



Submission No 64

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

Name: Mr Derek Bannister

F111 Deseal/Reseal Submission

My name is Derek Charles Bannister and I served in the RAAF from 1977 – 2000 and have served in RAAFAR from 2000 to current. I was an ADASTFITT, Advanced Aircraft Structural Fitter, by trade. This is also known as a Metal Basher. My service number was A510173 and I discharged as a Sergeant.

I was posted to Amberley during the period Jan 90 to Jul 96 and served at 3AD/501 Wing and 1 Sqn with an attachment to 482 Sqn.

I was contacted just after my discharge and asked if I had been involved in the Deseal/Reseal process and if I would like to be involved in the health study. I took part in the Health Study and was classed as a Group 1 participant. My understanding of a Group 1 participant is that of a person who was involved in the Deseal/Reseal process.

During this time I was employed within the bonding room at Aircraft Structural Repair Section at 3AD/501 Wing which was tasked to perform Bonded Panel Repairs to F111's and damaged components. This also encompassed performing repairs to damage panels in F111 aircraft undergoing the Deseal/Reseal process.

I also had several occasions when I performed repairs in the cockpit while Deseal/Reseal repairs were also being performed to the cockpit.

Our work involved the removal of sealant; if not already done, removal and repair of the damage to components; usually bonded panels, and the replacement of the sealant to the areas that had been repaired and the surrounding area.

Our work was performed during the usual operating hours of Deseal/Reseal section with regular occasions where our work would finish after their night shift due to the requirement to complete the bonded panel repair process.

When we performed our repair work, all the necessary plumbing was removed from the tanks and all the fumes from any work being carried out were able to pass easily between the tanks.

Due to the bonded panel repair process I spent many hours inside the fuel tanks whilst the Deseal/Reseal process was being performed. I could spend up to eight hours of a twelve hour shift inside a tank. On some occasions shifts went for longer than this and more time was spent in the tanks.

I used chemicals that the Deseal/Reseal personnel were using to enable me to correctly perform those processes if required.

When the ex Gratia Scheme was announced I applied and was unsuccessful in being granted an ex Gratia payment. Some months after I submitted my claim, I contacted the team administering the scheme to find out how the process was progressing to be told that ADASTFITT's had not done any work during the Deseal/Reseal process and basically we were not there.

I expressed that we where and that they needed to investigate more fully what had actually happen. I also highlighted to them that I had been contacted to be part of the health study and was a Group 1 participant. I was informed that they were investigating however it would take some time to ascertain an answer. My claim was subsequently rejected.

I wrote to my local federal Member of Parliament at the time who forwarded my concerns to the Minister in charge of Veteran's Affairs. I received a reply that basically outlined that I was never going to receive any payment under this scheme because the guide lines were very narrow as to who was going to get paid.

I am aware on one ex member who worked performing the Deseal/Reseal process for a period of time and was also rejected because he was he sent down on relief manning and was not 'on strength' with Deseal/Reseal section.

I also found out later that I was not eligible to the full range of health care available to Group 1 participants due to not making application for them.

I have submitted claims to DVA for what I believe are Deseal/Reseal related conditions however they have been unsuccessful to this point.

I am hoping that this inquiry can achieve the reinstatement of the full entitlements under the health care scheme as I believe there are other people who are in the same situation as me. I feel I am like other Deseal/Reseal personnel and will require ongoing health assessments and care. When you read the information regarding Group 1 participants it appears that we were all automatically transferred to the health care scheme.

The ex Gratia Scheme should be revisited as there are many of us who performed the same work or worked in the tanks during the process and have been rejected because we were not part of Deseal/Reseal section. We were in some regards 'Contractors' who were brought in to achieve a set task(s) and then 'laid off' when the job those task(s) were completed.

In essence there are many of us who were not in the core group who performed the same or similar functions in the process and experienced the same level of exposure to the chemicals and fumes as those in the core group however we received nothing in the way of compensation. This anomaly needs to be rectified as we also suffer the same ailments which DVA has still not recognised.

The issue that has been missed/avoided with the ex Gratia Scheme is that we were there whilst the Deseal/Reseal process was being performed and were exposed to the same chemicals and dangers of the Deseal/Reseal personnel. We suffer the similar health complaints however struggle to be recognised.

Derek Bannister

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