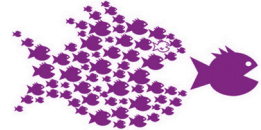


Voices of the Valley

Voicing the concerns of the Latrobe Valley community

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Voices of the Valley
Incorporated Association A0060859B

PO Box 593

Moe Vic 3825

14/08/2014

To:-

The Board,

Hazelwood Minefire Inquiry,

(via Justine Stansen)

Following up from the telephone conversation with Justine Stansen this morning we are forwarding the findings of our team into the premature deaths (harvesting effect) brought about by the Hazelwood Minefire within the Latrobe Valley.

As you are aware we at VOTV have been concerned with documenting and reporting the public health issues surrounding the minefire to you. We presented the results of 3 separate health surveys spanning several weeks of the incident and were alarmed at the results. These surveys and the raw data were collated, summarised and submitted to the Inquiry by the due date.

VOTV were also simultaneously chasing up data on death statistics because we had anecdotal evidence and requests about the increase in morbidity and mortality around the time of the incident. For example we were approached at the time by a source within the aged care sector who wanted an investigation into what appeared to be a noticeable increase in deaths. This was reinforced by a local tombstone maker who told us he has never been busier.

We approached Births Deaths and Marriages (BDM) several times beginning in May 2014 to ask for statistics to help us assess this persistent theory. We have had many applications to them but there has been no information forthcoming.

During the waiting period the submission dates for the Inquiry closed but we continued to follow it up.

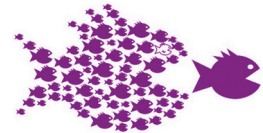
A team from VOTV then set out to find what data could be obtained about the last 6 years via the long and laborious task of filtering through the death notices in the local media. This took place at the offices of the media, at the local libraries and indeed at the State Library of Victoria Archives.

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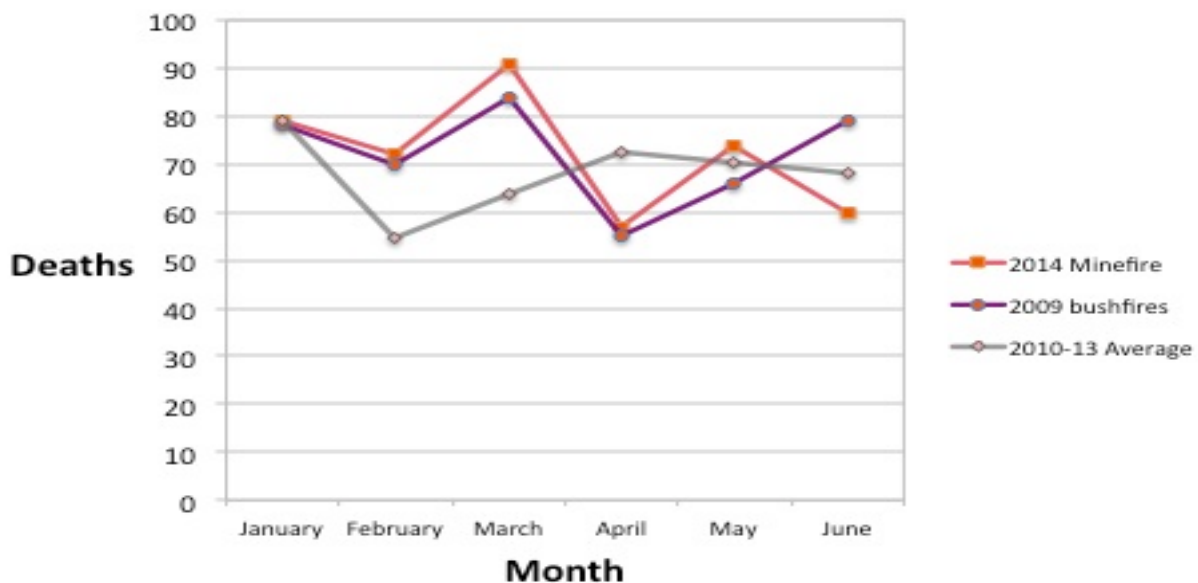
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The figures are beyond what we had imagined and show a harvesting or mortality rate greater than that experienced during the 2009 fires and heatwave where the bushfires killed by burning local people in their homes.



We at VOTV are still trying to get a response and proper statistics from BDM But given that the inquiry is drawing to an end and thus the chance to get to the truth or do anything about it is waning, we are turning to you, the Board Members of the Inquiry.

We have been told all along that there was no problem and that the minefire wasn't a major incident because nobody had died, unlike for example the Black Saturday fires where the deaths were highly visible and public and thus aroused outrage and attention from the public. This it would seem is simply not true.

It would seem that motivation to do something about what happened, or prevent it from happening again within the Government departments we have spoken to is tempered simply because it is being classed as a non-fatal, one off incident.

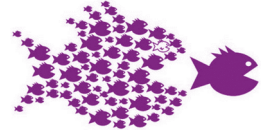
VOTV voted unanimously on the side of social responsibility to present this data to the Board of the Inquiry as soon as possible as a first step and seek your advice and counsel on this matter. We understand that there may be limitations inherit in the methodology of this data, and that the timing of this is perilously close to the end of the inquiry process and much of the report will already be firmed up. We understand that the board may not be able to accept new information for legal reasons since the closing of the submission date.

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Amongst the possibilities we see are that :-

- The Board may not be able to take the data on board at this late stage either because it is past the closing date for new information or that the Inquiry process is too advanced and almost complete.
- The Board may use its influence to obtain the official data from Births Deaths and Marriages to examine the harvesting effect themselves.
- The Board may have the ability to open a window that allows the new data to be submitted and evaluated.
- The public call for the inquiry to open a window that allows the new data to be submitted and included.
- The Board refer the deaths to a further coroners investigation or inquest.
- The Board is unable to do anything with the new information and VOTV and the people of the area are on their own to pursue the truth and take it to the media.

Attached are the spreadsheet of the data which includes some of the graphs and the very simple calculations used and where and by whom the data was obtained from for this research, copies of the emails sent to BDM during the early attempts to obtain official statistics, and the thanks and trust of the people of the Valley.

Sincerely seeking your assistance and advice

Ron Ipsen

For VOTV

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scuzzi@bigpond.com