

Evaluation of the Communications to Affected Communities During the Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire

REPORT

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Date: 23/05/2014

Contents

A. Expert Witness Statement.....	1
1. Background.....	2
2. Communications Analysis	3
3. Key Objectives	4
4. Approach.....	5
5. Caveats and Limitations	5
6. Main Findings.....	6
6.1 Reactions to Communications	6
6.2 Communication Successes	6
6.2.1 ABC Local Radio	6
6.2.2 Face-to-face Contact.....	6
6.2.3 Community Meetings.....	7
6.2.4 Handouts / Leaflets	7
6.2.5 Social Media.....	7
6.2.6 Specific Individuals	8
6.2.7 Summary.....	8
6.3 Perceived Communications Issues.....	9
6.3.1 Timing of Communications	9
6.3.2 Incorrect and Inconsistent Communications	10
6.3.3 Alarming Communications.....	11
6.3.4 Lack of Reach and Distribution.....	12
6.3.5 Lack of Information / Inability to get Answers.....	12
6.3.6 One-way Communications	13
6.3.7 Communications too Basic or too Complex	14
6.3.8 Apparent Lack of Empathy and Understanding	15
6.3.9 Distrust of Communications.....	15
6.3.10 Loss of Control of Messaging and Role of Social Media	16
6.3.11 Lack of Apparent Coordination / Central Oversight of Messaging.....	17
6.4 Agency and Spokespeople Specific Findings	17
6.4.1 Department of Health	17
6.4.2 EPA.....	18
6.4.3 CFA.....	18
6.4.4 Latrobe City Council	18
6.4.5 GDF Suez	19
6.5 Communicating to Regional and Rural Audiences	20
6.5.1 Metro vs Regional	20
6.5.2 Regional Demographics	22

6.5.3 Regional Values	22
6.5.4 Specific Morwell Region Characteristics	24
6.6 Framing the Crisis	27
6.6.1 Bushfire or Chronic Health Crisis?	27
6.6.2 Cognitive Dissonance	28
7. Conclusions	31
8. Recommendations	33
8.1 Towards a Model for Regional Crisis Communications	35
9. Appendices	36
9.1 Letter of Engagement	36
9.2 About Redhanded	37
9.3 Curriculum Vitae	38

A. Expert Witness Statement

This report has been prepared in response to a request for expert assistance to the Board of Inquiry in the area of communications. This request was made by Ms Elizabeth Lanyon Head of Secretariat for the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry and a Letter of Engagement from Ms Justine Stansen, Principal Legal Adviser, Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry of 14 May 2014 attached as Appendix 9.1.

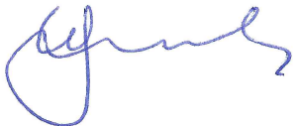
The analysis and advice provided in this report is independent and impartial. The author has no connection with any of the parties referred to in this report. Redhanded Communications declares that it undertakes State Government work for Energy Safe Victoria and Rural Finance Corporation, however these relationships have no bearing on the findings contained in this report.

The author's expertise relevant to this report is summarised in Appendix 9.3 Curriculum Vitae.

The author has read the Expert Witness Code of Conduct, Supreme Court (General Civil Procedure) Rules 2005, Form 44A, Rule 44.01.

The author hereby declares: "I have made all enquiries which I believe are desirable and appropriate and no matters of significance has been withheld."

The author has obtained the best available evidence in the time available in relation to the public communication of the government departments, agencies and companies discussed in this report. Any error or omission is unintentional and any substantial error or omission will be corrected by addendum.



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24 May 2014

1. Background

The Hazelwood Coal Mine fire started on 9 February 2014 and burned for about 45 days before being declared safe. During that period residents of Morwell and regions surrounding the mine were adversely affected by smoke and particulates from the fire.

On 11 March 2014, Premier Denis Napthine announced the establishment of an independent, three member, Board of Inquiry into the Hazelwood Mine Fire, Chaired by The Honourable Bernard Teague AO. The matters specified for enquiry by the Board included:

1. The origin and circumstances of the fire, including how it spread into the Hazelwood Coal Mine.
2. The adequacy and effectiveness of the measures taken by or on behalf of the owner, operator and licensee of the Hazelwood Coal Mine to prevent the outbreak of a fire, and to be prepared to respond to an outbreak of a fire including mitigating its spread and severity, in the Hazelwood Coal Mine, including whether the owner, operator and licensee of the Hazelwood Coal Mine, or any person or entity acting on behalf of any of them:
 - i. Implemented the recommendations arising from reviews of previous events; and
 - ii. In the opinion of the Board, breached or did not comply with the requirements of (or under) any relevant statute or regulation, including any notification or directive given under such statute or regulation and any code of practice, management plan or similar scheme, developed and/or implemented due to such requirements.
3. The adequacy and effectiveness of the application and administration of relevant regulatory regimes in relation to the risk of, and response to, fire at the Hazelwood Coal Mine
4. The adequacy and effectiveness of the response to the Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire by:
 - i. The owner, operator and licensee of the Hazelwood Coal Mine;
 - ii. The emergency services; and
 - iii. Other relevant government agencies, including environmental and public health officials, and, in particular, the measures taken in respect of the health and well-being of the affected communities by:
 - iv. Informing the affected communities of the Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire and about its known effects and risks; and
 - v. Responding to those effects on, and risks to, the affected communities.
5. Any other matter reasonably incidental to the matters specified in paragraphs 1 to 4.

2. Communications Analysis

During the period in which the fire burned, relevant Government agencies and officials (including the Environment Protection Authority Vicotira [EPA], Chief Health Officer and Incident Controller, among others) attempted to keep affected communities informed about issues raised by the fire of relevance to them. This included keeping communities apprised of the progress in extinguishing the fires, possible health effects of the smoke and ash and agency responses, among other communications.

Point 4 iv in the matters specified for enquiry (above) refers to the adequacy and effectiveness of the response in terms of informing the affected communities of the Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire and its known effects and risks. Arising from community consultations and other feedback mechanisms, questions have been raised as to the overall quality and effectiveness of the communications. Specifically, how well were communications managed in terms of being timely, relevant, consistent, easily understood and reaching affected communities?

Redhanded, as regional and rural communications experts, was asked to provide the Head of the Board of Inquiry Secretariat for the Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire Inquiry with a report that evaluated the overall quality and effectiveness of the communications and make recommendations to the Board for possible improvements, pursuant to Point 4iv, in matters specified for enquiry.

3. Key Objectives

1. Undertake an analysis of all relevant public communications issued by government departments, agencies, companies and their spokespeople.
2. Determine the adequacy and effectiveness of the communications in informing the affected communities of the Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire and about its known health effects and risks, including but not limited to:
 - i. Channels (use of social media, TV, radio, print, mobile phones etc);
 - ii. Timing;
 - iii. Credibility and authority with which communications were delivered and factors impacting on this including individuals and positions occupied by those delivering the communications;
 - iv. Issues of tone, salience, resonance and cut-through.
3. Identify problems or shortcomings with the communications including the specific nature of problems and perceived severity of the problems, including but not limited to:
 - i. Any apparent inconsistencies;
 - ii. Incomplete or missing information;
 - iii. Areas of confusion;
 - iv. Anxieties and fears raised by such communications;
 - v. Timeliness of communications.
 - vi. Problems associated with access to and coverage of communications;
 - vii. Issues associated with comprehension.
4. Identify examples of successful and effective communications during the fire period and factors driving the success of these and lessons from them.
5. Provide constructive suggestions about how communications may have been undertaken in a more effective manner to affected communities.
6. Ensure that conclusions and recommendations regarding lessons from these communications are aligned to the communities to which communications were aimed (and sub-groups within these such as people from Non English Speaking Backgrounds and Koori peoples).
7. Make recommendations regarding communications learnings to people in regional areas faced with a longer-term issue.
8. As far as possible, develop a model for delivering future communications to regional communities in comparable circumstances.¹
9. As required, provide expert evidence before the Inquiry.

¹ Note that because of the very specific nature of the incident in Victoria and the communities affected, the findings will necessarily be quite specific to the event, possibly limiting the ability to develop and apply lessons to other circumstances.

4. Approach

Redhanded was supplied with secondary data collected during the three month period from 9 February 2014 until 9 May 2014. This data included:

- Edited video of seven community consultations each lasting between approximately 30 minutes and 1 hour;
- Summary notes from all community consultations;
- Witness statements;
- Written submissions (from individuals and organisations);
- Twitter feeds (collated by VOST Victoria);
- Video of press conferences delivered by relevant authorities including (Chief Health Officer, Fire Services Commissioner, CEO of Environment Protection Authority, Latrobe City Council Mayor etc)
- Media releases;
- Community Information Fact Sheets;
- Press clippings from all major metropolitan and regional newspapers.

Redhanded undertook a thorough analysis of the data listed above as a basis for the communications analysis. No primary data was collected from affected communities.

5. Caveats and Limitations

1. The review of the communications covered the three-month period from 9 February until 9 May 2014.
2. The timeline for delivery of the appraisal was approximately three weeks, which limited the extent of the examination.
3. The review did not collect any primary data and instead look only at secondary data already collected by the Inquiry including, but not limited to recordings, notes and other data obtained from the Community Consultations as well as media reports and clippings obtained by the Inquiry.

6. Main Findings

6.1 Reactions to Communications

Overall, an analysis of the community consultations and witness statements reveals widespread community frustration and anger at the communications issued by relevant authorities. Although some channels were singled out as providing helpful and timely communications, these examples were the exceptions. What follows is a summary of community reactions to communications directed towards them. The summary starts with an analysis of successful communications followed by a longer examination of some of the communications that were problematic.

Unless noted, all quotes come from community members at the community consultation meetings.

6.2 Communication Successes

Those who attended the community consultations were asked to identify what worked well during the crisis.

6.2.1 ABC Local Radio

Though many struggled to identify examples of what worked well, the consultations reveal that in the initial stages of the crisis, around February 9th, the ABC Local Radio provided affected communities with regular updates on the state of the fire.

This was viewed as being extremely helpful as communities could see smoke, were aware of fires and sought information as to how to react to the situation. ABC Local Radio was regarded as a trusted, reliable and easily accessible source of information.

6.2.2 Face-to-face Contact

Personal face-to-face contact through community meetings and a door-knock were greatly valued by community members. As the crisis evolved, it was apparent that some community members were not receiving communications. Towards the end of February, around week three of the crisis, the Latrobe City Council organised a door knock of Morwell residents to inform them of fire status and discuss health concerns. A number of people in the community consultations commented that this was appropriate in reaching audiences who may not have been able to access other communications.

6.2.3 Community Meetings

Community meetings were also identified as a key channel for information acquisition and dissemination. For example, the first such meeting occurred at the Kernot Hall in Morwell on the evening of Friday 14 February. These meetings were very well received because they provided an opportunity for two-way communications and for community members to ask questions and voice concerns.

The second such meeting was held at the same venue on Tuesday 18 February. Craig Lapsley in his Witness Statement commented on this meeting:

“This meeting was a turning point and highlighted to the emergency management agencies the depth of concern within the Morwell community about the mine fire and potential effects of the smoke.” Craig Lapsley Witness Statement Paragraph 166

6.2.4 Handouts / Leaflets

Although the first letterbox drop did not occur until 20 February, a number of people commented on the value of a printed document, especially for more vulnerable community members and those who were not internet or smart-phone connected.

“The emergency services that gave us the handouts were great because up until that point we didn’t know whether we were coming or going.”

6.2.5 Social Media

Social Media and specifically Twitter and Facebook were noted as filling an important gap in providing timely information. Because of the perceived absence of communications and confusion associated with some communications, some residents used Twitter and Facebook to inform themselves as to what was happening. In this crisis affected communities were hungry for information and valued the instant nature of these channels. One of the issues, acknowledged by community members, was the potential for inaccurate information and rumour emanating from these sources. However, in the desire to know as much as possible about the crisis, these channels were valued. This is covered further in Section 6.3.10.

6.2.6 Specific Individuals

Finally, there were some specific individuals who were identified as meeting the needs of the community in terms of informing them in a way that was reassuring. This included the Incident Controller, John Haynes and also Fire Services Commissioner Craig Lapsley.

“The Incident Controller reports at the public meetings were really good. Early on they said we don’t know how long it will take. It was honest and felt trustworthy.”

6.2.7 Summary

It was noteworthy that authorities such as the Department of Health and Department of Human Services were not identified as performing well in their communications and that good communications tended to come from grass-roots sources and through more traditional channels (ABC Local radio, door knocks, leaflets, community meetings).

6.3 Perceived Communications Issues

There were numerous weaknesses and problems identified by affected community members in the communications approach taken by relevant authorities and individuals. What follows is a summary of these issues. Unless noted, this summary is not agency specific office bearer findings are covered in Section 6.4.

“ OVERALL, MY BIGGEST CONCERN THROUGHOUT THE PERIOD WAS THE LACK OF INFORMATION. I FELT THERE WAS NOT ENOUGH INFORMATION AND THE INFORMATION THAT WAS PROVIDED WAS OFTEN MIXED MESSAGES THAT MADE DECISION-MAKING VERY DIFFICULT. ”

– Annette Wheatland Witness statement
Paragraph 31

6.3.1 Timing of Communications

One of the first and most commonly mentioned areas of weakness and frustration for affected communities was the slowness of communications. The community believed that it was in the middle of a major crisis and yet had little information to go on as to how to react and the extent of the problem. Community members, were experiencing first-hand issues of smoke, ash and the impact on their homes and health and were clearly frustrated by a lack of information in the early stages of the crisis.

“It took a week after the disaster started before we heard anything substantive in an emergency response message, from any of the government agencies. The result of that was the community stepped in and developed its own groups to get some action. One of the consequences of that was that the community didn’t have the information to start with. That exacerbates the emotional response to the situation. Why did it take so long before we heard from the responsible authorities something that could help us manage our lives? There was a gap there.”

“It took too long for the Government to acknowledge the health effects of short and long-term smoke exposure.”

Craig Lapsley in his witness statement makes a number of comments about the timing of communications to affected communities. On or around February 11:

“It was apparent that the smoke and ash emanating from the mine and the carbon monoxide (CO) levels were critical community issues. There was a necessary shift in the agency responses to direct community engagement, support and information. In order to support the development of (a) strategic approach to communications, a Media Officer tasked with providing support and writing a communications strategy for the mine fire was deployed from the SCC to the Hazelwood ICC.” (Paragraph 158, 159)

This is noteworthy in that it reveals that a specific communications plan and strategy for the affected communities did not exist and needed to be written.

“On Sunday 16 February 2014, a copy of the draft ‘Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy’ was provided to the FSC and key ICC and RCC leadership teams.” (Paragraph 164)

“The development of a strategic approach to community engagement in relation to the mine fire was developed at a Regional level and fed into the State level planning process. From 20 February 2014 onwards, this approach is reflected in the ‘Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy’ documents incorporated into the State Strategy Support Team briefs.” Craig Lapsley Witness Statement Paragraph 167.

In summary, when the fire commenced there was no strategic communications document for affected communities and it was not until February 16 that a draft was written and not until February 20 (some 11 days after the start of the fire) that the document was adopted. This may help explain why community members believed:

“It took Government two weeks to get here to even start thinking about it.”

In addition to being slow to respond, strong community criticism was directed at the timing of the announcement of the evacuation of vulnerable people. This occurred on the afternoon of Friday 28 February. The main concern here was that it occurred late in the day and immediately before a weekend. Since the overall situation had not changed, the date and timing seemed arbitrary and could have been made earlier in the day or week.

“The evacuation was called at about 3pm on a Friday afternoon but DHS closed not long after so people couldn’t go and get help. They needed to stay open over the weekend. This caused a lot of confusion.”

6.3.2 Incorrect and Inconsistent Communications

Another major short-coming with communications identified by community members was the inconsistency of the communications and in some cases incorrect advice.

“The Council’s incorrect information as to the location of those free health checks carried out by Ambulance Victoria. They didn’t know it was happening and then they gave me the wrong address. The Council has got to get the information correct first time.”

“There were confused messages from health authorities and there still is a certain amount of uncertainty regarding future health issues.”

“There was an inconsistency between the VicRoads and emergency websites. One site said roads were open and the other said they were closed.”

“People wanted to leave but roads were blocked but there was no notification as to how to get out. There was confused information on road closures and no clear direction on exiting the area.”

“The Department of Health and the EPA appeared to be contradictory.”

“Centrelink is located in South Morwell and yet we were told we shouldn’t go to that area.”

“We got confused by various appearances by government leaders that gave different information. This made a lot of us angry.”

6.3.3 Alarming Communications

On Saturday 15th February at 12.59pm, the CFA issued a 'Watch and Act' Alert to more than 26,000 fixed and mobile telephone subscribers within or passing through the area. Watch and Act Alert is described by the CFA as being:

- An emergency threatens you.
- Conditions are changing and you need to start taking action now to protect your health, life and your family.

The Alert stated that:

"Emergency Services responding to the Hazelwood fire have detected elevated levels of carbon monoxide in Morwell, north of the mine. Anyone in Morwell located in the area north of the Princes Freeway and west of McDonald Street / Maryvale Road should shelter indoors ensuring all exterior doors, windows and vents are turned closed and that heating and cooling systems are turned off."

This communication spread across Twitter and was re-tweeted many times. The community response to this was one of great anxiety.

"At 1.02 pm on 15 February 2014 I received the following message on my mobile phone "Watch and Act Morwell residents indoors immediately, close windows/doors/vents. Seek further info via radio". My business partner and I decided that we immediately had to get all the kids out. A fireman drove by and said that everything was fine but to keep the kids inside. I immediately ensured that all the kids and staff were inside and shut the doors. We then sent a text message to all the parents and asked them to collect the kids. We waited with the kids while their parents came. Unfortunately some parents lived over an hour away so it took some time for them to get to the studio. During this time I started to feel a bit light headed. Some of the kids seemed a little bit off. Towards the end of the time I felt funny, it could have been anxiety, I felt that it was harder to breathe. It was very scary. Prior to the 15 February 2014 I was a bit sceptical and felt that some of the parents were overreacting about the smoke. However, after this day I knew the situation was serious." Witness Statement Brooke Burke Paragraph22-25

The effect of this Alert was to create anxiety and concern but it also appeared to conflict with communications from other sources such as The Department of Health which implied that there was no need to be alarmed.

Some two hours later at 3.34pm the advice was downgraded by the CFA and residents were advised there was 'now no requirement to shelter in place'. The downgrading of the Alert, soon after it was issued coupled with the other more benign advice had the effect of adding to the confusion surrounding the communications during the crisis.

"The carbon monoxide tests were alarmist and inconsistent and created division."

See also the later discussion in Section 6.6.2, Cognitive Dissonance.

6.3.4 Lack of Reach and Distribution

A common theme expressed by those who attended the community consultations was that messages simply did not get to a wide enough audience. The main issue identified here was an (initial) over-reliance on electronic communications which failed to reach those who were not digitally connected.

Regional and metropolitan audiences do not differ greatly in terms of digital uptake and usage. That is, regional audiences do not lag in this area compared to metropolitan people. Therefore, in this region, digital messaging may have been expected to work as effectively as in a metropolitan area. However, there are other characteristics of a population which are better predictors of digital uptake and usage—such as age, ethnicity, income and education. For example, older Australians have a much lower uptake and usage of the internet as compared with younger people (Newspoll research 2013). Although a detailed analysis of the effectiveness and reach of digital communications is beyond the scope of this report, we would argue that the demographic profile and the lower Socio Economic Status of the audience would suggest that this was the main issue associated with a lack of reach of electronic communications and the need to use a broader array of channels.

“Electronic communications are good for people with smart phones but not everyone has a smart phone. Not everyone got told the information they needed as quickly as they should have been, especially if they didn’t have a smart phone.”

Text messages weren’t user friendly. Older people couldn’t ask any questions about the texts they have received.”

“Not everybody has a computer or smart phones. The information needs to get out in leaflet form. Get leaflets in the local papers too.”

6.3.5 Lack of Information / Inability to get Answers

The crisis raised a very diverse range of questions for which community members sought answers. This included questions such as:

- How to manage animals and livestock;
- Whether tank water was safe to drink;
- How to remove ash from pools;
- Short-term and longer-term health impacts;
- Toxicity of smoke and ash;
- Potential damage to vehicles;
- Safe approaches to cleaning etc.

Despite the fact that the crisis raised numerous questions, many community members felt very unsure as to where to go to get answers to these questions. Furthermore, when they were directed to places to find answers, invariably the response failed to answer their questions and concerns.

For example, often community members were referred to generic websites or telephone numbers such as 1300 EPAVIC or NURSE-ON-CALL. When they accessed these services, they tended to find that responders were unwilling or unable to answer their queries. Some helplines referred users to other services and vice versa. Additionally, helplines tended to provide only generic advice.

One person telephoned the EPA to find out if smoke was dangerous and what was in it, only to be told they could not assist or provide the information and were referred to WorkCover.

“There was no information as to what to do with pets and livestock.”

“The web-page of Latrobe City Council was not updated.”

“Schools didn’t have the knowledge or information about how to respond for kids.”

“By the second week I was experiencing some difficulty breathing and whistling in my breath. I initially contacted NURSE-ON-CALL who were unable to provide me with any helpful information other than to suggest that if I was feeling unwell I should go to my GP.” Witness Statement of Lisa Wilson Paragraph 13

“I tried numerous times to contact the Department of Health to obtain some information on the impact of the smoke on myself but more importantly on my unborn baby but was unable to obtain any information. On one instance I specifically requested to speak to a Health Officer but was ultimately put through to the grants line at DHS where they very quick to inform me that I was not entitled to any grant, despite my insistence that I wasn’t enquiring about a grant rather I wanted to speak to a Health Officer. I was reassured that a Health Officer would call me back, but I never received a phone call.” Witness Statement of Lisa Wilson Paragraph 17

6.3.6 One-way Communications

Many in the community commented that the communications were almost exclusively one-way. That is, they felt they were unable to voice their concerns or have their questions adequately addressed. Community meetings were an exception to this, but for the most part, community members felt that they were not being listened to and had limited opportunities to get express their concerns. Some even suggested that an advocate was required to help have the community heard among decision makers.

“Responsible bodies like Council were providing information, but not listening to peoples’ experience. So it was one way communications. And not particularly useful information for the kinds of experiences that people were dealing with.”

“More listening to the community and their concerns. A combination of face-to-face and online. A variety of set ups to list their concerns and the ability to keep the dialogue open with an emphasis on listening.”

“We evacuated from our home and we can’t move back because I have allergies and I can’t breathe after being in the housed for half an hour. My insurance company won’t cover me because of the wording of our policy. We’ve disputed it but they said ‘no’. And Latrobe City Council give me a bucket! It is upsetting. We feel we’ve been abandoned by every level of government and every agency that should be there to help and support us. It is quite emotional to talk about it. We want someone to advocate on our behalf because we try and talk through the local paper or whatever we can but it doesn’t seem to make an impact. That’s why we are here tonight to have our story heard and influence something to happen to help our community.”

“I attempted on many occasions to escalate the concerns of the community to the Latrobe City Council and Department of Human Services, however it fell on deaf ears.” Witness Statement of Tracie Lund Paragraph 31

6.3.7 Communications too Basic or too Complex

A further issue identified by community members with respect to communications was the basic nature of much of the advice. This included numerous EPA smoke advisory updates regarding the presence of high and low level smoke, which failed to address some of the more pressing information needs and concerns and instead provided information which, for many, was self-evident. For example, to stay indoors if possible, enact asthma management plan etc.

More fundamental community questions associated with health impacts, questions about animals and livestock health, how to treat rain water tanks, toxicity of ash etc were left unanswered.

“Lack of decisive actions or only very basic recommendations. Get out if you can but it’s not that serious. Very limited information.”

Whilst some information and advice was far too repetitive and basic (such as the EPA smoke advisories) other advice was too complex and used language that was not well understood.

The EPA was singled out here also. For example, words and phrases like ‘particulate matter’ and ‘superficial irritant properties’ and ‘PM 2.5’.

John Merritt of the EPA acknowledged this in his Witness Statement:

“As the incident unfolded, it became clear that more information was required by the community. The challenge was that the next level of information, such as individual test results started to introduce more complex scientific ideas, principles and concepts and as such required substantially more explanation and translation into easily understood terms.” John Merritt Witness Statement Paragraph 50

The difficulty that the EPA had in translating their data into information that was easily understood, further added to the problems associated with communications during the crisis. In summary, much of the communications issued by authorities was viewed as being either too self-evident and basic or too complex and therefore failed to strike the middle ground of being easily understood and valuable.

6.3.8 Apparent Lack of Empathy and Understanding

One of the other themes that emerged from analysing the communications and the way in which these were received was that the community felt that communications lacked empathy and understanding.

The affected communities were experiencing major emotional and physical distress and yet the message coming from authorities failed to acknowledge this and appeared to downplay the seriousness of what was being felt.

Community members made a number of points about wanting their emotional state to be recognised and in so doing have their positions validated. What was sought was re-assurance, empathy and decisive action.

“The Chief Health Officer meant well but did not communicate effectively. The community responded to her style and words as ‘shut up, stop whingeing and get on with it’. What she could have said was – ‘I know you are suffering, we have not had a situation like this before and we are carrying out urgent research, how can we help?’”

“If someone had been speaking the truth in the first place there would have been a lot more happy people.”

The communications also demonstrated a lack of understanding of the community. For example, local residents don't use the term 'Morwell South' and yet the authorities referred to this region. This further undermined the credibility of the message and put distance between the communicators and recipients.

“All of a sudden Morwell had a new suburb called Morwell south. Morwell never had a suburb called Morwell south before the fires. That caused so much animosity between the residents. Whether it was the State's fault I don't know, but they need to stop putting communities against each other. Tell us the truth about our health.”

6.3.9 Distrust of Communications

Arising from the major problems experienced with communications was a fundamental loss of trust in the communications being issued to the community. The quotes below illustrate how some in the community reached a point of believing that they were actually being lied to.

“We felt we were lied to by the Health Department.”

“Unreliable information from EPA about air quality and we didn't trust the information from the EPA.”

“Government didn't appear to support or trust the Chief Health Officer and that caused us to distrust all the agencies. The agencies weren't aligned.”

“Latrobe Regional Hospital were using clipboards and there was suspicion as to why their presentations were not recorded on computers. Their presentations in hospitals seemed to downplay seriousness. People were not trusting the information provided.”

“Total lack of communication from every strata of government. The information on health was an outright lie. It sounded like it was to placate the population. (And yet) the obvious incorrectness of the information led to a whole of panic.”

“There was no recognition that people were getting sick. They denied people were getting sick. We know there were extra presentations at Latrobe Regional Hospital. Doctors were told not to put conditions down as smoke inhalation.”

“The advice from the Chief Health Officer regarding air quality and its impacts was misleading. We feel it was to avoid later litigation and to avoid evacuations. They only told us what they wanted to hear.”

In the absence of receiving the quality and consistent communications and answers the community sought and with increasing distrust, the authorities appeared to lose control of the messaging, leading to social media commentary filling this void. This is discussed next.

6.3.10 Loss of Control of Messaging and Role of Social Media

Where communications were either too basic, repetitive, complex or delivered from sources for whom the community had lost trust, grass-roots community messaging and social media appeared to fill a void. The community felt there was an information vacuum and that their health and wellbeing was not put first and hence the community turned to the internet and to social media. An issue here was that some of the content on social media was inaccurate.

“Health services messages were inconsistent and unclear and allowed incorrect information to get out, which meant that self-proclaimed experts hijacked the process and caused alarmist responses. Because of that, the media was allowed to sensationalise the event.”

“There was a big rally here and one of the people in the community handed out health forms (information) for people suffering from sore throats, stinging eyes, bad chests and blood noses. But who did it from the Government? Nobody. It took a local member to do it, but that only got to people who attended the rally.”

“We felt that Facebook worked well because we weren’t getting information from other sources.”

“I also tried to keep our website and Facebook page up to do with the latest information for the community. However, this was a hard process as I was ping ponging from site to site to get the right information and the information was changing so quickly. This amplified the distress in the community. It was very difficult to get clear and easy to follow information. The Government websites often published information that did not make sense. For example, it was very difficult to obtain information about the assistance packages.”

“Teachers had to make a call themselves rather than rely on EPA lack of communications.”

6.3.11 Lack of Apparent Coordination / Central Oversight of Messaging

Community members thought that one of the key reasons behind some of the issues previously discussed was a lack of co-ordination among the agencies involved.

Despite having the appearance of being coordinated and delivering joint press conferences with relevant agencies, the experience of residents in the Morwell area was quite the opposite. The message received was confusing, with agencies appearing to contradict each other and affected communities struggling to find the answers and reassurance they were seeking.

“The delivery of information was terrible. There appeared to be a lot of talking and not much listening. People did not know what was safe. It was an epic fail. Clearer and more organised communication from the providers of relief and assistance was required. There was a heavy reliance on the internet to provide the relevant information, however there were a lot of residents that are not connected to the internet. The message was provided like a confused jigsaw puzzle which contributed to the distress of the community. The community’s concerns are primarily directed at the Local Council, the Department of Health, the Department of Human Services and the Government in general.”

6.4 Agency and Spokespeople Specific Findings

6.4.1 Department of Health

The Department of Health and specifically the Chief Health Officer was singled out for strong criticism with respect to communications. In summary, the messages being put out by the Chief Health Officer were interpreted by the community as downplaying the seriousness of the event which did not match with their personal experiences.

“We were being told by the Chief Health Officer that all was OK when it was not and we knew people were really suffering.”

“The Health Department didn’t get info out quickly enough and didn’t inform us in a truthful manner.”

“The Information from the Chief Health Officer didn’t work well at all. The information she was giving was contradictory.”

“Every time that woman’s name got mentioned there was uproar. If you are going to appoint a minister (sic) to talk on behalf of the future of our children, then she needs to be knowledgeable. If she doesn’t know then don’t let her take three weeks to find it out... Do not put her on TV and continuously tell people everything is alright. People are not stupid. People prefer the truth to be put in a manner that they can understand, rather than someone of importance saying there is nothing to worry about.”

“Chief Health Officer gave misleading information and treated the local community with contempt.”

6.4.2 EPA

The community consultations revealed a high degree of resentment and anger directed towards EPA communications. This was underpinned by a belief that:

- Information was slow to be released;
- Information was not particularly helpful;
- Information about (relative safety) did not match with community experiences (experiencing adverse health effects);
- Inability to explain and adequately address concerns;
- Credibility of the EPA was damaged when they framed their primary responsibility as one of reporting to the Chief Health Officer and not to the community (this was a misreading the situation by being overly bureaucratic in process);
- Lack of trust in data and figures;
- Information was at times overly simple, repetitive and unhelpful while other communications was complex and not adequately explained.

“The EPA didn’t work well at all. They didn’t start monitoring until two weeks after the fire. The EPA staff didn’t tell us the information we needed to know.”

“The EPA involvement was too little too late.”

“The EPA was worse than useless. They lied to us. The EPA bulletins said the air was fine, when it wasn’t.”

“I am disgusted with the EPA.”

6.4.3 CFA

Possibly because of the credibility of the CFA generally and their integrated involvement with the community, there was significant praise for the work of the CFA. For the most part, communications were also well received, however, a notable exception was the alarming Watch and Act Alert regarding Carbon Monoxide levels around Morwell and that it was downgraded soon after.

“The CFA was clear with the message that they were delivering to the community and went out of their way to hear the communities concerns, however this was not the same with all the other agencies.”

6.4.4 Latrobe City Council

Community members expressed the view that the Latrobe City Council was in a difficult position in that it was recognised as being under-resourced and that many local community members worked at the Council. However, the Council was criticised, in that many community members found it very difficult to get information from Council of any value.

The program of handing out plastic buckets and gloves was widely derided for being woefully inadequate and lacking any communications regarding how to approach decontamination.

“Trying to get information from Local Government was non-existent. No one would listen, apologise or show any interest.”

“I also believe that the community saw the bucket program as an insult.” Witness Statement of Tracie Lund Paragraph 33

“The plastic buckets were a joke for hazardous materials.”

I contacted the Shire to ask if there was someone to speak to about what local businesses should do. They said there wasn't anyone.” Witness Statement Brooke Burke Paragraph 14

Council's Witness Statement to the Inquiry acknowledges some of these issues:

“The wide array of different agencies, senior officials and elected representatives involved in the response to the Hazelwood Brown Coal Mine Fire created challenges in effectively communicating with representatives of Council and the community.

At times, the Council was requested to attend various announcements and press conferences at short notice and often with no clarity as to what was being announced. This led to confusion for members of the community and Council as to what the role of Council was during the response phase of the fire.

At other times, members of the Victorian Government and its respective agencies made decisions and announcements that Council was unaware of and that Council was not resourced or equipped to implement. This left Council unable to react to the best of its ability. It also fuelled mounting anger in the community when there was an expectation for these decision and announcements to be implemented immediately. There was a wide array of agencies providing messages to the community from their respective departments but it appeared that at times this was not coordinated or consistent in its approach. Council believes that this created confusion, fear, anger and a lack of trust within the community.”

John Mitchell Acting CEO, Latrobe City Council in Submission to Inquiry 14 May.

6.4.5 GDF Suez

GDF Suez as the mine operator was noticeably absent in any communications. No public statements were issued despite the fact that many in the community expected their involvement to be much greater. Some thought that the mine operator appeared to hide behind Craig Lapsley. Community consultations revealed that the lack of communication with the community by GDF Suez appeared to show a lack of commitment and responsibility toward the community.

“Lack of representation from Hazelwood mine at the first two community meetings, when they said they thought it was all to do with health and therefore didn't deem it necessary to attend.”

6.5 Communicating to Regional and Rural Audiences

Redhanded was founded on the basis that regional and rural Australians exhibit differences in values, attitudes and behaviours from their metropolitan cousins and yet this is not well understood among many organisations that engage with that audience. Consequently, engagement with regional and rural audiences may be based on stereotypes and fail to adequately resonate and engage that audience. It is part of Redhanded's mission to ensure detailed, current and useful market knowledge is used to inform the development of communications that successfully "cross the great divide" between metro and regional and rural markets and resonate with its audience.

While much is known about the values, attitudes and behaviours of urbanites, the needs and expectations of those who live in regional and rural Australia are less well researched and understood. Unfortunately, many communication programs fail to appreciate the significant divide that exists between metro and regional audiences and tend to use language, channels or propositions that do not resonate with regional and rural Australians values and beliefs.

This discussion is particularly pertinent in relation to the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry and the criticality of optimum communications to the affected communities in and around Morwell. What then makes this audience different and how best to communicate with them?

The determination of Australia's suburb geography is based on the ABS remoteness structure - the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS). By this definition Morwell, located 136km ESE of Melbourne, is classified as inner regional Australia. The classification of Morwell and its surrounding areas frames the following discussion and provides an objective reference for why an understanding of the differences between metro and regional audiences, and in particular, Victoria and Morwell, is paramount to effective communication programs.

6.5.1 Metro vs Regional

Over 18% of Australia's population, almost one in five Australians, live in inner regional areas (ABS, 2013). People living in inner regional Australia and broader regional areas of Australia have shown marked differences across two important factors that influence their responsiveness to communications. An understanding of these fundamental differences is pertinent to the determination of how best to communicate to inner regional areas like Morwell: These are:

- Demography & Profile;
- Values.

The table below provides a summary of the differences based on the above factors with each explored in more detail in the following section.

Exhibit 1.

Demo-graphics & Values	Regional Profile	Variable	Metro	Regional
Demographics	Older	% 50+	37%	43%
	Smaller households	1-2 person households	37%	46%
		3-4 person households	45%	38%
	Less educated	Degree	31%	18%
		Certificate	16%	20%
	Lower socio-economic status	Average household income	\$99,000	\$80,000
		Net worth	\$300,000	\$249,000
Australian heritage	Born in Australia	63%	84%	
Values	Community oriented	Feel part of local community	70%	77%
		Volunteer in a typical week	17%	22%
		Active member of community based club	35%	40%
	Australian loyal	Consider myself Australian	81%	88%
		Prefer to buy Australian made	75%	83%
		Try and buy Australian made products as often as possible	68%	74%
	Traditionalists	Like things to stay the same	41%	45%
		Progressive viewpoint on social issues and trends	37%	32%
		Attracted to new things and ideas	35%	32%
	Politically cautious	Don't trust the government	53%	60%
		Government is a major concern	19%	26%

6.5.2 Regional Demographics

While the demographic make-up of audiences does not directly determine the effectiveness of communication, it significantly influences how a communication should be developed for an audience. Again, given Morwell is classified as an inner regional area the following information is pertinent to the recommendations of how to most effectively communicate with the Morwell population. The demography of regional Australia is unique in the following ways:

- **Older cohort:** Inner regional Australians are significantly older than other Australians. While 37% of metro Australians are 50 years of age or older, 43% of those in regional Australia are in the same age bracket (Roy Morgan, 2012).
- **Higher proportion of smaller households:** Being older correlates with statistics that show those in regional Australia are also more likely to be classified as a 1-2 person household (46% vs 37%) as opposed to a 3-4 person household (38% vs 45%) (Roy Morgan, 2012). These could be classified as empty nesters or retired couples.
- **Less educated:** While 31% of metro Australians have a degree only 18% of those in regional Australia hold a similar level of formal education (Roy Morgan, 2012). Inner regional Australians are more likely to hold a certificate (20% vs 16%), but again, less likely to hold a bachelor degree (8% vs 13%) (ABS, 2006). This reinforces the common perception that regional areas of Australia are more associated with “blue collar” work than those in the city.
- **Lower income and wealth:** It does appear a relationship exists between formal education and wealth with regional Australians significantly less wealthy than their metro counterparts. Regional Australians have \$19,000 less in average household income (\$80,000 vs \$99,000) and a lower individual net worth (\$249,000 vs \$300,000) (Roy Morgan, 2012).
- **Australian born and strong heritage:** Those living in inner regional areas are more likely to have been born in Australia. In fact, 84% of regional Australians are born in Australia compared to 63% of those in metro areas (Roy Morgan, 2012). This is particularly relevant when considering 28% of people in Australian cities were born in Australia compared to only 11% in inner regional areas (ABS, 2006).

6.5.3 Regional Values

The demographic data on inner regional Australians and Morwell residents provides a rationale for the values that resonate these Australians. The effectiveness of communications in informing or creating behaviour change is determined largely by how well the communication resonates with the target audiences’ values. The following values are more prevalent in regional areas of Australia and must be understood when considering the development of communications for regional areas such as Morwell.

- **High community orientation:** The most notable value prevalent in regional and rural Australia is the affinity this group has with their communities. While 70% of those in city areas feel part of the local community 77% feel the same way in inner regional areas – 84% have the same feeling in remote areas (HILDA, 2007). This feeling is largely driven by personal actions and engagement with the community. 22% of inner regional Australians volunteer in a typical week compared to those in the city (HILDA, 2007). 40% are an active member of a sporting, hobby or community-based club compared to only 35% of city dwellers (HILDA, 2007).
- **Australian loyalty:** Regional Australians resonate more with Australia and their purchase behaviour and actions reinforce this. While 81% of metro Australians “consider themselves Australian”, 88% of regional Australians feel the same. This feeling is shown in purchase considerations where regional Australians are more likely to “prefer to buy Australian made” and “buy Australian made products as often as possible” (Regional TV Marketing; Roy Morgan, 2012).
- **Traditionalists:** The older age of regional Australians, less formal education and lower income and wealth support the assertion regional Australians are more traditional in their views and values. Change is challenging for this group of Australians and is reinforced with the statistic that shows regional Australians are more likely to want things to stay the same (45% vs 41%), have a less progressive view point on social issues (37% vs 32%) and are less attracted to new things and ideas (35% vs 32%) (Roy Morgan, 2012). While some would suggest this paints a picture of regional Australian’s being “stuck in their ways”, it in fact shows this group of Australians want to preserve the “typical” Australian values they were raised with and believe in. 64% of regional Australians feel the fundamental values of our society are under serious threat, significantly higher than the 55% of metro Australians that feel the same way (Roy Morgan, 2012).
- **Politically cautious:** Often, regional and rural Australians are most impacted by government decisions and proposed legislation. Given this, regional Australians are more likely to distrust the government (60% vs 53%) and consider government a major concern (26% vs 19%) (Roy Morgan, 2012).

6.5.4 Specific Morwell Region Characteristics

While metro and regional Australians differ across their attitudes, values and behaviours, the Morwell region differs again. The following table and points outline how the Morwell population differs from other Victorian regions.

Exhibit 2.

Demo-graphics	Descriptor	Variable	Victoria	Morwell	Latrobe city
Demographics	Australian heritage	Australian ancestry	24%	29%	-
		Australia as country of birth	69%	77%	-
	Smaller households	Couple without children	37%	40%	-
		Couples with children	46%	36%	-
	More likely to be retired	Retired	19%	28%	-
	Less educated	Bachelor degree or higher	21%	-	10%
		Vocational qualification	16%	-	24%
	"Blue collar" employment	Technicians, trade workers or labourers	23%	32%	-
		Professionals or managers	35%	22%	-
	Lower income	Gross household income less than \$600 a week	24%	37%	-
		Median weekly family income without children	\$2,046	\$1,854	-
		Median weekly family income with children	\$2,242	\$2,021	-
	High unemployment	Unemployed aged 15 years and over	5.4%	10.7%	8%
		SEIFA index of disadvantage	-	1010	940 (ranked 74/80 LGAs)

- Australian born:** The prominence of Australian born people in regional areas is further evidenced in Morwell with 28.7% having an Australian ancestry as opposed to 23.3% of Victorians (Census, 2011). 77.4% of Morwell residents call Australia their country of birth compared to a significantly less 68.6% of all Victorians with Morwell also having a significantly higher portion of residence with two parents born in Australia than other Victorians (64.3% vs 50.4%) (Census, 2011). The city of Latrobe also shows that only 8% of its population has a non-English speaking background, significantly less than the 20% in other Victorian areas (Latrobe, 2013).
- Higher proportion smaller households:** There are significantly more couple families without children (40% vs 36.7%) than couple families with children (35.9% vs 46%) in Morwell when compared to other Victorians (Census, 2011). This is reinforced in the broader Latrobe region where only 26% are classified as couples with children compared to 32% across all of Victoria (Latrobe, 2013).
- Higher proportion of retired cohort:** Consistent with being an older demographic as outlined in the previous section, Morwell residents are more likely to be retired with 28% of couple families in Morwell not working compared with only 19% of other Victorians (Census, 2011).
- Less educated with “blue collar” workers:** The “blue collar” type work in inner regional Australia is prominent in the Morwell region with 32% of those employed in Morwell as technicians, trade workers or labourers as opposed to 22.9% of other Victorians (Census, 2011). The “white collar” nature of other Victorian work is evidenced by 35.2% of other Victorians being classified as professionals or managers, significantly more than the 21.7% of Morwell residents (Census, 2011). This again is reinforced in the broader Latrobe city with only 10% holding a bachelor or higher degree compared with 21% of other Victorians and even 13% in other regional areas (Latrobe, 2013). Again, the labour intensive nature of work in Morwell is further evidenced with the Latrobe city having 24% of people with a vocational qualification compared to only 16% of other Victorians (Latrobe, 2013).
- Low income:** 36.9% of Morwell residents have a gross household income of less than \$600 a week compared with only 23.85% of other Victorians (Census, 2011). Couple families with two incomes also have, on average, a 9.6% lower median family income than those in other Victorian areas. Furthermore, the broader Latrobe city reinforces this with the cities average median weekly household income 22.5% lower than that of other Victorian areas (Latrobe, 2013).
- Higher levels of unemployment:** Morwell has an unemployment figure of over 10% (10.7%); almost double that of other Victorian areas with 5.4% (Census, 2011). This is evidenced across the Latrobe city with an unemployment figure almost 50% high than other Victorian areas (8% vs 5.4%) (Latrobe, 2013).
- Poor SEIFA index of disadvantage:** The SEIFA index of disadvantage measures the relative level of socio-economic disadvantage based on a range of Census characteristics. It provides a general view of the relative level of disadvantage in one area compared to others and is used to advocate for an area

based on its level of disadvantage. The index is derived from attributes that reflect disadvantage such as low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment, and jobs in relatively unskilled occupations. Lower levels of formal education, significantly lower income levels and a higher unemployment rate reinforce why, in 2011, the city of Latrobe scored 939.7 on the SEIFA index of disadvantage (Latrobe, 2013) To put this into perspective, across the 80 local government areas in Victoria, Latrobe held the 7th lowest (worst) SEIFA index of disadvantage – 74th.

Another factor to consider when communicating to affected communities in the Morwell region is that Morwell also has a Koori population and those from a non-English speaking background. Community consultations took place with these groups and revealed some specific issues and needs. For example:

- During the crisis, information wasn't given to Koori organisations but was given to other non-government organisations. This meant that this group felt isolated and vulnerable;
- Financial assistance wasn't available to all groups (needed to have a Health Care Card) and among those Koori people in the community who did receive the financial assistance there was some evidence that this was spent on alcohol;
- Koori people experienced the feeling of not being listened to when they spoke at community consultations.
- Communications to those didn't speak English or had limited English literacy was poor.

“Notifications to leave messages didn't get out to people with disabilities, elderly and those who don't speak English.”

The above analysis suggests the audience in the Morwell region is a more socially disadvantaged region across a number of standard government and statistical measures as compared with metropolitan and other regional areas.

Based on the above analysis the Morwell region requires tailored communications that takes into account these social and demographic differences. Best practice approaches to communicating to this audience appears in the Recommendations section of this report.

6.6 Framing the Crisis

6.6.1 Bushfire or Chronic Health Crisis?

On Sunday 9 February 2014, there were numerous bushfires burning across Victoria. On that day the Hazelwood Mine Fire started as a bushfire outside the mine perimeter and spread into the mine. The fact that the crisis started as a bushfire drove the direct involvement of particular authorities as well as command and control structures. In other words, the origin and characterisation of the crisis influenced how authorities reacted to it. In this case a well-practiced emergency response framework (and communications) associated with a bushfire was deployed.

However, both Craig Lapsley and John Merritt acknowledge that although this crisis may have started as a bushfire, in reality it was quite a different event.

“The long lasting nature of the incident meant that the usual health advisories for bushfires (based on smoke exposure for shorter periods of time) had to be adapted both in terms of the nature of the smoke and ash and other risk factors (due to the fire being a coal fire). Further, the exposure to the smoke and other irritants was longer than normally encountered.” John Merritt Witness Statement Paragraph 93

“PM 2.5 has not generally been tested for in the rest of the EPA ambient air monitoring network as it is most often related to short-term events such as fire or from poorly controlled vehicle emissions.” John Merritt Witness Statement Paragraph 101

“There was a heavy reliance and close collaboration between EPA and DH on the existing Bushfire Protocol which was developed for smoke from bushfires and fuel reduction burning. Based on EPA forecasts against set trigger levels, this formed the basis for the regular smoke advisories provided to the public.” John Merritt Witness Statement Paragraph 103

“I determined on Thursday February 14 2014 that this Mine fire should have a HazMat overlay applied to operations. This influenced the way in which the event was dealt with by the emergency services from this point onwards. It also reflected the complexity of the event as it had evolved by that time.” Craig Lapsley Witness Statement, Paragraph 128

As a result of the bushfire characterisation, well established protocols were deployed. This meant that communications drew upon messaging such as Watch and Act Alerts, however these approaches appeared to be a poor fit with the crisis (and created alarm. See Section 6.3.3).

The community consultations revealed that one of the reasons for the perceived problems with communications and agency integration was that traditional frameworks and procedures that were invoked didn't adequately capture the nature of the disaster. That is, the response was oriented towards a shorter term natural disaster such as a bushfire but not a longer-term crisis.

“The traditional emergency response framework doesn't work for a medium-term disaster over a month. You can't wait for a month to start recovery aspect. They need to look at Emergency Management framework.”

“It needs to be called a disaster. Government don’t treat us as fools.”

The Hazelwood Mine Fire may have started as a bushfire but finished as a health crisis. A timely and more accurate classification of the crisis would have led to a better response to it. Authorities took a fire fighting approach to the crisis and were forced to adapt this on the run when it became apparent they were dealing with a longer-term health crisis. Communications were therefore not fit-for-purpose.

Though beyond the scope of this analysis, Redhanded believes that this crisis could be more accurately classified as an industrial accident or technological disaster as opposed to a natural disaster. The framing of the crisis in this context would drive a very different (and we would argue better) set of emergency management procedures and communications. It is therefore critical that the ‘true’ nature of such a disaster is recognised early and the response that is triggered fits the type of event.

There exists a growing body of literature on the characteristics of and responses to Chronic Technological Disasters² (which appears to fit the Hazelwood Mine Fire). We therefore recommend that lessons from the literature on Chronic Technological Disasters be examined as a model for the development of response frameworks that better fit the nature of the Hazelwood Mine Fire and possible future events like it.

6.6.2 Cognitive Dissonance

The previous discussion posits that the way in the fire was ‘framed’ in terms of being a bushfire directly influenced the way in which authorities reacted to it. Although the crisis started as a bushfire, it quickly evolved into quite a different event, more akin to an industrial accident leading to a longer-term community health crisis.

Communications and actions undertaken by authorities (especially in the early stages) failed to adequately recognise the true nature of the event and did not meet the needs of affected communities. The community was experiencing one thing (ill-health and ash contamination) while the statements issued by the EPA and Chief Health Officer did not match with this (effectively ‘be alert but not alarmed’) and indeed failed to acknowledge the serious health and lifestyle problems being felt by the community. This created a disconnect between the messages from key authorities and what communities were experiencing. This is also known as Cognitive Dissonance.

Cognitive Dissonance is the feeling a person experiences when they hold and attempt to reconcile two conflicting viewpoints. The Morwell community was being told one thing and experiencing another. The dissonance was made worse by the fact that one viewpoint was being delivered ‘expert’ authority figures and therefore came with a sense of magnitude and trust. The power relationship was also unequal in that the message was being delivered by authorities to a lower socio-economic status audience who are typically disenfranchised and disengaged from power and authority.

² As a starting point: J. LaPlante and J.S. Kroll Smith: ‘Coordinated Emergency Management, The Challenge of the Chronic Technological Disaster’ (CTD), International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters, August 1989, Vol.7, No 2, pp 134-150.

“There was confusion when the Chief Health Officer was saying there was nothing to worry about and yet we had readings up to 1809.”

*“When I was at the office in Morwell, I had sore red eyes, a sore throat and I was tight across my chest...I kept listening to the authorities to hear what they were saying about the conditions and they kept saying that it was safe. However, when I looked outside I did not think that we should have to work in the poor conditions...I didn't believe the advice that it was safe to be in Morwell.” Annette Wheatland
Witness statement Paragraph 13, 16*

By contrast, the statements below from the Chief Health Officer do not match with the experiences of the community, leading to Cognitive Dissonance:

“I think people have very appreciated those basic health checks and the accurate health information that's been given out.” Chief Health Officer Interview February 27.

“I think there's been a terrific level of cooperation from the CFA fighting the fire; the Department of Human Services, who are supporting people if they need assistance to relocate; the various health agencies around town, so the GPs, the Latrobe Regional Hospital and the community health centre; Ambulance Victoria, of course, are playing a very key role in running the health assessment centre for us; and the local council, I think, are doing a terrific job in terms of supporting the community through this.” Chief Health Officer Interview February 27.

In response to Cognitive Dissonance and to reconcile competing viewpoints, we saw some community members rejecting what authorities were saying while for others it led to self-doubt:

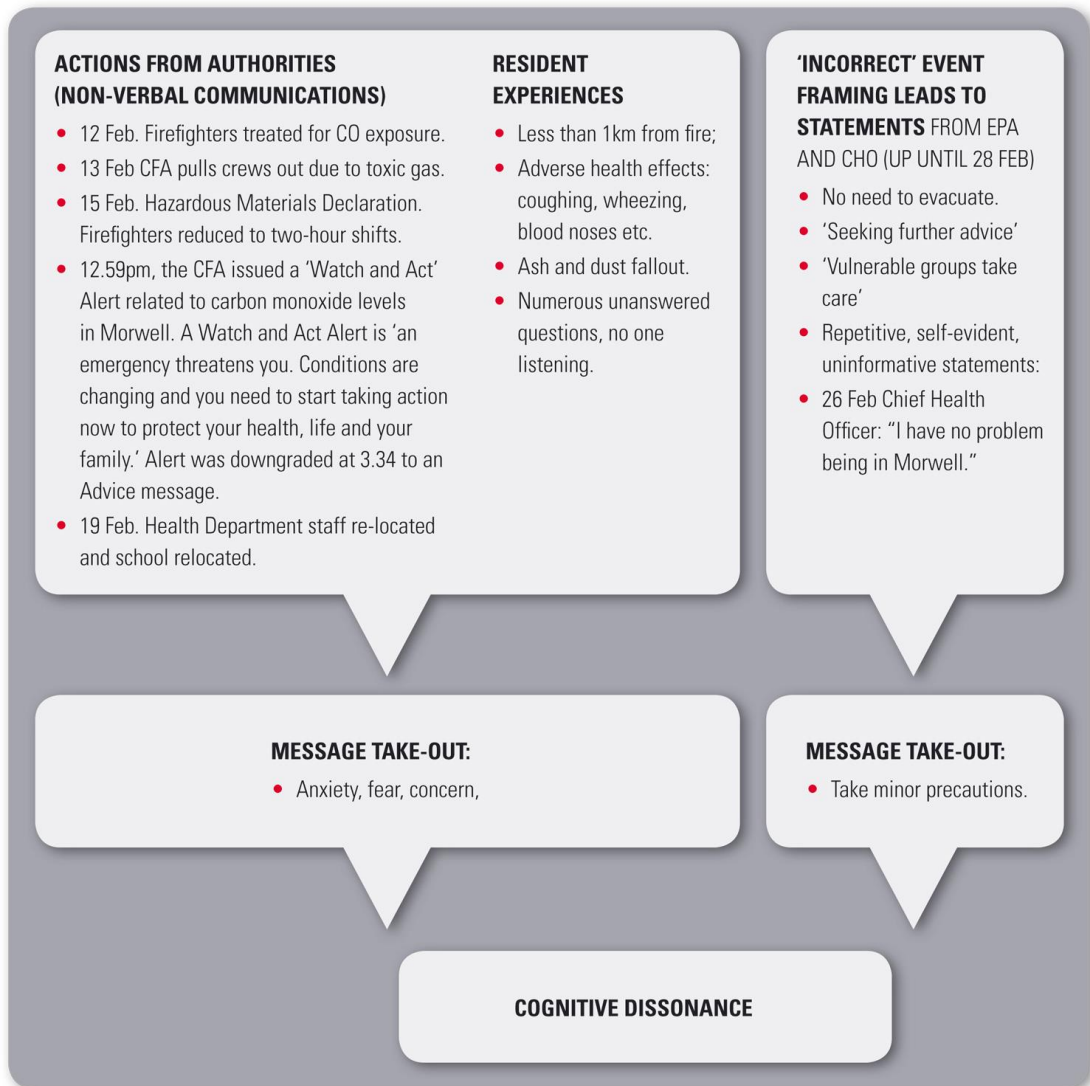
“The government sent out messages that said everything was fine, which was insulting.”

“The person at DHS who gave me the \$500 made me feel very guilty and ashamed about having the money. She did not believe me that my son was on a disability pension.” Ray Whittaker Paragraph 20

The apparent downplaying of the severity of the situation did not fit with individual experiences and caused some people to question their own judgement about the mine fire.

“I am well educated and have travelled yet my experiences during this period made me feel stupid and disheartened.” Witness Statement Lisa Wilson Paragraph 19

The Exhibit below summarises the competing viewpoints leading to Cognitive Dissonance:

Exhibit 3.

In summary, the 'incorrect' framing of the event and apparent misreading of the situation by authorities created a situation where affected communities were experiencing major emotional and physical distress and yet the message coming from authorities failed to acknowledge this, leading to Cognitive Dissonance.

7. Conclusions

Redhanded undertook an analysis of the communications issued by key authorities and individuals during the Hazelwood Mine Fire and the community responses to these communications. What this analysis revealed was that communications from relevant agencies during the crisis, exhibited the following deficiencies:

1. Initial communications to affected communities was slow and there was a failure to deliver timely and accurate information at critical times throughout the crisis;
2. Communication efforts appeared reactionary – not part of a considered plan or co-ordinated effort. There was an apparent lack of coordination among relevant authorities which contributed to the problems in communications experienced by affected communities.
3. There was a lack of a single credible voice in relation to communicating health risks.
4. Factually incorrect and inconsistent communications were issued;
5. Some communications, notably the CFA Watch and Act alert associated with Carbon Monoxide had the effect of (unnecessarily) alarming the community, especially since it was downgraded only hours later;
6. Some information, particularly from the EPA was either too basic or too complex:
 - a. Too complex: Information related to EPA air quality data was complex and not well understood by the community;
 - b. Too basic: Affected communities found EPA News and Updates associated with smoke advisories to be repetitive, self-evident and uninformative;
7. Communications failed to adequately reach some members of the affected communities, notably older residents, Koori people and those from Non-English speaking backgrounds;
8. The crisis raised many questions among residents in affected communities. The channels available and opportunities available to raise questions were limited and those channels that were used were found mostly to provide inadequate answers.
9. Cognitive dissonance was created when communications and advice from authorities conflicted with lived experience. There was a major disconnect between the direct, personal experiences of the affected communities (ill-health, ash contamination, anxiety, concern) and the communications issued by the Department of Health and the EPA which appeared to downplay and not adequately address community concerns. This led community members to distrust the advice and communications being issued.
10. In the absence of trustworthy communications, relevant authorities were perceived to have lost control of the messaging and social media and community networks filled the void.
11. Communications failed to adequately recognise and account for the social and demographic profile of the community to which they were aimed. Communications also illustrated a lack of understanding of the community. This manifested itself in a lack of empathy - community members perceived they were not being listened to or respected. There was also a lack of understanding of most effective communication channels to reach regional communities, lower socio economic groups and disadvantaged individuals.

It is the view of this author that communications to affected communities were, to a large extent, deficient and failed to adequately meet the needs of the communities to which they were aimed. Though some communications were effective and those delivering them were acting in difficult and changing conditions, in many cases, instead of assisting the affected communities, the weaknesses in communications contributed to community frustration, confusion and general distress.

8. Recommendations

Trust is the cornerstone of effective crisis communications. In this crisis authorities struggled to build trust from the outset and therefore communications failed to achieve their desired result. To underpin trust in communications in this community it is recommended that the following occurs:

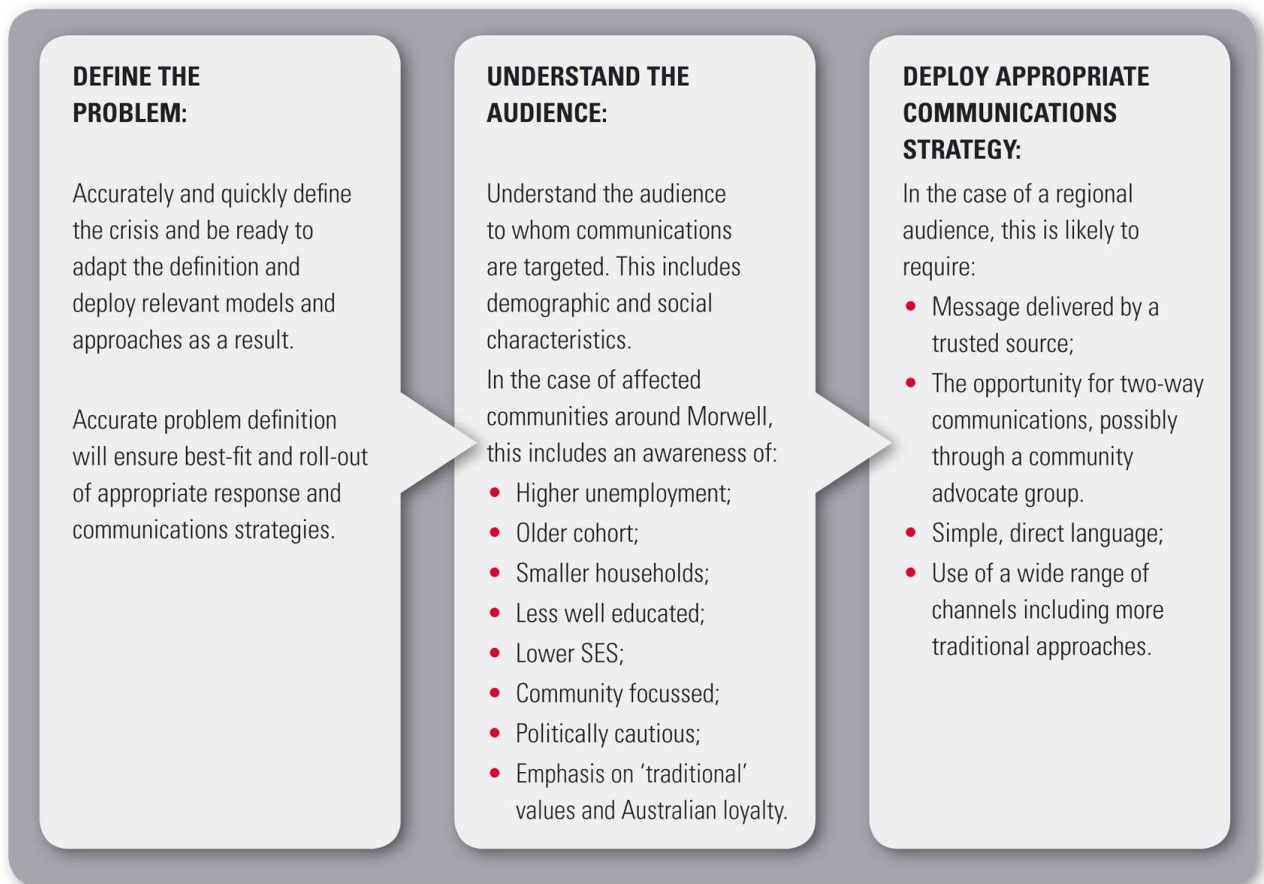
1. **Fast and accurate characterisation of the nature of the crisis and the ability to adapt if the crisis changes is critical.** It was apparent that bushfire response models were deployed initially and failed to adequately address the issue of an industrial accident leading to a longer-term health crisis. Accurate characterisation will ensure deployment of best-fit frameworks and resources. It will also ensure that communications are fit-for-purpose and build trust quickly.
2. **Crisis communications to an affected community such as Morwell must take into account the social and demographic characteristics of that audience and demonstrate an accurate understanding and knowledge of that community.** The Morwell region exhibits characteristics which set it apart from other areas and impact on the approach to communications. A clear understanding of this must flow through all communications and impact on channels, tone, style and content. Arising from this recommendation is a series of best practice recommendations for communicating to this audience.
3. **Use trusted spokespeople.** Regional Australians have a higher distrust of government and a stronger affinity with their community. Utilising a community leader to deliver a message would ensure residents felt their situation was understood intimately. Utilising a community member will deliver an inclusive tone and tap into the importance of community in Morwell. This means avoiding bureaucrats and those closely aligned with government and the city. It also means identifying potential communicators from within the community or those who have a tangible link to that community. It may also mean moving response teams to the area so they can understand first-hand what is being experienced and build trust and a sense of genuine engagement, concern and camaraderie. Government is a source of distrust and if possible spokespeople should be at 'arm's length' from government. An organisation like the CFA is trusted and respected and therefore a spokesperson from this organisation or even someone from a military background is likely to be better received.

4. **Facilitate two-way communications through the establishment of a community advocate group during a crisis:** Although community meetings worked well, most in the community felt there was insufficient channels to have their opinions heard and a lack of listening among authorities. Therefore, we recommend that in a crisis of a similar nature that a small community advocate group be established with an appointed chair and spokesperson who can effectively take issues and concerns to relevant authorities. The group could include specific members of the community to give them a voice such as the Koori population and those from Non-English speaking backgrounds. It would also be important to make sure that this person appears with / alongside key authorities at events such as press conferences to send a clear message to the community that they have the ear of decision-makers. The purpose of such a group would be to effectively represent the voice of the community. This is especially critical for a regional area like Morwell where the community typically feels disempowered and unable to get their message across.
5. **Ensure that communications are simple, meaningful, use plain language, avoids jargon and terms and acronyms that could confuse.** A simple functional message – straight to the point that is not over-complicated is required. Lower formal education levels, income and higher unemployment suggest simple messages with easy to remember deliveries would prove more effective than “information dumps”.
6. **Pay particular attention to tone and style:** In order for an affected community to identify with communicators, it is critical that such people exhibit empathy, genuineness and concern. Speakers that are ‘wooden’, bureaucratic and too ‘on message’ are likely to be rejected. This means acknowledging the crisis quickly, with sincerity and exhibiting a willingness to engage and help. Failure to adequately ‘speak the language’ and use the channels of the community will lead to poor, piecemeal and ultimately deficient communications.
7. **Channel recommendations:** Use multiple channels to access hard-to-reach reach audiences. Hard-to-reach audiences include those with a lack of access to ‘smart’ mobile phones, digital communications as well as Koori populations, older people and those from non-English Speaking Backgrounds. We recommend the greater use of a wide variety of communications channels including more traditional methods of leaflets, community meetings and door-knocking.
8. **Best Practice Models:** We recommend that lessons from the literature on Chronic Technological Disasters be examined as a model for the development of response frameworks that better fit the nature of the Hazelwood Mine Fire and possible future events like it. This event could be better characterised as an industrial accident leading to a longer-term community health crisis and therefore needs procedures, protocols and communications models that relate directly to that type of event—in a regional area.

8.1 Towards a Model for Regional Crisis Communications

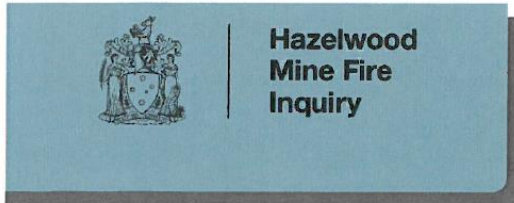
The recommendations made above lead to consideration of a model for communicating to a regional audience under similar circumstances. We stress that this model is a starting point for further examination by the Board of Inquiry and should incorporate literature associated with Chronic Technological Disasters which is beyond the expertise and scope of this report.

Exhibit 4.



9. Appendices

9.1 Letter of Engagement



14 May 2014

Mr Lachlan Drummond
Redhanded Creative Pty Ltd
78 Docker Street
RICHMOND VIC 3121

By email: lachlan@redhanded.com.au

Dear Mr Drummond

Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry

We refer to previous correspondence in relation to your engagement to provide expert assistance to the Board in the area of communications.

The Board of Inquiry requests that you provide a written report that addresses the following matters:

1. Outline your qualifications and relevant experience, and attach your curriculum vitae.
2. Describe the current best practice model for public communications during an event such as the Hazelwood Mine Fire, including the current best practice for public communications in rural and regional Victoria. If possible, provide examples or case studies of effective public communications during such an event, drawing if applicable comparisons with the response to acute emergencies.
3. Evaluate the public communications that occurred in relation to the Hazelwood Mine Fire against current best practice. Include in your evaluation communications in all media from State government agencies, including the fire services, the Environment Protection Authority, the Department of Health and the Department of Human Services, Latrobe City Council and GDF Suez Energy Australia;
4. Identify any problems or shortcomings in public communications in relation to the Hazelwood Mine Fire.
5. Identify measures that should be taken to improve public communications in similar situations in future.

1300 442 972
hazelwoodinquiry.vic.gov.au

PO Box 3460
GIPPSLAND MC VIC 3841
20 Hazelwood Road
Morwell VIC 3460

I understand that you have already been provided with access to media monitoring in relation to the Hazelwood Mine Fire from 9 February 2014 to date. In addition, the Inquiry has requested a number of statements in relation to communications, including from the Fire Services Commissioner, the EPA, the Department of Health, the Department of Human Services, Latrobe City Council, and GDF Suez Energy Australia. We will provide these statements to you as they become available.

You may be assisted by the attached Expert Witness Code of Conduct that applies to expert witnesses giving evidence in the Supreme Court of Victoria. While it is not directly applicable to the Inquiry, it gives a concise explanation of what is expected of an expert witness and the matters that should be included in your report.

We request that you provide your report by Monday, **26 May 2014**.

In turn, we will provide your report to the parties with leave to appear before the Inquiry before you give evidence to the Board. It is proposed that your evidence will be called during the Board's public hearings in the week starting 2 June 2014, probably on Thursday, 5 June 2014.

If you have any queries in relation to this request, please contact me on 9223 1706.

Kind regards



Justine Stansen
Principal Legal Advisor

9.2 About Redhanded

Redhanded is a strategic communications and research consultancy dedicated to understanding rural and regional audiences. Redhanded executes insightful strategic communications and media strategies across all media platforms with engaging creativity for some of the biggest brands in regional and rural Australia. As well as pioneering digital and online in the regional landscape, Redhanded has established unique relationships with the key influencers that impact on our clients' brands.

9.3 Curriculum Vitae

Lachlan Drummond, Lead Author, Research and Strategy Lead

Qualifications

- Master of Marketing, Monash University (2001);
- Honours Degree of Bachelor of Arts, Monash University, Majoring Media Studies / Visual Arts (1995).

Relevant Experience

Lachlan Drummond has 20 years of experience in the private sector in research, strategy and communications. This includes:

- Consultant, Research and Strategy Lead, Redhanded Communications (2008-)
- Lecturer, Market Research, Deakin University (2014-)
- Group Director and Head of Newpoll Strategy (2011-2014).
- Director of Chant Link & Associates, Market Research and Strategy (2001-2010);
- Lecturer, Marketing Communications, Monash University (1999-2000);
- Marketing & Advertising Manager magazine publishing industry (1996-1999).

Professional Memberships

- Member of the Australian Market & Social Research Society (AMSRS) and former Treasurer of the Victorian Committee.

Publications

- Behavioural Economics Course Co-convenor and Presenter AMSRS Winter School (2012).
- Drummond, L. (2011) Turning Financially Dysfunctional Lives Around. Analysis of ANZ's Saver Plus Program. Proceedings of the AMSRS National conference 2011. Sydney, Australia.
- SOSE Alive, Economy and *Society*, 'Market Research in a Climate of anti-Marketing' (2005),
- Research News, 'Market Research in a Climate of anti-Marketing' (November 2003)
- Luxton, S. & Drummond, L. (2000). What is this thing called 'Ambient Advertising'? Proceedings of the ANZMAC (Australian & New Zealand Marketing Academy Conference) 2000, Visionary Marketing for the 21st Century: Facing the Challenge. Gold Coast, Australia.

Research and Strategy Experience

- Experienced in all aspects of qualitative & quantitative research and strategic communications;
- Specialisation in strategic marketing research and communications in a business-to-business setting with significant experience in agri-business and regional / rural audiences, telecommunications, finance, higher education, building industry, government, publishing and retail.
- Research expertise includes: Brand analysis & positioning, marketing communications, market segmentation & channel strategy, new product development, performance assessment (sales & marketing, service delivery), market entry strategy, value proposition testing.
- As well as undertaking numerous research, strategy and communications projects in regional and rural Australia, he has undertaken work in New Zealand, South Africa and the United Arab Emirates.

Regional and Rural Communications Expertise

Lachlan Drummond has undertaken a large number of projects for corporate and government clients in both metropolitan and regional areas in communications. He has an expert understanding of regional and rural attitudes and behaviours and communicating to these audiences, based on first-hand experience of living in regional Victoria and because of numerous Agri-business research, strategy and communications projects with clients such as DuPont, Incitec Pivot and Sinochem.

He has also informed the communications strategies for GE Money, ANZ, The Australian Tax Office, Australian Securities and Investments Commission, Channel 9 as well as Monash and Latrobe Universities, among others.