

**From:** [Luke van der Meulen](#)  
**To:** [Hazelwood Info Shared Mailbox](#)  
**Subject:** Attention: Honourable Bernard Teague  
**Date:** Tuesday, 25 August 2015 5:48:02 PM  
**Attachments:** [CFMEU MINE INQUIRY SUB.pdf](#)

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Honourable Bernard Teague  
Chair  
Mine Fire Inquiry  
Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry  
PO Box 24  
Flinders Lane Vic 8009

Dear sir

Please see attached CFMEU Submission to the reopener Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry.  
I apologise for being a day late as we had computer problem.

Luke van der Meulen

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## Mine Fire Health Issues

CFMEU supports the Health Study initiatives introduced by the State government following the Mine Fire. We expect that such studies will provide the community with advance warning of any health problems that may develop as a result of the Mine Fire. We also expect that such studies will make the case for any additional medical support/facilities that are required to combat such health issues.

A case can also be made for the Health Study to be broadened to examine the reasons for the Latrobe Valley community's continuing poor health record and to make recommendations as to the necessary actions required to overcome this problem.

All necessary steps must be taken to avoid a situation developing which could result in a repeat of the asbestos related health problems that have blighted the Valley.

However, CFMEU is concerned that the Health Study will be restricted to residents of Morwell. This will mean that the majority of those most directly exposed to the Mine Fire and related emissions have been excluded from the Health Study. This can only serve to distort the results of the study and could result in health effects on those most closely exposed being overlooked.

We refer to those involved in directly fighting the fire at the coal face, or in support roles close by, such as volunteer and salaried firefighters, ambulance officers, staff of other supporting government agencies and employees of GDF Suez and their contractors. Also, throughout the fire, GDF Suez mine and power station operating staff, and contractor maintenance and ancillary operations staff, continued their normal duties in close proximity to the fire. Despite continual exposure to the heaviest of the fire emissions, they ensured that the mine produced coal and the adjacent power station continued to supply the national grid.

From our membership records, we are able to establish that the majority of GDF Suez Hazelwood site employees are not Morwell residents and will therefore be excluded from the Health Study. Anecdotally, we understand that an even greater proportion of the firefighting and associated personnel do not live in Morwell and will also be excluded.

CFMEU requests that the Inquiry examines this apparent oversight and recommends the appropriate adjustment to eligibility criteria for the Health Study.

## Mine Remediation

CFMEU has made an extensive submission on this subject to the first phase of the Inquiry. The following is offered as additional commentary around that submission.

In summary, CFMEU is of the belief that the risk to community from brown coal mine fires/fire emissions/dust can be drastically reduced by the simple expedient of covering all exposed coal surfaces (including batters) of worked-out sections of mines with a relatively thin layer of mine overburden (typically clay).

In the case of the Hazelwood Mine Fire, the section of the mine that had been remediated in this way did not catch fire despite being directly beside the burning sections. Any fire impact on the working section of the mine was quickly controlled by the better availability of fire fighting equipment and personnel in this area. The major fire impact was on the unremediated worked-out sections of the mine.

Our view is that the type of remediation outlined must follow quickly upon a section of mine being worked-out. That is, that mines must be continually remediated relatively closely behind the working faces.

On the issue of mine subsidence, CFMEU is of the view that mine batters must be 'adjusted' immediately after being worked-out. That is, to take them to a situation where they pose little, or no, risk of subsidence or slippage with consequent damage to nearby communities. The Morwell By-Pass incident and Yallourn river break-throughs being examples of such incidents. We note that the term 'repose' is now being used in reference to safer remediated batter profiles.

It also seems logical that, at the end of their working lives, mines should be 'landscaped' in consultation with local communities to return the sites to acceptable uses.

CFMEU submits that municipal planning solutions to mine fire and subsidence threats that are currently being pushed by government agencies and planning bodies appear to be directly aimed at avoiding the need for mine remediation. In effect, these proposals push the problem onto the residents of towns such as Morwell and Traralgon. That is, the state and mine operators avoid mine remediation costs at the financial and quality of life expense of the affected residents.

CFMEU submits that such 'planning based' proposals are unjust and an unfair attempt to pass the burden of mine remediation issues onto the local communities. We submit that they should be withdrawn immediately and the focus be redirected to mine remediation.

On addressing the issue of financial responsibility for mine remediation, CFMEU firstly notes that there is little specific information available on the detail of contractual or legal obligations of Latrobe Valley brown coal mine operators as concerns mine remediation. This considerably hampers open discussion of this matter within the community.

CFMEU view is that, in addressing and overcoming the danger to Latrobe Valley communities posed by worked-out sections of brown coal mines, a way must be found to work around any existing contractual agreements or state government policies or regulations that will constrain such actions.

Our view is that arrangements entered into by previous state governments to enhance mine privatisation returns, regulatory decisions based on outdated social and political assumptions or flawed data, and 'light handed' regulation of mine planning and safety, must all be swept aside in the interests of community safety. Any suggestion that mine operators could leave mines in nominal

'care and maintenance' indefinitely after their working life, thus avoiding remediation costs, must be refuted.

CFMEU submits that all decision making that has lead to the current situation is directly attributable to previous state governments and their agencies. Whilst we strongly believe that responsibility for mine remediation is that of the mine owner/operator, we also believe that any failure to achieve such an outcome must fall back on the state as the ultimate responsible authority.

CFMEU therefore recomends that a program of mine remediation as outlined above be immediately implemented in the Latrobe Valley brown coal mines.

We would be happy to meet with Inquiry staff to provide background or detail to the issues raised in this submission.