

# OPENING REMARKS FROM THE CHAIR OF THE HAZELWOOD MINE FIRE BOARD OF INQUIRY

26 May 2014

Welcome to a very special day, the first day of public hearings at the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry.

What can you, present in this auditorium, expect from today? What can the wider public expect? We hope to have an open public exposure of many things.

A week ago we were troubled about the skimpiness of information provided by the principal agencies. In the past week we have been swamped. Over the next three weeks we want you and the public generally to have presented in open forum the most important parts of what is now a mass of material.

In our consultations over the last six weeks we have focused on three questions about the disastrous mine fires of 9 February last: what caused them, what are the health and environmental implications now and in the future for the locals, and particularly the children and younger people, and what can be done to prevent a disaster like this from happening again.

We have deadlines to meet. We must limit the issues that we can address and the depth of treatment of even those issues. My colleagues and I have chosen to each focus more strongly on different issues. For me, the focus will be on the fires and firefighters, preparation and response; for Professor John Catford, on the health and well-being of the community and the firefighters and the environmental and communication issues; for Ms Sonia Petering, on the assessment of the adequacy of the regulatory regime. John will not be able to sit on every day of the hearings. When not present, he will be keeping up-to-date on what takes place here.

The evidence will be presented through Counsel Assisting, Ms Richards and Mr Rozen, and we will be listening over the next three weeks with a final week for submissions.

The past six weeks have seen us listen to over 250 participants at 10 community consultations in Morwell, Moe, Churchill and Traralgon. Those consultations provided us with invaluable information.

We have also received and read hundreds of written submissions, many with extremely helpful guidance.

We place great emphasis on openness. Our website reflects that. We encourage all to go to our website to look at three things: (1) the reports on the community consultations; (2) the submissions in which the media has already located several news stories; (3) as from tomorrow the statements of witnesses and a transcript of their testimony.

Today we start the most formal process of the Inquiry, the public hearings. During these hearings we will hear evidence from firefighters, from mine workers, from experts in many fields, from community members. We plan to listen to all of them with open minds.

Ms Richards.