

Response provided to journalist
03 November 2016

Questions:

Can I please have a statement from the department about providing alternative drinking water to Katherine landholders relating to investigations around RAAF Base Tindal?

Response to all:

Defence has been proactive in initiating an environmental program to investigate the extent and levels of per- and poly-fluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS), including PFOS and PFOA, on and in the vicinity of some of its bases around Australia. As well as a number of detailed environmental site investigations already underway, a preliminary sampling program has also been undertaken at 12 Defence sites across Australia, including RAAF Base Tindal, RAAF Base Darwin and Robertson Barracks. The purpose of the preliminary sampling program is to understand if PFAS are present on, or in the vicinity of the selected bases.

Preliminary sampling conducted at RAAF Base Tindal, RAAF Base Darwin and Robertson Barracks was undertaken in June 2016. Groundwater and surface water samples were collected on and/or in the vicinity of the bases. Subject to the outcomes of the preliminary sampling program, a detailed environmental investigation may be undertaken at selected sites. If detailed investigations are to be conducted, the details will be provided to the local communities at the earliest opportunity.

The preliminary sampling program report was recently provided to the Northern Territory Government for review and consultation. Following these consultations, Defence will release the report to the general public via Defence's national PFAS investigation and management website. A date for the public release of the results is not yet confirmed but we anticipate that will be in first half of November 2016.

Defence is currently in the process of individually contacting land owners and users whose properties were accessed to collect samples as part of the preliminary sampling program, to advise them of their sample results.

Defence has adopted a precautionary approach and will provide alternative sources of drinking water to eligible residents located in close proximity to RAAF Base Tindal, RAAF Base Darwin and Robertson Barracks who do not have a town water connection, and who 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. 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 National PFAS Investigation and Management Program can be found at: <http://www.defence.gov.au/id/PFOSPFOA/Default.asp>.