

Questions:

I wish to follow up on Defence completing all its water sampling conducted at RAAF Base Townsville at the end of July and the results of the final report of the environmental sampling.

1. What were the results of the preliminary sampling investigation commenced in May 2016 and why have they not been released publically?
2. When was the final report of the environmental sampling completed and when will it be released publically? If it won't be released publically, why is this?
3. How many of the approx. 10 samples of bore water and surface water within the boundaries of the RAAF base had traces of PFOS and PFOA?
4. What level of risk do those detections of PFOS and PFOA pose at the base in terms of the health of personnel working on the base and the community?
5. Where exactly in terms of particular unit blocks or areas of the base were the chemicals detected on base?
6. What further detailed environmental investigations need to be undertaken focusing on PFOS and PFOA on or outside the base?
7. What communication has Defence had with the Townsville City Council in relation to the preliminary results and possible further testing or investigations?
8. What related testing or investigations will Defence undertake at the Townsville civilian airport given its proximity to the RAAF base?

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 Townsville. The purpose of the preliminary sampling program is to understand if PFAS are present on, or in the vicinity of the base.

Subject to the outcomes of the preliminary sampling program, a detailed environmental investigation may be undertaken at selected sites. If detailed investigations are undertaken, they will be conducted in accordance with the National Environment Protection (Assessment of Site Contamination) Measure (MEPM) framework. At this stage, the schedule for future detailed investigations is not currently known.

Preliminary sampling conducted at RAAF Base Townsville was completed in May 2016. Groundwater and surface water samples were collected within the boundaries of RAAF Base Townsville. No preliminary off-site sampling was conducted.

Defence has received the draft report which covers all 12 Defence sites including RAAF Base Townsville. The report is currently being reviewed and is expected to be released this month to Queensland government and the Townsville City Council. The key findings from the sampling will also be released publicly, which could include a community information briefing session. Defence is already in communication with the Queensland Government and Townsville City Council.

If a detailed site investigation is conducted at RAAF Base Townsville, consideration will be given to including Townsville Airport. RAAF Base Townsville is a Joint User Base and as such Defence is a partner in a Joint User Deed with the Townsville Airport. Defence continuously engages with the Townsville Airport regarding this issue and all matters of importance to the airfield and surrounds.

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

The Environmental Health Standing Committee (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-envirn.htm>