EDITORIAL REVIEW NO. 10: THE VICTORIAN CFA DISPUTE

Paul Austin, October 2016

Topic: ABC News coverage of the industrial dispute between the United Firefighters Union and the Country Fire Authority.

Scope: ABC news and current affairs coverage on the 7pm TV News in Victoria (19 items), 7.30 (1 item), AM (7 items), PM (9 items), The World Today (10 items) and key News Online stories of the dispute (39 items, including one on The Drum website). That is, a total of 85 items.

Time span: From 1 June 2016 (when non-binding recommendations were handed down by Fair Work Australia) to 30 August 2016 (when Federal Parliament resumed and a new debate about proposed federal legislation began).

The reviewer: Paul Austin is an editor and journalist of more than 30 years experience. A former Deputy Editor, Opinion Editor and political correspondent of both *The Australian* and *The Age*, he is now an independent communications and media consultant based in Melbourne.

Introduction:

A bitter industrial dispute engulfing the Country Fire Authority became one of the defining issues in Victorian public life in 2016. Negotiations for a new Enterprise Bargaining Agreement between the volunteer-dominated CFA and the United Firefighters Union had stalled for three years. The brawl built to a series of crescendos in the lead-up to the federal election of July 2016.

The political impact was dramatic. The Minister for Emergency

Services in the State Labor Government resigned in protest against Cabinet's decision to back the union-supported EBA. The CFA Chief Executive Officer and Chief Fire Officer quickly followed, and the State Government sacked the CFA board for refusing to endorse the deal. The Federal Coalition Government ran hard on the issue during the election campaign, with the Prime Minister and other Ministers attending protest rallies against the EBA and promising, if re-elected, to legislate to protect volunteers from a "union takeover" of the CFA.

The social impact across Victoria was arguably even more profound. Volunteer firefighters, with their storied role in the history of this fire-prone state, were pitted against professional firefighters, with whom they are required to work. Volunteer brigades themselves were split, with some members accepting the thrust of the EBA and others vehemently opposed to it.

This was a multi-faceted and fast-moving story, and it posed acute challenges for media outlets because of the emotions generated in cities, towns and homes throughout the state, the intensity of the claims and counter-claims about the potential impact of the EBA, and because the climax of the dispute, in terms of public engagement, coincided with the federal election.

Findings:

This review assesses the ABC's coverage of the dispute with regard to the Corporation's Editorial Policies on impartiality and diversity of perspectives. My findings, on the five questions I was specifically asked, are:

Question 1. Were packaged reports, interviews, backgrounders, investigations and any other analysis

impartial and constructed as objectively as possible, reflecting an appropriate diversity of relevant perspectives?

Finding 1: Yes.

Question 2. Were any perspectives either misrepresented or unduly favoured?

Finding 2: No.

Question 3. Where opinion pieces were either commissioned or acquired by the ABC for publication, was appropriate diversity of perspectives achieved?

Finding 3: No. During the review period, only one opinion piece was published on the CFA dispute (Item 40). This was a forcefully argued attack on the EBA, the union and the State Government. Of itself, the piece was entirely legitimate. It could have and should have been one of a number of perspectives. But the inability or (less likely) unwillingness of the ABC to commission or acquire at least one other opinion piece mounting a different case was a regrettable mistake. It represents in particular a failure to meet Standards 4.2 and 4.5 of the Editorial Policies. Standard 4.2 requires the ABC to "Present a diversity of perspectives so that, over time, no significant strand of thought or belief within the community is knowingly excluded or disproportionately represented". Standard 4.5 says the ABC should not "unduly favour one perspective over another". I make further comments about this in my summary of Item 40 below.

Question 4. Were any relevant perspectives or context absent from the reports, interviews and discussions that should have been included in order to ensure appropriately accurate and balanced coverage of the issue? Finding 4: No (except in terms of opinion pieces, as mentioned in Finding 3 above).

Question 5. Were the voices given a fair opportunity to express their views, having regard to the significance of the interest represented and to the amount of time given and prominence assigned to each interview?

Finding 5: Yes (except in terms of opinion pieces, as mentioned in Finding 3 above).

Overall finding:

The ABC's coverage of the CFA dispute in Victoria, during the three months from 1 June to 30 August 2016, was very good. The reporting was generally professional and often compelling. The coverage complied with the Corporation's polices and guidelines on impartiality. The news and current affairs coverage gave appropriate time to relevant interested parties to put their views, and a diversity of perspectives was presented over the period. Among the 85 items reviewed, only one gave rise to a serious concern: a failure to provide a range of perspectives in opinion pieces published over the period (see Finding 3 above). I emphasise, however, that this breach was not characteristic of the overall coverage, and I saw no evidence that suggested a systemic problem.

Additional comments:

Beyond the formal findings on impartiality and diversity of perspectives, I make three other observations about the ABC's coverage of this dispute.

Firstly, I want to especially commend the "backgrounder" or

"explainer" articles published online (Items 14 and 71). These sorts of articles are an excellent use of the website and of great value to readers. The ABC should continue to attempt such articles on all complex or long-running stories.

Secondly, the coverage over this three-month period would have been enhanced by one or several online stories giving a summary of the actual content of the EBA. I believe the document runs to about 450 pages and is not easy reading. Nonetheless, a detailed report on the document itself – how many pages, how many clauses, which are new to this EBA, which are of particular note or controversy – could have helped readers better inform themselves about the dispute. Such forensic reporting could also have been applied to some of the claims and counter-claims that, necessarily, occupied much of the coverage of this saga. It would have better enabled readers to make up their own minds about the disputed claims. For example, when volunteers said the EBA would destroy volunteerism, precisely which clauses were they concerned about? When the union said there were provisions in the document to protect volunteers, precisely which provisions was it referring to? When the State Government accused the Federal Government of lying about the content of the EBA, precisely which content? Such potentially dense reportage does not lend itself to tight TV and radio news reports, but it could be attempted on the website.

Thirdly, the ABC's coverage of this dispute highlights the unfortunate gap in its news and current affairs portfolio created by the decision to abandon a state-based TV current affairs program such as 7.30 Victoria. The current affairs items considered in this review all came from national programs – 7.30, AM, PM, The World Today, The Drum. As a consequence, the items tended to be general rather than specific, broad rather than deep. This saga was crying out for in-depth TV

interviews and debates involving some of the key players. The coverage would have been enhanced by lengthy, expert cross-examination of the Premier, the Prime Minister, the union leader, the departed Emergency Services Minister and others, on a prime-time TV program such as 7.30 Victoria. The ABC would have better served Victorians on this important story if the national broadcaster still had the resources and the will to produce high-quality state-based TV current affairs.

Summary of individual items, with comments where necessary:

1. News Online, 1 June, 10.57pm

"Fair Work backs Victoria's firefighters' union in dragged-out pay dispute with CFA"

This was a dramatic day in the dispute, neatly encapsulated in the first paragraph: "The industrial umpire (Fair Work) has ruled in favour of Victoria's firefighters' union in a bitter pay dispute with the CFA, sparking political unrest and fears volunteers could resign en masse." A CFA spokesman says the Authority had consistently raised "serious concerns about the impact of the UFU claims on both community safety and on our operational ability". Acting CFA chairman John Peberdy says he "wouldn't be able to sign an agreement that hands veto and other contentious clauses to the UFU ... I think that's an insult to every volunteer in Victoria". The report makes clear that the Fair Work commissioner had criticised the way the CFA had handled the bargaining process. Commissioner Julius Row, whom the report relevantly describes as a former Australian Manufacturing Workers Union president, had said the role of volunteers was "not altered" by the proposed agreement. The report finishes with two strong critics of the ruling: Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria chief executive Andrew Ford says the deal "will destroy the CFA as we know it"; and Victorian Opposition Leader Matthew Guy suggests dark links between the

commissioner, his union, and Premier Daniel Andrews' own faction. UFU secretary Peter Marshall is quoted saying the union would comment on the findings at an appropriate time. But there is no indication in the story that comment was sought from the Premier or the Government. Such comment should have been sought, particularly in light of the decision to publish Guy's attack, and to publish it under the supplementary headline: "Premier shouldn't accept the recommendations: Opposition". If such comment was sought, readers should have been made aware of that fact. If it was not, that was an oversight.

2. The World Today, 2 June, 12.18pm

"Victorian firefighters face political turmoil"
This is a well-balanced report, with on-the-ground colour provided by Henry Barton, the officer in charge of the Warrnambool fire station in Victoria's far west, and interviews with two protagonists in the dispute: Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria boss Andrew Ford and UFU secretary Peter Marshall. The report contains more heat than light. Barton suggests his volunteers were "hearing, perhaps, the wrong information out of EB (enterprise bargaining) negotiations"; Ford warns that if the deal were to go through "it will destroy CFA as we know it today"; and Marshall accuses certain "vested interest groups" of spreading "misinformation and untruths".

3. News Online, 5 June, 10.08am

"Malcolm Turnbull vows to amend the Fair Work Act; backs volunteer firefighters during Melbourne protest"
The political heat is turned up, with the Prime Minister, during the federal election campaign, addressing a rally in central Melbourne. This report is heavy with critics of the deal, naturally enough given that the Prime Minister's intervention is the hard-news "angle", along with the rally attended by hundreds of volunteers. There are six photos of the rally, many

rather similar, and an embedded tweet from the reporter, which contains an 8-second video of the scene. But balance is provided with a summary of the UFU's response to the criticisms, and quotes from Acting Premier James Merlino on the Government's position.

4. 7pm TV News, 5 June, James Hancock

The report begins with an arresting, but also justifiable, assertion by the reporter, over pictures of the PM shaking hands with chanting, yellow-overall clad protesters on the steps of the Victorian Parliament: "It's the state dispute that fits into the federal Coalition's narrative that Labor is beholden to the unions." The PM tells the protesters: "We stand with you." A uniformed protester says: "These people will walk out the door and won't come back." The PM makes reference to the CFA effort at Wye River on the Great Ocean Road last summer, which prevented loss of life during a major bushfire. A CFA volunteer from Wye River is interviewed on a burnt-out property and expresses his concern about the EBA. State Government Minister Lisa Neville gives Labor's view: "This is absolutely not about undermining in any way the way that the CFA operates and the way that the volunteers play a role in that." The report finishes with reference to the Premier about to return from a visit to the USA, "into the growing fire storm".

5. News Online, 6 June, 11.31am

"CFA rejects proposed EBA as Premier Andrews returns for crisis meeting"

Things get hotter still. The CFA board issues a statement saying it is "not able to approve" the EBA in its current form, adding: "We have serious concerns many of these proposed clauses are unlawful." Meanwhile, Premier Andrews has returned from a trip to the US "for crisis meetings and a Cabinet meeting this afternoon". These developments are reported well. Under a cross-heading "Deal breaches anti-discrimination laws:

commission", the report states baldly: "In another blow to the Premier, Victoria's Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission found parts of the deal breached antidiscrimination laws." The remainder of the story is reaction to the Human Rights Commission intervention, from Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (saying this is further evidence that the EBA is unacceptable in its current form), and from Minister James Merlino (saying the report is based on an old version of the proposal and that the issues it raised had been dealt with by the Fair Work Commission). But there is no further information provided in this story about the Human Rights Commission report. Readers of this story were left in the dark about precisely what the Human Rights Commission's concerns were, and in what context they had been expressed.

6. The World Today, 6 June, 12.45pm

"Victorian firefighters caught in union pay dispute with Premier"

This story is heavy with critics of the deal: Max McCaffrey from the Wye River CFA; Andrew Ford from Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria; Victorian Opposition spokesman Brad Battin; and former Labor Minister for Police and Emergency Services Andre Haermeyer. The "defence", as it were, is confined to Deputy Premier James Merlino, and his comments relate only to the issue of whether the proposed deal breaches antidiscrimination laws. More from the Government or another defender of the EBA would have improved the balance of this report.

7. 7pm News, 6 June, Jean Edwards

With news breaking late into the day, this report is a live interview with reporter Jean Edwards. In his introduction, presenter Ian Henderson uses some florid but justifiable language to encapsulate developments. He says the Andrews Government has "again failed to draw a line under" the

dispute, which has "poisoned its relations with the CFA and delivered an election campaign free kick to Malcolm Turnbull". Edwards beings by saying "This dispute has become a huge headache for the Andrews Government and at this point it doesn't seem to be getting much better". She says the CFA board "really upped the ante today" by rejecting the agreement. She then throws to "grabs" from Minister James Merlino and Opposition Leader Matthew Guy. Henderson asks if there is any sign of an end to "this fiasco". Edwards concludes by saying "the Andrews Government is under enormous pressure to try to reach an agreement that is palatable to all" and that "there's bound to be a number of (federal) Labor MPs who are worrying about how this deal might damage the party's chances in Victoria (at next month's federal election)". The assertions, while perhaps a little stronger than would be normal in an ABC news report, were all legitimate and served to contextualise the day's developments.

8. News Online, 6 June, 8.31pm

"CFA pay dispute continues after no resolution in Victorian Government Cabinet meeting"

A slightly confusing story, although understandably so, given that the Cabinet meeting made no final decision beyond vowing to do "further work around the Fair Work Commission's recommendation". The first paragraph of the story says: "The Victorian Government has avoided a political firestorm in a long-standing dispute over pay and conditions with the Country Fire Authority that could have led to the resignation of the CFA board and the Emergency Services Minister". It may have been better to say the Government had sought to buy some time by deferring a decision. Especially given that in subsequent days the CFA board was dismissed and the Minister did resign.

9. AM, 7 June, 8.11am

"Fiery talks to dominate Vic State Parliament again today"

A neat and straight-forward report, based on an interview with Deputy Premier James Merlino. Unlike some of the other items reviewed so far, this one gives most time to the Government/union side of the argument.

10. The World Today, 7 June, 12.40pm

"Firefighting professionals rally for EBA in Melbourne" With "the other side" fighting back in the propaganda battle, this report is a good corrective in terms of giving time to the argument in favour of the EBA. Samantha Donovan's report is based on an interview with Metropolitan Fire Brigade officer Grahame Perry, who criticises the CFA board's "intransigence" and says the volunteers having nothing to fear.

11. News Online, 7 June, 3.05pm

"CFA board concerns about pay dispute can be fully addressed: Premier"

This very sound report includes two images of the pro-EBA rally in Melbourne that day, and comments from Premier Dan Andrews and UFU secretary Peter Marshall (the later attacking Opposition Leader Matthew Guy for allegedly using the dispute for political gain).

12. PM, 7 June, 6.40pm

"Victorian professional firefighters label PM's intervention in pay dispute a stunt"

A strong report, making good use of the pro-EBA rally and the sitting of State Parliament to illustrate to a national audience the heat being generated by this issue in Victoria. Reporter Samantha Donovan uses to good effect some audio of UFU secretary Peter Marshall and two firefighters at the rally, and the scope of the story is widened by an interview with Professor Andrew Stewart of the University of Adelaide, casting doubt on the PM's plan to legislate to "protect" volunteers.

13. 7pm TV News, 7 June, Jean Edwards

Pro-UFU firefighters protest on the steps of the Victorian Parliament, as the Premier tries to "douse the political inferno". Union leader Peter Marshall addresses the rally, calling for the "independent umpire's decision" to be upheld. Inside, the Opposition tries to hand the Premier a volunteer's 60-yearservice medal. It is, says Opposition Leader Matthew Guy, "from someone who is disgusted about their treatment". Under attack in Question Time, Daniel Andrews says: "No member of the Government is other than fully respectful of our CFA volunteers." Emergency Services Minister Jane Garrett, who has "put her ministerial career on the line", is door-stopped on her way into Parliament, saying she has had "an interesting time" but "I'm pleased to be here today and I'm pleased to be working towards an outcome that respects everybody." Andrews says the Government is confident it can address all the concerns raised about the EBA. But, says the reporter, the CFA board says the deal is unlawful, prompting this provocative comment from senior State Government Minister Gavin Jennings: "I encourage them (the board members) to be better informed, to be better engaged, and to work through these issues." Peter Marshall says the deal does not affect volunteers and urges the Liberal Party to "end its scare campaign", adding: "Firefighters are not political footballs, so get your hands off us."

14. News Online, 8 June, 6.06pm

"Victoria's CFA, union EBA dispute explained"
An excellent piece of journalism, which delivers what the headline promises. My only criticism is that such a neat explanation of the saga could have been produced earlier. The value of this report can be gleaned from the various crossheadings: How did it all start?; What are the CFA's concerns?; What does the union say?; Where to from here? Hyperlinks are used frequently and effectively, to enable readers to get more

information and background on various aspects of the story. This article could be a textbook example of how the news media can use digital platforms to help readers better understand complex, long-running stories.

15. The World Today, 10 June, 12.10pm

"Emergency Services Minister Jane Garrett resigns over CFA dispute"

A big, breaking story, well handed. Rachael Brown reports that "This has blown up in spectacular fashion for the Premier", after the minister resigned and the Fair Work Commission's recommendations were "rammed through" State Cabinet. She also suggests the next step may be that the whole CFA board could be "thrown out".

16. News Online, 10 June, 4.02pm

"Victorian minister Jane Garrett resigns from Cabinet as Government seeks to end CFA dispute" An energetic report on the fast-moving events, including embedded tweets by Garrett.

17. PM, 10 June, 6.10pm

"Court nullifies Victorian Government's firefighter deal deadline"

Another good report encompassing the fast-moving developments of the day. Tom Nightingale reports on a wide range of perspectives, and his interviews seek to elicit further information and to test the assertions of interviewees. When the head of Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria says there are "a whole lot of clauses that impact on and restrict" the way firefighting teams work together, Nightingale asks: "Can you give an example?" When a volunteer firefighter says the volunteers are being treated like "mushrooms" and do not know what the deal actually means, Nightingale asks: "If you don't understand the detail, then your fears might be wrong?"

18. 7pm TV News, 10 June, Jean Edwards

The report begins with the statement: "For the Premier, the time for talking is over", then a "grab" of Daniel Andrews at a press conference, surrounded by pro-EBA firefighters, saying: "Enough is enough. This dispute has gone on for more than 1000 days. Unless we take decisive action it'll go on for a thousand more." He confirms Minister Garrett resigned at this morning's emergency Cabinet meeting, because she "refused to support a unanimous decision of the Cabinet". Her postmeeting tweets are shown; she says she leaves the ministry "with a heavy heart". The Opposition Leader accuses Andrews of bullying Garrett out of her job, saying she "stood up to him, but paid the price". New Minister James Merlino delivers the new CFA board an ultimatum: sign the deal or be sacked. Andrews says, rather too optimistically as it turned out: "This is a good day, for a good deal that respects and values career and volunteer firefighters and puts this spiteful dispute behind us." And one of the firefighters who attended his press conference to lend support says: "I'm sick and tired of the whole lot of us being used as political footballs." This was a balanced, coherent report on a day of rapid developments.

19. News Online, 10 June, 9.07pm

"CFA board sacked by Victorian Government in bitter dispute over pay and conditions"

The earlier online story about Garrett's resignation (Item 16) is hyperlinked in this breaking story on the early-evening decision to sack the board. The "explainer" story (Item 11) is also pointed to; another good use of the online platform.

20. News Online, 11 June, 3.49pm

"Victorian Government defiant over move to sack CFA board" A straight-forward report on the wash-up of the previous day's dramatic events, based on public comments by Deputy Premier James Merlino (and picking up comments by Malcolm Turnbull in Queensland the previous night, showing that the Prime Minister remains keen to exploit this issue during the federal election campaign). The "explainer" article (Item 11) is helpfully attached.

21. 7pm TV News, 11 June, James Hancock

The report begins at the Smythesdale CFA brigade near Ballarat, where the EBA issue is "red hot" and a volunteer of 30 years has guit and four other members are threatening to walk. There is a "grab" from the CFA captain, then from new Minister Merlino, who "today drew a line under the saga". But "the fire storm is only growing for volunteers". "If he thinks it's over he's got another think coming," says the local, who is outraged that former Minister Jane Garrett was "knifed in the back". In a "piece to camera" the reporter says: "Despite the volunteers' sustained anger, the Government maintains the firefighters' concerns have been resolved and the EBA won't have a negative impact." He then asserts: "The longer the dispute drags on, the more it could hurt Labor at the federal election", before "grabs" from federal Deputy Liberal Leader Julie Bishop and federal Labor Leader Bill Shorten. This report is careful to reflect the State Government's position in the face of concerted attacks.

22. News Online, 12 June, 2.49pm

"Opposition Leader Bill Shorten urges Victoria's volunteer firefighters not to quit"

Federal Labor enters the fray, as the ABC reports on volunteers resigning from the Smythesdale CFA brigade near Ballarat.

Again, usefully, the "explainer" article (Item 11) is attached.

23. News Online, 13 June, 5.28pm

"CFA: Victorian volunteer firefighters urged against splitting away, as fmr (sic) judge says EBA 'unsatisfactory'"

A "pull together" of the news developments of the day, including: the pro-CFA views of Jack Rush QC, who was counsel assisting the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission; Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria saying that volunteers would be "out in force" during the federal election campaign to highlight their concerns; and threats by some volunteers to breakaway from the CFA.

24. PM, 13 June, 6.45pm

"Volunteers threaten breakaway brigades" Expanded reporting on the threatened breakaway, and the very newsworthy views of Jack Rush QC (Item 23).

25. 7pm TV News, 13 June, Jean Edwards

The report begins with Jack Rush QC's concerns about the damage the deal could do to the CFA: "The whole ethic of volunteers is I think being put under threat by what you're seeing ... What you're losing is the ability of the CFA and the volunteers to run their own show, and I think that is of critical importance." It then quotes two volunteers, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria, and Opposition spokesman Brad Battin. Then follows a "grab" from the CFA board's statement, in which the board says it will not "sign an agreement which is unlawful". Government response comes from Minister John Eren: "We've got to get this right and that's exactly what as a Government we are trying to do." Back to Jack Rush: "I don't think you would see a minister resigning if it was all well and good." This was a tough story for the State Government, in that virtually all the people speaking were opponents of the deal. But Jack Rush's views certainly hold weight, given his status as counsel assisting the Black Saturday Bushfires Royal Commission – and the State Government did get a brief opportunity to put its case. The report also asserts that federal Labor candidates "have been warned" about a voter backlash in Victorian seats. This reference could have been better explained. No evidence is provided in this particular story to support the assertion, and

there is no further contextual information. Warned by whom? When? In what way?

26. PM, 14 June, 6.10pm

reference been dropped.

"The political backdraft of the CFA feud" A discussion about the impact of the dispute on the federal election, and in particular whether it is harming the ALP's prospects in Victoria. Perhaps not, argues Monash University lecturer Nick Economou. No, hopes the federal member for the marginal Labor seat of Bendigo, Lisa Chesters. The first half of this report relies on extracts of emotional and aggressive talkback radio callers speaking to Premier Daniel Andrews, as well as a tough exchange on ABC Radio between Andrews and Melbourne host Jon Faine. Faine: "So Jane Garrett, the CFA board, Melinda Richard QC, Crown Counsel Jack Rush QC, counsel assisting the Bushfires Royal Commission, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria and its hierarchy, 40,000 or 50,000 volunteers and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission; they're all wrong when they say this EBA will impact on volunteers, and you're right?" Andrews: "I made an election commitment in November 2014 that we would recruit 350 additional CFA career firefighters. I'm not going to apologise, Jon, for turning more firefighters out to dangerous fires." Andrews of course is a well-practised interviewee more than capable of looking after himself on talkback radio. But in seeking to add further colour to the picture of a dispute causing severe heartburn for Labor and the Premier, this report refers to Andrews becoming "part of the internet meme featuring Adolf Hitler in the final moments of his rule". Any reference in news or current affairs reports to Hitler needs to be treated with the utmost care. I would argue that the reference here was unwise. It was a lively and interesting report; it would have lost nothing had the Hitler

27. AM, 15 June, 8.20am

"Victorian firefighters' industrial dispute may influence federal poll"

A look at how the row may influence voting in the federal seat of Corangamite in western Victoria. This report is based almost entirely on an impactful interview with a local beef and lamb producer and veteran volunteer with the CFA, Robert Cooke. He speaks with power and passion, and he is dead against the "union takeover of the CFA". Taken in isolation, this report is clearly one-sided. But taken in the context of the ABC's extensive and varied coverage of the federal election campaign and of the "hot" running issue in Victoria, this report adds a worthwhile human touch.

28. News Online, 15 June, 5.53pm

"CFA protest interrupts Victorian Government's new renewable energy target"

A report on two protests against the EBA. The first, perhaps most embarrassing for the Premier, involves dozens of volunteer firefighters storming his announcement near Ararat in Victoria's west of a major renewable energy initiative. The second is a more orthodox affair, with 150 CFA members gathering at the Bannockburn fire brigade, west of Geelong, to voice their frustrations about the EBA.

29. 7pm TV News, 15 June, Jean Edwards

More dramatic protest pictures: a convoy of CFA trucks hits the road for "an Ararat ambush", cruising past an announcement on renewable energy by the Premier. A protest spokesman explains their action: "The volunteers want to be seen and they want to be heard." Andrews talks tough: "I will leave the political games and the lies and the nonsense, frankly, to others. This dispute had to come to an end, and I ended it." He refuses to say if he has confidence in the CFA CEO Lucinda Nolan: "I've answered the question — it's a matter for the

board." In a "piece to camera", the reporter says that despite continuing discussions between the parties, some firefighters are still "furious". Union chief Peter Marshall refuses to comment on the dispute despite repeated questions at a press conference on another issue. Once again, the "visuals" in this report are damaging for the Premier. He looked frustrated, even angry, and would come to regret his statement that he had "ended" the dispute. The report reflected all this very well.

30. News Online, 16 June, 3.01pm

"CFA facing 'challenging times', staff urged to stick together"
A straight report of a video message to members by CFA Chief
Officer Joe Buffone, including an embedded YouTube clip of the
message. Buffone basically appeals for calm and urges all staff
to "focus on what really matters": "That is, getting trucks out
the door, making sure our communities are connected and
engaged, and making sure we meet our legislated
responsibilities."

31. News Online, 17 June, 11.44am

"CFA volunteers to take protest over EBA deal with firefighters' union to north-east Victoria"

The dispute becomes still more prominent, with CFA tankers heading in convoy through the north-east Victorian towns of Wangaratta, Benalla and Mansfield. Local Nationals MP Steph Ryan is quoted briefly, saying "the whole ethic of volunteering is under threat through this EBA". Deputy Premier and Emergency Services Minister James Merlino is given more extensive coverage, saying he has been trying to counter misinformation in the debate.

32. PM, 17 June, 6.20pm

"CFA chief resigns over long-running industrial dispute"
After the resignation of the minister and the sacking of the board comes the resignation of the CFA Chief Executive Officer,

Lucinda Nolan. As this report makes clear, her resignation came within hours of Minister James Merlino announcing the new chairman and some other board appointments. Merlino adds a rhetorical flourish: "Today is a significant step forward in making a fresh start, in turning over a new leaf. A new board to deliver improved community safety." But Nolan, in her resignation statement, pointedly thanks Merlino's predecessor, the resigned Minister Jane Garrett. This report finishes with an interview with Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria spokesman Garth Head who, after being identified as a life member of the Labor Party, says the dispute is damaging his party's brand: "I've been around a fair while and I've never seen anything quite so embarrassing and frankly stupid as what's being done in this area by this Government."

33. 7pm TV News, 17 June, Jean Edwards

CFA CEO Lucinda Noland quits, and her resignation statement does not read well for the State Government. A new chairman and four new board members are appointed. Minister James Merlino says their task is to make a fresh start. The State Opposition says that if the new board signs the EBA, then any incoming Coalition government will sack it. This report is tight and straight.

34. AM, 18 June, 8.20am

"Former CFA chair warns Government against sacking board on political grounds"

This is an interview with the dismissed board chairman, John Peberdy. Clearly his views on the dispute are of public interest, and the reporter, Tom Nightingale, as well as eliciting Peberdy's views on a range of pertinent issues, ensures the interview is not merely a series of "free kicks". "Do you accept that there was some need for cultural change, given some of the things that have happened?" is one question. "Do you have any regrets?" is another.

35. News Online, 18 June, 11.46am

"Former CFA board member says Government's actions undermine independence"

A news report of the Peberdy interview, along with a mention (with photo) of federal Deputy Liberal Leader Julie Bishop joining CFA volunteers protesting against the State Government's actions, at Belgrave in Melbourne's outer east.

36. 7pm TV News, 18 June, Robyn Powell

This report shows protest marches in regional towns (with protesters shouting "Hands off the CFA!") and in Melbourne's outer eastern suburbs, with federal Deputy Liberal Leader Julie Bishop joining a street march. She speaks of a fear sweeping the nation that "this creeping unionisation of volunteer organisations won't just stop with the CFA". The report says: "But not all volunteers oppose the deal." One such volunteer says: "We're not playing politics. We're not here to play the game when it comes to the federal election, and it's unfair to put that upon us." They are also unhappy about a Liberal Party website using the dispute to appeal for donations: "I find that totally outrageous. It's not what we're about." A well-balanced report, making clear that the opposition to the deal is not unanimous, and that the way the Liberal Party is "playing" the issue is causing concern to some.

37. 7pm TV News, 18 June, Cameron Best

This report looks at the CFA campaign in the marginal federal seat of Corangamite. One volunteer says: "The only way at the moment that we can voice our opinion is through a vote." Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria says people who say this is a state issue "are turning their back on volunteers". The reporter says the timing of the dispute could hardly be worse for federal Labor. Federal ALP frontbencher Anthony Albanese is shown fielding three questions about the dispute at a campaign press

conference. He and his candidate look uncomfortable as he says: "I'm concerned about federal issues." The federal Liberal MP for Corangamite says the dispute is "absolutely front and centre a federal issue", and again pledges that the federal Coalition will amend the Fair Work Act "to protect the CFA". She is framed in front of a fire truck with the words "Dan Andrews Destroys Volunteers" daubed on it. Liberal campaigners have made the issue a focal point at pre-poll voting centres in the electorate. But a "vox pop" finds some voters don't regard it as a vote-changing issue. In circumstances where federal Labor was trying to avoid talking about the dispute, this was a fair and balanced report.

38. News Online, 20 June, 1.13pm

"Marlene Kairouz to replace Jane Garrett in Victorian Cabinet" A short, straight-forward news story on the limited Cabinet reshuffle made necessary by the resignation of Minister Garrett.

39. 7.30, 22 June, 7.40pm

"Victorian Government dispute with the CFA spills into the federal election campaign"

A seven-and-a-half-minute national story. Host Leigh Sales says in her introduction that the dispute "is threatening to claim the scalps of a number of federal Labor MPs" because "many of the 60,000 volunteer firefighters are vowing to take out their anger on Labor in the federal election". The report is heavy on florid criticism of the CFA deal and the Labor Party, from emotional CFA volunteers at Wye River on the Great Ocean Road and at Bradford in the marginal Labor-held seat of McEwen. "Put Labor last – that's what we're saying," says one volunteer. "I've voted Labor all my life and it's almost gut-wrenching, actually, to think that, no, I'm not gonna vote Labor this time," says another. And two members of the public in McEwen are "vox popped" to illustrate the reporter's statement that "locals are

already listening to their firefighters' campaign". "I'm not really Labor's biggest fan at the moment ... They doing the wrong thing by the CFA," says one. "Not voting Labor ... even though they say it's a 'state issue'," says the other. Labor voices "in defence" are not thick on the ground in this report. Federal Labor MP Jenny Macklin "declined an interview" and viewers are told that Bill Shorten "is trying to keep the issue at arm's length too". But the report passes the "fairness" test because Labor people were invited to put their case, and because the report was about the damage the dispute could cause to federal Labor. The words of those who were interviewed, including University of Melbourne political lecturer Andrea Carson ("this is an issue that particularly plays well for the LNP"), supported the premise.

40. The Drum, 23 June, 10.36am

"Victorian firestorm sends Shorten scrambling" In my view the publication of this "Opinion" article was a mistake. Of the 85 items provided to me by the ABC for review, this was the only one of this genre. It is a 900-word article in the style of traditional print media "oped" pieces: opinionated, assertive and able to be read as partisan. The trouble is that this was a one-off in the midst of a federal election campaign and a bitter industrial dispute; it was not balanced by anything similar from "the other side". I know of and like the work of Chris Earl, the author of this article. I published pieces by him when I was Opinion Editor of The Age. He writes and researches well, and as a commentator from "the bush" his views can be of considerable value to metropolitan audiences and readers. This piece meets those measures: it is well written and researched and provides a thoughtful view from outside Melbourne. But, as is declared at the end of the article, Earl was a member of the administrative committee of the Victorian Division of the Liberal Party for five years. His article can be read as a political assault on the Labor Party and the union

movement. For example, it says that the Andrews Labor Government is "ignoring the angry sea of volunteers in yellow overalls massing in Melbourne and dozens of country communities". It says that the volunteer protests "have turned the political battleground into arenas defending country life and culture from a costly ideological war started by Labor". That, "The ideologically-driven agenda for greater union influence and control within the CFA has foolishly antagonised all 1200 towns and districts with a local fire brigade". And that, "By igniting this battle with the CFA now, Labor is either ignorant of the past, devoid of genuine empathy for rural and regional areas or merely the puppet of a union that believes it is on the cusp of advancing a 60-year dream". To repeat: there is nothing wrong with these views – except when there are published in isolation by the ABC. Clearly they are contentious and disputed views. If the ABC had any concerns that it would not be able to source an opinion piece with a different perspective, it should have sought and obtained a different perspective before publishing this piece. Certainly, having published this piece, it should have pushed hard and then harder to source and publish a counter-piece of similar length, strength and quality. But to publish this piece and then no counter-piece in subsequent days, weeks, even months, was a clear and regrettable breach of the ABC's Editorial Standards on impartiality and diversity of perspectives (See Finding 3 above). I note that the ABC has since closed The Drum website. Readers will have different views about that decision. But to the extent that it may reduce the prospect of another breach such as this, the closure is to be welcomed.

41. The World Today, 23 June, 12.11pm

"CFA stoush could dash Labor's chances in Corangamite"
Malcolm Turnbull spends the morning campaigning in the
marginal Victorian seat, and makes a direct appeal to CFA
volunteers, reiterating his promise to "ensure that the Victorian

Government cannot have its way and subordinate you to the union". This report, valuably, gives Bill Shorten a substantial say: six paragraphs of his comments on the campaign trail, including: "We've seen him (the Prime Minister) come out as recently as this morning and say that thousands of volunteers will be subordinate to the union. This is an outrageous lie ... Mr Turnbull wants to use volunteers as political pawns in his pursuit of power."

42. News Online, 23 June, 2.53pm

"CFA firefighters call for unity as tensions boil over EBA deal" Appeals for calm, from the Premier, the State Opposition Leader and others, as a career firefighter says a bullet shell was placed in a donation tin while he was collecting for his brigade in the Latrobe Valley in Victoria's east, and a man is expected to be charged after an alleged altercation over CFA stickers at a Diamond Creek newsagency. A good, comprehensive report illustrating the anger the dispute is causing.

43. PM, 23 June, 6.33pm

"CFA dispute: Victorians warned against threats and violence"
As the dispute gets "nasty", in the words of PM presenter Tony
Eastley, this valuable report achieves two things: it gives voice
to the idea that the saga is a "beat up"; and it casts further
doubt on the efficacy of the Turnbull plan to "protect" the
volunteers through legislative change. Professional firefighter
Danny Ward suggests the anger and angst are unnecessary:
"The people of Victoria need to know this is a beat-up, nothing
more and nothing less. Most of the country brigades where this
doesn't have any impact at all are being fed a line by the Liberal
Party, and also by the Herald Sun." And Andrew Stewart,
Professor of Law at the University of Adelaide, explains why he
thinks the Turnbull plan is highly problematic: "The chances of
this particular dispute being resolved by the kind of legislation
that the Coalition is talking about: very, very unlikely."

44. 7pm TV News, 23 June, Jean Edwards

Malcolm Turnbull uses a breakfast meeting in Corangamite to accuse Labor of crushing the spirit of CFA volunteers. He ramps up the rhetoric: this is a "union takeover" and is "putting at risk the lives and property of Victorians". But, the report says, his plan to legislate to "protect" the volunteers "may not be that simple". There is a "grab" from an industrial academic on the difficulties of framing such legislation. Dan Andrews fires back, urging the Prime Minister to give to the CFA every dollar raised by the Liberal Party's "Hands off the CFA" website: "Will you hand back the money you have fraudulently raised?" The report says the dispute has taken a sinister turn, with reports of abuse, intimidation and even death threats. A firefighter talks of a bullet being put into a collection tin in country Victoria, and the report says an MFB member has been suspended and is expected to be charged with assaulting a volunteer in a newsagency. A balanced, comprehensive wrap of the day's events.

45. News Online, 23 June, 7.53pm

"Election 2016: Protecting role of CFA volunteers will be first order of business if re-elected, PM says"

A wrap-up of the day's events, including: the Prime Minister's address to volunteers in Geelong; Labor's Senate leader, Penny Wong, responding to "Malcolm Turnbull wanting to play politics with what is essentially a state issue"; more on Professor Andrew Stewart's assessment of the Turnbull legislative plan; and responses by the Premier and the State Opposition to an "editorial" in the Herald Sun that morning by Jack Rush QC, senior counsel to the Black Saturday Bushfires Royal Commission, who asserted that "The EBA undermines the role and the independence of volunteers".

46. The World Today, 30 June, 12.05pm

"CFA chief fire officer resigns in ongoing industrial stoush" Reporter Samantha Donovan asserts that "the majority" of the CFA's volunteers are concerned that the new EBA will give the union too much power over them, and that "It appears Joe Buffone agrees", because the Chief Fire Officer resigned that morning after less than a year in the job. In the circumstances, both assertions appear justified. In this report, Buffone's resignation statement is detailed and then former CFA board member John Peberdy is interviewed. He laments the loss of "another great asset" to the CFA, and adds: "There must be another agenda running, that's one between the Government and the UFU." The report finishes with a "grab" from State Opposition Leader Matthew Guy, saying the latest high-profile resignation shows that "No one is safe in the fire services in Victoria". All three people quoted in this report are strong critics of the EBA: Buffone, Peberdy and Guy. Clearly Buffone is the news point of the day, and Peberdy as a former board member is an informed and newsworthy commentator. But a State Government or union voice should have been heard; or, if efforts were made to get such a voice and invitations were declined, this should have been made clear to listeners.

47. News Online, 30 June, 6.16pm

"CFA boss Joe Buffone resigns over controversial workplace deal; Government disputes reasons"

Unlike the previous item, this report has a State Government voice: the provocative assertion by Deputy Premier and Emergency Services Minister James Merlino that Joe Buffone had indicated he was prepared to stay if he was given an \$85,000 pay rise. Buffone responds, saying pay had nothing to do with his decision.

48. PM, 30 June, 6.10pm

"Victorian Government blames money, not principle, for CFA chief's exit"

A lively, balanced report giving more details of the extraordinary claim by James Merlino that Joe Buffone had been willing to stay for more money, along with response by Buffone, his lawyer and Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria.

49. PM, 30 June, 6.15pm

"Bill Shorten distances himself from CFA dispute as election looms"

This item immediately follows the previous story on PM (Item 48). Presenter Tony Eastley begins by saying the dispute "hasn't done Labor any favours". Reporter Peta Donald then looks at the possible federal election implications. There are extended comments from Bill Shorten, insisting it is a state issue, and a "grab" from Malcolm Turnbull's National Press Club luncheon address, reiterating his intention to legislate to protect CFA volunteers "from a power grab orchestrated by the United Firefighters Union and the Andrews Labor Government".

50. 7pm TV News, 30 June, Stephanie Anderson

CFA Chief Fire Officer Joe Buffone's is the latest head to roll, following the Minister, the board and the CEO. "They all can't be wrong," declares State Opposition Leader Matthew Guy. "They are sending a loud and clear message to Daniel Andrews: get your hands off the CFA." Buffone's resignation makes bad reading for the State Government. But Minister James Merlino hits back hard, saying Buffone was prepared to stay if he was given an \$85,000 pay rise. Buffone says the Government is trying to discredit him, and former Emergency Services Commissioner Bruce Esplin takes to social media to praise Buffone. Meanwhile, Merlino says he doesn't think the dispute will be a decisive factor in Saturday's federal election. Bill Shorten accuses the federal Liberals of "seeking to inject opportunism into what is always going to be resolved at a state level". A fair and balanced report of another dramatic day.

51. PM, 1 July, 6.10pm

"Victorian union chief urges calm between volunteer and paid firefighters"

Presenter Tony Eastley says "there are concerns Victoria's warring firefighters might come to blows at some polling booths tomorrow", and the union at the centre of the dispute has issued an urgent plea for calm. UFU secretary Peter Marshall has written to volunteers "to try and calm things down", but he plays down the prospect of things getting heated at the polling booths. "There is a lot of third party speculation about that potentially happening, but I think that's more a wish than a reality." The balance of this report is an interview with a CFA captain in Corangamite, who is skeptical about the union's motives.

52. AM, 3 July, 8.20am

"Labor unaffected by CFA industrial dispute in Victorian seats: Kim Carr"

After the July 2 federal election comes the "spinning" of the result. Veteran Victorian Labor Senator Kim Carr tells AM that there was actually a swing to Labor in "the so-called CFA seats".

53. News Online, 3 July, 3.29pm

"Election 2016: Daniel Andrews dismisses CFA effect as Labor holds in Victoria"

The Premier says the "so-called Armageddon impact" failed to materialise, and in fact the CFA dispute played no part in the federal election. "Those areas that were most heavily targeted by a campaign of misinformation, grubby misinformation, they have swung to Labor, to Labor, in very strong terms." Bill Shorten is also quoted. This story may have benefitted from a Coalition perspective. Of, if a Coalition perspective was not available, readers should have been told as much.

54. The World Today, 4 July, 12.40pm

"CFA dispute: Vic Premier adamant it had no role in federal election result"

Monash University's Dr Nick Economou adds weight to Daniel Andrews' view, saying "Victoria hasn't been quite the disaster (for Labor) that many commentators have been describing". "I just don't think that there is statistical or empirical evidence to sustain the argument that the CFA issue impacted on Labor's vote in Victoria." Again, there is no Coalition perspective (which may be because the Labor case on this point is difficult to argue with and no one from the Coalition wanted to try to mount an alternative case).

55. 7pm TV News, 4 July, Guy Stayner

Daniel Andrews welcomes the federal election result in Victoria, saying it debunks the idea that his handling of the CFA dispute would damage federal Labor. "If the CFA is the defining issue, and we're going to be wiped out, how do you get very solid swings (to Labor) in McEwen, in Latrobe, in the Dandenong Ranges for heaven's sake." This report was mainly a wrap-up of the still-in-doubt seats in Victoria, rather than a report focusing on the CFA dispute, but it was of value to have on the record the Premier's strong rejection of the assertion that the issue would harm his party in the federal election.

56. News Online, 7 July, 6.17pm

"Two key firefighting organisations removed from bushfire inquiry schedule"

This story is only marginally associated with the CFA dispute, if at all. It reports that the CFA and Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria had been removed, without explanation, from the schedule for a state parliamentary inquiry into Victoria's readiness for bushfires. But it is a slightly confusing report. It is unclear to the reader whether the organisations will appear at another time. The report says: "The secretariat of the Parliament's Environment and Planning Committee would not

comment on the reasons for the schedule change, and said the new timetables would be made public when witnesses were rescheduled." A story such as this requires a follow up, to detail what actually happened and, as far as can by ascertained, why.

57. The World Today, 15 July, 12.34pm

"000 call-takers deny work bans are threatening public safety" Although some of the same organisations are involved (the Victorian Government, the CFA, the UFU), it appears there is no direct link between these work bans (which have been in place for five months) and the long-running dispute involving the CFA EBA. Nor does this report suggest such a link.

58. News Online, 19 July, 5.05pm

"CFA dispute 'eroding confidence' in Victorian fire services, parliamentary inquiry told"

The Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council is asked about the dispute during an appearance before a state parliamentary inquiry looking at Victoria's preparedness for the approaching fire season. The council's representative says it is "agnostic" about industrial matters, but is concerned that the dispute may have led to a loss of morale within fire services.

59. News Online, 2 August, 8.06pm

"CFA dispute: Volunteer firefighters urge Victorian Parliament to avoid 'reckless' resolution"

A lengthy news report on the appearance before the parliamentary committee of Andrew Ford, chief executive of Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria. He "appeared to choke back tears" as he recounted the impact of the dispute on volunteers, and again warned that the changes could "destroy CFA". Deputy Premier and Emergency Services Minister James Merlino is given space, high in the article, to give the Government's response: "The VFBV has made similar claims

about the negative impact of previous CFA enterprise agreements over the past decade," Merlino says. "These impacts did not eventuate and volunteer numbers actually increased over this period."

60. News Online, 3 August, 10.26am

"CFA row flares again with Melbourne Fire Brigade boss raising concerns over union power"

A new front in the saga opens up, with the Herald Sun revealing a letter from the Metropolitan Fire Brigade's Chief Officer to Minister James Merlino expresses concerns about the CFA deal and warns against a similar agreement being enforced on the MFB. This ABC report appropriately provides readers with a link to the original Herald Sun story, and includes comments on it by Merlino and UFU secretary Peter Marshall.

61. The World Today, 3 August, 12.20pm

"Victorian inquiry questions whether industrial deal could affect bushfire season"

This report covers the appearance before a parliamentary committee that morning of CFA senior officer Steve Warrington, who says both career staff and volunteers are fed up with the long-running public row. The report also encompasses reaction to the MFB letter (Item 60), quoting the responses of union chief Peter Marshall and Minister James Merlino.

62. News Online, 3 August, 5.35pm

"CFA dispute: Sacked chairman 'would have resigned' over EBA proposal"

The EBA dispute dominates the day's discussions at a parliamentary inquiry into Victoria's preparedness for the upcoming fire season, with the dismissed CFA chairman John Peberdy saying he "would never have been able to sign the agreement as is was" and would have had to resign had he not

been sacked. But the new CFA Chief Officer appeals for calm: "Yes there'll be changes, but the sky is not going to fall in." The new CFA CEO Frances Diver rejects a suggestion from a Liberal MP that the new leadership team has been installed as the Government's "lapdogs". She says she is an experienced senior executive, and the new management is "absolutely committed to a volunteer model".

63. 7pm TV News, 3 August, Stephanie Anderson

The CFA leaders "charged with ending the 1200-day dispute" appear before the state parliamentary committee. The new Chief Officer says: "Yes there will be changes, but the sky is not going to fall in." The new CEO says: "The CFA will live long beyond all of us, and it will also involve volunteers." A Liberal MP on the committee says: "You have been put in here as lapdogs to the Government, just to do their bidding, because you know if you don't do their bidding, you'll be sacked like the others have been." The dismissed former board chairman says: "I would never have been able to sign the agreement as it was. I would have resigned." The Chief Officer says coverage of the dispute is hurting morale. The report says "But the front pages keep on coming", and then summaries the Herald Sun story of that morning on the leaked letter from the MFB (Item 60). Minister James Merlino at a "doorstop" responses to the MFB concerns: "Those comments are reckless and alarmist and do not reflect the reality." Union secretary Peter Marshall also responds: "We think the letter's designed to polarise the public. Much of what's in the letter is incorrect." The report ends with CFA chiefs telling the committee that despite the dispute, the organisation is ready for this upcoming fire season. Says the Chief Officer: "If the state needs us, we are there." This is a very neat TV compilation of another dramatic day in the saga.

64. News Online, 4 August, 1.31pm

"CFA row: Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews refuses to express

confidence in MFB chief officer"

The Premier, on his way to delivering a business speech, is "door-stopped" about the MFB's concerns, as outlined in the letter leaked yesterday (Item 60). He avoids endorsing the MFB boss, saying: "We are about making the cultural and other operational changes that are critically important in keeping Victorians safe, and I make no apology for doing that. That will not always be universally popular, but that's my comments for you today." This report usefully reiterates that UFU secretary Peter Marshall had said all of the claims in the MFB letter had been tested and rejected in Fair Work Australia.

65. News Online, 5 August, 8.15am

"CFA dispute: Union boss Peter Marshall denies axe threat towards Jane Garrett"

An explosive new claim in the row: Fairfax Media reports that Peter Marshall had threatened to put an axe through the head of the then Emergency Services Minister Jane Garrett during negotiations over the EBA. This ABC report covers reaction: Marshall issues a statement categorically denying the allegations; Premier Andrews refuses to say whether he had known about the allegations, but says Victorians should always behave respectfully towards each other; the Opposition calls for an investigation; Garrett refuses to comment.

66. AM, 8 August, 8.24am

"Sacked board member calls for inquiry into Fair Work Commission head"

Former CFA board member Michael Freshwater wants the Federal Government to hold an inquiry into the actions of Fair Work president Iain Ross, in putting commissioner Julius Roe, a former Australian Manufacturing Workers Union president, in charge of the CFA dispute. "He (Roe) has never been in the emergency services area before ... and he gave the CFA less than 5 minutes." Freshwater accuses Roe of speaking to people

he possibly should not have, including UFU secretary Peter Marshall and Premier Daniel Andrews. "I just want to make sure that the people who are making these decisions are the appropriate people," Freshwater says. Fair Work Australia tells AM it is declining to comment.

67. News Online, 8 August, 1.17pm

"Fire dispute: CFA board to vote on proposed industrial agreement, Minister James Merlino says"
A short, straightforward report quoting Merlino saying the new board will vote "shortly". He again asserts that the new EBA will not impact adversely on volunteers.

68. News Online, 9 August, 11.06am

"CFA dispute: No decision by new board on EBA proposal proves concerns, Opposition says"
The Opposition seizes on news that the board has met but reached no decision on the EBA. Minister Merlino responds.

69. 7pm TV News, 9 August, Stephanie Anderson

The dispute appears no closer to resolution. State Opposition Leader Matthew Guy has a good "grab" for the cameras: "If distrust, chaos and division were an Olympic sport, the Andrews Government would get a podium finish." Yesterday, Minister James Merlino appeared confident the new board would sign the EBA. "That will happen shortly," he is shown as saying. But despite a marathon meeting yesterday, there is still no agreement. In a statement, the CFA says it is "continuing to work through the proposed agreement". This story wraps us reaction to the delay, from the Government, the Opposition, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria and the UFU. It is a straight report on another awkward day for the State Government.

70. 7pm TV News, 12 August, Stephanie AndersonBreaking news of a "very significant step forward" in the

dispute. A live cross to the reporter outside CFA Headquarters who says that in the last hour or so the CFA board endorsed the agreement. A grab of the new chairman after the meeting, with a message to volunteers: "They should trust the CFA board to work hard and to try and rebuild the trust that they should have in the CFA ... The objective of the board now is to try and heal the organisation and to explain our position a lot further." But the reporter says this decision is unlikely to end the dispute, because the volunteers' association is planning to take legal action to prevent the deal being signed. But the decision is, she says, "a win for the Andrew Government". Another fair report on an important development, this one favourable to the Andrews Government.

71. News Online, 12 August, 7.12pm

"CFA: How the Victorian Country Fire Authority dispute unfolded"

A second "explainer" report on the 1200-day dispute. Like the first (Item 14), this report is very useful for readers trying to keep in touch with and make sense of a long and sometimes confusing saga. It is enhanced by a series of cross-headings: Fair Work finding fuels firestorm; Fire dispute heats up federal campaign; Board sacked, minister, officials resign; Pressure on new board to sign off on deal. Each episode includes useful links to previous stories. I reiterate the comments I made regarding Item 14: reports such as these are of great value.

72. News Online, 12 August, 7.58pm

"CFA dispute: New board endorses controversial wage deal after two meetings"

After a second meeting, the board endorses the deal. New CFA chairman Greg Smith is quoted, along with Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria, which condemns the "sell out". This report includes a link to the "explainer" report (Item 71), a "Key points" panel, and a screen-shot of the two-page board

resolution. All three elements are of value to readers.

73. News Online, 13 August, 2.58pm

"CFA dispute: Emergency Services Minister James Merlino urges firefighters to back deal"

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria plans to mount a legal challenge to the CFA board's decision to endorse the EBA, but the minister says they are doing themselves a disservice. This report "wraps up" reaction to the board decision, from VFBV, Merlino, CFA Chief Executive Officer Frances Diver, CFA Chief Officer Steve Warrington, State Opposition Leader Matthew Guy and federal Employment Minister Michaelia Cash.

74. 7pm TV News, 13 August, Stephanie Anderson

After the board decision to endorse the deal, the new CFA leadership team makes a public pitch for everyone to "move on", although the Chief Fire Officer concedes that the EBA is "not a perfect document". The report says that the "Government's hand-picked" new board has now done what the sacked board would not: endorse the EBA. Minister James Merlino declares: "The time for conflict, the time for division, is over." But Opposition Leader Matthew Guy says: "The majority of this board is just hand-picked puppets of this Government. Of course it (the EBA) was going to be signed off." And Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria is outraged by the decision, accusing board members of "betraying" volunteers. The new CEO says she would be very disappointed if the volunteers' association took the matter to court: "This dispute has gone on for long enough. It is affecting morale. It is causing some divisions within the organisation." In a "piece to camera", the reporter says that as well as the prospect of court action the State Government faces a fight on another front, with the Prime Minister promising federal legislation. But Merlino dismisses this: "It was a political stunt by a political opportunist during the campaign period." Meanwhile, the UFU welcomes

the board decision. Again, a fair report on the wash-up of a significant moment in the dispute.

75. News Online, 17 August, 4.25pm

"CFA dispute: Victorian volunteer firefighters win bid to halt workplace deal vote"

Victoria's Supreme Court agrees to send the dispute to trial next month and gets an undertaking from the CFA not to endorse the EBA until the courts have ruled on whether it is lawful. This report quotes some evidence to the hearing, and reaction from relevant parties. It reports that the trial will begin on September 22.

76. 7pm TV News, 17 August, Stephanie Anderson

The report beings: "CFA members should be fighting fires, not each other." Then comes a grab from Emergency Services Commissioner Craig Lapsley saying, with feeling: "We've got a war out there - it's almost a war between volunteer and career. That's got to stop." He says his job is to get back goodwill between the two sides. But the report says the decision of the Supreme Court to hear a case on the EBA shows the dispute won't be over any time soon. Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria says the court decision shows that they have not been "making up" their concerns. The new CFA boss says she is disappointed with the court action because it delays any settlement. Meanwhile, Question Time "fired up" over bullying allegations against union chief Peter Marshall. The report shows "grabs" from Parliament of Matthew Guy and then Daniel Andrews. The reporter says Marshall has denied making violent threats during the negotiations. This is a sharp and wellbalanced wrap of another dramatic day.

77. News Online, 18 August, 7.53am

"CFA dispute leaves Victorian firefighters 'exposed' for bushfire season"

A member of the sacked CFA board tells a state parliamentary inquiry that the dispute will affect bushfire operations this summer. Michael Tudball says: "When a chief officer resigns, a chief executive resigns, a board is removed and a minister goes, it's got to impact ... I think CFA is at risk."

78. AM, 22 August, 8.03am

"CFA legislation will make sure volunteers are protected: Senator Fifield"

The Turnbull Government will today release a draft of the legislative changes it promised during the election campaign. AM interviews Victorian Liberal Senator and Manager of Government Business in the Senate, Mitch Fifield. The questions and answers relate mainly to the politics of the new Senate, rather than the content of the legislation. Fifield says: "What the Victorian Government is seeking to do is to hand control of 60,000 CFA volunteers to the United Firefighters Union ... The Andrews Government is seeking to destroy the culture of the CFA, to mess with one of the great firefighting organisations ... What we're going to do is make sure that the volunteers are protected."

79. The World Today, 22 August, 12.10pm

"The PM reveals details of CFA legislation"

Reporter Tom Nightingale details what Malcolm Turnbull and Michaelia Cash said in releasing the draft. His report includes quotes from Cash and response from Victorian Minister James Merlino, who says: "This dispute needs to end. We need people to get out of the trenches." Nightingale points out it's not clear whether the legislation will be passed by the Senate, or what impact the legislation may have on the pending Supreme Court trial.

80. News Online, 22 August, 4.15pm

"Malcolm Turnbull introduces new laws to 'protect' CFA

volunteers from firefighters' union"

A good "wrap" of the day's events, reporting details of the proposed legislative amendments along with comments from Malcolm Turnbull and Michaelia Cash, response from James Merlino and the State Opposition, and a quick summary of the saga.

81. 7pm TV News, 22 August, Jean Edwards

This report opens with happy scenes of the Prime Minister shaking hands with volunteers, while being introduced by a beaming Matthew Guy. The reporter says: "Making good on a pre-election pledge to protect Victoria's volunteer firefighters." An emphatic Turnbull says: "The volunteerism of the Country Fire Authority is its very spirit." He talks about the details of the legislative amendments, which "he says will save them from a union takeover of the CFA". An emotional volunteer tells the crowd: "This is our current Ash Wednesday, and by God, we'll win it." Turnbull accuses the Premier of demoralising the volunteers, adding: "I think there is a sinister purpose here from the State Government." But, the report says, federal Employment Minister Michaelia Cash is under fire for misrepresenting a clause in the EBA, in an opinion piece in that morning's Herald Sun. She acknowledges that there "may have been an incorrect use of wording", but says "you need to go to the broader picture". The State Government brands the federal legislation a political stunt. Minister James Merlino: "It's not necessary and it's based on lies and misinformation that they just continue to spread." An industrial relations academic says: "I think it's going to take a very messy political situation and make it even more messy. What the legislation is going to do is potentially prolong the settlement of what's already been a very protracted dispute." This report would have pleased the PM and his media managers. It contains uplifting, indeed quite moving, footage of him with volunteers, and gives considerable time to his presentation and arguments. However, it is

balanced at the end by the response of the State Government and the academic's criticism of the federal move.

82. News Online, 25 August, 9.36am

"CFA defends directive banning Opposition MPs from making speeches at official events"

The CFA's new Chief Executive Officer, Frances Diver, says this directive was part of a long-standing convention and that the organisation does not want to get involved in politics. She denies an Opposition allegation that the State Government had prompted the CFA to send out the directive. This report finishes with an appropriate sentence in the circumstances: "The Government has been contacted for comment."

83. News Online, 29 August, 4.28pm

"Speculation of leadership challenge to Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews dismissed as 'nonsense'"
Response to two explosive stories in the Melbourne newspapers: first, in the Herald Sun, that unnamed state Labor MPs have been sounding out support for a leadership spill; and secondly, in The Sunday Age, that the Premier allegedly made a derogatory remark about a former Liberal MP with bowel cancer. Given that Daniel Andrews had vehemently and comprehensively denied ever making the alleged comment, and that the ABC provided no evidence that he had made it, it was appropriate that this news item did not repeat the alleged comment.

84. News Online, 30 August, 11.33am

"Daniel Andrews dismisses leaked firefighters' union memo as 'political games'"

Excerpts of the memo were published by the Herald Sun that morning. It suggests that the Premier's advisers had warned him that union boss Peter Marshall had crossed the line during negotiations over the CFA dispute. Appropriately and usefully,

this report includes a hyperlink to the Herald Sun article. This ABC report quotes Andrews saying the memo has been selectively quoted. "These are political games and I've no interest in playing them," he says. But the Opposition says the memo shows Andrews had lied when he told Parliament earlier in August that he was not aware of any complaints about Marshall's conduct. Andrews maintains that his answer to Parliament had been "completely accurate". Readers are told that Marshall refuses to comment.

85. News Online, 31 August, 7.54am

"CFA dispute: Former minister Jane Garrett to lodge complaint over 'distressing' conduct by UFU boss"

Jane Garrett's statement comes as union leader Peter Marshall

appears before a parliamentary inquiry. Outside the inquiry, he responds to the Garrett issue: "I haven't admitted to bullying and intimidating and I suggest you don't accuse me of such." Inside, he comments on a private meeting he had with Premier Daniel Andrews in April, after which the State Government appeared to soften its until-then hardline stance on the union's proposals. Marshall tells the parliamentary committee: "Contrary to what's alleged, there was no deal, they was no commitment ... I'm telling you, on the record: no deal." A straight-forward piece of reporting.