

WITNESS STATEMENT MICHAEL KEITH TISBURY

1. I, Michael Keith Tisbury, Senior Station Officer (**SSO**) with the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board (**MFB**), 456 Albert Street East Melbourne VIC 3002
2. I have been employed by the MFB for approximately 26 years and I currently hold the rank of SSO which I have held for 4 years.
3. As well as holding the rank of SSO I hold the following qualifications/memberships:
 - i. UFU BCOM Member
 - ii. Medical Liaison
 - iii. Certificate IV in Workplace Trainer and Assessor
 - iv. Wildfire Level 1, 2 and 3
4. I have also received the following awards and medals:
 - I. Executive Officer Commendation
 - II. National Medal
 - III. MFESB Long Service and Good Service Medal
5. As a UFU member I have represented the UFU on numerous consultative committees/subcommittees including:
 - I. MFB/UFU Consultative Committee
 - II. Training Subcommittee
 - III. EBA negotiations
6. I have read the UFU's submissions and I support the UFU's position.
7. I wish to add specifically further information on the following matters:

BUDGET CUTS - NGR

8. In 2005 I was heavily involved in the introduction of the new Melbourne Metropolitan Radio (MMR) system. This new system was being introduced because the MFB had been running on an old analogue communications system which required upgrading to a digital system to provide clearer signals and enhanced ability to communicate via radio.
9. This communications system was to be implemented in two phases. The first phase was the roll out of the required new equipment (radios) and physical infrastructure needed. The second phase was to be the activation of the status buttons which would have effectively reduced radio traffic by about 80% as the activation of the status button would allow MFB firefighters to communicate directly to the CAD system the current status of their appliance (i.e. on route, on scene, returning to station, in station and out inspecting). Currently this is all done via radio for every appliance.
10. This second phase was never implemented and the benefits of decreased radio traffic were never achieved. The benefits of decreased radio traffic would have meant

that the important messages and information such as information from the fireground can be relayed to all firefighters on scene and the communications centre in real time. The failure to implement the second phase created a gap in the technology.

11. To fill this gap in or around 2010-2011, the MFB, in consultation with the UFU began developing the Next Generation Response system (NGR).
12. Next generation response would have provided huge benefits to firefighters including:
 - I. decreasing the amount of required radio traffic;
 - II. providing real time updated information regarding incidences direct to fire appliances;
 - III. mapping/GPS software
 - IV. real time fireground accountability;
 - V. increased firefighter safety
 - VI. improved response times
 - VII. accurate statistics regarding operational response.
13. In November 2012 the MFB advised the UFU, at a consultation meeting where I was present that they were no longer pursuing the NGR Project.
14. I was and still am bitterly disappointed that they did not implement this hugely beneficial technology into the MFB.
15. I have no doubt that it was discontinued due to budget cuts.

INTEROPERABILITY

16. I agree with the UFU's statements regarding the inefficiencies which arise due to lack of interoperability between the fire services.
17. I have, on numerous occasions, been deployed by the MFB as a strike team leader/administration officer to major events which involve co-agency response such as bushfires.
18. Most recently these have included, Donnybrook Fires, Mickleham Fires, Warrandyte Fire, Dereel, The Wangaratta Floods and Hazelwood (the Hazelwood Coal Mine fire is discussed further below).
19. Inefficiencies I have personally experience include those listed by the UFU, but further practical realities which lead to complications on the fireground also encompass issues including:
 - I. different safety regimes/cultures which leads to confusion on the fireground about appropriate OH&S standards to apply and can lead to firefighters being placed in serious danger (I provide practical examples of this below in relation to the Hazelwood fire).
 - II. different command structures within the organisations meaning directions and orders and these major events can often be unclear and confused.

20. Regarding the Hazelwood Coal Mine fire, this incident, which occurred in the 2013/2014 Bushfire Season, highlighted very clearly, the continued issues in the areas of interoperability between the CFA and MFB.
21. The areas outlined in the UFU's submission are all correct. Some examples of the practical realities that I faced at Hazelwood regarding the impact of lack of interoperability included:
- I. On my first deployment, on route to Hazelwood, I was advised that by the MFB ECC that I was to fulfil the role of Deputy Divisional Commander. This role does not exist in the MFB and I was completely unaware of what it involved and whether I had the necessary qualifications and skills to perform it. I believe it is a CFA role on the fireground. Due to my confusion I was forced to contact MFB Command and was advised that they thought it was similar to our forward control role. On arrival on scene I was still somewhat confused as to what role I was to play. I reported to Division Command to receive instructions from the CFA Divisional Commander.
 - II. The staging area at Hazelwood was outside of the mine pit. Both CFA and MFB had set up their staging areas together in a common space. MFB had installed an SSO as a Deployment Officer to manage the movement of MFB appliances and personnel in and out of the mine pit on the direction of Division Command. This ensured fireground accountability and knowing who was in the mine and their location at all times. This is standard MFB procedure. It soon became apparent that CFA were self-deploying from the staging area into the mine pit. It soon became apparent in my role as Deputy Divisional Commander, that the CFA command were not implementing the same fireground accountability process. I am not aware if they had a standard procedure for such events however my lack of knowledge as to where CFA firefighters were being deployed did lead to a seriously dangerous situation. On the second night of my deployment I was in the Divisional Command centre. I was approached by a CFA communications officer to be informed, in person, that they had received a mayday communication over the radio from a CFA vehicle trapped and engulfed in flames with four firefighters on board. I was unable to deploy any firefighting appliances to their location to render assistance as I was completely unaware of their location, as were the trapped firefighters. Luckily, a passing mine employee spotted them and was able to evacuate them from the area. This incident highlighted to me that I have very little knowledge of the CFA SOP's and practices in place as I was not certain of their fireground accountability system, or even if they had any. It also highlighted the lack of communication, even at the Divisional Command level between the services.
 - III. Following that incident, in conjunction with the MFB and CFA Senior Officer, a standard procedure was applied for fireground accountability for all firefighters entering and exiting the staging area and deploying into the mine pit so that all were aware of the location of our appliances and firefighters at all times.
 - IV. The lack of commonality between the CFA and MFB's BA's and cylinders also created practical problems on the fireground. Due to the high levels of carbon monoxide that was in the air around Hazelwood, BA's needed to be worn as

soon as carbon monoxide levels became too high. This meant there was a high turnover of cylinders amongst firefighters. The MFB quickly began running out of cylinders. We cannot use the CFA filling stations to re-fill our cylinders, nor could we attach CFA cylinders to our BA's as the equipment is incompatible.

- V. Different safety procedures also resulted in some MFB safety standards being inadvertently breached. The MFB has clear guidelines relating to clean and dirty areas in all our fire stations and on the fireground. No dirty PPE/PPC can be worn or taken into a clean area. This is to avoid cross-contamination of dangerous particles and chemicals into clean areas. It soon became apparent in the staging area that CFA volunteers did not apply the same standards and had obviously not been trained to these procedures. As such, they were contaminating the clean areas that CFA professional and MFB firefighters were using by entering them in dirty PPC/PPE.
- VI. With regards to qualifications, I became aware that at one stage, CFA Sector Commander, the person in charge of one of the sections of the fireground, was uncomfortable performing the role. They advised me of such. When I inquired as to why, they notified me that they were not qualified to do so as this does not form part of the CFA's SSO's training. I queried why he had not informed me of this earlier as he had been performing the role for some hours, he advised that in his experience the CFA is always short of resources and that they just make do with what they have (this is a sentiment I hear echoed regularly amongst CFA firefighters).

- 22. Given my experience, I strongly support initiative for greater interoperability between the fire services.

WATER QUALITY AT HAZELWOOD

- 23. I have been heavily involved in the issues surrounding Fiskville training college. Water contamination and the risks that firefighters have been exposed to due to CFA and MFB's senior management has resulted in me being highly disillusioned with the current management and a complete lack of trust and confidence.
- 24. Although Fiskville is subject to a separate Inquiry to which I have given evidence, I wish to highlight one event that occurred at the Hazelwood Coal Mine fire which illustrates the lack of concern that MFB and CFA senior management show in relation to firefighter health and safety issues. This incident resulted in a firefighter being off work for over 6 months with blood poisoning and having to undergo a series of operations on his hand after being exposed to highly contaminated water at Hazelwood.
- 25. At the time of exposure the UFU vigorously sought water testing results from CFA as information was not forthcoming however we we're continually denied documents and information. It was later discovered that the water testing performed was very limited.

26. In order to rectify the lack of information, UFU commissioned its own independent hygienist to conduct water testing at a cost of over \$10,000, which showed the firefighting water was heavily contaminated.
27. Emergency Services Commissioner Craig Lapsley, after seeing the results, ended up publicly thanking the UFU for their due diligence and amended the water testing regime to replicate what the UFU tested for.
28. CFA, MFB have a duty of care to their employees, however once again it was the UFU that ended up providing that level of care at considerable expense.

LACK OF TRUST AND CONFIDENCE IN SENIOR MANAGEMENT

29. As a BCOM member, a UFU member and an MFB firefighter, I can honestly say that I no longer have any trust or confidence in senior management of the MFB. They do not have the protection of firefighters and the Victorian Community at heart but have shown very clearly that when directed to they will pursue ideological aims, to the detriment of their own staff.
30. I do not believe that this trust and confidence can ever be restored.



.....
Michael Tisbury

Date: 30 August 2015