



## Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry

### **Morwell Community Consultation – Kernot Hall, 12.30pm, 10 April 2014 Summary of discussion**

#### **Background**

The Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry held its first community consultation at Kernot Hall in Morwell at 12.30pm on Thursday, 10 April 2014. The community consultation was attended by 52 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**

- Government warnings about the fire/weather conditions leading up to 9 February
- Firefighting resources and emergency services that were already in place
- Information updates from ABC radio, the CFA and the Fire Services Commissioner
- Smart phone and internet information for those who have access to them, particularly the emergency.vic.gov.au and VicRoads websites
- The community response
- Latrobe City Council efforts to look after pensioners
- Very little / don't know

#### **What didn't work well**

- Considerable lack of preparation leading into the fire season, including poor management of roadside vegetation
- Poor preparation by the mine owner, including removal of the fire-sprinklers two years ago, and lack of rehabilitation of the unused parts of the part
- No specialist coal mine firefighting equipment was available locally and had to be brought in from interstate, and so did the appropriate firefighting foam, causing delays in putting the fire out; helicopter water-bombing is not an efficient way to fight a coal mine fire
- Authorities, including the EPA and the Department of Health, providing information that was confusing, contradictory, and lacking in credibility
- Inconsistent information on different websites, such as the VicRoads and CFA websites
- Authorities were too slow in responding, leaving the local population to fill that gap by having to help each other
- Emergency services didn't seek local information
- Primary schools weren't given adequate information to respond
- Reliance on social media and internet as the official method of communication is not effective as not everyone in the community has the internet and not everyone speaks English

- Lack of information about what was in the smoke and ash that has settled in water tanks, wall and roof cavities – there was no official reference to fly ash, which is known to be dangerous and have long term health implications
- Lack of comprehensive information about health issues, causing uncertainty on the health implications for the community
- Individuals experiencing ill health such as headaches, sinus and respiratory symptoms
- Confusion about the Ambulance Victoria Health Assessments
- The discrimination and division in the community caused by the creation of artificial boundaries and assistance being provided to people south of Commercial Road, when people north of Commercial Road were equally affected
- A lack of visible leadership from local, state and federal representatives
- Financial burdens for local business through lost revenue
- Insufficient grant amounts, and grants being allocated with no accountability
- Public meetings were chaotic and not all were attended by mine representatives
- Evacuation issues – the government should have evacuated the town; DHS/Centrelink should have temporarily relocated away from its current location; a recovery/respite centre should have been established in Morwell for those who had transport issues and couldn't travel to Moe or Traralgon

### **What should be done differently**

- The safety and maintenance procedures of government assets that become privatised should be maintained at pre-privatisation standards
- Better regulatory compliance - maintenance compliance should be assessed regularly (6-monthly), and by an independent body
- Compliance breaches should attract penalties in the form of fines
- Better rehabilitation of the mine
- Ensure specialist firefighting equipment, training and personnel appropriate to fighting coal mine fires are locally available (foam fire trucks, sprinklers re-installed, fire-spotting capacity)
- Establish fire plans for Morwell, including strategies in the event of fire at each mine
- Improve maintenance and fire preparation at the approach to the mine
- Establish bigger buffer zones between industry (forest and mine) and town
- Improve communication and engagement by government authorities, and ensure this is not limited to electronic/IT formats
- Establish national procedures for natural disasters, particularly around evacuation
- Conduct a longitudinal health study on the local community, in particular, on young children
- Provide follow up health checks and monitoring, especially for children
- Establish and deliver more realistic clean up assistance
- Assistance – financial, welfare and aid – should be allocated equitably on a needs basis, and with an awareness of the spend burden on taxpayers