



Hazelwood Inquiry info/DPC@DTF

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To Hazelwood Inquiry  
info/DPC@DTF

cc

bcc

Subject Morwell Mine Fire Submission

Title: Mr

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Content of submission (you can choose multiple): Measures taken by Hazelwood Coal Mine to prevent fire, Response to fire by Hazelwood Coal Mine, Response to fire by Emergency Services, Other (please state)

If Other please state here: (comment not part of the submission) John Drewitt's name may need to be redacted for the published version. I may hand deliver the DVDs in Morwell Monday 12th May. Enhanced MP4 versions will also be on offer, to go straight onto the Inquiry's hard disk storage system. "Enhanced" means deinterlacing, overcoming faded colour dyes, trimming black margins, stretching the contrast and slight sharpening to aid clear viewing of what were some very wishy-washy images (as the DVDs will still demonstrate). MG

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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North Melbourne VIC 3051  
Thursday 8th May 2014

Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry  
by online submission (PDF upload) to:  
<http://hazelwoodinquiry.vic.gov.au/make-a-submission/online-submissions/>

Dear Inquiry Board Members Teague, Catford and Petering,

**Re: Archival SECV videos, their relevance to the 2014 Hazelwood Mine Fire.**

Thank you for this opportunity to finalise my submissions to your Inquiry. As will have been indicated in the online submission form, this submission responds to terms of reference regarding both prevention and suppression of fires in open cut mines, specifically in this case the Hazelwood (Morwell) Open Cut Mine.

Three DVDs – being my second tranche of historical SECV video and film footage – have been posted to your Australia Post mail box address, and form an integral part of this submission. I am of the view that they are potentially quite useful to the Inquiry, to the current mine owner, to the CFA and indirectly to all Latrobe Valley citizens.

They supplement Tranche One: the 1982 U-matic video cassette (submitted to you in DVD format) which seems to have been the SECV's main audio-visual training aid for mine staff. Its ID at the Victorian State Archive is **VPRS 5061/P0002/83 "Document No. 002216 Fire Fighting In The Open Cut. Master"** – my shorthand for that DVD is "002216"

Notes on each Tranche Two DVD:

**VPRS 5061/P0001/24 "SECH00122 Open Cut Fire Morwell" (1977)**

It is a silent movie, as supplied to me on the DVD. I take the silence to accurately reflect the silent nature of the source material: 16mm cine film. It appears to be a concatenation of three different lengths of cine film, some elements of which are repeated twice or three times, giving a final structure of A-B-A-C-A-C. where each element is as follows:

- "A" - mine managers meeting workers down in the mine, after the fire is controlled (3'33")
- "B" - mine fire filmed from a light aircraft circling above the mine, probably also from the rim of the enormous hole. (8 mins approx.)
- "C" - ground-based fire fighting and mopping up (4'20" approx.). The two versions of "C" are not identical, but very nearly so.

Individual scenes of note include:

- \* The proliferation of thousands of small embers blown by wind gusts in the night-time scenes, confirming the narrator's statement in "002216" that small embers can be a potent mode of rapid fire spread over dry coal dust;
- \* The use of strong jets of water, rather than the sprays recommended in SECV's training DVD "002216". Discussion: There is some visual evidence of hardened partially burnt coal, perhaps not surprising given that oxygen-starved combustion on the steep batters is likely to "cook-up a hot cake" resembling coke. Perhaps the water jets are a deliberate technique to break up these accretions by what is in effect a sluice-mining operation, thus uncovering the fire within the hardened accretions. Obtaining the opinion of former SECV firefighters on this could provide valuable insights to modern day mine managers, their first responders and to the CFA, with a view to improving or rediscovering effective fire-fighting techniques;
- \* Massive dousing sprays in operation on a huge dredge, exemplifying effective asset protection;
- \* Warm overcoats being worn by management -- probably on day 3 or day 4 of the fire -- seem to indicate that the spring weather had gone quite cold. It may therefore be important for the Inquiry to get Bureau of Meteorology records for November 1977, to determine whether calm winds, cold clear nights, high humidity, dew, fog, mist, rain showers or heavy rain played a significant role in the rapid control of that fire. (flagging a possible counter-argument by the current mine owner, regarding the relative duration of the 2014 fire, compared to 1977);
- \* Through the smoke, aerial scenes from a high-wing light aircraft show that the fire ground contains dark areas apparently wet and/or unburnt, contrasting with much lighter peachy-pink areas presumably of ash where fire is either active or has moved through (and presumably pale because it is yet to be wetted down). This hypothesis needs to be confirmed by others with mine fire experience;
- \* The fire-fight in 1977 appears to be a dirty, grim, gruelling and unhealthy activity. The 2014 fire-fight was presumably a similar experience for all directly involved.

**VPRS 5061/P0002/120 "Document No. 005708 Major Open Cut Fires in Latrobe Valley" (7'28", 1994, 1" videotape)**

This video says, by way of on-screen titling, that there have been five major fires in the Valley since 1922. Four are shown:

Yallourn Open Cut, February 1944  
Morwell Open Cut, October [sic] 1977  
Yallourn Open Cut February 1983  
Loy Yang Open Cut, February 1983

It is not narrated, but has dramatic music accompanying, so the apparent purpose of the film is to

trigger an emotional response through the skilful combination of dramatic images and audio. This could therefore be a *powerful training tool* to impress upon mine inductees (including the new private owners) the importance of fire prevention in open cuts. Privatisation of all SECV's generation assets happened on 30 September 1994. One Inch videotape is not a user-friendly format, so I suggest that the Fire Inquiry endeavours to learn from Mr John Drewett, public officer of The Office of the Administrator (SECV rump) whom if anybody received playable copies of this video, e.g. in VHS cassette format. Ethical behaviour *by the sellers* at multiple handovers of essential corporate knowledge through a series of owners *should* have resulted in GDF Suez management still being in possession of a playable copy of it. GDF Suez's due diligence should have identified unethical withholding of key information by the seller. Key information would include DVD "002216" as well.

**VPRS 5061/P0002/120 "Document No. 005704  
Generation Victoria Bushfire Footage Roll 2"**

This low quality, mostly silent, material has been transferred to DVD from a VHS video cassette. It is a compilation of various other materials, e.g. a full 19 minute version of "002216". It contains a banner timecode so that every frame can be identified. So it would appear to be a working document: an aid to the planning, storyboarding and editing of another production. Judging from the content, that final product would seem to be "005708" (above).

It is included in this submission, in the hope that former SECV mine staff, with the benefit of their experience and specialist knowledge, may be able to view it and point to some evidence in it which corroborates their stories of how the mine used to be maintained in hot windy "TFB" weather. The vision may also reveal significant failings in SECV's management of the mines, I have no evidence myself either way.

**Conclusion:**

I submit in relation to Term of Reference 2 (ii) – *specifically its mention of management plans* – that the series of entities that have owned this mine since its first sod of coal production, have had a continuous, inescapable obligation to maintain and preserve the SECV's painful learnings from past mine disasters, throughout the unbroken chain of transactions, throughout the years of continuous operation of this power\_station/mine integrated facility, both as sellers and as buyers, so as to responsibly discharge their obligations under Australian corporate law. What the current owner may not have known in February 2014 about fire prevention, the current owner should have known. Such knowledge comes at minimal cost: the exercising of an enquiring mind. To remain ignorant of the expert knowledge necessary to responsibly operate a coal mine, when such knowledge is obtained simply by exercising an inquiring mind, raises legitimate concerns that the massive scale of the 2014 mine fire may have been the outcome of a sustained period of wilful blindness by its current owner.

Yours faithfully,



Michael Gunter