

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

**STATEMENT OF LAWRENCE ROBERT JEREMIAH**

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Filed on behalf of: State of Victoria  
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I, LAWRENCE ROBERT JEREMIAH, of 71 Hotham Street, Traralgon, Department of Environment & Primary Industries, Regional Business Manager, can say as follows:

**A. Employment history, qualifications and background**

1. My full name is Lawrence Robert Jeremiah. My date of birth is 22 December 1957.
2. I am a regional business manager within the Department of Environment & Primary Industries (**DEPI**). In this role I am responsible for DEPI's budgeting, workforce and corporate activities in the Gippsland region. I have held this role since 2012.
3. Prior to my current role I have held various positions within DEPI, in its previous forms, for approximately 40 years.
4. I hold a Bachelor of Forest Science from the University of Melbourne. I have recently completed a Graduate Certificate in Rural Leadership from the James Cook University. I also hold a Diploma in Training and Assessment from the East Gippsland Institute of TAFE. I am a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.
5. I have been involved in fire management in various capacities for approximately 40 years. I have been operating as a Level 3 (and equivalent) Incident Controller (**IC**) for approximately 25 years. Level 3 is the highest level of accreditation for ICs. I will usually be deployed as an IC three to five times a year for a period of up to seven days at a time.
6. I filled the role of IC in the Traralgon Incident Control Centre (**ICC**) during each day shift from 8 February 2014 until 12 February 2014. This statement has been prepared in response to the request made by the Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire Board of Inquiry by letter of 7 May 2014 (the **Letter**). This Statement seeks to address

each of the matters raised in the Letter. As a separate ICC was put in place on Tuesday, 12 February 2014 to manage the fires in the Hazelwood Mine, the relevant period of my control is 8 February 2014 to 10 February 2014.

7. This Statement comprises information predominantly from my personal experience and knowledge, and from my information and belief following any inquiries.

**B. Overview of command structure for fire management**

8. According to the *Victorian Bushfire Handbook*, dated August 2013, fire incidents are classified according to a scale which is as follows:
- (a) Level 1 – A small, simple fire (or group of fires) which is controlled with local resources (may include other agencies) with the Incident Controller probably undertaking more than one function.(e.g. Second shift unlikely to be required. Approximately 0-5 ha with no complex problems)
  - (b) Level 2 – is classified when an incident cannot be contained by the first attack of local resources and becomes more complex. A Level 2 incident is characterised by the need for:
    - The deployment of resources beyond initial response;
    - Sectorisation of the incident;
    - The establishment of functional sections due to the levels of complexity; or
    - A combination of the above (e.g. Expected that incident will be controlled within twenty-four hours. Approximately 5-20 ha (or much larger if there is little complexity or problem), or with some complexity and control problems).
  - (c) Level 3 – A large or complex fire where resources from a range of locations are involved. Normally, but not necessarily, will involve multiple agencies. (eg. Normally expected to exceed 24 hours). Level 3 incidents are characterised by degrees of complexity that may require the establishment of Divisions for effective management of the situation. These incidents will usually involve delegation of all functions.

(The *Victorian Bushfire Handbook* is provided in [Attachment 1 \[VGSO.0002.002.0257\]](#). The passage referred to above is at page 37 (VGSO.0002.002.0297).)

9. According to the scale of a fire incident, controllers with the relevant fire level experience and accreditation are appointed to manage the fire incident.
10. When managing fires under the State Arrangements, I operate under the Fire Services Commissioner (FSC) Strategic Control Priorities dated 9 December 2011, which focus, in priority, on:
- (a) protection and preservation of life is paramount;

- (b) issuing of community information and community warnings;
- (c) protection of critical infrastructure and community assets;
- (d) protection of residential property;
- (e) protection of assets supporting individual livelihoods and economic production; and
- (f) protection of environmental and conservation assets.

(The FSC Strategic Control Priorities dated 9 December 2011 are provided in Attachment 2 [\[DOJ.0001.001.0414\]](#).)

### C. Preparedness

#### *Level of readiness of the ICC / IMT in place for 9 February 2014*

11. Question 1 of the Letter requests information about the level of readiness at the Traralgon ICC and any other ICC in the Latrobe Valley region for 9 February 2014. On 9 February 2014, the only ICC in the Latrobe Valley was the Traralgon ICC as no separate ICC for the fires in the Hazelwood Mine had been established at that time.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, I have responded to this request in relation to the Traralgon ICC, where I was working as IC. Question 1 of the Letter also requests information about the Incident Management Team (IMT) in place. This is answered in paragraphs 24 to 28 below.
12. As a preliminary point, I wish to clarify that some procedural issues apply to the naming of the Hernes Oak fire:
  - (a) A copy of Standard Operating Procedure 3.02 (SOP 3.02), which provides for standards in fire incident naming, is provided in [Attachment 3 \[FSC.0011.002.0001\]](#);
  - (b) the original fire at Hernes Oak was known as the 'Hernes Oak – McDonalds Track' fire when it started and during 7 February 2014 and 8 February 2014;
  - (c) after the fire broke containment lines on Sunday, 9 February 2014, at approximately 1330, it became known as the 'Morwell – Hernes Oak' fire acknowledging the greater area it was then impacting;
  - (d) the multiple new ignitions at approximately 1420 on 9 February 2014 in Driffield became known as the 'Driffield – Strzelecki' fire;
  - (e) during the afternoon of 9 February 2014 the 'Driffield – Strzelecki' fire was absorbed into the 'Morwell – Hernes Oak' fire due to the fires effectively joining together, being managed by a single IMT and impacting the same community; and

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<sup>1</sup> ICCs are established in accordance with JSOP 2.03 discussed at paragraph 20. For the purposes of this statement, where I use the term Latrobe Valley I understand it to mean the urban areas of Traralgon, Morwell and Yallourn and the associated industrial complexes; generally defined by the City of Latrobe Municipal boundary.

- (f) In my statement, references to the 'Morwell – Hernes Oak' fire after the ignition of the 'Driffield – Strzelecki' fire relate to the collective fires.
13. In relation to the issue of the level of readiness at the Traralgon ICC for 9 February 2014 and by way of background, in January and early February 2014, there were a number of active fires in the Gippsland area and across Victoria which required a significant amount of resourcing both on the ground and from a fire management perspective.
14. I undertook the role of the day shift IC at the Traralgon ICC from 8 February 2014 to 10 February 2014. For the reasons set out below, my shifts as IC from 0700 on 8 February 2014 to 10 February 2014 were days of intense activity because:
- (a) we were dealing with forecasts of Extreme fire danger;
  - (b) a large number of Gippsland resources were already committed to many other areas of Gippsland and the State which were experiencing significant fire incidents (I understand that the Board has been, or will shortly be, provided with detailed information relating to these incidents); and
  - (c) the remaining resources available to the Traralgon IMT were limited to cover an expanded footprint.
15. On Friday, 7 February 2014, after the forecasts for Extreme fire danger on the Saturday and Sunday became known, readiness and preparation arrangements were put into place by Bryan Russell, the Regional Controller (**RC**), who was on duty at the time. In particular, a core IMT was put into place at the Traralgon ICC for the Saturday and Sunday.
16. During the afternoon of Friday, 7 February 2014, DEPI's Regional Resources Officer Kelly Rash asked me to perform the IC role for the day shifts of 8 February 2014 to 12 February 2014. I accepted this request.
17. In the evening on Friday, 7 February 2014, I attended the DEPI Traralgon office for a preparatory meeting. A copy of the proposed core IMT for the 8 to 10 February 2014 day shifts was provided to me (Attachment 4) [\[CFA.0006.001.0011\]](#).
18. At that stage, as at the evening of 7 February 2014, the Hernes Oak – McDonalds Track fire was the only Going fire in the footprint and was being managed as a Level 1 fire by local Country Fire Authority (**CFA**) resources. I was made aware that should the Hernes Oak – McDonalds Track fire escalate, it was likely to be assigned to the Traralgon IMT on Saturday, 8 February 2014.
19. Generally, the Traralgon ICC will have responsibility for Level 3 incidents in the Latrobe Valley, but as a result of the large number of fires across the State in February 2014, the Traralgon ICC was responsible for a much larger area during this period.
20. More specifically, for the purposes of fire management, Victoria is broken up into 17 ICC clusters identified in the 'Incident Management Teams – Readiness Arrangements' document known as the 'Joint Standard Operating Procedure 2.03' (**JSOP 2.03**). Within the 17 clusters, there are one or more footprints. Each footprint has an ICC which can be activated if required and each cluster has a

designated Primary ICC. A copy of JSOP 2.03 is provided in Attachment 5 [\[DOJ.0001.001.0520\]](#).

21. The Traralgon ICC is the designated Primary ICC for the South and West Gippsland cluster. The footprints within that cluster are Traralgon, Erica, Noojee, Ellinbank, Leongatha and Yarram.
22. My role as IC on 8 February 2014 to 10 February 2014 was unusual in that I had control of not only the Traralgon footprint but the entire South and West Gippsland cluster. This was due to the large number of fires across the Gippsland region and the resulting pressure on fire management resources. This is also in the context of undertaking my role as IC with a smaller than usual IMT (particularly given for the expanded footprints) due to resourcing issues.
23. According to the JSOP 2.03 Schedule 4 – 'Minimum ICC Readiness Arrangements', the circumstances involving an extreme Fire Danger Rating require that the minimum ICC arrangements for the South and West Gippsland cluster would be a core IMT in the Traralgon footprint and a base IMT (comprising an IC (Level 2 or 3), Operations Officer, Radio Operator/administration, and Warnings and Advice Officer (or Public Information Officer)) for Ellinbank, Leongatha, Yarram, Noojee and Erica. Only Leongatha had such a 'base' IMT in place.
24. JSOP 2.03 defines that a 'core' IMT comprises:
  - (a) Incident Controller;
  - (b) Deputy Incident Controller;
  - (c) Operations Officer;
  - (d) Aircraft Officer;
  - (e) Radio Operator;
  - (f) Planning Officer;
  - (g) Situation Officer;
  - (h) Resources Officer;
  - (i) Warnings and Advice Officer (or Public Information Officer); and
  - (j) Logistics Officer.
25. My first shift as the IC at the Traralgon ICC commenced at 0700 hours on Saturday, 8 February 2014. On Saturday, 8 February 2014, and Sunday, 9 February 2014, the IMT for the day shifts comprised:
  - (a) myself as IC;
  - (b) Don Allen of the CFA as Deputy IC;
  - (c) Brad Fisher of DEPI as Operations Officer;

- (d) Jackie Dalrymple of CFA as Radio Operator;
  - (e) Peter McHugh of DEPI as Planning Officer;
  - (f) Alison Kerr of DEPI as Situation Officer;
  - (g) Andrew Horner of DEPI as Resources Officer;
  - (h) Louise Haughton (sometimes referred to as Louise Van Deelen) of the SES as Warnings and Advice Officer; and
  - (i) Melissa Dickson of DEPI as Logistics Officer.
26. The Latrobe Valley air operations were supported by an Air Operations Manager and Air Base Manager who were reporting through the Traralgon Regional Control Centre (**RCC**) and supporting the Traralgon IMT operations.
27. The Traralgon IMT was essentially a core IMT, save for we did not have an Aircraft Officer on duty within the IMT (as an Airbase Manager and Air Operations Manager was on duty within the RCC team, as described in paragraph 26 above).
28. In normal circumstances when dealing with a Going fire, I would have expected the IMT to have included more IMT personnel, but on 8 and 9 February 2014 (being the relevant period of my involvement), I only had the people listed in paragraph 24 above due to other demands on resources.
29. Based on the weather predictions for the Sunday, at around 1600 hours on Saturday, 8 February 2014, I made a verbal request to the RC, through Ross Sullivan (CFA Regional Agency Commander), that we pre-position three strike teams and two heavy helicopters in the Latrobe Valley.
30. Subsequently two strike teams and two helicopters were allocated to the Latrobe Valley. Strike teams usually comprise five tankers and a command vehicle; all fully crewed. The two strike teams were pre-positioned in the Traralgon area on Saturday evening. The two helicopters I had requested did not arrive that day. Ultimately the helicopters arrived in the Latrobe Valley around midday on Sunday, 9 February 2014.

#### **D. Response**

31. As IC, I have the responsibility for overseeing and managing the IMT in relation to all aspects of dealing with fires elevated to the ICC, including resourcing, operations, information, logistics and safety. A complete description of my role is contained in the *State Command and Control Arrangements for Bushfire in Victoria 2013* dated September 2013 (Attachment 6) [\[DOJ.0001.001.0471\]](#) at page 20 (DOJ.0001.001.0494) and extracted at Schedule A to this statement. In addition, as IC, I am also the chair of the Incident Emergency Management Team (**IEMT**) with responsibility for collaborating with a wide range of stakeholders in relation to both the response and recovery processes.
32. In relation to fire response, the role within the IMT which focuses on fire ground tactics and tasks is the Operations Officer, who in this instance was Brad Fisher.

33. Brad Fisher and I communicated regularly throughout the period 8 February 2014 to 10 February 2014; formally at IMT Meetings and as required in between.

***IMT in place for Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire between 7 and 9 February 2014***

34. On 7 February 2014, the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire had not yet been upgraded to a Level 3 fire and was being managed through a Level 1 IMT comprised of CFA resources on the fire ground.
35. The IMT in place between 8 February 2014 and 9 February 2014 in relation to the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire was the team described in Part 3 above.

***Steps taken to suppress Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire between 7 and 9 February 2014, including steps taken to prevent it from spotting into the Mine***

36. Question 3 of the Letter requests information about steps taken to suppress the Hernes Oak-MacDonald's Track fire, and to prevent it from spotting into the Hazelwood Mine between 7 and 9 February 2014. The following paragraphs 38 to 78 contain my answer to that question.
37. In general terms, the steps taken to suppress the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire in the period 8 to 9 February 2014 (being the relevant period I was on duty as IC) were to:
- (a) adopt the aggressive approach referred to at paragraph 48 below from the morning of Saturday, 8 February 2014 onwards;
  - (b) request additional resources as referred to at paragraph 29 above and paragraphs 46 and 87 below;
  - (c) consider other preparatory works that could be undertaken in the area; and
  - (d) inform and alert major industries, including the Mine operators, through the Central Gippsland Essential Industries Group Incorporated (**CGEIG Inc**).
38. I am confident that these steps were adequate and appropriate in the circumstances because the permitter has been contained.
39. There were limited opportunities for the Traralgon IMT to implement preparatory works in the period between 0700 hours on Saturday, 8 February 2014 and when the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire broke containment lines and, as I understand it, ultimately entered the Mine on the afternoon of Sunday, 9 February 2014, as the area is already dissected by major roads and rivers, each in their own right a barrier to the spread of fire.
40. In relation to the Mine specifically, the primary strategy pursued during that period was to try to prevent the fire entering into the Mine, by suppressing the fire where it was burning and attacking the fire wherever it spread.
41. Having alerted the Mine operators, to the best of my knowledge no request was made by them to the Traralgon ICC for resources or assistance during that period.

***Specific steps taken to suppress the original Hernes Oak fire (Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire)***

42. I started my first shift as IC in charge of the Traralgon ICC, at 0700 hours on Saturday, 8 February 2014. As part of my briefing from Ross Sullivan, I was advised that the Traralgon ICC was to assume control of the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire because of the bad weather predicted over the weekend. I am not aware of the precise time this occurred but it was between 0700 and 0900 hours.
43. At the briefing, I was given a copy of the Incident Shift Plan (**ISP**) for the day shift on 8 February 2014, which had been prepared by Peter Lockwood, the local level incident controller responsible for the management of the Hernes Oak-McDonald Track fire on Friday, 7 February 2014. The maps forming part of the ISP indicated that the size and scope of the fire were consistent with a Level 1 fire.
44. As the fire had been previously locally controlled by CFA resources on the ground, I did not receive an incoming handover briefing. When I commenced my duties as IC I was not aware of any resources currently on-scene at the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire.
45. During the morning of Saturday, 8 February 2014, the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire had a secure perimeter, but was still burning internally. The fire was divided into two sectors, the south-west end of the fire and the north-east end of the fire on the opposite side of the Princes Highway. On the fire ground there was one divisional commander and two sector commanders.
46. Local CFA resources were deployed to these two sectors of the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire at some time during Saturday morning. Whilst the ISP identifies them as available for the entire shift, actual time worked varied. I do not recall the exact time the resources were deployed. They were deployed to the two sectors separately to enable the operations to take place on either side of the Princes Highway without the need for personnel to cross the highway. I considered this was safer for the personnel involved.
47. At approximately 0930 hours on Saturday morning, I participated in a telephone conference convened by the RC with the other ICs on duty in the Gippsland region (**IC Teleconference**). I recall that, in general, we discussed the status of all the fires under the control of each IC in the region.
48. At that time, the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire had still not been Controlled, but was not spreading. Because of the weather forecasts for the next day (attached is the State Control Centre (**SCC**) Fire Weather Update issued at 1700 hours on Friday, 7 February 2014, but viewed on Saturday morning (Attachment 7) [\[FSC.0011.002.0005\]](#)) and my experience with previous fires in or threatening the Latrobe Valley, I determined that the best strategy was to apply an aggressive approach involving as many local resources as were available to the fire on that day with a view to minimising the resources required for the next day. I instructed Brad Fisher to adopt this approach that morning. I do not recall the precise time of this occurring, but it was before the first IMT meeting I held at 1100 hours.
49. Throughout the day, I held four meetings with the IMT at 1100, 1300, 1700 and 1900 hours. IMT meetings involved discussions about the status of the Hernes



Oak-McDonalds Track fire including discussing resourcing, safety and operational issues.

50. During the 1100 IMT meeting, we discussed the operations on the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire (amongst other matters). This included allocating an extra bulldozer to the south-west sector of the fire to assist with containment, safety issues working in and around the railway line and highway, and general resourcing of the fire. My recollection is that during the meeting, one of the IMT members noted that there was potentially some fire activity in the overburden works area at the Yallourn Mine and that there had been an asset loss at the Traralgon gun club, which was within the fire perimeter.
51. During the IMT meetings on Saturday, 8 February 2014, as part of our scenario planning, I also recall there being some discussion about what would happen if the fire spread to the mines. Based on the computer generated modelling, referred to as 'Phoenix predictions' for the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire for that day,<sup>2</sup> the geography of the region and my fire management experience, I classified the probability of the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire breaking through the containment lines as a low risk and the consequences as high to catastrophic.
52. I classified the probability of the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire breaking containment lines as low, because during the Saturday, the perimeter was contained and ground crews were actively working on the remaining hotspots. I classified the consequence as high to catastrophic because of its proximity to the Latrobe Valley mines, the Princes Highway, the Gippsland railway and the township of Morwell.
53. Late on Saturday (the precise time I cannot recall ) 8 February 2014, I was provided with copies of the Phoenix modelling for the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire for Sunday, 9 February 2014. The models forecast the likely spread of the fire based on it breaking through the containment lines at various times throughout the day.
54. One Phoenix forecast showed the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire potentially spreading during the early hours of Sunday, 9 February 2014, into a little community to the south-west of Hernes Oak. Another Phoenix forecast modelling potential outcomes if the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire broke in the hours subsequent to the first forecast showed it spotting as far as into the Yallourn and Hazelwood Mines.
55. Under the FSC's Strategic Control Priorities (see paragraph 9), our first priority is the preservation of life, response agencies and community. Accordingly, at approximately 1800 hours on Saturday, 8 February 2014, I made a recommendation to Victoria Police to evacuate approximately 300 people in the small farmlet community southwest of Hernes Oak during the early evening.
56. The decision to evacuate the small community early was to avoid the issues associated with an evacuation in the middle of the night which can be hampered by a limited ability to contact people by text message, radio or internet whilst they were asleep.
57. The Traralgon IMT co-ordinated this evacuation which was carried out successfully by Victoria Police and the SES. This involved the IMT liaising with Victoria Police

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<sup>2</sup> The modelling is generally prepared and reviewed by fire behavioural analysts within the SCC.

and the SES, notifying the RCC, the State Control Centre, Lance King (the local Municipal Emergency Resources Officer for the Latrobe Shire (the delegate of the Department of Human Services)), and issuing warnings and information to the community. A copy of the information leaflet provided to households in the evacuated area is provided in Attachment 8 [\[CFA.0006.001.0001\]](#).

58. When I finished duty as IC at the Traralgon ICC at 1900 hours on Saturday night, the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire was still burning; whilst the fire had a containment line around the perimeter, areas within the fire were still alight. The status of the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire on the DEPI Fireweb system at that time was 'Going'.
59. On Sunday, 9 February 2014, I recommenced duty as IC of the Traralgon IMT at 0700 hours. During my handover briefing from Stephen Walls, who had been the overnight IC at the Traralgon ICC, I was informed that the two pre-positioned strike teams had been activated and were working on the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire.
60. The weather forecast for Sunday indicated the conditions to be experienced during the day included high temperatures, low relative humidity and strong winds. The fire danger rating for Gippsland was Extreme. A copy of the SCC Fire Weather Briefing paper issued at 0300 hours on Sunday, 9 February 2014 is provided in Attachment 9 [\[FSC.0010.001.0001\]](#).
61. During Sunday, 9 February 2014, multiple new fires broke out in the Latrobe Valley and in South and West Gippsland including the:
  - (a) Jack River fire near Yarram, which started at approximately 1045 hours;
  - (b) Driffield Strzelecki Highway fire, which started at approximately 1430 hours;
  - (c) Jindivick fire, which started at approximately 1220 hours; and
  - (d) Giffard West fire, which started at approximately 1820 hours.
62. The Jack River fire and the Driffield Strzelecki Highway fire were elevated to the Traralgon IMT.
63. The Jindivick fire and the Giffard West fires were to be assigned to the Traralgon IMT should first attack fail.
64. Another active fire on the Sunday morning which could have impacted on the Traralgon IMT that day and drawn resources from the IMT's footprint was the Yarra Junction fire, a Level 3 incident just outside of our territorial boundary (this fire started at 0827 on 9 February 2014).
65. During Sunday, aircraft working in the Latrobe Valley were diverted to deal with the Jack River fire as it had the greatest potential to impact on life and property at that time. I made this decision to divert the aircraft. The exact time for this would be contained in the log books of the airbase manager or state aircraft unit. This reduced the number of aircraft available to actively work on containing the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire.

66. The Jack River fire was a priority when it began. It eventually reached 2894 hectares in size and, on the Sunday, destroyed one primary residence. In contrast to the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire, which at 1045 hours was contained, Jack River had the potential to make a large, uncontrolled run towards the town of Yarram if first attack failed.

*Specific steps taken to suppress the Morwell-Hernes Oak fire*

67. At approximately 1330 hours, the north-east area of Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire broke out of the containment lines. It was moving very quickly in a south-easterly direction towards Morwell and the Hazelwood Mine.
68. It was moving so quickly alongside and between the railway line and Princes highway that it was unsafe to directly attack the head of the fire. At this stage, my focus was on protecting the fire crews on the ground and protecting the people of Morwell, who were directly in the line of, and being impacted by, the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire, which became the Morwell-Hernes Oak fire. My next priority, consistent with the FSC's Strategic Control Priorities mentioned in paragraph 9 above were the townships of Yallourn, Morwell, Australian Paper Manufacturers Marysvale Pulp mill, the Maryvale Private Hospital, the Gippsland Water Factory and the Yallourn and Hazelwood power stations.
69. In addition, at this time, I was also continuing to manage the multiple fires across the West Gippsland region (listed in paragraph 61 above), including the expanding Jack River fire. However, for the remainder of this witness statement I have focused on my activities relating to the Morwell-Hernes Oak fire, including the Driffield Strzelecki Highway fire and the Hazelwood Mine fire.
70. As soon as the Morwell-Hernes Oak fire reached the north-west edge of the Hazelwood Mine, a predicted south-west wind change arrived and caused the fire to burn in a north easterly direction towards and into the western edge of the Morwell residential area.
71. At this stage the Morwell-Hernes Oak fire was now entering Morwell amongst the houses and continuing to cause spot fires ahead of the main front.
72. There was not sufficient time available between the fire breaking out and it impacting on Morwell to safely conduct an evacuation of the affected area of Morwell west of Latrobe Road.
73. Residents of Morwell had been advised through several 'watch and act' messages for the potential of the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire (and subsequently the Morwell-Hernes Oak fire) to impact their properties. At 1556 hours, after the fire broke containment lines, a State Emergency Warning System (SEWS) warning was issued for Morwell.

74. My main focus at this time was to protect the people of Morwell and manage the fire that was entering densely populated housing areas of the town outskirts and threatening the Maryvale Private Hospital and the Maryvale Pulp mill. At the same time I was also acting as IC for the Jack River fire, which by that stage was a Level 3 fire threatening life and property, and the other fires listed in paragraph 61, and had a watching brief over the rest of South and West Gippsland.
75. At approximately 1420 hours, several fires were deliberately lit in close proximity to each other on and adjacent to the Strzelecki Highway at Driffield. These fires quickly merged and were known collectively as the Driffield Strzelecki Highway fire.
76. These fires were lit after the south-westerly wind change had moved through the Latrobe Valley. This fire headed directly towards the Hazelwood Mine under the influence of the south-west wind. It is my belief that the Mine was already on fire at this time.
77. At some stage during Sunday, 9 February 2014 afternoon or early evening, Steven Warrington, a CFA Deputy Chief Officer, attended at the RCC, which was also in the Franklin Street building. He became directly involved in the proposals for and the management of the fire in the Hazelwood Mine.
78. At 1900 on Sunday 9 February, Deputy IC Stephen Walls took management of the Traralgon IMT overnight.

***IMT in place for the fires at the Mine post 9 and 10 February 2014***

79. Question 4 of the Letter asks for information about the IMT from 9 February until the fires in the Hazelwood Mine were brought under control. As I was the IC from 8 to 10 February only, the information in this statement on the IMT responding to Question 4 of the Letter is necessarily restricted to 9 and 10 February 2014.
80. The make-up of the Traralgon IMT on Sunday, 9 February 2014 is as described at paragraph 24 above. A small number of additional IMT resources were deployed to the Traralgon IMT on Monday, 10 February 2014.
81. Resourcing was a key issue at this time as the Traralgon IMT was simultaneously dealing with:
- (a) the fire in the Hazelwood Mine;
  - (b) a fire in the log dump and chip pile at the Maryvale Pulp Mill;
  - (c) possible issues at the overburden area at the Yallourn Mine;
  - (d) the Jack River fire, which was yet to be controlled;
  - (e) closure of the Princes Highway;
  - (f) burning sleepers on the Gippsland railway line;
  - (g) logistical issues arising from the evacuation of the community south-east of Hernes Oak on the Saturday (see paragraph 55 above); and

- (h) support and resourcing for the evacuation centres receiving people affected by the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track/Morwell-Hernes Oak and Jack River fires.
82. The incident action plan I was given by Stephen Walls during the handover briefing identified Peter Lockwood of the CFA as the Division Commander for Hazelwood Mine. Peter set up his own support centre at the Hazelwood Mine. In my opinion, setting up a Division dedicated to the fires at the Hazelwood Mine was the appropriate step to take at that time, particularly given the industrial nature of the fire and the need for specific strategies, tactics and resources.
83. During Sunday afternoon and the morning of Monday, 10 February 2014, multiple discussions were had between the IMT and the RCC about the management structure for the current fires and, in particular, whether an 'Area of Operations' should or would be set up to manage the Hazelwood Mine fires separately. An 'Area of Operations' can be set up by the State Controller as a distinct management area, to be run by an Area of Operations Commander. This is set out in Part 4.5 of the State Command and Control Arrangements (Attachment 6) [\[DOJ.0001.001.0471\]](#). Ultimately, a separate IMT for the Hazelwood Mine Fire was established at 0800 hours on Tuesday, 11 February 2014.
84. Under normal circumstances Peter Lockwood would have been reporting to me as the IC for the Traralgon footprint and would usually have participated in the IC meetings on that day. However, because the Hazelwood Mine fire was managed separately through Grange Jephcott and Steven Warrington, Peter Lockwood was communicating directly with them.
85. Steven Warrington was formally appointed as Assistant Controller, known as Deputy Regional Controller, effective 1200 hours Monday, 10 February 2014. Under that instrument of appointment, Peter Lockwood as IC of the Hazelwood ICC, reported directly to Steven Warrington. A copy of the document appointing Steven Warrington effective 1200, 10 February 2014 is provided in Attachment 10 [\[CFA.0006.001.0007\]](#).
86. During the Monday, I received updates regarding certain aspects of the Hazelwood Mine fires. By way of example, at approximately 1720 hours on Monday 10 February 2014, Brad Fisher, the Traralgon IMT operations officer, informed me that air crane operations were ceasing at the Hazelwood Mine fires due to safety concerns about the impact of coal dust and ash on visibility. Two helicopters using long line buckets continued to operate. We were supporting fire at the Mine by tasking aircraft to that fire activity, but given the safety issues and absence of a safety officer in the IMT, the cessation was brought to my attention. I agreed this was an appropriate course of action.
87. Throughout the period I was IC, numerous requests were made for IMT personnel and fire ground resources. Resource needs that could not be met locally were requested through the DEPI Fireweb system by Andrew Horner, the Traralgon ICC Resources Officer. Recognising the high demand for resources across the state, where a particular resource could not be met by an appropriately qualified individual (eg. Level 3 Public Information Officer), the next best resource option was taken, this may be a Level 2 accredited person or someone from the same unit (eg Situation Officer acting as Planning Officer). For some logistics support roles,

such as organisation of catering and accommodation, we opted to utilise labour hire staff inexperienced in emergency management. The critical core IMT roles were filled and deployed for both day and night shifts.

***IEMT in place for Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire post 9 February 2014***

88. Question 5 of the Letter asks for information about the EMT from 9 February until the fires in the Hazelwood Mine were brought under control. As I was the IC from 8 to 10 February only, the information in this statement on the IEMT is necessarily restricted to 9 and 10 February 2014.
89. As the IC responsible for the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Trackfire, I was also the Chairperson of the IEMT whilst on duty as IC on 8 to 10 February 2014.
90. IEMT's, which are provided for under the *Emergency Management Team Arrangements 2013* prepared by the FSC, are made up of various representatives of agencies which are relevant to community support, relief and recovery, as well as representatives from the relevant community groups and private industry members potentially affected by the relevant fire. A copy of the *Emergency Management Team Arrangements 2013* is provided in Attachment 11 [\[DOJ.0001.001.0452\]](#).
91. In the period 8 to 10 February 2014, members of the IEMT included a representative from Victoria Police, SES, SP Ausnet, Hancock Plantations, Vicroads, Department of Human Services, CGEIG Inc, Gippsland Water and the Latrobe City Council. The IEMT operated out of the Traralgon ICC and participated in the IMT meetings. Not every member of the IEMT participated in every meeting, depending on their other commitments. In my opinion, the IEMT properly fulfilled its function during that period.

***Steps taken to suppress the mine fires post 9 February 2014***

92. Questions 6, 7 and 8 of the Letter ask for details about the management of the fires in the Hazelwood Mine. As explained above, I was not directly involved with the management of the fires in the open cut coal at the Mines at any time (as this was managed by a separate Division/IMT) and cannot comment on the steps taken to suppress those fires or whether any external expertise was accessed. For this reason I am also unable to assess what went well, what did not go well and what could have been done better in relation to the fires in the Hazelwood Mine (question 9 of the Letter).
93. I was involved with managing some spot fires in grassland within the Hazelwood works area on Monday, 10 February 2014. Anything outside the Mine 'bed and batters' was the responsibility of the Traralgon IMT. These fires were quickly and successfully extinguished.
94. In my opinion, there were a number of things which worked well in relation to the preparation and response to the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire. These are set out below.
  - (a) The preparation for the weekend of the 8 February 2014 and 9 February 2014 was well managed and timely as it commenced some 48 hours prior.

- (b) The fact that the strike teams arrived on the Saturday meant that they were able to rest and be available for deployment on the Sunday morning.
  - (c) The availability of the Phoenix predictions was both timely and useful. In particular, they provided substance for our discussions with the community and various agencies by demonstrating the magnitude of the issues with which were going to be faced.
  - (d) The process of implementing road closures by Victoria Police and the road authorities was enhanced by their involvement as members of the IEMT.
  - (e) The issues arising from the closure of all major traffic routes through the Latrobe Valley on Sunday, 9 February 2014 were well managed. In particular, the various recovery agencies co-operated well in dealing with the members of the travelling public who required emergency accommodation and/or other assistance.
  - (f) The evacuation of the small farmlet community south-west of Hernes Oak was timely and orderly.
  - (g) SP Ausnet, and in particular Derek Walton, worked pro-actively with the IEMT to ensure SP Ausnet's assets were assessed and power supply distribution was maintained. Although some assets were compromised, we were able to sustain power supply along the regional feeder lines to Warragul.
  - (h) Sufficient relief centres were readily available to accept persons leaving the community south-west of Hernes Oak and subsequently Morwell.
  - (i) The interoperability between DEPI, CFA, MFB and SES was also effective at this incident.
95. What could have been done better in relation to the preparedness for and response to the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track/Morwell-Hernes Oak fire was to:
- (a) address the sub-optimal level of resourcing available for the Traralgon IMT in the period 8 February 2014 to 10 February 2014;
  - (b) ensure there was no delay in the arrival of the additional aircraft requested on Saturday, 8 February 2014; and
  - (c) ensure that all three of the additional strike teams requested be provided instead of only two.

#### **E. Communications**

96. Questions 10, 11 and 12 of the Letter request information and views about community information and warnings issued by ICs during the course of the Hazelwood Mine Fire.
97. In my role as IC from 8 February 2014 to 10 February 2014, I was not involved in the issuing of community information or warnings specifically in relation to the Hazelwood Mine Fire for the reasons set out in paragraphs 77, and 82 to 86 above.

98. The Traralgon IMT had responsibility for a number of community warnings in respect of the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track (subsequently Morwell-Hernes Oak) and Driffield-Strzelecki fires issued in the period 8 February 2014 to 10 February 2014. I understand that all of the relevant warnings have been requested by the Board and either have been, or will shortly be, provided to the Board. These will include the warnings issued between 8 February 2014 and 10 February 2014.
99. Those warnings related to the risks associated with the Morwell-Hernes Oak fire outside of the Hazelwood Mine. As such, the warnings at that time did not need to be tailored to members of the community who might be particularly vulnerable to environmental consequences of the Hazelwood Mine fire.
100. In my opinion, the community alerts and warnings authorised and issued from the Traralgon IMT up to and including 10 February 2014 were appropriate and effective.

#### **G. Evacuation**

101. Questions 13 and 14 of the Letter request information about evacuations from part or all of Morwell.
102. As explained in paragraph 72 above, when the Morwell-Hernes Oak fire was approaching Morwell residential areas in the afternoon of Sunday, 9 February 2014, I did not formally recommend an evacuation as there was not sufficient time to safely undertake an evacuation. Instead, an 'emergency warning' (SEWS) was broadcast as explained in paragraph 73 above.
103. I am unable to comment on evacuation recommendations, or lack thereof, made after that period as I was no longer the IC in control.

#### **D. Liaison with other parties**

104. Questions 15 and 16 of the Letter request information about liaison arrangements between the IMT with other parties 'during the course of the fire in the Mine'. For the reasons set out in paragraphs 77, and 82 to 86 above, I was not involved in the IMT that managed the fire in the Hazelwood Mine.
105. For the fires that were dealt with by the Traralgon IMT, during Saturday, 8 February 2014 to Monday, 10 February 2014, my primary contact with the Hazelwood Mine operators and other businesses in the area was Nick Demetrios, the representative of the CGEIG Inc. The CGEIG Inc meets regularly to discuss various issues with the utilities, producers and suppliers in the Gippsland/Latrobe Valley area.
106. During Saturday, 8 February 2014, Nick Demetrios, the Chair of the CGEIG Inc and also a member of the REMT, attended the Traralgon IMT and was briefed on the potential bush fire threat associated with the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire and was provided with copies of the Phoenix predictions which clearly showed that should the Hernes Oak-McDonalds Track fire containment break, spotting from that fire was likely to occur in the Hazelwood Mine. The Phoenix forecast pages for 0900 and 1100 on 9 February 2014 are provided in [Attachment 12 \[CFA.0009.001.0001\]](#).



107. For the reasons set out in paragraphs 77, and 82 to 86 above, I did not have any contact with the Environment Protection Authority, the Victorian WorkCover Authority or the Chief Health Officer during the period of 8 to 10 February 2014.

Dated: 22 May 2014

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**LAURIE ROBERT JEREMIAH**

## **SCHEDULE A INCIDENT CONTROLLER ROLE DESCRIPTION**

Extracted from the *State Command and Control Arrangements for Bushfire in Victoria 2013* at page 20.

### **Role Description**

The Incident Controller leads and manages incident resources from all agencies to resolve the incident.

### **Responsibilities**

The specific responsibilities of the Incident Controller are to:

- Act on the directions of the Regional or Area-of-Operations Controller within the line-of-control (if operating)
- Take charge of and provide leadership for the resolution of the emergency at the incident site, including directing support agency commanders
- Establish a control structure to suit circumstances
- Establish the Incident Management Team and Incident Emergency Management Team
- Provide warnings and communicate information to the community in a timely, relevant and tailored manner
- Consider evacuation requirements as appropriate
- Ensure the timely flow of information to the:
  - Community
  - Fire ground
  - Regional or Area-of-Operations Controller
  - Municipal Emergency Response Coordinator
  - Municipal Recovery Manager / Regional Recovery Coordinator
  - Other stakeholder agencies
- Initiate relief arrangements (if required)
- Ensure subordinates have appropriate resources to achieve their task\Identify risks, opportunities and priorities
- Ensure the safety and welfare of personnel and
- Develop plans including the identification of priorities and objectives