



Submission No 45

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

Name: Mr Michael Crowley

To Parliamentary Committee

Inquiry in RAAF F111 Reseal-Deseal Workers and their families

1. My name is Michael Crowley I was a Leading Aircraftsman (LAC) employed in the RAAF from 15th April 1980 - 7th August 1987.
2. I was trained as an Air Frame Fitter and worked in Reseal-Deseal F111 program from 1981-1983. I was required to work within the F111 fuel tanks, and therefore the chemicals, for extended periods of time. My Air Force number was A410242.
3. On the 7th of August 1987 the RAAF granted me an early discharge on medical grounds. I was diagnosed in the Reseal-Deseal program with Ankylosing Spondylitis, Iritis and Dermatitis. Since my time in the Air Force I have been diagnosed with numerous other immune disorders.

Health Care Scheme

- 1) I previously applied for assessment for eligibility for a Department of Veteran Affairs Gold Medical Services Card under The Study of Health Outcomes in Aircraft Maintenance Personnel (SHOAMP) Scheme.
- 2) On 7 September 2001, the Hon. Bruce Scott, MP announced that former F-111 fuel tank maintenance workers whose health has been affected by their employment will have access to an 'Gold Card' under an interim Government funded health care scheme (now call the SHOAMP Health Care Scheme).
- 3) I registered with the scheme and participated in initial medical examination and support counselling.
- 4) Through my Queensland solicitors, Quinn & Scattini Lawyers, I was advised that I had been unsuccessful in my application for a 'Gold Card', under the Health Care Scheme as I did not meet the listed criteria of conditions. While some immune disorders such as Crohn's Disease and Dermatitis were included on the list many other immune disorders were not included.

- 5) While there is no published research examining effects of Reseal-Deseal chemicals exposure on immune system functions in humans The Naval Health Research Center Detachment (Toxicology) notes in its report Biological and Health Effects of JP-8 Exposure Report no TOXDET 01-01 the following:

Several recent studies (Harris et al., 1997, 2000; Ullrich, 1999; 2000) have indicated severe immunosuppression in rodents exposed dermally to raw JP-8 or by inhalation to JP-8 aerosol. Major alterations in immune system function can: 1) increase susceptibility to infectious agents; 2) increase the probability of development of cancers (Freeman et al., 1993; Broddle et al., 1996); 3) increase the probability of development of autoimmune diseases; or 4) increase the toxicity potential of exposure to chemicals and stressors.

- 6) In February 2007, the Minister for Defence announced the reopening of the SHOAMP Scheme to those members who were previously rejected.
- 7) I made inquires to SHOAMP personnel regarding the Ministers statement and was informed that I would not be considered as I was never assessed/registered correctly in the first place as a form – requesting certain information – was not received by SHOAMP personnel which disqualified me from assessment.
- 8) I maintain I sent this form to SHOAMP personnel and have documented this conversation with them on the 7 Sept 2005 at 9.51am noting that SHOAMP personnel would send me a copy of the form to complete and return.
- 9) SHOAMP personnel claim that they did not receive this form (but did not notify me that it had not been received) and will not consider any resubmission of the form. The non receipt of the form has totally disqualified me from the possibility of receiving any benefits or support under the Health Care Scheme. SHOAMP received all my forms before and after this date. For example, from 7 Sept 2005 – February 2007 I received and returned additional forms to SHOAMP personnel regarding participation in the Better Health Program. To be eligible for the Better Health Program individuals had to be:
- i) SHOAMP Health Care Scheme Group 1 participants; and
 - ii) All individuals eligible for an ex-gratia F-111 lump sum payment.

- 10) However, I have been denied, to date, access the Health Care Scheme and/or its support services on the basis that one form was not received.
- 11) To date, I have spent thousands of dollars engaging solicitors to pursue a claim through the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) in South Australia in an attempt to access the equivalent of what is provided to other Reseal-Deseal workers through the Health Care Scheme benefits and support services. For example, I am unable to access the lifestyle management programs provided to all other registered SHOAMP personnel.

Overall Handling and Administration of the Ex Gratia Scheme and Compensation Claims

- 1) Because I considered the nature of the process for claiming compensation complex and confusing I initially requested the assistance of an Air Force Advocate Officer in South Australia. The Officer, due to complexity of the process, advised me that he was unable to help and for me to engage solicitors.
- 2) Because my place of residence was in South Australia and I was distant from the process which appeared to be primarily driven from Queensland I engaged the Queensland based law firm of Quinn and Scattini to lead my compensation claims submissions. This includes the SHOAMP Health Care Scheme.
- 3) Quinn and Scattini advised that they were informed by Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) personnel that my claim under the SHOAMP Health Care Scheme was denied. However, in February 2007 I was advised that my claim was never assessed due to one form never received.
- 4) I have taken what I believe are the appropriate steps (at considerable financial cost) to ensure that my claim under the SHOAMP Health Care Scheme was assessed. To be denied consideration for assessment because one document in the whole process was never received (and no notification that it was never received by DVA or SHOAMP personnel) and no recourse except through engaging solicitors, at considerable expense, through appeal via the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) is inappropriate.

5) The SHOAMP Health Care Scheme benefits and/or support services should be made available to all Reseal-Deseal workers. Reseal-Deseal workers should not be excluded from the scheme solely due to minor errors.



Michael Crowley
Ex Reseal-Deseal Worker

