

From: [Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry](#)
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Subject: Morwell Mine Fire Submission
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Attachments: [Quit-Coal-Submission-to-Hazelwood-Mine-Fire-Inquiry.docx](#)

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Content of submission (you can choose multiple): Health

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To the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry,

Thank you for re-opening the inquiry to consider the impacts on local residents of the industrial tragedy that was the Hazelwood mine fire.

Quit Coal is a non-hierarchical collective of volunteers who are opposed to the damaging and outdated coal and gas industry in Australia. Due to the negative social, health, ecological and environmental impacts of coal, and its substantial contribution to climate change, we maintain that the only real way to improve the health of the Latrobe Valley community is to cease all coal mining and fully rehabilitate the mine sites, which pose an ongoing fire risk.

6. Whether the Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire contributed to an increase in deaths, having regard to any relevant evidence for the period 2009 to 2014;

In order to answer this question, we suggest that the inquiry consider the following factors:

- A comparison of death rates before, during and after the fire;
- An investigation into the specific medical symptoms of any person in the days/hours/months leading up to their death;
- The wind trajectory during the 45 day period of the fire, to determine which areas both in and around the Valley should be included in the investigation;
- Deaths not just of humans but also of pets and livestock (many residents of the Latrobe Valley spoke of impacts on their furry family members).

If such information is not made available via any submission to this Inquiry, we put it to the committee that such data should be actively sought.

As emerging stories of cancer diagnosis amongst fire fighters and mine workers are just beginning, given the nature and pathology of cancers and pulmonary fibrosis, we put it to this Inquiry that an investigation of deaths needs to be extended to:

- A much longer period of investigation beyond 2014;
- Include fire fighters and any other emergency response crew who were present during the fires but who do not live in Latrobe Valley.

We question the narrow scope of this term and think that the inquiry should consider focus on health impacts other than death. As acknowledged in the next term of reference the fire caused wide ranging health impacts.

7. Short, medium and long term measures to improve the health of the Latrobe Valley communities having regard to any health impacts identified by the Board as being associated with the Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire:

As a Victorian-based collective, we have visited with local residents around Morwell and Moe, and were moved by the ongoing trauma they still experience in the wake of the mine fires. They told us of the wide range of health problems experienced both during and in the weeks following the fire, including respiratory distress, burning eyes, skin problems, heaviness in their chest, sore throats, headache, nausea.

A common theme we heard from different residents we spoke to was that it was difficult to describe to anyone who wasn't there how "wrong" "different" and "poisonous" the smoke felt compared with smoke one experiences during bushfire. They spoke of the stress and tension of being given either conflicting public advice about their safety, or receiving no information (depending on the individual). Their distress has been exacerbated by the lack of public acknowledgement, resources and facilities to properly investigate and address ongoing, and still emerging, health complaints in the wake of the fire.

Many spoke of their despair at being unable to evacuate, because they couldn't afford alternate accommodation and were deemed ineligible for government-assisted evacuation. People spoke of being unable to leave because they had a job (a lucky thing in the Latrobe Valley), had pets to care for and who were not covered by any evacuation offers, or, for example, a loved one in a nearby care-facility from whom they didn't wish to be separated.

We bring these things to the attention of the Inquiry, as it is clear that, in such an event, state policy should be to evacuate everyone, and do so immediately – to prevent exposure.

Further, many residents we spoke with still have coal ash in the cavity of their roof, meaning they remain exposed to the risk of contact and breathing in this pollutant. Given the toxic metals contained in coal ash, we put it to the Inquiry that all residents should be assisted in having this ash removed.

Even before the fire, the Latrobe Valley already suffer from diminished health outcomes as a result of the coal dust distributed by the wind, as well as air pollutants from the stacks. The ongoing effects of these will only exacerbate such problems.

Residents also told us of the difficulty of getting access to medical specialists versed in the health problems which are emerging.

Thank you for the opportunity to input into this inquiry.

Regards,
Laura Williams,
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