

## **QUESTIONS**

The government has promised funding for blood testing and \$55-million for the problem nationally (among other things). Where is it up to on delivering those promises given it's been 2 months since the election?

A local MP is pushing for the release of the EnHealth independent drinking water guidelines review. Where is that up to?

## **RESPONSE TO ALL**

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

The independent review of the enHealth interim guidelines is being progressed. Minister Ley appointed Adjunct Professor Andrew Bartholomaeus to conduct an independent evaluation to consider approaches and assumptions used and relevance of these approaches to the Australian context, having regard to current Australian regulatory science policy. Questions on the review of the enHealth interim guidelines should be referred to the Department of Health.

The Government committed to investing \$55 million from the existing Defence budget to manage, contain and remediate perfluorinated chemical (PFAS) 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 Williamstown and Oakey with the ability to expand the program where clear exposure pathways have been identified and endorsed by the Department of Health.

The Government is establishing dedicated mental health and counselling services in all affected communities and will appoint a dedicated Community Liaison Officer to connect residents to these services to be in place during early September.

The Department of Defence is providing drinking water to a number of residents in the Williamstown vicinity and will, in consultation with NSW State Authorities, look at any further needs. As at 30 August 2016, Defence is providing water to in excess of 70 properties.

Defence is providing \$3.5m in funding to the Hunter Water Corporation to fund its capital works to connect properties in the investigation area to town water as soon as possible.

Defence is funding the operation of a \$9 million water treatment plant to treat the outflow of Lake Cochran into Dawsons Drain at RAAF Base Williamstown. It is expected the plant will be operational in September 2016 subject to weather and commissioning requirements.

Defence has completed a range of detailed and complex investigations using independent expert consultants in accordance with the National Environment Protection (Assessment of Site Contamination) Measure 1999 in consultation with New South Wales State Authorities including the NSW EPA as follows:

### **Environmental Site Assessment**

The Williamstown environmental site assessment was released to the public on 8 August 2016. The report is available at: <http://www.defence.gov.au/id/PFOSPFOA/Default.asp>

The environmental site assessment report describes the location of, and the method used to collect a range of samples including soil, sediment, groundwater and surface water samples. The environmental site assessment report includes details of the sampling undertaken including soil, groundwater, sediment and surface water sampling. The report informs the human health risk assessment and an ecological risk assessment.

#### **Human Health Risk Assessment**

The Williamstown human health risk assessment was released on 8 August 2016. The report is available at: <http://www.defence.gov.au/id/PFOSPFOA/Default.asp>

The human health risk assessment assessed the possible human health risks through exposure to soil, groundwater, surface water, sediment, plants and animals in the Investigation Area.

The report assists the New South Wales State Government to determine any appropriate management measures that may be required including ongoing monitoring and further sampling. Defence will ensure the human health risk assessment is reviewed in light of any new information or regulatory changes.

Defence continues to work with Federal, state and local authorities to understand the full scope of the issue and to consider all future management and remediation options.

The Government will consider the matter of property acquisition once interim health reference values have been established and detailed environmental investigations are concluded.

#### **Ecological Risk Assessment**

The Williamstown ecological risk assessment is underway. The ecological risk assessment assesses the potential for PFAS detected in the environment to pose risks to ecological receptors (plants and wildlife) within the investigation area.

The report, once received and subject to review and comment by the NSW EPA and other NSW State Authorities, will be released and residents, businesses and local stakeholders will be offered a chance to discuss the findings with Defence and NSW representatives.

#### **Blood testing**

Defence encourages people from the Williamstown community who live or work/have lived or worked in the investigation area and wish to have their blood sampled, to participate in the upcoming Federal Department of Health blood sampling programme and epidemiological study, which is expected to begin later this month.

The epidemiological study will help authorities better understand the potential impacts of PFAS to human health. Defence will not have access to the blood test results of individuals.

If, however, individuals still wish to have their blood tested prior to the establishment of the programme they can and will have that expense reimbursed by Defence.

Defence recommends that those seeking to have their blood sampled attend a pre- and post-general medical practitioner appointment for medical advice on the process which will also be reimbursed by Defence.

Questions relating to the blood testing program should be referred to the Commonwealth Department of Health.

#### **Community Engagement**

The Minister for Defence, Senator the Hon Marise Payne, attended a meeting with representatives of the Williamstown community at RAAF Base Williamstown on 21 June 2016.

Defence is a member of the Williamstown Contamination Investigation Community Reference Group (CRG) and has attended all formal meetings and community information sessions organised by the group since 1 October 2015.

The Government is establishing dedicated mental health and counselling services in all affected communities and will appoint a dedicated Community Liaison Officer to connect residents to these services to be in place during early September.

The results of the Williamstown Environmental Site Assessment and the Williamstown Human Health Risk Assessment were presented to the community at community consultations on 9-10 August 2016.

Defence attends the Williamstown Elected Representative Reference Group (ERRG) as invited and continues to work collaboratively with the NSW EPA to ensure they have the current information when considering possible actions.

As well, Defence is working with key Australian Government stakeholders, NSW Government agencies and the Port Stephens Council.

### **Remediation**

Managing the contamination and reducing the release of PFAS from RAAF Base Williamstown 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 funding the operation of a \$9 million water treatment plant to treat the outflow of Lake Cochran into Dawsons Drain at RAAF Base Williamstown. It is expected the plant will be operational in September 2016 subject to weather and commissioning requirements.

The surrounding drains that may have water run off are jointly managed by Port Stephens Council and NSW Government. Defence is consulting with the Port Stephens Council in investigating options to manage the drainage network. Defence has provided funds to the Port Stephens Council to upgrade stormwater infrastructure downstream of the Base to remove a bottleneck and assist with the flow of water out of Moors Drain.

Defence continues to consult and work with Hunter Water Corporation regarding infrastructure development works at RAAF Base Williamstown, which includes remediation plans for the base sewerage treatment plant and lagoons.

### **Financial Assistance**

As at 14 August 2016, total payments of over \$1,000,000 have been made to financial assistance claimants.

In late July 2016 the Commonwealth Government further extended its financial assistance package, in light of the NSW Government's decision on 24 June 2016 to extend the temporary fishery closures until 30 September 2016. The package will continue until eight weeks after 30 September 2016, or eight weeks after the reopening of the fisheries by the NSW Government, whichever occurs first.

### **Bank Lending Policies and valuations in the Williamstown investigation area**

Defence is working with the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet, the NSW EPA and NSW Health to ensure that financial institutions and property valuers are accurately informed about the progress and results of the investigation.

Defence has also met with a number of lending institutions and the Australian Property Institute to discuss property lending and valuations. On 3 June 2016, representatives from Defence, the NSW EPA and Hunter New England Health, presented at a workshop for

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property valuers held by the Australian Property Institute. Defence explained the investigations currently underway in the Williamstown area to assist them to understand progress with the investigations and the timing of results.

The API released a Valuations Protocol on 28 June 2016 which provides context for valuations being conducted in the area. Valuations remain decisions for individual valuers and firms. \

Defence is encouraging valuers and lending institutions to consider what is now known regarding the limited pathways for exposure of humans to PFAS and to appreciate that, across an investigation area, the presence and concentrations of PFAS differs based on hydrogeology and other factors.

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