where you get your view from.

**Mr IRELAND** — If we look at initial reports that were put out by Minister Garrett, it was closed because of PFOS in the drinking water, but then it was moved from there because that affected the town, because the town was on the same main that filled that tank. That caused more anxiety. Then it was said to be outside the tank, and then on the final submissions it was supposed to be in the hangar. We believe that the highest readings are not in any of those areas.

**Mr HATFIELD** — To address your question, from our point of view, like I said, safety is at the forefront of what we do. We do not want anyone in our community, from the Lloyds, whoever, to be exposed to anything that is dangerous or unsafe. The issue that our community has is that we have had a whole heap of experts come in initially through the Joy report and, as we stated, say that exposure and risk is low. We have been told from experts in one stage that we are safe, and then we are told now in regard to what is happening around the closure that we are unsafe. What we want is someone who knows what they are talking about to come in and tell us are we safe, are we not safe. Yes, we may have levels of PFOS in our blood, but is that level dangerous? Can someone come in and tell us what the actual real story is? The longer that this uncertainty stays on and the longer that we are not told how this is actually affecting us, that is where the uncertainty and anxiety come from. There are heaps of people who tell us that PFOS is bad, but then we have experts who are telling us it is not. That is the trouble that our community has.

**The CHAIR** — A lack of information about it and, as you say, the transparency.

**Mr IRELAND** — The inquiry panel refers to the Australian Defence Force in its interim report and the army aviation base at Oakleigh being a source of PFOS contamination. The army has suggested that locals refrain from drinking bore water. However, in August 2014, the community update, the army also indicated that the bore water can still be used for irrigating crops and can still be used for watering livestock and that there is limited information on possible health effects of PFOS and PFOA on humans. So whichever way you look at it, we are looking at different issues but we are not getting the same answer. Here is the army saying they have got that problem in Oakleigh in Australia but they do not consider it to be of concern. Yet we are closing a whole facility because of this, but no-one has laid out on the table what the readings are, where they are and how bad they are. And can a new PAD be built and use all those facilities and create employment again in the town?

**The CHAIR** — Hopefully we will get to the bottom of that through this inquiry, but it does not happen straightaway, which I understand is a frustration. Because you have come up with some sort of solutions in a way to some of this stuff, I will take the opportunity. You were talking about the memorial which is at Fiskville. If, for example, Fiskville does not reopen or cannot be used because of health and safety, what can be done about that? Of course that is a very important memorial, and it needs to be sorted out. Have you got any ideas about what you think should happen?

**Mr IRELAND** — No, I have no ideas, but I guess if the gardens around the shrine became infected, would you move the shrine?

**The CHAIR** — So would you prefer to leave it there?

**Mr IRELAND** — I would prefer it to stay there. Fiskville for years has been the heart and soul of the volunteers as well as career staff. It has provided a home. If you take that away, there is no home anymore.

**The CHAIR** — Just another quick question, and then I will let somebody else have a go. I suppose you are aware of the articles that have been in the *Weekly Times* and this issue about how much of a study or how much support has been provided by the CFA to actual volunteers as opposed to paid staff. Do you have a view on that? I am assuming you are both volunteers.

**Mr IRELAND** — Yes.

**Mr HATFIELD** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — Just in terms of the health surveys and the information and support around those things, people's concerns?

**Mr IRELAND** — I have been going out to Fiskville for approximately the last 10 years, every recruit course for a training day, taking out a vehicle and being involved with the recruits, and at no stage have I ever considered my own health to be at risk. My children played at Fiskville. Their friends went to primary school and they played there. They are not concerned. You can make the area of concern whatever you want to be, but the combination of the cancer and the PFOS and bringing them together and using that as an element or a tool to close something is very unfair. We cannot talk about the historical past. What has happened has happened. Let us look forward and move on and fix the problem. That is the way we should go.

**The CHAIR** — I was asking not so much about the closure of Fiskville but more about the CFA as an organisation, its support for volunteers in all of this. If people are concerned and they want to get some health checks or whatever, what is the feedback you have been getting from other volunteers?

**Mr HATFIELD** — I think in regard to that point we believe that there are a number of people who have concerns about what exposure they may have had to Fiskville, whether they be volunteers, residents or visitors. We would like to see maybe that program expanded to anyone, especially those in the local community and members of the CFA, be they volunteer or career, who may want some extra checking, to be part of the monitoring program that is currently in place. I think that would help to alleviate a lot of the fear and, like I say, the anxiety that is out there.

**Mr YOUNG** — It says in the submission:

We also hope that justice is brought against the organisational leadership should any negligence be found.

I just want to clarify 'organisational leadership'. Are you talking about the staff at Fiskville or the CFA as an organisation?

**Mr HATFIELD** — CFA management.

**Mr YOUNG** — In your opinion, is there any negligence on their part, and what do you think are examples of that?

**Mr HATFIELD** — Like we say in the submission, and like we said in our presentation, we have not been witness to any negligence or any systematic health and safety failures or management failures. I guess that is up to you guys as a committee. If you find something in that regard, then we would like to see that process followed.

**Mr YOUNG** — It is also pretty obvious that you guys consider the Fiskville training centre very important and that without it it is going to be hard for the CFA to deliver the training they need to. It has been said before that if it was to reopen, it would have a tarnished reputation and that would affect new volunteers coming there. How does the Ballan brigade consider that reputation to be tarnished, and what are your thoughts on that?

**Mr HATFIELD** — There has been a lot of talk about, I guess, the Fiskville brand. While Fiskville has served external clients before, the main purpose of Fiskville is to train CFA volunteers, so the brand argument to me is out the window. But I would like to also echo again the statement of the VFBV that if we have got subject matter experts in there who review the site — review the condition of the site and what is done out there and have that information peer reviewed — and these experts say it is all clear, then who can argue with that? I think that gives confidence or would give confidence back for volunteers and career staff to go back and train there. Our brigade has had feedback from surrounding brigades and brigades all over the state saying, 'We want it reopened. We want to train there', and not just them but

other clients of Fiskville that have been there and now have nowhere else to go to train. There is still a desire to train at Fiskville despite all the negative sentiment that is around it.

**Mr IRELAND** — Fiskville will never disappear because it is in the postcode book. It is always going to be there.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — Thanks, Ian and Ben, for coming in. I just have a few questions, firstly relating to the reference to the Lloyds. The evidence tendered before this committee is that the exposure to PFOS was 3000 per cent greater than what is acceptable in the Lloyds' children and in the Lloyds themselves. Does that create any concern? Given that they are not on the PAD and the talk about a second PAD being built at Fiskville, what sort of confidence does the brigade have, and more broadly the community, that Fiskville can be deemed safe, given those levels of PFOS in people's bodies?

**Mr IRELAND** — Provided the correct work is done and the proper testing is done and it comes up within the levels that it should be, then there is no reason why you cannot use it. We have said that if people are ill from it, then they should be compensated, or whatever the case may be. I am not saying that what they are saying is not true. But again, there is no proof of the PFOS levels that we have received or anyone has received in the public to ascertain in our own minds what the levels are. It is all a scenario based on cloak and dagger stuff: 'We'll keep that locked up and won't tell anyone about it and let everyone be concerned about it'. But as far as an organisation, or as far as I am concerned, we have been out there for a couple of training nights where we have integrated into recruits training. We got wet, got dirty and things like that. There is not one member in our brigade who has ever fallen ill from it, and there is not one member in our brigade who will not put up their hand to go out there again.

**Mr HATFIELD** — In regard to the Lloyds, they are members of the community. Matt is a mate of mine. We do not want to see them or anyone else exposed to anything that is harmful. That situation needs to be rectified as best it can. On the other hand, in our brigade and in our community we have a number of members who are classified by the Joy report in the high-risk group. A number of these members have been exposed to the environment at Fiskville for 20 or 30 years plus, every day, working around there, and their serum levels are acceptable. Whatever is happening around the Lloyds' farm or on that boundary definitely needs to be fixed, but on the other side as well there are people who have been working out there for years who are okay from it. This is where we have the imbalance: there are issues over here but not over here. The consistency seems to be all over the place.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — Going to when Brian Potter first brought this to a head in 2011, what communication subsequent to that has the CFA had with the Ballan brigade about training at Fiskville, since those concerns were raised in 2011, through 2012 and 2013? That is part one of the question. Secondly, what is your understanding of some of the remediation works that have been done from that point up until now?

**Mr IRELAND** — I am aware of stage 1 of the remediation that has been completed, which was the cleansing of some soil. Around the lake has been revegetated. That is evident in the amount of frogs and birds and things that are now coming back to Fiskville. It is an indication that that eco environment is going strong. We know this from one of our members who did a lot of work out there, who was a contractor for the CFA and did a lot of the vegetation. We know the amount of work that has been done there. But as far as we are concerned, I believe that there were some piles of dirt that were moved. They created some concern with one of the neighbouring farmers and this soil was moved. This seems to happen with the CFA: 'We'll keep the peace, we'll just move it. Don't say, "Look, there's nothing wrong with it"'. My understanding is that those piles of dirt are not a risk to anyone now, so why move them? We moved them because we are keeping the peace. That is something which is the CFA. We try and keep things on a level keel and keep everyone happy.

**Mr HATFIELD** — To answer part one of your question, I think — correct me if I am wrong, Ian — we were not informed any differently to any other brigade in regard to what was happening, what the CFA was doing in regard to when the issues around Fiskville first broke. It would have been through email and general bulletins that we were informed.



**Mr IRELAND** — But we do see the Brian Potter issue as being separate to the current closure.

**Mr RICHARDSON** — Just getting to the final part of my question before I give other people ago, the Joy report in its opening statement is adamant that it is not a health study. It makes some references in chapter 7 about health, but then it relies further on a health study. Have you been able to go through the Monash report which followed that, and is that still an ongoing concern to members? I know that the volunteer association is talking about presumptive legislation and how that applies broadly. Has your brigade been able to go through that and digest some of those findings?

**Mr HATFIELD** — Yes. In regard to the Monash report, it is a good report, but it mentions, itself, how limited it is in regards to its study. Also a lot of its findings are in regard to the greater study that it did, I think for AFSM, in regard to a nationwide firefighter study. I think to get some real depth, and this probably links back to Bronwyn's question before, maybe those sample groups need to be expanded, and maybe some more conclusive findings will come out of that work, which will allow better actions to occur.

**Ms WARD** — Thank you for coming to see us today. I really appreciate it and I appreciate the thought and the work that you have obviously put into your preparation today, which is great. Thank you very much.

You spoke about the Joy report, and we have heard quite a bit about the culture at the CFA in the period that the Joy report covers — which finishes in 1999. One of the things that we heard about was how people were discouraged from making complaints or that there was a can-do culture where people just got on with the job. What are your thoughts on the organisational culture of the CFA, and what changes have you seen since 1999 in terms of how the culture has evolved and changed?

**Mr IRELAND** — To us as a brigade, or to me as a person, from 1986 until now, other than the normal changes with progression or moving away, I do not see any changes in the culture. I have never come across a culture that has been vindictive towards me or bullying or anything like that.

**Ms WARD** — This is what you are experiencing?

**Mr IRELAND** — Yes, that is right. As I said, I have been out there for the last 10 years, seeing the recruit courses. My involvement with the recruit courses has been fine. I have not even seen any forms of bullying — in fact it has been more on a helpful basis.

**Ms WARD** — And your experience, Ben?

**Mr HATFIELD** — The CFA in general has a very can-do attitude. I think one of the strengths of the CFA is that when something happens, we get in and get it done. That is what happens when we have major bushfires. We see people from all over the state get in and get the job done. In regard to the culture around Fiskville, for our brigade and for our community, it has always been a supportive one. Fiskville has always welcomed us, and likewise, we have always supported them when we need to.

**Ms WARD** — How has the workplace culture been, though? That is a social component, and it is great to hear that it has been that supportive. But how was the workplace culture when you were at Fiskville and in terms of the evolution of occupational health and safety guidelines and how that has been adopted and how people have worked through issues and addressed concerns?

**Mr HATFIELD** — In regard to the occupational health and safety culture, I have always found it to be good, if not excellent, at Fiskville. I have worked in a dangerous industry in regard to high-voltage power, and a lot of the things that have been implemented in that industry over the same time period were in place at Fiskville beforehand.

**Ms WARD** — Were you surprised that the Joy report finished in 1999?

**Mr HATFIELD** — In regard to the set-up of the Joy report, we had no real influence or input into when it actually started and when it actually finished. I think Rob Joy said that that was when the PAD changed, and obviously it did, so it made sense, but we had no influence over it.

**Ms WARD** — No, I understand that you had no input, but I am interested in your own view on whether you think that 1999 should have been the date for that report to conclude or whether it would have had greater benefit for it to go on into more modern times.

**Mr HATFIELD** — I do not really have an opinion on it. I think the practices that I have seen from that period, which is from 1999 onwards — like we said, we have never had an issue out there.

**Ms WARD** — Okay. I observed in what you were saying, that it is good to recognise the history of the place and what has happened but that we need to move forward. Do you think that we have got, with the Joy report, an accurate understanding of everything that has gone on from, say, the mid-2000s to 1999, to talk about the practices that have gone on and the kind of things that were happening on the site as well that give us an understanding of the kind of pollution that may have occurred on the site?

**Mr HATFIELD** — I know there has been a lot of talk in this inquiry about that end date of 1999. If there seems to be such concern in this inquiry that a big chunk has been missed between 1999 and the present day, maybe the Joy report needs to be expanded in that area. From our point of view, they had to pick a date, and that was the date.

**Ms WARD** — But more information could be helpful, you think?

**Mr HATFIELD** — Like we said, more information is always going to be helpful.

**Mr IRELAND** — You can look at changes that have been made and use PPC as a typical example. We have gone from overalls to turnout coats to today's — the evolution has changed and moved forward, and it has all happened since those dates. As I said, like Ben, I guess with anything you have to pick a date. When that eventuated, that date was picked because they were looking, obviously, at the time at the historical values of the Potter report and Brian's influence at the time.

**The CHAIR** — As you were saying earlier in your presentation there are two parts: there is the exposure to the chemicals and the substances that were burnt; then the more recent issue we hear about is the contamination of water. When you are talking about health and safety practices, one of the things we heard was that the problem at Fiskville was lack of proper treatment of the water and therefore exposure of firefighters and trainees to the contaminated water. You have probably been to Bangholme, but I know they had a very different, more stringent set-up to try to keep the water from being contaminated.

Then of course there is Craigieburn, which actually has a water treatment plant, which we understand cost about \$700 000. What is your view, because it just seems a bit odd with all of the money that was put into Fiskville that they would not have put in a water treatment plant, for example, to ensure that the exposure to contaminated water does not happen?

**Mr IRELAND** — I personally do not disagree that there has been infrastructure lacking in that area. But if you are looking at Craigieburn, we are talking about a facility that has only been open for a couple of years.

**The CHAIR** — I am talking more about Bangholme.

**Mr IRELAND** — Then if you look at Bangholme, and I do not know how long it has been opened — possibly 15 years, maybe — but it is in a shorter time frame. If you are looking at Fiskville, which has been operating since 1970, sure, if we want to be critical, we can be critical of the CFA for not upgrading the equipment, but is that where the problem lies?

If we look at PFOS or AFFF foam, it has not been used out there since 2007. I also ponder it with you. If that is the case, and we are concerned about the PFOS levels there, what about every other fire brigade in

Victoria in the rural area? We all use light water in our trucks. Is it possible that a big percentage of those fire stations and those vehicles, some of which are old because they have been on the road for up to 20 years, could not be contaminated? Is it possible that our fire station is not contaminated? How far do you go? How far do you look? We can be critical about that, but are we going to go out now and check every fire station in Victoria to make sure it is safe and test PFOS levels on it?

**The CHAIR** — We had the recommendation that people should be able to get themselves tested, and I guess from there it goes.

**Mr HATFIELD** — I think especially with technology, technology evolves reasonably rapidly. As with most firefighting practices, Fiskville evolved pretty quickly with that as well. The water issue has been around for a while, as you guys have seen in this inquiry, and there have probably been a number of options that could have gone in early enough to fix those issues and solve the problems. I believe that it probably should have happened earlier and probably some of those options should have been a priority.

**The CHAIR** — In regard to the serum test that you were talking about, were any of those people volunteers, or was it only people who had been employed by the CFA who were able to get those tests; do you know? I do not know; that is why I am asking.

**Mr HATFIELD** — They are CFA employees, but they are also volunteers, as in not career staff but employees of the CFA.

**The CHAIR** — Volunteers have had serum tests as well?

**Mr HATFIELD** — No, I think it was only the CFA staff.

**The CHAIR** — It is an area of confusion for us; that is all. Thank you.

**Mr HATFIELD** — I think under those terms it was PAD operators and full-time instructors in that high-risk group.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much for coming today. As I think Vicki said, you have put in a lot of work and effort, and we really appreciate the information you have provided. Thank you for answering all our questions openly.

**Mr IRELAND** — It is a pleasure.

**Witnesses withdrew.**