



Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry

Community Service Provider Consultation – Morwell Club, Morwell, 7.00am, 8 May 2014 **Summary of discussion**

Background

The Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry held its tenth and final community consultation with representatives from community service providers at the Morwell Club in Morwell on Thursday, 8 May 2014. Sixteen people representing 12 different agencies participated in the consultation. The following summary reports key themes and issues that were raised by 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 CFA and mine putting the fire out
- The use of the helicopter to water-bomb as a means of firefighting
- The CFA – firefighting and engagement/communication and informing the local community
- CFA website
- Local emergency management
- Red Cross communications with the mine
- Information from Victoria Police
- Information from and availability of the Fire Services Commissioner
- Local media - ABC radio and the Latrobe Valley Express - were the best source of information
- Online updates from the EPA; EPA monitoring
- Support from local businesses
- Latrobe City Council doorknocking
- Food provided to the volunteers
- Information buses and vans (at Mid Valley); information packs provided on the trains
- Accommodation vouchers, masks and ventilin (which could have been distributed earlier) for those who received them
- The Health Assessment centre, once it was established
- Medical assessments were reassuring for some people
- Young clients were good about wearing masks and doing what was recommended; young people were more resilient and understood better than the elderly
- Respite events were a good idea

What didn't work well

- Communication from everyone (except the CFA) was confused and disjointed; trusted community voices were not used and leaders in the community were excluded from taking a role
- There was not enough information in the first week on what to do or plan for
- Miscommunication via social media which was not countered with relevant actual information from authorities in a timely manner
- Absence of local members of parliament
- Conflicting information, unanswered questions and not knowing – the community was undermined by not being informed
- No triggers for action and no plan for those with a disability
- Local information was not listened to; local health knowledge was not accessed, or it was minimised
- Lack of support to service providers and the community
- Negative media coverage
- There was little service delivery for families in Morwell
- As a service provider its difficult to deliver services to clients when your own health is suffering
- Department of Health – there was no one on the ground to push out the messages or provide clear information; local health services were not given the opportunity to support the community in the early stages
- Band aid supports (for example the masks and buckets); community recovery didn't start soon enough
- The creation of 'Morwell South'
- The Health Assessment Centre was not easily accessible and provided a limited range of support services
- Relocation costs are not sustainable
- Businesses had to close or relocate – which was not helpful to clients
- Impacts on mental health
- Lack of funds to assist those with disabilities - it's very difficult to find suitable alternative accommodation in a crisis for people with disabilities (access via ramps, disabled toilets and showers, secure locations for people with dementia) - therefore they and their carers had to stay in Morwell
- The relief centre failed to cater for the needs of people receiving in-home palliative care, acute mental illness, profound dependent disabilities
- Interruption in services to people with disabilities – those with spectrum disorders such as autism find it hard to change routine, so leaving the area and not taking part in day programs has a profound effect on their mental wellbeing
- Internet reliability
- State authorities over-riding local emergency management arrangements and associated protocols
- Fewer volunteers to help out
- Impacts on the local food bank
- Local infrastructure was not able to function at full capacity

- The holiday house scheme
- Complex, vulnerable families not accessing services
- Government decision-making (a group of people with disabilities who normally meet on a Sunday at government offices were told they would need to relocate their meeting to a park)
- Latrobe City Council doorknocking took too long, which meant that not everyone was given information
- Role of Latrobe City Council as responder and provider of services, as well as advocate for the community created a conflict
- People with poor English language skills being isolated
- The ill feeling created by the lack of support available to people who don't have a Health Care Card
- Relocation packages not being retrospective
- Information about clean up and recovery is still unclear
- No consideration of any extra support for the agencies to clean up – they had to do it in their own time
- Concerns that the longer term impacts will see an increase in financial disadvantage and family violence
- Impacts on children - silent witnesses - particularly through media exposure
- Social impacts created by clients who presented as agitated, angry, fearful, anxious, tired, acutely stressed and defeatist
- A general sense of disillusion and distrust which has worsened since the fire due to the confusion created by conflicting information
- Support and information provided by funding bodies – advice to close early appeared odd, limited to only two pro-active communications, a notice of understanding that performance targets might not be met, and the absence of any official plan other than to 'call back if the fire isn't out in two weeks'
- OH&S and Worksafe Victoria advice – agencies told to make their own decisions about evacuation/relocation, and in general agencies were left to make their own decisions (supportive advice was provided by the union)
- Conflict between duty of care owed to clients / staff
- Community Advisory Group was formed too late
- Inability of children to burn off energy outdoors placed increased pressure on people in volatile family situations
- Those in other vulnerable groups were not recognised as being vulnerable ie those with a disability or pre-existing injury
- Number of people spent support money from the Department of Human Services inappropriately
- Inconsistency in evacuating some, but not all, schools
- Financial constraints for people who now want to move

What should be done differently

- Early intervention to prevent trauma
- The media's use of language – more thought/care should be given to how impacted communities are portrayed/reported

- One single, clear leader to deliver information should be established – a hotline number – one message, from one source, that is not conflicting, and is clear and to the point
- There should be better management, and action plans in place in future
- Use local emergency management systems
- Better information about time frames
- More funding for local crisis events
- Better coordination of fire suppression
- There should be established trigger points for dealing with events such as this
- The Government should make better use of local expertise and resources; key community leaders who are trusted within the community should be better utilised
- Department of Health should have/use on the ground representatives; and engage more with the community; GP clinics could be used as information hubs to support health interventions; hospitals, community health centres and other allied health agencies should be more effectively used as trusted access points for health information and assistance
- Ongoing and universal support for short, medium and long term ongoing emotional and psychological issues
- Health care should be provided to those who need it, and not based on age or those with chronic conditions
- Health assessment protocols should be widely available to all health services
- Families with caring responsibilities should be given priority
- Use of camping grounds for relocation
- Clean up assistance should be universal, free to the community, easily accessible, and timely
- Funding for extra resources on the ground, with community agencies having a say on what should be prioritised, and allocated, and for what purpose – the Government needs to be aware of the resources, capabilities and limitations of the community
- Establish a disaster recovery plan that involves coordination of all agencies
- Better acknowledgement of the good work that has been done
- Acknowledgement that the Latrobe Valley provides a service (electricity) to the country and the area was significantly impacted