

WITNESS STATEMENT OF ROBERT JACKMAN

I Robert Jackman, of [REDACTED], Morwell, Victoria, state as follows:

Background

1. I live in [REDACTED], Morwell with my wife.
2. I moved to Morwell about 7 and a half years ago from Western Australia. We moved to Morwell to be closer to my daughter who lives in Morwell with her husband, a veteran medically discharged from the SAS and diagnosed with PTSD. They now have three children, a boy aged 7 and twin girls aged 18 months.
3. I have two other daughters, one living in Melbourne and the other living in Perth.
4. I am now retired after having had a career in hospitality.

Impact of fire

5. On 9 February 2014, I first became aware of the fire in the Hazelwood mine by the smoke. I also picked up pieces of information about the Hernes Oak fire and the mine fire through the radio and television.
6. I really noticed the effect of the mine fire about 2 to 3 days after it started. In particular, I noticed the visible smoke and the ash build-up in the Sacred Heart Primary School yard.
7. My grandson attends the Sacred Heart Primary School, which is located on the corner of Wilson Street and Commercial Road in Morwell. My wife and I volunteer at Sacred Heart Primary School on Mondays and Wednesdays, working with children who have reading and comprehension difficulties.
8. My grandson attended school as normal for the first week after the mine fire started. I was concerned that the school children were being exposed to the smoke and ash and that the school should have been closed. I remember wiping my finger across the classroom desks and wiping away ash. It was filthy. There was ash an inch deep in some places in the playground.
9. On 14 February 2014, I went to the first community information meeting held at Kernot Hall. Only about 70 people attended that meeting.
10. During the first week after the mine fire started, I noticed that my grandchildren were coughing more than usual and that my daughter had a sore throat and cough. We were also told to stay inside as much as possible. It was difficult to keep the children entertained inside.

11. On 18 February 2014, I went to the second community information meeting. There were about 500 people at the meeting and a lot of those people were very angry. There were various people from different agencies there to talk to the meeting, including a doctor. There was no representative from the Hazelwood Mine at either the first or second meetings at Kernot Hall. They ran an add in the Latrobe Valley express stating that they thought the meetings to were only to address questions relating to health concerns. People were angry about its absence from the meeting because people wanted to ask questions about had happened and what was going to happen at the mine. I wanted to know whether the mine had disconnected the sprinklers in the fire effected area.
12. The meeting was not well managed and quickly got out of control with people shouting questions to the representatives of the various organisations. I thought that there were too many organisations giving different information that made it hard to comprehend what was relevant information.
13. After a while, the meeting was better controlled by having residents line up to speak and ask questions of the panel. I asked what information was being provided to the school principals about the risks relating to the mine fire. I was told that the principals were being contacted daily with reports about current risks. When I asked the Sacred Heart Primary School principal whether he was receiving these daily reports, he told me that he was not getting any such reports and that the only information being provided to him was through the Catholic Diocese.
14. On one of the days after the Kernot Hall meeting on 18 February 2014, my daughter went to the CFA information van. She asked the CFA member present at the information site what she should be doing, whether she should be relocating her family. She told me that the CFA member told her, "If it were my family, I'd be out of here".
15. On the basis of that conversation, we decided that my daughter and her children should leave Morwell and stay with my daughter living in Perth. My wife travelled with her as she needed another adult to fly with the twins as they were under 2 years old. My daughter's husband stayed in Morwell, and so did I.
16. My wife, daughter and grandchildren travelled to Perth on 23 February 2014. We purchased the flight tickets for all of them, which cost about \$3696.95 given the late purchase of the flights including car hire. They planned to stay 2 weeks in Perth, and ended up staying there for 3 weeks. We were fortunate

that we could afford to pay for flights and that my family had somewhere out of the Latrobe Valley to go and stay during the mine fire.

17. So that my grandson could continue his schooling whilst in Perth, Sacred Heart Primary School gave him a stack of homework to do. The school was fantastic.
18. My wife was granted \$500 for relocation assistance.
19. While my family was away in Perth, I kept myself busy. I continued to volunteer at the [REDACTED] and for the RSL.
20. I cleaned the house regularly whilst my wife was away. As soon as it was clean, it got dirty straight away.
21. On or about 20 February 2014, Sacred Heart Primary School was relocated to a disused school facility in Newborough. This happened the day after the children at the State primary school in Commercial Road were relocated. The school arranged bus transportation leaving from the School each morning and returning each afternoon for those children who needed it. Because of the relocation, the school did not continue the volunteer program whilst in Newborough.
22. In the second week after the fire, I heard on the radio that Ambulance Victoria had set up a medical assessment centre for members of the community to access. I did not hear the location of the assessment centre so I rang the Latrobe City Council. The person who answered my call did not know anything about the assessment centre. The person put me on hold to find out further information. Upon returning to the call, they told me that it was at the Mid Valley Shopping Centre opposite Katies. I went to that location and there was no medical assessment centre. I eventually found it nearby in Saskia Way, next to the Ambulance Victoria headquarters in Morwell. I thought that there would be a lot of people there but I was the only one. I got checked out and was told I was okay.
23. I was surprised that the Latrobe City Council did not know about the medical assessment centre and I think they should have known what was going on.
24. On 16 March 2014, my wife, daughter and grandchildren moved back to Morwell. After my daughter moved back, she made a claim for the relocation assistance payment. She was denied relocation assistance. After asking for a review of that decision, she was given \$500 but I don't think it fell under the category of relocation assistance – it was some other kind of assistance.

25. My grandson attended the final week of term one at Sacred Heart Primary School at Newborough. The school relocated back to Morwell after the Term 1 school holidays, around about 22 April 2014.
26. Sacred Heart Primary School was cleaned up by a professional cleaner over the school holidays. They did an amazing job cleaning the playground, the classrooms, computers and library books.
27. We are in the process of doing a big clean-up now at home, taking out all the furniture and cleaning the wooden floor boards. I have not looked in our roof cavity. I have asked our insurance company to come and inspect my roof and let me know whether a claim for cleaning it will be accepted. If my insurance company denies the claim, I will have to pay someone to clean it because I cannot do it myself.
28. I am concerned about the conflicting information about the toxicity of the ash – Rosemary Lester has said that the ash is fine, but I have heard reports on the radio that it is toxic. I don't know who to believe.

Other comments

29. In the week leading up to Anzac Day, I sold Anzac badges at the Mid Valley Shopping Centre. During that week I spoke with a lot of community members about how they were feeling about the mine fire.
30. The management of the mine fire in the community has resulted in a division within the community. The division of the town by reference to the railway line has split the community. People are unsure why some people got help and others did not – the decisions were not based on need but by location and by having a health care card.
31. The community divided itself into lots of splinter groups trying to get something for certain groups and not others. It would have been better if the community had been represented by one united group.
32. I think these matters have alienated members of this community and it will take a long time for the community to reunite.
33. There is a perception that everyone in the community has access to the internet. There are a number of people that I know that do not use the internet. Morwell is an aging community and many older people do not have computers. The use of the internet to get information to the public has limitations.
34. There were too many Government agencies telling us too many messages.

35. The CFA and the Hazelwood Mine need to have the correct equipment to fight fires in the mine. It was ridiculous that the mine did not have its own foam tankers, so that foam tankers had to be sent in from Queensland, Tasmania and New South Wales.

Robert Jackman