



**Fw: Morwell Mine Fire Submission**

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13/05/2014 09:56 AM

**Submission**

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**Hazelwood Inquiry info/DPC@DTF**

12/05/2014 10:50 AM

To Hazelwood Inquiry  
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cc

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Subject Morwell Mine Fire Submission

First Name: Gerald

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Content of submission (you can choose multiple): Other (please state)

If Other please state here: this submission is in regards to the need and importance to clearly define responsibilities in the past and more importantly going forward, and creating a mechanism such as an open books policy to ensure accountability. In my view, lack of clear responsibility definition because of apparent distributed responsibilities between parties contribute a significant risks to the operation of the Hazelwood mine, and contributes to risk of future incidents that can have a significant impact on the community in the valley. An open book policy not only will help the operator to consider more thoroughly its short and long term operation and its impact on the community, but will also help significantly the public to feel at ease in regards to the risks inherent in operating the mines.

Please select one of the following options: I acknowledge that my submission will be treated as a public document and may be published, quoted or summarised by the Inquiry.

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In recent years, Latrobe valley has been affected by a number of accidents related to the brown coal mining and electricity generation industries, which had a significant impact on the communities living in the valley. The main issue which I would like to put forward in this submission is the question of responsibility and accountability.

Looking at previous accidents and this fire that is the focus of this enquiry, there has been a tendency to look at each accident as a complex situation which require a multitude of parties to take shared responsibilities to solve the problem. We have the owner, operator and licensee of the Hazelwood mine, we have the emergency services, we have the relevant government agencies which all have their own expertise and contribution to try and solve the problem when it happens and to take measures to try and protect similar cases happening in the future. While it is obvious that each party had their own expertise and capabilities, the issue is that the overall responsibility cannot not be shared as the reality is that unless one party assumes the overall responsibility, no party really takes on real responsibility, the kind that is able to adequately balance the needs (and related costs) to prevent future accidents. Unfortunately, even the terms of reference of this enquiry have not directly stated the question of who actually was and is responsible, and seem to only try and identify if each party was adequate and effective in their way of operation.

The basic question is whether the owner, operator and licensee of the Hazelwood mine is ultimately responsible on its own for any harm to the community that is caused by its operation of the mine which would not have happened if the mine did not exist. And if the owner is not responsible, then which exact government department and official takes on this responsibility going forward and sleeps knowing that he directly will need to answer to the public the next time an accident will happen, and needs to take the measure to make sure he prevents the next accident, and takes out insurance as he sees fit to cover himself against risks of the future.

If by the end of this enquiry, it is not clear from the enquiry report which party should be liable for the bill for the emergency services rendered during the event, the bill for the public health department work, the bill for the special services rendered by the different governmental human services departments as a result of this event, the enquiry has done very little in regards to the question of responsibility, and as a result, the value from this enquiry would be questionable in regards to its ability to prevent the next incident.

The second topic raised is around accountability, specifically, once the responsibility of the operator of Hazelwood mine and other government bodies are clear, what is the best method to make sure they are accountable for it. Visibility and access for the public to information is the best way to ensure accountability. Considering the risks to the community from operating the Hazelwood mine, it is strange how little information is actually available in regards to the operation of this mine. There are only snippets of public relation slogans available on the companies' website. They lack any financial information guiding which will allow the public to assess the operational risks in the company. They have a published Environmental policy but have no details on what they actually do with it, what are the KPIs and performance indicators they track and how they perform. There is no clarity in regards to which government regulations the mine needs to adhere to, and no visibility to how they adhere to any such policy and regulations.

The mines and electricity generators are a significant part of the communities in the Latrobe valley, and they have a significant impact to many aspects of living in the valley, and of course they have an impact on the wider Victorian community. As such, and as a result of the risks highlighted through the Hazelwood fire, the community expects the operator to assume an open book policy and allow the public open access to all aspects of the operation, and expects the enquiry to ask for and try enforce this outcome.

To summarize, this submission is in regards to the need and importance to clearly define responsibilities in the past and more importantly going forward, and creating a mechanism such as an open books policy to ensure accountability. In my view, lack of clear responsibility definition because of apparent distributed responsibilities between parties contribute a significant risks to the operation of the Hazelwood mine, and contributes to risk of future incidents that can have a significant impact on the community in the valley. An open book policy not only will help the operator to consider more thoroughly its short and long term operation and its impact on the community, but will also help significantly the public to feel at ease in regards to the risks inherent in operating the mines.

Gerald Berkovics,  
Traralgon