

PROOF VERSION ONLY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING

Inquiry into fire season preparedness

Bairnsdale — 27 September 2016

Members

Mr David Davis — Chair

Ms Harriet Shing — Deputy Chair

Ms Melina Bath

Mr Richard Dalla-Riva

Ms Samantha Dunn

Mr Khalil Eideh

Mr Cesar Melhem

Mr Daniel Young

Participating Members

Mr Greg Barber

Mr Jeff Bourman

Ms Colleen Hartland

Mr James Purcell

Mr Simon Ramsay

Staff

Secretary: Mr Michael Baker

Witnesses

Mr Ian Ashcroft (affirmed), and

Mr Nick Barton (affirmed), Country Fire Authority district 11.

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

The CHAIR — Gentlemen, I will ask you to make an introductory statement. We have an inquiry into bushfire preparedness. The CFA plays a very significant role. After that statement we will follow with some questions.

Mr ASHCROFT — We sort of come as a double act.

The CHAIR — I gathered that, so I am going to leave you to sort it out. I am conscious that we got have half an hour, so let us be brief.

Mr ASHCROFT — We will be brief. We actually have two subjects to cover. Nick will cover one and when Nick is finished you can perhaps ask him some questions and then pass to me and I will do my half of the double act.

The CHAIR — Maybe we will do both and then we will come up with questions at the end.

Mr ASHCROFT — Okay, that is fine; however you want to do it. So I will pass over to Nick.

Mr BARTON — I was invited by Melina, and I am not quite sure on what basis. But there was also submission 79, which was put in by Nicholas Barton of Bairnsdale, on roadside vegetation management. If I could, could I refer to that very briefly?

Ms BATH — Absolutely.

Mr BARTON — Thank you. Roadside vegetation, despite Shane Turner's comments, is a problem throughout the area. I am from Hillside brigade; just before you got to Bairnsdale you were in our brigade area. You have driven along Princes Highway and hopefully noticed beautiful old red gums and quite a lot of undergrowth, particularly on one side. One side can be slashed in places; the rest of it is a problem. In 1978 a major fire originated from that roadside and burnt right down to Paynesville. I think two people were killed and there were quite extensive losses.

The CFA has been involved in trying to remedy this situation for quite a few years, but the problem is that the initiative is left totally up to the volunteers. It is very hard to get a strategic plan to say, 'Okay, this is what we are going to do'. With my brigade, we have said that we would like to burn this section and there is no problem getting permits. We have had VicRoads' cooperation and everything else. Then we are looking for a window for when we can get actual volunteers to do it. That has been fairly limited, because as you can imagine on the highway you have got to have a situation where it is not getting totally smoke-logged. You have got to have favourable wind; you have got to have favourable weather when it is not too wet and not too dry. 'Oh, we have got a good weekend. Sorry, we can't get any volunteers in'.

So my plea is that we involve the professional agencies, such as DELWP, in their strategic areas to say, 'Well, hang on, we should look at roads outside the forest areas', and some of these that are going to be carrying a lot of traffic that currently rather than being a strategic firebreak as listed are in fact a fire hazard.

Ms SHING — How big is the land size that you are talking about in terms of the roadside part of Hillside that you are focused on?

Mr BARTON — Hillside probably goes for about 12 to 15 kilometres west of Bairnsdale. The area of Stratford, for which there has been a strategic management plan done, is, I think, 51 kilometres. It is a beautiful plan on paper, but the actual implementation is left up to volunteer brigades to say, 'Okay, this is what we want to do', and in a lot of cases it is just not happening. So there was a big meeting in 2011 saying, 'Yes, this is what we are going to do'. Five years later there has been possibly 2 or 3 kilometres of that 51 kilometres treated. I think this is probably symptomatic of elsewhere. If you have got a keen brigade, yes, something is done. If you have not, nothing is done. So if I could leave it at that.

Ms SHING — How many members have you got in the Hillside brigade?

Mr BARTON — Hillside has only got about 30 members.

Ms BATH — That is not too bad.

Mr BARTON — Okay. Most of them are farmers. Most of them seem to be busy, particularly in fine weather when we want them —

Ms SHING — We have heard a lot of evidence to that effect.

Mr BARTON — so it is very hard to get staff. We can get cooperation from other brigades, but once again if the initiative is left up to us, it is one obsessed old man in a lot of cases trying to get it organised.

Ms SHING — It is about mustering support, yes.

The CHAIR — So that is point one. I think Ian had some points too, did you? A separate matter?

Mr ASHCROFT — Yes, my topic is slightly different, so that is okay. Thanks, Nick.

I believe the Mount Taylor fire brigade also put in a submission covering some of Nick's concerns. I think it was a late submission so the committee may not have had access to it, but I would encourage you to — —

The CHAIR — This is the Mount Taylor — —

Mr ASHCROFT — Yes.

The CHAIR — We have a copy of that.

Mr ASHCROFT — A fairly concise submission.

The CHAIR — If committee members are happy to accept this — —

Mr ASHCROFT — I encourage you to have a read of it.

The CHAIR — I think it has come in late and I think it is — —

Ms DUNN — It was emailed to us, I think.

The CHAIR — Yes, it was.

Ms DUNN — That is the one that came through.

The CHAIR — So I will take this opportunity to accept that for the committee. Are you happy to — —

Ms DUNN — Yes.

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Mr ASHCROFT — It is quite concise and contains a lot of good information. I will start. First, a little bit of history. Until 1891 there was actually no official firefighting agency in Victoria. The Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board and the Country Fire Brigades Board were established in that year of 1891. The Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board had responsibility for 10 miles around the GPO, which was probably about the size of Melbourne in those days and it was a completely paid force — paid firefighters. The Country Fire Brigades Board was for regional towns and cities and was an all-volunteer force. There was no established rural force at that time. Any fires outside those areas were left to the forestry commission and were the responsibility of private landowners. They were basically on their own.

In 1945, following the royal commission in 1939 into the 1939 bushfires — I think there was something else going on between 1939 and 1945, which was occupying people's minds.

Ms SHING — I know what you mean.

Mr ASHCROFT — But in 1945 the CFA was established encompassing the existing Country Fire Brigades Board and the then small and very underfunded Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades Association and also the forestry commission. They were all volunteer based and supported by a small number of paid staff.

As the population grew, especially around Melbourne, there was a need for improved response capability, especially in outer Melbourne and the larger urban centres and, rather than expand the role of the MFB, an integrated model was adopted and we saw the emergence of brigades with both volunteers and paid staff working together. That model may now be broken. It might no longer be appropriate, but that is probably a discussion for another time and another day. But currently there are about 30 to 34 integrated stations with paid staff in Victoria. There are none in East Gippsland. There are about 30 brigades in East Gippsland and they are all fully volunteers. The nearest integrated station to us is in Traralgon. So that is a bit of history.

The paid firefighters are unionised and for some years they have been gaining more influence in the operational management of the CFA. This leads us to the current situation regarding the proposed EBA between the CFA and the United Firefighters Union. Many people believe that the proposed EBA is a bridge too far and should not be implemented as it stands. There are a range of opinions about that. It is a long and complicated document, but, amongst other things, I feel that it devalues and diminishes the role and contribution of volunteers. If volunteers see no value in what they do, or are prevented from carrying out their roles, then membership is likely to decline and the recruitment effort will fall away. There is already some anecdotal evidence that this is happening in a number of integrated stations and surrounding volunteer stations.

Ms SHING — In East Gippsland?

Mr ASHCROFT — Not in East Gippsland because we do not have any integrated stations in East Gippsland.

Ms SHING — Correct.

Mr ASHCROFT — Okay. But I will come to East Gippsland a moment.

Ms SHING — No worries.

Mr ASHCROFT — If that happens, particularly in areas with significant numbers of integrated brigades with surrounding volunteer brigades, it will have serious implications for community safety in East Gippsland. Large fires happen regularly down this way, as you are well aware, and they need a long and sustained effort by large numbers of equipment and large numbers of people to protect the surrounding communities from their impact. Fortunately the CFA has significant surge capacity. We have large numbers of volunteers across the state who can respond and are willing to respond for long periods when needed. In East Gippsland most of this surge capacity is provided by the volunteer brigades in and around outer Melbourne. Our concern is that if the EBA as it currently stands is agreed to, it will result in volunteer disengagement and a lack of future recruitment and, if this happens, a valuable community protection resource will be lost and it will probably never be recovered.

Unfortunately, if that happens, the result for East Gippsland in particular and our communities down here will be poorer, not better, community safety and lack of preparedness for future bushfire seasons. I do not know what the solution is to the current impasse we find ourselves in, I will leave that to wiser heads to negotiate, but the concern of the volunteers is that the proud tradition of volunteerism in the CFA will be seriously eroded and the community will be the worse for it, thank you.

The CHAIR — Can I thank you both for your evidence and I am going to ask a question of both of you, and I will start with Nick first, and I am just going to try to paraphrase what you have said to get to the essence of it. It seems to me that what you are essentially saying is that those large VicRoads roadside areas are not well catered for and that we need a more systematic and integrated approach to deal with those — and tell me if I am paraphrasing this — —

Mr BARTON — I could not have put it better myself.

The CHAIR — The essential point here is that they are not operating as firebreaks, in fact they may well be firetraps. Load builds up and people try to get in and out, and these may actually become a serious hazard or risk in themselves.

Mr BARTON — This has been noticed in the royal commission report that said that a lot of roads are acting as wicks. The Glenaladale fire has been mentioned. It was in grassland, hit the roads, climbed the trees and spotted. So rather than acting as firebreaks, they are acting as fire accelerants.

The CHAIR — So are you aware of any systemic work that has been done by the CFA, or VicRoads for that matter, or others — —

Ms SHING — DELWP was the other one

The CHAIR — DELWP, but whatever particular agency, that catalogues or gives us a systemic position as to those VicRoads roads and the fire preparedness?

Mr BARTON — VicRoads roads — not any that I am aware of. DELWP does look at some of those roads in their Crown land, particularly with emphasis on hazardous trees, and there is some clearing there, but once you get out into what is the country area of Victoria, there is very little. The CFA currently has this ‘leave early and live’. In some areas, if you have a whole heap of people trying to get out at the first sign of fire, you are going to have a massive disaster

The CHAIR — Well, you can see what happened in the Marysville fire, for example, with people trying to get out.

Mr BARTON — Absolutely, and that could be magnified.

Ms SHING — Mallacoota has had that situation.

Ms DUNN — And it probably does not make the leave early criteria if there is already a fire as well.

Mr BARTON — Well, the point is, what are you going to do if you have got — —

Ms DUNN — No, but my point is that the CFA talks about leave early, I do not think that is what they mean by leave early.

The CHAIR — They mean ‘earlier’ early. But the point is still well made.

Ms DUNN — Oh absolutely.

Mr BARTON — If I could just comment on that, if you are going to try to evacuate the Dandenongs every time there is a total fire ban, that is leave early. But it is absolutely totally impractical. Okay, I am not speaking — —

Ms DUNN — You are telling me, Nick. I live in the Dandenong Ranges.

The CHAIR — She represents the Dandenongs as well.

Mr BARTON — I am not representing the CFA, obviously, on that, but I am a volunteer and I am concerned.

The CHAIR — Okay. I am not trying to follow up any further because I think we have got the essence of what I think is a very important point that we have not heard made systematically and clearly before. The other point, and I am going to do the same here — and I am conscious of time — and paraphrase the contribution from Ian, essentially, Ian, what you are saying is that in East Gippsland it is volunteer brigades, but you are dependent in part, when the surge capacity is required, on the movement of other CFA volunteers and indeed probably some paid staff as well into East Gippsland, and the majority of those could come from anywhere in the state but the majority come from the eastern side of Melbourne?

Mr ASHCROFT — Correct.

The CHAIR — And you see — and again I am paraphrasing; some will contest this, but I will put it on the record that it is my view that you are correct — that the diminishment of the CFA volunteers that is occurring as part of this longer sweep and the current cabinet-endorsed EBA puts at risk the recruitment long term in those integrated stations and the surrounding areas of Melbourne, and that the long-term loss of those recruitment opportunities and numbers will, in the longer haul, put East Gippsland communities at risk because the search capacity will not be there. Have I summarised that?

Mr ASHCROFT — That is essentially correct, yes.

The CHAIR — Thank you. I am happy to get that sort of sharply, so that I have got my understanding right. Is this accepted by local district levels? Is this understood at a local district level by the CFA here? Is this all of the local districts through here that understand this?

Mr ASHCROFT — When you are talking about the CFA are you talking about — —

Ms SHING — Brigades or members or — —

The CHAIR — I am talking about the structure. Has this been looked at in some way? Have there been any assessments?

Mr ASHCROFT — Not that I am aware of. Not in any formal sense, no. Not in our preseason planning or anything. If the EBA was signed tomorrow, then on Monday we would not see any difference at East Gippsland.

The CHAIR — But five years down the track you might have a serious impact?

Mr ASHCROFT — Five years down the track we might. Now, whether that has been factored into the strategic planning for the future by our district 11 staff, I do not know; I cannot help you with that.

The CHAIR — Or by the central part of the CFA?

Mr ASHCROFT — I cannot help you with that.

The CHAIR — We will ask them on your behalf and seek to get — —

Ms SHING — Well, no, we can ask them in our own right. We are not asking them on behalf of Mr Ashcroft.

The CHAIR — No. I make the point that we will ask on behalf of the local communities and the local CFA volunteers, because I know that your focus is on getting the best outcome for your communities. Can I ask you also about your view of paid firefighters coming into the field in those sorts of surges and the impact of those paid firefighters and whether there is, under the cabinet-endorsed EBA, a risk that those paid firefighters will not act under direction of a CFA senior officer?

Ms SHING — That is not what the EBA provides. You need to be careful about misleading the witness here, Chair.

The CHAIR — I am asking a question. You will get your turn in a moment.

Mr ASHCROFT — There are a couple of things. The majority of volunteers have no difficulty working with paid staff. We think they do a valuable job and, just as an aside, we think they should be paid appropriately for it and rewarded for their efforts, so we have no issue with their pay claims as it were. We work well with paid staff. But we do not have much experience of it here in East Gippsland because we do not have the integrated stations, but the parallel would be the DELWP staff who are paid, and the CFA volunteers work well with the DELWP staff so there would be no reason why we would not work well with paid staff. We would have no issue with them coming into East Gippsland from integrated stations down the line and helping us out. The issue of whether paid staff will take instructions from volunteers is a vexed one — —

The CHAIR — UFU-paid staff?

Mr ASHCROFT — The UFU-paid staff?

Ms SHING — Well — —

The CHAIR — I am asking a question

Mr ASHCROFT — And there seems to be a range of opinion about that.

Ms SHING — Yes.

The CHAIR — I am asking.

Mr ASHCROFT — I think if that was the situation, if paid staff did come into the area after an incident had been running for some time, moved in and there were experienced volunteers who had been running the incident for some time, and the paid staff indicated that they were not going to take instruction from the volunteers, there would be a degree of resentment amongst the volunteering ranks, put it that way.

Ms SHING — Thank you, gentlemen. At the outset thank you for your service and for the contribution that you make along with your brigades and the volunteers who assist, as well as the families of volunteers. They are often a huge part of response in Gippsland in particular when assistance is needed. I would like to go what the Chair has just indicated to you. We have previously heard evidence from the chief fire officer, Mr Steve Warrington, in relation to the way in which a volunteer could in fact and would under the proposed enterprise agreement, as an incident controller being first on scene, be the one to actually be able to direct paid and volunteer staff in relation to an incident, and it would be then paid staff who would direct their crews as other paid staff to give effect to what the incident controller wanted to have happen. That is one important thing to clarify in all of this.

Mr ASHCROFT — That would be a perfectly acceptable arrangement for everybody.

Ms SHING — That is an acceptable outcome for you?

Mr ASHCROFT — Yes.

Ms SHING — And for you as well, Mr Barton?

Mr BARTON — It would be. One concern I do have about the EBA is the discrimination between paid and volunteer. I believe the EBA states that seven paid staff must be despatched, which in fact means that if volunteers are despatched, they do not even count. To me, that is changing the emphasis of the CFA, which was originally a volunteer-based organisation supported by professional staff. The professional staff are saying, 'We are different, and we are not actually integrating' — although they call them integrated stations — 'with the model of the CFA', and that is a concern.

Ms SHING — To pick up on that despatch of seven on the ground and the paid staff requirement in that regard, that is — as much as anything in terms of the evidence that this inquiry has heard — relating to response times, whereby if paid staff are already at the integrated station, one of the 34 stations to which this would apply, they can then be despatched to a total number of seven. If a volunteer happens to go to the incident and actually becomes the incident controller because they are first on scene, or if a paid person turns up at the scene, they can then — after that has been despatched — say, 'Well, no. we don't actually need seven. So don't worry. You don't need to come in', and on that basis — —

The CHAIR — That is contested.

Ms SHING — No. That is the evidence that we have heard from the CFA.

The CHAIR — It is contested heavily.

Ms SHING — Chair, please! That is the evidence that we have heard —

The CHAIR — No, it is not.

Ms SHING — from the CFA and from the chief fire officer. On that basis I just wanted to give that to you. One of the things I also wanted to confirm is that federal employment and industrial relations minister Michaelia Cash has been on the record in an interview confirming that the enterprise agreement will only affect staff and volunteers working in those 34 or 35 integrated stations. I just wanted to flesh that out in the context of East Gippsland, because we all know just how dense and difficult the terrain is. The topography is incredibly challenging. The communities are spread far and wide, and often in cases of communities like Mallacoota, one road in and one road out, and the community has to rely on itself and agency support as it works there.

Do you think that community safety as it currently applies, where everyone participates from the area to assist in the event of an emergency, would change so that, because of this proposed agreement, there would be a

lessening of responsiveness to people in need — from a volunteer perspective, from your perspective? You talk about people leaving the CFA and volunteers not wanting to come along and help out. Everywhere I go, the evidence seems to be that people will keep on turning out and keep on being there for their communities, and that is one of the hallmarks of the volunteer effort and has been since 1891.

Mr BARTON — Okay. If I could support what Ian says, there is no concern that local volunteers will not turn out. I have been to the alpine fires in 2003 and 2006–07. As was stated, the strike teams that came up were predominantly from eastern Melbourne. We just cannot handle the amount of work that had to be done for the period of time it had to be done. If it is correct that in fact these volunteer brigades around the integrated stations are being discouraged from coming, which anecdotally I have heard, and if there is the discouragement of these volunteers in this area, we are going to lose that surge capacity. So years down the track, yes, the communities will still be doing their best, but it will be against much more overwhelming odds than we face at the moment.

Ms SHING — That is what the VFBV said in 2006, interestingly too. Ian, did you want to add anything to that before we pass on to Melina?

Mr ASHCROFT — No. That is fine.

Ms BATH — I am interested, Nick, in your comments and your submission around the vegetation. I think it is a very pertinent point, because we have many roads and many towns in this beautiful countryside of East Gippsland and, as you say, they can be a wick. You mentioned the strategic management plan that looks good on paper. How would you see the relationship? What needs to change? If you had your magic wand, what would change in working with DELWP and government? What would it look like in terms of forward planning for that roadside management?

Mr BARTON — DELWP currently have a plan for asset protection. I cannot remember the exact phrase.

Ms BATH — It is *Safer together*.

Mr BARTON — Yes, *Safer together*, but they do not include roadsides in the country area of Victoria in that planning, or it is for the bush adjoining communities — ‘Yes, we’ll have to control that’. I think that they need to broaden their thinking so that, okay, within *Safer together* we actually start looking at developing a strategic plan in conjunction with the CFA and VicRoads, or with the shire where appropriate whose roads are — —

Ms BATH — All agencies.

Mr BARTON — Yes, all agencies. So we can say, ‘Okay. We can see the problem. This is how we tackle it, and we will actually use professional organisations to get the strategic planning. This is when it will be done’. We can say to the local brigades, ‘Can you assist us in that?’, and I think almost all of them would love to, but at the moment it is the other way around. It is the volunteer brigades having to try and initiate all this work.

Ms BATH — Move the camel.

Mr BARTON — Move the camel, yes. If the camel is actually moving, we are happy to ride it.

Ms BATH — I mean no disrespect to DELWP in that comment at all.

Ms SHING — Or to camels.

Ms BATH — That is right. You feel like you are pushing.

The CHAIR — We are not introducing another pest, by the way.

Ms DUNN — Let us not go there.

Ms SHING — And we have got brumbies already.

Mr BARTON — In my perception, it is just outside DELWP’s current field of view. They are not even looking at it. We really would love some assistance to get a system where these roads could be dealt with much better.

Ms BATH — Thank you. In fairness to DELWP, I am sure they are very willing to look at this, but maybe it has not come and this is an opportunity to raise these issues here, and council included.

Mr BARTON — I would be delighted if you could.

Ms BATH — Just shifting back to the removal of the 5 per cent target burns, in many respects East Gippsland is a mosaic of forests and hillsides et cetera. In the past, Ian, what has been CFA district 11's role in supporting those targeted patchworks, and what do you see in the future? Has district 11 helped within that?

Mr ASHCROFT — Can I take over? I have a couple of issues.

Ms BATH — It is open to the floor.

Ms SHING — This is relatively informal.

Mr BARTON — Don Roderick is over there, but I am an ex-Mount Taylor member. Yes, particularly Mount Taylor, Sarsfield and some of the brigades on that fringe have regularly assisted DELWP in burns in their area of concern close to their district.

Mr ASHCROFT — I am from Lakes Entrance, so I am a predominantly urban brigade, and we do assist occasionally. But CFA brigades are not the land managers. As Nick was saying, it is up to the land managers to organise the burnings — the paperwork and the administrative work — with the brigades. Quite frankly brigades often are not capable of all that administrative stuff. They then invite the CFA brigades in over the top of it to help.

Ms SHING — Jump-start.

Mr ASHCROFT — So, yes, we participate by invitation, and they are only too willing to participate. It is great training for our members; it is pretty good.

Ms SHING — Yes, absolutely.

Mr ASHCROFT — It is the first time a lot of them ever see a fire.

Ms BATH — Good experience. Thank you.

Ms SHING — A lot of land out there to manage.

Ms DUNN — Thanks, gentlemen, for your submission this morning. Yesterday we heard from district 9 in the South Gippsland group, and they talked about an anecdote in relation to issues around chain of command. The story that they told as part of that was that a paid firefighter would not take instruction from a volunteer firefighter who happened to be the incident controller. What I am wondering is have either of you gentlemen experienced or heard similar stories in relation to concerns around chain of command?

Mr ASHCROFT — I personally have not. Nick may have.

Mr BARTON — I have heard concerns, but I have absolutely no firsthand experience at all. I do not personally know of any such situation. In a lot of fires where I have been involved, in some of the longer term ones, they have in fact had paid staff come up, but there has often been the incident controller. So I do not know of a situation where a paid officer has refused to take instruction from a volunteer, but I cannot say that it has not happened.

Ms DUNN — That is fine.

Mr ASHCROFT — The situation we have with DELWP, which we work closely with, is we have a protocol. If DELWP and CFA turn up at a fire at the same time, one of the first things we do is the leaders of the two organisations get together and say, 'Who's the boss?', 'You are? You run it'. So that is the way we work with DELWP.

Ms DUNN — Yes, it is very clear. Thank you, gentlemen.

Mr YOUNG — Thanks for coming in today. I have just got one very simple question. If you had a wish list for what you could have to provide a better service than what you do, what would it consist of?

Ms SHING — Now is your chance.

Mr ASHCROFT — I think we are well served with equipment. Although some brigades might say their trucks are a bit old — —

Ms SHING — Mallacoota has got the oldest truck in the fleet apparently.

Mr ASHCROFT — I think from my own point of view I would prefer to see more resources put into training.

Mr YOUNG — Anything else to add?

Mr BARTON — I would go along with that. There have been instances, apparently, where there have been problems with training due to this UFU versus CFA.

Ms BATH — I think it is clause 148, from yesterday's conversation.

The CHAIR — Are there examples of that?

Mr BARTON — The only examples I am aware of are, firstly, Judge Lewis, I think it was, where there was an ongoing dispute for quite some time about the provision of protective clothing.

Ms SHING — Uniforms, yes.

Mr BARTON — The report on that was fairly scathing of the UFU's position. Secondly, there are apparently chainsaw training trailers which have been developed. The UFU was allegedly inhibiting their release to the volunteers to provide that training and apparently they have now put a thing on — sorry, the trailers cannot be taken out unless the person taking them has a qualification to tow a trailer. I am unaware of any such — —

Ms BATH — I tow a trailer. Do I need a qualification?

Mr BARTON — Not as far as I am aware, as long as it has not got chainsaws in it.

Mr YOUNG — I am pretty sure a drivers licence is a qualification.

Ms DUNN — A drivers licence is probably important.

Ms SHING — So a drivers licence would suffice in that situation.

Ms DUNN — Only if you are going on a public road though.

Mr BARTON — Normally a drivers licence suffices if you are going to tow a caravan.

Mr YOUNG — So they are talking about an additional qualification?

Mr BARTON — I am going on what the VFBV has told me, and I cannot confirm it, but they are claiming that unless the operator has a licence to tow that particular trailer, the trailer stays — —

The CHAIR — It would be a shock to everyone who owns a boat and a caravan.

Mr ASHCROFT — The VFBV have made a submission to this inquiry, the 22-page submission and 10 attachments. Somewhere in that mass of paperwork is the story of the chainsaw trailer.

Ms SHING — Is that what you based your earlier statement on, having read the VFBV submission, Ian?

Mr ASHCROFT — Based what on? What I said — —

Ms SHING — Your opening comments?

Mr ASHCROFT — No, they were my personal views and what I believe to be the views of the majority of volunteers in East Gippsland.

Ms BATH — Thank you, Ian.

The CHAIR — Thank you. We will also follow that up. I will just put on record my thanks and the committee's thanks for the work that CFA volunteers do in East Gippsland.

Ms DUNN — Yes, absolutely.

The CHAIR — We are very happy to have had the evidence that we have just had. Thank you very much.

Ms SHING — Thanks, gentlemen.

Mr ASHCROFT — Thank you very much for your time.

Mr BARTON — And thank you for coming to East Gippsland.

Ms SHING — Thanks for having us back.

Witnesses withdrew.