

**HAZELWOOD MINE FIRE INQUIRY****Submission cover sheet**

Post your submission with this cover sheet to:

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

Email your submission with this cover sheet to [info@hazelwoodinquiry.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@hazelwoodinquiry.vic.gov.au).

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

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*+ 3 pages  
 + 1 disc Doug Stealey*

**Acknowledgements****I understand that:**

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8/5/14.

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Date

## Hazelwood Mine Fire Report

Doug Steley Cowwarr Brigade CFA

( I also turn out with Heyfield as I live close to the Heyfield station now )

On Sunday evening 09/02/14 I was called by Ken Walker of Cowwarr brigade requesting assistance to crew a tanker at the Hazelwood mine fire.

We drove to the Traralgon station where we were assigned to the Gormondale tanker Ken driving one member from the Flynn brigade and myself as crew. We were accompanied by 3 other members from Flynn in their tanker.

We arrived at the mine site at about 10pm we went to the assembly area and waited for instructions for some time, we were finally given a very quick briefing with no maps only a hastily drawn sketch on some A3 paper.

We were given a monitor and told that it had 2 alarms the first was for low CO ( Carbon Monoxide ) levels that would allow us to continue working in the area for up to 8 hours, the second alarm was high CO levels and we were to evacuate if that sounded. We were not shown the levels monitors or what the different alarms sounded like or details of how the alarms worked.

After waiting for some time we were assigned an escort and went to the eastern end of the mine to check for spot fires and protect power lines. Most of the fires had been extinguished but we were to extinguish spot fires some burning power poles.

Our CO monitor sounded several times while driving to the assigned area

Our escort nearly drove into a set of downed powerlines at the site and we halted suddenly and reversed while electricians were called to check and see if they were live.

After more waiting we were assured the lines were safe and proceeded to extinguish a burning power pole and various spot fires burning in the area, during this time I fell into a hole about 50cm deep and wide, no injuries were sustained but walking over a black field with a hose by myself as we only had a crew of 3 and I did not have a helmet torch to see the hole in the dark. We had a spotlight on the area but that did not show the hole.

**( Personal helmet torches should be issued to every member for night safety )**

Tangles of blackberry runners were both a problem and showed that the area immediately adjacent to the mine edge was overgrown and weed infested before the fires. There were car bodies and rubbish in the area it looked like it had been used as a dump for old equipment.

After extinguishing any fires we could find in the area and patrolling for some time we returned to the assembly point and waited for a briefing.

Cold coffee was available as there was no electricity and there was little or no food.

While we waited we spoke to mine employees who were obviously very upset at what was happening, I was repeatedly told by different employees of the lack of planning and preparedness by the new owners, how emergency equipment had been run down or sold off, how they knew the fire risks had been repeatedly raised and ignored by management due to expense issues. Most alarming was a claim I heard on several occasions from different sources that the flood irrigation/sprinkler system that had been installed after the last fire ( At a cost of \$8 Million ) had been sold off for scrap metal so they could not prevent the mine and walls from catching fire as had been in the previous plan.

They also said how the walls of the mine were to be sealed in fire proof clay and earth as a prevention measure but the owners had refused to do this because it would cost too much. There was an attitude of anger and despondency amongst the mine staff.

We did another patrol of our assigned area our monitor sounded a few more times. No spot fires or threats were seen so we returned to the assembly point.

By this time power was back and there was bread and some luke warm hot dogs in a slow cooker. Unappetizing in the extreme in the early hours of the morning and few people ate them.

Later again, towards dawn we were told to follow a new escort. We followed them to the western end of the mine where they spoke briefly to some other crews and then left with them not informing us of what we were to do or why we were where we were.

After checking the immediate areas and seeing no threat we could deal with with 2 tankers we returned to the assembly area.

Radio communications were non existent and we did not even have a UHF to speak to the other tanker.

By this stage crews were exhausted and being relieved, Ken the Fynn volunteer and I had been up for over 24 hours and on site for about 11 hours, we asked if we could be relieved and go home, we were told no that we were needed. 8 hours is a normal shift on a fireground as it is stressful both mentally and physically.

We were instructed to go into the pit and defend the clean water pumps, we followed the escort and arrived to find 2 huge mine dust suppression tankers defending the pumps + 2 mine staff. The pumps were directly below a large burning outcrop of coal in the bottom of the pit and surrounded by fires, it was about 9am and the air was perfectly still so any CO or heavier than air gasses or particles would have been accumulating in that area.

These pumps had no fire suppression system set up to protect them from fires I found it surprising that what appeared to be a major pump facility did not have a fire spray system in place and ready to protect the infrastructure.

We sat there for another hour before being relieved by 2 new tankers with fresh crews.

By the time we finished and sorted out equipment we had been on site for over 12 hours and up and working for over 24 hours. We were exhausted, frustrated, angry, disappointed and hungry when we left, the crews were upset that there was so little organization or communication, it was an extremely unusual situation as we are used to knowing what is happening and having a competent plan to work to even during emergencies.

The general impression of the site and operation was one of confusion, disillusionment, disorganization and a total lack of any form of counter disaster plan I did not see anyone who looked or sounded a senior member of the mine at any time during the 12 hours I was there. We were never briefed by any mine staff we got minimal information from the CFA person in charge.

It was clearly obvious the size of the fire was such that we were totally incapable of doing anything other than what we had done.

We returned home, Ken was concerned about driving but there was no other alternative offered or suggested. He had a medical appointment he needed to attend so was keen to get home have a shower and head in to town for that.

I checked in at the Heyfield station and was given a brief overview of what was happening.

About midday 11/02/14 I received a text message suggesting that if I had any ill effects I should get a medical check, I was feeling tired but generally OK at that time.

At the meeting that night I found out that others had been sent to hospital and were ill, I had very mild symptoms so I attended Sale Hospital on the morning of 12 /02/14 and was given an all clear report.

\*Attached is a disk of all the photographs I took during my time at the fire and selected prints.



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Doug Steley

██████████ Heyfield Vic 3858



**Fw: Enquiry from website [SEC=PUBLIC]**

info to: [REDACTED]  
Sent by: [info@hazelwoodinquiry.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@hazelwoodinquiry.vic.gov.au)  
Cc: [REDACTED]

15/05/2014 12:42 PM

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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Additional statement to submission of Doug Steley:

On the Sunday 09/02/14 for most of the day I was stationed at the Glenmaggie and later the Heyfield fire stations. As the day progressed it was increasingly apparent from the radio reports and sitreps that the CFA resources were

stretched to breaking point and beyond.

I believe for the area from Traralgon to Sale and as far north as Licola there were 2 or possibly 3 CFA tankers available to respond to any fires that may have broken out, on a high fire risk day there would normally be at least 5 tankers turned out to ANY reported fire. Some of the CFA tankers are up to 25 years old and while they are being replaced with more modern equipment there is still what I believe to be a critical lack of reserve tankers and crews for what would appear to be a rapidly increasing fire risk.

In addition to this many CFA crews like myself are getting on in years ( I am 58 ) and while I am still able to do one long and heavy shift firefighting is not something I can keep doing over an extended period of time.

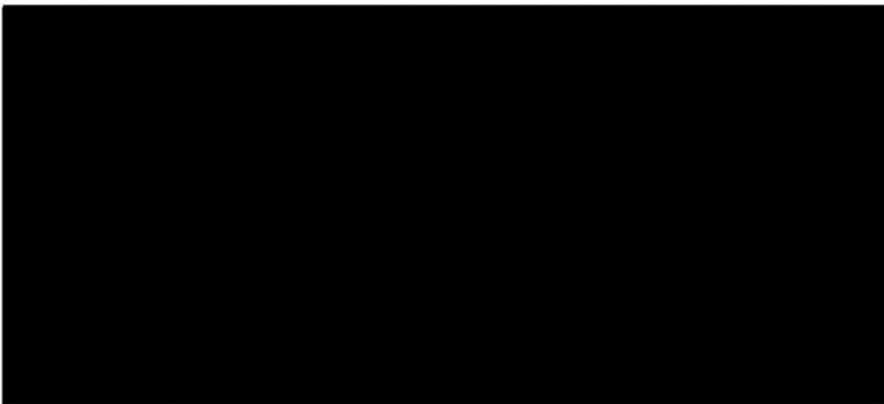
CFA needs a larger reserve of both people and equipment to call on during emergencies.

I also note that many towns and some city areas had their firefighting capabilities severely depleted while the mine fire was burning, Heyfield was without a tanker for about 6 weeks and while surrounding brigades had support tankers we were lacking the ability to respond quickly and effectively to local fires both wildfires and structure fires. Had the mine fire occurred at the height of the fire season rather than at the end of it this could have been more disastrous or even a fatal lack of equipment.

If CFA is to protect communities and infrastructure we need people and equipment to do the job, we need to have a reserve pool of spare tankers that can be mobilized for extreme fire days and we need crews for them.

It does not matter if these are DSE crews, CFA crews, MFB crews or paid volunteers hired and trained for bad days there needs to be a substantial increase in expenditure on front line fire fighting equipment.

yours sincerely  
Doug Steley



**Fw: More additional info**

info to: [REDACTED]  
Sent by: info@hazelwoodinquiry.vic.gov.au  
Cc: [REDACTED]

15/05/2014 12:42 PM



Doug Steley [REDACTED]  
12/05/2014 11:05 AM

To Hazelwood Inquiry  
info/DPC@DTF  
cc  
bcc  
Subject More additional info



Additional statement to the submission of Doug Steley

The photos similar to image DSSI\_0054714 show water flowing down the side of the northern face of the mine, this water appeared to come from a pipe that was running the fire suppression sprays that had been cut.

To the western side of this flow of water the fire suppression sprays were still working when the photo was taken and there was no fire in the coal seam in that area.

The area to the east appeared to have no water supply and no fire suppression sprays and was well alight and burning uncontrollably.

When we relocated to the clean water pump area shown in photo DSSI\_0054770 and associated images there was no fire hydrant to refill tankers.

Our tankers hold 3,500 liters of water, if we had used that water we would have had to return to the top of the mine or have found an alternative water source to refill and return.

This seemed very strange as we were defending a facility that was pumping clean water that could have been used in that area if required.