

**IN THE MATTER OF
The Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire Inquiry**

STATEMENT OF SIMON JOHN BLOINK

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Filed on behalf of: The State of Victoria
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Attention: Peter Stewart

I, SIMON JOHN BLOINK, of 24 Normanby Street Warragul, Victoria, Operations Officer, Country Fire Authority (CFA), can say as follows:

1. My full name is Simon John Bloink. My date of birth is 5 February 1964.
2. I am the Operations Officer in CFA District 9 (the area around Warragul). I am based at the CFA District 9 Headquarters, 24 Normanby Street, Warragul, Victoria.
3. I have been in this role since September 2005. My primary responsibility involves managing CFA brigades and emergency management response.
4. I hold accreditations as an accredited level 2 Incident Controller (IC) and Level 3 Operations Officer. I have held these accreditations since about 2005. I have worked extensively as a Deputy IC at Level 3 Incidents, including campaign fires. I have also worked in the role of Regional Duty Officer on a number of occasions in relation to hazardous material incidents.
5. I have been an employee of the CFA since September 1989 and a volunteer since 1977. Prior to commencing my current role, as an Operations Officer, I came up through the ranks starting in the role of fire fighter.
6. This Statement has been prepared pursuant to the request made by Counsel assisting the Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire Board of Inquiry by letter dated 22 May 2014 (**Letter**).
7. I note that the Letter requesting this statement, requests information from the Deputy ICs for the period 14-16 February 2014 in relation to the Hazelwood Mine Fire. I was one of the Deputy ICs in this period on day shift.
8. I first commenced duties in the Traralgon Incident Control Centre (ICC) on the evening of 9 February 2014. At that time, I received a briefing from the night shift Deputy IC, Stephen Walls. By the time I had received this briefing there was fire in

the Mine. At this briefing I was tasked by Stephen Walls to establish a division at the Morwell fire station to establish a structure for managing the various fires that were occurring above ground level around Morwell. I undertook the role of Divisional Commander on the nights of 9-10 and 10-11 February 2014.

9. On the night of 11-12 February 2014, my role changed and I commenced the role of Operations Officer within the Traralgon ICC, working on the Hernes Oak Fire. I was rostered off on the night of 12-13 February.
10. From 14-17 February 2014, I undertook the role of day shift Deputy IC.
11. In the period that I was Deputy IC, James Hayley was the Information Officer and was being assisted by a team including Craig Rawlinson. I have been advised that the various information releases and warnings that were published in the period that I was Deputy IC have been provided to the board separately.
12. On Friday, 14 February 2014, I was involved in a public meeting that occurred at Kernot Hall in relation to the fire at the Mine. During that meeting, I gave a verbal presentation about the suppression activities that were going on within the Mine. Questions were taken from the floor.
13. Other than my attendance and presentation at the meeting, I did not have any direct involvement in issuing information to the community. On that day, my role mostly related to providing local knowledge to those within the Incident Management Team (IMT) who were from outside the Gippsland area. This resulted in me having considerable involvement with the logistics, operations and planning sections of the IMT on that day.
14. On Saturday, 15 February 2014, I was the media spokesperson in relation to the incident. In that role I was interviewed at least twice. The information I conveyed on that day was consistent with the information that was contained in the watch and act messages that had been published on that day.
15. Prior to my becoming part of the IMT, various procedures had been put in place to monitor the carbon monoxide (CO) levels being emitted by the fire. On 15 February 2014, during the morning, it was reported back to the IMT that those levels were increasing. At the time, I could see that there was an inversion layer over the Latrobe Valley and no wind. This meant that the smoke from the Mine fire was not dispersing.
16. When the information was received in the IMT about the increased CO levels, there was a discussion around the information that needed to be provided to the community by reason of the increase in the levels reported. Those involved in that discussion included Nick Brown (the IC), Costas Katsikis (Deputy IC), Warren Glover (Scientific Officer) and James Hayley (Information Officer).
17. As a result of these discussions it was decided that a 'watch and act' message should be issued to Morwell West. The effect of this 'watch and act' message was to advise residents in that area that they should stay indoors and shelter in place, ensuring that all exterior doors, windows and vents are closed and that heating and cooling systems are turned off. Residents who chose not to shelter in place were advised that they could safely travel to a location outside of the area specified in the message.
18. Once this message had been generated and published, I did an interview live to air on the ABC. I spoke about the 'watch and act' message and the raised CO levels. I also mentioned the fact that the raised CO levels were likely to be a short term

consideration, because a forecast easterly breeze was likely to cause the smoke from the fire to disperse. I did at least two interviews with the ABC in relation to this issue.

19. As anticipated, during the afternoon of 15 February 2014, the easterly wind arrived. This caused the smoke and CO to disperse. At that time there was a further discussion within the IMT. I participated in that discussion and it was decided that the 'watch and act' message should be downgraded back to an 'advice' message. Shortly after this occurred, I was again interviewed on ABC radio. During this interview I referred to the content of the 'advice' message that had been issued and alerted listeners to the possibility that elevated levels may occur in the future.
20. After 15 February 2014, I did not do any further media interviews or have any direct involvement in the issuing of information to the public in relation to the Mine Fire. Furthermore, after 15 February 2014 a process was established whereby information relating to the levels of CO in the atmosphere would be handled by the Regional Control Centre (Andrew Zammit) and the Department of Health.

Dated: 23 May 2014

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SIMON JOHN BLOINK