

Response provided to journalist  
23 December 2016

**Questions:**

I'm following up delivery of bottled water to homes which have water supply possibly contaminated by firefighting foam chemicals.

- how many households in the NT are receiving water from Defence? Where are these homes?
- why is Defence taking on responsibility for delivering water?
- why is delivery of bottled water necessary?
- how long will water deliveries go on for?
- what is the timeline for more detailed testing in the NT?

**Response:**

Defence has been proactive in initiating an environmental program to investigate the nature and extent of per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), on and in the vicinity of selected Defence properties around Australia. A Preliminary Sampling Program was undertaken at 12 Defence properties across Australia, including RAAF Base Tindal, RAAF Base Darwin and Robertson Barracks, to understand if PFAS are present on, or in the vicinity of the properties. Based on the outcomes of the Preliminary Sampling Program it was determined that these sites will be subject to a detailed environmental investigation.

The detailed environmental investigation will determine the full nature and extent of PFAS on, and in the vicinity of, the base and will be undertaken in accordance with the National Environment Protection (Assessment of Site Contamination) Measure (NEPM) framework as part of Defence's national PFAS environmental investigation program.

The investigations will commence in 2017 and take approximately 12 months to complete. Specific dates will be advised once Defence has consulted with relevant federal, territory and local government authorities.

The enHealth guidance statement on per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), updated on 24 June 2016, reiterated that *"there is currently no consistent evidence that exposure to PFOS and PFOA causes adverse human health effects. Because these chemicals persist in humans and the environment, enHealth recommends that human exposure to these chemicals is minimised as a precaution"*.

Defence has adopted a precautionary approach and is providing alternative sources of drinking water to eligible residents located in close proximity to bases, currently undertaking and pending detailed environmental investigations, who do not have a town water connection, and rely on the use of a bore for drinking water.

Defence will also provide water to residents if drinking water is sourced from a rainwater tank that contains, or has contained, bore water in the past. Defence may also provide drinking water to residents in other exceptional circumstances.

As of 22 December 2016, Defence is providing 44 properties in the Katherine Region with alternative drinking water.

Residents are welcome to contact Defence's PFAS national hotline on 1800 365 414 to discuss eligibility for water assistance and possible management strategies. Each household's drinking water requirements will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Further information regarding the investigation at RAAF Base Tindal, RAAF Base Darwin and Robertson Barracks can be found at:

<http://www.defence.gov.au/ID/PFOSPFOA/DefenceSitesPending.asp>

The Northern Territory Environmental Protection Authority fact sheet pertaining to Per- and poly- fluorinated alkyl substances (PFAS) in the Katherine Region can be found at:

[https://ntepa.nt.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/384266/PFAS\\_FAQ.pdf](https://ntepa.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/384266/PFAS_FAQ.pdf)