

Board of Inquiry into  
the Occurrence of Bush  
and Grass Fires  
in Victoria February 1977

Transcript of Proceedings, pages 2317-2332

VPRS 9823/P0002/13, Unit "Day 43 – 45 Transcript of proceedings"

[note on transcript page 2325  
Mr. Lloyd makes reference to  
the SEC undertaking to make  
an instructional film for staff,  
to educate them about sparks causing fires.]

Photography at PROV and conversion to PDF: M.Gunter, 1<sup>st</sup>- 4<sup>th</sup> Oct 2009  
(for research only, not for publication)

*NB some transcript text is almost illegible due to the over-use of recycled carbon paper*

existing lines before the next bush fire season.

Pole caps - pole caps coming adrift can also be a source of trouble. Greater vigilance in respect of loose pole caps is needed and all personnel should be instructed to keep a lookout and report them to the appropriate supervisor. In particular, pole inspectors should be required to inspect and report on pole caps and any obviously deteriorated crossarms. Field glasses should be issued to all Pole Inspector for this purpose.

Although there is an extended pole cap strap already available, a new strap is being designed which will facilitate installation of the strap without removal of the pin from the cap or the insulator from the pin.

Recording of complaints - as you have already been advised, a committee has been set up to review and report on the recording of complaints and the conciliation of subsequent actions.

General - in order to improve communications with customers, CFA, and other authorities, will you please arrange to have district office communications manned on weekends and public holidays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on days of extreme fire danger (as distinct from days of total fire ban). Such a situation is to be treated in the same way as a normal emergency storm situation where local district control has been assumed on a hand back basis from the report centre.

I take it that means it has been assumed on the basis the report centre has rung up and told somebody to man it.

The advice to customers is appended at the back. It is a two-page document and the guidelines by which spreaders are put in low voltage mains are set out on the very last page. It shows as an interim guideline the spreader should be fitted about mid-span and tells when, and that new extensions or low voltage mains, the following should apply. I think I shall now call Mr. Hill.

ROLAND JOHN HILL, sworn and examined:

MR. MARKS: Mr. Hill, is your full name Roland John Hill?---That is correct.

Where do you live?---I live at 17 Corangamite Street, Colac.

Are you the Regional Manager of the South-Western Electricity Supply Region of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria?---Yes.

You are a qualified professional engineer?---Yes.

You have made a statement, have you not, for presentation?---Yes.

You have referred to certain photographs?---Yes.

I think you have copies there, and I tender those photographs. Those photographs are referred to on page 5, examples of the kind of problems that exist and can be seen along the Great Ocean Road.

EXHIBIT 277.....Photographs referred to in Mr. Hill's statement.

9.GT/LC.  
Fire. F

2317.

HILL.

MR. MARKS: I suggest this whole statement go in the transcript.

THE BOARD: Yes.

(See transcript of the 46th day for statement of Roland John Hill).

MR. MARKS: On page 6 you refer to a time that you went to a meeting of the Lismore group of the CFL at Lismore?---Yes.

You got the co-operation of property owners there in about 1970, is that right to a tree clearing operation?---That is correct.

Were you able to marshal an effective force of tree clearing?---Yes, that was a very successful operation.

That is a different time to the one referred to by Mr. Morris because he wrote in 1969, or is it the same one?---It was in relation to a different area. Mr. Morris was speaking rather about the Mingay area.

I take it that you do not wish this to be read out?

THE BOARD: I do not think so. I read it myself. I know Mr. Nixon has read it. It will go into the transcript. I do not think it is necessary to read it out aloud.

MR. MARKS: I wonder if this map could be put up and tendered. I think it is called Electricity Commission of Victoria Electric Supply map.

EXHIBIT 278.....State Electricity Commission of Victoria Electric Supply Map.

MR. NIXON: Mr. Hill, when the power goes off at Anglesea, you are the man I ring, is that right?---Not actually me in person. It is my organisation.

The South-Western Region is a region covering a very large area, is it?---Yes, it covers quite an area in the south-west of the State, 28,000 square kilometres.

As I see it, and you correct me if I am wrong, after the fires of 8th January 1969 there was quite a large increase in tree cutting activities by the SEC?---Yes.

That was organised by the Commission because of the very fact these fires had occurred?---Yes.

As you say in your statement, the cost of tree cutting rose almost three-fold in 1969/70 to the previous year, 1968/69? ---Yes.

I suppose the cost has risen in years thereafter, would that be right?---The cost fell after the 1969/70 year and has tended to rise again since.

Tended to rise again since, not because more people were engaged, I suppose, but because wages increased over those years? ---On a man-hour basis, it has also shown an increase.

(Page 2320 follows)

9.GT/AC.  
Fire.

2318/2319.

HILL.

24x30

MR. MARKS: That is why there is the man hours thing.

MR. NIXON: After 1969/1970 you say it decreased a little?---Yes.

Was that because of the big burst the Commission had after the fire of 8th January?---Well, it was to achieve the effort that was made in the 1969/1970; we had to divert lots of our tree cutting resource to the problem and we were unable to sustain that effort because of other things.

Contractors engaged in 1969/1970 on tree cutting were put off in subsequent years, were they not?---Not to my knowledge. We had no sub-contractors in the south-western region at that time.

Did you not have some contractors - and their names elude me at the moment - from Geelong?---Not prior to 1969/70.

Have you recently engaged some contractors from Geelong?---No.

Are you sure of that?---I am sure of that.

What have you done since these fires of 12th February? Have you engaged more men for tree cutting?---We have engaged contractors since 1969/70.

But since the fires of 12th February?---Since the fires of 12th February?

Yes?---We have made provision for further expenditure on tree cutting than was intended prior to 12th February and the orders placed on tree-cutting contractors were due for review at about this time or near 1st July. They have been expanded - "enlarged", I suppose, is a better word.

Was there much tree cutting done in your region in 1976?---Yes.

Was it, in your view, sufficient?---Employing hindsight, it was not sufficient.

One gains the impression, Mr. Hill, that the Commission has concentrated on the expansion of power services and supplies and that there has not been a corresponding increase in maintenance on the line. Is that a wrong impression or not?---It is a very difficult question. The Commission is obliged to direct its efforts to meet the demands of the people who want our services. Many of our efforts are directed towards giving customers the supply they want.

I realise that. That is why I have suggested you have concentrated on the supply of power and not on the maintenance of SEC assets?---I would not say there has been undue concentration one way or the other. We try to keep these things in balance with the resources we have.

I appreciate it comes down to money and resources and that you say you try to keep these things in balance with the resources you have but, indeed, in your regions and in other regions there was not enough maintenance on SEC installations?---I think "enough" is one of those words. I would agree we could have done more maintenance over those years than we have done, but I might add that we are going to do more in the years to come.

I should hope so. Mr. Hill, as regional manager of the South Western Electrical Supply Region of the SEC, did you give instructions to employees to look for dangerous hazards

9.PA.KK  
Fire

2320

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such as conductors coming into contact with trees or foliage, conductors under trees or foliage and that type of thing?---Yes.

Before the man went out and had all these photographs taken, were you aware of these types of hazards in your region?---I was very frankly surprised when I drove up on these few roadways which are not far from Colac, any of them, and I decided then to make a photographic record of some of our problems.

You were surprised at the magnitude of the problem?---Yes, I was surprised.

In a letter to the Graziers Association of Victoria dated 8th August 1969 there was a statement by the Honourable Mr. Falfour which reads: "I have discussed this matter with the SEC and am advised that the Commission makes every effort to keep trees and other growth clear of the electricity conductors. To this end, inspections and control of the lines are continually carried out to ensure that all possible measures are taken to eliminate potential hazards and sources of danger". No doubt, that was the Minister speaking about an answer received in 1969. Regular patrols were not carried out at the time, were they? ---They were of some lines and they still are of some lines but they are not carried out on all lines on a regular time slotted basis.

Have there been regular patrols of any of these lines we see in any of these photographs?---Regular patrols, in the sense that they are done once every so often?

Yes?---No.

These are not the lines you were thinking of as being patrolled regularly?---I was thinking of the 66,000 volt line.

You make regular inspections of the 66,000 volt lines?---Yes.

Not of the lines here?---No.

Those regular patrols are necessary now, are they not?---Yes, I think they are. I have felt always that we could depend on reports to us from people who live in the rural areas and reports from our own people who are travelling the roads. Some of the things that have been said at this Inquiry indicate that for the future that source of information is not one on which we could completely rely.

It is a bit like "passing the buck", is it not, to rely on others to inform you?---I do not think so.

THE BOARD: I am inclined to disagree with that phrase. I do not think it is the right phrase.

MR. NIXON: Did you give any instructions to employees of the Commission in your region to look at the 22 kV conductors and check whether they needed spreaders at any point? Have you ever done that?---We have written about spreaders and we have discussed spreaders. When you use the expression have I instructed employees, I should explain that the normal line of communication I use is through the district managers. I have written to them in the terms in which I have been written to. I have not done sufficient in the way of following up with them the writings I have done.

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Fire

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MR. McDONALD: Is this a spreader on a high voltage conductor?---  
The spreader relates to the low voltage -- there is no  
spreader on a high voltage conductor.

MR. NIXON: Beecac is within your region, is it not?---Yes.

Have you been down Pierce's Road since the fire of 12th February  
at Beecac?---Yes.

Clearly, that was an area that required spreaders?---I have been  
in an elevating platform vehicle, I have closely examined  
and have handled the conductors on Pierce's Road and  
I would agree that those conductors clash and that a way  
of avoiding that is by the use of a spreader.

You pass on instructions you receive from the hierarchy in Monash  
House?---Yes.

You pass on the instructions to the district managers, is that  
right?---Yes.

It is their responsibility to take the necessary steps to ensure  
that your directions are followed up?---Yes, that is the  
way our organisation works.

Has each district manager been left to his own devices with regard  
to tree cutting in your region or is that not the situation?  
---No, they have the assistance of the contractors and the  
assistance of a tree cutting party which is a regional party  
that visits districts.

It was fairly non-existent, was it not, during 1976?---The regional  
party?

Yes?---I do not think it has ever fallen below four men in strength.

It was taken out of the regions on occasions, was it not?---No.

Is it at all times engaged in tree cutting?---Yes.

Were contractors engaged in 1976 in your region?---Yes.

How often?---Continuously.

MR. McDONALD: This is a region?

MR. NIXON: Yes. (To witness): All the time?---Yes.

How many more men do you propose to put on if you can get them in  
that region for tree cutting?---We intend to have five  
parties belonging to contractors instead of the existing  
three parties.

(Page 2323 follows)

MR. HIXON: Did you ever make it a practice of asking inspectors of your part of the area to look for the hazards that were noted by Dr. Connolly after the fires of January 1969? ---I personally, no.

Did you request your district managers to make these inspections?---Yes.

Do you know whether they were done?---Not with certainty.

Did you require reports to be submitted by district managers as to the condition of the conductors in relation to trees and branches, etc.?---I think the requirement then that the region laid down was that districts would report to the region regarding situations that they could not handle themselves. That is a bit of hearsay, as far as I am concerned.

A number of people have stated that they made complaints to SEC offices in your region - Campdown, Colac, I think were two that were mentioned - and nothing was done about the complaints. Do you know anything about that? Have you made enquiries about that?---Yes, I have made enquiries about it. It is a matter that very greatly concerns me and is one of the reasons that we are having a look at our methods of dealing with information from customers, and recording.

THE BOARD: It is always a problem as to how far you should spend the money and energy in recording matters of this sort. I do not blame your organisation for not recording a lot of these things. If you had known there was going to be this inquiry you would have recorded a great number of things. I suppose the difficulty is that the customer in some cases - we have even had allegations that they have gone to the office and made complaints, but we do not know who they have seen, they may have seen the cleaner in some cases, and he has not bothered to pass it on, but it is desirable, I think, to have some sort of record of complaints, mainly for purposes of protecting your own flank against allegations?---We are concerned that this has been said so often by people and we want to set up something that will ensure, as far as we can, that whatever the customer tells us is dealt with and he is given some satisfaction. That is the purpose of the exercise in that area.

I am not wildly impressed by this business. There is too much of this casually telling linesmen whom you happen to see in the hotel or who come out for some other purpose, or strolling into the office at lunchtime and telling the office boy or the office girl, but, on the other hand, it is true that we have had a great number of complaints about this.

MR. HIXON: Tree cutting recommendations were put out in July, 1969, or thereabouts, were they not, by the Commission?---Yes, indeed.

And you were aware of them, of course?---Oh yes.

And the Commission acknowledged the fact that it had been strongly criticised for its failure to undertake adequate clearing, did it not?---Yes.

And also acknowledged its failure to take precautions to prevent, if possible, conductors clashing?---Yes.

And standards were set out and they were described as minimum standards?---Yes.

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Fire

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And the standards were adopted as an attempt to prevent the disastrous consequences of the fires of 8 January, 1965, were they not?---Yes.

It would be fair to say that by 1976 in your region - and I am not criticising you - the SEC did not get halfway towards those minimum standards, did they, on a number of occasions -- I do not know about halfway, but I would agree that the standard has become eroded over the years because of a number of pressures.

Going back to what I might describe as the Connolly/Eason dialogue in 1969, following the January fires, really the Commission indicated to the Country Fire Authority that they required or would welcome advice from local representatives of the CFA concerning any of the situations of trees in contact with conductors, overhead trees and the clashing of conductors?---Yes.

And really the Commission was leaving it to the landholders, the volunteers in the field, to notify the Commission of any defects, was it not?---I think it was asking them to notify us of things they saw. I do not think that is passing the buck because those people live nearer the situation than we are and if they would but tell us, I think we would have undertaken some action, but as I understand it, that is all that arrangement was.

You were relying on individuals to inform your officers of dangerous situations they observed?---Yes.

There was no real increase on the part of the SEC, of patrols on the lines, to look for things, themselves, was there?---No.

And if the individuals did not notice the situation or did not report the situation, your maintenance fell down or did not reach the required standards?---That could happen.

But in some of these matters, tree cutting in particular, you would ask the district managers and others in the region to inspect as far as they were able. To that extent, there were special patrols done for that particular purpose, but they would perhaps be a one time look at the time of being asked and perhaps not a complete look?---They would depend perhaps on their local knowledge of the areas they should look at, so it was never completely dependent on other people telling us of the state of affairs.

You are aware of the situation, are you, at Hamilton's property at Tatyoon?---Only from what I have heard at this inquiry. That is not in the south-western region.

I was looking for Pura Pura - is it in your region?---Yes, indeed.

If you had gone to the Petrass' property before 12th February and observed the conductor as it was going through the plantation of sugar gums, do you think you would have done anything about it or would you have accepted the situation?---I would have done something about it.

For whatever reason, the system of keeping adequate clearance between the trees and foliage and the conductors fell down during 1975/76 and in the time leading up to the fires?---Yes.

And there was no real system of regular patrols to look at the lines?---No.

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No real patrols of the lines to see where spreaders could be put?---  
No.

MR. CHESTER: At page 5 of your statement, about halfway down, you say that large tracts of the Otway ranges are public land or forest land and that authorities such as the Forests Commission, and you name a couple of other authorities, exert an influence on tree removal. Is there any instance where the Forests Commission, to your knowledge, in the Otway ranges, precluded your Commission from removing any trees?---Yes.

Where was that and when?---That was between Wye River and Separation Creek where, with an on site inspection with officers of the Forests Commission, we agreed to accept a fairly minimal standard of clearing because it would have, frankly, presented a great scar on the landscape.

Have any problems arisen from that, as far as you know?---No, none.

It was resolved on the ground?---Yes, it was.

And you were happy to accept the compromise which was arrived at?  
---We thought it was a reasonable situation, yes.

What happened in the Macedon area some time previously - the same sort of thing?---No, I have no knowledge of the Macedon area in relation to the Forests Commission, they were private trees.

MR. LLOYD: Mr. Hill, do you personally, as an engineer, feel satisfied from hearing the evidence in this inquiry and from looking at the results of the experiments that the Commission carried out, that the Commission's installations can in certain circumstances and in a variety of ways emit particles of matter which can cause fires?---Prior to 12th February I was quite satisfied, but now we have done some experiments.

Are you satisfied now?---I am not satisfied now.

I do not think you follow me. Is it your belief that the Commission's installations can in certain circumstances, for one reason or another, emit hot particles which can cause fires - are you satisfied of that?---Talking of Commission installations, you are talking about low voltage conductors that might clash?

Any of them?---I cannot be satisfied now that this does not sometimes happen.

Are you satisfied that it can happen?---That it can happen?

Yes?---Am I satisfied that it can happen?

Yes?---I have not seen it happen with my own eyes, but I must accept the fact, that is that it can happen, yes.

As I understand the material, the SEC proposes to make a film to convince its people at every level of just what I have put to you - is that not what you understand the proposal to be?---Indeed.

If they cannot convince you, they will have some trouble with the district managers, will they not?---Have I not said I am convinced?

9. YE. BOL  
Fire

2325.  
(Page 2325A. follows)

HILL

24x30

But you were not prior to 12th February?---I have been convinced with great reluctance.

Are you of the same opinion still?---No.

That has involved your mind being changed, has it not?---Oh yes.

And would you say that that has been probably so throughout the whole organisation of the SAC, that you will have to change the minds of people at every level?-- Yes, we will do, we will have to do that.

Is the essence of the experience this, that to some extent the SAC now realises that what the farmers have been saying for years, and they have not been believed in saying, is literally right?---I do not know what the farmers have been saying for years.

THE BOARD: What they have been saying, is that the SAC installations have, in fact, caused fires and nobody believed them?--- They must now be believed in some instances, yes.

(Page 2326 follows.)

THE WITNESS: They must now be believed in some instances.

MR. LLOYD: If all levels believed in the SEC that this was most unlikely, that would tend to make them discount the complaints that the farmers made, would it not?---Yes, it would.

And that is probably where the agreement between the CFA and the SEC broke down, is it not, it was agreed it would be dealt with at the local level, but you have people in at the local SEC level with a scepticism about the complaints, a tendency to reject them. Do you follow what I am saying?---Yes, I do, but I do not think it is valid because I think the things we were looking for the CFA to tell us was in relation to trees and powerlines and we have never had any doubt that trees in contact with lines, very close to lines, something should be done about it. I do not think the C.F.A. has ever been in a position to give us reports about other parts of our equipment. I think we have had to learn this by experimentation and experience in the hard way.

And by facing up to a very big pay-out, I suppose? There is nothing like that to drive the message home?---Well, that is true.

THE BOARD: That area that Mr. Lloyd was putting to you that you are not very happy about might have something to do with the celebrated incident at Merino of the fellow ringing up saying the trees were rubbing against the lines. There were other factors there as to precisely what time the call came through and I do not know you can be greatly blamed about it, but it is obvious the head man, Mr. Speed, was quite sceptical about it.

MR. LLOYD: Mr. Speed said, "I had been out there along that road some weeks earlier and everything was all right", so a man who rang, an officer of the local group who identified himself, told him everything was all wrong but he does not take him seriously. That is part of the problem, is it not?---Yes, it could be part of the problem. I think that call to the Custerton office should have been responded to.

THE BOARD: I do not know that you can be all that harsh on them. I think there was a good deal to be said for the fact they failed to convey any real sense of urgency, if not to the fellow they spoke to then certainly to Mr. Speed. Even allowing for that, he seems to have taken - and there is no doubt in reading his evidence he was saying, "I was very sceptical about it" and he said, "I was out there, I knew this line".

MR. LLOYD: There is nothing quite so calculated to allay a sense of urgency as a belief that what is complained about is most unlikely to happen, would you agree with that, as a factor of human nature?---Yes, I believe that.

The collective belief of the SEC up to these fires, its personnel and its engineers, were that fires were very, very unlikely to be caused by SEC installations? Maybe you were allayed by the figures, maybe it was a legitimate view to have, but it was the SEC collective view, was it not?---Yes, I think it was, I think that is right.

Part of the purpose of this film is to instil in the SEC's officers at all levels a sense of urgency?---Yes.

To that extent in future to improve on errors that have been made in the past of not taking these complaints seriously enough, is that right?---Yes, I would agree with that. The complaints should, of course, have been taken seriously in spite of what beliefs we might have, but now we have to say, "Yes, to say about some parts of our equipment that must be taken seriously.

THE BOARD: Does your organization in fact get calls - I will not say hoax calls, which you might get for all I know - people ringing up in a great fuss and saying there is some awful hazard five miles down the road from their place and it turns out to be something of no importance whatever? ---We certainly get calls that appear to be of some urgency to the caller, but which, on investigation, we find to be not a matter that is urgent. I think the pole that was going to break in half at Glenthompson is an example of that. We get calls from people on very minor matters at all hours of the day, or people who ring up in the small hours to complain about a street light being out, but I do not think we get many calls that are rather malicious in the way they would take resources

You do not get calls like the hoax calls to the fire brigade?---No, I do not think we do, not to my knowledge.

MR. LLOYD: We had Mr. Kinder giving evidence to this Inquiry - you know him?---Yes, indeed.

Saying in substance he had never heard of a fire caused by an EDO clamp on fuse. Do you recall that?---Yes.

And saying also that you could not have fires caused by low voltage lines clashing together, it could not happen?---I am not sure he said that, but he may have.

THE BOARD: He got very close to it.

MR. LLOYD: He was wrong about it?---He was wrong about the EDO fuse, the low voltage fuse.

And wrong about the clashing together causing fires?---Yes.

If he genuinely entertained those views and he is an experienced man with the SEC, he has been with them for a long time? ---Yes.

Then if someone unskilled in the field complained to him there was a danger of those things happening, he would tend to reject it as a possibility, would he not?---Yes.

What was being complained about, in his view, was an impossibility? ---Yes, impossible, most unlikely.

Now you have to persuade Mr. Kinder and many other Mr. Kinders that they are not right, it is not an impossibility at all, and that all his firmly held views should be looked at again?

THE BOARD: He was not only firm in his views, but very persuasive. He had me convinced for a while.

MR. LLOYD: He did not regard the evidence in this Inquiry as being established. Mr. Hill, I am anxious to see whether I correctly understand what you are saying. Do you say the purpose of this film and other programmes of information

19 18

is to persuade members of the Commission, many members of the Commission, that the ideas they had previously entertained are wrong?---I do not know whether "persuade" is the word. I see it as a training medium, and I think there is no great problem in this, our people are being trained all the time. Our experience in many matters dictates us to change ideas we have had, to change designs and when these things are set out to people they accept it. I do not see any problem in the use of this film. It will be a training aid rather than something to persuade them, change their views, as I see it.

(Page 2328 follows)

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MR. LLOYD: Were these tests carried out in the 1960s - were the results of those tests distributed to district managers?--- I beg your pardon?

The tests carried out in the 1960s.

THE BOARD: Were the results of those tests - - -

MR. LLOYD: Conveyed to the district managers?---Not to my knowledge.

If Mr. Kinder had had access, as I understand regional managers did, to the annual statistics compiled by your officer from the Public Risk department, Mr. Kirk, that would have disabused them of any notion that clamp-on fuses could not cause fires, would it not?---I do not think so.

If those statistics show cases of clamp-on fuses causing fires, would not that disabuse them of the notion that it could not happen, should it not?---I do not know that they show clamp-on fuses as a fire cause prior to this February.

Mr. Hill, I am just anxious to enquire as to how well the message has got home, or what I conceive is the message, do you follow?---Yes.

THE BOARD: Are you right about those statistics showing specifically clamp-on fuses?

MR. McDONALD: There are one or two, I think.

THE BOARD: I just could not recall whether those statistics were subdivided sufficiently to put it down to that.

MR. LLOYD: Two swallows do not make a summer, but they cast a considerable amount of doubt on the assertion that swallows do not exist.

(To witness): Mr. Hill, the question as to whether a particular line needs to have spreaders installed is not a decision for a layman, is it, it is an engineer's decision?---Yes. The instructions that have been issued about the use of spreaders have been fairly broad, not very easy to interpret perhaps. There has been a tendency on the part of people not to like spreaders.

It is an engineering decision, is it not?

THE BOARD: Why do they not like spreaders?---They do not like spreaders, first of all, because the design of spreader we had until maybe 12 months ago - that is a bit of a guess - was not a very easy thing to install, could not be installed on a live line and, in fact, the installation of one on a line that was alive caused a fatality. They are not a very popular tool. They were presented to us by Distribution Engineering Department as something to use in those situations where it appeared there was a design problem or it appeared there was a particular problem with the low voltage design. I would not have regarded spreaders until now as something you ever needed if the design of your line was correct and correctly installed.

THE BOARD: You may still be right about that. Why do they not use spreaders on high voltage lines?---It would be difficult to produce material of a sufficient insulation property. This is not my field at all. I think that would be it.

MR. LLOYD: Do you say now that a spreader is only needed for a line which has not been properly designed or the design of which has not been properly executed?---I think now

that we have a different design of spreader it will be easier to install which is one of the factors which is going to make for more ready acceptance of it, and I think we recognise the spreader now as a good tool in situations where maybe the kind of alterations you would have to do to a line to avoid the use of a spreader would take time and it is protracted.

Do you say now that a spreader is only necessary where a line has either been badly designed or, if correctly designed, the design has not been properly executed?---No, you would have to repeat that, you have tangled me.

THE BOARD: Should you ever need a spreader if the line were properly installed, and the design properly carried out?  
---In my belief, no.

MR. LLOYD: Does that not follow for someone to determine whether or not you need a spreader, he would have to have the engineering knowledge to say whether the line had been properly designed or properly installed. Does that not follow?---Yes.

Except in the event if they saw them clashing. Would you tell me, Mr. Hill, to date are any of the S&C lines installed on the basis of design criteria which contemplate the avoidance of clashing under particular wind and weather conditions? Is there a standard? Are they so designed and so installed that they will not clash up to certain wind speeds under certain temperatures?---Yes.

What are the criteria?---I cannot tell you. I have not been associated with line design for a number of years. The criteria has changed somewhat, but temperature, wind conditions, sag, are all taken into account in the standard design of lines and should avoid clash and would avoid clash if correctly sagged and correctly installed.

MR. MARKS: What at the present time is the delay on getting connections to consumers in your region?---It would depend very much on the amount of work. If it involved any sort of extension to the distribution system, whether low voltage or high voltage extension, I would say probably about five months.

What is the range of time involved to give a connection, domestic connection?---A simple domestic connection where mains exist?

Yes?---Quite quickly, within a week.

And where they do not exist?---Up to five months.

When Mr. Chettle asked his question about the Forests Commission's problem in the Otway Ranges, you said that actually you agreed on a certain distance of clearance?---Yes.

Was the one you agreed on one which was equal to the height of the trees adjoining the lines?---I do not know.

What was it?---We agreed on clearance from standing trees of, from memory, something in the order of six feet to seven feet, but the standing trees were much higher than the lines. In fact, I think in some places almost met above the line.

So that the arrangement that you say was come to, did involve trees in fact overhanging the line?---Yes, true.

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Have you yourself had experience of clamp-on fuses causing fires?  
---No.

You had the same experience as Mr. Kinder, is that the position?---  
Well, in different places, I suppose.

Mr. Kinder said he had never known a clamp-on fuse to cause a fire?  
---Yes.

Is your position the same, you have never known it either?---Yes.

When the tree cutting is planned for a particular year, you plan  
it, do you, from the regional office, or do the districts  
plan it?---The districts plan it.

Before they plan it, by necessity do they have to go out and have  
a look, make an inspection?---They would make an inspection  
and take note also of those things that are reported to  
them.

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MR. MARKS: To that extent, certainly, some inspections are made for that purpose?---For a particular purpose.

There may be some confusion about the films you said you were going to show. It is not a film to be made - you are talking about the films on the tests made at the laboratory?---Yes.

These were tests of the expulsion of fire or hot particles from the fuses?---That is right.

There is another source of trouble with the lines chafing on the poles - can the poles change?---The poles can twist and the crossarms can warp.

The lines get out of alignment?---One line is tighter than the other one.

They can occur through the effect of weather?---Yes, warping of the wood and other things.

MR. NIXON: Going back to the Beacac fire, you agreed that spreaders were necessary on the low voltage conductors there?---Yes.

It follows from what you said to Mr. Lloyd that either because the line was badly designed or, alternatively, badly constructed or installed, or it got out of alignment over the years - those are the three alternatives?--- Yes.

Which alternative do you prefer for Beacac?---It was badly designed.

THE BOARD: In too long a span?---The span was too long for the number of conductors involved. When originally designed it was a two wire line.

MR. NIXON: Modifications were made at a later stage?---Yes.

Do you know when they were carried out?-- I do not know but it was some years ago.

Before or after 1969?---I am guessing, but I would think it was after.

The condition of the low voltage conductors and the necessity for spreaders would be quite obvious to a linesman in the SEC if he had inspected those conductors down Pierce's Road before 12th February, would it not?---I would be doubtful about that. I think that would only become obvious to a linesman if we were to specify a span length and say that we will use some low voltage spreaders in situations where that nominated span length is exceeded.

Do you think that would be good practice in the SEC?---Yes, I do.

Are you going to recommend it?---I, personally, am not going to recommend it because that matter is in train and being looked at by the people who produce our line standards.

(THE WITNESS WINDS UP)

MR. MARKS: I understand from my learned friends at the Bar table that probably Mr. Chapman's evidence and Mr. Pocknee's evidence will be completed tomorrow.

I have in mind that we may well need Tuesday to obtain instruction about our final submission. We have had a battle in fact to talk to our clients and some time may be

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saved at the conclusion of the evidence if we could, first of all, get instructions and then obtain some material to ensure there is the minimum time involved at the end. As in fact we have been sitting five days a week, I was wondering whether you would give consideration to our having Tuesday off?

MR. NIXON: I have been bargaining with Mr. Marks that if you were disposed to grant us Tuesday off he would be prepared to concede one day taken off after the evidence and before the final submissions commence.

MR. LLOYD: I agree. I find myself working with a mass of material but I have, by no means, mastered it.

THE BOARD: What, then, do you think is the programme? At the conclusion of Mr. Poelnee's and Mr. Chapman's evidence, which are important submissions, that is the end of the SEC evidence.

MR. NIXON: Because of the detail of Mr. Poelnee's statement and that of Mr. Chapman's, a great deal of cross-examination would probably be rendered unnecessary and I would expect that most, if not all of the Foresters Commission's evidence should be completed tomorrow. There is then, a number of private submissions, which I propose to table. I do not propose to call all the witnesses unless I am persuaded otherwise. For example, Mr. Barclay has put in a submission on behalf of the Grazier's Association, of which he is Secretary. Presumably he has read the transcript but has not been present here. I see no point in calling a person such as that, whereas I do propose calling somebody who, firstly, compiled the report and gave the details from the Victorian Rural Fire Brigades Association to enable Mr. Lloyd, in particular, to cross-examine him. There are also certain other private submissions and I propose to call the proponents of these submissions also.

THE BOARD: If that suits everybody we shall have a full day tomorrow and then adjourn until Wednesday.

MR. McDONALD: Before you rise, Sir, you will recall that some time ago when Mr. Wilson was being cross-examined, reference was made to the 1969 experiments carried out as to conductors clashing. It was referred to by my learned leader in his opening and we were asked at that time to produce the file relating to that. I now tender a photostat copy of the SEC file relating to the experiments carried out on conductors clashing in 1969.

EXHIBIT 279.....Photostat copy of SEC file relating to experiments carried out on conductors clashing in 1969.

MR. MARKS: As a matter of fact, Mr. Barnard asked me to produce the original direction in writing about the changeover in the emphasis to be given to EDO's with fire chokes and to replace clamp on fuses for fire chokes. I do not think it has ever been exhibited.

THE BOARD: Very well.

EXHIBIT 280.....Memorandum dated 7th August, 1975 from Chief Engineer, Distribution in relation to changeover, EDOs with fire chokes to replace clamp on fuses for fire chokes.

THE COURT ADJOURNED UNTIL 10.30A.M. FRIDAY, 10TH JUNE, 1977.

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