



VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT  
SOLICITOR'S OFFICE

Contact details: Andrew Suddick  
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All correspondence to:  
[REDACTED]

15 October 2015

Ms Justine Stansen  
Solicitor to the Board  
Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

*By email*

Dear Ms Stansen

**Request for information from Victoria Police (VicPol), the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board (MFB), the Country Fire Authority (CFA), the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)**

We refer to your letters dated 22 September 2015 addressed to the MFB, CFA, VicPol, DHHS and EPA, seeking information from each in respect of the Long Term Health Study.

We confirm that all State entities take the health and wellbeing of their employees (and volunteers) very seriously and have systems in place accordingly.

We respond as follows:

**1. Requests for inclusion in the Long Term Health Study**

The Board sought information as to what, if any, requests the MFB and/or CFA received by persons wanting to be included in the Long Term Health Study. We confirm that neither agency has received any such requests to date (and accordingly no responses were required). The Board also sought information as to whether either agency was aware of any MFB/CFA members who wish to be included in the LTHS. Neither agency is aware of any members who wish to be included.

The Board sought information as to whether any written or oral requests were made by EPA staff wanting to be included in the Long Term Health Study. EPA staff (including those who had left the agency since the Hazelwood coal mine fire) were contacted by internal emails dated 22 and 27 January 2015 notifying them of the opportunity to have their details provided to Monash University for potential inclusion in the study, with an opportunity to opt out. Twenty one staff opted out, leaving a total of 115 whose details were provided to Monash University on 5 June 2015.

Finally, the Board queried whether Ms Reid (of VicPol) received any response to her letter of 16 June 2015. We confirm that VicPol received the attached email from Professor Abrahamson indicating that his team was busy working on study protocols and sampling frames. A copy of this email is **attached** and marked **‘VicPol response’**.

**2. Emergency responders who attended the mine fire**

The Board sought information on the numbers of MFB/CFA and VicPol members believed to have been working in Morwell during the mine fire, and whether it is known how many days on average they worked.

The following table sets out the number of members of each agency who attended the mine fire, and of those, the number of whom are residents of Morwell:

	Attendees	Residents
<b>MFB/CFA</b>	2209	Approximately 10
<b>VicPol</b>	176	Approximately 105

The attendance by MFB/CFA members at the mine fire varies significantly. Whereas some attended on a single occasion, others attended for multiple shifts. We understand that records may be available if required by the Board, but we would need to make further enquiries as to how long it might take each agency to provide such information.

As far as EPA staff are concerned, although a number of personnel undertook activities in Morwell during the incident (including positioning of monitoring equipment, undertaking community engagements, sampling and testing), the majority of these functions involved short terms in the area of a matter of hours. The two bases of operations for the team were in Traralgon Regional Control Centre and the EPA Traralgon office. None of the EPA staff are residents of Morwell.

**3. The existence of any programs to monitor health effects**

The Board sought information as to whether any internal programs exist to monitor the health effects of emergency responders who attended the mine fire.

**MFB and CFA**

The MFB and CFA both provided and continue to provide a Hazelwood Mine Fire – Emergency Services Post Incident Health Check, which is a confidential check of individual members health post Hazelwood attendance. The service is offered to all members who attended Hazelwood mine fire.

It is not a long term study of a group of firefighters and cannot be compared to the Long Term Health Study. There is no collation of information.

The MFB and CFA also offer voluntary health checks for staff and for the CFA volunteers, which predominantly cover issues such as cardiovascular health, lifestyle and fitness. MFB also offer a broader voluntary health monitoring program which covers lung function, skin cancer checks, prostate checks and full blood analysis.

The Board sought confirmation that the Australian Fire-fighters health study was a retrospective study that only looked at events prior to 2011, and has now concluded. This is correct.

## **VicPol**

The VicPol Medical Advisory Unit provides health advice and assessments for VicPol . This includes medical assessments for fitness for duties, medical assessment of recruit applicants and regular medical assessments for specialist units that may have routine exposure to chemicals or other environmental hazards, such as lead.

## **EPA**

EPA have health and well being programs available to staff, predominantly in relation to the risks associated with their regulatory field activities.

### **4. The scope of the Long Term Health Study**

The Board sought information from DHHS as to the following:

#### **4.1 The length of the Long Term Health Study being limited to 10 years, in light of Recommendation 10 from the First Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry Report in 2014.**

Initially, DHHS entered into a three-year contract with Monash University, with three two-year options and one one-year option to extend the Long Term Health Study to a period of ten years.

It is expected that the next ten-year contract will be negotiated in 2024. This will be based on satisfactory performance on the deliverables.

#### **4.2 The arrangements in respect of reviewing drafts of Monash University's work and/or interim reports, and providing suggestions/comments.**

The Acting Chief Health Officer chairs a DHHS Contract Management Steering Committee that oversees the Long Term Health Study. This committee meets on a monthly basis to assess progress of the study and review study outputs.

It is the responsibility of the contract manager to read and be familiar with all parts of the contract including the terms and conditions, specification, contractor submission and any other attachments. As such it is the content of the contract that is being implemented and the progress of implementation and fulfilment of contract deliverables and requirements is to be monitored and facilitated by the contract manager.

Each contract may have its own performance indicators. Contracts with measurable indicators will be monitored over the contract term. Where a contract does not have specific key performance indicators (KPIs), performance will generally be measured (directly or indirectly) in terms of

quality of deliverables and timeliness in delivering specified deliverables. Contract deliverables are documented in the contract.

Each contract manager will ensure that contractor performance and associated deliverables are measured in terms of quality and timeliness at the minimum, or in accordance with the KPIs specified in the contract, and monitored through regular meetings and reports.

Monash University has final editorial oversight and responsibility to meet all milestone activities.

**4.3 Whether revisions of drafts are linked to staged payments to Monash University in any way.**

The department only pays for services and products specified in the contract. All deliverables are certified as meeting the specifications before the supplier is paid.

Revisions of drafts are not specified as a deliverable in the contract.

**4.4 Any methodological barriers to including emergency responders, residents of other parts of the Latrobe Valley, and other people working in Morwell, in the scope of the Long Term Health Study.**

If methodological barriers exist in relation to a possible expansion of the Long Term Health Study, those persons at Monash University carrying out the study would be best placed to describe them. As far as DHHS is concerned, it can only suggest that the Board consider the following complexities.

The scope of the Hazelwood Long-term Health Study is focused on the residents of Morwell, rather than occupational health and safety of emergency responders or other employees who were working in Morwell at the time of the mine fire event. Responsibility for occupational health and safety matters is the remit of employers and WorkSafe Victoria. The potential health impacts upon these workers may be assessed by occupational health and safety programs of each employer / emergency service department.

The Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry report 2014 noted that more than 7,000 fire services personnel (including interstate firefighters) were involved in firefighting at the Hazelwood mine during the fire. This is also the number of Morwell residents required to be included in the study for it to have enough significance to detect potential health impacts from the mine fire event. The 4,000 residents of Sale are required for an adequate number of participants as a comparison (or control) community. To include 7,000 fire service personnel in the study would double the size of the study and require a separate comparison group of emergency responders who were not exposed to the mine fire event. It also does not take into account the number of other emergency responders across Vic Pol etc.

The emergency responders who were involved in fighting the Hazelwood mine fire were potentially exposed to the smoke event for a six-week period. The potential for exposure of emergency responders to many particles and chemicals from other occupational events, in some cases over many years, may make it difficult to determine whether any health implications were caused by the mine fire event or by other exposures not related to the mine fire event. To include other Morwell workers who were not resident at the time of the mine fire event may also significantly increase the scope of the study further.

It may be challenging to quantify the exposure of those non-Morwell residents and those who only worked in Morwell during the mine fire. There is also the potential for greater loss to follow up in those people who were not as exposed to the mine fire event as the residents of Morwell. This may also reduce the robustness of any study findings.

DHHS understands that Monash University had some challenges in identifying a comparison community for the Long Term Health Study, due to difficulty in finding a community that had matched demographic indicators. If these demographic indicators differ substantially, the community cannot be readily compared to Morwell.

In the event that residents from other parts of the Latrobe Valley are included in the study, it may be extremely challenging to identify exposure characteristics as well as appropriately matched controls.

Broadening the scope of the long-term health study was discussed at Hazelwood Long-term Health Study Steering committee meetings on 24 June 2015 and 25 August 2015 (minutes **attached**). Following the meeting on 24 June 2015, a departmental representative recently discussed this with Mr Tony Murphy from Emergency Management Victoria to determine what occupational health and safety investigations were available to emergency responders. Mr Murphy indicated that occupational health and safety programs were conducted for all emergency responders and all staff were covered by these programs.

**4.5 Whether any methodological barriers to expanding the scope of the Long Term Health Study have been discussed with Monash University**

We confirm that no such discussions have taken place.

**4.6 Documents**

The Board also requested copies of the following documents, which are attached to this letter as indicated:

- (a) Notes and summaries from the community consultation sessions regarding scope of the study held on 6 and 7 May 2014.

**Attached and marked 'A'.**

- (b) Any correspondence with the EPA, CFA, MFB, Victoria Police, EMV and/or community members (or organizations acting on their behalf) regarding inclusion in the scope of the study

**Attached** and marked 'B'.

- (c) The minutes from the Community Advisory Committee.

**Attached** and marked 'C'.

- (d) Any minutes from the Contract Steering Committee post June 24 2015.

**Attached** and marked 'D'.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any further queries.

Yours sincerely  
Victorian Government Solicitor's Office



Andrew Suddick  
General Counsel (Litigation).