

TRANSCRIPT

ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL RESOURCES AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the CFA training college at Fiskville

Melbourne — 15 June 2015

Members

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

The CHAIR — On behalf of the committee, I welcome Mr Cory Woodyatt to the public hearing. 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 Acts 2003 and is protected from judicial review. Any comments made outside the precincts 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.

Following your presentation to us today, we would then like to have the opportunity to ask questions of you. I understand that you will be accompanied by Mr Samuel Watterson, and when he arrives he can sit next to you. Thanks again for making the time to come. Perhaps if you could just introduce yourself for the record and then go on with your presentation.

Mr WOODYATT — Thanks for giving me the opportunity to come and speak today. My name is Cory Woodyatt, and I am a senior station officer with the Country Fire Authority stationed at the Melton fire station. I have not got a lot of time — about 10 minutes or so — so I will try to keep to that. You all have a copy of my statement in front of you. I am not going to go through every single point; I will just get to the key points that I reckon need to be brought out today.

The whole intention for me today was to speak about my time as a volunteer and then the transition from a volunteer to become a professional firefighter, then also as an instructor at the training college Fiskville, and then to today. In particular I want to hone in on my recruit course, which was recruit course 1 of 2000, and in particular some effects that members of my squad had to do with birth defects, potentially as a result of our time at Fiskville. I want to hone in on those areas, if I can.

In particular I will touch on the point that I was a volunteer before joining the career staff full-time in 2000. Prior to that I was a butcher. I preferred to be called a meat surgeon, not a butcher; I thought there was a bit more to it than being a butcher. In my time as a volunteer from 1994 to 2000, I went to Fiskville a number of times just training from a volunteer perspective. I saw the transition from the old blue crushed rock framework of the training ground, and then I was involved in 1998 representing the CFA when they transitioned to the new concrete PAD area that is there today.

My experience as a volunteer at that time: I remember the days of no breathing apparatus, walking into clouds of smoke and then walking out of those clouds of smoke with stained nasal passages for the next two or three days, cleaning the insides of your ears out for the next two or three days and not being able to clean the black products that were on your helmet associated with that. You would wash it with detergents — whatever you could — and you could never ever clean the stuff off. I believe at that stage, in 1998, it was a diesel and petrol mix, at that time a foam liquid PAD, and I am hoping that there was no use of other chemicals as of that 1998 period when I was there.

The key thing as a volunteer compared to a career firefighter, which I will transition to shortly, was that as a volunteer at the training ground you really had the opportunity to say no, you did not want to participate in some of the drills that were taking place if you were not feeling comfortable about them or if you just did not want to do it.

Then in 1999 I went through quite a rigorous program, and excuse me for thinking that you are ignorant, but the process to become a career firefighter is an extensive one. It included physical assessments, practical drill training at that Fiskville training environment, aptitude testing, psychological testing. At my stage, in 1999, it was a 24-hour assessment at Fiskville, arriving at 5 o'clock one afternoon, doing the theory components, the aptitude testing and the psychometric testing of an evening, then the next morning being involved in group training sessions — team environments and one-on-one environments on how you reacted in a team or how you react individually — and then to a full panel interview, about an hour or so interview in the afternoon. So the process to become a career firefighter was quite rigorous.

I was successful, in 2000, to be offered a job with the CFA, and I started my recruit course in January of 2000. I have since found out that there were 20 of us that were chosen in that recruit course, and that 20 was chosen from, I think, around about 1500 applicants. That recruit course was the first full professional course that the CFA had run since about 1995. They had run a very small quick-hit one in 1998, which I believe had about six people on it, and that was about a two or three-week course at Fiskville, where they then went out on to the

station. Our course was a 14-week recruit course, live-in, so you were away from your families for the five days of the week. I was fortunate enough that I lived in Ballarat; I was 30 minutes from home, but I had other colleagues on the course who were from Phillip Island, a good 4-hour drive away from the training college. They basically spent one night at home with their family over that 14 weeks. I just want to paint a picture for you to give you an understanding of what it was like.

My time at the training college: from having resigned from being a butcher in quite a stable job working for Safeway to halving my salary and then joining the CFA in what was a dream job — it still is a dream job — you are put in an environment where you are pretty scared to say no to anything. You just wanted to ensure that you got through your recruit course, that you graduated, that you arrived on station, that you were successful getting through your probationary period to then take up your career unimpeded throughout your course. You never questioned really anything that occurred at the training course when you were on it. One particular thing that came about was that on two occasions we did mini-triathlons. At 6.30 in the morning there were always PT sessions. You had no choice. You had to be there at 6.30 to undertake this hour or so of PT sessions. Two of those sessions were mini-triathlons which included about a 3-kilometre bike ride and about a 1-kilometre run. Then we finished off by swimming through the dams located on the site.

The first particular dam — in your recent tour — was the golf course. There are two dams on the golf course as you head down the archway, on the northern side of the driveway. They were the first courses. After we swam through them, word got around that we were swimming in the dams and we were basically told, 'Don't use those dams'. Then later in the course we completed another triathlon, which involved swimming through dam 3, which was the one over the back of the southern stand or the ablutions area there.

In particular that time of going through those dams, one of my squad colleagues — and I cannot recall whether it was bronchitis or whether it was glandular fever — had been off training college for about a week, and when he returned to the college there were no questions asked. You will be going through as part of the course, swimming through the dams. That individual did not question anybody and, knowing that he just wanted to get through the course, just obliged. He was still battling illness and being told by his doctors to take it easy, but he still participated in the triathlon and swimming through those dams.

From that point we then came to the end of the course, when two of my colleagues had their employment terminated. I do not know the reasons behind that; that is none of my business, and that is something that is private and confidential between them and the CFA. But certainly it put more pressure back onto us individuals, knowing that we were in an environment where we could still lose our jobs, so it was just whatever you were asked to do, you basically did it without any questions.

That was my time as a recruit. Then I progressed on to a station and was fortunate enough to go back to Fiskville, a place that I enjoyed going to. Even though their recruit course was 'you did what you were told', I still enjoyed the mateships that I formed with my colleagues from my squad. I enjoyed, and still have, a good, close working relationship with some of the instructors who were on my course. I just thought that at a recruit course that was it, you just turned up. You played the games, as was commonly said of recruit courses. You just put your head down and your butt up, and you just worked towards achieving an outcome at the end of it.

I went back to Fiskville as an instructor in, it would have been, March of 2006, and at that time there are two particular circumstances that I want to raise, quickly going through the points. In January 2007, the last recruit course of 2006, when Victoria was amidst a fairly significant drought, our crews could not train at their fire stations because of the use of water and we did not want it to be seen as negative in the public's eye that we were squirting a heap of water. So they were sent back to Fiskville in the environment where they could use the reclaimed water there. I know that two particular individuals on that recruit course who I assisted with the pumping got significantly ill with gastro and spent three or four days off in bed after going and seeing the Ballan GP.

Since then I have found out about, referring to Mick Tisbury's document, the *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* document. But that was just about two weeks or so after the recruits had been there doing their pumping. I just started to ask questions, like yourselves, about what the water was like that we were training in prior to a potential [inaudible] remedy being put into place.

The other thing while I was at the training college, and I think about this quite often, is that I was heavily involved with the commercial client there, and I spent a lot of time training approximately 180 new Corrections

Victoria recruits, employed by Corrections Victoria, to work in the prisons on a casual basis. We were there to do some basic fire training with them. It was very, very basic fire training, so it was extinguishers around flame liquid trays — not significant fires but a lot of water was being used in that time. I think now, ‘What have I been involved in, in exposing potentially 180 or so people to some form of bacteria in the water?’. I do not know how they have been affected or, ongoing, if they have been affected by the potential contaminants that may have been in the water.

Quickly getting through to a key point as well that I want to talk about in relation to after the story was broken about Fiskville, Justin Justin, obviously the OIC there — JJ and I; I refer to him as JJ — had a fairly close relationship. He came through the ranks on station. At one particular time I was interviewed by the *Herald Sun* in relation to our recruits swimming through the dams, and that was about 2011 at a guess. From about that point our relationship broke down. JJ just did not speak to me that much. I am not sure if it was because I was speaking out in relation to the Fiskville stuff or not. But I was heavily involved in the lead firefighter and station officer development and assessment process for promotional programs within CFA, and I was being mentored to take over as the lead command and control assessor, which JJ put a stop to. I had one of the instructors say to me, ‘I’m not sure what you’ve done to JJ, but his attitude towards you is pretty poor and he doesn’t want you to have any involvement in anything’. From that point in time I still have not approached JJ about it. I just did not want to waste my time.

However, on 19 December last year I was representing Peter Marshall for the UFU at the recruit graduation, and JJ came up to me. He had just recently been successful in his application for the Northern Territory fire service, and JJ said to me, ‘Mate, when it comes time for the inquiry, if there’s anything that you or the union need, can you give me a call and come and see me because I’ve kept copies of absolutely everything’. That was the conversation had between JJ and I, standing at the back of a group of people. I do not believe anybody else would have heard that conversation, and it was just basically that I wished him all the best for his future career. Then from that stage we sort of just moved off from there.

The key point I really want to talk about is one in particular. Since my recruit course in 2000, I have been diagnosed, I suppose, by the doctor with having psoriasis. It has only occurred since I have been involved in the CFA, and that means ongoing treatment with the GP. He reckons that that is something I will have for the rest of my life. It is probably insignificant compared to some of the other things that I will speak about right now.

Recruit course 1 of 2000 had 20 employees on it. As I said, two had their employment terminated. Out of that course, there are five, possibly six, of my squad colleagues who have had children, and those children are suffering some defects in some way. That is 6 out of 20, which leaves us obviously with 14. Out of that 14, my partner and I — and my partner is 10 years older than I am — have never tried to have children, so I do not know whether or not there would have been any effects from there. I am not sure if some other colleagues who I was on the course with have had any difficulties with becoming pregnant, but there were also a lot of senior members on the course who were of an older age who had previously had children and who then may not have ever tried to have children again. So the number starts to reduce a fair bit from those who actually tried to have children but had them but they had defects.

Very quickly I will just read through what they have got without mentioning any names. One individual firefighter’s child was born with a club foot. Doctors have been unable to explain why the child has this condition. I understand that the usual contributing factors are not apparent in the family. There has been no link at all within the family. The child has had a number of surgeries. That same firefighter’s daughter has recently had her tonsils and adenoids removed, which I understand is quite a common thing in children. But the surgeon said he is unable to understand and has concerns due to the size of the actual adenoids and the tonsils, in particular their being part of the lymphatic system. His doctor had some major concerns. He had never seen anything like that before. Another member’s son was born with severe autism, epilepsy and is also mildly intellectually disabled. So that is two. A fellow firefighter’s son up until about — do not hold me to this — week 26 or week 28 of the scans had two kidneys evident. Their son was then born with one kidney. It is unexplained where that other kidney went or why it even occurred that way. The doctors are still at a loss to give a reason to the family, since both parents have been genetically tested, and there have been no genetic conditions whatsoever on either side of the family.

Another firefighter, when he was employed by CFA, CFA moved him and his family from Western Australia to Victoria, and he stayed at the Fiskville training college. His whole family were put up at Fiskville. He has

since — and for a period of time — been suffering a severe intestinal bacterial condition. It comes on every four or six months or so, and he loses approximately 7 kilograms in 5 days. The last occurrence was only in May of this year, and when he saw his doctor he was told he was about two days away from losing his kidneys. Basically his body had started to shut down. He went through some treatment where there were about four or five litres of fluid put back into his body. He basically went into dehydration, had no appetite and did not want to drink, so he went in at that point.

For the last point I will talk about an individual is sitting in this room today. It relates to her daughter. This particular person was a recruit on my course, and I will quickly read through — and I apologise if I do not get this 100 per cent. Her daughter was born with a genetic mutation disorder, and it was to do with chromosome 1. I believe it is to do with not having the right coating on the chromosome. There has been genetic testing, and they cannot understand why. The child has been diagnosed with what is known as Dravet syndrome and has seizures that last anywhere from 30 to 75 minutes in length. On a number of occasions with those seizures her child then stops breathing, and obviously there is the process she goes through with that of trying to revive her daughter. I believe her daughter is between two and three, I think close to the two years of age mark. The child has been on life support at least four times and has lifelong medication needs to assist with the seizures. She has had approximately 34 in-hospital visits as a result of the seizures, and on a number of occasions from the seizures they have had to teach their child how to walk again. The body just basically shuts down, and they have got to go through that process.

Both of those individuals, both the mother and the father, are career CFA firefighters. Both have been at Fiskville. I am not sure in the organisation how common that is, that we have had two go through the recruit courses — one in 2000 and one went through around about the 2006, 2007 mark. They are on opposing shifts from each other, and that allows them to manage their daughter. They just cannot afford to have their daughter with anybody else due to these circumstances that exist. They do not feel comfortable leaving that responsibility with anybody else. I believe that the ambos are on a pretty good working relationship with them based on this. At no time can they really be away from their daughter at all. Quite recently they were at a hotel somewhere having time away, and just by going into the pool to have a normal family splash in the water the child went into seizure as a result of the temperature of the water, I believe. So here they are away on holidays and still going through what they need to go through.

I know of a recent case where an individual who went through recruits in about the 2007 mark who has just had their conjoined twins terminated. They shared one heart and one umbilical cord. The obstetrician indicates that it is a very rare condition, about 1 in 200 000. There is not enough known about the condition to give an indication as to the cause. However, the obstetrician could not rule out any exposures the individual has had. Sadly, it is not uncommon within the fire service for individuals to have difficulties with having babies and to have to use the IVF program.

I will finish by saying that I thoroughly enjoyed my time at the Fiskville training college. I have got some great friends who still work there. I feel for those individuals in relation to the position that they are in, having no understanding of what has occurred previously to the place closing earlier this year. I certainly hope that we look favourably at a new training college in the western part of the state, around the Ballan area, to not only provide the resources for the western part of the state for the career and the volunteer firefighters but also for the community of Ballan, which has been affected by these circumstances, and also for those individuals who are work colleagues and friends who have been thrown around the state in workplaces because they do not really have a clear workplace at the moment. I will probably leave it at that and take some questions during the time frame.

The CHAIR — Thanks, Cory. That was a very good presentation. I am very sorry; there are a lot of sad stories that you have had to tell us. Perhaps I will just talk about this link between health issues and Fiskville. We know there has been, for example, the Monash study, which was fairly limited. There has been the Cancer Council study, which is also very limited. One of the things we have to look at is some ideas and recommendations around mitigating adverse effects, compensation and also further research and study to see how strong that link is and to provide answers for people. Have you got any suggestions for perhaps recommendations that we could make or things that the CFA itself could do?

Mr WOODYATT — One particular concern I have is that the Joy report finished in 1999, it related to then, and my recruit pool started in 2000. CFA had not really recruited heavily from 95 to 99, but since 2000 I think

we have employed 400 or so professional firefighters in that time. Yet the Joy report did not cover off on that area into the 2000s. Probably the key point is that it would be great to know the truth. It would be great to know what the contaminants are that we potentially have been exposed to and what life or health effects they have on individuals and to get that as a starting point to then understand how we can move forward from there — those potential contaminants and what effects they have on the body. Then we can set up a health monitoring system from there that is ongoing.

Whether it is studies about two firefighters working in the same organisation who have children together or whether it is the recruit course 1 of 2000 or recruit course 1 of 2015, there needs to be some form of a study that looks at the impact that a controlled or potentially controlled environment has. That should be giving you a pretty good level. We are saying it is a controlled environment, and that should be giving us a pretty good benchmark for what the standard is. We understand that our job is inherently dangerous on a day-to-day basis, operationally, but as a senior station officer in incident control I take precautions in the operational field to ensure my members are not in smoke, whereas obviously on the training ground we would assume that in a controlled environment they would not have to be faced with any of those types of things. So, Bronwyn, it is probably one of those things that when we know more about what we have potentially been exposed to and that truth comes forward, then we just build from there.

Mr McCURDY — Cory, you said in point 6 that you have spoken to your partner about the fact that you believe you will die before she will due to your career as a firefighter and what you have been exposed to. Do you see that still as ongoing with your work at Melton, or is this going back to your days at Fiskville, or all of the above?

Mr WOODYATT — Yes, I had better explain that comment. My partner is 10 years older than I am, so obviously we have had conversations about funeral plans and those kinds of things, getting your life in order for a few years down the track, and I quite often say to her, ‘There’s no need for you to be worrying about yours. We probably need to worry about mine first, because I will pass away before you do’. That is based on probably the last two or three years in relation to the stories and the facts that have come out from Fiskville about the chemicals that were dumped there over a period of time and the fact that I trained there as a volunteer in the mid-90s. There was no use of breathing apparatus in those times. I am getting more and more educated the older I get and the more experienced in the job I get in relation to those chemicals and the harmful effects they have on us.

As Peter Marshall mentioned earlier on, our structural ensemble that we wear provides us with some pretty good protection, but not the best. So we are being exposed every day of the week in relation to contaminants. But I know for a fact that at the Melton fire station, as an incident controller, the only individuals that go anywhere near the smoke are those who are wearing breathing apparatus. If they are not in breathing apparatus, they do not go anywhere near the smoke. It does not matter — if I have got to move them 50 metres down the road, including the general public, then that is what I will do to ensure that I am not exposing those individuals in an uncontrolled environment to any contaminants that may be present. The thought has probably just come particularly from my early stages of volunteering and my time in the recruit course, swimming through the dams with potentially unknown contaminants or chemicals and then what impact that is potentially going to have on me in years to come. That is why I think I will probably die before my partner does.

Mr McCURDY — In the Joy report you spoke about various high, medium and low risks. Where do you believe you fall?

Mr WOODYATT — Probably medium to high, given my time as a volunteer, a recruit firefighter and an instructor at the training college as well.

Mr RICHARDSON — Thanks, Cory, for your presentation. Just a question about Justin Justin and your engagements with him at Fiskville. I have a two-pronged question. What was Justin’s role at the time, and were there any issues raised at that time with him? What is the nature of that conversation you had at the ceremony in 2014?

Mr WOODYATT — My involvement with JJ was at the training college was that he was the OIC, or officer in charge — I think it is called the office manager of training delivery — at Fiskville. In particular the items raised, what do you mean by that?

Mr RICHARDSON — Were any concerns raised at the time about safety, or was it just — —

Mr WOODYATT — Yes, there were concerns probably in my time when JJ was the OIC at the training college. My involvement at that particular time was through the leading firefighter and station officer, promotional courses. That is pretty much managed by the station officers who come off a station to work inside that environment. We take that external attitude with us, and it is part of the assessment process while we are there that if any candidate or any crew member walks through smoke while they are in that environment, it is an immediate fail of their assessment, and they come back in three months time to reassess. We stop the drill from there. Our attitude with regard to the safety around those drills has been based on the same attitude that I have operationally out in the field.

The concern was raised with JJ in relation to the stench of the water, and when a particular member who was part of the assessment process, a senior station officer in the Geelong region, raised some concerns with JJ, it ended up in a stand-on argument on the parade ground and a refusal to use the water. The trucks would — so I would fill up from one town main hydrant that is located just on the parade ground. That is really my only direct involvement, as I understand, in direct conversations from our point of view.

The recruits quite often raised it, and the recruit instructors were probably more exposed at that period of time. I know they raised concerns about the smell and the quality of the water. In my time as an instructor there in 2007 when the individuals actually got sick from the pumping of the water we asked for that water to be tested. The water was tested, and the result came back saying, ‘There’s nothing wrong with the water; it’s okay’. I took that on face value from the people I trust who worked at that location and said, ‘Okay, there’s obviously nothing wrong with the water. Maybe it’s just a bug that’s going through the recruits’. But to then find out that only three weeks later the *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* bacteria was introduced into the water, that was about exactly the same time the recruits were there. It had been raised in relation to the water.

Mr RICHARDSON — What do you take his comment ‘I’ve got all the documents’ to mean. What do you interpret that as?

Mr WOODYATT — At that time I was pretty shocked because JJ and I had not really had that good relationship for the two years leading up to that. I made the move, walked over, shook his hand, congratulated him on his promotion and wished him all the best. I just asked him a few questions about why he was moving on — why the choice to move on — and he just said that during his time there he had not had the support he believed he needed at Fiskville from upper management. He named particular people at that particular time. From that stage he said that when the inquiry occurs — obviously we have already had the change in government, and the inquiry was one of the promises that would occur. I am glad we are here today — ‘Any documentation that you need, I have kept copies of everything’. I can only assume — whether it is wrong for me to assume — that anything that JJ had been involved in in relation to the testing of the water, anything he had with emails, he would have a copy of.

Mr YOUNG — Thanks, Cory. Given that Craigieburn is, as I have been told, nearing capacity and Bangholme is sort of on the other side of town, where do you see the future of CFA training and what needs to happen from now to have that?

Mr WOODYATT — I think I touched on it earlier on. The CFA obviously looks after the state of Victoria, and from a professional firefighter’s point of view we have got 34 stations scattered around the state. There are something like 1215 CFA brigades in this state, so we all know that VEMTC Craigieburn is not sustainable to hold that amount of people. We are experiencing that right now with four recruit courses that are running through — back-to-back recruit courses over a four-day period, with four days on and four off. We cannot even accommodate them there now. They have had to bring in external infrastructure to make it work down here. Bangholme is the same. They are outside of Frankston. They are right on the freeway, and they are limited with what they can do in that type of environment.

There need to be some strategically located training centres around the state of Victoria to be able to accommodate the needs of the firefighters across the board, and the training needs to be done in the safest manner that is possible, not what they think is possible. It needs to be the safest possible. As I said, there needs to be a major training ground in the western part of the state to help service the delivery aspect of things for that side.

When you look at Bangholme at the moment, we have individuals today who are commencing their lead firefighter assessment process — three-day rigorous assessments down at Bangholme — and some of those individuals had to drive down from Mildura yesterday to be at Bangholme today. For the next three days they are taking the next step in their promotional career under extreme pressures and stressors, having a 6-hour drive to get down to the location. There needs to be one major and then some additional ones across the state. I probably dragged on a bit with that, sorry.

Mr YOUNG — That is all right. Thank you.

Mr RAMSAY — Thanks, Cory. One of the tasks of this committee is to try to tease out the connection between practices at Fiskville and health impacts, and then consequently we go into compensation or other matters. Could you provide the committee with any evidence or documentation from a clinician or someone from the medical field in relation to all those things you have listed in your submission in relation to illnesses that directly link to Fiskville and the time spent there?

Mr WOODYATT — To answer your question truthfully, no, I cannot. I can provide the evidence from doctors' comments on the ailments that have occurred, but I cannot provide evidence to say that they were attributable to Fiskville. I also cannot provide evidence to say that they were not attributable to Fiskville. It is up in the air at the moment, but nobody will be able to provide evidence to say that the elements I mentioned in relation to my squad colleagues have not come from their time at Fiskville or that they have. I think we are open at the moment in relation to that. Once we get the truth to come out in relation to what has occurred there in the past and then look at the chemicals that we have potentially been exposed to and all the water contaminants and get an understanding medically of what they can do to a human being, we will know when evidence can be provided due to time frames and people being on courses and those kinds of things.

Mr RAMSAY — I guess I was also seeking, given that answer, what you would recommend the committee do in terms of some more investigatory work in relation to gathering information — —

Mr WOODYATT — That would be fantastic too because, as I said, we need an understanding of what has occurred there over the years and the effects those things have on people, and once we have got that to then look into the illnesses that are currently occurring. It is probably the same as presumptive legislation. Do not let that individual who is going through their illness or the family that is going through that environment have to prove that it is attributable to Fiskville. Let the CFA or their insurers or whoever it might be prove that it is not attributable to Fiskville.

Ms WARD — Thanks, Cory. Thanks for your submission as well. In their appearance before this committee some of your colleagues have said they feel that their colleagues would not have the confidence that Fiskville will ever be clean enough or safe enough to use again. Do you agree with that, and do you think that Fiskville should be reopened in the future?

Mr WOODYATT — There are probably two parts to my thinking here. The first part is that the practical area, from what I have heard today and from what I have read in submissions and statements that have been put forward, I certainly have no confidence in potentially what could still be at that site. I really do not know how much it can be rehabilitated or the cost behind rehabilitation, when you think that some of that soil cannot be removed from the site; so I do not understand the costing of it.

I happened to be involved and on duty at the Melton fire station on the day after Fiskville closed. We got the Fiskville staff to come to the back room at the Melton fire station as a briefing for them, so they had a focal point to come to. A number of questions were asked by the members from Fiskville on that particular day to the acting CEO, Michael Wooten, to Lex de Man, and another individual who was there, whose name I cannot recall. They said, 'We understand that there are issues with the chemical and the water on the training ground, but why have the administrative staff, who were in a separate environment, been removed from the property?'

After 10 minutes of dancing around the story, not one of those individuals in that room could give a clear answer as to why the administrative staff or the hospitality staff had been removed from that environment. So based on that evidence that I witnessed that day, I have no confidence in any part of the facility whatsoever. No-one could give a clear answer that day.

Ms WARD — So do you think it should be reopened at any time in the future?

Mr WOODYATT — Not reopened — a new separate location built somewhere else that meets standards.

Mr TILLEY — I just want to prosecute a bit further something that my colleague Tim Richardson ran across just a short while ago about a conversation you had at the graduation parade in 2000.

Mr WOODYATT — No, it was 19 December 2014.

Mr TILLEY — All right. Thank you. So that conversation that you had with JJ — Firstly, your relationship whilst he was still a member of the CFA, serving in the CFA, what was that like?

Mr WOODYATT — I will paint a quick picture for you. I was employed in 2000. JJ came in as a career firefighter at around the 2001–2002 mark and went through the ranks on fire stations, where I worked on a number of occasions with him on station. I had been directly involved with him at other training courses, at the training ground. I had a fantastic working relationship with JJ. I actually looked at him as a mate; we would have a one-on-one conversation and feel no animosity between the two of us. Then, as I said, I personally felt as a result of the *Herald Sun* document that I was — my words only — a union thug basically coming out to slam Fiskville that he was the OIC of at the time and that I was talking about swimming through dirty dams and those kinds of things. To this day I am still thankful that I actually did.

From that point, that conversation on that day, I felt as if it was back to the old conversations that we used to have. I did not feel any animosity there at all. We spoke for maybe 15 or 20 minutes. He asked how I was going. He asked about the result of the state election and what impact that may have. We also spoke about the inquiry and that from there. I wished him all the best and asked why the career move. He told me some names in relation to people who did not help him that much in his role at Fiskville, and then from that stage — the only reason the conversation terminated was that JJ was required to go and officiate as part of a formal function. As the MC — for part of the practical side of things — he needed to be there for the display.

Mr TILLEY — I just want to go to the part of the conversation where JJ said he kept copies of everything. What was your understanding of what he meant by that?

Mr WOODYATT — The conversation at the time was based on this inquiry. As I said before, I can only assume that he has copies of everything that has gone through Fiskville in his time of being there. That is what he said, 'I have copies. If the union or you need them, just ring me, and I can produce them.

Mr TILLEY — The problem with that — and you do not have to agree — is that if you pursue something, it makes an ass out of you and me.

Mr WOODYATT — I understand that, yes.

Mr TILLEY — My next question is: have you at any stage tried to pursue having a further conversation and getting those documents?

Mr WOODYATT — No, I have not, but I have certainly informed the industrial body of that conversation that I had that day. So I spoke to the union and said, 'This is the conversation that I had'. As I have said before, there were no witnesses. JJ and I were standing over at the back of a group of people — —

Mr TILLEY — With your role with the UFU, from that conversation you were reporting to the UFU, would you know whether the UFU have, on your advice, sought further — —

Mr WOODYATT — No, I cannot know.

The CHAIR — Thank you so much for coming in and presenting today. We are sorry that there was a bit of a delay. We really appreciate the information that you provided. Thank you.

Mr WOODYATT — No worries. Thanks again for your time.

Witness withdrew.

Closed proceedings followed.