

HAZELWOOD MINE FIRE INQUIRY

Submission cover sheet

Post your submission with this cover sheet to:

Submissions Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry
PO Box 3460
GIPPSLAND MC Vic 3841

Email your submission with this cover sheet to info@hazelwoodinquiry.vic.gov.au.

Title: <i>Miss</i>	First Name: <i>LISA</i>	Surname: <i>WILSON</i>
Organisation represented (if applicable):		
Email address:	[REDACTED]	
Postal address:	<i>Monwell Victoria</i>	
Telephone: [REDACTED]	Mobile:	[REDACTED]
<input type="checkbox"/> Origin and circumstances of fire	Response to fire by:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Measures by Hazelwood Coal Mine to prevent fire	<input type="checkbox"/> Hazelwood Coal Mine	
<input type="checkbox"/> Application and administration of regulatory regimes	<input type="checkbox"/> Emergency Services	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please state)	<input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Agencies	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Public Health Officials	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Government Agencies	

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Grider

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Date 12.5.14.

My name is Lisa Wilson and I am a 34 year old, Morwell Resident. I am currently pregnant with my first child, who is due to arrive on the 9th of July 2014. My child will be the 5th generation of my family to be raised in Morwell. I reside with my partner and our 2 pet cats in [REDACTED] Morwell.

I am currently employed in Morwell, as the Gippsland Homelessness Network Co-ordinator. My position consults with and works alongside all Homelessness and Family Violence funded agencies in Gippsland. My primary work address is in the Quantum Support Services at 227 Princes Way, Morwell.

Other than a 5 year absence, from Morwell when I lived and worked in London and later Melbourne, I have worked in Morwell. Having completed my Primary, Secondary and later Tertiary education, (Bachelor of Social Welfare at Monash University, Gippsland) in the Latrobe Valley.

During the 2014 Coal mine fires, I was in the second trimester of this pregnancy. Initially, until the announcement of Chief Health Officer Rosemary Leister, for those in the high risk or vulnerable groups (Including pregnant women) to temporarily relocate, we remained in our Morwell home and workplace. After significant consideration, my partner and I relocated to East Gippsland with the assistance of family, friend and my employer.

In formulating this submission I have considered the most appropriate areas for me to respond based on my own circumstances and knowledge.

Origin and circumstances of the fire:

My knowledge of the origin and circumstances of the fire, are limited to that reported in media sources, available on website and given in community forums/recovery centres/information sheets.

I am of the belief the coal mine fire originated outside of the mine in the deliberate lighting of fire by an individual yet to be identified. This is not the first arson event in my community and I am aware there are many known arsonists in the Latrobe Valley and surrounds. I am of the belief the fire eventually made it to the coal mine, changing the fuel for the fire and the causing the subsequent high levels of smoke, ash and vapour in and around my home and work place.

In relation to this matter the only submission or suggestion I would make, is for there to be consideration of what may motivate an individual to commit arson and where possible ensure the resources for early intervention, prevention and treatment are easily accessible and available in abundance in Gippsland.

Measures by the Hazelwood coal mine to prevent fire:

As my above response indicates I have little first hand understanding on the measures taken by the coal mine. I am limited to that shared with the whole of the community.

It is my only hope the mine used all of its facilities and the knowledge of those locals who have had a long history in managing our communities safety from any possible implications from the mine fire. I must say my confidence is tarning to wain given the number of mine disasters we have had in the last decade. My mind is brought to the collapse of the Princess Fwy, the flood of one of the mines and previous smaller fires.

Application and administration of regulatory regimes:

Again, an area where my specific knowledge is limited, however having for many years worked in state government regulated environments in both government and non government agencies, I would hope that the regulations were met and up to date.

If this is found not to be the case I would assert the highest level of accountability should be applied to the mine managers and government services if they are found to have failed in their duty.. I have lived in Morwell my entire life and this is the first time I have been made to feel unsafe in my home.

If a business was found to be negligent or failed to act in a reasonable or quick manner to ensure the safety of my community, I would submit they should be made liable for any costs. (Physical, Health, Financial). My thoughts are they should also be expected to repay costs of the emergency services effort related to this matter. A company who profits from a lack of action should not be able to rely solely on resources provided by government and tax payers.

Response to fire by:

Hazelwood Coal Mine:

I do not feel I have adequate first hand information to comment on this.

Emergency Services:

Fire Brigades:

I am sure you will have already heard much about the Fire Services involved in this effort. Some of the first responders being local CFA staff, who we are always proud of. Without a doubt their considered effort meant the fire was eventually extinguished whilst decreasing the impact on community wherever possible.

Most notably, particularly in the later weeks when we were assisted by interstate services and the DCSE, these men and women were visible in our community. Not only did we see them fighting the fire but they were present in our community. Eating in local café's walking down our streets, making us feel like they really cared for our community when at times we felt forgotten by others.

My only criticism of any fire services was the CFA information available on their fire ready app, their website and their information bus. The initial fire ready warnings for us on the **9th of February 2014** were incorrect. We were flying back from Queensland we had received an alert which indicated we needed to evacuate our home, being east of Latrobe rd up to Maryvale rd. We later found this information to be incorrect, however being so far away it caused us distress trying to evacuate our animals which were at home and not knowing the full extent of risk. We eventually received information from neighbours which appeared more accurate.

The CFA website did not clearly identify where the CFA info bus would be on any given day until what seemed to be late in the day. When it was published the bus was often in place for very short periods of time and it felt like we were also chasing it. Our first contact with a CFA info bus was on

the 19th of February when we arrived they were closing. They were helpful and told us they would call the next day and let us know where the bus would be, they did this.

I was disappointed to see no representatives from the Department of health at the bus. I was also disappointed to be told by CFA and EPA that up to date and relevant information was available on their website. We had already found this to be incorrect.

Craig Lapsley:

It was great when we had one consistent voice from emergency services who appeared to be balanced and knowledgeable. He did not shy away from admitting there was not an easy fix to the fire. It was great he had rural experience and appeared respectful of the community

Ambulance Victoria:

Ambulance Victoria staff remained, supportive and respectful of the community acknowledging when they had limited information and encouraging contact every few days to see any info updates they may have.

The health centre eventually set up by the Ambulance service, was a great place to focus questions relating to health. This became difficult or problematic in the first week the centre was open, when I attempted to have a health check twice (20.2.14 and 21.2.14) however left due to long wait times and the waiting area being full.

I attended the CFA bus at Coles on the 20th of February, I spoke to [REDACTED] a local Ambulance officer who offered us some information in relation to the respiratory impacts given I was pregnant and my child was in the stage of lung development. She showed me how to correctly fit a mask and to wear the mask just in case as we could not be sure what particles were in the air. She encouraged regular visits to the health centre. If any changes occurred to see the doctor. This was helpful however, frustrating given we again had been left with no information on the effects on our unborn child.

I was eventually able to see someone at the ambulance centre on the 24th of February, the service provided was pleasant however the lack of information was notable. I was also perplexed when my carbon reading was taken and the ambulance officer covered the finger tester with a towel "stating they had learnt the fluorescent lights affected the readings, registering a reading above 0 when that was not correct". I asked out of interest how many had rated over 0 since the towel had been used I was told none. I found this odd.

After Rosemarie Leister (CHO) announcement in relation to recommended relocation on the 1st of March 2014, we accessed the Morwell recovery Centre to seek further advice as we fell in the vulnerable or at risk group (being pregnant).

By this point after many weeks of uncertainty and confusion. We sought further information re health and the impacts on our unborn child. Again the Department of health was notably absent. We had contact with [REDACTED] a local Ambulance officer who talked to us about haemoglobin and the concern with not knowing the full extent of what particles toxin etc were in the smoke and vapour. We could not be sure if the blood passing from me to my baby, would have optimal oxygen levels to

ensure the health of our baby. John was honest and in acknowledging the lack of information was seeking to provide further information through his own sourcing of information.

Police:

Police were visible throughout the mine fire disaster, and appeared to be doing their best to ensure safety of individuals and property.

Ken Lay:

It was great to hear Ken Lay on ABC radio, acknowledging the Morwell Community. Not shying away from questions related to the number of arsonists in Gippsland. He acknowledged Arson has many contributing factors which needed additional treatment and support.

Red Cross:

We registered with the Red Cross at the suggestion of [REDACTED] from DHS at the Recovery Centre on the **1st of March 2014**. The red cross were helpful and clear about the reason to register.

Environmental Agencies:

EPA:

We eventually became aware of the EPA measuring and how to interpret these readings at the Community meeting at Kernot Hall on the **18th of February 2014**. From that moment on we used the site regularly for guidance. This was particularly useful when the odour was strong and helped to explain bad nights of sleep and headaches.

What would have been helpful was to know when the PN2.5 was at levels above 1000 or up to 10x that reported to be Very Poor air quality of 150, what advice may be of assistance. We received 1 air quality warning on the **15th of February 2014** via text. We now know this was a result of EPA testing at the time we had no real understanding. Apart from heading to friends in Sale for the day we had no idea what to do or if it was safe to go home.

I must say for the whole 6 or so weeks of the fire it did not assist in picking the best day to wash clothes, the house or our cars. There was actually no help with that.

Activist Groups:

After attending the Community meeting on the **18th of February 2014** I became angry at those who claimed to be a Morwell resident with adverse affects from the fire. These people appeared to be everywhere, monopolising time available to residents to ask specific questions. We were not even able to get close to experts at this meeting or any other, these people should have been moved on.

Public Health Officials

Department of Health:

Perhaps the group I am most disappointed in their lack of response, in this crisis. There was no information available on their website as to any research any where in the world in relation to the affects of smoke and vapour on our unborn child. We found information on the impacts of secondary tobacco smoke but nothing else of use. Not even an acknowledgement of their lack of information.

At the CFA bus, recovery centres and at the ambulance health centre there was a notable absence of DOH representatives. They were no where.

On the **27th of February** 2014 after having no success in finding any written information in relation to the impact on our unborn child I rang, the Gippsland Department of Health seeking advice. After speaking to the receptionist [REDACTED] who failed to understand what it was I was looking for and that I had already checked the website without success, she said she would transfer me to someone else who could assist.

After a short wait I was put through to [REDACTED] at the Department of Human Services Grant application line. Before I had a chance to explain to [REDACTED] my confusion in having been transferred to DHS when I wanted to speak to someone in DOH, I was asked identifying questions related to my current income and any entitlement to government financial assistance. I was told quickly by [REDACTED] he could not assist as I did not meet the eligibility criteria for financial assistance.

Fortunately I was able to explain to [REDACTED] we were not looking for financial assistance, and I was very aware of the criteria as in the Black Saturday Fires when I was employed by DHS I conducted a role much like his in supporting community members to understand the assistance they qualified for. Although [REDACTED] eventually took note that I had been incorrectly transferred to him and I was looking for information and not money, he reassured me he would pass my details to a health Officer at the DOH to call me back. I still have never received a return call.

Chief Health Officer – Rosemary Leister.

It was reassuring to hear an independent voice in relation to health advice in the CHO. It was helpful to have her recommend on the **1st of March** the temporary location in vulnerable categories such as pregnant women. It gave us a better threshold of understanding about the possible impacts.

The most disappointing part of the CHO message was information on her site was delayed and variable. Originally we heard the message that anybody in Morwell who fitted the vulnerable category or lived in the south side of Morwell should temporarily relocate.

First of all until this event I was not even aware there was a south side of Morwell and the train line was a physical barrier to this side of town and thus any affects from the smoke and vapour.

Secondly on the **17th of March** when it we were advised by the CHO we could return home. The press conference held at 1pm was not simulcast in any media was not uploaded on the website and information was not accessible to several hours later.

Finally, the advice around clean up, suggested I as a pregnant woman should not be involved in the clean up of our home, due to the possible health risks. This information had come too late as in the first 3 weeks of the fire when we remained at home in Morwell I had cleaned my home on several occasions. Also, despite our belief we were one of the 'Vulnerable' we did not qualify for any of the support from the Latrobe City Council for clean up assistance as we had not received a DHS Grant.

This all combined to make the clean up seem over whelming for us. We were fortunate our family did a thorough clean up of our home so we could return to our home on the **18th of March**, rather than the following week which would have been the earliest our friends and I could have cleaned the home.

I welcomed the long term health study announced and look forward in participating, however feel it is too late and lost the valuable testing time during the fire. I hope participating in a study such as this (which I requested several times during the fire) will assist future women to not feel helpless and ill informed to make a decision in relation to their unborn child. It would be much more helpfully than hearing it's ok, it's safe, it's fine and then the next breath it is too dangerous for you to clean up.

Department of Human Services – State

We made contact with the Department of human Services Grant line on two occasions. As stated previously the first occasion on the **27.2.14** was by accident. The second time was on the **6th of March**. We made this contact after Darren Chester – Federal Member for Gippsland spoke on the **5th of March** on ABC Radio stating the criteria for grant applications had changed and he encouraged anyone in the Vulnerable group who had temporarily relocated to contact the line to receive assistance.

We mistakenly thought Mr Chester and his team would be giving local and accurate information which his team may have found to be tried and true given the level of misinformation that had been coming from metro Melbourne information points.

Due to the continuing duration of having to be away from our home being unknown, we had already received some indication we may need some financial assistance.

For example I had received a mobile phone bill which was triple that of my usual bill in this time. We believed the continually seeking of information online, returning calls of concerned family and friends and seeking information wherever we could had significantly increased this cost and it was likely to continue for an unknown period of time.

We had been unable to naturally dry any of our clothing and linen and as such expected a significant power bill given the increased use of our dryer. Also we had used the Laundromat on several occasions for our larger items such as linen which we had been cleaning more regularly.

We had also hoped to contribute some funds towards our friends household costs as we were uncertain how much longer we would be unable to return home. Also as time continued to pass, it was likely we would need to place our animals in a cattery. We had seen the vast improvement in our animals since we had moved them out of Morwell and we were not willing to return them there despite the reassurance it was safe for them. The damage to them had been clear.

We had also gone from commuting 5 min to work for me to 40min and my partner had increased from a 50min commute to an hour and a half commute. This continued cost, plus still having to pay the bills was becoming difficult.

David from DHS who we spoke to on the grants line on the **6th of March** was sympathetic and respectful of our needs but again identified we had been misguided in our information and we did not qualify for assistance. He should not have had to deal with this increased pressure either due to people being misinformed.

When we attended the Morwell Recovery centre on the **1st of March** we were assisted by [REDACTED] from DHS who despite admitting she could not assist in any financial support or additional information, respectfully listened to our concerns and calmed us when I had eventually reached the point of shame, embarrassment and distress.

Other Government Agencies:

Latrobe City Council

As outlined earlier we had little contact with Latrobe City Council as we did not qualify for clean up support, having not received a DHS grant. I did have phone contact with the LCC on the **17th of March** when I was seeking an outcome of the Chief Health officers media conference, the customer service officer advised she was unable to assist and perhaps I contact the DHS info line.

Needless to say by the time we became aware in the **6th or 7th** week of not getting consistent information and assistance, of the ability to hire vacuum cleaners, pressure hoses or vouchers for car cleaning and Laundromat. We didn't bother.

Vic Roads

We used the vic roads phone app on the **9th and 10th of February** to assist us in returning home. We had returned from a QLD trip in the afternoon of the **9th**. After further investigation with friends and family we decided not to chance driving home from Melbourne. Opting to stay with friends in Melbourne.

The app when we attempted to use it, was slow to update and was not user friendly in trying to ascertain an alternate route home. I actually would never use it again it was that frustrating.

Non Government Welfare Agencies

In this Coal Mine Fire Crisis I think it was forgotten that other crisis continues. Working for an agency who delivers homelessness and family violence support and accommodation, it became evident quickly these crisis's would continue. For the duration of the fire local services continued to operate as they are contracted to, supporting Latrobe Valleys most vulnerable.

For the period of the fire emergency accommodation in hotels was unable to be sourced this side of Drouin or Sale, for those from the Morwell Community. Due to all accommodation being taken by the emergency services or department staff. this meant those in crisis needed to be relocated away

from family and friend support in Morwell. This was stressful for those needing the assistance and the staff giving the assistance felt helpless.

There was little to know guidance from Gov departments who funded these agencies to provide the support.

Even in considering feedback in the mine fire enquiry I think it has been forgotten Morwell has moved from a thriving metropolis in years gone by to be a community of significant disadvantage. Morwell is number 1 in Victoria for incidents of reported Family Violence. This is not a statistic we are proud of, however we are proud of the support services provided, however these were limited in the time of the Fire.

ABC Radio

For the first 3 weeks of the fire there was little reporting other than CFA fire ready updates available on ABC. Our usual greatest source of information locally. It felt until the fire in the western part of Melbourne had been extinguished the fire in Morwell was not important.

The coverage from the third week on was much better, but then focused largely on the Morwell fire forgetting our East Gippsland neighbours in Goongerah who were sleeping on football ovals well after the Morwell fire was put out.

Rather than continually being disappointed in the information provided by ABC it would have been better to use the emergency warning channel to get accurate and reliable information for our area.

Perhaps the most disheartening experience with ABC came with a lack of respect and consideration for censorship. In the week after Dennis Naphine (**27.2.14**) suggested people loan their beach houses to Morwell residents, ABC Radio chose to share a text message received from a listener who had stated " I would not lend my dog kennel to someone from Morwell". Now I cant remember the date this statement was made but I remember it made me feel sick and deeply saddened

We are a community which experiences a number of social disadvantage factors and often it is hard to get community members to feel worthy,. Instances like this and a lack of response in the fire reinforces and exacerbates this. ABC should have used their discretion and not read this message out.

I found the best sources of information in this whole fire experience were Russel Northe – State member for Morwell and Kelly O'Callaghan – Latrobe City Councilor without whom I would have felt completely in the dark.

Nurse oncall:

I had one experience with Nurse on call on the **17th of February 2014**. I contacted them rather than attend my GP as I new our local health system was already congested and the fire was likely to add to this.

I felt I received little helpful information and the end result was a recommendation to attend my GP. I was not confident in the understanding of the nurse on call and felt the experience embarrassing and lacking in useful information.

General Practitioner/ Bairnsdale Hospital

I attended my GP on several occasions (**11.2.14, 17.2.14 and 13.3.14**) during the mine fire for respiratory checks and information in relation to the impacts on my child. These were reassuring however confirmed the lack of health information being provided to community.

On the 7th of March 2014 I attended the Bairnsdale Hospital Emergency and Mid Wifery centres. Our baby had stopped moving for a period of over 15-18 hours. The staff at the hospital were so wonderful, they reassured me straight away, with a fast and respectful response. They offered us so much help knowing we had relocated to the area and were away from our GP. They encouraged us to return at any time. After some testing and significant encouragement our baby eventually moved and we after a long period of not being able to locate the heart beat, finally got to hear the rapid little heart beat. I could not believe that within their own community the Goongerah fires were burning and being largely ignored and they treated me and my baby as if we were the only important people in the world. Amazing !!! .

Morwell Traders (Small Business Owners)

Perhaps going largely unnoticed this group of traders continued to keep the Morwell pride alive. They made sure they kept their doors open, took every opportunity to show case Morwell's pride and what we have to offer. They should be truly commended and the signs thanking the CFA for all their efforts reminded me why I am so proud to be a Morwellian.

In Summary:

I am a proud Morwell Girl born and raised and looking forward to welcoming our first child, the fifth generation of our family to be raised in Morwell. This mine Fire disaster highlighted strengths in our community such as pride, comradery and the strength of local traders, emergency services, non gov agencies and some local politicians to pull up their sleeves and chip in when times are low.

It also reinforced some people such as Department of Health, nurse oncall, Darren Chester, vic roads CFA fire ready app and the ABC need to lift their game.

I am not an expert as to the role the Coal mine operators, but I can tell you what my experience was and how it could be improved.

We won't know until our child arrives in July 2014 if there are ongoing implications for our child out of this disaster and we look forward to welcoming the newest member of our family regardless of the effects.

I just hope what is learnt from this experience is shared so another family never has the experience we had of uncertainty, inadequacy, embarrassment, shame or distress. Information is powerful and in a time when time frames and information is uncertain it is better to share that you don't know rather than present people with false hope.

I do not believe we should have relied on Government solely, and we were fortunate to have the support of family and friends to allow us to relocate. However, some people are on a low income

which is not commonwealth benefits, and they should have been eligible for support with unexpected costs.

My thanks for those who assisted us in our personal experience sits largely with:

- Those who allowed us to participate in the his enquiry.
- [REDACTED] from Ambulance Victoria
- Our GP [REDACTED]
- Staff at Bairnsdale Hospital
- My Employer Quantum Support Services
- Russell Northe and Kelly O'Callaghna (local members) for their information.
- Morwell Traders for keeping the Morwell pride alive.
- My friends who housed us in East Gippsland - [REDACTED]
- All of my family and friends who offered support no matter how small.
- Finally to my sister [REDACTED] and her family, who cleaned our home for us so that we could return home as soon as we possible. When the thought of clean up overwhelmed us, they stepped in without us knowing and we returned to a clean home earlier than we expected.

Thank you for your time and interest

Lisa Wilson