

F-111 'sealing' inquiry calls for action

The report of the Inquiry into RAAF F-111 Deseal-Reseal workers and their families, tabled in Parliament on June 25, recommended that approximately 2,000 Defence personnel who worked in the F-111 fuel tanks be included in the F-111 ex-gratia scheme as recognition of their working conditions.

The Chairman of the inquiry, Arch Bevis MP, said, "The recommendations of this inquiry, if adopted, will rectify the shortcomings of the Howard Government's 2005 scheme, which 'was born of fuzzy logic, shrouded in misleading spin and then administered in confusion'.

"Those workers involved in running repairs of the fuel-tank leaks undertook work known as 'pick and patch'.

"Without explanation, the 2005 scheme provided assistance to workers who did pick and patch in the formal deseal/reseal programs but not to about 2,000 other Defence personnel in three other squadrons who undertook the same duties.

"The recent inquiry recommends that those 2,000 forgotten F-111 Defence personnel receive the appropriate ex-gratia payments and other assistance.

"The report also makes recommendations for assistance to be provided to the long-suffering families of those affected, improved communication with the wider F-111 fuel-tank repair community and improvements in the handling of occupational medicine and OH&S issues within the wider Australian Defence Force."

The inquiry concluded that there was a lack of clear evidence to prove that certain chemicals used in the F-111 deseal/reseal programs were the cause of widespread health problems in the F-111 fuel-tank repair community.

However, the report's 18 recommendations are wide-ranging and cover ex-gratia payments, health matters and processes.

They include:

- The recommendations seek to ensure that access to the ex-gratia scheme is based on the work undertaken in the tanks, not the unit nor the year in which the work was undertaken. As a result, about 2,000 RAAF personnel would qualify for the scheme;
- Increased counselling support for families is recommended to help those affected move on with their lives;
- The Committee will seek regular reports on the progress of civil legal action taken by F-111 personnel in the hope that these can be concluded in a reasonable time;
- An urgent increase in the number of occupational medicine specialists. Amazingly, the Australian Defence Force has only one full-time person in this role;

Technology to keep divers safer



The Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science, Greg Combet AM MP, and the Chief of Navy, Vice Admiral Russ Crane AM CSM, observe Navy Clearance Diver Able Seaman Dave Wyatt, using the wrist-mounted computer.

New technology that promises to significantly reduce the risks for Navy divers is among seven technological proposals to be funded by Defence.

One of the proposed pieces of technology, by Sydney company Blue Glue, was demonstrated at the Sydney Aquarium — a wrist-mounted computer that monitors a diver's vital signs from the surface to enhance safety during operations.

Others include:

- enhanced surveillance technology

for unmanned aerial vehicles (BAE Systems);

- a high-powered, low-frequency underwater acoustic system for mine-sweeping (Thales Australia);
- a secure hard drive for protection and movement of classified data (Secure Systems); and
- a system to detect potential threats from moving and static ground vehicles (Sentient Vision Systems).

More information on the seven new CTD projects is available at <http://www.dsto.defence.gov.au/ctd13/>

Battlefield compo scheme

The Defence Legislation Amendment Bill (No.1) 2009 has introduced a Tactical Payment Scheme to

- Further research into the health implications of working with aviation fuels is also recommended.

Mr Bevis added: "My hope is that the report's release brings some closure to those affected by working in the F-111 fuel tanks, some of whom have waited many years for recognition."

The Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Alan Griffin, has welcomed the tabling of the report.

Downloadable copies of the report are available on the Committee's web site at:

http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt/deseal_reseal/index.htm

provide a means for making no-liability payments to people adversely affected by ADF activities abroad.

Greg Combet, Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science, said, "The ability to make timely and responsive payments to persons adversely affected by Australian Defence Force activities is critical for maintaining local community support and thereby ensuring the safety of our troops overseas."

The Tactical Payment Scheme will operate independently from the Act of Grace provisions which are unsuitable in operational environments.

The scheme will be managed by Defence and, like the Act of Grace provision, will be bound by strict transparency, accountability and reporting.

MPs act on disability discrimination

Both Houses of the Federal Parliament have passed the Disability Discrimination and Other Human Rights Legislation Amendment Bill 2008.

The Attorney-General has announced also that the Australian Human Rights Commission will be given specific responsibilities for monitoring Australia's implementation of the international Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Amendments to the federal Disability Discrimination Act respond to findings by a Productivity Commission inquiry that stronger measures to ensure economic and social inclusion for people with disabilities are not only necessary but also make good economic sense.

\$90,000 allocated to support Defence families

Defence family community groups across Australia will receive more than \$900,000 in Family Support Funding grants over the 2009–10 financial year.

The Defence Family Support Funding Program was introduced to provide grants for Australian Defence Force family groups for projects that will connect the families with their local communities, enhance the families' self-reliance and improve their over-all well-being.

This financial year, forty-seven Defence family support groups in all states and territories, as well as in Papua New Guinea and Malaysia, will benefit from the grants, which help Defence family support groups to make appropriate use of neighbourhood houses and community centres as well as undertake programs and activities such as craft groups and playgroups.

They also help in other ways such as assisting children with special needs and producing local newsletters.

Training death

An Australian soldier was killed in a training accident at Puckapunyal, Victoria, on June 26 when a single M113A1 Armoured Personnel Carrier holding four troops overturned while in a training exercise. Another soldier was injured in the accident and was flown to hospital in Melbourne for treatment.

STAND TO

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