

**IN THE MATTER OF  
THE HAZELWOOD MINE FIRE INQUIRY**

**STATEMENT OF DAWN SIMS**

I, Dawn Sims of Level 17, 595 Collins Street, Melbourne Victoria, Enterprise Data and Intelligence Consultant, Victorian Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages, say as follows:

1. The Victorian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages ("RBDM") registers all deaths occurring in the State of Victoria.
2. When a person dies, a funeral director is required to complete a Death Registration Statement which is provided to RBDM and records information including the residential address of the deceased.
3. In most cases, a medical practitioner will determine cause of death and is then required to complete a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death which is provided to RBDM and records information including the place of death. This is recorded as: name of place/institution (if applicable), email of place/institution, street address/postal address, suburb/town, State, and postcode. The name of place/institution, email of place/institution, and postcode fields are not mandatory.
4. Some deaths are referred to the Coroner to determine cause of death. This referral is done either directly by a medical practitioner or, in some cases, by RBDM after it receives the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death.
5. When RBDM receives information from a funeral director and cause of death has not been determined (or there is some other pending information to be provided to RBDM), the death will be recorded in the RBDM system as 'pending'. When cause of death (and all inquiries) have been finalised, the death will be recorded in the system with a status of 'Complete'.
6. Sometimes RBDM does not receive all the information required to complete the registration for a number of years. This occurs when the Coroner is undertaking an investigation over a period of time.
7. The total number of deaths recorded with a 'Complete' status for a specified period can alter over time, depending on when the data is extracted from RBDM's system. For example, if data of the number of deaths with a 'Complete' status in February 2014 was extracted in September 2014, there may have been a number of pending deaths which would not be recorded in that data. Some of those 'pending' matters may have become 'completed' by, for example, July 2015 so an extraction at that time may have a slightly higher number of deaths recorded.

**Requests from Voices of the Valley and the Department of Health and Human Services ("DHHS")**

8. On 27 May 2014, Tara Dean, a member of Voices of the Valley, wrote to RBDM and requested data showing the number of deaths for the months of February to June 2014 for four postcodes (3844, 3825, 3842 and 3840). She also requested the same data for those months for the previous five years.

9. On 4 August 2014, Michael Gunter, a researcher working with Voices of the Valley wrote to RBDM to confirm the request of Ms Dean from 27 May 2014 and to additionally request comparison data from the whole of Victoria.
10. On 17 August 2014, the Registrar contacted DHHS to confirm whether it was appropriate to refer Dr Gunter to the Public Health unit to assist him with his request for data. DHHS declined this approach.
11. On 25 August 2014, Mr Gunter wrote to RBDM to confirm his original request and to request additional data for the months of July to December 2014.
12. On 3 September 2014, the Registrar provided Rosemary Lester (DHHS) and Neil Robertson (Emergency Services) the statistical data prepared in response to Dr Gunter's request for information. This data was the number of registered deaths with a completed status, not the names of the deceased or causes of death.
13. On 4 September 2014, RBDM provided Mr Gunter with 'completed death data' for the months and postcodes requested.
14. When any request for data is received, RBDM assesses the request to determine whether, pursuant to section 48 of the *Births Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1996* (Vic), it is appropriate to release information to a person or organisation and to determine the cost to charge for the request.
15. On 2 October 2014, Ms Dean made a request for further information being data showing the deaths for each month between 2004 and 2014 for the same four postcodes and in addition for postcodes 3869 and 3870. She also requested data which would allow for a comparison with the whole of Victoria and for details of the cause of each death.
16. On 9 October 2014, RBDM wrote to Ms Dean advising her that the cause of death would not be provided but that the balance of the request was agreed to. Only data with a status of 'Complete' was provided.
17. On 8 December 2014, DHHS made a request for data recording deaths from four postcodes (3844, 3825, 3842 and 3840) for each month between 2009 and 2014 with cause of death information as well as comparison data for the whole of Victoria (excluding cause of death).
18. On 12 December 2014, RBDM provided Ms Dean with the additional requested data requested except cause of death. This was declined due to the sensitivity of that information, and the capacity of those who received the data to identify deceased individuals in the specified postcodes. Only data with a status of 'Complete' was provided.
19. On 15 January 2015, RBDM provided DHHS with the data as requested on 8 December 2014. Only 'completed death data' was provided.
20. On 16 January 2015, Ms Dean requested RBDM provide data recording deaths for the full month of December 2014 for the same postcodes as in previous requests.
21. On 11 February 2015, DHHS requested RBDM provide data recording deaths for the same four postcodes as in previous requests for each month in the years between 2004 and 2008.
22. On 13 February 2015, RBDM provided Ms Dean with an updated extraction of the data for December 2014. Only 'completed death data' was provided.
23. On 12 March 2015, RBDM wrote to DHHS granting them a request to on provide data to the University of Melbourne for the purpose of data analysis.

24. On 22 June 2015, RBDM provided DHHS with the data as requested on 11 February 2015. Only 'completed death data' was provided.
25. On 8 July 2015, DHHS wrote to RBDM and requested permission to provide the data it had received to Dr Rosemary Lester.
26. On 8 July 2015, RBDM wrote to DHHS granting its request to provide data to Dr Lester.
27. On 31 July 2015, Ms Dean wrote to RBDM noting that the data that had been provided for November 2014 was incomplete.
28. On 7 August 2015, RBDM provided Ms Dean with updated figures for that month. Only 'completed death data' was provided.

#### **Requests from the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry ("the Inquiry")**

29. On 17 June 2015, the Inquiry wrote to RBDM and requested documents detailing the number and cause of deaths by month from 2004 until the most recent month available in 2015 for eight postcodes (3844, 3840, 3825, 3842, 3870, 3854, 3856 and 3869).
30. The Inquiry requested details of deaths which occurred within those postcodes and deaths where the primary address of the deceased was located in one of those postcodes.
31. On 24 June 2015, the Inquiry wrote to RBDM and requested documents detailing the overall deaths that occurred in Victoria in the period 2004 and 2014, not including cause of death.
32. On 6 July 2015, RBDM requested its IT specialist to extract the requested data. This was extracted on 10 July 2015.
33. On 13 July 2015, RBDM emailed this data to the Board. Only 'completed death data' was provided.
34. Attached to this statement (**Attachment 1**) is the first and last page of the data for deaths in 2014 that RBDM provided to the Board on 13 July 2015 but with the individual details of each death redacted.
  - (a) The data is displayed in a number of columns.
  - (b) 'Registration Date' is the date the event was first registered, or the date of any subsequent activity that amends the information on that registered record.
  - (c) 'Postcode of Place of Death' is extracted from the Death Registration Statement completed by the Funeral Director, and is only recorded when it has been supplied to RBDM.
  - (d) A medical practitioner or Coroner (depending on who has responsibility to determine cause of death) must provide RBDM with the disease or condition directly leading to death, which RBDM records as 'Primary Cause of Death'. If the medical practitioner or Coroner identifies antecedent causes related to the death, RBDM records them as 'Secondary Cause of Death'. There is no standardised amount of information or form that this opinion is given in. That means that sometimes there is a lot of information provided in this field and sometime very little.
  - (e) A 'Secondary Cause of Death' is not always provided to RBDM.
35. It is possible that there are additional deaths that occurred during some of the requested months which are not included in this data because the matter is still listed as 'pending'

meaning cause of death has not been confirmed, or there is some other incomplete information preventing the completion of the registration. This is explained above at paragraphs [5]-[7].

36. On 25 August 2015, the Inquiry asked RBDM to provide details of the total numbers of deaths for the months and postcodes previously identified – ie including both deaths which are at a status 'Complete' and deaths currently 'pending'.
37. Due to the size and complexity of the request, RBDM has asked an external consultant to extract that data. We expect to be able to provide it to the Inquiry on 14 October 2015.
38. Until this data is extracted, RBDM cannot confirm whether there are any deaths for the months of February and March 2014 that are not displayed in the data provided to the Board in July 2015.