

In the matter of
The 2009 Victorian Bushfires
Royal Commission
and
In the matter of
Powercor Australia Ltd

SUBMISSIONS ON BEHALF OF POWERCOR
FIRE AT COLERAINE

- 1 Powercor accepts that on the evidence, the Commission can find that the Coleraine Fire was started when the conductor was blown from its pole following the break of a tie wire on 7 February 2009.
- 2 Mr Power in his Statement to the Commission dated 1 September 2009 identified that the Colfitz North Spur was part of a system of powerlines constructed by the SEC in 1961.¹
- 3 He referred to the differing span lengths either side of pole 3 causing changes of tension in the two spans which, as a result would apply forces on the sections of the tie wire which broke. Mr Power explained in his evidence the differential span lengths and the mechanism for causing failure by fatigue was catered for in the design standard for stringing power lines.² The ratio of span lengths between poles 2 and 3, and 3 and 4 on the Colfitz North Spur line of 1:2 is within the industry standard which allows a ratio of up to 1:5 of shorter span next to the longer span.³ Mr Power also gave evidence that the design standard catered for the materiality of the effect of differential span lengths on tie fatigue. He noted that the standard deals with the conditions under which the threshold for a material impact of differential span length becomes relevant.⁴
- 4 Powercor further accepts that the conductor, once it became detached, swung in the wind and came into contact with the branches of a tree. The proximity of branches of the trees to the conductor complied with the powerline-to-vegetation clearance requirements.⁵
- 5 The evidence given by Powercor was that the fuse on the isolating transformer supplying the Colfitz North Spur line was the correct fuse for the fault current and load current on the SWER lines.⁶ Mr McDonald in his witness statement stated that the circumstances of the conductor coming into contact with the tree branches

¹ Power, WIT.7002.002.002.

² Power, T12708:1-5.

³ Power, WIT.7002.002.004.

⁴ Power, T12708:10-13.

⁵ Part 2.1 of the Code of Practice for Electric Line Clearance, see Regulations 5 and 7 of the *Electricity Safety (Electric Line Clearance) Regulations 2005*.

⁶ McDonald, WIT.7001.001.0010, paragraph 64.

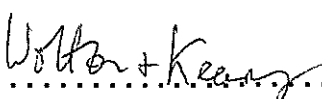
outside the clearance zone under the line were that the fuse did not operate because it detected the tree as a high resistance earth path. Non-operation was not a defect in the fuse but a feature of the available technology.⁷ Mr McDonald was questioned on this issue and he indicated several times that there was no other technology available which would have caused the fuse to operate in the circumstances.⁸

- 6 The evidence before the Commission was that the assets on pole 3 on the Colfitz North Spur were last inspected by asset maintenance inspectors within the time required by Powercor's regulated inspection standard. The inspection was satisfactorily carried out. Pole 3 was noted to require installation of Polesaver, but had no other defects.⁹
- 7 Powercor otherwise notes that the issues raised by Counsel Assisting in relation to Powercor's system of inspection of tie wires will be addressed in subsequent submissions. In the circumstances Powercor does not respond to paragraphs 3.33 – 3.41 of Counsel Assisting's Submissions in respect of the Coleraine fire. Powercor will deal in particular with the contents of its Asset Inspection Manual Guidelines and asset classification in its response to any submissions on systemic issues.

Conclusion

- 8 By reason of Counsel Assisting's qualification at paragraph 10.3 that *"the extent to which the failure of the tie wire reflects systemic issues in the electrical distribution network will be addressed in submissions relation to systemic issues concerning electricity"*, Powercor accepts that the Commission, if so minded, can make Proposed Key Findings 10.2 to 10.6.

27 January 2010


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⁷ McDonald, WIT.7001.001.0010, paragraph 66.

⁸ McDonald, T7601:15-31.

⁹ Statement of Vince Power, WIT.7002.002.0003.