

13 September 2016

QUESTION

On 15 June 2016 the Prime Minister said in a radio interview with Alan Jones "Well Alan what we've said is that we'll consider acquisition of property once the health reference values have been established and the environmental investigations have concluded." – When will these investigations conclude? Has a decision been made of property acquisitions? If not, when can the community expect a decision on this?

RESPONSE

The Government acknowledges that this is a particularly challenging time for the Oakey community. The Government also recognises the concerns of the Oakey community and will continue to communicate openly with the community.

Defence has completed the Oakey Environmental Site Assessment, which was released on 27 July 2016, and the Oakey Human Health Risk Assessment, which was released on Monday 5 September 2016.

The Minister for Health released the findings of the independent review of the Environmental Health Standing Committee (enHealth) interim guidelines on Friday 9 September 2016 which was completed by Professor Andrew Bartholomaeus as an independent expert reviewer.

The results of these activities will help inform the Government's as to the actual level of risk for existing property use.

The Government has sought advice on possible next steps, including the circumstances under which the Government should consider any land buy-backs and compensation and under what conditions.

Defence has held town hall style meetings on 27 July 2016 and 5 September 2016 and drop-in sessions on 28 July 2016 and 6 September 2016 for local residents following the release of both the Human Health Risk Assessment and Environmental Site Assessment.

Defence has briefed the Mayor and Toowoomba Shire Council representatives and also representatives of the Oakey Chamber of Commerce on the detailed investigation process and progress to date.

QUESTION

What decisions / actions will Defence now take considering the HHRA concluded a precautionary approach should continue within the Oakey IA?

RESPONSE

Defence released the Oakey Human Health Risk Assessment report on Monday 5 September. The assessment was carried out by independent international environmental experts AECOM, in collaboration with relevant Queensland Government departments, including Environment and Heritage Protection, Health, Agriculture and Fisheries and Natural

13 September 2016

13 September 2016

Resources and Mines. The Human Health Risk Assessment looked at a range of exposure pathways through which adults and children in the Oakey community may potentially be exposed to PFAS in the investigation area.

The Human Health Risk Assessment includes precautionary recommendations to minimise exposure to PFAS and any associated potential health risks. Defence will support the local community through continued provision of alternative water supplies to stakeholders relying on bore water for drinking. In some cases, this assistance may also extend to stakeholders using bore water to fill swimming pools or for use in bathrooms. Stakeholders with questions about the use of bore water at their property can contact the project team on 1800 163 129 (freecall, business hours) or via email on defence.oakey.anz@aecom.com for more information.

Additional work will also be completed by Defence to better understand the potential for adverse health impacts from consumption of chicken eggs from back yard chickens exposed to water containing detectable concentrations of PFAS.

Defence has commenced discussions with the Queensland Government to identify the scope of further investigations in relation to the environmental assessment in the Oakey investigation area,

Defence will regularly review the Human Health Risk Assessment in light of any new information.

Managing the contamination is a key priority for Defence and trials on a number of remediation and management techniques are underway to progress this including:

- Ongoing remediation and management trials (Solidification, Stabilisation, and Foam Separation).
- Commencement of groundwater remediation through pilot trials; and
- Continuing to assess international remediation capabilities.

Defence is also examining what steps might be appropriate to manage better the movement of PFAS from the base in surface water carried in local drains.

QUESTION

Considering the completion of the HHRA, does Defence accept the health of some Oakey residents has been impacted by exposure to PFAS?

RESPONSE

The Government is establishing dedicated mental health and counseling services in all affected communities and a dedicated Community Liaison Officer commenced at Oakey on 5 September 2016 to link residents to these and other Government support services.

Defence is not an authority on community health. Questions regarding health should be directed to relevant State health authorities.

13 September 2016

13 September 2016

The enHealth released Perfluorinated Chemicals (PFC) Guidance Statements on 16 March 2016. This advice was updated on 24 June 2016 and 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".

The enHealth Guidance Statements are available from the Department of Health at: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-publthpublicat-environ.htm>

QUESTION

As at Friday 9th September, how many properties is Defence providing water for?

RESPONSE

Defence has been providing water assistance to Oakey residents who use bore water in the investigation area for drinking water since May 2014 and will, in consultation with Toowoomba Regional Council, look at any further needs. As at 9 September 2016, Defence is providing water for 35 properties.

QUESTIONS

As at Friday 9th September, how many reimbursements for blood tests had Defence processed in Oakey?

What is the next report Defence is waiting on? When will the blood sampling programme and epidemiological study commence?

RESPONSE

The Government committed to investing \$55 million from the existing Defence budget to manage, contain and remediate perfluorinated chemical (PAFS) contamination at Defence bases. This includes funding an epidemiological study to be led by the Department of Health that will look at potential patterns, causes and health effects in communities exposed to elevated levels of PFOS and PFOA.

The Government is establishing a voluntary blood testing program for residents living within the investigation areas at Williamtown and Oakey with the ability to expand the program where clear exposure pathways have been identified and endorsed by the Department of Health.

In the interim, Defence has established arrangements to reimburse individuals in the Williamtown and Oakey environmental investigation areas who have already obtained PFAS blood tests, and to meet the costs of PFAS blood testing for individuals in the Williamtown and Oakey environmental investigation areas who wish to obtain a blood test prior to the Commonwealth-funded voluntary blood testing program commencing.

Defence is already processing a number of requests for reimbursement and payment of invoices.

13 September 2016

Response provided to journalist

13 September 2016

For further questions regarding the Commonwealth blood testing program and epidemiological study the Department of Health is the responsible department.

Background:

Specialised Aqueous film forming foam (AFFF) was used for nearly 50 years across a range of major military bases, civilian aerodromes and industrial facilities around Australia for critical national defence and other purposes to rapidly extinguish liquid fuel fires.

Chemicals in the older fire fighting foams - in particular, perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) - were also used in a range of industrial, commercial and domestic products.

In 2003 Defence became aware that this was an emerging contaminant. From 2004, Defence transitioned to a new product called Ansulite for use on the Defence estate. The product currently used by Defence has significantly reduced environmental impact and does not contain PFOS and PFOA as active ingredients.

Defence has been proactive in initiating an environmental program to investigate the extent and levels of 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 commenced at a number of sites.

Defence is continuing to work with Commonwealth, State and local authorities to investigate this legacy issue. This issue is not unique to Defence.

Most people living in developed nations will have some level of PFOS and PFOA in their body as these chemicals were also used in common household and industrial applications, such as in the manufacture of non-stick cookware, fabric, furniture and carpet stain protection applications, food packaging and in some industrial processes.

According to the Environmental Health Standing Committee (enHealth) Perfluorinated Chemicals Guidance Statements released on 16 March 2016 and updated on 24 June 2016, there is currently no consistent evidence that exposure to PFOS and PFOA causes adverse human health effects. Because these compounds persist in humans and the environment, enHealth recommends that human exposure is minimised as a precaution.

The enHealth Guidance Statements are available from the Department of Health at <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-pubhlthpublicat-environ.htm>

Defence has established a national website to facilitate access to information regarding its PFOS and PFOA investigation program: <http://www.defence.gov.au/id/PFOSPFOA/Default.asp>

Defence has also established a national telephone number: 1800 365 414 and email address: PFCDefenceCoordination@golder.com.au

Response provided to journalist

13 September 2016