

TRANSCRIPT

ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the CFA training college at Fiskville

Melbourne — 6 November 2015

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Witness

Mr Brian Whittaker.

The CHAIR — Good morning to Mr Brian Whittaker, who is currently commander of leadership and development at operational training with the MFB. But you are here, I understand, as an individual in your own capacity?

Mr WHITTAKER — Correct.

The CHAIR — You also were the former commander of the Hazmat scientific unit at the MFB.

I will just quickly go through some of the official bits to start. First of all, just to confirm that the procedure for today is that you have up to 15 minutes to provide a presentation to us, and then we would like to ask you a number of questions, based on both the submission that you provided to the committee, as well as what you are saying today.

As outlined in the guide provided to you 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 it attracts parliamentary privilege. Any comments you make outside the hearing will not be afforded that privilege. It is an act of contempt of Parliament to provide false or misleading evidence to the inquiry, and we may ask you to come back as a witness if we think there is further information that you could provide to us, if that is okay. All evidence today is being recorded, and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript prior to its publication to check for accuracy.

Just for the record, could you say your name, your title and any background in terms of the Fiskville training college?

Mr WHITTAKER — Brian Whittaker. I am the commander, operational training, leadership and development, with the MFB. I have been with the MFB for 30 years now. Previous to being commander, operational training, I was with the Hazmat unit for approximately eight years. Fiskville training college — I have been there several times for training over my career.

The CHAIR — Do you have a presentation or would you like us to — —

Mr WHITTAKER — I know I have presented to some of the committee out at Craigieburn, but probably in response to questions that have been forwarded to me from the committee, I have made amendments to that presentation. So if you do not mind, I will go through that, just to answer those questions.

The CHAIR — Fine.

Visual presentation.

Mr WHITTAKER — Firstly, one of the questions asked was about the establishment of the Hazmat unit of the MFB. In 2006 I did a review into the MFB's Hazmat response capability, and I produced a strategic report that really focused on the safety, health and wellbeing of MFB firefighters, other emergency service staff, the community and the environment. That report was accepted by senior management of the MFB, and we established the Hazmat unit within the emergency management department. The real reason for that is that during the 2000s it was really acknowledged that the increased use of dangerous goods within the community was certainly increasing as we went. Also Hazmat had evolved, or the Hazmat response had evolved, because significant advancements in technology were of great assistance to firefighters in understanding and dealing with Hazmat incidents on a much better level than we had previously. That was the start of the Hazmat unit, probably around 2006–07.

I was asked to discuss with the committee and provide a statement in regard to the workplace of firefighters — their common workplace. It is an uncontrolled environment, and they are subjected to many hazards: explosion, fire, structural collapse, so on and so on. One of the major hazards for firefighters is their exposure to toxic chemicals: either gas, vapour or particulate material. There have been many studies around the world as to what that smoke consists of. The products of combustion — they are carcinogenic, they are toxic. There are many different incapacitations — systemic toxicity.

Fire services around the world do focus on safety controls for firefighters — how do we protect the firefighters who are protecting the community and the assets? But in this profession sometimes you cannot eliminate those hazards, purely because of the nature of the job involved. I heard that in the previous session. Firefighters are

responding to an emergency. We cannot just let the fire keep going. Sometimes we probably might not even control that fire, though. The expectation from the community is that firefighters will do something — firefighters will enter the building that is on fire; ensure people have been removed from the building, rescued from the building; and try and minimise the damage of the fire. That is what is expected from the community.

The products of combustion — again, I heard about them just previously. There have been many studies around the world. One that we focused on at the MFB a lot was a study from the UK, the Health Protection Agency, on what those products of combustion were: what is in that fire smoke? They are the PAHs that we heard of previously: the benzenes and the formaldehyde, and then there is the carbon monoxide and the hydrogen cyanide. So they are quite toxic materials, and some known carcinogens. These are probably the hazards we are truly trying to address in how we attend fire and how we protect our firefighters. That smoke will come from almost any fire and most fires that we attend. It is the materials: the building materials, the materials used in car manufacturing — it is just common products.

Can we go to the next slide? This is simply a table from that study from the UK. I would like to draw your attention, without looking at it too deeply, to the PAHs. They are likely to be present in high concentrations in fires involving plastics, timber, rubber, fossil fuels. The particulate matter has very high concentrations in all fires. That particulate matter is suspended in the smoke: the formaldehyde, the acrolein, so on and so on. Please understand that these are in high, if not very high, concentrations in most fires. Look at that first column: it is the plastics, it is the timbers, it is the fossil fuels and the rubber and the tires, and it is the synthetics.

Firefighters really do attempt to eliminate the hazards we are confronted with. We have engineering controls and equipment that we use, administrative controls in regard to procedures and policies on how we do things, and personal protective clothing and equipment. That is probably the key protection for firefighters.

Without going into too much depth, there are different types of PPC and PPE that firefighters will select for whatever incident or fire they are going to. That is probably the issue: selectivity for PPC. What is fit for purpose for the incident or fire that we go to? What we deem to be a level A fully encapsulating gas-type suit provides fantastic protection from almost any chemical that we can be exposed to. We are very well protected in that level of protection. However, it is very unsuitable for firefighting. It is extremely unsuitable for many reasons, offering minimal protection from the fire itself, from heat. Also the metabolic heat build-up in the firefighter would certainly not be very good for the health of the firefighters themselves.

The next slide is the structural firefighting ensemble. There have been great advances in the past 10 to 20 years, significant advances in the protection from heat and from flame. But the design of that is also a hazard to firefighters because of the chemicals they will actually be exposed to because that ensemble is designed to breathe. Again, my body heat can cool down whilst I am firefighting, otherwise we will have real heat stress issues with firefighters due to heat exhaustion. It is the breathability of that ensemble that will expose firefighters to those toxic chemicals in the products of the combustion.

The exposure comes several different ways. The primary exposure is for firefighters going into a fire and fighting the fire. They will be completely consumed by the smoke. That smoke will penetrate and permeate the ensemble, get to the skin and possibly be absorbed through the skin into the body. The breathing apparatus that firefighters wear is fantastic, with excellent protection for the respiratory system of the firefighter. They are not going to get contamination from inhalation. It is the firefighter's direct contact with those products of combustion — and I say smoke and firefighting water.

If those who were at Craigieburn remember, I did a demonstration by putting some powder into the air. It is particulate matter and it is suspended in the air. I can inhale that if I am not wearing a breathing apparatus. That will go into my suit and be absorbed through it. When we spray water around to extinguish the fire that will trap the particulate matter and the chemicals and bring them to ground. That water will also get onto my uniform, my firefighting ensemble. Again, it will seep through and penetrate down to my skin. It also contaminates the water that I am using to fight the fire. It is where that water goes.

The secondary exposure is post-fire. Post-fire, firefighters will clean up. In the past few years we have really gone to a huge effort to make sure that on-scene firefighters uniforms will be taken off, packaged up and taken back to the station separately for cleaning and decontamination. It is that secondary

contamination, where we are removing the uniform, we are cleaning equipment, that will get onto hands, skin, face and everything like that. So there is that secondary contamination issue.

That is probably the completion of my presentation. I hope I have answered the questions that have been put to me.

The CHAIR — You have. That has been really helpful. Thank you. I have just a couple of questions and then we will pass on. You mentioned that the nature of firefighting is such that you cannot eliminate all of the risks that firefighters are exposed to, and in this case it is the chemicals, whether it is by breathing them in, skin contact or whatever. Could you say the same about training a firefighter? Can a firefighter get good training and have those risks eliminated in the training context?

Mr WHITTAKER — It is critical that we train firefighters for the real environment, as best as possible. We have evolved in training over many years from when I joined 30 years ago to present-day training. We are trying to eliminate that contamination or that exposure in a training environment. Now, in our new Craigieburn facility — we have only been there for just over 12 months — we are trying to replicate fire and heat by using LPG fire props. LPG burns an enormous amount cleaner than the flammable liquid fuels that we used to use, but it still gives us the same heat and flame and understanding of the behaviour of fire, which is critical for firefighters. They must experience the heat; they must understand how fire behaves. So we have done that. We have training in regard to understanding smoke, what it is doing to your uniform and how to maintain and prevent that secondary exposure post a fire.

The CHAIR — That is in terms of the fire, but one of the arguments, I guess, is that there are limited resources in terms of providing the state-of-the-art facility there is at Craigieburn for firefighters. What about what we heard, say at Fiskville, which seemed to be a little bit different at both Bangholme and Craigieburn — things such as the props that are used? For example, at Fiskville, in the prop of a vehicle, a car, that is on fire, the inside materials and plastics may stay in the car and that is burnt as a real-life fire that needs to be put out. At Bangholme they told us they took out all the plastics and stuff that was inside the car to reduce the amount of burnt contaminants and poisons. What about in that area? Is there much that can be done in that area?

Mr WHITTAKER — Absolutely. Craigieburn is state of the art and there has been significant funding to be able to do that. It is important that if we are going to train to fight a car fire, a vehicle fire, yes, if we leave the plastics in there and the upholstery and all that, that is going to create a really toxic environment from the smoke. Now, firefighters need to understand how to approach and fight a car fire,. At Craigieburn what we have done is we have made vehicles from steel and they are gas prop fires. So they can still have the same procedure, they still get the same heat and flame effect from that type of prop, but we are really trying to reduce, if not eliminate, exposing firefighters in a training environment to those toxic chemicals.

The CHAIR — And what about breathing apparatus? How important is that in terms of protecting a firefighter?

Mr WHITTAKER — Absolutely critical, breathing apparatus. As I said earlier, probably the worst type of contamination will be from inhalation. So if I am exposed by inhaling those chemicals, that is really internal to my body immediately.

The CHAIR — Just one other question on that, the health and safety act was introduced, I think, in 1985. At what point in time do you believe there has been more emphasis on or a real understanding of the risks that firefighters are exposed to, when you are talking about industrial fires and chemicals that they ingest or are exposed to? How long do you think people have known about the dangers?

Mr WHITTAKER — I joined in 1985 as a recruit firefighter, and I was trained to use breathing apparatus immediately. That probably was not something that you had to wear; it was something that you wore because you understood that smoke was toxic. How toxic, we did not understand back then. What the product's combustion was, we did not understand back then. We saw smoke was not good.

Probably before me, in talking to firefighters that came well before me, you know, it was something you did. You just did not worry about the smoke. You breathed it, and that was it. But certainly since 1985 there have been advances, and probably only in the last 10 to 15 years have we come to understand those products of combustion and what is really extremely dangerous to firefighters.

The CHAIR — So do you think that is what the concern is now, in terms of things like PFOS and PFOA and those sorts of chemicals, that maybe the same thing is going to happen — we will find out later?

Mr WHITTAKER — Absolutely. I have very limited knowledge on PFOS or PFOA, but again my understanding is that there are more chemicals now that are highly dangerous to a firefighter's health. How do we protect ourselves from it? That is being discussed.

The CHAIR — Just one final question from me. We have heard quite a bit of evidence through submissions and through information that firefighters have provided to the committee for this inquiry that there seems to be a high incidence of melanoma. We understand that in terms of the federal presumptive legislation that I think you were involved in — I understand you presented to the Senate inquiry — —

Mr WHITTAKER — Yes.

The CHAIR — That is not a cancer that is on the list or the schedule of cancers. Have you got any view about that?

Mr WHITTAKER — I do have a view on it, but I do not have the knowledge of that. I would like to think that the chemicals that I have been exposed to certainly are causing melanoma, or skin cancers. Personally, yes — from my personal view.

The CHAIR — From your experience and those you know?

Mr WHITTAKER — Yes.

Mr RAMSAY — Thank you, Brian, and congratulations on your work in the Hazmat area. The Chair has probably posed a couple of questions that I had wanted to ask. The presumptive legislation is an area of interest. Are you willing to perhaps provide some advice to the committee in relation to the models that are currently in each state and which model you think Victoria might be best placed to introduce through such legislation — whether it is a Tasmanian-type model or a Queensland-type model — and if a model should encompass volunteer firefighters as well as career firefighters. I am not sure if you have an opinion on that.

Mr WHITTAKER — Yes.

Mr RAMSAY — That is one question I would pose to you.

Mr WHITTAKER — This is about protection of firefighters, right? I do not have a concern if they are volunteers or permanent firefighters. I think any firefighter that is constantly exposed to fire smoke should be covered by those models. Is that answering your question?

Mr RAMSAY — Yes, it does, in relation to whether they are career or voluntary. Is there a model you have a preference for in relation to the different states' legislation?

Mr WHITTAKER — To be honest, no, I do not. I do not know enough of each of the different models in the different states and around the world.

Mr RAMSAY — We have heard evidence from a previous witness in relation to different toxins that firefighters are exposed to both in their training and also in their fire responses as firefighters. The issue for us is about Fiskville and the closure of that facility because of high levels of PFOS, yet all the evidence we are hearing at the moment is about all these other toxins — and you have named a number of chemicals — that are actually far more harmful to firefighters than PFOS. So I am wondering what is your view about a decision to close a facility based on PFOS, yet many, many other chemicals have been used and are still being used in different public facilities, whether it is asbestos or other things. I am still not quite clear if PFOS is the harmful chemical that we are told it is to actually be responsible for the closure of a training facility, as against a whole lot of other toxins that firefighters are exposed to during their normal firefighting work. Can you offer an opinion about whether we should be concentrating perhaps on other areas rather than just the PFOS area, given your knowledge of the work that you are doing in Hazmat?

Mr WHITTAKER — I will probably answer that by first of all saying yes, firefighters are exposed to an enormous amount of chemicals in firefighting in general. When we look at a training environment I am

probably not accepting that we expose firefighters to the same chemicals in a training environment if we do not need to, and I do not think we need to. As to your question in regard to PFOS and the other chemicals, they are all toxic, some are carcinogenic, and I do not accept that we expose firefighters in a training environment to any of those — any of those at all.

Mr RAMSAY — I agree with you. I am again perhaps just questioning the basis on which a decision was made to close Fiskville based on PFOS rather than anything else. Whereas with the use of dangerous chemicals — and I agree, we should not be exposing firefighters to known toxic chemicals — I still am at a loss why a decision was made specifically on Fiskville because of PFOS, when there are a whole lot of other training facilities right across the state that are exposing trainees to a whole range of chemicals.

Mr WHITTAKER — Okay, I probably can answer that now. I understand where you are coming from. I was commander of operational training during the time that we stopped MFB firefighters going to Fiskville. The basis of us stopping our firefighters going up there was due to all the other chemicals — not the PFOS and the PFOA. It was because of what we suspected. The information that we had was that the water was being recycled from the fireground without any purification mechanisms, which meant our firefighters were complaining of the smell, the rashes and the things like that. Through our information we were provided we said, ‘No’. We did not have enough information on the PFOS, so our decision to stop firefighters going was because of what was there. The toxic chemicals from the fires we knew would have certainly been there and exposed firefighters, and we were not accepting that.

Mr TILLEY — It probably leads me to the next one. The MFB stopped continuing their training, and we have heard evidence in relation to rehabilitation and those sorts of things. Particularly as an expert at Hazmat and those areas, hypothetically speaking, if Fiskville was to be rehabilitated and those things, is there any reason why the MFB would not participate in any training in the future on that site?

Mr WHITTAKER — If Fiskville can be rehabilitated and there is evidence to prove that it is clean, absolutely, I do not see any reason why not. But the question is: can it be and can we get sufficient evidence to say that it is safe?

Mr TILLEY — Again, we are still getting to can it be rehabilitated. There is nothing prohibiting that. What level would it take for the MFB to be convinced that it was satisfactory?

The CHAIR — Can I just mention that Brian is here in his personal capacity. I did not want to put him in a difficult position. Anyway it is up to you. From your personal point of view.

Mr WHITTAKER — Probably a very simple way to answer that one is that now because of the Craigieburn facility we probably would not see a need to go to Fiskville.

Mr TILLEY — Yes, and that is fair enough too. If I could go back to where I was originally. We were talking about effective new demonstrations at Craigieburn, the equipment and everything that is provided to members of the MFB. Of course with every organisation, whether they are be the defence force or some activity in emergency services, people who are deployed in those areas want the rolled gold best of everything, but of course sometimes it is cost prohibitive to be able to provide the absolute rolled gold solution.

Mr WHITTAKER — Absolutely.

Mr TILLEY — Are you satisfied that at this point of time, and taking into considerations the sins of the past, at what level are we at now to ensure that the protective equipment the firefighters are provided with will ensure their safety into the future?

Mr WHITTAKER — In the training environment?

Mr TILLEY — Both. Is there something else on the market currently?

Mr WHITTAKER — Not to my knowledge there is not. I think now we have the best firefighting ensemble we can actually get for protection, especially from flame and heat. We have just currently renewed our level 8 gas-tight suits to the best we could actually get, so I think with those types of things, absolutely. To answer your question further, it is our policy and procedure, our administration and how we operate that is the way we protect our firefighters, and training in the knowledge of what we are exposed to.

Mr TILLEY — I suppose being a career firefighter with enormous experience, and being with the MFB, do you have a view of the CFA with their equipment?

Mr WHITTAKER — With their what?

Mr TILLEY — Their protective equipment. Are they of the standard — —

Mr WHITTAKER — From my knowledge, they are very similar to ours, yes.

Mr TILLEY — You would be comfortable if you were, say, working in the CFA and throwing on their gear and equally do what you do today?

Mr WHITTAKER — From the CFA that I know of, their ensemble, their BAs, absolutely, yes.

Mr TILLEY — Which leads me to what I suppose I want to have a discussion about. In general terms our nation has a defence force and it has a reserve force. There is that full-time career body, and, putting it in contrast to the reserve forces, you have your part-timers. I want to put it in the context of as a career firefighter, a full-time professional, do you have a view of volunteer organisations and how they work together? Is there a professional camaraderie or is it adversarial or other things?

Mr WHITTAKER — I think everyone certainly acknowledges the value of volunteers; they are critical to protecting the state. How well do we work together? I think certainly there could be improvements in how professional staff interact and work with volunteers, absolutely. That will come down to better policy, procedure and understanding.

Mr TILLEY — I think we have covered enough of the presumptive stuff.

Ms WARD — Thanks, Brian. Great to see you again. I share my colleagues' gratitude for the tour we had of VEMTC. It was really good — really interesting actually. It convinced me that no, I should not be a firefighter. But it was good.

Mr WHITTAKER — I am glad you survived.

Ms WARD — One of the things that was interesting for me at VEMTC was the decontamination process. What is the history within the MFB of decontaminating firefighters and trainees after a fire?

Mr WHITTAKER — After a fire, many years out from when I joined, minimal. Decontamination was almost strictly for Hazmat incidents where there was no fire and you may have been contaminated by splash or spill or whatever. Probably again only within the past 10 years have we started to realise that getting back into the truck to return to station we are just cross-contaminating; we are extending the contamination of the fire. Again, it goes back to our understanding of what we are contaminated with and what is the make-up of that contamination.

You experienced the decontamination of your uniform after being in a fire. That is also back at the station. All firefighting ensembles are separated from the station environment so we do not continue to do that. My answer is probably yes, in the past 10 years we have gone to a huge extent to decontaminate on scene so it is not taken back inside the truck, inside the cabin, and back at the station again there is separation.

Ms WARD — Does the CFA share that same kind of practice?

Mr WHITTAKER — I understand they are certainly going to that level.

Ms WARD — So they are heading in a similar direction but are not quite in the same space you are in?

Mr WHITTAKER — Yes. I certainly do not know where they are at with that.

Ms WARD — Is it compulsory to wear BAs when fighting all fires with the MFB, or are there exceptions to the rule?

Mr WHITTAKER — For the MFB, absolutely. It is not compulsory on scene; you are trained to wear your BA as a firefighter from the time of recruits, and every recruit is trained to use BA. On scene you know it is policy and procedure to use your BA and the officers will certainly ensure that is done.

Ms WARD — So in training BAs are always used?

Mr WHITTAKER — Every single time. I think they start that at about week 4 or week 5 of their recruit course.

Ms WARD — Is that the same practice with the CFA?

Mr WHITTAKER — The CFA, because they are currently training at Craigieburn, I notice they are doing the same thing.

Ms WARD — Has that also been in parallel with the MFB, or is that something they have just started to do recently?

Mr WHITTAKER — I cannot answer that. I believe their recruits have always trained with BA.

Ms WARD — Great. In your submission you said that it is currently not possible to fully protect a firefighter. That is in a real-life firefighting situation, for which I completely understand your point. But what about in training? Is it possible to fully protect a firefighter in training?

Mr WHITTAKER — The control mechanisms are a lot more on scene than at a job, and that is because of the fuels we use to expose them to fire, the safety mechanisms of the instructors and the operators of the actual props themselves.

Ms WARD — In your view is it necessary to create identical real-life situations in fighting fires?

Mr WHITTAKER — They are not identical; they are as close as can be.

Ms WARD — But is it necessary to create an identical scenario?

Mr WHITTAKER — No. There are many reasons why you do not need to. It is as close as you can get.

Ms WARD — Given that VEMTC is now using gas for the fires, what are your thoughts on the burning of aviation and diesel fuels during training?

Mr WHITTAKER — We certainly do not do that; it is not our policy.

Ms WARD — And the reasons behind that?

Mr WHITTAKER — Again, why do I need to expose firefighters — —

Sorry, the only one — and I will make a correction here — is we do extinguisher training, so we will use a minimum amount of flammable liquids to do extinguisher training.

Ms WARD — You mentioned in your role the decision by the MFB in deciding to no longer use Fiskville for training. Can you talk me through the process that led to that decision to no longer train at Fiskville?

Mr WHITTAKER — For MFB firefighters?

Ms WARD — Yes, MFB.

Mr WHITTAKER — We probably had significant feedback from our instructors and our trainees, whether they were recruits or promotional courses going up there, that probably raised eyebrows and made us think, ‘What is going on up there?’. We liaised with the CFA management up there. In the end probably with the amount of health issues that were coming back we decided, ‘No, we don’t like this happening’. But in the end — —

Ms WARD — So when you say ‘we’ you are talking about the MFB — —

Mr WHITTAKER — No, the management of training. But probably in the end the United Firefighters Union put agreements in anyway, because they heard enough from their members to put agreements in, and that went to Fair Work Australia and we had stopped anyway. So it was a decision taken out of our hands.

Ms WARD — So that process at Fair Work Australia was what led to pulling out?

Mr WHITTAKER — Yes.

Ms WARD — You did have people scheduled to train at Fiskville?

Mr WHITTAKER — Yes.

Ms WARD — What happened to them? Where did they go?

Mr WHITTAKER — We ended up going to a few different places — to Carrum at the Bangholme training ground, and at Sale — when we looked at different alternatives to do that, and then we had to use our Burnley complex as best we could.

Ms WARD — Did that end up costing the MFB more?

Mr WHITTAKER — Significantly more, yes. We also used the Longford complex down near Sale, which gave us the hot fire training.

Ms WARD — We also heard about alerts sent out by NICNAS regarding PFOS and PFOA starting in 2003. How well do you think the MFB responded to those alerts?

Mr WHITTAKER — To my knowledge of that — I was in the Hazmat unit at the time — another department, our equipment resource management department, were looking at different foams, I believe, at the time of that. We were using the Tridol foam, which contains PFOS and PFOA. They did extensive testing with different foams down at Longford. There were different reasons for looking at that and we changed it to Solberg foam I think in 2006–07.

Ms WARD — I am interested in your comments regarding the rehabilitation of Fiskville. Who would you personally trust to tell you that it was safe? Who would you need to hear that from?

Mr WHITTAKER — I think probably — again, my opinion — I would be looking at EPA, WorkSafe and the government to make that judgement.

Ms WARD — Thank you.

The CHAIR — Just to follow up on the training, in addition to exposing firefighters to hazards in training, there is also the issue about the exposure to the recycled water. What is your view on that? Is that something that can be eliminated? What do you think about that in terms of the dangers of the recycled water?

Mr WHITTAKER — In training?

The CHAIR — At Fiskville.

Mr WHITTAKER — I do not have extensive knowledge in how that was done at Fiskville, but in my experience up there — and I had several experiences — the water quality in my own opinion was not great. I do not know what was contained in it, but I did know that the water we were using to fight the fires, especially the fossil fuel fires, the flammable liquid fires, would go back into their dams and recirculate back to us to use. But I cannot answer that without too much knowledge, whereas at Craigieburn it is a filtration system, a purification system, and the water is almost drinking quality.

The CHAIR — Okay, thank you, and thanks for your time today.

Mr RAMSAY — Can I just ask a question, if I may, Chair? Just in relation to the requirements of the CFA in relation to the training facility as distinct from the MFB facility at Craigieburn, could you just provide comments? Just assuming that, say, part of the Fiskville facility cannot be remediated, particularly the fire pad area, but the rest can be — accommodation, training — and they are looking to a new fire pad area presumably

within the region, how much of Craigieburn do you think should be built in relation to the CFA? Because they are volunteer brigades and come in from all over the south-western region to spend a few hours training, you could not really impose a Craigieburn-type \$200 million facility on a regional CFA volunteer facility, I would not have thought, so what structures do you think would be imperative for a CFA volunteer facility that could replicate part of Craigieburn but obviously not need the bells and whistles, as Bill said before, given all that we have learnt about the poor practices in the past? If you are building a new fire pad in, say, Moorabool shire, what would you be seeking in relation to safety for firefighters?

Mr WHITTAKER — There are a few ways to answer that question. One: we are already looking at what scope we have to extend our Craigieburn facility. We have got land out there that we are not using, so we need to increase the usage of the property. I am probably not in a position to answer what the volunteers would need, because Craigieburn is really built as an urban environment training ground. They would certainly get a lot of use out of some of that, and a site like that should be available to them, so I think it would be critical to replace in the short term what they are missing out at Fiskville. At Craigieburn at the moment we are operating above capacity, and that is not just because of the CFA being with us; it is because our need to train — our training needs — is quite extensive. That is why we are looking at expanding Craigieburn as we speak. It would certainly cater for MFB and CFA, but capacity is an issue.

Mr RAMSAY — Isn't the cost of training at Craigieburn nearly three times as much as it was in Fiskville?

Mr WHITTAKER — No, I would totally disagree with that. The costs are cost recovery mainly, and if I look at what we were charged for training at Fiskville to what we are charging, that is certainly very inaccurate.

Ms WARD — So the costs that you are charging people at Craigieburn are cheaper than what you were getting charged at Fiskville.

Mr WHITTAKER — Yes.

Ms WARD — Substantially?

Mr WHITTAKER — Significantly, yes.

Ms WARD — Thank you.

Mr RAMSAY — I had information — —

The CHAIR — Can you tell us the figures?

Mr RAMSAY — Per firefighter my understanding is that the costs are significantly greater in Craigieburn with the instructors and the training programs than they were at Fiskville, and you are telling me that is not right.

Mr WHITTAKER — No, because to put it in perspective we were charged around \$140 000 for one week of training at Fiskville — and I cannot be quoted now — and 18 weeks at Craigieburn certainly does not equate to \$140 000 a week.

Ms WARD — \$140 000 a week?

Mr WHITTAKER — Yes, for the week that we did there, which was significant hot fire training, so there were a lot of fuel costs in that, and we totally accept that. We accepted the cost at the time, but to compare them, no, certainly not.

Ms WARD — When you were going around to various parts of the state, once you stopped going to Fiskville, to relocate, how did those costs compare? It was always the CFA charging you, so it was the same kind of rate.

Mr WHITTAKER — Depending on where we were, it was different costing models. If we went to Bangholme or Sale, they were different costing models to Fiskville, and for Longford, a private company, there was a different costing model again, so it is very hard to compare.

Ms WARD — It is apples and pears.

Mr WHITTAKER — Yes.

Mr RAMSAY — Craigieburn does not have accommodation, though, does it?

Mr WHITTAKER — No, absolutely not, and that is probably where you might think costing is more because they have to get accommodation elsewhere.

The CHAIR — Okay, thank you.

Mr WHITTAKER — Thank you.

Witness withdrew.