

IN THE MATTER OF THE HAZELWOOD MINE FIRE INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF JAMES EDWARD HUBERT MAUGER

BACKGROUND

- 1 My name is James Edward Hubert Mauger. I live at Traralgon, Victoria, 3844.
- 2 This statement covers my recollections of the events which occurred on 9 February 2014 at the Hazelwood Coal Mine (**Mine**).
- 3 I am 29 years old and have lived in Traralgon since 20 November 2012. I lived in Morwell from 16 October 2008 until I moved to Traralgon on 20 November 2012. I live in Traralgon with my wife and our 3 children.
- 4 My father, Garry Mauger worked at the Mine in various capacities for 32 years, until he recently retired. At the time he retired, my father's position was "Manager Special Tasks Morwell Main Drain".
- 5 All my life, the Mine has provided me with a stable and comfortable life. First, due to my father's employment at the Mine. Secondly, through my own employment at the Mine, which has enabled me to financially support my wife and children. In fact, at the time my wife and I decided to start a family, I was employed in retail and applied for jobs at the Mine because it pays better than retail. I applied to work for the Mine, and missed out on several positions that I applied for over approximately 6 years, before I was finally offered employment at the Mine.
- 6 I have worked at the Mine for approximately 8 years. In the first two years I was employed by RTL, which at the time was a joint venture between Roche Mining, Thiess and Linfox. RTL incorporated in 2011 and is now known as RTL Mining and Earthworks Pty Ltd (**RTL**), which was and remains a contractor to the Mine. My duties with RTL mainly involved operating a dump truck. For the last six years, I have worked at the Mine as a direct employee of Hazelwood Power Corporation Pty Ltd (**HPC**). My current position is "1x7A Operator".
- 7 Since I have been employed by the Mine, my positions have included:
- (a) 9 day fortnight operator;
 - (b) 1x7 operator;
 - (c) 2x12 operator;
 - (d) Production Services Coordinator;
 - (e) Services Planner; and
 - (f) Services Superintendent.
- 8 At the moment, I am a 1x7 operator. I am currently a member of the 1x7A Operations team. There are two 1x7 Operations teams at the Mine, 1x7A and 1x7B. The "A" and "B" is simply used to differentiate the two 1x7 teams, which work on alternating rosters.

- 9 The rosters of each team operate on a fortnightly basis. Each working day starts at 6:45am and ends at 5:00pm. The roster is that each team work 5 days straight, have 5 days off, work 4 days straight, have 5 days off, work 5 days straight and have 4 days off.
- 10 The 1x7 Operations teams are a multi skilled work-group, and perform tasks such as fire services, earthworks and general maintenance around the mine. A typical day's work at the Mine might include the following tasks:
- (a) moving a coal conveyor to a new dig line on the operating face of the Mine;
 - (b) extending conveyors to allow the dredgers to dig further on the operating face;
 - (c) testing, repairing and moving (if required to allow the operating face of the Mine to extend) fire service mains throughout the Mine;
 - (d) safety device testing of fire systems on dredgers and other mine equipment; and
 - (e) dust suppression.
- 11 The 1x7 Operations teams also undertake the annual fire services inspection at the Mine, which is a detailed audit of the fire prevention systems in the Mine. This task is a large task and usually occurs between July and September each year.
- 12 In this statement, I refer to various locations at the Mine that I went to Sunday, 9 February 2014. A map of the Mine is contained in **Annexure A** to this statement, in which the approximate locations referred to in this statement that I attended on that day have been marked. For the remainder of this statement, I will refer to **Annexure A** as the "Location Plan".

Events of Sunday, 9 February 2014

Morning

- 13 Sunday, 9 February 2014, was the fifth day on of my 5 day roster cycle. Over the preceding five days, I had attended briefings as usual at the start of each shift.
- 14 As a result of those briefings, I had been informed that:
- (a) a fire had been burning for 3 days (but was almost extinguished) approximately 7 km north-west from the Mine, in the Hernes Oak area;
 - (b) staff at the mine were monitoring the fire and preparing the Mine in case the fire came closer to the Mine; and
 - (c) the Mine had already been operating for a number of days a significant number of sprayers on the coal levels, to help protect them from the risk of fire and to eliminate coal dust leaving the Mine in the extreme wind conditions.
- 15 Over those five days, I had also checked the CFA Fire Ready App on my phone on a regular basis. As a result, I knew that it had been, a Total Fire Ban day for the State of Victoria on Saturday, 8 February 2014 and Sunday, 9 February 2014.

- 16 On Sunday, 9 February 2014, my 1x7A Operations team was working at the Mine. I started work at 6.45am.
- 17 During the morning, my 1x7 Operations teams performed a number of duties around the Mine. I assisted in changing the head works on the pipework associated with water bore number H2161. I undertook this task with Lou Bianconi (a 1x7A Operator) and Dean Soares (the Supervisor of 1x7A Operations team). Daniel Dalla Valle (a 1x7A Operator) and Pino Digiulio (a 1x7A boiler maker) performed spraying in preparation for potential fires. Trevor Shaw was checking the Mine reticulation system, which included checking the Mine's dirty and clean water pumps. Shane Chapman (a 1x7A Operator) and Andrew Polkington (a 1x7A Crane-Driver rigger) was towing 300m diameter pipe with a grab dozer from 25 dredger's maintenance site to the M680 conveyor.

Lunch time

- 18 I remember sitting in the 1x7 brew room, which is the area in which the 1x7 teams prepare for work and have lunch, near the Mine's Administration Building. The brew room is marked "A" in the Location Plan. I remember that at approximately 12:50pm, when I was having lunch with the rest of the 1x7A Operations team, the Shift Supervisor (Ian Wilkinson) entered the room and said that the Hernes Oak fire had flared up and was starting to travel south-easterly towards the Mine. Despite having been almost extinguished, it had flared up due to the extreme wind conditions and started to become a threat to the Mine and its surrounds.
- 19 After Ian Wilkinson left the 1x7 brew room, the 1x7A Supervisor (Dean Soares) spoke to the 1x7A Operations Team and said that we need to get people organised so that the Mine fire truck (which is a 3,000 litre capacity ex-CFA truck, that is usually garaged near the 1x7 brew room), was patrolling the perimeter of the Mine. There is another ex-CFA truck that is usually garaged near the main entry gate to the site, and is known as the "Power Station" ex-CFA truck. Shane Chapman drove the Mine fire truck. Dean Soares then sent Daniel Dalla Valle and Pino Digiulio to start turning on all sprayers that were not already on, along 1 level of the northern batters and the rest of the gang were to get furphys (which are 1,000 litre water carts on trailers, to attach to the back of a four wheel drive vehicles) and look for embers and hot spots around 1 level of the northern batters.
- 20 Dean Soares asked me to come in the car with him and go over to the north-western perimeter of the Mine along the old part of Marretts Road. On the way over to the perimeter of the Mine, Dean Soares spoke on UHF radio channel 25 with Laurie Howell and Chris Stewart, both mobile plant operators from RTL and called up both the Delta water carts (35,000 litre water carts that were purpose built for the mine). Delta is a contractor that supplies and maintains mobile plant to the Mine. He asked them to go to the perimeter of the Mine where the Hernes Oak fire had flared up.
- 21 Once Dean Soares and I arrived at the perimeter of the Mine (which is marked "B" in the Location Plan) and saw how much the extreme wind conditions had caused the Hernes Oak fire to flare up, I said to Dean Soares that we needed to get the two Mine graders to grade in fire breaks along the grass level on the western perimeter. Dean Soares used the UHF radio to contact RTL operator Geoff Smith and 1x7A operator Andrew Polkington and gave them instructions to use the graders to grade in further fire breaks in the north-western area of the Mine marked "C" in the Location Plan.

From 1.30pm onwards

- 22 At that time (approximately 1:23pm) I took the following photograph at the area marked "B" in the Location Plan, which shows the severity of the Hernes Oak fire. It wasn't long before we could see the flames from the fire themselves and could see burnt embers within the Mine perimeter.



- 23 Shortly after that, the wind changed direction and pushed the Hernes Oak fire more North-Easterly around the outside of the mine. Dean Suares and I then drove to the RTL yard, which is an area in the Mine where RTL stores its equipment, including at the time approximately thirty 50 tonne dump trucks, ten 30 tonne dump trucks and other earth moving equipment. At that time (approximately 1.45pm), I took the below photograph from the RTL yard on the western side of the Mine, which is marked "D" on the Location Plan.



- 24 I estimated that the fire was approximately 100 meters from the boundary fence of the Mine. I heard Dean Soares radio for one of the Delta water carts (the one driven by Chris Stewart, a mobile plant operator from RTL) to go to the electrical sub-station known as MWN, which was approximately 400 meters away from the fire, to watch for embers and protect that area.
- 25 Dean Soares and I then drove to the area of the previous river diversion (on the western side of the Mine), to check whether embers had started any fires that could potentially travel to the working face, known as the west field, which is comprised of freshly exposed coal being actively mined to fuel the power station. The area that we drove to is marked "E" on the Location Plan.
- 26 We saw that the Hernes Oak fire had crossed the Strzelecki Highway and had entered the Mine perimeter. Dean Soares then called for the Mine fire truck (being driven by Shane Chapman) and the other Delta water cart (being driven by Laurie Howell, a mobile plant operator from RTL) to come over to the western end of the Mine perimeter to patrol for spotting over the Morwell River. At that time, the river had been acting as a natural fire break. Both of the Mine's graders were still working in tandem, putting a secondary fire break around this area.
- 27 Dean Soares asked me to go with the Mine fire truck and help with the patrol of that area. After approximately 15 minutes, it was clear to me that the Morwell River was going to stop that fire and that only the Delta water cart was needed in that area to watch for spotting of fire over the river. I said to Shane Chapman (who was operating the Mine fire truck) that there are a lot of burnt embers going over our heads into the Mine with the extreme wind, and that we should start to patrol inside the open cut of the Mine.

- 28 As we were driving back towards the Mine, my mobile phone rang and it was 1x7A roster Leading Hand (Trevor Shaw) saying that I [redacted] had just spotted smoke along the northern batters and that we were required to go and have a look. This was the first time that I had heard of smoke coming from inside the open cut section of the Mine.
- 29 Shane Chapman and I proceeded towards the northern batters looking for smoke but after driving up and down the northern batters from 1 to 7 level we could not see any. Shane and I drove between the areas marked "F" and "G" on the Location Plan to look for smoke. We had driven between those points three times when I tried to call Trevor Shaw back, but he didn't answer. I then called the Mine Control Centre and spoke with Control Centre Operator, Geoff Murray, who told me that [redacted] had called him and reported that he had seen smoke on the northern batters, and that [redacted] was putting sprays on in that area. I asked Geoff Murray the exact location of the smoke, but he told me when he had asked [redacted] the location of the smoke, the phone went dead. To try and find the exact location of the smoke, I called [redacted] on his mobile phone, but there was no answer.
- 30 Shane Chapman and I then drove up and down the northern batters (between points "F" and "G" on the Location Plan) one last time. We still did not see any smoke. We then started to drive to patrol the top ('grass') level of the northern batters of the Mine and I called Dean Soares and told him:
- (a) that Shane Chapman and I had driven up and down the northern batters four times and had not seen any smoke;
 - (b) that I had tried to call Trevor Shaw and there was no answer; and
 - (c) that I had called Geoff Murray who told me that [redacted] had reported smoke on the northern batters but when Geoff had asked [redacted] the location, the phone went dead.
- 31 Dean Soares told me that while [redacted] was turning sprays on in the northern batters, one of them had spun and hit [redacted] in the mouth and chipped [redacted] front teeth, and that he had taken him to hospital.
- 32 After hanging up from Dean Soares, I saw Trevor Shaw driving towards us, so I asked Shane Chapman to flag him down and we got out of the Mine fire truck. The area we saw Trevor Shaw in is marked "H" on the Location Plan. Shane Chapman and I had a conversation with Trevor Shaw about not seeing any smoke on the northern batters and let him know that [redacted] was at hospital with chipped teeth after being hit by a spray. Trevor Shaw said he already knew that because Dean Soares had told him. At that time (approximately 1.55pm), I looked to the TP7 area of the Mine on the south-eastern batters and saw a small amount of what looked like blue smoke coming from that area. The area I saw smoke in is marked "I" on the Location Plan. I asked Trevor Shaw "Does that look like smoke coming from the TP7 area?" Trevor Shaw said he was not sure, because he could not see that far over the other side of the Mine.
- 33 Trevor Shaw said that he would accompany us (Trevor Shaw in his vehicle, Shane Chapman and I in the Mine fire truck) over to the TP7 area to check for fire. As we got closer to the TP7 area, Trevor Shaw rang my mobile phone and said that it was definitely smoke and that we needed to come in on the level above where we were, so that we could couple the Mine fire truck up to the water main to give us continuous water supply from the mine fire ring

main (rather than having to refill the tank) and greater water pressure (being able to rely on the water supply and pressure from the mine fire ring main).

- 34 Upon arriving there (the area marked "J" on the Location Plan) at approximately 2.10pm, we confirmed that there was a fire in the TP7 area, and we started to fight the fire. It wasn't long before the 2x12 Hazelwood Leading Hand gang (two conveyor attendants that work on the top-half of the Mine's conveyor system) arrived to help us, as well as the Road Runners (two conveyor attendants that work on the bottom-half of the Mine's conveyor system). This was the first fire within the mine, as far as I know, and I believe it ignited from embers blown to the TP7 from the Hernes Oak fire as a result of the extreme conditions of the day.
- 35 The wind was making it extremely difficult to extinguish the fire because it was pushing the fire so quickly. Geoff Crisp (a Mine employee), and the Diamond Protection team (3 people who were driving the "Hazelwood Power Station" fire truck, which is the other ex-CFA truck that is usually garaged near the main gatehouse entry to the site) began to arrive to fight the fire.

From 2.30pm

- 36 At approximately 2.30pm, I looked over to the northern batters and saw a small amount of smoke coming from 5 level. Shane and I went to the northern batters (with Jarrod Lumley from the 2x12 Hazelwood Leading Hand gang) to fight that fire in the Mine fire truck. The area we went to is marked "K" on the Location Plan.
- 37 When we arrived at the northern batters (at approximately 2.45pm), the fire was in the middle of the batter in the scrub, which made it impossible to walk in with hoses, so we started spraying water from above the fire, to little effect.
- 38 We were then joined by non-CFA air support, who started dumping fire retardant on the fire. We had not had any prior contact with the air support crew, and as a result, while their efforts complemented ours, our efforts were not co-ordinated. An airplane dumped fire retardant on the fire, and on Shane and myself.
- 39 We had almost exhausted all of the water in the Mine fire truck, when we went up a level (from level 5 to level 3) of the batter, as the fire had spread up. As we travelled there, shortly after 3pm, a non-CFA helicopter was assisting us dumping water on the northern batters. While we were on level 3, we were joined by Lou Bianconi (a member of my 1x7A Operations team) and Bradley Marriott (a conveyor attendant from the 2x12 operations team), who were in a 4WD with a 1,000 litre furphy attached to help fight the fire.
- 40 It wasn't long afterwards that the power lines started to sag and a power pole in front of us was on fire, and the whole batter in front of us was on fire and had spotted above us. The area where the power poles started to sag is marked "L" on the Location Plan. When we had exhausted the Mine fire truck's water, we coupled the Mine fire truck to the fire service main at approximately 3.17pm at the location marked "M" on the Location Plan, but the fire was so fierce in the extreme conditions and was spotting all over the place with the wind.
- 41 While I was on level 3, at approximately 3.20pm, a non-CFA helicopter continued to dump water on the northern batters. I took some vision from level 3 (and from level 5) of the air support on my iPhone.

- 42 At that stage, our efforts to fight the fire at location "K" on the Location Plan were mostly overwhelmed by the intensity of the fire.
- 43 It was too dangerous with the power lines nearly on the ground in the northern batters area, marked "L" on the Location Plan, to continue fighting that fire. We continued to try and put out spot fires in nearby areas for approximately 15 minutes but to little effect, as all levels of the batters were on fire at that stage. I estimate that it only took 50 minutes from the time I first saw smoke at location "K" on the Location Plan for all levels on the batter to ignite.
- 44 Shane and I then drove to the clean water pump station, where we had seen spot fires on the floor of the Mine. We arrived there at approximately 3.50pm. The area we arrived at is marked "N" on the Location Plan. Doug Anton, a 2x12 Operator arrived driving a D6 Swamp Dozer to put a fire break around the clean water pump station. After a period of time, Shane and I ran out of water in the Mine fire truck while fighting the fire. We drove around for some time finding water to refill the Mine fire truck. We went back to location "N". Trevor Shaw arrived and told us that the Mine had lost power. Trevor told us to fill the Mine fire truck up at the dirty water pump station, using gravitational forces, as power had been lost in the Mine, to continue to fight the fire at location "N" on the Location Plan. We were able to fill the Mine fire truck once using this method, but were unable to refill it again after we continued to fight the fire at location "N".

After 5pm

- 45 By around 5.30pm, Shane and I were exhausted and out of water. We stayed around location "N" for around 20 minutes as Doug Anton was in the middle of the fire with a dozer. We wanted to be with him to look after his well-being. As we stood there resting for those 20 minutes, the true extent of the impact of the fires became clear.

Evening of 9 February 2014

- 46 By the evening of 9 February 2014, it was devastating to see that:
- (a) most of the northern batters was engulfed;
 - (b) the fire that originated in the TP7 area had engulfed 5-1 levels of the south-eastern Batters; and
 - (c) the floor of the Mine was alight in approximately 8 or more places, extending approximately 200m south east, 200m west and 100m south of location "N" as well.
- 47 Just before 6.00pm, Shane Chapman and I were told by Dean Suares to exit the Mine via UHF radio as the Incident Controller at the Mine had deemed it too dangerous for personnel to remain in the Mine. Dean Suares also informed us that there would be a briefing for all Mine personnel at 7.00pm in the Mine Administration building.
- 48 I estimate we drove out of the Mine at approximately 6.00pm.
- 49 After we got the Mine fire truck out of the Mine, we attempted to wash it, but could not because there was no power in the Mine, which meant there was not enough water pressure in the pipework to be able to spray enough water to wash the Mine fire truck. We washed our hands and had a drink of water. We then attended the 7.00pm briefing. I probably stayed at the briefing for 30 minutes and then went home because I was told to go

home by Dean Soares, and to come in the next day (which was not a rostered day on for me) to help fight the fire.

- 50 The fire that day was so quick to spread and spot. It spread more quickly than I ever thought would be possible. It was ferocious. The efforts of everyone who tried to stop and contain the fire were excellent.

Subsequent days of the fire

- 51 I undertook a range of roles, other than fighting the fire in the days following. Up until 27 February 2014, I worked a total of 14 days. 8 of those days were rostered work days and the other 6 days were overtime.

- 52 For example:

- (a) From 13 to 14 February and on 17 February, I assisted in communications between the Mine and the CFA, in a liaison role.
- (b) On 19 February and 22 February, I did a nightshift role where I recorded carbon monoxide levels of work groups of all personnel in the Mine.

JAMES EDWARD HUBERT MAUGER

Dated:

Annexure A

