

SUBMISSION OF JESSICA WALSH

1. I, Jessica Walsh, Station Officer (**SO**), with the County Fire Authority (**CFA**), of [REDACTED], in the State of Victoria, say as follows:
2. I have been employed by the CFA for fourteen years and seven months. I currently hold the rank of SO and I have held that rank for five years and four months. I have been a volunteer firefighter at Falls Creek Fire Brigade for two years and six months prior to commencing employment with CFA. I had also been a volunteer firefighter with SA CFS for approximately ten years
3. As well as holding the rank of SO I hold the following qualifications/memberships:
 - i. Certificate IV Firefighting (Supervision)
 - ii. Certificate IV Business (Frontline Management)
 - iii. Certificate IV Assessment and Workplace Training
 - iv. Certificate III Motor Vehicle Driver Trainer
4. I have also received:
 - i. 15 Year Service Medal
 - ii. National Emergency Medal (Vic Fires 09).

Morale at Work

5. I feel that the morale at work has decreased during the Napthine Government (2010 – 2014). The workforce focus is currently all about cuts. There is no consideration that real people are working for this organisation, on station as well as in districts and regions.
6. I feel that the morale at work also decreased because of the MFB's attempt to set aside the Enterprise Agreement. The CFA asked to be part of the discussion. As soon as the MFB had walked away from a legal document the CFA could have come in and done the same. They are not interested in us as firefighters or our welfare.
7. The result of the CFA failing to honour its agreements has resulted in a lack of trust and uncertainty. We are unable to trust a management who are happy to sign an agreement yet fail to subsequently honour it. There have been other examples demonstrating why there is a lack of trust in the workforce, some of these include:
 - a) Management have spent most of my career denying that there was any problem with the water at Fiskville. These lies prove that they cannot be trusted.
 - b) I have been bullied and harassed by volunteers at my workplace and on social media. I am not allowed to respond to these attacks as I am bound by CFA's Social Media policy, and management have been very slow to respond.
 - c) One volunteer said publicly in a brigade meeting, that "if they (the staff) collapse at a fire they will have to wait for another staff truck to come and help

them” or words to that effect. This person is still the [REDACTED] and I am unaware of any reprimand. We have not received any apology for this person’s conduct.

d) Integration at Sunbury has been a complete failure.

8. When senior management are put in place who will allow us to be treated with respect, then the trust and confidence in the workplace may be slowly built back.

Equipment and Staffing

9. The standard of equipment and operational response (including staffing) has decreased during the Napthine Government. Budget cuts have had a direct impact on maintaining equipment and trying to get new equipment. The significant cuts have made it difficult to get on training courses. I have been trying for three years to maintain my accreditation as a workplace trainer to no avail as I haven’t been able to get on a course.
10. Staffing levels are currently also not adequate to protect the Victorian Community and fellow firefighters. There are only 3 staff on duty at Sunbury as opposed to the required seven for full fireground operations and flexibility. Depending on the time of day and day of week, we could be the only ones responding to an emergency. Our nearest integrated stations are over 20km away and the local SES Rescue brigade have a 20 minute turnout time. They have previously told me that its lucky if they get a truck out of the door on some occasions.
11. Also, volunteers have four members on the CFA board yet the staff have none. We are the ones responding to more than half of all emergencies in the country area of Victoria, yet we have no representation.

Interoperability

12. I have experienced issues arising from the lack of interoperability between the CFA and MFB. The two organisations cultures are very far apart. This is evident in their equipment and procedures.
13. Due to budget cuts we do not even have interoperable equipment at Sunbury. Our trucks have different hoses and couplings, meaning that we require adapters to connect the two Sunbury trucks together. Also, only one appliance, the tanker (rural appliance), has MFB radios in it. If we get called to an emergency in the pumper (urban appliance), we have no way of communicating with MFB crews. When MFB responded two appliances to the medical centre fire in Evans St in April 2015, we needed to lend their crews our portables radios so we could simply talk to one another

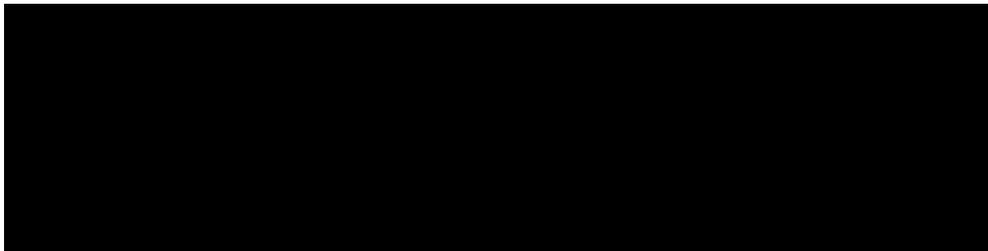
14. I would like to see increased interoperability between the agencies through expanding the MFB and CFA secondment program to be ongoing. I have worked with an MFB leading firefighter for a year and it was a great way to learn about their culture, training and operations. Increasing and improving the amount of shared/standardised equipment between the services will also go a long way in increased interoperability.

Senior Management

15. There has been an evident disconnect between Senior Management in the fire services and their employees. Very few of the current management have any experience on the fireground. This is the bread and butter of our occupation but they are unaware of our procedures, and how and what we do. For example, some sections of headquarters are unaware that we have professional firefighters as far away as Mildura or Warnambool.

16. I have lost trust and confidence in senior management as they have tried to destroy our employment conditions. They refused to allow many stations, including Sunbury, to be certified as three firefighters per shift instead of two and it required court action to simply get the CFA to honour their agreements.

17. Senior Management are uninterested in the welfare of operational staff and are only interested in their own welfare. I believe the only way to repair the relationship is to source new management who want to promote the fire service instead of condemning the people who actually do the work.



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Jessica Walsh

Date: 6 August 2015