

# Government response to the IGEM Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry Annual Report 2019

## Implementation of recommendations and affirmations

*The Hazelwood coal mine fire burned for 45 days between February and March 2014, becoming the largest and longest burning mine fire to occur in Victoria's Latrobe Valley. In March 2014, an independent inquiry into the circumstances of the fire was established, and in May 2015, the government reopened the inquiry to focus on human health impacts and mine rehabilitation.*

## Overview

The Victorian Government welcomes the Inspector-General for Emergency Management's (IGEM) fourth Annual Report into the implementation of recommendations and affirmations from the 2014 and 2015-16 Hazelwood mine fire inquiries.

In response to the inquiry, the government released its Implementation Plan in June 2016 setting out 246 actions across the following eight themes: governance and accountability; communications and community engagement; health in the Latrobe Valley; incident air quality and wellbeing; Latrobe Valley coal mine regulation; Latrobe Valley coal mine rehabilitation bonds; Latrobe Valley Regional Rehabilitation Strategy; and emergency management, planning, response and recovery.

Implementation monitoring and transparent reporting provides assurance to the community that the lessons identified from emergencies are acted on in a timely and sustainable manner.

This is the final IGEM Hazelwood Annual Report to be tabled in Parliament.

## The Report

Acknowledging the scale and complexity of the reforms over the past four years, the 2019 Report finds significant progress has been made and commends the timeliness of implementation.

Of the 246 actions set out in the government's Implementation Plan, 230 are closed or complete with the outstanding 16 actions progressing.

Consistent with implementation action in 2017-18, the IGEM finds that many key improvements in 2018-19 focused on the Latrobe Valley region. The Report highlights progress in relation to:

- a wide range of health improvement initiatives focusing on preventative health, chronic disease management, and mental health
- a new air monitoring framework, co-designed with members of the Latrobe Valley community, which provides a significantly expanded network
- legislative, policy, and administrative reforms to the Latrobe Valley coal mines' regulatory framework, which is due to be completed in 2020
- the Latrobe Valley Regional Rehabilitation Strategy, which provides a blueprint to progress mine rehabilitation planning
- implementation of the emergency management planning reforms.

For the first time, the IGEM exercised its effectiveness monitoring powers, finding that implementation of the following actions has been effective:

- completion of a community co-design process for a new air monitoring network
- embedding the smoking cessation initiative, in partnership with key providers

- biannual workshops on the Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions and WorkSafe to improve their connection and ability to monitor and enforce compliance with mine fire risk across both regulatory regimes.

The 2019 Report notes, however, that progress on a small number of actions has slowed, with four actions being overdue and another four delayed. This includes the provision of personal monitoring equipment to Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board (MFB) firefighters, which the IGEM finds should be progressed as a priority.

The MFB is in the process of acquiring an initial cache of this equipment by July 2020 and anticipate procurement will be completed in December 2020. The IGEM will continue to monitor the progress of this action.

## The future

The IGEM will continue to monitor 11 outstanding government actions relating to the Latrobe Valley coal mine regulation, communications and community engagement, and emergency management planning, response and recovery.

Latrobe Valley Mine Rehabilitation Commissioner will monitor the outstanding five actions relating to the Latrobe Valley Regional Rehabilitation Strategy led by the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, which IGEM finds are in their early stages of development, until June 2020. A new Mine Land Rehabilitation Authority to be established in July 2020, will take over the role of monitoring from the Commissioner and will provide ongoing assurance to the community that public sector bodies and coal mine operators are implementing the Latrobe Valley Regional Rehabilitation Strategy and planning for the rehabilitation and management of declared mine land.

The government is committed to the delivery of all outstanding actions to ensure these reforms have a lasting positive impact on Victoria's emergency response and the Latrobe Valley community.