



Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry

Morwell Koori Community Consultation – Ninde Dana Quarenook, Morwell, 1.00pm, 7 May 2014 Summary of discussion

Background

The Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry held its eighth community consultation with the local Koori community at the Ninde Dana Quarenook Aboriginal Co-op in Morwell at 1.00pm on Wednesday, 7 May 2014. The Koori community consultation was attended by 11 people. The following summary reports key themes and issues that were raised by community members during the consultation discussions. This summary reports on what was stated and does not attribute views to any or all community members.

What worked well

- The firebreaks put in between the road and the APM plant about a week and half before the fire, which stopped the APM plant burning
- Radio publicity from day 1 – the ABC updates were excellent
- The Fire Ready App
- Helicopter waterbombing was helpful
- Roadblocks – they stopped stickybeaks
- Local information about which roads were open
- CFA vans handing out breathing apparatus and masks (for those who went to Coles)
- Newsletters and phone text messages worked well for some
- Department of Human Services notice that went out (to those who received it)
- Ramahyuck Co-op collected information; staff from Koori community organisations working proactively to support Koori community members
- Respite vouchers

What didn't work well

- Removal of the sprinklers and pipes from the mine
- Locals with mine firefighting expertise and experience weren't used – they should have been utilised before CFA/MFB firefighters were brought in from outside the Valley
- Information on the Fire Ready App was good, but it came too late, especially for people travelling to Morwell from outside the Valley
- Official information and advice about the fires came too late – residents could see smoke for hours before official information came out
- Information wasn't given to Koori community organisations, but was given to other non-government organisations – Koori community is an isolated group
- Bushfires/grass fires are different to coal fires – residents weren't told and there was no preparation for a coal fire
- No disaster plan in place – in Queensland every resident receives an annual update cyclone emergency plan booklet in September that provides advice, information about local safety spots and warning sirens etc
- Asthma puffers should have been distributed in the first week, not after four weeks
- Concerns about long term health effects – will I get cancer from breathing in the dust for the past eight weeks?

- Salvation Army door knock to give out breathing apparatus to some members of the community – should have been extended to the whole community, especially all elderly people
- Better assistance and options should have been provided to the elderly and isolated - they should have been put on a bus and evacuated or arrangements made so carers could reach them
- Increasing psycho-social issues – a rise in domestic violence and drug abuse
- Outdoor workers still had to work
- Difficulties for families and business trying to relocate to get away from the smoke
- Child care centres being closed created issues for parents who still had to work – if it had been declared a disaster then everything should have stopped/been closed
- Only people on welfare being eligible for the \$500 financial assistance (one pregnant lady with four asthmatic children was not eligible for any financial assistance because her husband is employed)
- Abuse of the \$500 financial assistance (spent on grog)
- Additional financial burdens arising from increased medical expenses (extra medication), increased petrol costs (having to take detours to get to work), lost income (through having to take sick leave because existing chronic illnesses were made worse by the fire) impacting on meeting mortgage payments
- Having to use personal leave entitlements
- The artificial boundary created at Commercial Road – smoke doesn't understand lines on a map
- Being told every week that it would be just one more week, then another week, then another week
- Community members not being listened to when they speak up at community consultations

What should be done differently

- Suppression foam should have been used sooner
- Latrobe City Council should develop a local emergency plan, similar to the Queensland cyclone booklet, that is updated and distributed to every household on an annual basis
- Local (information) coverage should be improved
- Information, support and materials should be provided to Koori community organisations the same as other non-government agencies
- Breathing apparatus should be given to all residents
- Doorknocks to residents living nearby, especially the elderly and nursing homes
- More Koori representation in decision-making, and the broader community needs to listen to and take notice of Koori voices
- A Koori representative on the Latrobe City Council to represent the Koori community
- Better evacuation for the elderly and those who might be at risk (elderly grandmother living independently at home on her own with relatives not able to reach her due to road blocks)
- Everybody should be treated the same - financial and other assistance should be provided to everyone in the community, not just those on welfare
- Engagement of the Koori community in emergencies – Koori community members would willingly volunteer to help with firefighting, making sandwiches etc
- Establishment of a Koori emergency committee, auspiced by Ninde Dana Quarenook, to be the key contact in future emergencies, to contribute to the broader community response, and ensure the elderly, ill, young and babies within the Koori community are cared for
- Avoid creation of imaginary lines – 'Can't tell the smoke where to blow and the ash where to fall'
- The whole town should have been on alert and the whole town should have been evacuated
- Shut the mine down or relocate the town
- Consider alternative power sources – solar or wind power
- The mine owners should be held accountable and foot the bill that taxpayers are currently paying
- In future, authorities should apply a worse case scenario approach right from the beginning, rather than dragging a response out from week to week to week before acting
- Address the long term health impacts for kids – 'hope this is not another Maralinga' – by dealing with the mine pollution affecting the entire Valley community
- Respite assistance should be offered for weekends as well as weekdays so those who are working can also take advantage