T R A N S C R I P T

ENVIRONMENT,NATURAL RESOURCES AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the CFA training college at Fiskville

Melbourne — 9 November 2015

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The CHAIR — Good morning to everybody attending today, in particular Dr Kate White, who is presenting. Before we go to your presentation I have a few formalities to go through. As outlined in the guide that was 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 attracts parliamentary privilege. Any comments you make outside the hearing will not be afforded such privilege. It is an act of contempt of Parliament to provide false or misleading evidence to the inquiry. The committee may ask you to provide follow-up information or perhaps even return if there are some other things we need to talk to you about. All evidence given today is being recorded and you will be provided with a proof of the transcript to check for accuracy. I now pass over to you and thank you again for coming. After your presentation committee members will ask a number of questions.

Dr WHITE — Thank you, Chair, and thank you members of the committee for the opportunity to present an overview of the history of the CFA. I was asked to focus on four matters: one is the culture of firefighting specifically within the CFA, including any changes over time; secondly, the emergence of the environmental conservation movement in the 1960s and 1970s and the response of the CFA to environmental issues; thirdly, the establishment of the Fiskville training college in the 1970s; and, fourthly, approaches to occupational health and safety matters in the CFA from the 1970s to the mid-1990s.

The evidence I give is based on a book that I co-authored with Robert Murray called *State of Fire*, which was a commissioned history of volunteer firefighting and the CFA in Victoria.

I will now address the first issue, and that is around the culture of firefighting, specifically within the CFA, and changes over time. How do we understand the culture of an organisation over time? I do a lot of research at the moment in a very different field and organisational culture is one thing that really interests me. The definition adopted by the Victorian Public Sector Commission is that:

> Organisational culture is the shared values and beliefs that guide how members of an organisation approach their work and interact with each other. It is expressed and manifested through the behaviours, customs and practices these members collectively display.

The first thing to say about the organisational culture of the CFA is that in part it was forged by powerful individuals. The first of these was Geoffrey Graeme Sinclair, whose working life, or most of his working life apart from service in the AIF during World War I, was mostly spent with the Country Fire Brigades Board and the CFA. After service at Gallipoli, France and Belgium he returned to Melbourne and worked in the federal tax department for some years and studied part-time to become an accountant. In 1926, aged 30, he was appointed secretary of the CFBB, a position more akin to a chief executive officer or general manager. We wrote in the book that:

> No other person in the entire history of the CFA excited so much passion and controversy.

Sinclair remained secretary of the CFBB from 1926 to 1945, when the CFBB merged into a new entity, the CFA, and he then continued as secretary until he retired in 1961.

The urban brigades were more sympathetic in their assessment of him than leaders of rural brigades due to the longer association that urban brigades had with him. Sinclair was autocratic and did not like to delegate. He was the eyes and the ears of the CFA and centralised its management. He monitored the work of the chief officer and the deputy chief officer, the regional offices and the motor mechanics. He had an excellent knowledge of Parliament, government departments and state authorities, and he was efficient and courteous in his dealings with the minister. He was often required to provide information to the minister between monthly board meetings. He established good relations with the Forests Commission, the police and local government. He favoured those functions of the CFA that he understood and was unsympathetic to others. For instance because of his interest in engineering he supported the need for maintenance mechanics, but he did not initially support the development of radio communication.

CFA groups of brigades had been formed during and after the Second World War by a group of volunteer leaders who had all had commissions during the war. As an example of some of the tensions within the organisation in the post-war period, they waged a war with Sinclair over his opposition to the groups. In the end the rural association bypassed Sinclair and went to the chief secretary to put its case for recognition of the groups, and the 1959 act, the Country Fire Authority (Amendment) Act, made provision for the formal recognition of groups of rural fire brigades.

Another indication of tensions within the organisation is that in 1950 H. V. Gingell, deputy chief officer of the CFA, was dismissed, according to the *Age*, for insubordination and alleged disloyalty to the authority. That case exposed some of the difficulties inherent in having a determined secretary acting as a de facto general manager. When he retired he was replaced by Jack Allen, and the following year disastrous fires in the Dandenongs exposed the weaknesses of the CFA. The view was held by one parliamentarian at the time that the head office administration ran the CFA and the chief officer was way down the hierarchy.

Following the fires in 1962 in the Dandenongs, the government appointed a permanent chairman, Dick Eason. Like Sinclair before him he had fought in war. He had a very strong military background. He fought in the Middle East and in New Guinea during the Second World War and afterwards he was an instructor in the PMG training school. That sort of authoritarian culture continued as well as a disciplined, coordinated approach to the CFA's operations. In 1975 the UFU Victorian secretary, William Webber, claimed Eason was developing the CFA into a paramilitary organisation. So there is this theme about, I guess, the experience he had in the armed forces being then transposed onto the CFA culture.

But the culture was not just about those two very powerful individuals. It was to do with the regional officers that were appointed with the formation of the CFA in 1945. In the book we describe how they really were missionaries for the new organisation. Without them the CFA would have been a remote organisation in Melbourne with little impact on the workings of country brigades, so the regional officers had a critical role in developing the culture of the CFA.

Another view of the culture of the CFA was provided by Race Mathews, who as Minister for Police and Emergency Services in the Cain Labor government in the 1980s had supported the government's proposal to integrate the CFA and MFB, and this move was resisted by the CFA. The chief argument against integration was that it would weaken the volunteer basis of the CFA. Mathews later reflected that there was no way in which the cultures of the MFB and CFA could be successfully married within the time frame the government had in mind. He also recalled frustration within the bureaucracy in trying to subject the CFA to any sort of managerial discipline and accountability.

In reflecting on the culture of firefighting it is important to acknowledge that volunteers were and remain central to the CFA. While successive leaders tried to instil a military-like discipline, at the end of the day volunteers maintained a degree of independence and, you know, could take their bat and ball and go home. So that reflects, I think, the culture within the organisation of top-down leadership but also the bottom-up approach, in which volunteers become local champions of the organisation. I think that is very important to the culture of the organisation.

So there was often tension in the period that we were looking at between the management of the CFA, the paid officers and the volunteers. There was also tension between the rural association that represented the interests of rural volunteers and management on the one hand and also the urban association and management on the other.

The volunteers were the face of the CFA in local communities. As rural towns and hamlets lost population and, as a result, services during the 1970s and 1980s - often including the local shop and even the local post office - the CFA was at times the only visible sign of community that remained. The CFA tin sheds often came to symbolise the local community, and rural brigades were well supported by their local community.

In the wake of the Ash Wednesday fires there was better appreciation that there needed to be more coordination between the emergency services. Previously they had not communicated well and did not, for example, train together. One improvement was the disaster services council established under the 1983 disaster act.

In 1991 the government appointed Len Foster, former secretary of the State Electricity Commission and director-general of the Department of Conservation and Environment, as chairman. Voluntary redundancies were offered to full-time officers and new specialists were brought into the organisation, particularly in the research area. He tried to reduce the distinction between permanent employees and volunteers by ensuring that training, protective equipment and other CFA support was available. He introduced, for instance, a corporate plan in 1992 that provided for a policy framework for the CFA. He changed the role of regional planning committees to ensure that volunteers and career personnel shared in regional decision-making.

In summary, this brief outline of the culture of firefighting indicates the impact of strong leaders with a military background on the organisational culture, the crucial role of regional officers as the face of the CFA in local

communities, the resistance of volunteers at times to what they considered an authoritarian approach, the frustration of government on occasion with the culture of the CFA and finally the transition in the early 1990s to a managerial culture.

I have actually reversed the order of these four issues, and I would like to talk briefly about the establishment of Fiskville training college in the 1970s. As noted in the response to the first issue, Dick Eason, the permanent chairman of the CFA, had spent time as an instructor in the PMG and the need for more training in the CFA had been emphasised in the wake of the 1962 Dandenongs fires. He developed what was called the Little Red Book — its formal title was *Tactics and Administration in the Field* — which introduced a more disciplined and coordinated approach to firefighting in country Victoria. He said this was the first attempt to formalise firefighting on a military basis and provide volunteers with a uniform framework of operation. He also recommended that the CFA expand its group officer training and suggested the establishment of a mobile wing for urban and rural training and in the long term a permanent training school.

Eason had required all permanent officers to undertake the PMG's teacher training course to gain proficiency in instructing others about how to gain information and skills. All CFA regions formed training committees and on the weekends the training wing put these committees through an abridged teacher training course.

The Barber report in 1977 recommended greater expenditure on vehicles, radios and other equipment, but it also noted there had been almost no research into rural grassfires and noted other points requiring research, including the width of back-burn required to stop a running fire, the most effective way to make a wet firebreak and requirements to ensure crew safety. Eason therefore was instrumental in the greater focus on training in the 60s and 70s, and of course the largest change in the CFA in the 70s was the establishment of a permanent training centre near Ballan.

There were a number of pressures for additional training in the CFA, and one of the important ones was to prepare new leaders. The CFA and its predecessor had been fortunate to have outstanding leaders, many of whom had forged their leadership skills in the first and second world wars, but a new generation of leaders was emerging who had a different path into volunteering in the CFA. The development of Fiskville was also, though, a response to the greater incidence of more complex fires in oil refineries and chemical and industrial plants and of chemical and oil spillages in road accidents, and the expansion of communications.

It is important to note, I think, that a greater emphasis on research complemented this focus on training, and so there was a research unit established in the 70s. In the early 90s under Foster's chairmanship the CFA introduced decentralised field training grounds, with facilities such as fire attack buildings and flammable liquid and LPG to simulate fire conditions. These were opened at Wangaratta, Penshurst, Horsham, West Sale and Carrum Downs. The initiative for using these grounds lay with individual brigades, and increasingly the emphasis was on competency-based training, with step-by-step accreditation more specifically geared for particular needs but under national standards. It should be noted that, for instance, in 1992–93 the Fiskville training centre accommodated over 3500 CFA personnel but also 1171 others for many different courses. Organisations such as Shell, Alcoa and Telecom used Fiskville for their own fire training courses.

While innovations such as competency-based training and decentralised training grounds left the decision of training with individuals or brigades, some volunteers, particularly in rural brigades, believed that the effect of more training and administrative changes was making the CFA work too time consuming. That was particularly a problem for rural volunteers who were tied to farms, as many of them were, who could not easily drop out but who might on rare occasions be called to a chemical spill, for example.

Chair, I am aware that I have used my 15 minutes. Would you like me to continue to talk about the emergence of the environmental conservation, or would you rather I took questions from there?

The CHAIR — What I have read of the book, in terms of the environmental agencies, this is the clash between the greenies and the CFA?

Dr WHITE — Yes.

The CHAIR — Maybe we can ask a bit about that, do you think?

Dr WHITE — Yes, that is fine.

The CHAIR — I think all the committee members have a lot of questions.

Dr WHITE — Okay. That is fine.

The CHAIR — It is not really about what the CFA was doing in terms of the environment but more of the issues with burning off and so on.

Dr WHITE — Yes. Different perspectives.

The CHAIR — Okay, so maybe I will start with the first question. First of all, in terms of the book, I think it makes reference to board meeting papers and things like, so there was cooperation with the CFA in terms of writing the book; is that correct?

Dr WHITE — Yes. We were actually commissioned by the CFA to write the book. They advertised publicly for expressions of interest to write a history of the CFA, and this occurred under Len Foster's chairmanship. They were really very keen. They had set up a subcommittee, that we worked with, that included at least one academic historian who specialised in environmental issues. I think it was a sense of the CFA really wanting to reflect on its history and the journey that it had taken. Having said that, in terms of being a commissioned history, we had freedom to make our own conclusions on — —

The CHAIR — I was not asking that question in terms of questioning any of what is there. I have not quite finished it yet, but it is a good read as well as good information.

Dr WHITE — Thank you.

The CHAIR — But it sounds to me like they opened up their records so that you could have a look and go through it, whatever you wanted to.

Dr WHITE — Absolutely, and we did a total of 101 interviews with both full-time officers and volunteers right across the state. There was a lot of cooperation. I think it was also a sense of still coming to terms with Ash Wednesday and the legacy of that, and I think for some of the volunteers being able to talk about it to us was good, was cathartic.

The CHAIR — And so with the board papers, there was no problem with you looking at them and going through all of those issues?

Dr WHITE — No.

The CHAIR — Okay. I guess because people were thinking about the bushfires and responses by the CFA, was there any information that came up — for example, what we are looking into, which is the occupational health and safety issues around the Fiskville training college or the contamination?

Dr WHITE — Not specifically around Fiskville. There were some issues around occupational health and safety that we have detailed in the book. One was as early as 64–65 when Samuel Burston was part-time chair of the CFA, and he became very aware of occupational health and safety. Throughout that two-year period that he was chairman there were frequent reports from its medical officer, Sir Albert Coates, recommending leave for regional officers referred to him. He said that they were generally suffering from physical symptoms in which stress was a factor. In fact the CFA in response agreed that its senior officers and regional officers aged 45 and over should have medical examinations each six months. Coates examined 23 officers over a two-month period and found that 9 of them showed evidence of some medical disorder and recommended they get adequate rest. These people were working long days and long nights and had what we would know as burnout, but they just kept going.

The CHAIR — But not in terms of any of the chemicals that were burnt or used?

Dr WHITE — I cannot recall any discussion, and I have gone through the book and I cannot find any reference to that. But Fiskville, when we visited it in maybe 93 or 94, was very important as a training centre, and we were taken there to see the extent of its operations there.

The CHAIR — When you talk about there being strong leadership from the top down but also a very robust and questioning volunteer grassroots movement, would you say there was a really strong emphasis on reputation, that that was foremost in the minds of the leadership of the CFA? I just note there are a few people who have dissented or raised an issue and were terminated or suspended and, as you say, there was one person removed for insubordination. Do you think this was an issue within the culture of the CFA during the time that you were looking — that reputation seemed to be in the forefront of everybody's mind as the thing that was to be most protected at the cost of everything else?

Dr WHITE — Reputation of the authority was very important, and as you have said, the very strong leadership required that that reputation was upheld. But in a sense the volunteers are always that sort of little niggling — how does one describe it? When you have as a backbone of an organisation a large volunteer base who are not paid employees, there will be dissent. I guess we saw it in the period we were looking at as very healthy dissent too, particularly among some of the rural brigades because rural brigades had to support each other during fire seasons et cetera. These were very competent firemen, old-style firemen, and they probably had more difficulty than the urban brigades amalgamating into the CFA. So there was always going to be healthy questioning and scepticism, but one could also see that as a real strength of the organisation.

The CHAIR — One other question in terms of that sort of culture, because I know that in the Joy report it talks about a real can-do attitude and some allegations about wanting to protect reputation. Where do you think that sort of attitude came from, this idea that 'We can do it whatever the cost'? Is that through pride in being a member of the CFA and therefore anything can be done? Do you agree with Mr Joy's assessment that that was one of the problems at the time of the chemical contaminations, that this can-do attitude was there and no-one said anything because if you did you were a bit of a wuss and you did not want to raise any issues about the reputation of the CFA?

Dr WHITE — I saw evidence of that can-do attitude when we were doing this book. Keep in mind that we actually worked within the CFA headquarters at East Burwood at the time and there was a very positive can-do attitude. But the need to protect reputation, I think, goes right back to Sinclair and Eason. It was that framework of army discipline, you know, and an authoritarian leadership model, and that seemed to continue within the organisation. So it was very deep seated,.

Mr McCURDY — Dr White, my understanding is the CFA is the largest volunteer group in the world — 65 000-plus members. Obviously, as you say, there are not issues but certainly relationship difficulties. You said the cultures could not be married between the MFB and the CFA at the time. Do you think things have changed over time?

Dr WHITE — When I referred to that, that was a quote from an interview we did with Race Mathews, and that was his view — that they could not be married.

Mr McCURDY — That was when, did you say? Was that in the early 90s?

Ms WARD — The 1980s.

Dr WHITE — That was in the 80s, I think, when he was the responsible minister.

Mr McCURDY — Okay. So has there been any evidence since that time that that relationship has changed?

Dr WHITE — I guess it is not appropriate for me to comment on that. My interest in or my understanding of the CFA as an organisation really ends with the end of that book, which was about 94, and I can offer no more than a layperson's view on that. It is probably not appropriate.

Mr McCURDY — Fair enough; thank you. We have been talking about the CFA's attitudes to OHS probably not matching community expectations as time went on. Obviously in the 70s there was a lack of awareness, but as community expectations grew do you think the CFA changed in that time, or was there a time lag between community expectations and their attitudes towards OHS?

Dr WHITE — I think one of the interesting things was that in the late 80s, after the Ash Wednesday fires, the CFA joined the industrial chaplaincy service, and volunteers found the stress counselling provided after major incidents was valuable. That, I think, was the CFA catching up, because the stress that volunteers experienced during the Ash Wednesday fires was enormous.

I think it is worth noting that several of those whom we interviewed about their experience in the Ash Wednesday fires to us still seemed traumatised when we interviewed them 10 years later. I can clearly remember a captain of a brigade saying to us that even a year or two earlier he would not have been able to talk with us about that experience as it was so traumatic and traumatising, and that memory stayed with me. I think the CFA did have some catching up to do to understand that you cannot put people through a holocaust of fire — to experience that — and then go back to normal life afterwards.

Mr RICHARDSON — Thank you, Dr White, for coming in. First a question regarding record keeping and your observations over time. The Fiskville inquiry committee has heard of numerous examples of records not being kept regarding Fiskville. I just wanted to get your thoughts on whether that was systemic across the CFA and whether those record-keeping practices, particularly through the 70s and 80s, were systemic across the organisation.

Dr WHITE — My recollection is that the record keeping was quite good and that we had an enormous amount of archival material to work through. The CFA certainly was very serious about record keeping when we were working there in the early 90s — 92, 93, and 94. They had a full-time librarian and archivist, and the records had all been very well archived, so I was not aware at that time that there were any shortcomings in the record keeping.

Mr RICHARDSON — Why do you think maybe there is that contrast between the training college at Fiskville and some of those chemicals that were operated there and the procedures? Do you have a view of why there might have been shortcomings in that regard?

Dr WHITE — I really could not comment at all. As I said, we did on one occasion visit Fiskville. I cannot remember any discussion about the chemicals that were used. I know at one point we were invited to go into a simulated fire situation, which was terrifying, in a dark, heated room, but I do not recall any discussion around chemicals that were used there.

Mr RICHARDSON — We have had witnesses and career firefighters give evidence about trying to access records and details over sometimes a decade-long period. In any of your observations and research did you come across some of that tension between career firefighters trying to access information about incidents or records and that tension with the board or with the authority in accessing that information?

Dr WHITE — No.

Mr RICHARDSON — Obviously the OHS procedures came online through the mid-80s and provided a strong obligation for an employer to adhere to those proper practices and procedures. Did you observe in any of your research any tension between the CFA undertaking that work and implementing a proper safe and protected work environment for their career and volunteer staff across the authority?

Dr WHITE — No. There was discussion. The discussion, I guess, was more at the level of equipment, particularly for volunteers, but not in relation to broader OHS issues. It was necessary to provide the right equipment and breathing apparatus et cetera, so the discussion was at that level rather than anything broader.

Mr RICHARDSON — Just finally, with the point that you raised about volunteers and the fact that they could pick up their ball and go home, given the challenges that career staff faced in raising various issues, what chance did volunteers have to bring any concerns or challenges forward when effectively that oversight was not there as opposed to career staff? Were there any tensions you found where volunteers were unable to raise those issues?

Dr WHITE — We have cited several occasions in the book where the volunteers were very effective in bringing issues, because they would use the political processes; they would often go to the relevant minister. They would bypass the CFA board and take their concerns directly to government or to their local member, so they were really quite effective at being heard. I guess that is the strength of being part of a volunteer organisation: your job is not on the line. If you are not happy with the conditions and you are not happy with communication between the board and the volunteer brigades, there are avenues open to you, and they certainly used them.

Mr RICHARDSON — Even with safety procedures?

Dr WHITE — I am not aware of that. I have gone back through the book, and I cannot find any evidence of that being discussed.

Mr YOUNG — Thank you, Dr White. I am very interested in hearing about the environmental movement, and I will get to that, but just quickly, when talking about the military culture being ingrained in the CFA right from the beginning, do you think that might have been one of the driving factors in the CFA becoming such a successful organisation and in doing what they do and achieving what they have over the past?

Dr WHITE — I agree, absolutely. When you have got an unusual organisational structure, where you have got a board, paid officers and this huge contingent of volunteers divided between the urban brigades and the rural brigades, you need I guess strong leadership to get all that to hang together, so yes, that strong, almost authoritarian leadership is a strength, but it also is an issue when there is dissent within the organisation.

Mr YOUNG — In terms of the environmental movement, can you tell us a bit about how that affected the CFA, what sorts of things were imposed on them, how they reacted to them and what practices they may have had to take up as a result?

Dr WHITE — Yes. I would like to actually go back. To talk about environmental conservation, we really do need to go back to 1926. Why 1926? Because in that year Victoria experienced disastrous fires in its forests in January and February. They were most severe in Gippsland, and they burnt 405 000 hectares of mostly Crown land and killed 50 people. As a result of these fires the government extensively amended the Forests Act in 1927, and these amendments banned indiscriminate lighting of fires in the open in certain periods of the year, both inside and outside forest areas. They also commenced the proclaimed period in October rather than traditionally as it had been in November and extended it from April to May.

While intended to prevent fires being deliberately lit near forests, in practice these amendments led to Forests Commission officers mostly not burning at all in forests. It was just too complicated. Some landowners were not burning either because they found it inconvenient to go and get this permit — you can imagine that bushmen do not like authority and do not like having to go in and get permits — or because it was difficult to start undergrowth burning between the wet months of May and October. This October would be no problem, but there are times when it would be too wet to burn. So the apathy towards fires extended to fire prevention. Many owners did not clear and burn their land. They said, ‘If the government wants to play the game this way, we won’t do what we traditionally have done, which is burn and clear when we think the time is right’. The worst offenders of course were absentee landowners.

What emerged at the Stretton inquiry into the 1939 fires as an important cause of this apathy was landowners’ anger or fear towards the Forests Commission, which pursued a policy of controlling indiscriminate burning — that is, burning at those times of the year when the government deemed it illegal to start fires — and landowners resented the permit system. What happened in 39 was that there was an abundance of fuel on the forest floor, partly as a result of the policies pursued by the government and carried out by its Forests Commission over the previous 13 years and partly due to the influence of landowners. Several of the witnesses at the Stretton royal commission talked about it being ‘nobody’s business’. They used the words, and we have a chapter entitled ‘Nobody’s business’. It was nobody’s business to fight fires. That is an example of where government intervention — government policies — caused people to walk away from fire prevention.

Why I mention this and why I think this is so important is that what had happened by the 50s and 60s was that many Victorians had not learnt from their recent history. In the 1950s you had this urban fringe to the east of Melbourne moving rapidly towards the Dandenongs, with some of the houses being built in scrubby areas beyond reticulated water supply. Property owners often failed to comply with council orders to clear their properties before the summer, and a great proportion of these new property owners worked in other suburbs or in the city, so they were away during the day and were leaving the responsibility of fire protection to the few volunteers who remained in the area.

Conservation issues became really clear in the 1962 fires in the Dandenongs, which were the worst on the fringe of Melbourne since 1939. Residents in the Dandenongs had always been conservation minded, and some criticised the Save the Dandenongs League, an early conservation group, and the influence it had on the council and more particularly on the Town and Country Planning Board. As a result of several local planning schemes, locals could not cut down trees on their block. That is an example of where, within a generation, we had forgotten the stories of 1939 and what happened and what led to that huge firestorm across so much of the state.

But by the 70s community thinking about conservation had changed. Environmentalists wanted less fuel reduction burning, both in the forests and in the countryside at large. They also opposed ploughed or burnt roadside firebreaks. Cool-burning techniques, well established in the 70s, allowed room for compromise, but it was not always easy, but the CFA was in those discussions and negotiations a lot more.

Conservation pressure was felt most in the regional and local advisory committees, but as it developed it could influence local councils and the Country Roads Board and the Forests Commission to be less stringent in enforcing hazard clearing, especially at roadsides and in and around forests. It seems for some reason that roadsides became a bit of a symbol of this tussle between conservationists and others. Sections of roadsides became the source of sometimes bitter controversy from the 70s, as conservationists' sentiment consolidated. These were generally roadsides that were too steep, narrow, rocky or wooded for slashing but where conservationists objected to burning either on aesthetic grounds or because stretches of the bush were the habitat of particular botanical or bird species.

The search for common ground and an acceptable path between the conservationists and old-style firemen in the construction of roadside breaks became one of the more time-consuming fire prevention questions, particularly in the 1990s. So what we described, I think, in the book was that the CFA did try to meet common ground with the conservationists, and cool burning was one of those compromise techniques. They were certainly well aware of the arguments that the conservationists were putting forward and, I would say, responding to those. They were actually looking at the arguments that conservationists were putting forward.

Mr YOUNG — But I am assuming that all the while arguing that preventive burning still is a very vital part of what they do.

Dr WHITE — Yes. If you look at the period between 1926 and 1939 and the loss of life that occurred in 1939, you cannot leave the forest floor to accumulate that much debris.

Mr YOUNG — And even if you take away the loss of life, I suppose there is the loss of environmental assets as well.

Dr WHITE — Yes.

Ms WARD — Thanks, Kate. It was a very interesting read; thank you. It was a good perspective for a number of us on the history of the CFA and how we are where we are now. In your research did you come across any material discussing training at Fiskville, such as meeting minutes and so on.

Dr WHITE — Meeting minutes of training?

Ms WARD — No. In terms of the board or any other conversations around Fiskville, were you able to find material that spoke about those meetings or that were minutes of those meetings that discussed the training at Fiskville?

Dr WHITE — No. I have gone back through the book, and I cannot. The emphasis was much more on the setting up of Fiskville, of the development not only of training there but in the regions. There is quite a lot of discussion about more complex fires, particularly fires in refineries, chemical and industrial plants, and fires around road accidents and how to respond to those. We certainly were not aware of any tensions between the board and the Fiskville operation, or criticisms of volunteers about Fiskville. The only criticism, which I have already mentioned, was some particularly rural volunteers who thought that they did not need more training or they did not have time for more training.

Ms WARD — Given that Fiskville appears to be such an important part of CFA culture and of CFA life over a number of decades, do you think it is unusual that you did not have a lot of material about that training facility?

Dr WHITE — In terms of the history that we wrote — and, you know, we have got quite a few chapters that are pre-1945 — Fiskville was quite recent in terms of our historical time span. It was new. Everyone appeared to be enthusiastic about it, except, as I said, some volunteers.

Ms WARD — But it was about 20 years old when you were doing your research.

Dr WHITE — Yes, by the time we had finished. Yes.

Ms WARD — When you were visiting it in 93 and 94, it is 21 or 22 years old.

Dr WHITE — Yes. No, there was certainly no indication or no criticism of Fiskville of which we were aware at the time, and certainly not in terms of OHS issues.

Ms WARD — In the research that you have done have you seen an evolution of the paramilitary or military style training within the culture of the CFA?

Dr WHITE — Of the paramilitary?

Ms WARD — This is how it has been described to us throughout our hearings.

Dr WHITE — As I said, Eason, who was responsible for the setting up of Fiskville, came from a training background. He came from a military background. He came from a training background, but there was at least some dissent about the way that training was developing in the CFA, as I have mentioned. On page 265 of the book, the UFU Victorian secretary claims that Eason was developing the CFA into a 'paramilitary organisation'. I am not sure what was meant by 'paramilitary organisation', but it is suggesting that the form of training being developed was very much on a military model.

Ms WARD — On page 265 you write that during the 1980s:

> Both employee organisations demanded improved conditions at Fiskville —

meaning both the UFU and CFAOA. Do you know what the better conditions were that were being sought?

Dr WHITE — Not at this point in time.

Ms WARD — William Webber, former state secretary and national president of the UFU, is quoted on page 275 as saying that he:

> … became very suspicious of the empire building that went on in the emergency services.

Do you think this is statement with any merit and in the emergency services, in particular the CFA, there is a culture of empire building?

Dr WHITE — I guess in any large and really complex organisation — and the CFA is complex because it has this large volunteer base — there are going to be tensions, and tensions around the style of leadership and tensions about the direction of the organisation. I would say that there certainly were tensions within the organisation when we worked there and we were based there in the early 90s.

Ms WARD — In terms of investment in assets or where you put the money?

Dr WHITE — Maybe more around leadership styles, personalities, yes, but particularly around leadership style.

Ms WARD — I will go back to the military or paramilitary culture over a number of decades within the CFA. There is mention in the book that in the 80s there were conversations both at government level and I think within the CFA of having representatives for employees or unions on the CFA board. With this can-do paramilitary-style leadership at Fiskville that did not welcome criticisms of training practices, do you think having employees and/or union representation on the board may have changed that culture or may have been a little more inclusive or helped that evolve a bit more?

Dr WHITE — I think it would. There was a lot of tension between unions and the CFA board over a period of time. Maybe it is that clash of cultures between that strong authoritarian bent and then union representatives saying, 'Well, what about the people we represent?'. There was a lot of tension between unions and the board.

Ms WARD — Under Labor in the 1980s the CFA becomes more affluent, you say on page 284. You also say:

> The strategic use of increased wealth made the CFA more visible in the community —

also page 284. How does this reflect the CFA's ongoing reliance on donations of cheap fuel waste for training at Fiskville, do you think?

Dr WHITE — Can you just repeat that?

Ms WARD — Yes, of course. On page 284 you say — and this happens throughout the 80s — there is a massive increase in money going to the CFA from government throughout that decade. You say:

> The strategic use of increased wealth made the CFA more visible in the community.

It is just a way of you explaining how the money goes. What I am interested in is that during this period we have still got the marked truck, we have still got donations of fuel coming to the CFA and people not knowing exactly what is in these chemicals, but it is a cheap way of investing in training, if you like. How do you think that marries, where there is this massive injection of funding over a 10-year period but you have still got this smell of an oily rag, if you like — to use a pun — training going on at Fiskville?

Dr WHITE — Can I just clarify? You are saying on the one hand there is quite a lot of money, on the other hand they are buying chemicals or accepting?

Ms WARD — Accepting.

Dr WHITE — Accepting donations of chemicals?

Ms WARD — Of petrochemicals.

Dr WHITE — Petrochemicals, yes. I would have to say I was not aware of that when I was researching the book.

Ms WARD — So a lot of the training practices and so on that were happening at Fiskville you were not privy to in the research of your book?

Dr WHITE — That is right.

Ms WARD — On page 308 Kevin Shea, who was the chairman at the time, says he was:

> … very disappointed. I thought it more concerned with the process than the results —

in terms of the practice. What do you think he meant by this regarding the culture of the CFA?

Dr WHITE — Look, that is an interesting one, because you know what happened to him — a year later he lost the confidence of the board. I think we say at that point in the book that his mission was to streamline procedures. He did say that he found the organisation:

> … an 'inward-looking bureaucracy', dominated by the interests of head office and excessively administered by a number of committees —

and, as you said, more concerned with process than results. I think what that suggested was that to some extent the board's position had become ossified. They certainly did not like a new chairman who was going to change things quite dramatically. It is interesting that following him is Len Foster, who really does shake up the organisation. But certainly Kevin Shea was unable to do it because of this very strong, still authoritarian bent of the board and of the leadership.

Ms WARD — My final question. Are you aware of any changes to the style of managerial leadership in the CFA that has changed how members are disciplined or how dissent or insubordination is viewed or managed, going back to Bronwyn's question about reputation and so on?

Dr WHITE — Are we talking about the period of the book or beyond?

Ms WARD — The period of the book and if you are aware of anything since that you have heard. I suspect that you have still got a bit of an interest in how things go. It is hard to devote so much of your time to an organisation and not have your ears prick up when things are being discussed about them or with them. So

during the period of your book, the period that your book covers, as well as anything that you have learnt post that.

Dr WHITE — Sorry, if you can go back to the question. My concentration is lapsing.

Ms WARD — I am sorry. Have you noticed any change in the managerial style, both in how they manage staff and volunteers, in the period covered by your book as well as post your book?

Dr WHITE — I do think under Foster there was a real change in the leadership. Some did not like it, because with that new style — I mean, I would describe that as managerialism, an early example of managerialism — there was much more accountability .But at the same time he did try to reduce the distinction between permanent employees and volunteers; he put an emphasis on training, protective equipment and other support; and he was changing the role of regional planning committees to ensure that volunteers and career personnel shared in regional decision-making. So this is a big change; this is a decentralised model that he is trying to introduce. We were researching and writing this book while these changes were being implemented. But I would have to say that there seemed to be tremendous energy and enthusiasm among the volunteers, particularly in rural areas — enormous enthusiasm for the organisation and what it was trying to achieve.

The other thing that was really important — and this again was under Foster's leadership, but it began earlier — was much more emphasis on research about fires and fire behaviour, and structural fires as well as wildfires. All that information was being fed back to the volunteers, and they were actually encouraged to join in some of that research with observation in local areas about what is happening to grass curing et cetera. There really was a lot of enthusiasm for the organisation at that time.

The CHAIR — Just a quick question in terms of the book, on compensation. In the book it talks about how, I think in the 70s and 80s, the CFA provided a supplementary compensation scheme to volunteers, which was considered very generous — for example, if somebody had a heart attack during a fire, they would be compensated and there were lump sums paid to widows. Did that continue on into the 90s as well — are you aware of that? It is just that we have heard, in terms of Fiskville and the many illnesses that people have contracted and that they believe are connected to the Fiskville training college, that there has not been, as far as we understand, any sort of support. This is a bit of a contrast.

Dr WHITE — Yes, to what we are writing about happening in the 70s. I was not aware of any issues around compensation particularly for people connected with Fiskville.

The CHAIR — But during the researching of the book there were quite generous schemes provided or quite generous payments made to people, but it was when they were actually fighting a fire as opposed to — —

Dr WHITE — That is right, to actually undertaking training.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for your time. It is a really good book.

Ms WARD — Thank you; it was really helpful.

Dr WHITE — Thank you very much.

Witness withdrew.