

15 November 2016

Dr Jacqueline Dewar
Research Director
Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis Select Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Via e-mail: cwpsc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Dr Dewar

Please find herewith a written submission regarding the parliamentary inquiry into the re-identification of coal workers' pneumoconiosis (CWP) amongst coal mine workers in Queensland by Vale Australia Pty Ltd, on behalf of itself and Carborough Downs Coal Management Pty Ltd.

Yours Sincerely,

Marcelo Matos
Country Manager
Director
Vale Australia Pty Ltd

1. Introduction

Vale Australia Pty Ltd (Vale), on behalf of itself and Carborough Downs Coal Management Pty Ltd, has prepared this submission in response to the Coal Workers' Pneumoconiosis Select Committee's Inquiry into the re-identification of coal workers' pneumoconiosis (CWP) amongst Queensland coal mine workers. Vale is pleased to host the Committee at Carborough Downs on the 22nd November and is also available to appear and contribute to the Inquiry's public hearing in Mackay on the 25th November.

The Carborough Downs coal mine (Carborough Downs) is a joint venture operation of which Vale owns 90%. Carborough Downs Coal Management Pty Ltd is 100% owned by Vale and is appointed as the Coal Mine Operator by the Carborough Downs joint venture. Carborough Downs is located 20km east of the town of Moranbah. It is an underground mine that commenced production in 2006 as a bord and pillar operation, before converting to a longwall operation in 2009. The current production rate is over 3 million tonnes per annum ROM (run-of-mine).

In addition Vale holds a 50% joint venture interest in the Eagle Downs Coal Mine under construction 20km south east of Moranbah, and holds several coal exploration tenements in the Bowen and Galilee Basins.

Vale is surprised and deeply concerned by the re-identification of CWP. Vale has procedures in place to ensure its employees undertake the regular health checks required under the existing Coal Mine Workers' Health Scheme.

Vale supports the recommendations of the independent review of the current Coal Mine Workers' Health Scheme led by Professor Sim of Monash University.

2. Current cases

Currently, four Carborough Downs' employees have been diagnosed with CWP by our Nominated Medical Advisor (NMA). The work histories of three of these employees includes significant experience in underground coal mines overseas, while the fourth employee has a work history that includes over 20 years at another underground coal mine in the Bowen Basin.

The diagnosed employees remain working full-time at Carborough Downs in areas with low dust exposure. This decision is in accordance with our current medical advice. Vale's NMA sought further advice from respiratory specialists in Australia and in the USA prior to these diagnoses.

3. Proactive steps undertaken

Commencing in the third quarter of 2015, Vale has undertaken and continues to execute the following proactive measures at Carborough Downs:

3.1 Review of employees x-rays

- Engaged the services of an occupational respiratory physician and 'B' Reader* in the USA, Dr Robert Cohen, to review chest X-rays for over 200 current Vale employees in combination with our NMA
- Worked in conjunction with the union (CFMEU), to gain consent from employees for such a review, which involved the review of a chest X-ray less than two years old and the previous X-ray

3.2 Communication

- Undertaken open and regular communication with the workforce, the CFMEU, and the Queensland Department of Natural Resources & Mines Inspectorate
- Hosted the Queensland Minister for Natural Resources & Mines, Dr Anthony Lynham, for a detailed site visit
- Facilitated briefings to the workforce by our NMA
- Hosted Dr Robert Cohen, who addressed the workforce

3.3 Dust mitigation

- Continued improvement of dust mitigation controls, including:
 - Application of additional engineering solutions
 - System improvements
 - Operational modifications

3.4 Dust monitoring

- Enhanced our dust monitoring regime, including:
 - Increased frequency of monitoring, over and above statutory requirements

- Addition of real time monitoring
- Incorporated an analysis of operator positioning

3.5 Personal protective equipment (PPE)

- Continued focus on PPE such as:
 - Education of correct PPE
 - Implementing a clean shaven policy to ensure PPE is correctly fitted
 - Face fit testing
 - Mandated Positive Air Powered Respirators (PAPR) for employees with a higher risk of dust exposure

It is worth noting that PPE is not considered a primary control measure but forms part of a suite of control measures to manage dust exposure.

4. Summary

Vale's number one priority is to work with its employees, the government, the CFMEU and other relevant authorities to ensure it is doing everything in its power to address this issue. The company will continue to work diligently to safeguard the health of its employees.

Vale has consulted extensively with its workforce and the Queensland Mines Inspectorate since the initial diagnosis of CWP in 2015. Vale has proactively instigated a medical investigation including a review of over 200 underground employees X-rays by the ILO system which incorporates two B readers initially reading the films in the USA.

Vale is complying with dust regulations and continues to invest in significant dust mitigation and monitoring measures in addition to those that have previously existed at the mine.

Vale looks forward to discussing the matters in this submission with the Committee during the site visit on the 22nd November and at the public hearing in Mackay on the 25th November.

*Footnote: A 'B reader' is a physician certified by the USA National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) as demonstrating proficiency in classifying radiographs of pneumoconiosis.