



Submission No 85

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

Name: Mr Ian Fraser

Ian Fraser 8 Claremont Pde, Forest lake, 4078.

“Group Capt. Sargeant—That is quite correct. The entire aircraft goes into the deseal/reseal facility and we have to get right into the actual tank itself. In the old days, we did have to remove the sealant. What we now use is a spray on sealant. So rather than having to go through and remove all the old sealant, we can actually spray over the existing. **That is a new technique we are using, but as a result of that, whilst productivity improves, it also brings with it greater lethality and so forth of the spray on sealant.”**

Tuesday, 19 May 1998

This is an interesting date in the tragedy that is the F111 Deseal Reseal programs. Look at the date and remember that the Deseal Reseal programs were not suspended until Jan 2000. The quote above came from an Official Hansard Report. This statement by the Group Captain is very clear in demonstrating that RAAF had a very clear understanding of the risks involved for those poor souls sentenced to death in Deseal Reseal. The Australian public was of the understanding that we as a civilized nation had done away with the death penalty for criminals and murderers. What they didn't know was our Military leaders were happy to sentence to death innocent men and women in this process of **“greater lethality”**. They have been quite happy to do this for almost 30 years.

The cost in human suffering is beyond calculation. People have died, lives have been destroyed, hopes and dreams of a wonderful retirement gone, many good people dead before their time, widows robbed of their partners and financial stability. Even for those left behind we have to watch our mates die horrible deaths from cancer or suicide caused by the mental pain of dealing with a Government who didn't care enough to help those people they poisoned.

What is really disturbing about the quote at the top of this document is not one of the gentlemen at the meeting bothered to seek any clarification on the **“Greater Lethality”**. The people in this meeting are more concerned about damage to aircraft components and heritage issues. This clearly demonstrates the canon fodder attitude that Officers and Politicians have towards those who are paid to defend the freedom of this country. This attitude continues today, how else can you explain the terrible situation we the Deseal Reseal community find ourselves in.

We all served our country as volunteers. We did our job, a job which meant giving up holidays, long weekends, months away from our family, working in extremes of weather conditions, and long hours of overtime without recompense. We lived by the standard that if we looked after the “good name of the RAAF and brought no dishonour or disrepute to the service”, we would be taken care of if ever anything happened to us as a result of our service. However, we are suffering now because of a callous and criminal disregard for our wellbeing.

We deal with a hostile belligerent Department of Veterans Affairs. At the time when most of the Deseal Reseal claims were to be determined (at the end of 2005 – Refer QUEST Meeting Brisbane Minutes December 2006) DVA as a policy decided to have a change in Benevolence. The intention here was to make it harder for a claim to be accepted (not just for Desealers), and the timing of this change in attitude by DVA was very curious. You need to seriously question the ethics of DVA when it undertakes a policy change like this.

The BOI found that there were systemic failures that caused the tragedy that is the F111 Deseal Reseal saga. You would have expected that after that, the systemic failures would stop. But no! Government and

Ian Fraser 8 Claremont Pde, Forest lake, 4078.

the machine of Government didn't seem to listen and seemingly people with agendas we never understand just stood in the way of good outcomes. One of the most telling outcomes is where most Desealers find themselves. And that is in the lower percentile of the population for lifestyle and cognitive ability. Now consider that an Aircraft Technician is recruited from the top 5% of the population what an incredible fall from grace. To add insult to injury, we as a group are 40% more likely to die of cancer than the rest of the population.

It's not bad enough that as a group we watch our mates die either by their own hand or some slow horrible cancer but we have to do it facing a Department that keeps moving the goal post on health care and seemingly mindless cut off dates. The Better Health program started in great faith to offer us on going screening and treatment. It was hijacked by DVA and made into something else that suited another agenda. Instead of ongoing monitoring of the progression of current conditions and screening for cancer, to assist affected members and as an early warning for the younger personnel who don't yet show symptoms, the program is now one of very limited assistance or risk assessment.

The SHOAMP Health Study was to include dependants and next of kin. This was not done. The previous Minister stated on 9 September 2007 that no effect on the spouses and children is proved because no testing has been done and without testing, no Health Study will be undertaken. However, the RAAF undertook a psychological study on the spouses and forwarded the results to DVA two years ago.

The SHOAMP Health Care Scheme was hijacked with cut off dates and what seem to be rule changes that limit the Department's liability to provide health care services and deny many personnel with financial reimbursement and assistance with developing illnesses and diseases which are included as caused by Deseal/reseal. The original list of conditions which were accepted for reimbursement of medical costs was suddenly changed when DVA took over the administration of the Scheme. The Department established a new list which they determined was a reflection of the Health Study but which included conditions not examined in the Health Study. The previous Ministers for Veterans' Affairs confirmed that medical costs for claimed conditions would be reimbursed until all avenues of recourse were exhausted. This is also not being followed through and claims are rejected as soon as DVA determinations are made before any Veterans' Review Board or AAT considerations are made.

As part of the SHOAMP Health Study, serum samples were collected. A Forum was established to ensure the safety and confidentiality of the samples. The samples were to be stored in a private facility and the identity of the member's samples protected by keys. The keys were to be held independently by the RAAF Association to ensure propriety. Again this appears to have been hijacked and DVA have ignored requests by the RAAF Association for three years to hand over the keys.

Many personnel who were recognized by the RAAF as eligible for recognition as Desealers and therefore able to access the above Health Care Scheme and Better Health Program, were then excluded from the ex-gratia lump sum payment because of arbitrary dates (which are incorrect for the civilian involvement), and unexplainable limitations on who is recognized as a Desealer. Even though this criteria could not be changed, DVA changed it – twice. DVA advised the only recourse was the Commonwealth Ombudsman but again this was *incorrect information* because the Ombudsman only has the authority to review the administrative process, not the decision.

Ian Fraser 8 Claremont Pde, Forest lake, 4078.

Section 7.2 of the SRCA was enacted to recognize “a person or particular group of persons” for compensation for Deseal conditions. The conditions only included the SHOAMP Health Care Scheme list. Under provision of the Act, DVA is to determine if the condition exists and if it can be related to service. However, DVA delegates denied personnel who identified themselves under Section 7.2 of the Act as being “a person or particular group of persons” because they did not receive the ex-gratia payment. The ex-gratia payment has no bearing or effect on any other statutory rights. However, it has denied the rights of those who did not receive the ex-gratia payment.

These are only a few examples of the constant, ongoing stonewalling by the previous administration of the government’s Department of Veterans’ Affairs. There are many more examples.

These examples should help give you a small glimpse into the difficulties faced by Deseal/reseal personnel over the last 9 years. Every Ministerial decision made since the Board of Inquiry has created almost insurmountable hurdles, long delays, arbitrary decisions which cannot be justified, arbitrary dates whose only purpose is to ensure that personnel are excluded from justice, and VEA and MRCS decisions which vary in acceptance based on ex-gratia acceptance, and which vary in value depending on the date the condition was “deemed” by DVA to have taken effect.

Interestingly the departmental personnel who were involved in determinations and decision making on the Deseal/Reseal issues over the last 9 years have earned good incomes. They have been paid well, enjoyed sick leave and holidays and increasing Superannuation, while stonewalling and manipulating the “beneficial” provisions of the different Veteran’s Acts. Yet Deseal families have lost income, often joint income, Superannuation and savings, faced serious emotional and psychological challenges caused by the effects of toxic chemicals on their partners or parents, had their social and recreational lifestyles diminished almost to the point of hermits, nursed crippled and tormented partners without help because claims were not determined, faced raising children who also show effect of chemical poisoning, and developed their own early onset illnesses because of the stress of lost homes, businesses, relationships, marriages, and lives.

We as a group and individually hope that this Parliamentary Inquiry will understand the long on-going struggle for justice we have faced and acknowledge the many many injustices meted out to us who obeyed orders, undertook our duties, spent time in cells when we refused to enter the tanks because of the health effects, lost promotions when we complained, were castigated by our peers because “we stank” and have constantly received the same belligerent treatment when we have sought recognition and compensation for conditions which have been caused by our service to Australia. We further hope that this Inquiry will acknowledge that “chemicals DO cause harm” and the military HAS exposed their workers to toxic chemicals since the mustard gas days of the First World War. We ask that you correct the errors of the Deseal/Reseal disaster and award a fair, just, and equitable compensation package to our members and the widows of deceased members which reflects and acknowledges the scope of not only the contamination and it’s effect, but also the last 9 years battle for recognition and compensation already confirmed and recognized by the RAAF in the original Board of Inquiry.