

**Closing remarks—end of fire-related death hearings  
Commissioner Bernard Teague, Chairperson  
2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission  
19 May 2010**

Today marks the end of the fire related death hearings. We have had 86 sad hearings over 23 days. Our task has been, and will be, to focus on what lessons we learn from the circumstances of the 173 deaths. Most particularly, we must use our examinations to re-evaluate the key policy applied on Black Saturday. Stay and defend or leave early.

Deaths cannot but stir up so many emotions. That's the more so when the circumstances of those deaths are sudden and savage. Our probing those circumstances for enlightenment could not but stir up a further range of emotions.

Empathy. We are so grateful to the more than 450 family members, friends and colleagues who came here to listen empathetically.

Courage. It was not easy to look at photos of death scenes and to hear the last words of dying fathers and mothers and, even sadder, of sons and daughters.

Dedication. I change the focus. There has been an enormous amount of work done by individuals and organisations behind the scenes. We should mention many more, but we will embarrass just three leaders. We ask them to thank those that they have led.

The first is Paul Hollowood, leading the police. You, Paul, and your offsidiers in the Phoenix Taskforce and the Judicial Support Unit have done a fantastic job. You and they have collected and summarised a mass of material and turned it into superb audio-visual presentations. You and they have also provided much valued support to bereaved families.

The second is Lana Kolyunski, leading Annie Tinney and other staff of the Royal Commission. You, Lana, have been inspirational. You have gone to extraordinary lengths to keep in touch with the bereaved families, and to help them in so many ways.

Third is Peter Rozen. During the hearings in this annexe, you, Peter, have so effectively led the team of barristers and solicitors who have rounded off the work of the police and commission staff in guiding us on our path to enlightenment. You have so sensitively handled the questioning to minimise the grief of the families.

We also thank the Coroner and her staff for their early advice as to our processes, so that they can complement rather than duplicate the coronial processes.

And we thank two groups of psychologists, the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement, and Gus Carfi and his team, for the support provided to family members and friends attending the hearings, and attending to the Commission's staff.

Sadness. Let us end with a minute's silence to remember and honour the 173 who died.