

INQUIRY INTO WAMBELONG FIRE

Name: The Family of Meldrum-Poulton

Date received: 3/09/2014

Partially Confidential

Timor

Myself, Heather Meldrum my partner Lee Poulton and our children and
from the property Timor thank you for the time you have taken to acknowledge our experience.

I grew up in Coonabarabran on the property of Xanadu in the house my father built. My parents started the business of Timor Country Cottages and ran them for almost 2 decades.

When I returned to Coonabarabran with my young family, we leased Timor for a year until Lee sold his house in Gympie and we secured a loan with the Commonwealth Bank and we purchased the property and business. We lived in one self – contained house (full of all our own possessions) and continued to rent the other to short term holiday makers. The business did not make us a lot of money, it was a lot of work with cleaning and maintenance that paid the Rates and Power bills and bought our fuel. Casual work kept us well and paid the mortgage.

Guests loved the property and the comfortable house. We enjoyed meeting them.

Life was busy and for the first time I was actively contributing to the improvement of my family's future in a healthy, happy environment.

On Sunday afternoon we left our property with optimism it would not burn. Due to drought and stock there was not a blade of grass and only the odd tree. Because our property had easy access and was so open we saw the devastation of our property and business through the media long before we got there in person.

The Shire Council used our property as the poster for asbestos removal. The rubble sat for almost 5 months before it was removed. We were given no choice but to take a payment from our minimal insurance, as the Commonwealth Bank insisted we pay the loan. To access any funds took 7 months.

Meanwhile we are paying \$200 a week in the worst place in town, running out to feed our remaining stock, finding sheep paralysed and rotting from eating toxic weeds and a sow dead from snake bite. Thanks to the A.N.U, we have managed to hang onto our casual jobs at Siding Spring Observatory. We now have a shed and some caravans. This was going to be our quick fix, unfortunately not as 'quick' as we first thought. We have enough funds left to build one small house although the council have told us even if we could afford it, the rules have changed and we will be lucky to be allowed to replace even one house.

Emotionally and financially we have lost years of our lives.

Yours Sincerely with Kind Regards,

The Meldrum – Poulton family.