

WEEK THREE OPENING REMARKS FROM SONIA PETERING

10 June 2014

Good morning and welcome to the third week of the public hearings of the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry.

We've heard from a number of people throughout the first two weeks on the origin of and the circumstances of the fires in week 1 and on matters concerning the environment and health of the community in week 2. We've heard evidence that the fires in the mine were complex. The fires took many thousands of people to put out and affected many thousands of others.

We've heard from Incident Controllers; firefighters; a Fire Behaviour Analyst; mine workers; mine management; air quality, health and communication experts; community members; volunteers; Department of Education, Health and Human Services representatives. We've heard from the local council; the Fire Service Commissioner; the Chief Health Officer and many others.

We've heard about spotting; predictions; compressed air foam, PM 2.5; 8-hour average readings; carbon monoxide protocols; emergency command structures; travel blankets; Emergency Response Plans; information versus communication; and fire, smoke and ash.

The key areas of focus of this Inquiry were driven by the terms of reference and the issues raised by the community in the ten community consultations attended by over 260 people and the 160 submissions received. The information has been presented in this open forum, and the number of folders around the room demonstrate the mass of material that has been provided.

We extend our thanks to the many people who have been involved in the Inquiry to date, providing information and evidence, and we also recognise the many members of the community taking time to participate, in listening to the materials presented either here or in the hearing room or via bulletins in the media. The hearings have been conducted respectfully and the parties have co-operated with the Inquiry, and we thank you for your continuing cooperation.

The social, environmental and economic impacts of mining, and particularly mining failures, can be significant. We've heard that the fire got into the mine coal seam, elderly and vulnerable residents were encouraged to temporarily relocate from Morwell, and the remaining community breathed acrid smoke and lived in houses covered with ash.

Commencing today, the focus of the Inquiry, led by Counsel Assisting, Ms Richards and Mr Rozen, will be on mitigation and prevention and regulatory

compliance. The evidence will explore whether the risk of fire in the worked out batters of the mine close to the township of Morwell was adequately recognised by people and by those responsible.

We will also look at whether the measures taken to control the risk were sufficient and how they might be improved in the future. If no changes are made, then we will not have learned the lessons of experience and we can expect similar disasters to occur in the future.

So, for us, another week of listening with open minds. Chairman.