

**IN THE MATTER OF
The Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire Inquiry**

STATEMENT OF ALAN HALL

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Filed on behalf of: The State of Victoria
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Attention: Peter Stewart

I, ALAN HALL, of Level 24, 50 Lonsdale Street Melbourne, Victoria, State Recovery Co-ordinator and Director of Performance Regulation and Reporting, Department of Human Services (**DHS**), can say as follows:

Introduction

1. My full name is Alan Gordon Hall.
2. I am the State Recovery Co-ordinator, in Community and Executive Services, at the DHS based at 50 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, Victoria.
3. I have been in this role since January 2011.
4. The State Recovery Coordinator is a statutory position under the *Emergency Management Act 1986* (**the EM Act**). Under the EM Act, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services has appointed DHS by instrument of delegation, as the coordinating agency for recovery within the meaning of the EM Act. The State Recovery Coordinator is a senior officer appointed by the Secretary of DHS to ensure the overall coordination of recovery activities across Victoria. I have been in this role since January 2011, in addition to my substantive position as Director of Performance Regulation and Reporting.

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5. As the State Recovery Coordinator, I establish committees to plan coordinated recovery from emergencies with multiple departments and agencies having roles or responsibilities in recovery. I am also the key contact for communications with the Commonwealth Government for recovery activities undertaken in Victoria, and the interim chair of the State Crisis and Resilience Council (**SCRC**) Recovery Sub-committee. A detailed explanation of the state recovery coordination structure can be found at **Attachment 1** to this Statement. [\[DHS.0005.001.0001\]](#)
6. This Statement has been prepared pursuant to the request made by the Principal Legal Advisor assisting the Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire Board of Inquiry by letters dated 6 May 2014 and 9 May 2014 (the **Letters**).
7. I note that the Letters request that this witness statement cover the topics set out in Attachment A to the letter dated 6 May and in the letter dated 9 May, copies of which are **Attachment 2** to this statement. [\[VGSO.0003.004.0001\]](#)
[\[VGSO.0003.006.0003\]](#)
8. This Statement seeks to address each of these topics.
9. This Statement comprises information which is within my personal knowledge and which has been provided to me by officers of DHS as a result of inquiries made of them for the purpose of providing information to the Board. These DHS officers are Carmel Flynn (Director, Health and Human Services Emergency Management) and Argiri Alisandratos (Area Director Inner Gippsland). I believe that information to be true.

Background

- ***Overview of the Department of Human Services***

10. Pursuant to a number of Acts of the Parliament of Victoria DHS plans, funds and delivers community and housing services, both directly and in cooperation with community sector partners.
11. The department's portfolios include:
 - **Community Services:** supporting Victorians living with disabilities, protecting vulnerable children, assisting young people entering or leaving the youth justice system, and recovering from emergencies;

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- Housing: providing public and social housing, improving the range of housing options available, and reducing homelessness;
- Women: working to improve the quality of life for all Victorian women, and coordinating Victorian whole-of-government policies for women;
- Youth: driving a whole-of-government agenda in relation to Victorians aged 12 to 25, and delivering programs and initiatives that support the social, civic and economic participation of young people.

12. The Minister for Community Services is the lead minister for the Department of Human Services, and attends the Security and Emergency Committee of Cabinet. DHS is the principal agency for relief and recovery coordination. The Secretary of DHS's role is to appoint a State Recovery Coordinator, and ensure the department manages its emergency management responsibilities under the Emergency Management Manual Victoria (EMMV) and to its clients and services. The Secretary is a member of the SCRC. The State Recovery Coordinator is an Executive of the department; a DHS Director is responsible for the ongoing management of Health and Human Services Emergency Management; DHS Divisional Executive Directors are appointed Regional Recovery Coordinators and DHS Area Directors are Deputy Regional Recovery Coordinators. DHS participates on the State/Regional Control Teams, State/Regional Emergency Management Teams, SCRC subcommittees, and calls together state-wide and regional recovery coordination meetings/committees as required.

- ***Agency with primary responsibility for relief, respite and recovery, and the role of DHS in relation to the Hazelwood Mine Fire***

Emergency Management Act 1986

13. The responsibilities relating to the recovery from emergencies arise from the EM Act.

14. DHS is the coordinating agency for emergency recovery at both the State and regional level, working in collaboration with municipal councils who have that responsibility at a local level.

Emergency Management Manual Victoria (Attachment 3) (Links: see List of Attachments)

15. The EMMV sits under the EM Act. It contains policy and planning documents for emergency management, and details the roles of different organisations under the emergency management arrangements.
16. By virtue of the EMMV (Parts 4 and 7), DHS is the principal agency for state and regional recovery coordination, across the social, natural, built and economic environments. DHS delivers social recovery supports (including information, financial support, personal and psychosocial support, and temporary accommodation) with partners and through human services command relief services.
17. Within the State and departmental arrangements, DHS also has responsibilities in regard to portfolio services and organisational resilience, including:
 - continuity of care to clients through services, including evacuation and relocation response; and
 - business continuity management planning, incident management capability and response.

State Emergency Relief and Recovery Plan (Attachment 4) [\[DHS.0004.002.0092\]](#)

18. The State Emergency Relief and Recovery Plan is a requirement in the EM Act. Part 4 of the EMMV structures responsibilities to enable the planning, management and coordination of emergency relief and recovery activities for emergencies affecting Victoria.
19. The State Emergency Relief and Recovery Plan allows local, regional and State emergency recovery activities to operate concurrently at multiple levels.
 - B. State

At the State level the State Recovery Coordinator has responsibility for ensuring the development and maintenance of policies and procedures for effective emergency relief and recovery and inter-agency coordination.
 - C. Regional

At the regional level a Regional Recovery Coordinator in each Victorian Government administrative region has responsibility for the preparation and maintenance of a Regional Emergency Recovery Plan for that region. The Regional Recovery Coordinator (a DHS officer) is a statutory position under the EM Act, and can activate a Regional Emergency Recovery Planning Committee in response to a regional-level emergency to consider issues of regional significance, to advise the Regional Recovery Coordinator of key issues for consideration and assist in coordinating recovery (including information, communications and service provision).

D. Local

Municipal councils have responsibility for coordinating recovery at a local level because they are the closest level of government to their communities, and have access to specialised local knowledge.

Shared Service Arrangements

20. DHS and the Department of Health (**DH**) operate a shared service – Health and Human Services Emergency Management (**HHSEM**) – to prepare for, deliver and/or support both departments’ respective emergency management responsibilities.
21. HHSEM operates centrally and regionally, planning and delivering all of DHS relief and recovery functions, as well as its Human Services command function. HHSEM is administratively based in DHS and cannot act on behalf of DH without its explicit approval or request. As such, it supports DH in meeting its emergency management responsibilities under the EMMV.

Emergency Management Reform

22. From 1 July 2014 when the *Emergency Management Act 2013* comes into operation, the coordinating agency will be nominated in the State Relief and Recovery Plan and the position of State Recovery Coordinator will cease to exist. Instead there will be an Emergency Management Commissioner who will be accountable for recovery coordination with power to delegate his/her responsibility.

- ***Relief and recovery coordination in relation to the 2013-14 fire season***

State Emergency Management Centre

23. HHSEM activated the Health and Human Services State Emergency Management Centre (SEMC) on 14 January 2014 in response to the Victorian bushfires. The SEMC coordinated the DHS response to the Hazelwood mine fire and supported as requested the State Health Incident Management Team set up by DH to oversee the health response. For this event, DH requested DHS assistance through the SEMC in deploying DH staff, procuring designated health equipment, disseminating health information on the recovery website and in the production of joint situation reports up to 28 March 2014.
24. The SEMC includes liaison officers from the Australian Government's Department of Human Services and from the Red Cross.
25. During its operations HHSEM creates daily situation reports which include key summaries of information provided by the SEMC which it, in turn, receives from other agencies including the Red Cross, Victorian Council of Churches (VCC), the Salvation Army, Save The Children, Foodbank Victoria, Ambulance Victoria, Australian Government Department of Human Services (**Attachment 5**) (**Links: Table in List of Attachments**).
26. HHSEM liaised with Save the Children, who remained on standby throughout the emergency and were available to provide support to children and young people as required.
27. A DHS emergency management liaison officer was present at the State Control Centre and either myself or the Human Services Commander (the Director HHSEM) attended daily State Emergency Management Team meetings and State Control Team meetings representing our functions. HHSEM state operations coordinated regular teleconferences with regional HHSEM staff, Ambulance Victoria and the Red Cross.

State relief planning for the Hazelwood Mine Fire

28. DHS updated the State Relief Plan in February 2014 (v1.0 signed off on 7 February, updated again 12 February) (**Attachment 6**) [\[DHS.0002.005.0101\]](#), later renamed the State Relief Readiness Plan: March 2014 (24 February) (**Attachment 7**) [\[DHS.0004.002.0174\]](#) and produced a weekly State Relief Action Plan for the

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Morwell Incident (12-18 February, 18-23 February, 24 February-3 March)
(**Attachment 8**) [[DHS.0002.005.0134](#)] [[DHS.0002.005.0136](#)]. All documents were submitted to the State Control Centre.

State recovery planning for the Hazelwood Mine Fire

29. On 24 January 2014 DHS established the 2014 Bushfire Recovery Coordination Team, under the SCRC, to coordinate state recovery for the 2014 bushfires. As the State Recovery Coordinator (DHS), I currently chair this team. In consultation with its emergency recovery partners, DHS developed Terms of Reference and the State Recovery Plan 2014 Bushfires that supports a multi-agency approach to recovery management.
30. When the fire made its way into the Hazelwood mine, DHS updated the State Recovery Plan 2014 Bushfires to include all state recovery coordination activities associated with this incident (**Attachment 9**) [[DHS.0004.002.0162](#)].

Regional relief and recovery coordination

31. At the regional level, DHS also has responsibility for coordinating relief and recovery activities. Regional involvement in coordinating operations may be required if there are multiple incidents across a region or the incident exceeds the local council's capacity to respond and the local council seeks assistance.
32. In this event, while the incident was localised and the Latrobe City Council (the **Council**) retained responsibility for the coordination of relief and recovery operations, DHS identified early on through its existing regional relationship with the Council that it would be required to support the Council given the unusual nature of the event.
33. The event was unusual due to the fact that it was a prolonged and large scale emergency, with persistent smoke being the main challenge for the community rather than the fire itself.
34. HHSEM established a regional emergency operations centre (**REOC**) on 14 January 2014. There were other emergency operations centres in operation in other parts of the State in response to other events. The REOC staff coordinated relief and recovery activities.

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35. The REOC creates daily regional situation reports which include information received from local government, Red Cross, VCC, Salvation Army, and recovery agencies.
36. Through the REOC, DHS provided logistical support to DH in deploying DH staff, disseminating health information via respite and recovery centres and in the production of joint situation reports up to 28 March 2014.
37. The Human Services Commander was a member of the Regional Control Team and the Regional Emergency Management Team, with the Commander or deputy attending Regional Control Team and Regional/Strategic Incident Emergency Management Team meetings. A DHS emergency management liaison officer was also present at the Regional Control Centre and attended Regional Emergency Management Team meetings as delegated by the Human Services Commander when required.

Regional relief planning for the Hazelwood Mine Fire

38. On 7 February 2014 DHS, in conjunction with Gippsland local governments, Red Cross, Victorian Council of Churches and the Salvation Army drafted a Gippsland Regional Relief Plan that was ready to activate. (**Attachment 10**)
[\[DHS.0004.001.0034\]](#) Following the spread of the fire into the Hazelwood coal mine, DHS updated the draft Gippsland Regional Relief Plan and distributed it to agencies for comment on 17, 19, 20, 23 and 26 February 2014. (**Attachment 11**)
(**Links: see List of Attachments**)
39. The Gippsland Regional Relief Plan (Latrobe Valley Coal Mine Fire Incident) was formally approved by the Regional Recovery Coordinator on 28 February (version 1.5) and 6 March (version 1.6). (**Attachment 12**) [\[DHS.0002.005.0087\]](#)
[\[DHS.0004.001.0042\]](#) In consideration of risk and consequence scenarios, the plan included planning for relief services capability in the event the town of Morwell required a complete evacuation. This included identification of lead agencies for emergency relief functions, Emergency Relief Centres, accommodation and the required supplies (e.g. bedding, food etc.) in the event of an evacuation. The decision to evacuate is however not in remit of the principal agency for recovery, but one for the State/Regional Response Coordinator (Victoria Police), informed by the Incident Controller, and in this instance, also DH.

Regional recovery planning for the Hazelwood Mine Fire

40. Following consultation with the Council and lead recovery agencies, DHS developed the Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Transition Plan which was signed by the Regional Recovery Coordinator on 7 March 2014. (**Attachment 13**) [\[DHS.0002.005.0532\]](#) DHS subsequently distributed copies of the plan to relevant agencies, including DH, the Council, Department of State Development, Business and Innovation, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Department of Environment and Primary Industries, Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure, Environment Protection Authority and the Regional/Incident Controller.
41. On the same day DHS, together with the Council and lead recovery agencies, developed the draft Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Plan and distributed it to relevant agencies. Since that date, DHS has updated the draft plan and distributed it to agencies for comment on 9, 13, 17 and 24 March. The latest version of the draft plan was updated and distributed on 8 April 2014. Please refer to Section H: Recovery for further detail and Attachment on these plans.
42. The Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Plan sets out the arrangements for coordinating and managing the planning and delivery of emergency recovery activities across the affected region in response to the Hazelwood mine fire. This plan includes: the goal and objectives of recovery for the Hazelwood mine fire, the governance, reporting and communication arrangements for the six recovery streams, an impacts narrative, and recovery risks.
43. The Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Committee first met on 11 March 2014 and endorsed the Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Plan v1.0 as a working draft, with the following six recovery streams and lead agencies to chair subcommittees to support municipal recovery planning and implementation:
- Social and Community - Department of Human Services
 - Health - Department of Health
 - Economic - Department of State Development, Business and Innovation
 - Built Environment (clean-up) - Local Government Victoria

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- Natural and Agriculture Environment - Department of Environment and Primary Industries
- Community Engagement - Department of Human Services/Latrobe City Council.

44. DHS chairs the Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Committee. Membership of this committee includes representatives from key agencies:

- DHS (chair)
- Latrobe City Council
- DH
- Department of State Development, Business and Innovation
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
- Department of Environment and Primary Industry
- Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure
- Environment Protection Authority
- Country Fire Authority
- Regional/Incident Controller

45. The Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Committee is coordinating all recovery activities and its membership includes the chairs of each sub-committee. Links between the sub-committees and their recovery initiatives have also been established through representation on the community engagement sub-committee.

Other agencies or organisations involved in the delivery of assistance

46. All Victorian Government agencies and departments assisted in responding to the needs of the Morwell community, and continue to do so throughout the recovery period. The agencies and departments that have assisted the Council to respond to the relief and recovery needs of the Morwell community include:

- Department of Human Services (DHS)
- Department of Health (DH)

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- Fire Services Commissioner (FSC)
- Fire Agencies (CFA, MFB, DEPI, Parks Victoria)
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD)
- Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI)
- Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC)
- Department of State Development, Business and Innovation (DSDBI)
- Victorian State Emergency Service (SES)
- Victoria Police
- Environment Protection Authority (EPA)
- Ambulance Victoria (AV)
- Vic Roads
- Public Transport Victoria (PTV)
- Department of State Development, Business and Innovation (DSDBI)
- Tourism Victoria
- Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure (DTPLI)
- Regional Development Victoria (RDV)
- Local Government Victoria (LGV)
- Worksafe.

47. In recognition of the need for full integration of regional and local recovery planning, and to provide substantial support to the Council in the early recovery phase, DHS provided a recovery management team to work alongside Council recovery staff and management at the Morwell Council offices from 11-31 March 2014. This team established and supported the recovery governance arrangements and developed the Hazelwood Mine Fire recovery plan.

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48. Other organisations have worked closely with government to help the Morwell community recovery, including:

- numerous other local governments
- Red Cross
- Municipal Association Victoria
- Victorian Council of Churches
- Insurance Council of Australia
- Salvation Army
- Relationships Australia

49. DHS has service agreements with the Red Cross and Victorian Council of Churches. Refer to paragraph 135 (outreach) for detail on relief activities.

C: Communications

50. In reference to the second letter from the Board dated 9 May 2014 (the **Follow up Letter**) [\[VSGO.0003.006.0003\]](#), I have prepared a response to the questions regarding the DHS communications strategy and community engagement.

DHS Communications Strategy

51. The state level DHS communications strategy for the Hazelwood incident was managed by the Public Information Unit (**PIU**) within the SEMC.

52. The PIU was supported by the DHS Communications Branch, and liaised with other government departments and agencies through the Emergency Management Joint Public Information Committee (**EMJPIC**).

53. The PIU's operational strategy in response to any incident – including the Hazelwood fire – is documented in the functional statements for the PIU, in the SEMC's State Operations Manual.

54. The PIU's principle functions are:

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1. across government liaison (e.g. ministerial liaison, regular EMJPIC input, etc.);
 2. communications (e.g. drafting media releases, spokespeople's lines, key messages for the State Control Centre and Incident Control Centre media sections, etc.);
 3. media (e.g. handling any media inquiries, media monitoring, etc.);
 4. social Media (e.g. monitoring activity across twitter and Facebook); and
 5. web (e.g. updating content on the Recovery website, and distributing relevant content to other government websites).
55. The PIU process overview (July 2013) further helps frame the general strategy for all relief and recovery communications activities. This succinct document assumes those working in the PIU have the necessary skills, knowledge and training to execute all strategic tasks – as determined by the Public Information Officer (unit manager) to support and deliver on the SEMC's overall statement of intent.
56. The Latrobe Valley EMPJIC drafted the 2014 Latrobe Valley Coal Mine Community Information and Engagement Plan on 23 February 2014. (**Attachment 14a**) [\[DHS.0004.001.0076\]](#) This plan included a stakeholder analysis outlining agency responsibilities and identified key local leaders for a range of agencies, including the Gippsland Multicultural Service, Sudanese community, and Morwell Neighbourhood House. The regional plan also outlined tactics for engaging with the community and a draft schedule of community engagement activities.
57. Once the SEMC determined the probable scope and requirements of the recovery required for the Hazelwood incident, on 10 March the PIU drafted (and later circulated across government) a Recovery Community Engagement and Communications Plan. (**Attachment 14b**) [\[DHS.0004.002.0048\]](#)
58. The plan referred to in paragraph 57 is based on strategies successfully used to guide recovery communications activities for previous events (e.g. the 2012 Victorian Floods). It is designed to be an iterative document, and helps direct appropriate communications and community engagement activities as time, resources and funding allow.

Implementation

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59. The SEMC's PIU delivered its communications strategy through a range of public communications, media and (later) community engagement activities, principally through:

- daily updates of the Emergency Relief and Recovery Victoria website (**the Website**), as required; (**Attachment 15**) (**Links: see List of Attachments**)
- daily updates of Victorian Emergency Recovery Information Line (**VERIL**) scripts, as required;
- contributions to a whole-of-government print and radio advertising campaign (initiated by the Department of Premier and Cabinet) to inform residents of current activities, and offering phone numbers and websites for more information;
- contributions to a twice-weekly newsletter that was letter-box dropped to all Morwell properties, with hard copies distributed at community venues such as Morwell Neighbourhood House, Morwell rail station, aboard VLine trains, at CFA information bus stops, etc.;
- contributions to the fortnightly recovery newsletter coordinated by the Council;
- Online monitoring of relevant social media outlets;
- and supporting DH's public health communications team to distribute information messages from the Chief Health Officer.

60. Approved DHS spokespeople conducted media interviews with local and metro outlets to the provision of emergency financial assistance for respite, and later relocation; then clean-up activities. These activities included:

- Carmel Flynn, HHSEM Director – media conference for local and metro outlets, Traralgon, 19 February
- Argiri Alisandratos, DHS Area Director (and Deputy Regional Recovery Coordinator) ABC Gippsland radio interview 21 February

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- Dr Geoff Russell, HHSEM Communications Manager, media interview with ABC State wide Drive radio; The AGE; 3AW; 26 February
- Gill Callister, DHS Secretary – ‘closed’ briefing for metro and local media, Traralgon, 28 February
- Carmel Flynn, HHSEM Director – ABC 77 Radio interview, 1 March
- Argiri Alisandratos, DHS Area Director (and Deputy Regional Recovery Coordinator) – metro and local media conference, Traralgon, 1 March
- Argiri Alisandratos, DHS Area Director – ABC 774 Radio Jon Faine interview, Morwell, 4 March
- Argiri Alisandratos, DHS Area Director – ABC Gippsland radio interview, Traralgon, 6 March
- Argiri Alisandratos, DHS Area Director – TR FM local radio – ‘virtual community meeting’, Traralgon, 17 March

61. On 17 February 2014 the PIU distributed demographic profiles from the Australian Bureau of Statistics to all other government agencies and departments (via the EMJPIC) to help them better tailor communications messages, tools and tactics to the specific needs of Morwell residents.

62. The SEMC’s PIU also shared recovery information – including the availability of firstly, respite payments then subsequently relocation payments – with other government agencies and departments through:

- daily EMJPIC teleconferences, which would then coordinate whole of government messaging for public dissemination across multiple channels;
- daily updates to the Incident Control Centre’s media unit at Traralgon;
- daily updates to the State Control Centre’s media unit in Melbourne; and
- Regional Emergency Management Joint Information Committee meetings at Traralgon.

Effectiveness of this strategy

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63. The most recent, high-level analysis into effectively communicating with emergency-impacted communities (Comrie Flood Review, Victorian Auditor General's Office, and the Royal Commission into the 2009 Bushfires) recommended the use of multiple mediums, particularly online sources - including a single website/portal containing emergency financial assistance information.
64. In response to these recommendations, HHSEM created and launched a new Whole of Victorian Government Emergency Relief and Recovery website in August 2013, together with the VERIL hotline; both were used as primary tools for the State level recovery communications process.
65. From October to December 2013, HHSEM partnered with the State Library of Victoria (SLV) and Victoria's Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship (OMAC) to produce new relief and recovery content for the website suitable for Victoria's 12 key Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities, including AUSLAN (via video). Site-use tracking (using Google Analytics) showed this information was accessed over the fire season.
66. HHSEM also continued to issue printed collateral (information sheets, etc.) to cater for other audience needs.
67. On 21 February, HHSEM Communications Manager Dr Geoff Russell visited Morwell (with colleagues from DPC and Victoria Police) to talk with local media and council communications officers, and explore how to better tailor the communications and community engagement to most effectively reach Morwell residents.
68. To further assist and better tailor local communications and community engagement, the SEMC's PIU organised for disaster-trauma psychologist, Dr Rob Gordon (and his associate Dr David Younger), to run two workshops in Morwell on 13 March, titled: 'Communicating with people in emergencies'. Both sessions were well-attended and well-received by Latrobe City Council call centre and media staff, and local health professionals.
69. As a result of these personal visits and evaluations, and ongoing media monitoring, the PIU further adjusted its 'language style' to better address perceived complexities in some communication.

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70. More importantly, the PIU took active steps (through EMJPIC) to encourage all other departments and agencies to similarly adopt simpler, plainer and more accessible communications across all messaging and media.

71. The overall strategy successfully addressed many needs, but there are certainly areas for improvement which DHS is already addressing. These improvements include:

- the introduction of a new information management system to the SEMC that will allow a more accurate and faster input of respite, relief and recovery centre information onto the Recovery website;
- the review and rewriting of all emergency relief and recovery information across all media (particularly printed material) to ensure the use of simple, accessible plain English explanations for all DHS support services;
- further work with OMAC to develop additional CALD information, particularly using video and audio information to convey important relief and recovery information in non-text based formats (accessible online, and for display at information centres, etc.);
- further planning and guidance in HHSEM's new Regional Operations Manual, under the section of Public Information; and
- additional training and workshops for other government departments and agencies on the communications functions, approach and responsibilities of the SEMC's PIU, with improved guidelines for communicating with communities under stress or trauma.

D: Assistance with relocation

- *Personal Hardship Assistance Program*

Assistance Program description

72. The Department administers the Victorian Government's Personal Hardship Assistance Program (**Assistance Program**), which includes two categories of assistance:

- Emergency Relief Assistance – a set payment per household to meet immediate relief needs

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- Emergency Re-establishment Assistance – payment to assist in the re-establishment of a principal place of residence, once eligibility is established.

73. The Assistance Program provides financial assistance to alleviate the personal hardship and distress suffered by eligible Victorians, as a result of an emergency. This assistance is *not* intended to replace insurance or other compensation for loss.

74. The two key documents that describe the policy and administration of the Assistance Program are:

- Personal Hardship Assistance Program Policy, December 2012 (See **Attachment 16**) [\[DHS.0002.002.0063\]](#)
- Personal Hardship Assistance Program Implementation Guidelines, December 2013 (See **Attachment 17**) [\[DHS.0004.002.0001\]](#)

Activation of Assistance Program

75. The decision to provide emergency relief assistance for single incidents is by approval of the Director, HHSEM. This is based on consideration of Victorians experiencing personal hardship after an emergency.

76. Emergency relief assistance is available to eligible applicants to assist a household during the first seven days after single house fires and the following natural emergency events: bushfire, flood, storm, storm surge, landslide, earthquake, meteorite strike, tornado and tsunami.

77. The decision to provide emergency re-establishment assistance payments can only be made by the Premier or the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, and can only be provided for the emergency event for which approval is given.

78. The Assistance Program primarily caters for natural emergencies. The Assistance Program Implementation Guidelines provide a list of situations to which the Program does not apply: e.g. damage caused by construction or building works, business losses of every type, non-natural emergencies such as transport accidents, industrial accidents or bombings or shootings, loss of income. As the Morwell mine fire was started by a bushfire, the Assistance Program is applicable.

Funding

79. All expenditure on payments for an eligible natural disaster is from the HHSEM budget up to a level of \$240,000. Above this, expenditure becomes eligible for partial reimbursement from the Commonwealth Government.

Personal Hardship Voluntary Relocation Payments description of assistance and agency responsible

80. On 28 February 2014, the Chief Health Officer recommended that 'at risk' residents living in the south area of Morwell should temporarily relocate away from the smoke.

81. On the same day, a special meeting of the SCRC supported finalisation of the eligibility for relocation assistance and the Premier announced the availability of personal hardship voluntary relocation payments (relocation payments). This was the second type of relief payment made available in relation to the Hazelwood mine fire. Consistent with the Chief Health Officer's recommendation to Government and the community, these relocation payments were available to eligible 'at risk' residents in the south Morwell area including pregnant women, residents aged 65 years and over, children under school age (under five years) and anyone with pre-existing heart or lung conditions.

82. The amount of the relocation payment was assessed on a case by case basis and was in the order of \$1,250 per week per household, or \$750 per single person household.

83. DHS developed and administered the guidelines for administering the relocation payments. (**Attachment 18**) [\[DHS.0002.005.0356\]](#)

84. In recognition that web based communication would not be effective to all Morwell residents, DHS developed a relocation information fact sheet and this was letter dropped to properties in the south Morwell area on 28 February and (with a small revision) on 1 March 2014. (**Attachment 19**) (**Links: see Table of Attachments**)

85. At the height of the incident (6 March 2014), 101 DHS staff were deployed to the Latrobe Valley. All staff continually invited anyone who felt they might need assistance to talk to DHS about their needs and issues.

86. A Health Care card, Pensioner Concession card, payslip or proof of other benefit could be used to demonstrate hardship. However, if this could not be provided, individual circumstance was taken into account and a compassionate approach was taken.

CASE STUDY

DHS provided additional assistance by finding accommodation options for the purpose of temporary relocation for people who required it. A case example was a female resident in her mid-90s, who had emigrated from Bosnia in 1981 and lived on her own in the south area of Morwell without any support services, caught a bus to the Moe Respite Centre seeking help to stay out of the smoke. The woman told DHS she had no family, only a couple of acquaintances, and was finding it difficult to get around on her walking frame. She was also struggling to breathe at times. DHS drove the woman to a Respite and Relocation Assistance Centre where she successfully applied for a relocation payment. DH sourced accommodation for the woman at an Aged Care Supported Accommodation facility in Churchill, and DHS contacted the Red Cross to assist the woman to make a smooth transition to her temporary accommodation. Red Cross volunteers helped pack the woman's belongings then visited her every few days to check in, have a chat, and confirm her health, safety and wellbeing. The woman said "I just wanted to feel safe. The staff from DHS and Red Cross were very friendly and helped me discover and organise a range of supports that I didn't even know existed. I'm so glad I have moved away from the smoke."

Eligibility and rationale

87. The relocation payments were tailored from the usual types of payments made under the Assistance Program, with some additional eligibility criteria to take into account the unique nature of the event including the persistent presence of smoke rather than loss of home, the 'at risk' conditions identified by the Chief Health Officer, and the purpose of the payments. The payments were intended to cover costs for needs such as transport, accommodation, medical care and other personal expenses.

88. Relocation payments were available to eligible residents in the south Morwell area. The eligibility criteria were based on:

- hardship experienced by the continuing emissions from the fire;
- proof of address within the affected area as primary place of residence;

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- proof of low-income e.g. pension or benefit; and
- need to relocate because of assessed vulnerability.

89. The eligibility criteria were developed to target assistance to those 'at risk' groups that the Chief Health Officer had advised to relocate. Members of at risk groups who met the vulnerability requirement included pregnant women, residents aged 65 and over, pre-school aged children (under 5) and anyone with a pre-existing heart or lung condition.

90. DHS acted on Environment Protection Authority/DH advice concerning where the health risk was located, and took a liberal view on where the 'south' of Morwell is situated.

91. The amount of the relocation payment was \$750 per single person household or \$1,250 per week for other households. This was based on emergency relief assistance under the Assistance Program which provides \$750 for a principal resident with one dependent child and \$1,250 for larger households.

92. Given the purpose of relocation payments, these amounts were appropriate to help with temporary accommodation needs for up to a week. These payments were extended for the duration of time that the Chief Health Officer advised relocation.

93. The government approved second and third relocation payments for eligible residents on 7 and 14 March.

94. As at 28 April 2014, there have been 1,307 relocation payments made to eligible Morwell residents, totalling \$1,251,750.

Proof of relocation

95. The provision of assistance to an individual was not contingent on proof that the individual had already relocated. Applicants ranged from those who had already relocated to those who intended to relocate following advice from the Chief Health Officer.

96. Application forms for relocation payments included details of intended relocation address. This form had to be signed by the applicant. Registration with the Red Cross

was also considered proof of intention to relocate. (**Attachment 20**)

[JDHS.0004.001.00011](#)

Fraud mitigation

97. Assistance Program officers used best efforts to balance helping people quickly and compassionately with requirements for financial accountability (as per the Assistance Program guidelines).

98. To prevent some relocation payments being accessed inappropriately, DHS had a number of measures in place to help mitigate misuse and fraudulent activity.

- DHS conducted an interview with each applicant to check their identity and eligibility against the criteria. They discussed each applicant's individual needs and their proposed travel and respite plans.
- Applicants were advised that if they received a relocation payment, their details could be shared with other agencies, including Victoria Police in Morwell.
- Applicants were advised that if they decided to return home early, they should advise DHS immediately, so that DHS could tell the police and avoid any false alarms.
- Where it was identified that funds may have been obtained inappropriately, DHS provided information to Victoria Police for investigation.
- ***Vulnerable People in Emergencies Program***

99. The Vulnerable People in Emergencies (VPE) program is a collaborative project involving DHS, DH, community service organisations, local government and Victoria Police, and is the outcome of a recommendation from the 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission. The VPE program's purpose is to improve the safety of vulnerable people during emergencies through:

 - supporting emergency planning with and for vulnerable people; and
 - developing local lists of vulnerable people (Vulnerable Persons Registers) which are available to Victoria Police in their role as evacuation managers, for consideration in response to emergencies.

100. Agencies funded by DHS or DH use existing relationships with their clients to identify people who are:

- frail, and / or physically or cognitively impaired; and
- unable to comprehend warnings and / or respond in an emergency situation.

101. These clients are then supported to develop emergency response plans. The VPE program recognises that many vulnerable people are unable to develop emergency response plans for themselves, and cannot identify personal or community support networks to help them in an emergency. Those people are particularly vulnerable to emergencies and are placed on Vulnerable Persons Registers.

102. Many people in the community may be vulnerable in emergencies due to a range of factors. The VPE program targets a specific group of vulnerable people and is not intended to cater for the needs of all people who may benefit from support before, during and after emergencies. Other relief and respite activities were in place to provide emergency support to the broader Morwell community.

103. The VPE program also requires councils to keep lists of facilities where vulnerable people are likely to be situated, and include this list of facilities in their Municipal Emergency Management Plan. Councils are required to make this list accessible to Victoria Police in the event of an emergency. A list of facilities including St Hillary's, residential aged care, schools and pre-schools, disability day programs, and group homes in Morwell were available to Victoria Police for their consideration in relation to relocation.

104. In addition DHS ensured contact was maintained with agencies providing services to client groups (e.g. child protection, youth justice, disability, and public housing), as well as our direct clients, so that any needs were addressed.

105. Through implementation of the VPE program, local agencies identified *four* vulnerable people living in Morwell without personal or community support networks and placed their details on the Vulnerable Persons Register.

106. In response to the Hazelwood mine fire Victoria Police checked the Vulnerable Persons Register, produced an evacuation report containing the details of the four identified vulnerable persons and that this information was considered in evacuation

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planning. None of the four vulnerable persons resided within the southern area of Morwell.

- ***Views about how things worked***

107. Given the complex and prolonged circumstances of the mine fire, I consider that DHS responded flexibly and appropriately. In a short period of time DHS tailored two assistance payments with different purpose and eligibility, including deploying and training officers to assess and provide payments to eligible people.

108. Financial assistance was broad, with approximately 65 per cent of all Morwell households having received at least one financial assistance payment for respite or relocation purposes.

E: Other relief during the fires

109. DH provided significant health relief and assistance during the incident. However, I trust these details will be supplied by the Chief Health Officer's witness statement.

- ***Personal Hardship Respite payments***

Description of assistance and agency responsible

110. On 20 February 2014, a special meeting of the SCRC supported personal hardship emergency relief assistance (under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements) being made available to individuals directly impacted by the Hazelwood Mine Fire, with criteria and a communications strategy for payments to be determined by the DHS, Department of Treasury and Finance, Fire Services Commissioner and Department of Premier and Cabinet. This assistance was referred to as 'personal hardship respite payments.' This was the first type of relief payment made available in relation to the Hazelwood mine fire.

111. On 21 February 2014 – within 24 hours of this decision – DHS made available personal hardship respite payments (respite payments) for Morwell residents who met the following criteria:

- hardship experienced by the smoke related to the fire;
- proof of a Morwell address as the primary place of residence;

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- proof of low-income e.g. pension or benefit;
- intention to relocate from Morwell for the purpose of respite, and the planned destination.

112. Respite payments were \$500 per household; however DHS officers could approve up to \$1,250 per household, by exception. Factors to consider were:

- the number of persons in the household;
- where a family would relocate for respite purposes;
- mode of travel;
- accommodation type e.g. whether the family would stay with extended family or in paid accommodation.

113. DHS developed and administered the guidelines (in consultation with other departments including DTF and DPC) for administering the respite payments. See **Attachment 21** for Guidelines for the payment of personal hardship respite payments, 20 February 2014. [\[DHS.0002.005.0351\]](#)

114. All Morwell applicants were initially screened over the phone by DHS staff in the DHS call centre, and then interviewed and assessed in person by DHS staff at one of the three Respite & Relocation Assessment centres in Morwell.

115. In relation to the hardship eligibility criteria, broad principles were applied to each case to take account of the individual's circumstances as reported by the resident, related to their vulnerability or risk, such as health conditions or disabilities in household members, lack of transport or general support networks to assist them, social isolation and lack of financial means to afford the respite or relocation required.

116. The process established to support quality, consistency and equity in relation to the case-by-case assessments for eligibility was that each call centre or payment officer escalated any threshold/complexities/other issues to a team leader and then to a DHS Executive Officer (located on site at Respite and Relocation Assistance centres) to make the decision. If a further determination was required, the decision was escalated to the DHS Human Services Commander (or delegate) in the REOC.

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117. All DHS call centre and respite and relocation payment staff were briefed in relation to the eligibility criteria, including the need for a generous and compassionate approach. In addition, DHS officers were debriefed daily and provided with support around assessing eligibility in relation to complex eligibility issues.

118. In addition, many cases were reviewed as the emergency progressed and the reported circumstances of residents changed or deteriorated, and in some of these cases payments were subsequently made available.

Eligibility and rationale

119. The respite payments were made available in recognition that some Morwell residents were experiencing personal hardship as they tried to seek respite from the smoke and ash from the Hazelwood mine fire.

120. The respite payments were tailored from the usual types of payments available under the Assistance Program, with some additional eligibility criteria to take into account the unique nature of the event (persistent presence of smoke rather than loss of home) and purpose of the payments. The payments were intended to cover costs associated with seeking respite (e.g. petrol, accommodation).

121. The criteria were developed to ensure Morwell residents most in need were targeted for respite assistance, and a generous and compassionate approach was taken.

122. The amount of the respite payment was \$500 per household. This was based on emergency relief assistance under the Assistance Program which provides \$500 for a sole resident. Given the purpose of respite payments, this amount was deemed appropriate to assist people to take a break from the smoky conditions.

123. Usually emergency relief assistance is provided to people with homes damaged or destroyed, who may not have access to personal clothing or toiletries. This situation was different for Morwell residents who had access to their homes and personal belongings.

124. DHS officers could in exceptional circumstances approve up to \$1,250 per household (which is the capped amount for emergency relief assistance under the Assistance Program) depending on the circumstances.

125. As the event continued and Morwell residents continued to be impacted by smoke and ash, a second respite payment of \$500 was made available to eligible Morwell residents on 7 March.

126. As of 28 April 2014 there were, 4,202 respite payments totalling \$2,107,500 made to Morwell residents.

- ***Views about how things worked***

127. I refer to my comments made above in paragraphs 107 and 108.

- ***Other relief activities***

128. In addition to financial assistance, many other relief services were provided by DHS, other departments, local council and relief agencies.

Emergency Relief Centres

129. On the night the fire entered the Hazelwood mine, the Council opened two emergency relief centres for residents and the travelling public. The emergency relief centres were located at the Moe Town Hall and Traralgon Town Hall. The centres were operated by the Council, Red Cross, and Victorian Council of Churches. Victoria Police also provided two members to the emergency relief centres for the first evening and overnight.

130. Services offered at the emergency relief centres by relief agencies included personal support and information, meals, material needs, emergency shelter and temporary accommodation. A total of 660 people registered at the centres, with 259 staying overnight. Both centres closed by 11 February due to lack of demand by the affected community.

Respite Centre

131. DHS recognised that Morwell residents needed a centre where they could seek respite from smoky conditions. On 19 February 2014 DHS established such a respite centre in Moe. The centre was staffed by DHS, Ambulance Victoria, Victoria Police, EPA, the Country Fire Authority, relief agencies (Red Cross and Victoria Council of Churches) and local council personnel. The respite centre provided a cool, air conditioned space where any resident could take a break from the smoky conditions.

The respite centre also provided information, personal support and referral for assistance for respite from the poor air in Morwell. Free transport to attend the centre was provided to those who were aged, disabled or required transport assistance.

Respite and Relocation Assistance Centres

132. DHS established three Respite and Relocation Assistance Centres (DHS office, Commercial Road Primary School and Senior Citizens Hall) in Morwell on 28 February. Residents called the DHS hotline and made an appointment to be assessed by a DHS officer for respite and/or relocation payment eligibility at one of these centres. DHS provided additional support through these centres, which included assisting people to source accommodation, as well as other activities highlighted by the case study below.
133. The centre at the DHS office did not have sufficient capacity to cope with high volume of applicants and was closed on 4 March. An alternate location was opened.

CASE STUDY

An example of relief support provided at a Respite and Relocation Assistance Centre:

A young family attended the Moe Respite Centre seeking a break from the smoke and respite for their sons aged four weeks and two years. The new born child had presented at Latrobe Regional Hospital earlier in the week with stomach complaints and breathing difficulties. The family was immediately provided with food and drinks. An appointment was made for the family to attend a Respite and Relocation Assistance Centre to apply for a relocation payment. As the family was low on fuel for their car, DHS transported the family back to their home to pick up supplies and then on to the Respite and Relocation Assistance Centre where a relocation payment was made available to the family. DHS then transported the mother to Moe to collect the funds and assisted her to secure the last remaining room in a motel close to public amenities and transport. Through the collective support of relief and recovery agencies, the family secured safe and reliable accommodation for the rest of the week.

Other respite assistance

134. A range of other State Government respite assistance initiatives were made available specifically for this event, including:

- 13,500 people travelled for free to and from Morwell on V/Line;
- 171 people received free entry to Melbourne Museum venues;
- 5,372 people received free entry to Zoos Victoria zoos;
- free transport and food and drink vouchers for the Morwell community to attend activities in neighbouring communities.

- ***Outreach***

135. Outreach support is an important component of relief and recovery. DHS coordinated Red Cross outreach to residents in the south area of Morwell (again based on the ‘at risk’ recommendation from the Chief Health Officer) to ensure residents knew how to access information and support. The Council, supported by 31 other councils, CFA, SES and the Victorian Council of Churches, also conducted outreach to residents across Morwell and businesses in the Morwell central business district. A total of 6,441 households were visited. Outreach activities identified 20 households experiencing social isolation and/or complex issues and these households were followed up by DHS (9 households) and Red Cross (11 households). This was a key method of communicating information to community members, and for those who were not at home, a calling card was left.

DHS hotline

136. DHS operated a hotline (1800 006 468) from 21 February to 21 March. The DHS hotline provided the Morwell community with information on respite and relocation payments, and other available support. During this time 10,332 telephone calls were received. From 21 March DHS ensured that residents were made aware of the ongoing availability of support and assistance via the Community Information and Recovery Centre and the Council through their dedicated recovery hotline (1800 017 777) operating through a call centre established on 20 March 2014.

DHS public housing

137. DHS met with 78 aged residents at Maryvale Crescent public housing units in Morwell on three occasions during the event (19 February, 26 February and 27 March). DHS proactively supported the residents by providing practical assistance and information as required.

Psychosocial recovery information sessions

138. In recognition of the importance of psychosocial recovery for residents and communities following an emergency, DHS engaged clinical psychologists Dr Rob Gordon and Dr David Younger to host two psychosocial recovery information sessions/workshops on 13 March (as discussed in paragraph 67). The first session was designed to assist the Council staff and government communications professionals to improve their communications with local residents with a focus on improving messaging to people experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety. The second session for health professionals focused on the challenges of correctly diagnosing symptoms that may present from anxiety, psychosomatic responses and toxic response.

139. The psychosocial needs of the community were considered early on by DHS and as part of recovery planning, a Social and Community Recovery Sub-Plan was prepared. The purpose of the Sub-Plan (which forms part of the Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Plan) was to outline and coordinate social and community recovery activities that would meet the needs of the Morwell community (refer to section H).

'Register.Find.Reunite'

140. Victoria Police activated the Red Cross 'Register.Find.Reunite' service earlier in the 2014 bushfire season. This service enables individuals to register their whereabouts during an emergency. Then with the individual's permission a matching process enables Red Cross to share details so that family, friends and loved ones can reunite with affected individuals. This service was formally activated for the Hazelwood mine fire on 27 February (on instruction from the office of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services), operating at the DHS Respite and Relocation Assistance Centres in Morwell and the Respite Centre in Moe, to assist family and friends to find individuals who elected to take a break away from Morwell.

141. A total of 5,300 registrations were taken via Register.Find.Reunite over 18 days. The Red Cross subsequently telephoned 659 Morwell residents who had registered with Register.Find.Reunite and were either over 70 years of age, had significant health issues or had other characteristics that could have made them more vulnerable (e.g. young children), to check on their welfare and provide them with information.

F: Clean up

- *Clean up assistance*

142. On 18 March 2014 the Premier announced a \$2 million community assistance package to help residents begin to clean up ash left by the Hazelwood mine fire.

143. A professional cleaning service was made available for residents who needed assistance to clean up. This included a range of inside cleaning tasks and the following outside tasks: cleaning the outside of windows and window ledges; removing ash and dust from back and front verandas, decks, railings and steps; and the wiping down of outdoor furniture.

144. For those who are able to undertake cleaning themselves, the Community Information and Recovery Centre provides a clean-up kit which contains information on how to clean, a bucket, masks, gloves, laundry voucher, car washing vouchers and trigger hose fittings if required. High-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter vacuum cleaners and industrial vacuum cleaners are also available for loan.

145. As at 12 May 2014 there have been:

- 780 assisted clean-ups completed by professional cleaning services;
- 635 self-clean up kits dispensed;
- 713 laundry vouchers dispensed;
- 1,143 car wash vouchers dispensed;
- 418 instances of HEPA vacuum cleaners loaned.

146. The bulk of the assisted clean-ups have been completed and it is anticipated that all assisted cleans will be completed by the end of May.

- ***Agencies responsible***

147. The coordination for clean-up is overseen by Local Government Victoria in support of the Council. The Council is responsible for coordinating and managing the clean-up support service, including assessment of eligibility.

148. The Built Environment (clean-up) Recovery Plan was on 14 March 2014 following the Premier's announcement of the \$2 million clean-up package. (**Attachment 22**) [\[DEECD.0001.002.0003\]](#) The sub-committee, which includes members from Local Government Victoria (chair), the Council, DHS, Worksafe, DEECD (as required), continues to meet to provide advice about the clean-up process.

149. DHS has supported the Council to open a one-stop-shop in central Morwell to provide residents with information and supplies for their clean-up after the Hazelwood mine fire. This council clean up assistance for Morwell residents operates from the Latrobe City Community Information and Recovery centre.

- ***Eligibility criteria and rationale***

150. A professional cleaning service is available for residents who need assistance with clean up. This service is available to:

- existing Home and Community Care clients;
- people who are assessed as having high needs because of their age, a disability or a current health condition;
- people from the south area of Morwell who received relocation assistance from DHS.

151. Local Government Victoria has made it clear that a compassionate and generous approach should be taken into account when assessing eligibility for clean-up assistance.

- ***Support available for people having difficulties with accessing clean up reimbursement from insurance companies***

152. I am aware that some people have reported experiencing difficulties accessing clean up reimbursement from their insurance companies. This issue has been looked into by DHS.

153. Under Australian law, insurers are required to have two distinct complaints processes. One must be internal and the other must be an external dispute resolution scheme that is independent from the insurer.

154. If the policy holder is not satisfied with the result of the internal dispute resolution process, they can contact the Financial Ombudsman Service. The Financial Ombudsman Service can attempt to mediate an outcome between the policy holder and insurance company or, if unsuccessful, the ombudsman can make a determination. These decisions are legally binding on the insurance company, but not on the policy holder.

155. The Insurance Council of Australia has representation at the Community Information and Recovery Centre in Morwell. Residents can ring to make appointments for this service or drop in. This is advertised on the Latrobe City Council website and in their local newsletter.

156. Other support includes:

- Insurance Council of Australia hotline (1800 734 621)
- Gippsland Community Legal Service
- Financial Ombudsman Service
- *Views about how things worked*

157. The clean-up package was generous and calculated on the assumption of 1,900 households receiving professional cleaning services (this included all Home and Community Care (**HACC**) clients). The current take up of clean-up will not exhaust the \$2 million allocated, which demonstrates the generosity of the package. It is unusual for State Government to provide domestic clean up services following emergencies. Clean up is usually limited to public (Council) assets and infrastructure. In my time as State Recovery Coordinator, there has not been clean up assistance of this sort provided to households after floods and bushfires.

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G: Assistance to business

- *Assistance provided to businesses and responsible agencies*

158. Regional Development Victoria, in the Department of State Development, Business and Innovation has been the lead agency providing assistance to Morwell businesses.

159. The following information on assistance to business has been provided by my colleagues in Regional Development Victoria.

Economic Recovery Sub-Committee

160. The economic recovery sub-committee established under the Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Committee includes members from the following agencies:

Department of State Development, Business and Innovation

Regional Development Victoria (Chair)

Small Business Victoria

Tourism Victoria

Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

The Council

Destination Gippsland

Committee for Gippsland

Latrobe City Business and Tourism Association

Advance Morwell

Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry

AusIndustry

Industry Capability Network

161. This sub-committee is working with the Community Business Recovery Committee to identify a range of opportunities to promote economic development in the Morwell CBD. Current proposals include a business leader breakfast and Morwell business

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event. The timing of these events is being worked through in consultation with the group leading the 'Thank the Firies' day event which is planned for late May.

162. The sub-committee has drafted the Economic Recovery sub-plan to the Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Plan.

Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry Morwell Business Relief Fund

163. On 3 March, the Premier announced the establishment of the Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VECCI) Morwell Business Relief Fund to support businesses that have been adversely affected by the Hazelwood mine fire.

164. The \$2 million fund is being administered by VECCI with the aim of providing short-term financial support through small grants of between \$1,000 and \$10,000 to owner-managers of small businesses in the Morwell township that have experienced income loss.

165. As at 23 April 2014, more than 180 grant applications have been approved, totalling over \$1 million granted to small businesses.

Small Business Support Workshops

166. A total of four workshops were held in Morwell to assist businesses to manage operations and plan for their recovery. The workshops were held on 10 March (two held - afternoon and evening), 17 March and 24 March 2014. There were a total of over 58 participants at the four workshops. The workshops offered specific information for small business owners to help them manage their business operations through the incident and plan for recovery.

Small Business Bus

167. The Small Business Bus visited Morwell on six days (on 3-4 March, 20-21 March and 28-29 March 2014). A total of 34 mentoring sessions were delivered on the Bus and 75 'business engagements' took place (in which a business owner received assistance from the Small Business Victoria information officer).

Small Business Mentoring Service

168. The Small Business Mentoring Service has been very active in Morwell, providing mentoring sessions at the Council Offices, at the Small Business Bus, and at the final

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Small Business Support Workshop held on 24 March 2014. Mentors attended all of the four workshops held. The Service also door knocked businesses in Morwell to provide direct assistance. In total 110 business owners received mentoring over 14 separate days from 3-29 March 2014.

Other economic recovery activities

169. The 2014-15 Victorian Budget includes \$2.35 million to support the economic recovery of communities affected by bushfires in January and February 2014. Of this commitment, \$1.15 million is reprioritisation of existing RDV funding for community events (\$150,000) and the fast-tracking of regional development projects in affected communities (\$1 million). The remaining \$1.2 million is new funding for the establishment of a 2014 Bushfires Economic Recovery Fund (ERF).

170. The 2014 Bushfires ERF is intended to support the recovery of communities affected by the bushfires by stimulating economic activity. It will fund initiatives such as tourism promotion, 'buy-local' marketing campaigns, small infrastructure projects, streetscape projects and community development initiatives. The Fund will be administered by RDV in consultation with Tourism Victoria and Small Business Victoria.

Eligibility criteria and rationale

171. The VECCI Morwell Business Relief Fund offered grants of up to \$10,000 for small businesses in the Morwell township whose income was adversely affected by the mine fire. With smoke and ash affecting local businesses and residents for over a month, the fire impacted businesses across a broad range of industries, including retailers, manufacturers, restaurants, cafes and hairdressers.

172. To be eligible, a business must meet the following criteria:

- employ less than 20 full time equivalent employees;
- have an ABN;
- be located within a five kilometre radius of the Morwell Post Office;
- can demonstrate loss of income since the Morwell mine fire.

CASE STUDY

A small business owner in Morwell telephoned the DHS hotline to make an appointment to discuss assistance payments. Although the small business owner lived in the south area of Morwell and wanted a break from the smoke and ash, she was a middle-income earner and was not assessed as an 'at risk' resident. She was therefore not eligible for either a respite or relocation payment. DHS discussed the option to apply for a small business loan as her camera business was not operable because equipment had been damaged, and the availability of small business mentoring; however this was not taken up at that stage. DHS also discussed the other services available, including free V/Line travel which the business owner had already utilised.

H: Recovery

- *Continuing recovery planning for the Hazelwood Mine Fire*

173. DHS began planning for recovery immediately after the fire spread into the Hazelwood mine. Due to the unique nature of this emergency, relief and recovery activities had to be adaptable, flexible, responsive to changing health triggers, and supportive of the Council and the community's changing needs.
174. The Council, with support from DHS, is currently managing a longer-term community-led recovery process that began with a Victorian Government funded clean-up of eligible residences, and the cleaning of public (Council) assets.
175. The SCRC – through the State Recovery Coordination Team – is actively monitoring these activities and outcomes, and supporting the Council and the regional DHS office (and recovery team) to help ensure a successful longer-term recovery.
176. DHS continues to chair the Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Committee. This committee is due to finalise the Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Plan, and sub plans, for endorsement on 3 June 2014.
177. On 7 March 2014 DHS developed and signed the Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Transition Plan which was distributed to agencies.
178. On 7 March 2014 DHS, together with the Council and lead recovery agencies, developed the draft Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Plan and distributed it to relevant agencies (see **Attachment 23**) [\[DHS.0002.005.0586\]](#).

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179. DHS subsequently updated the draft plan and distributed it to committee agencies for comment on 9, 13, 17 and 24 March 2014. The latest version of the draft plan was updated and distributed on 8 April 2014, with the plan and sub-plans ready to be finalised pending State budget funding announcements (see **Attachments 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28**) (**Links: see Table of Attachments**).

180. A Social and Community Recovery Sub-Plan is a key sub plan of the Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Plan. (**Attachment 29**) [\[DHS.0004.002.00671\]](#) Dr Rob Gordon and consultant psychologists were consulted in the development of the Sub-Plan. The Sub-Plan identifies the psychosocial needs of the Morwell community, including recovery activities to address known issues. This informed a budget bid made by DHS as part of the state budget process.

181. The 2014-15 Budget provides \$2.3 million for a range of psychosocial and community support measures (e.g. counselling, case support, community development officers, capacity building initiatives and local government recovery support) for bushfire affected communities. This includes \$673,500 for psychosocial initiatives in Morwell.

182. To support an integrated and multifaceted approach to community information and engagement, HHSEM has employed a community engagement/communications officer (from 22 April) to work with the Council, the local community, DHS recovery officers, and the local DH office for a three-month period, to support their various community engagement and communications activities.

Dated

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[NAME]

I: List of Attachments

1. State Recovery Coordination Structures and Functions [\[DHS.0005.001.0001\]](#)
2. Letters from the Board – 6 May 2014 and 9 May 2014 [\[VGSO.0003.004.0001\]](#) and [\[VGSO.0003.006.0003\]](#)
3. Emergency Management Manual Victoria (EMMV) [\[DHS.0004.003.0204\]](#), [\[DHS.0004.003.0001\]](#), [\[DHS.0004.003.0024\]](#), [\[DHS.0004.003.0036\]](#), [\[DHS.0004.003.0075\]](#), [\[DHS.0004.003.0110\]](#), [\[DHS.0004.003.0121\]](#), [\[DHS.0004.002.0092\]](#) and [\[DOJ.0001.001.0172\]](#)
4. State Emergency Relief and Recovery Plan (Part 4 EMMV) [\[DHS.0004.002.0092\]](#)
5. HHSEM State Situation Reports (See Table below)
6. State Relief Plan (v1.0 signed off on 7 February, updated again 12 February) [\[DHS.0002.005.0101\]](#)
7. State Relief Readiness Plan March 2014 (24 February) [\[DHS.0004.002.0174\]](#)
8. State Relief Action Plan (18-23 February, 24 February-3 March) [\[DHS.0002.005.0134\]](#) and [\[DHS.0002.005.0136\]](#)
9. State Recovery Plan 2014 Bushfires [\[DHS.0004.002.0162\]](#)
10. Gippsland Regional Relief Plan 7 February 2014 [\[DHS.0004.001.0034\]](#)
11. Gippsland Regional Relief Plan (Latrobe Valley Coal Mine Fire Incident) 17, 19 - 20, 23 and 26 February 2014 [\[DHS.0004.001.0055\]](#), [\[DHS.0002.005.0068\]](#), [\[DHS.0002.005.0077\]](#), [\[DHS.0002.005.0034\]](#) and [\[DHS.0002.005.0045\]](#)
12. Gippsland Regional Relief Plan (Latrobe Valley Coal Mine Fire Incident) 28 February (version 1.5) and 6 March (version 1.6) [\[DHS.0002.005.0087\]](#) and [\[DHS.0004.001.0042\]](#)
13. Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Transition Plan [\[DHS.0002.005.0532\]](#)
14. A. Latrobe Valley Coal Mine Community Information and Engagement Plan [\[DHS.0004.001.0076\]](#)
B. Recovery Community Engagement and Communications Plan [\[DHS.0004.002.0048\]](#)
15. Updates of ERRV website [\[DHS.0004.002.0207\]](#), [\[DHS.0004.002.0208\]](#), [\[DHS.0004.002.0209\]](#), [\[DHS.0004.002.0210\]](#) and [\[DHS.0004.002.0211\]](#)
16. Personal Hardship Assistance Program Policy, December 2012 [\[DHS.0002.002.0063\]](#)
17. Personal Hardship Assistance Program Implementation Guidelines, December 2013 [\[DHS.0004.002.0001\]](#)
18. Guidelines for the payment of personal hardship voluntary relocation payments, 28 February 2014 [\[DHS.0002.005.0356\]](#)

19. Relocation information fact sheets [\[DHS.0004.004.0001\]](#), [\[DHS.0004.004.0003\]](#),
[\[DHS.0004.004.0007\]](#), [\[DHS.0004.004.0005\]](#), [\[DHS.0004.004.0009\]](#),
[\[DHS.0004.004.0011\]](#) and [\[DHS.0004.004.0013\]](#)
20. Application forms for relocation payments [\[DHS.0004.001.0001\]](#)
21. Guidelines for the payment of personal hardship respite payments, 20 February 2014
[\[DHS.0002.005.0351\]](#)
22. Built Environment (clean-up) Recovery Sub-Plan 14 March 2014
[\[DEECD.0001.002.0003\]](#)
23. Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Plan 7 March 2014 [\[DHS.0002.005.0586\]](#)
24. Hazelwood Mine Fire Recovery Plan v1.3 8 April 2014 (latest version)
[\[DHS.0002.005.0586\]](#)
25. Community Engagement Framework Sub-Plan v1.1 19 March 2014
[\[DHS.0004.001.0015\]](#)
26. Economic Recovery Sub-Plan endorsed 17 March 2014 [\[DHS.0004.001.0023\]](#)
27. HM Environment and Agriculture Recovery Sub-Plan v1.1 [\[DHS.0004.001.0071\]](#)
28. Health Recovery Sub-plan v0.2 [\[DHS.0004.001.0063\]](#)
29. Social & Community Recovery Sub-plan v1.3 [\[DHS.0004.002.0067\]](#)

Attachment 5 - HHSEM State Situation Reports

Document Id	Main Date	Title
[DOH.0003.001.0001]	8/02/2014	State Situation Report Number No 1
[DOH.0003.001.0032]	9/02/2014	State Situation Report Number No 2
[DOH.0003.001.0051]	10/02/2014	State Situation Report Number No 3
[DOH.0003.001.0101]	11/02/2014	State Situation Report Number No 4
[DOH.0003.001.0074]	12/02/2014	State Situation Report Number No 5
[DOH.0003.001.0077]	13/02/2014	State Situation Report Number No 6
[DOH.0003.001.0080]	14/02/2014	State Situation Report Number No 7
[DOH.0003.001.0083]	15/02/2014	State Situation Report Number No 7
[DOH.0003.001.0086]	16/02/2014	State Situation Report Number No 9
[DOH.0003.001.0104]	17/02/2014	State Situation Report Number No 10
[DOH.0003.001.0089]	18/02/2014	State Situation Report Number No 11
[DOH.0003.001.0106]	19/02/2014	State Situation Report Number No 12
[DOH.0003.001.0092]	20/02/2014	State Situation Report Number No 13
[DOH.0003.001.0095]	21/02/2014	State Situation Report Number No 14
[DOH.0003.001.0098]	24/02/2014	State Situation Report Number No 1
[DOH.0003.001.0034]	25/02/2014	State Situation Report Number No 2
[DOH.0003.001.0053]	26/02/2014	State Situation Report Number No 3
[DOH.0003.001.0056]	27/02/2014	State Situation Report Number No 4
[DOH.0003.001.0059]	28/02/2014	State Situation Report Number No 5
[DOH.0003.001.0062]	1/03/2014	State Situation Report Number No 6
[DOH.0003.001.0065]	2/03/2014	State Situation Report Number No 7
[DOH.0003.001.0068]	3/03/2014	State Situation Report Number No 8
[DOH.0003.001.0071]	4/03/2014	State Situation Report Number No 9

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[DOH.0003.001.0003]	5/03/2014	State Situation Report Number No 10
[DOH.0003.001.0006]	6/03/2014	State Situation Report Number No 11
[DOH.0003.001.0009]	7/03/2014	State Situation Report Number No 12
[DOH.0003.001.0012]	8/03/2014	State Situation Report Number No 13
[DOH.0003.001.0014]	9/03/2014	State Situation Report Number No 14
[DOH.0003.001.0017]	10/03/2014	State Situation Report Number No 15
[DOH.0003.001.0020]	11/03/2014	State Situation Report Number No 16
[DOH.0003.001.0023]	12/03/2014	State Situation Report Number No 17
[DOH.0003.001.0026]	13/03/2014	State Situation Report Number No 18
[DOH.0003.001.0029]	14/03/2014	State Situation Report No 19
[DOH.0003.001.0037]	17/03/2014	State Situation Report Number No 20
[DOH.0003.001.0040]	19/03/2014	State Situation Report Number No 21
[DOH.0003.001.0043]	21/03/2014	State Situation Report Number No 22
[DOH.0003.001.0046]	24/03/2014	State Situation Report Number No 23
[DOH.0003.001.0049]	26/03/2014	State Situation Report Number No 24