



Media Release

The Hon Alan Griffin MP
Minister for Veterans' Affairs

VA054

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F-111 DESEAL/RESEAL INQUIRY BEGINS

The Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Alan Griffin, today announced the parliamentary inquiry into the RAAF's F-111 Deseal/Reseal maintenance program has begun, and released its terms of reference.

The inquiry will examine:

- the adequacy of eligibility periods, ex-gratia payments and the health benefits provided to date; and
- the decision making process relating to ex gratia payments and compensation claims.

The F-111 Deseal/Reseal program exposed around 700 RAAF personnel and civilians to a range of chemicals and solvents when replacing sealant in the aircraft's fuel tank. The inquiry is a response to the public concerns of the F-111 Deseal/Reseal Support group.

The inquiry delivers on an election promise to the former workers and their families experiencing health issues as a result of their employment.

It will be conducted by the Defence Sub-Committee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade. The Committee will hold its first public hearing on 21 July and is scheduled to deliver its report on 23 October 2008.

The Parliamentary Inquiry, chaired by Arch Bevis, will have the power to examine all aspects of the previous government's response to the Study of Health Outcomes in Aircraft Maintenance Personnel (SHOAMP).

The Rudd Labor Government has listened to the concerns of the F-111 Deseal/Reseal Support Group and believes that workers and their families deserve the opportunity to be heard through a Parliamentary Committee's Inquiry into the previous government's handling of this matter.

The committee will consider:

- if the range of health benefits and eligibility periods under the health care scheme were adequate compared to other schemes;
- if the ex gratia payments offered were adequate, given the findings of the SHOAMP study;
- how the payments related to benefits under the Health Care Scheme;
- if they were consistent with one-off payments to other veteran groups
- the appropriateness, timeliness and transparency of the overall handling and administration of ex gratia payments; and
- compensation claims from participants and their families.

If the Committee determines that any of these aspects were inadequate, it will recommend what alternatives should be considered to provide an adequate response to former Deseal/Reseal workers and their families.

The Government will continue to meet the health and support needs of Deseal/Reseal workers and their families while the Committee examines these issues.

The Terms of Reference are attached. Submissions are now being called for and should be made to the Defence Sub-Committee Secretariat Parliament House Canberra ACT 2602 or emailed to jscfadt@aph.gov.au. Further inquiries ph 02 6277 4466. Submissions close on 26 June 2008.

Media inquiries: Laura Ryan 02 6277 7280 or 0437 863 109

Terms of Reference for Parliamentary Inquiry into claims for compensation from former F-111 Deseal/Reseal workers and Government responses

The committee will investigate and review claims for compensation from former F-111 deseal/reseal workers including the Commonwealth's response to the health and support needs of former F-111 Deseal/Reseal workers and their families. The Committee should ascertain whether the response was adequate, whether it was consistent with the findings of the Study of Health Outcomes in Aircraft Maintenance Personnel (SHOAMP) and whether the overall administration and handling of the program was adequate.

Terms of Reference

The Inquiry will consider the adequacy and equity of the Health Care Scheme in meeting the health and support needs of participants and their families and whether this was consistent with the SHOAMP findings. Matters to be considered will include, but not be limited to:

- The differences, and transitional arrangements, between the interim health scheme and the final Health Care Scheme;
- The timing of cessation of access to the Health Care Scheme;
- The range of treatment and health benefits provided under the Health Care Scheme;
- Whether the current Health Care Scheme is consistent with the range of treatment and health benefits available to persons under other Health Care Schemes;
- The adequacy of arrangements under the Health Care Scheme affected family members (including widows) or serving members; and
- If the Health Care Scheme is not considered to be an adequate response to the health and support needs of participants and their families, consider and report on possible alternatives that are considered to be adequate in light of the findings of SHOAMP and other Health Care Schemes.

The Inquiry will consider the adequacy and equity of the financial element of the Ex Gratia Scheme and whether it was consistent with (i) the findings of SHOAMP, (ii) the Health Care Scheme response (iii) the Tier definitions, and (iv) one off payments to other veteran groups. The Inquiry will consider, but not be limited to:

- Whether the lump sums available under the ex gratia scheme were appropriate;
- Whether the lump sums available were appropriate given the findings of the SHOAMP;
- Whether the lump sums, when considered along with the benefits available under the Health Care Scheme, were appropriate;
- Whether the lump sums available under the ex gratia scheme were appropriate, when considered along with the full range of benefits and compensation available under other Commonwealth or State statutory schemes;
- Whether the lump sums were consistent with the definitions of Tiers of participants;
- Whether the lump sums were consistent with other one-off payments made to veteran groups;
- When assessing the question of adequate remedies whether regard should be given to the establishment of a dedicated administrative assessment and settlement scheme, and
- If the lump sums available under the ex-gratia scheme are not considered to be financially adequate, discuss what compensatory payment would be appropriate in light of the SHOAMP findings, other one-off payments made to veteran groups, and the full range of benefits and compensation available under other Commonwealth and State statutory schemes or common law damages available under Australian law

The Inquiry will consider whether the overall handling and administration of ex gratia and compensation claims was appropriate, timely and transparent for both participants and their families. The Inquiry will consider whether, but not be limited to:

- Cross agency cooperation was effective;
- The documentation and records held by both Agencies as they relate to Deseal/Reseal activities was adequate;
- The standard of evidence required to substantiate a claim was reasonable and, if not, whether alternative standards of proof may be used when making an eligibility determination;
- There has been equitable treatment of service personnel, public servants, civilian employees and contractors involved in Deseal/Reseal activities;
- Staffing resources were adequate to produce a timely result;
- There were unreasonable delays in the process, taking into account the complex nature of issues; and
- The overall handling and administration of ex gratia and compensation claims was appropriate and timely.