

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

STATEMENT OF STEVEN MARK WARRINGTON

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Attention: Peter Stewart

I, STEVEN MARK WARRINGTON, of 8 Lakeside Drive, Burwood East, Victoria, Deputy Chief Officer – Emergency Management of the Country Fire Authority (CFA) can say as follows:

A. Introduction

1. My full name is Steven Mark Warrington. My date of birth is 14 August 1959. I hold the position of Deputy Chief Officer –Emergency Management at the CFA.
2. I first joined CFA as a volunteer in 1978 and commenced as a career fire fighter in 1983. Over the next 12 years, I was a career fire fighter and officer at various stations across Victoria. In 1995 commenced in the role of Manager Community Safety in CFA's Westernport Area. I held that role until 2000. Up until 1996, I also maintained my status as a CFA volunteer.
3. In 2000, I was seconded to the Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner for a 12 month period as a Project Officer responsible for developing a model for one service delivery standard for fire services in Victoria. In 2001, I commenced as Operations Manager CFA Westernport based at Dandenong Regional Headquarters. I held that role until 2007.
4. In 2007 I was promoted to Deputy Chief Officer based at CFA Headquarters, Burwood and undertook the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy, Emmitsburg, USA. I completed that course in 2009. I have been an accredited Level 3 Incident Controller since the current system of accreditation came into being.
5. I held a regional control position for Gippsland from 9 February 2014 until the fire at the Hazelwood Coal Mine (**Mine**) was declared safe in late March 2014. My role was initially described as Deputy Regional Controller and later became known as Regional Controller (Mines) (**RCM**). In my role as RCM, I was specifically focused

on the fire in the Mine as well as the threat that existed at the time to the Yallourn Open Cut Coal Mine (**Yallourn**) and the Maryvale Paper Mill (**Maryvale**).

6. In the course of preparing this witness statement, I have been shown the following documents:

6.1 “Outline of witness statement from Incident Controllers” (**Outline**) [CFA.0006.001.0005];

6.2 a letter from the solicitors from the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry (**Inquiry**) to the Victorian Government Solicitor dated 23 May 2014 (**Letter**). Among other things, the Letter states:

“In his statement dated 22 May 2014 at [83], Lawrie Jeremiah explains that at 0800 hrs on Tuesday 11 February 2014, a separate IMT was established for the Mine fire based at the Hazelwood CC. We understand that Peter Lockwood was the Incident Controller on 11 February 2014. The ISP for 12 February 2014 [FSC.0006.001.0059] identifies the IC as Mitch Simons.

We understand that both Mr Lockwood and Mr Simons reported to Deputy Regional Controller Steve Warrington. The Inquiry needs to understand the management of the mine fire on 11 and 12 February 2014.

...Mr Warrington should be guided by the issues that the ICs were asked to address [i.e., the Outline] but should not confine himself to 11 and 12 February 2014. He should also address his role in the response to the mine fire after 12 February 2014...”

6.3 transcript of proceedings at the Inquiry on 28 May 2014 (transcript pages 487 and 488) and 29 May 2014 (transcript pages 518 and 519) (**Transcript**).

In this witness statement, I address each of the matters referred to in the Outline, Letter and Transcript, insofar as they relate to the period in which I was RCM. As requested, I have given particular consideration to the period of 11 and 12 February 2014, but have not confined myself solely to those dates.

7. In addition to matters referred to in this statement, the following records of events were also kept at the time that I was RCM:

7.1 minutes of Incident Management Team (**IMT**) meetings;

7.2 minutes of Hazelwood Mine Operations Meetings;

7.3 minutes of Emergency Management Team (**EMT**) meetings. I note that it was not possible for me to attend all of the EMT meetings that occurred in the period that I was RCM;

7.4 Incident Action Plans (also known as Incident Shift Plans (**ISPs**)); and

7.5 written fire information releases.

8. These documents contain details relevant to the matters referred to in the Outline. In the time that has been made available to me to prepare this statement, I have not had

an opportunity to review these documents. I have been advised by the solicitors for the state of Victoria that the various minutes, plans and fire information releases have been provided to the Board separately.

B. The Role of RCM

9. The role of RCM is not one that usually exists within the incident management structure. Rather, the role was created specifically for the purpose of providing an additional layer of incident management expertise and resources in relation to the Mine fire and the threats which existed at Yallourn and Maryvale in February 2014. The need for such additional expertise and resources arose not only because of the nature of the Mine fire (and the other threats to critical infrastructure), but also because of the number of fires that were burning in Gippsland at the time.
10. On 9 February 2014, I had a telephone conversation with the CFA Chief Officer, Euan Ferguson. During that telephone conversation, we discussed the fire situation which existed in Gippsland and what might be done to provide additional assistance, over and above that which would ordinarily be made available at the incident and regional level. During the conversation, it was decided that I would travel to Morwell and provide that additional assistance. This was an unusual step, as I am not aware of any other occasions on which a CFA Deputy Chief Officer has become directly involved in the management of a particular incident in this way. My tasking was however consistent with the ongoing approach that the CFA took to the allocation of resources to the Mine fire. In that regard, during the course of the fire fight, two of the other CFA Deputy Chief Officers (John Haynes as one of the Incident Controllers (**IC**) and Joe Buffone as Deputy Regional Controller (Hazmat)) were also tasked to work on the fire at the Mine. When that occurred it meant that three of the four CFA Deputy Chief Officers in Victoria were tasked to deal specifically with the fire at the Mine.
11. As it was a position created specifically in response to the fire at the Mine and the threat to other infrastructure, there is no statement as to what the role of RCM involves. However, SOP J2.03 defines the role of Regional Controller (**RC**) as including the “exercise [of] control at the regional tier over bushfire readiness and response in the Region, irrespective of the jurisdiction.” Other than to replace the word “bushfire” with the words “Mine fire and critical infrastructure” the definition from SOP J2.03 reasonably describes the role I undertook as RCM. Whilst my involvement in the operational aspects of the suppression effort was limited, I maintained a strategic overview of the fire at the Mine.
12. In that context, the remainder of my statement addresses each of the issues that are referred to in the Outline.

C. Preparedness

13. As to question 1, I was aware that there was an IMT in place at Traralgon. However, from my arrival at 1730 on 9 February 2014, my focus was the fire at the Mine and the threats to Yallourn and Maryvale. Whilst I did not make any enquiries as to the specific strength of the IMT that was already established at Traralgon when I arrived, it appeared to me from the number of people present that a full IMT was in place.

D. Response

14. As to questions 2 and 3, as I did not arrive until 1730 on 9 February 2014, I do not know and cannot answer these questions.
15. As to question 4, the specific detail in relation to the make-up of the IMT for the fire at the Mine and any changes that occurred is contained in the minutes and ISPs I have referred to above.
16. Generally, however, the IMT in relation to the Mine fire was established by taking an iterative approach. In that regard, when I first arrived, Peter Lockwood was operating a divisional command in relation to the Mine fire from within the Traralgon ICC. This divisional command reported to Lawrie Jeremiah as IC and Bryan Russell as RC. Whilst Peter Lockwood and I were focused specifically on the Mine fire (as well as the other critical infrastructure issues) we had access to the planning, operations and logistics sections of the IMT that was already operating at the time.
17. From the time I arrived, I realised that a specific IMT needed to be established in relation to the Mine fire. There were two main reasons for this:
 - 17.1 it seemed to me that the possible consequences of the Mine fire (as well as the threat to Yallourn) could have been catastrophic. In that regard, there was the threat to the community of Morwell caused by smoke. At the same time, a loss of electricity infrastructure had the potential to impact power supply during the heat wave conditions that were occurring at the time. This would have caused major inconvenience to those reliant on power supplies to cool their homes. Furthermore, a loss of power had the potential to also affect water and sewerage services. A loss of these services could cause far reaching health consequences for vulnerable people, not just in Morwell, but also throughout Victoria and into parts of South Australia; and
 - 17.2 the size, complexity and intensity of the Mine fire made it obvious to me that a separate IMT needed to be established.
18. On the evening of 9 February 2014, I spoke to the Fire Services Commissioner, Craig Lapsley. This was one of a number of regular conversations that I had with him in the initial days of the Mine fire. Craig and I discussed the establishment of a separate IMT, specific to the Mine Fire. We both agreed that a separate IMT should be established. Arrangements were then made to start sourcing the additional IMT staff that were required. Arrangements were also made to source additional firefighting personnel and equipment. The additional IMT resources that were obtained were initially sourced from in and around Gippsland. Further resources were also drawn from the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board.
19. A separate IMT for the Mine fire was then formally established for the commencement of the dayshift at 0800 on Tuesday 11 February 2014. That IMT was physically located at the Mine. The reason the IMT was located at the Mine was that the facilities at the Traralgon ICC were already being used for the other fires. There was a large team of people dealing with those other fires. Furthermore, the Mine operators offered their premises as a location from which the Mine fire IMT could operate.
20. Under the structure that was established, two divisional commands commenced operation. One of these divisional commands dealt specifically with the fire at the

Mine. The other dealt with the ongoing fire situation at the Yallourn Mine. After the threat to the Yallourn Mine eased, the IMT dealt only with the fire at the Mine.

21. Sometime later (the specific date would be contained in the minutes I have referred to above) the IMT moved its location from the Mine, back to the Traralgon ICC. The reason for this move was that the bushfire situation had eased and as a result the IMT that was dealing with those bushfires was able to move to the Department of Environment and Primary Industries facility in Traralgon. At the same time, the fire at the Mine was continuing to burn and its suppression was complex and difficult. As a result, the IMT for the Mine Fire moved to the Traralgon ICC.
22. As to question 5, the make-up of the EMT during the period from 9 February 2014 is comprehensively described in the minutes of EMT meetings that I have referred to above.
23. In addition to these minutes, from 11 February 2014, there was a specific EMT established to deal with the issues presented by the fire at the Mine. This EMT was called the Strategic Emergency Management Team and was colloquially known as the "EMT (Mines)". It involved a number of experts, including industry groups. Each evening there were minuted meetings at which the risks and consequences of the Mine fire were discussed and plans were produced accordingly. The issues considered included the possibility of the state losing electricity, water and sewerage, which I have already referred to. Another issue was the possibility of the Princes Highway collapsing as a result of the Mine fire.
24. I convened meetings of the EMT (Mines) on 11 and 12 February 2014. The EMT (Mines) generally met each day at 1730. Attached are the minutes of the meeting on 11 February 2014 at 1730 and for the meeting on 12 February 2014 at 1730. These minutes are [CFA.0008.001.0083] (**Attachment 1**), and [CFA.0008.001.0085] (**Attachment 2**).
25. A spreadsheet which sets out the dates on which the EMT (Mines) met is [CFA.0008.001.0118] (**Attachment 3**). I understand that the minutes for each of the meetings referred to in this spreadsheet have been produced to the Board.
26. As to question 6, I have been instructed that the ISPs have been provided to the Board. These documents comprehensively describe the plan to suppress the fires at the Mine.
27. Broadly however, the plan to suppress the Mine fire was carried out having regard to the overriding consideration of the protection of life. This included the protection of the people of Morwell. It also included the consequences to the people of Victoria if the electricity failed. In relation to these consequences, I have already referred to the possible effect of a loss of electricity and associated loss of water and sewerage on vulnerable people throughout the state. Quite obviously, this was not the only consequence of a loss of electricity. The commercial value of the Mine and its equipment was not a consideration. At no point, was the firefight conducted on the basis of protection of the Mine simply for the Mine's sake.
28. Whilst on 11 and 12 February 2014 the specific details of the suppression efforts were an issue for the IC, Peter Lockwood, suppressing the fire as quickly as possible was the primary objective. This suppression was designed in large part to reduce the amount of smoke that was being produced by the fire. Reducing the smoke by

suppressing the fire as quickly as possible was designed to limit the impact of smoke and irritants on the town of Morwell.

29. As to question 7, the magnitude, complexity and sheer difficulty of the suppression effort meant that additional resources would have been of assistance. Whilst that is not to suggest that there was a deficiency of resources, it is to say that additional resources could have been used, had they been available.
30. As to question 8, there were numerous experts involved in informing the approach taken to the fire at the Mine. These included experts appointed by the United Firefighters Union, hydrologists, geologists, engineers and health experts. There were also independent assessments conducted of a number of matters, such as the health and safety of the staging area. The involvement of experts started on 11 February 2014, when the IMT for the Mine fire was established. The experts present and operating on that day included Chris Tonks (chemical engineer), Deputy Chief Officer Smith from South Australia's Metropolitan Fire Service in relation to fire fighter safety and Dr Michael Sergeant in relation to health issues.
31. As to question 9, there were a number of challenges given the size, complexity and intensity of the fire. It might be possible to consider the issues arising by reason of size, complexity and intensity as things that did not work well. However, without exception, every issue that did arise was addressed successfully and as quickly as possible. An example is communication with the community. This evolved and was refined to an extent I had not seen in any other incident. It included having community education officers riding trains. In that regard, whilst it is apparent from the minutes of the EMT (Mines) meeting that occurred on 11 February 2014 that community messaging from both Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and fire services was being considered and implemented from as soon as the IMT was established in relation to the Mine fire, there is little doubt that the provision of community messaging improved over time as additional processes were implemented.
32. As to the matters that worked well, the creation of the RCM role and the appointment of myself as a Deputy Chief Officer in that role provided an additional degree of leadership that might not have been available had this additional role not been created. This sent a message to everyone involved in the firefight at the Mine (and the community) that the CFA were taking the Mine fire very seriously. This continued when two of the other Deputy Chief Officers (John Haynes and Joe Buffone) were also tasked to deal specifically with the fire at the Mine. As I have already noted, I am not aware of any other incident at which such a large number of senior CFA personnel (three out of four Deputy Chief Officers in Victoria) have been tasked to deal with one specific incident.

E. Communications

33. As to question 10, I have been advised that the community information and warnings that were issued during the period that I was RCM have been provided to the Board separately.
34. As to question 11, regarding the tailoring of community messages to vulnerable people, the approach to the provision of information to vulnerable people was being considered from the establishment of the IMT in relation to the Mine fire on 11 February 2014. By way of example on 11 February 2014, the Chief Executive Officer of the Latrobe City Council was present at the EMT (Mine) meeting. He told

the meeting that there was community information being regularly disseminated. A further example occurred on the following day when similar matters were considered and discussed with the Department of Human Services, EPA and Chief Health Officer (CHO), among others.

35. During the course of the incident, additional measures were introduced to further tailor information to vulnerable people. In that regard, I have already referred above to community engagement officers riding the trains. This was designed to give people one-on-one contact with community engagement officers so that a person's particular circumstances could be considered. There was also specific consideration to the provision of information to groups such as the elderly. Door-knocks were undertaken and an information bus was deployed. This approach to community messaging necessarily meant that those who were vulnerable could make those vulnerabilities known and have their specific circumstances considered.
36. As to question 12, obtaining accurate data in relation to toxicity levels was difficult in the early stages of the fire event. Without this data, it was difficult to determine precisely what types of messages should be made available to people. This issue was resolved as the incident continued and overall, I have never before been involved in such a comprehensive approach to community engagement and warnings as that which existed during the Mine fire.

F. Evacuation

37. As to question 13, consideration was not given to evacuation in the period 11 and 12 February 2014. There was no immediate fire threat or reliable data about carbon monoxide levels which could have justified a recommendation to evacuate.
38. After 11 and 12 February 2014, there was a comprehensive evacuation plan developed. That plan recognised that there was a distinction between an immediate fire threat on the one hand and the health risk created by carbon monoxide and other gasses on the other. The threat created by carbon monoxide and other gasses was being considered by other agencies such as the Department of Health and the EPA. The fire services were reliant on advice from these agencies as to the level of risk created and whether evacuation was appropriate.
39. As to question 14, I was not the IC on 28 February 2014 and was not otherwise involved in the advice given by the CHO on that day.

G. Liaison with other parties

40. As to question 15, the liaison arrangements with the entities identified in this question are comprehensively recorded in the various minutes I have referred to earlier in my statement.
41. As to question 16, challenges were created by the size, complexity and intensity of the incident. These challenges were made more acute by the fact that there was not only fire risk, but also considerations arising from the smoke and gasses being produced by the fire. This required agencies to work closely together.
42. Whilst these challenges were overcome quickly and implementing solutions did not have any overall impact on the outcome, it may have assisted if multi-agency planning had been more developed. This would have meant that some plans did not

need to be built from scratch, but rather could have simply been refined to suit the specific circumstances of this particular fire at the Mine.

Dated

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Steven Mark Warrington

LIST OF ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1** Minutes of EMT (Mines) meeting on 11 February 2014
[CFA.0008.001.0083]
- Attachment 2** Minutes of EMT (Mines) meeting on 12 February 2014
[CFA.0008.001.0085].
- Attachment 3** Spreadsheet of dates on which the EMT (Mines) met
[CFA.0008.001.0118]