

IN THE MATTER OF
The Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire Inquiry

STATEMENT OF ROBERT LINDSAY BARRY

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I, ROBERT LINDSAY BARRY, of 61 Separation Street North Geelong, Victoria, Regional Director for the Country Fire Authority (CFA) Barwon South West Region, can say as follows:

A. Introduction

1. My full name is Robert Lindsay Barry. My date of birth is 25 November 1954.
2. I am the CFA Regional Director for the CFA’s Barwon South West Region and am based at the Barwon South West Regional Headquarters in North Geelong.
3. I have been at the CFA for 38 years. The last 32 of those years has been as an employee. I have held senior management roles within the CFA for the last 22 years. Those roles have included acting Regional Manager, Operations Manager (Regional Commander) and Operations Manager.
4. I have been the Regional Director for Barwon South West since 8 November 2010. In my current role I manage in excess of 11,000 career and volunteer staff and 262 fire brigades.
5. During my career I have received various awards by reason of my CFA service. These awards have included the National Emergency Medal for services to others during the 2009 Victorian Fires; the Australian Fire Services Medal for

'Distinguished Service' which I received as part of the 2009 Australia Day Honours and the National Medal for 15 years 'Diligent Service'. This medal was awarded to me in 1992 with a further two clasps awarded in 2002 and 2013.

6. Operationally, prior to the Hazelwood Mine (**Mine**) fire, I had been Incident Controller (**IC**) at major incidents in both structural and wildfire environments, both in Victoria and interstate. Such incidents included marine and hazardous environment events in the harbour of Geelong and major hazardous material incidents. I have been an accredited level 3 IC (state operations) since 8 November 2012 and hold a current five year accreditation for that role. I have undertaken the Level 3 Controller's role for many years prior to the formal accreditation process.
7. In addition to my experience and accreditation as IC, I also have extensive experience as a Regional Controller and Regional Agency Commander.
8. I hold the following tertiary qualifications:
 - 8.1 Associate Diploma of Applied Science (Fire Technology) (1994);
 - 8.2 University Certificate of Management (2001);
 - 8.3 Graduate Diploma of Business (2002);
 - 8.4 Advanced Diploma of Firefighting (Management) (2003);
 - 8.5 Diploma of Firefighting (Management) (2003); and
 - 8.6 Graduate Diploma of Management (2003).
9. I was IC for fire that occurred at the Mine for five rotations between 21 February 2014 and 21 March 2014. The specific dates of the five rotations in that period were:
 - Rotation No.1 – Friday 21 February 2014. This was for the last day of Barry Foss's rotation as he had to leave Traralgon for other duties. I arrived on 20 February 2014 and worked alongside IC Barry Foss for that day to familiarise myself with the incident before taking over the next day;
 - Rotation No.2 – Saturday 22 February 2014 until Wednesday morning 26 February 2014 when I changed over at 0800 hours with IC John Haynes. I then travelled home at approximately 1000 hours.

- Rotation No.3 – Sunday 2 March 2014 until Thursday morning 6 March 2014 when I changed over at 0800 hours with IC John Haynes. I then travelled home at approximately 0900 hours. I travelled to Traralgon on Saturday 1 March 2014 and worked with IC John Haynes before taking over the next day.
- Rotation No.4 – Monday 10 March 2014 until Friday morning 14 March 2014 when I changed over at 0800 hours with IC John Haynes. I then travelled home at approximately 0900 hours. I travelled to Traralgon on Sunday 9 March 2014 and worked with IC John Haynes before taking over the next day.
- Rotation No.5 – Tuesday 18 March 2014 until Saturday morning 22 March 2014 when I changed over at 0800 hours with IC Ross Sullivan. I then travelled home at approximately 0900 hours. I travelled to Traralgon on Monday 17 March 2014 and worked with IC John Haynes before taking over the next day.

The fire was declared under control on the night of 10 March 2014. By the time of my last shift as IC demobilisation planning had commenced for the handing back of the Mine to the Mine operator.

10. In my role as IC, I was present in the Incident Control Centre (**ICC**) during each day. Whilst I remained the IC overnight and was on call whilst resting, a Deputy IC was the ranking officer in the IC during the periods that I was not present within the ICC.
11. I have been shown a copy of a document entitled 'Outline of witness statement from Incident Controllers' (**Outline**) [\[CFA.0006.001.0005\]](#). In this witness statement, I address each of the matters referred to in the Outline, insofar as they relate to the period in which I was IC. In order to assist the Board, where appropriate, I have included into my statement photographs which I collected during the course of and following my involvement with the fire at the Mine. Whilst I collected these photographs for the primary purpose of using them as training aides, some of them are also relevant to the matters referred to in the Outline. All of the photographs included in my statement were taken during the period from the commencement of the incident until I completed my rotations as IC. Any annotations made on the photographs have been made by me.

12. In addition to matters referred to in this statement, the following records of events were also kept at the time that I was IC:
- 12.1 minutes of Incident Management Team (**IMT**) meetings;
 - 12.2 minutes of Hazelwood Mine Operations Meetings;
 - 12.3 minutes of Emergency Management Team (**EMT**) meetings. I note that it was not possible for me to attend all of the EMT meetings that occurred in the period that I was IC;
 - 12.4 Incident Action Plans (also known as Incident Shift Plans (**ISPs**)); and
 - 12.5 written fire information releases.
13. These documents contain details relevant to the matters referred to in the Outline. In the time that has been made available to me to prepare this statement, I have not had an opportunity to review these documents. I have been advised by the solicitors for the state of Victoria that the various minutes, plans and fire information releases are being collated and will be provided to the Board separately.

B. Preparedness and response

14. As to questions 1-3, I was not the IC in the period referred to.
15. As to questions 4 and 5, the details of the make up of the IMT and EMT in the period that I was IC (including whether the size and composition changed and the reasons for those changes) are described in the minutes of the IMT and EMT meetings that I have referred to above.
16. As to question 6, there were multiple parts to the plan to suppress the fire in the period that I was IC. In that regard, the primary objective was to reduce the impact of carbon monoxide, smoke and irritants on the community, firefighters and Mine workers during the time it took to suppress the fire. At the same time, it was also necessary to:
- 16.1 protect critical infrastructure within the Mine, including power lines because they were servicing water pumps, dredges and water distribution pipelines necessary for our fire fight;

- 16.2 contain the fire spread to protect both the community and Mine infrastructure. An example of this threat is demonstrated by the photograph below which was taken from the air on 25 February 2014. It shows a separate area of fire in the mid-left of the frame. This was a fire which had spread from inside the mine and at the time was threatening to spread into a coal bunker that was located within the Mine precinct;



- 16.3 assist in establishing water reticulation systems within the Mine.
17. To achieve these objectives a six stage suppression plan was implemented. This plan was designed to take a systematic approach to the enormous challenge that was presented by the size of the fire and the coal that was fuelling it. At the time, I described the suppression task as being like trying to eat an elephant. It had to be eaten one bite at a time.

18. Step 1 of the six stage suppression plan was to take an area of batter (as the Mine walls are known) and extinguish the fire in that location. Various types of appliances were used to achieve this, including aircraft.
19. The initial focus was on batters in the northern part of the Mine, because it was those batters that were creating the majority of the smoke and debris that was impacting upon Morwell. The section of batter that was extinguished was then washed down and kept cool so that it did not reignite. The photograph below demonstrates the manner in which the batters were kept cool after a section of fire had been extinguished:



20. Step 2 was to apply compressed air foam (or **CAFS**), which assisted the batter from reigniting whilst it was not being washed down and thereby allowed firefighting crews to move on to another section of the Mine.
21. Step 3 was to deploy aerial pumpers to apply CAFS to the higher reaches of the Mine. The use of such pumpers on the higher reaches of the batters is depicted in the photograph below:



22. Step 4 was to scan the area in which steps 1-3 had been carried out with thermal imaging cameras. This was carried out from both the air and at ground level. The purpose of this scan was to determine whether steps 1-3 had been effective. The use of such thermal imaging cameras, at ground level, is shown in the photograph below:



23. Step 5 was to follow up and suppress any 'hot spots' that were identified by the thermal imaging cameras as remaining following the initial suppression phase. Much of this work was carried out by 'concept' tankers which are twin cab and therefore kept the firefighters out of the smoke, as much as possible.
24. Step 6 of the suppression effort was to test any other methods of suppression which might have been appropriate and incorporated to improve steps 1-5. The two major examples of this in the period that I was IC was the testing and use of foam lances and spikes. These lances and spikes injected foam into the Mine walls and assisted in dealing with 'hot spots' that were identified by the thermal imaging cameras. The other major example was the testing and selection of foam products. This was done with the assistance of external foam experts who generally supported the manner in which foam was being used.
25. Outside of this overall approach to suppression, there was also additional work carried out in relation to:
 - 25.1 operational planning for spike days. That is, when weather was likely to make the fire fight more difficult and create the possibility that spot fires would leap out of the mine. That planning included the activation of additional strike teams, fire fighting aircraft and the creation of additional fire fighting sectors to suppress any additional fire threats which might arise on these days. This planning also resulted in additional passive fire fighting measures being introduced such as the creation of mineral earth fire breaks; and
 - 25.2 the approach taken to the use of fire fighting aircraft. In that regard, the Air Attack Supervisors who direct the fire fighting helicopters (known as helitacks) generally operate from helicopters above the fire ground. In the case of the Mine fire however, they took up on-ground positions which allowed them to direct the bombers with greater accuracy, as their view was not impeded by the smoke that was being emitted above the Mine.
26. The overall success of the suppression effort is demonstrated by the two photographs immediately below. The first of these photographs shows the fire at the peak of its intensity. The second photograph is of a similar section of the Mine, once the suppression effort had been successful.



27. As to question 7, the principal difficulty in implementing the IMT suppression plan was the size of the fire, the fuel that was being burnt and the concentration of resources that were necessary to effectively suppress the fire. In that regard, as I have already noted, the fire had to be divided into portions or grids and dealt with one section at a time. It was not possible to fight all of the fire at once in such a way that it could be suppressed or extinguished. I was not hamstrung by access to resources apart from weather events (rain). Those resources that could be made available were, including specialist resources from Tasmania, New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory and other places such as airports who provided extra appliances of the type that could allow the suppression effort to be conducted from within the cabin of the fire truck.
28. Further difficulties with the suppression effort included:
- 28.1 the management of water within the mine. In that regard, as the photograph immediately below shows, water pumped into the Mine during the fire fight had to also be pumped out of the Mine so as not to disrupt the water table at the base of the Mine and destabilise the Mine walls. In this example, the additional water that has been used to fight the fire has caused the water on the Mine floor to breach the groyne between the two water tables in the middle of the frame. Water management issues also affected the type of aircraft that could be used to fight the fire. Whilst Sikorsky helicopters with large buckets slung underneath could use the water already within the mine, other helicopters, such as air cranes that fill their tanks using a snorkel could not be refilled within the mine by reason of the amount of wash that process created; and



- 28.2 the absence of an extensive water reticulation system meant that it was difficult to supply water to appliances and also keep the batters of the Mine cool without the presence of fire fighting appliances. Of the following two photographs, the first shows work being carried out to reinstate and extend the water reticulation system in the Mine. Aircraft in the form of fire fighting helicopters had to assist in this work by cooling the areas that were being worked on. The second image depicts a section of the water reticulation system in operation, once the system had been reinstated.





- 28.3 the maintenance of fire fighter morale during a long a difficult suppression effort. This issue was significantly improved when steps were taken to measure performance and then communicate the progress that had been made to firefighting personnel.
29. As to question 8, details of the external expertise that informed the IMT's approach were recorded in the various minutes and ISPs I have referred to above. Particular examples of external expertise however included safety, geotechnical and hydraulic advice. This external expertise was additional to the expertise of entities such as the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and the expertise of the Mine operator which also informed the IMT's approach. I have already referred above to the external expertise that was used in relation to the use of fire fighting foam.
30. As to question 9, the major achievement was the successful suppression of the fire which was declared controlled on 10 March 2014 and handed back to the Mine operator on about 25 March 2014. Other matters that worked well included:

- 30.1 there being no significant injuries suffered during the suppression effort;
 - 30.2 the instigation and completion of risk assessments and risk registers for the ICC, staging area and fire ground;
 - 30.3 the effective implementation of carbon monoxide monitoring and associated personnel rotation procedures; and
 - 30.4 the extensive use of dual cab tankers and appliances which allowed the fire fight to be conducted from within the tanker cabin as a means of increasing the personal safety of fire fighters.
31. Of the matters that could have been done better:
- 31.1 the initial response to the fire did not use the same systematic approach to suppression that I have described above; and
 - 31.2 for some of those involved in the suppression effort, this was a unique firefighting environment.

C. Communications

32. As to question 10, I have been advised that the community information and warnings that were issued during the period that I was IC are being collated and will be provided to the Board separately.
33. In addition to these documents, I also instigated an incident controller's blog that was published on the CFA website. Whilst my main reason for doing this was to keep those involved in the firefight motivated by describing the progress that was being made, it also served to keep the public informed.
34. As to questions 11 and 12, I continued to use the processes which had been adopted before I became IC. The approach to community information seemed to work very well. I attended a number of community meetings personally as IC and had the sense that those who attended appreciated getting the word directly from the horse's mouth. Such meetings were conducted across all affected locations.
35. Other initiatives that seemed to be particularly effective included:

- 35.1 flying the leaders of community groups over the mine in helicopters so that they could see for themselves the progress that was being made in relation to the suppression effort;
- 35.2 community newsletters, of which there was 12 versions during the course of the Mine fire. There were 9000 copies of the last version of the community newsletter distributed;
- 35.3 engagement through the media and community displays in locations such as community halls; and
- 35.4 the provision of information through community engagement officers travelling on trains to and from Gippsland as well as sending busses to areas that people were likely to be. A photo of one theses buses, providing both fire and health related information during the Mine fire is below:



D. Evacuation

- 36. As to question 13, evacuation was not considered during the time that I was IC. There was however a process in place to deal with evacuation, had the need arisen. That process was coordinated at a CFA Regional level by the CFA Regional Controller, Joe Buffone.

37. In the time that I was IC, there was immediate threat to people as a result of the actual fire in the Mine. Any threat which existed was as a result of the health concerns arising from the carbon monoxide in the air. The levels of carbon monoxide were being monitored and I believe that representatives of the Chief Health Officer (**CHO**) and the EPA were involved in discussions at CFA regional level about those readings.
38. During the time that I was IC, there were spikes in the levels of carbon monoxide. These spikes however always subsided and therefore the readings were for the most part within the levels that I had been advised were safe. Had the readings remained above that which was considered safe, I would have taken steps to consult with Victoria Police and any other relevant stake holders to recommend evacuation.
39. As to question 14, I was not IC at the time referred to.

E. Liaison with other parties

40. As to questions 15 and 16, I liaised extensively in the period that I was IC. This liaison worked well and included liaison with the:
- 40.1 Mine operator. As I have noted above, I believe that the minutes of the daily meetings at which this liaison occurred are being provided to the Board. Successful liaison contributed to the Mine being handed back to the operator in late March 2014. In the time that I was IC, the meetings with the Mine Operator made a valuable contribution to the ISPs (known by some as the Incident Action Plans); and
- 40.2 EPA. This liaison occurred at the IMT meetings that I conducted, the minutes of which are being provided separately. A significant example of successful liaison with the EPA related to the issue of water testing within the Mine.
41. I did not liaise with WorkSafe, however this may have occurred at either the staging area or at a Regional level. Furthermore, my dealings with the CHO were limited to a couple of brief meetings. I had no conversations directly with the CHO in relation to the incident.

Dated: 20 May 2014

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ROBERT LINDSAY BARRY