

# Hazelwood Mine Fire

## Environment and Agriculture Recovery Sub-Plan

(For inclusion in the Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Plan)

<b>Version</b>	1.1
<b>Date</b>	24/03/2014
<b>Review</b>	

**Approved by:**

Regional Recovery Coordinator

**Date:**

18 March 2014

**Distribution:**

Environment and Agriculture Recovery Sub-Committee  
Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Committee  
2014 State Recovery Coordination Team (via State Recovery Coordinator)

## 1. Background

### Task

The Department of Environment and Primary Industries was tasked by the Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Committee to coordinate environment and agriculture recovery planning across State Government Departments and agencies.

### Purpose

The purpose of the environment and agriculture sub-plan, which will form part of the Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Plan, is to outline and enable arrangements to assess the need for and deliver environment and agriculture response measures around Morwell as a result of the Hazelwood mine fire.

### End State

The ultimate goal for this sub-plan is a community that is:

- environment and agriculture recovery measures meet the needs of the environment, community, and primary producers;
- ongoing recovery activities effectively delivery the information required to support the Department of Health's evidence-based decision making framework;
- recovery measures are timely and effective;
- the capacity of local agencies is enhanced through involvement in recovery activities;
- recovery measures help foster greater community resilience.

## 2. Overview

### Context

The Hazelwood mine fire and the resultant smoke impact on the Morwell and surrounding communities have presented a unique set of circumstances for environmental monitoring and operational decision making.

The State Controller's 'Strategic Control Priorities' outlined in the Emergency Management Manual Victoria are being utilised to ensure planning is focused and strategic. From the environment and agriculture perspective, the 'Strategic Control Priorities' for the 2013/14 Bushfire states:

- **Protection of environmental and conservation assets that considers the cultural, biodiversity, and social values of the environment.**

In this context, the above should also apply to recovery.

### Key Considerations

- Water quality
- Aquatic biodiversity
- Agricultural productivity
- Opportunities to build community resilience

## Priorities

- Assessing potential water quality impacts
- Documenting mitigation measures
- Identifying opportunities to foster enhances community resilience

### **3. Leadership and Coordination**

The Department of Environment and Primary Industries is responsible for coordinating environment and agriculture recovery planning across State Government Departments and agencies.

The Department of Human Services led Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Committee is responsible for leading activities with oversight of implementation.

EPA continues to monitor air, soil, water and ash at various locations around Morwell and the greater Latrobe Valley. It has steadily built from a platform of operational continuous monitoring, to multiple layers of testing and sampling. This supports a range of agencies activities, as well as the response to queries and anticipated queries from the community.

The Department of Environment and Primary Industries with the support of the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority are responsible for planning local operational activities related to their water quality and waterway health.

The Department of Environment and Primary Industries is responsible for coordinating support to primary producers.

### **4. Current Activities**

The Department of Environment and Primary Industries has commenced the following activities:

- EPA scientific monitoring program to address public health, natural environment, OH&S and agricultural concerns and to satisfy the Department of Health needs for ongoing monitoring data to support its decision making framework.
- Prepared and weekly review of the Water Quality and Waterway Health Plan.
- Animal Health and Welfare Liaison Officer finalised working with local veterinarians, Latrobe City Council, and animal aid networks on companion animal matters to ensure arrangements are in place to support residents and to monitor any impact on animals.
- Information on caring for animals as a result of the fires has been provided to the Latrobe City Council for insertion in their residents information pack.
- Department of Environment and Primary Industries continues to keep in contact with industry regulators and key agriculture stakeholders. No agricultural impacts have yet been reported by producers.
- Department of Environment and Primary Industries will continue to liaise with local veterinarians and other key stakeholders to monitor potential effects on agricultural production and animal health.
- Free Zoo Passes for Morwell residents – to finish end of March 2014. The Victorian Government has waived entry fees to Victoria's Healesville Sanctuary, the Melbourne Zoo and Werribee Open Range Zoo for residents of Morwell and surrounding towns within 15km to take a break.

### ***Timeframes***

Most of the above listed activities have been completed except for ongoing tasks where timeframes will be dictated by the requirements of the Department of Health.

### ***Estimated cost***

## **5. Post-fire environment and agriculture recovery**

### ***Overview***

The ongoing activities include:

- EPA scientific monitoring program to address public health, natural environment, OH&S and agricultural concerns and to satisfy the Department of Health needs for ongoing monitoring data to support its decision making framework.
- Prepared and weekly review of the Water Quality and Waterway Health Plan.
- Aerial visual monitoring of waterways before and the first rainfall event and fish surveys in local waterways
- Department of Environment and Primary Industries continues to keep in contact with industry regulators and key agriculture stakeholders. No agricultural impacts have yet been reported by producers.
- Department of Environment and Primary Industries will continue to liaise with local veterinarians and other key stakeholders to monitor potential effects on agricultural production and animal health.
- Department of Environment and Primary Industries investigating options to build environment and community resilience.

Associated Plan and Strategies which underpin this sub-plan include:

- EPA Data Analysis and Monitoring Strategy, LATROBE VALLEY COAL MINE FIRES
- EPA Ongoing Monitoring Plan, Recovery Phase Monitoring
- DEPI Water Quality and Waterway Health Plan

### ***Timeframes***

The estimated timeframes for delivering this program is up to 12 months, dependent on the Department of Health's requirements.

### ***Estimated costs***

The total estimated costs for delivering these activities/programs is being managed at the State level.

There are no alternative funding options identified for this initiative. Should funding not be provided this initiative will not proceed.

## **6. Communications**

The Department of Human Services and Latrobe City Council will coordinate communications and public messaging through the communications and community engagement sub-committee and sub-plan. To ensure continuity with communications and

provide a consistent and accurate message, information about the environment and agriculture recovery activities will be communicated through channels already established.

Communication pathways include:

- The Department of Human Services Recovery website
- Local government avenues
- Existing forums such as the Emergency Management Joint Public Information Committee.

Additional public information will be developed as required to support the environment and agriculture activities as required. This will include:

- Facilitating access to scientific experts for coaching media spokespeople on technical and scientific issues.
- Preparation of plain English science input for the EPA website and other communications.
- Identifying opportunities to involve the community with monitoring and reporting of local environmental trends during the recovery phase.

## **7. Reporting and Monitoring**

The main effort will be to reinforce existing reporting methodologies, as outlined in the Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Plan, allowing issues and risks that cannot be treated at appropriate levels to be immediately escalated.

This will be undertaken by the Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Committee to the State Recovery Coordination Team. A parallel stream built within the same reporting methodology focussing on reporting financial expenditure (or projected expenditure) across a range of criteria will also be established to ensure clear and accurate reporting for the state, in line with agreed requirements particularly in relation to NDRRA.