



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Veterans' Affairs**

## **BusinessLine**

**File/Trim Reference:**

**NATIONAL MANAGER MILITARY COMPENSATION SERVICE DELIVERY**  
**NATIONAL MANAGER VETERANS' COMPENSATION SERVICE DELIVERY**  
**Directors and Assistant Directors Military Compensation**  
**Directors and Assistant Directors VEA Compensation**  
**Deputy Commissioners**

### **Assessment of Compensation Claims Relating to Service Aboard Oberon Class Submarines**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this BusinessLine is to provide information to delegates administering compensation claims relating to ADF service aboard Oberon Class Submariners under the provisions of the *Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988* (SRCA) and its predecessor legislation and the *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986* (VEA).

#### **Background**

The Centre for Military and Veterans' Health (CMVH) was tasked with creating a hazard exposure profile for Australian Oberon Class submarines that were in service between 1967-2000 (all of which have now been decommissioned).

Beyond the literature review, the CMVH team, which included two senior occupational hygienists, visited the decommissioned HMAS ONSLOW, conducted focus groups in Sydney and Rockingham and spoke with several experienced submariners to develop a hazard exposure profile (which is attached at the end of this Businessline).

From a compensation perspective, there has been anecdotal evidence from personnel who served aboard the Oberon Class submarines of several health conditions they believe to have been caused by their service. In this respect, many submariners highlighted difficulties in having their Department of Veterans' Affairs claims accepted due to the lack of recognition of the hazards experienced during their submarine service. It is therefore hoped that the report will provide better authoritative documentation of the known hazards and will assist in the decision-making processes for future compensation claims.

Tables 4 and 5 in the report detail the exposure profiles and level of evidence of the hazards identified in the project. The legend for each of the tables is as follows:

### **Legend**

\*based on proximity to source, task and other factors

Rating: low =low exposure relative to exposure criterion; significant =comparable with or greater than exposure criterion.

Quality of evidence: good =published data under actual conditions; medium =professional judgement in conjunction with focus group information and observation; poor =insufficient, unavailable or presumptive.

### **Specified diseases under section 7(1) of the SRCA**

Section 7(1) of the SRCA relates to diseases contracted by ADF employees of a kind specified by the Minister in writing. In short, it states that the Commonwealth will be taken to have contributed in a material degree to the contraction of a particular disease if the employee was engaged in employment of that kind, unless the contrary can be established. The declaration under section 7(1) containing each of the occupational diseases (and requisite employment factors) can be found in Appendix 5 of the SRCA.

The profile shown in Tables 4 and 5 illustrate that exposure to certain asphyxiants such as carbon monoxide, hydrogen cyanide and hydrogen sulphide occurred on the Oberon Class submarines (all of which are specified by the Minister under section 7(1)). Additionally, Oberon submariners were significantly exposed to the more traditional types of workplace hazards such as noise, heat, musculoskeletal and psychological hazards. Whilst these types of hazards are not unique to the Oberon submarine, the context (of confined spaces and 24 hour exposures) in which the submariners were exposed was unique.

### **Assessment of Claims**

When considering all future claims relating to service aboard Oberon Class submarines, delegates are now required to have regard to the Tables at the end of this Businessline and also be aware that the provisions contained in section 7(1) of the SRCA may apply in certain circumstances.

### **MRCA & VEA Claims**

While the majority of claims will be assessed under the provisions of the SRCA and its predecessor legislation(s), VEA and MRCA delegates may still benefit from the content of the report and, more specifically, the exposure profiles contained in Tables 4 and 5 (particularly where SoP factors for conditions include any exposures listed in the tables). A full copy of the report will be made available to delegates in the Military Compensation Group staff site on the intranet.

## Contact

Any questions regarding the content of this BusinessLine or its implementation should be directed to Michelle Glanville, Director Military Compensation Policy on (02) 6289 6382 or Paul Weber, SRCA Policy Adviser, on (02) 6289 6419.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "M".

Mark Johnson  
National Manager  
Compensation Policy Group  
13 December 2006

Table 4: Exposure Profile and Quality of Evidence

Hazard	Most exposed crew*	Rating	Quality of Evidence	Comments
Gases (see below)				
Diesel vapour	Engine room crew	significant	medium	
Other hydrocarbons and volatile organic compounds	Engine room crew, electrical maintenance	low	medium	May be peak exposures when cleaning
Metals (e.g. lead, mercury)	Control room, electrical maintenance	low	medium	May be significant for mercury
Asbestos	Engine room crew	low	medium	
Diesel exhaust particulate	Engine room crew	low	medium	
Other particles	Engine room, cook	significant	medium	
Microbes (including bacteria and fungi)	All	low	medium	
Noise	Engine room	significant	medium	
Vibration	Engine room	low	poor	
Heat	Engine room	significant	poor	
Musculoskeletal	All Panel operators	significant significant	poor poor	Turning valves
Air pressure	All	significant	good	
Psychological	All	significant	medium	
Poor Illumination	Control room		medium	
Non-ionising radiation	Control room, Electrical maintenance	low	poor	
Electricity	Electrical maintenance	low	poor	

Table 5: Exposure Profile (gases) and Quality of Evidence

Gas	Most exposed crew*	Rating	Quality of Evidence	Comments
Carbon Monoxide (CO)	Engine room, torpedo operators	significant	good	Smoking and cooking also relevant
Hydrogen Cyanide (HCN)	No specific crew	low	poor	Only in the event of fire or possibly torpedo firing
Carbon Dioxide (CO <sub>2</sub> )	All	significant	good	
Oxygen (O <sub>2</sub> )	All	significant	good	
Hydrogen Chloride	Electrical maintenance	low	medium	
Phosgene	No specific crew	low	poor	
Chlorine (Cl <sub>2</sub> )	Electrical maintenance	low	medium	
Oxides of Nitrogen (NO <sub>x</sub> )	Engine room, torpedo operators	low	poor	Only in the event of fire or torpedo firing
Hydrogen Sulphide (H <sub>2</sub> S)	All	low	poor	Peaks possible
Hydrogen (H <sub>2</sub> )	Electrical crew	low	good	