

Australian Government Response to Senate Resolution of 6 December 2017

1. Australian Government action to stop contamination around RAAF Base Williamtown

- The Department of Defence continues to implement a range of response management actions at RAAF Base Williamtown, with the aim of reducing and containing the movement of PFAS off site, and removing exposure pathways for residents. These include:
 - Removing contaminated sediment and replacing with new, clean drain lining material, which reduces the exposure of the surface runoff of PFAS, and will in turn reduce the migration of PFAS from the sites to the surrounding environment.
 - Conducting (through local experts) a detailed Regional Drainage Study to assess and model the drainage network of the region surrounding the Base. The study will provide an up-to-date understanding of the capacity and function of the drainage network under various conditions, including serious flooding events.
 - Continuing to reduce PFAS levels in surface water leaving RAAF Base Williamtown through the installation of water treatment plants. Plants are operating at Lake Cochran and Moors Drain in Williamtown to treat the overflows from the Base to ensure PFAS levels are below the drinking water screening criteria. Another water treatment plant has been installed to treat PFAS impacted groundwater encountered during construction activities on Base.
 - Funded Hunter Water Corporation to connect affected properties in Williamtown to town water. This included installing new water mains infrastructure, and facilitating and funding plumbing connections from the water mains to private properties. Defence has also agreed to fund all costs associated with the consumption and use of town water for a period of three years, to enable residents to transition to this cost. Where town water connections are not possible or wanted by a resident, Defence provides rainwater tanks as a long-term alternative water solution.
- The Department of Defence is also examining a range of other technologies that have the potential to remediate contaminated water and soil. The recently announced PFAS Remediation Research Program will support the development of innovative technologies to investigate and remediate PFAS contaminated areas, including soil and other solid contaminated debris, groundwater, waterways and marine systems.

2. Extending and improving testing regimes for blood and the surrounding environment

- The Australian Government is leading the world in improving the understanding of the potential health effects relating to PFAS exposure by undertaking a long-term Epidemiological Study running concurrently with the Voluntary Blood Testing Program.
- To advance these programs, in late 2017 the Australian Government announced that it would extend its voluntary blood testing program, epidemiological study and mental health and counselling services to the expanded investigation area around RAAF Base Williamtown. This expansion was in line with the Department of Defence's updated human health risk assessment and the NSW Environmental Protection Agency's changes to the Williamtown PFAS Investigation Area.
- Investigations are conducted using an evidence-based approach, in line with the National Environment Protection (Assessment of Site Contamination) Measure 1999 (ASC NEPM). Defence's investigations will also be governed by additional, nationally consistent PFAS-specific guidance currently being finalised, including the PFAS National Environmental Management Plan (PFAS NEMP) and the Intergovernmental Agreement on a National Framework for responding to PFAS Contamination (IGA).

3. Australian Government consideration given to understanding and addressing any financial impacts on affected businesses and individuals

- The Australian Government has invested heavily in a wide range of activities to address PFAS contamination, its impacts, and to better understand the potential health effects relating to PFAS exposure including:
 - \$12.5 million for a National Research Program into the Human Health Effects of Prolonged Exposure to PFAS, informed by public submissions and an Expert Panel established for this purpose;
 - \$55m to support the communities of Williamtown, NSW and Oakey, Qld, to reduce exposure, manage the environmental impacts, and provide additional dedicated mental health and counselling services (\$3.5m), a voluntary blood testing program (\$4.5m) and an epidemiological study into potential health effects from exposure to PFAS (\$4m);
 - \$5.7 million to support the Katherine community through access to the voluntary blood testing program, epidemiological study and additional dedicated mental health and counselling services;
 - \$15 million for a National PFAS Remediation Research Program to support the development of innovative technologies to investigate and remediate PFAS contaminated areas, including soil and other solid contaminated debris, groundwater, waterways and marine systems;
 - An Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) on a National Framework for Responding to PFAS Contamination, developed with states and territories, which includes best practice guidance for all government agencies to effectively and efficiently manage PFAS contamination at any site;
 - Contributing to the PFAS National Environmental Management Plan, developed cooperatively by Environment agencies across Australia;
 - Activities to monitor and manage PFAS contamination, such as establishing water treatment plants to treat contamination at water sources, conducting research in soil solidification and stabilisation, conducting studies of PFAS uptake in plants, chicken and eggs, and providing alternative drinking water to affected communities;
 - A comprehensive report by Food Standards Australia New Zealand that provides Health Based Guidance Values for site investigations, a dietary exposure assessment, and risk management advice for authorities investigating PFAS contamination;
 - Ongoing detailed site investigations to determine the extent and spread of PFAS; and
 - Regular, transparent community engagement and consultation activities at sites where PFAS contamination has been detected, to ensure accurate and complete information is available to all affected communities as soon as it becomes available.
 - The Government is investigating a range of community assistance options.
- The PFAS Taskforce also met with organisations including:
 - Australian Bankers' Association;
 - Customer Owned Banking Association;
 - Westpac, ANZ, CBA, & NAB;
 - Australian Property Institute; and
 - Insurance Council of Australia
- The Taskforce provided these key organisations with the most current scientific information on PFAS, including the nature of the chemicals and environmental concerns, and highlighted the lack of consistent scientific evidence of adverse human health effects from PFAS exposure.
 - The Taskforce also provided an overview of Australian Government actions in response to PFAS contamination, which are evidenced-based and commensurate with known risks.

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- The purpose of this information was to assist these organisations to provide their members with accurate and factual information to inform business decisions.