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To Hazelwood Inquiry
info/DPC@DTF
cc
bcc
Subject Submission to Hazelwood coal
mine fire inquiry

Submission:

Dear Board of Inquiry,

I am writing this submission to request that your investigation also considers the issue (while directly relevant to the Hazelwood fire) of other coalmines in Victoria in regard to open cut coal mine safety, particularly where those mines abut communities.

I live in the township of Anglesea, which is surrounded by native bush of the Otway National Park and is one of the most fire prone communities in the State. My home is within 500 metres of the Alcoa Anglesea pit and power plant. The large open cut brown coal mine is close to the homes of some 2,000 people and the local primary school. Five large school holiday camps also operate nearby. Eco-tourism is the key occupation in the town and would be devastated for some time after a fire in the pit. The potential for disaster is obvious; however it is far from clear how the mine operator and the township of Anglesea would cope were a Hazelwood like emergency to occur. I admit to being very shocked to realise that what has happened to Morwell residents could happen here. Currently Alcoa has one fire cart onsite and relies on the local volunteer CFA station for fire protection -a totally inadequate situation.

I would like to submit that it would be appropriate for the Inquiry to recommend that an independent audit of open cut coal mines be performed through the Auditor General's Office (or another suitable independent agency) to ensure that all open cut coal mines in the State have adequate systems in place to prevent the occurrence of fire in the first place and to quickly and safely extinguish any fire that may take hold before it causes the appalling suffering that we recently witnessed in the Latrobe Valley. Moreover the systems should extend to the implementation of systems that properly protect the local community from the injurious effects of toxic smoke before the fire is extinguished.

While I appreciate the fact that the Inquiry primarily concerns the Hazelwood fire, the issues that arise out of the Hazelwood fire and which are plainly of broader application to other open cut coal mines in the State can and should be addressed in the Inquiry's findings.

If I can assist the Inquiry by providing further clarification of this submission I would be happy to do so.

Yours sincerely,

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