



## **Submission No 12**

**Inquiry into RAAF F-111 Deseal/Reseal Workers and their Families**

**Name: Mr Stanley Lawler**

**Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs,  
Defence and Trade:  
Inquiry into RAAF F-111 Deseal Reseal Workers and their families**

[REDACTED]

I hereby wish to make a submission before this committee in relation to the inequitable treatment of certain F-111 aircraft maintenance personnel involved in fuel tank repair activities (Pick and Patch), and inconsistencies between official **SHOAMP Findings / definitions**, and those contained within the **'DEFINITION OF A DESEAL/RESEAL PARTICIPANT FOR THE PURPOSES OF THE LUMP SUM PAYMENT SCHEME'**. I have attached, and will draw upon, 2 Extracts from government documents relating to the Deseal / Reseal issue to reinforce my argument in this submission.

**Submission Summary:**

- 1. Personal Work History**
- 2. SHOAMP Shortcomings**
- 3. SHOAMP Definition for 'Pick and Patch' Versus 'Payment Scheme' Definition**
- 4. Inequity of 'Ex Gratia' Payment Scheme**

**1. Personal Work History**

I wish to give a brief overview of my work history within the RAAF to substantiate my knowledge of the processes involved in the repair of aircraft fuel tanks. I enlisted into the RAAF in February 1979, and after trade training began working as an Airframe Fitter on aircraft at number 2 Aircraft Depot from June 1980. My employment included Fuel Tank repair (Pick and Patch) on P3 Orion aircraft, and the Reseal Deseal of Canberra Bomber wing tanks. In 1984 I was posted to No 6 Squadron at RAAF Amberley, where my employment included 'Pick and Patch' and other fuel tank maintenance activities. This posting lasted for a period of six years, in which time I had carried out many fuel tank entries. In 1990 I was posted to No 486 Squadron, and in 1993 I was posted to 503 Wing (RAAF Richmond), carrying out maintenance on C-130E / C-130H aircraft in both units. I was involved in 'Operational' and 'Deeper' level maintenance, and carried out regular fuel tank maintenance activities as part of my employment. When this posting ended in 1997, I had been involved in fuel tank maintenance on multiple aircraft types for a period of 17 years. My involvement as an Airframe Fitter / Aircraft Technician on the F-111 aircraft currently stands at 17 years.

## 2. SHOAMP Shortcomings

Obviously the Inquiry had strict terms of reference, but by not giving the 'Squadron' Pick and Patch personnel the same level of credence as other Deseal Reseal participants, the inquiry has shown either a serious lack of knowledge of what fuel tank repair work was actually carried out at No's 1 & 6 Squadron, or there was a deliberate attempt by individuals supplying technical assistance to the inquiry to disqualify squadron personnel from any possible compensation.

The dates of the actual Deseal Reseal programs are clearly highlighted in the document contained in 'Extract 2'. Anyone who has worked on F-111 aircraft for a reasonable amount of time will acknowledge that there has always been aircraft requiring fuel tank repairs. These repairs were not just carried out during the dates contained in Extract 2, and not just by personnel on the dedicated Deseal Reseal teams. Due to manning constraints at No 3 Aircraft Depot, 1 & 6 Squadron personnel were often required to carry out 'Pick and Patch' repairs on their own aircraft to ensure that the required number of aircraft were available to meet the squadron's flying commitments. Given these facts, it should be of serious concern why equal emphasis was not placed on the squadron 'Pick and Patch' personnel.

## 3. SHOAMP Definition for 'Pick and Patch' Versus 'Payment Scheme' Definition

While acknowledging my previous comments in 'SHOAMP Shortcomings', I must point out that there is one small, but significant reference, to Squadron Pick and Patch personnel contained within Volume 5 of the SHOAMP document. When considering the differences in the definition of 'Pick and Patch' between the authoritative SHOAMP report and that contained within the 'Payment Scheme' documentation, one cannot but question the standing of those involved in deciding who would be eligible for the Ex Gratia payments.

'Extract 1', taken from Chapter 1, Volume 5 of SHOAMP is a relatively small part of the overall document, but from my personal experience it contains what I believe are truthful, and highly critical statements such as:

*"Some repair work similar to DSRS was conducted on the F-111 fuel tanks **prior to, during, and after** the formal Deseal/Reseal programs."*

*"The aircraft subject to this process were in **operational squadrons**. As such, the Pick and Patch process involved running (ad hoc) repairs by the best means available whenever needed – and with a sense of urgency given the requirements for a certain number of aircraft to meet flying commitments at any one time."*

*"It also appears that **many aircraft other than the F-111** were subject to this procedure, and in some locations a number of maintenance staff were involved for various lengths of time."*

*"It is recognised that some individuals **may have spent more time working on Pick and Patch than on the formal DSRS programs.**"*

The question needs to be asked why, when the authoritative SHOAMP report acknowledges the fact that Operational Squadrons carried out Pick and Patch

activities, and in some cases spent more time on Pick and Patch repairs than personnel on formal Deseal Reseal programs, why then does the definition within the Ex Gratia 'Payment Scheme' document specifically state ***"While attached to an F-111 Deseal / Reseal section"***, and make no mention of 'Squadron' personnel?

As I mentioned previously, I believe the SHOAMP document did not place a suitable level of significance on the work of the squadron Pick and Patch personnel, but the points raised in Chapter 1 (Extract 1) make a clear and defining statement on the level of involvement this group had in relation to Deseal / Reseal activities. If this argument is accepted then it can be assumed that the individuals responsible for drafting the 'Lump Sum Payment Scheme' document did so from a purely 'Financial' standpoint, and not one made on facts laid down in the SHOAMP report.

#### **4. Inequity of 'Ex Gratia' Payment Scheme**

Based on the points I have raised in the previous paragraphs, I believe that the Ex Gratia payment scheme failed to acknowledge the significant involvement of the Squadron Pick and Patch personnel. While I do not wish to denigrate others who were involved in the different F-111 Reseal Deseal activities, I want to state my continued frustration at the fact that groups such as 'Boiler / Plant' Attendants and Fire Fighters received payments, but I, and many others like me spent many days working inside F-111 fuel tanks and we received nothing because we carried out our 'Pick and Patch' work at 'Operational Squadrons'.

#### **Conclusion**

While I currently enjoy reasonable health, I fear what lies in years to come, not just for me but for my children as well. All three of my children were conceived during particularly heavy periods of fuel tank maintenance, and one has already shown signs of problems attributable to chemical exposure. I am but one of many who have been forgotten here, all I ask is for a fair and equitable process to be put into place so all legitimate claims submitted by 'Operational Squadron' personnel can be assessed on the same basis as others involved in Reseal Deseal activities. If required, I am willing to be interviewed as part of the Inquiry.

**Stan Lawler**

**13 June 2008**

**'Extract 1', taken from: Volume 5 – Study Of Health Outcomes In Aircraft Maintenance Personnel (SHOAMP) – Phase 111. Report On The General Health And Medical Study – September 2004 (Chapter 1).**

#### **1.2.1.2 Pick and patch**

Some repair work similar to DSRS was conducted on the F-111 fuel tanks prior to, during, and after the formal Deseal/Reseal programs. The operation known as "Pick and Patch" was used to repair F-111 fuel tanks that were leaking. As with the formal DSRS programs, the Pick and Patch process involved entering the F-111 fuel tanks, carefully locating suspect areas of sealant, and removing the sealant from the area of concern plus a margin around it using solvents and tools such as dental picks. A patch of new sealant would then be applied. The aircraft subject to this process were in operational squadrons. As such, the Pick and Patch process involved running (*ad hoc*) repairs by the best means available whenever needed – and with a sense of urgency given the requirements for a certain number of aircraft to meet flying commitments at any one time. It also appears that many aircraft other than the F-111 were subject to this procedure, and in some locations a number of maintenance staff were involved for various lengths of time. **It is recognised that some individuals may have spent more time working on Pick and Patch than on the formal DSRS programs.**

**'Extract 2', taken from: DVA Website – F-111 Deseal / Reseal Lump Sum Payments**

#### **DEFINITION OF A DESEAL/RESEAL PARTICIPANT FOR THE PURPOSES OF THE LUMP SUM PAYMENT SCHEME**

##### **Tier 1 - \$40,000**

A person who meets any one of the following criteria will be eligible to receive a lump sum payment of \$40,000:

1. A person who spent at least 30 cumulative working days on the Fuselage Deseal/Reseal or Respray Programs during the period **1977 – 1982, 1991 – 1993 and 1996 – 2000**, whose duties involved working inside F-111 fuel tanks; **or**
2. A person who spent at least 30 cumulative working days on the Wing tank program during the period 1985 – 1992; **or**
3. A person who spent at least 60 cumulative working days carrying out Sealant Rework (Pick and Patch) during the period 1973 – 2000 while attached to an F-111 deseal/reseal section; **or**
4. Boiler and Plant Attendants whose usual place of duty was the Base Incinerator as an Incinerator operator and who spent at least 30 cumulative working days undertaking these duties during the period 1976 – 1986; **or**
5. A person who can demonstrate that they would have met one of the above criteria except for the fact that they:
  - had an immediate physical reaction; **and**
  - required medical treatment or intervention; **and**
  - were given a work restriction or medical fitness advice (PM 101) stating that they should not return to that working environment.

## **Tier 2 – \$10,000**

A person who meets any one of the following criteria will be eligible to receive a lump sum payment of \$10,000:

- 1 A person who spent between 10 and 29 cumulative working days on the Fuselage Deseal/Reseal or Respray Programs during the period 1977 – 1982, 1991 – 1993 and 1996 – 2000, whose duties involved working inside F-111 fuel tanks; **or**
- 2 A person who spent between 10 and 29 cumulative working days on the Wing tank program during the period 1985 – 1992; **or**
- 3 A person who spent between 20 and 59 cumulative working days carrying out Sealant Rework (Pick and Patch) during the period 1973 – 2000 while attached to an F-111 deseal/reseal section; **or**
- 4 Boiler and Plant Attendants whose usual place of duty was the Base Incinerator as an Incinerator operator and who spent between 10 and 29 cumulative working days undertaking these duties during the period 1976 – 1986; **or**
- 5 Fire Fighters whose usual place of duty was a Unit at RAAF Base Amberley and who spent at least 60 cumulative working days actively involved in the burning of by-products from the F-111 DSRS process during the period 1976 – 1994; **or**
- 6 Personnel who were **not** involved in tank entry and whose usual place of duty was the Rag Hangar for 60 cumulative working days during the period Dec 1977 - Nov 1983; **or**
- 7 Personnel who were **not** involved in tank entry and whose usual place of duty was Hangar 255, 260, 277 or 278 for a continuous period of 60 cumulative working days during the period 1977 – 1982, 1991 – 1993 and 1996 – 2000; **or**
- 8 A person who can demonstrate that they would have met one of the above criteria except for the fact that they:
  - had an immediate physical reaction; **and**
  - required medical treatment or intervention; **and**
  - were given a work restriction or medical fitness advice (PM 101) stating that they should not return to that working environment.

**Note:** Only one ex-gratia payment may be made regardless of how many times a person may be eligible. Where a claimant is assessed as eligible for both payments, the higher amount will be paid.

## **DEFINITION OF A DESEAL RESEAL PARTICIPANT FOR THE PURPOSES OF A DETERMINATION UNDER s7(2) OF THE SRCA**

The following personnel should be considered for inclusion in any determination under s7(2) of the SRCA:

- 1 Personnel who worked on the Fuselage Deseal/Reseal or Respray Programs during the period 1977 – 1982, 1991 – 1993 and 1996 – 2000, whose duties involved working inside F-111 fuel tanks; **or**
- 2 Personnel who worked on the Wing tank program during the period 1985 – 1992; **or**
- 3 personnel carried out Sealant Rework (Pick and Patch) during the period 1973 – 2000 while attached to an F-111 deseal/reseal section; **or**
- 4 Boiler and Plant Attendants whose usual place of duty was the Base Incinerator as an Incinerator operator during the period 1976 – 1986; **or**

- 5 Fire Fighters whose usual place of duty was a Unit at RAAF Base Amberley and who were actively involved in the burning of by-products from the F-111 DSRS process during the period 1976 – 1994; **or**
- 6 Personnel who were **not** involved in tank entry and whose usual place of duty was the Rag Hangar during the period Dec 1977 – Nov 1983; **or**
- 7 Personnel who were **not** involved in tank entry and whose usual place of duty was Hangar 255, 260, 277 or 278 during the period 1977 – 1982, 1991 – 1993 and 1996 – 2000; **or**
- 8 Motor Transport Drivers involved in the first deseal/reseal program who came into contact with aviation fuel contaminated with deseal/reseal by-products during the period 1977-1982;**or**
- 9 Maintenance personnel on the air transportable ('rag') hangar who were involved in removing/replacing canvas or dismantling the Hangar during relevant periods in 1978, 1980 and 1984; **or**
- 10 Personnel employed in Engine Test Cell No 1 during the period 1976 – 1986; **or**
- 11 Personnel tasked with entering the Warrill Creek Settling Pond for the purpose of maintaining the physical barrier during the period 1977– 2000.

#### **EXCLUSIONS**

This definition should not include others indirectly involved in the DS/RS procedures such as:

1. K Group and 7SD personnel; **and**
2. Dept of Housing and Construction Staff; **and**
3. ADG (or other personnel) who entered Warrill Creek for any other reason; **and**
4. Security Personnel; **and**
5. Work Experience students.

Note:

- *Some personnel have been employed on more than one task giving them different levels of exposure. These personnel should be assessed for the highest level of exposure – for example a member employed on both the Wings Program and one or more of the fuselage programs be assessed for having worked in the fuselage programs.*

#### **Details of Exposure**

#### **DIRECT INVOLVEMENT**

- 1 Personnel who worked inside body fuel tanks of the F-111 aircraft for extended periods of time for a cumulative period of not less than 30 working days, removing sealant and / or resealing the tanks. This category is exclusive to personnel employed in the F-111 Deseal/Reseal and Respray programs over the period 1977 to 1982, 1991 to 1993 and 1996 to 2000. The personnel involved include those involved in aircraft preparation, chemical deseal/water-pick, hand cleaning, barrier application, sealant application, plumbing in, air (dry) checks and fuel (wet) checks. This does not include Motor Transport Drivers who employed as Fuel Tank Drivers who may have been

responsible for de-fueling F-111 aircraft prior to Deseal/Reseal activities being undertaken.

- 2 Personnel employed full time on the wing tank program actively removing and replacing sealant for a period of not less than 30 cumulative working days between 1985 and 1992.
- 3 Personnel working on sealant rework (pick and patch) inside fuselage fuel tanks of the F - 111 aircraft for a cumulative period of not less than 60 working days while attached to a Deseal/Reseal section of 501 WG, over the period 1973 to 2000 plus those six personnel posted to Sacramento who completed training in deseal/reseal procedures.
- 4 Personnel regularly disposing of Deseal/Reseal products by burning, in particular the Sealant Remover SR51 and SR51A, at the RAAF Base Amberley incinerator for a cumulative period of not less than 30 working days between 1976 and 1986.

#### INDIRECT INVOLVEMENT

- 1 Personnel who worked inside body fuel tanks of the F-111 aircraft for extended periods of time for a cumulative period of between 10 and 29 cumulative working days, removing sealant and / or resealing the tanks. This category is exclusive to personnel employed in the F-111 Deseal/Reseal and Respray programs over the period 1977 to 1982, 1991 to 1993 and 1996 to 2000. The personnel involved include those involved in aircraft preparation, chemical deseal/water-pick, hand cleaning, barrier application, sealant application, plumbing in, air (dry) checks and fuel (wet) checks. This does not include Motor Transport Drivers employed as Fuel Tank Drivers who may have been responsible for de-fueling F-111 aircraft prior to Deseal/Reseal activities being undertaken.
- 2 Personnel employed full time on the wing tank program actively removing and replacing sealant for a cumulative period of between 10 and 29 cumulative working days between 1985 and 1992.
- 3 Personnel working on sealant rework (pick and patch) inside fuselage fuel tanks of the F - 111 aircraft for a cumulative period of between 10 and 59 cumulative working days while attached to a Deseal/Reseal section of 501 WG, over the period 1973 to 2000.
- 4 Personnel regularly disposing of Deseal/Reseal products by burning, in particular the Sealant Remover SR51 and SR51A, at the RAAF Base Amberley incinerator for a cumulative period of between 10 and 29 cumulative working days between 1976 and 1986.
- 5 Fire fighters permanently posted to a Unit at RAAF Base Amberley and who were actively involved in burning bi-products from the F-111 DS/RS process (including the Sealant Remover SR51 and SR51A) at the fire pits for training and/or disposal purposes, for a cumulative period of not less than 60 working days during the period 1976 to 1994.



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Personnel indirectly involved in DS/RS, for whom their normal place of work was the DS/RS air transportable ('rag hangar') Hangar or Hangars 255, 260, 277 and 278 and who provided direct support to those staff entering F-111 fuel tanks for a period of 60 cumulative working days. This does not include those personnel who may have regularly visited these hangars in the course of their duty.