

IN THE MATTER OF

THE HAZELWOOD MINE FIRE INQUIRY

STATEMENT OF SARA RHODES-WARD

I, Sara Rhodes-Ward, General Manager, Community Services, Latrobe City Council, of Commercial Road, Morwell, say as follows:

**Professional Background**

1. I am employed by the Latrobe City Council as General Manager, Community Services having commenced in September 2014[year].
2. My role is primarily focused on whole of community health and wellbeing. We do this through a range of services including community development and strengthening, healthy communities, community information services, libraries, child and maternal health, immunization services and childcare, kindergarten and family day care services of the community in the Latrobe City Council area. The strategic foundation of our work is the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan a document required to be produced by the State. This document seeks to improve the health and wellbeing of all residents who live, work, learn and play in Latrobe City. Our Plan is grounded in community consultation and research and involves cooperation and collaboration with agency partners in the health and wellbeing sector.
3. In my role, I have become aware of many community concerns and opinions in relation to the rehabilitation of the mines through my own interaction with community members and through the Council's Community Resilience work undertaken in partnership with the Community Recovery Committee and Future Morwell, an urban revitalization project for Morwell. Post the mine fire, our Community Resilience work has involved a door-knock undertaken by the Community Resilience team in two trial neighbourhoods – the first the Rose Garden Neighborhood – being the neighbourhood closest to the Hazelwood Mine this work commenced in June 2015. The second neighbourhood – the Morwell East Neighbourhood, this work commenced in October 2015.
4. The main concerns that the community have raised with me and the Council are:

- a. The community wants more information about the process of progressive and final rehabilitation. In particular, the community wants to have their concerns and fears allayed about whether the mines' rehabilitation plans will address:
  - i. the potential for another fire to take hold in one or more of the Latrobe Valley mines;
  - ii. the levels of noise affecting the towns from the Latrobe Valley mines;
  - iii. the levels of dust and other debris affecting the towns from the Latrobe Valley mines;
  - iv. the effect on the stability of the mines, in particular the effect on the towns nearby given the proximity of the mines to the freeway and residential properties.
- b. The community want visibility of the options for final and progressive rehabilitation to gain an understanding about what options are feasible. The community wants to understand the current thinking about what is possible but also to be involved in discussions which could lead to further research and consideration of other possible solutions for the final rehabilitation of the mines.
- c. The community want the mines and the Government to be more transparent and collaborative about the options for progressive and final rehabilitation. There is a feeling of anxiety and frustration that information relevant to the community's future is being kept private. There is a perception in some pockets of the community that the lack of a broad inclusive community conversation around rehabilitation suggests a lack of interest in seeking to understand and meet community expectations. There is a further view that information is not broadly share because the information is technical in nature and unlikely to be understood by the community.
- d. The community wants an opportunity to share its aspirations and expectations of an appropriate mine rehabilitation and to be part of the process which considers possibilities and finds solutions for the rehabilitation of the mines. The community is concerned to ensure that the final rehabilitated sites are beautiful and useful assets to the community and not ugly, remediated mine sites.
- e. The community wants to understand the likely final land form of the rehabilitated Latrobe Valley mine sites so that there can be consideration about the possible land uses that can be developed by the community, including economic and profitable ventures.

5. The Council has made a public submission to the Board which addresses some of these matters as well as other issues of importance to the Council. A copy is attached at Annexure 1.

Signature:

Date: