WITNESS STATEMENT OF WILLIAM BROWN

I, William Brown, of [redacted], Churchill, in the State of Victoria, state as follows:

Personal Background

1. I currently reside at [redacted], Churchill.
2. I finished school and completed a building apprenticeship in fibrous plastering. I was a fibrous plasterer for approximately 10 years before I enrolled in Monash Gippsland and obtained an associate diploma in business.
3. In January 1969, I commenced employment with the State Electricity Commission of Victoria (**SECV**) as a labourer working on dredger tracks. I gradually progressed during my employment until I ended up in the Hazelwood Mine fire service.
4. In 1970, I joined the Hazelwood Mine Fire Service. At this time there were approximately ~~15~~ 20 men in the crew who worked under the Fire Service Officer and ultimately the Mine Manager. There was also a Fire Service Foreman, then a leading hand and crews. It was a year round job. Charlie Strong was the Fire Service Officer and John Lee was the foreman. The Fire Service section under the direction of the Fire Service Officer and Fire Service Foreman were responsible for the Mine fire protection and suppression systems, which consisted of maintaining and operating significant piped water reticulation and pumping systems, fire fighting and other fire related duties in the mine and environs, as per the Fire Service Policy and Code of Practice.
5. After the fire in 1977, Charlie Strong retired and John Lee was promoted to Fire Service Officer. I was promoted from leading hand to foreman.
6. When John Lee later retired in 1988, I was promoted to Fire Service Officer.
7. In 1994 the mine was taken over by Hazelwood Power and my role was changed to Support Services Manager. My new role required me to look after everything in the mine that wasn't operational. This included relocating the mine's conveyer systems for dredging operations, drainage and other ancillary works, to ensure coal winning and operational requirements weren't compromised. However, the Fire Services Officer position was still my main role. This was the first time that the Fire Services Officer was involved in other roles in the mine.

8. I retired from the Hazelwood Mine in December 1998.

Hazelwood Mine Fire Service

9. Before privatisation all 3 mines in the Latrobe Valley had a dedicated fire service group who were responsible for their fire service activities. When Hazelwood Power (privatised company) took control of the Morwell mine we still maintained a dedicated fire service group. The Fire Service section was responsible for:
   a. fighting fires, and ensuring fire fighting apparatus was strategically placed in the mine and environs, this also included regular inspections of such equipment; and
   b. operating and maintaining the mine's pumping systems and installations, including all artesian aquifer pumps and the responsibility for maintaining and operating the mine's reticulation system which was the main source of water for the mine in case of fire.
10. If there was a fire in the mine, the fire service group would drop what they were doing, extinguish the fire and return to their previous duties.
11. The reticulation system consisted of 3 distinct separate systems: the dirty water pumping system, the clean water pumping system and the low quality water supply from Loy Yang which was a gravity system and was available to the mine in time of fire danger. The three systems although separate could be connected through various valving arrangements to ensure adequate water supply in the event of fire. The dirty water pump system was for dewatering the mine to alleviate flooding in the bottom of the open cut which could put coal dredgers and other plant and equipment in danger, compromising our coal winning activities. The clean water pumping station collected all the water discharged from the artesian aquifers, approximately 780 litres per second, and dispatched to the Hazelwood pondage. This was to control stability issues in the mine, otherwise coal winning systems could be placed in danger of collapse. There was about 100km of water pipes laid in the Hazelwood mine that were used for fire fighting, spraying and dust suppression in the mine. We were responsible for maintaining these pipelines. Every pipe was fixed with alternating rotating sprays and hydrants, spaced 55 metres apart. This was covered in the Fire Service Policy and Code of Practice.

12. At the top of the Hazelwood mine there were two 100,000 gallon capacity tanks, one connect to the dirty water pump station and the other connected to the clean water pump station and the low quality water supply from Loy Yang.. Each of these systems were connected to pumps situated on the Hazelwood pondage and could transfer water back to the mine via these tanks in the case of a fire emergency.
13. Every conveyor at the Mine had two water pipes on either side, one remote and the other charged. The practice was to close off the valve at each end of the remote pipeline and leave all the rotating sprays in the open position. In case of a fire emergency the valves were opened instantly supplying water to the spray systems which would take approximately 10 minutes to activate compared to 45 minutes if done manually by walking the kilometre long conveyor. The other pipeline would be left charged especially when adjacent to a working dredger. If it was a high fire danger risk day I would instruct my staff to come in early to turn on the water pipes and start spraying.
14. The Fire Service section worked out of a depot on the Northern batters with an office which housed the Fire Service foreman and an office worker who carried out daily administration requirements, he also took fire calls and directed fire service crews to fire incidents.
15. The Fire Service office had a good view of the mine and its operations. It sat right on the edge of the cut and could see the whole mine except for the batters directly below.
16. The Fire Service had a dedicated Fire Service Foreman or the Fire Service Officer on call every day and night, who was responsible for receiving any fire calls during the day or night. Overnight the line would be transferred to go to shift operations who would immediately ring the fire service person on call if a fire related incident or burst pipeline occurred. All trucks were also radio equipped.
17. We had a patrol that would drive around the Hazelwood mine when everyone was at lunch. We would also send out fire patrols on fire alert days, foggy days or when there were days of reduced visibility.
18. On a high fire day, it was the responsibility of the Fire Service Foreman to ensure that all critical fire service pumps were in operational mode and that there were sufficient water stores available.
19. The training provided to those in the Fire Service was primarily on the job training learning from those who were experienced in fighting brown coal

fires. After the fire in 1977, we were required to comply with the Fire Service Policy and Code of Practice.

20. We also viewed a training video. Attached to my statement at **"WB-1"** is a CD containing the training video entitled "Fire fighting training in brown coal open cuts". This video was based on the years of experience of preventing and fighting coal fires that had built up in the Fire Service. The Fire Service Officer prior to me provided significant input and I appear in the video.

Audits of the Fire System

21. In order to ensure our compliance with appropriate fire service practices the SECV arranged for Dr Hutchins from Monash House, the head office of the SECV to attend the mine once a year just prior to the fire season to audit our practices and to ensure the mine was adhering to the Fire Service Policy and Code of Practice. Dr Hutchins was a doctor of Mechanical Engineering and was very thorough in his fire audits. He systematically followed the Fire Service Policy and Code of Practice and was very strict. He would check that all rotary and birdsmouth sprays complied with the required coverage and if deficient would set up portable sprays to cover such deficiencies. He would ensure that the grass was slashed close to the mine and that properties around the mine did not cause fire hazards, as per the Fire Service Policy and Code of Practice In my role as Fire Service Officer, I took his visits very seriously.

22. After privatisation of the Hazelwood Mine these external audits ceased. I continued to do the audits myself in-house. I made sure that they were to the same standard as the audits conducted by the SECV because that was my responsibility. I don't know if this happens anymore. The person who took over my role when I retired had no background in fire services.

1977 Mine Fire and its Aftermath

23. In 1977, there was a fire at Hazelwood Mine, where a vehicle exhaust set the coal alight at around 12.30pm.

24. Prior to the fire there had been a strike with the metal trades and as a result our maintenance of the pipework around the mine was not up to date. In addition, the pump station lost power for a short period of time.

25. As a result we had some difficulty extinguishing the fire for a short time. The fire took three days to extinguish and another four days to mop up. This was considered a fire of long duration.

26. In 1977, we used manpower and a lot of water to extinguish the fire. It was evident that we needed a lot of people. We asked for the assistance of the local RAAF, approximately 200 men. They were happy to help and were good workers who took our direction.

27. Following the 1977 fire, there was an extensive inquiry into the fire. Every month for three years senior people from Monash House would come up from Melbourne to investigate the fire. Following the Inquiry, the SECV developed the Fire Services Policy and Code of Practice which became the bible for the fire services at the mine.

28. Attached to my statement at "**WB-2**" is a copy of the Fire Service Policy and Code of Practice which was last revised by me on 4 December 1995. I don't know what happened with the Fire Service Policy and Code of Practice after I retired.

29. A key recommendation that came out of the 1977 fire was that there needed to be two sources of power to the mine, in case one failed. The SECV under direction of the Fire Service Policy and Code of Practice installed duplicate electrical supplies to all critical fire pump installations.

30. Another change following the 1977 fire was that if there was a fire at the mine we were required to call the CFA. I would then take over as the emergency commander under the direction of the CFA. However, the CFA would still listen to us and use our experience with mine fires.

31. Historically, because the CFA didn't have the experience with fighting coal mine fires, they didn't have a major presence at the mine before the 1977 fire.

32. Later in 1977, there was a smaller fire at the Yallourn Mine. I was sent to help out. We spread ourselves out over the Yallourn Mine with hoses and water. It was burning at the top of a batter in the Yallourn Mine so I used a bulldozer to push the overburden down the side of the mine. This was very effective in extinguishing the fire because it stopped the oxygen reaching the coal.

Rehabilitation of the Mine

33. The SECV did some rehabilitation of the Hazelwood mine whilst I was with the SECV, however I was not happy with it. They removed a large section of

pipe from the rehabilitated area, however I had reservations that there was still a fire risk to the batters so I re-established a pipeline back on to the clayed area.

My experience with the Hazelwood Mine Fire in 2014

34. I live in Churchill and was not directly affected by the mine fire in 2014.

35. I recall on 9 February 2014, a representative of GDF Suez said on the radio that the fire was in the Hazelwood mine in the late afternoon. He said it wasn't a source of worry because it was in a worked out section of the mine. I was very surprised that this was announced by the operator of Hazelwood mine because any fire in the mine is a worry.

36. In my role as Fire Service Officer, if it was a bad fire day like it was on 9 February 2014, I would have had my gang there early in the morning to spray the mine. It is very important to be prepared. I would have then ensured that all the pumps were working and that there was sufficient water supply

37. On Tuesday 11 February 2014, I contacted the mine management at Hazelwood to offer my assistance. I had previously received a call from an engineer working at the mine when a fire broke out and I got the sense from him that they didn't really know what they were doing. I had no confidence in the current operator's ability to put the mine fire out and wanted to be of assistance. I was advised that they were okay. I told them to contact me if they needed, however they never called.

38. I knew very early on that the fire was out of control by the amount of smoke that was in the sky. I was at my sister's house in Latrobe Street, Morwell when I heard the GDF Suez representative talking on the radio on 9 February 2014.

39. When the mine operator declined my offer of help, I tried to contact the local radio but couldn't get through. At the suggestion of John Lee, on Thursday 13 February 2014 I contacted Jon Faine at ABC radio to express my concern about the fire and the smoke in the area. I spoke with Jon Faine on the radio. I am not sure how long I was broadcast on the radio - it was a bit of a blur. When I told Mr Faine that the mine operator had rejected my offer to help, he told me that he would speak to Craig Lapsley and get him to call me. The following day I was contacted by Mr Lapsley, he didn't say a lot other than that he would come down so we could meet up. He came and met with me

the next day on Friday 14 February 2014. He offered to take me out to the Hazelwood mine. for an inspection of the fire

40. On Friday 21 February 2014 I was taken on a tour of the Hazelwood mine. I was supposed to be taken by Mr Lapsley, however he couldn't make it, so I was taken around by a senior member of the CFA, whose name I cannot recall and an employee of the Mine.

41. When I was taken around the Hazelwood mine I noticed that there were many hot spots burning in the mine and a lot of smoke. The representative of the Hazelwood mine said to me that they did not have enough people fighting the fires. On the Northern batters the CFA were using choppers to water bomb the Hazelwood mine but it wasn't working. In my view, helicopters have their place in fire suppression however I am of the belief they are more suitable and efficient in combatting fires at coal levels than they are at fighting batter fires.

Replaced

42. I was concerned that GDF Suez did not appear to understand the Fire Services Policy and the Code of Practice. I was concerned that if they didn't understand the policy they could inadvertently connect into the high pressure main by connecting into the wrong side of the water-pipes which could potentially result in a fatality. I also noted that the Hazelwood mine water-pipes didn't seem to have a connected head and tail end to maintain the integrity of the ring water system.

43. During my mine visit I observed the mine staff to be frantically building a second pipeline to put out the fire.

44. I also observed that there were a lot of firefighters around, however there did not appear to be any co-ordination of the fire fighting efforts. It appeared that there was no plan of attack.

Improvements for the future

45. I have been provided with a GDF Suez document entitled 'Mine Fire Policy & Code of Practice' (May 2013). This appears to be a recent version of the SECV Code of Practice which is attachment '**WB-3**'. I have read through the GDF Suez Code

46. My recommendation for the future is for the Hazelwood mine to ensure that they are complying with the Fire Service Policy and Code of Practice. A lot of testing and effort went into putting together the Fire Service Policy and the Code of Practice and it should be utilised. Whilst the Fire Service Policy and

the Code of Practice cannot prevent fires entirely, it will certainly mitigate the effect of fires considerably.

47. I would also recommend that the State Government mine regulator introduce an external audit, similar to that which operated in the SECV days, to ensure that the Hazelwood mine is complying with safe fire practices.

48. It is also important to remember that water is only one way to put out the fire, another is oxygen suppression. In this case, I would have used the bulldozers to bulldoze clay onto the fire.

Submission

49. Attached to my statement at "**WB-4**" is my submission submitted to the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry.

WILLIAM BROWN

41. When I was taken around the Hazelwood mine I noticed numerous spot fires burning in the bottom of the mine and giving off a lot of smoke. I asked the employee/pilot why these fires were allowed to keep burning and he replied they didn't have enough people to put them out. I replied that if there is a change of wind direction these fires could set the southern batters alight. He just repeated his previous answer of not having enough men. These fires would take about 4 hours to extinguish with a fire tanker and bulldozer I couldn't believe the risk they were taking letting these fires burn.
On arrival at the Northern batters I could see the C.F.A were using helicopter to fight the fires, but I didn't believe they were effective. I believed then and I believe now that the only way to combat coal batter fires in an open cut is with a comprehensive piped water reticulation system, plenty of manpower and plenty of water, as per the S.E.C.V era with 80 years of experience in coal fires. I am of the belief that the helicopter experiment was the reason the fire burnt for so long. Helicopters may be more suitable for coal level fires, not batter fires.