

Council welcomes the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry and its consultations in Anglesea.

Council Notes and supports the Inquiry's three areas of interest.

1. Options to decrease the risk of fire arising from or impacting the Anglesea Mine;
2. Health impacts on the Latrobe Valley community resulting from the 2014 Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire; and
3. Mine rehabilitation options for the three Latrobe Valley coal mines.

Council also notes and supports Reference 11 in the terms of reference which requires the Board to inquire into and report on *'Sustainable, practical and effective options that could be undertaken by the mine operator to decrease the risk of fire arising from or impacting the Anglesea Mine for the 2015/2016 summer season, noting the impending closure of the mine on 31 August 2015.'*

The Hazelwood coal mine fire provides an opportunity to investigate the likelihood and consequences of a similar fire at Anglesea. Through its involvement in the Surf Coast Coal Mine Emergency Management Taskforce it is clear that the circumstances at Alcoa's operations at Anglesea are quite different to Hazelwood and that the chances of a similar large fire appears unlikely. The Anglesea coal seam is substantially smaller scale than Hazelwood in both area and depth and the coal is less volatile and less susceptible to a spontaneous combustion type fire.

The taskforce has also been advised by Alcoa that

- Before the 31 August 2015 all exposed coal will be covered over with at least one metre of soil which will substantially reduce the risk of fire arising from or impacting the Anglesea Mine.
- Alcoa will document an explanation on how the fire risks will be managed into the longer term, and use an external verification process to ensure that there is a high level of confidence in the longer term plans.
- Managing the fire risks in the short, medium and longer term is a priority for Alcoa.

Council is aware of large underground coal fires in other parts of the world that have threatened the environment and human life. Large-scale underground blazes can cause the ground temperature to heat up and kill surrounding vegetation, produce greenhouse gases and can even ignite forest fires. The resulting release of toxic elements can also pollute local water sources and soils. Large coal seam mines have burnt for decades in the United States. Australia is home to one of the world's few naturally burning coal seams, Burning Mountain Nature Reserve, in north-eastern New South Wales estimated to be about 5,500 years old.

Whilst the likelihood of a large underground fire occurring in Anglesea may be small, the consequences of such an event could be devastating; therefore it is important that there are appropriate risk mitigation strategies in place. The areas of interest that the Hazelwood Coal Mine Fire Inquiry is examining are of interests to the Surf Coast Shire community and will influence the rehabilitation options for the Anglesea coal mine. Council offers its support to the Surf Coast Coal Mine Emergency Management Taskforce and the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry to ensure that the short, medium and longer term risks are adequately managed and any risk management opportunities with the cessation of the coal mine and power station are realised.