



HMAS Albatross and surrounding community

Background

In April 2016, the Department of Defence (Defence) engaged an independent environmental consultant to undertake a detailed environmental investigation into per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) on, and in the vicinity of, HMAS Albatross (the base).

Defence have a history of using legacy Aqueous Film Forming Foam (AFFF) for emergency fire fighting situations and for fire fighter training. In 2004 Defence commenced phasing out its use of legacy AFFF containing perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS), perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorohexane sulfonate (PFHxS) as active ingredients. The AFFF now used by Defence is a more environmentally safe product.

These PFAS were also used across Australia and internationally in a range of common household products and specialty applications, including in the manufacture of non-stick cookware; fabric, furniture and carpet stain protection applications; food packaging and in some industrial processes. As a result, most people living in the developed world will have levels of these PFAS in their body.

PFAS are emerging as a concern around the world because they are persistent in the environment.

The Environmental Health Standing Committee (enHealth) of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) has released guidance statements relating to human health.

According to enHealth, there is currently no consistent evidence that exposure to PFOS and PFOA causes adverse human health effects. As these substances persist in humans and the environment, however, enHealth recommends that human exposure is minimised as a precaution.

Objective of the Investigation

The objective for the detailed environmental investigation is to identify the nature and extent of PFAS in the environment and any risks to human health. The understanding of these risks will assist in developing any mitigation strategies to minimise exposure.

All detailed environmental investigations are undertaken by experienced environmental services providers and are in accordance with the National Environmental Protection (Assessment of Site Contamination) Measure 1999 (NEPM).

What Investigation activities have occurred to date?

The Preliminary Site Investigation (PSI) was conducted between June and October 2016 and included engagement with the local community and key local and state government agencies, reviewing site history for AFFF use to identify areas of contamination and preliminary sampling on and in close proximity to the base.



Groundwater bore drilling in the area surrounding HMAS Albatross

Current Status of Investigation

The Detailed Site Investigation (DSI) commenced in September 2016 and includes on and off-base sampling to further assess the nature and extent of PFAS on, and in the vicinity of, the base.

Initial findings have identified that additional groundwater wells are required to confirm the potential extent of contamination and assess potential risks to human health and the environment. This work has commenced and will be completed in June 2017.

A detailed report will then be prepared and provided to relevant government agencies and regulatory bodies for comment before being finalised and made publicly available.





Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessment (HHERA)

As part of the detailed environmental investigation, a Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessment (HHERA) has also commenced. To inform the HHERA, selected flora and fauna is currently being sampled and tested. This includes sampling from edible produce including honey, edible fish, pasture, livestock and fruit and vegetables.

The Commonwealth Department of Health released final Health Based Guidance Values (HBGV) for PFAS on 3 April 2017. The HBGVs were developed by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) at the request of the Department of Health and replace the interim Environmental Health Standing Committee (enHealth) guidelines released in June 2016.

Defence will adopt the final HBGVs in all its environmental investigations including at HMAS Albatross.

Support

The provision of public health advice is the role of respective Australian Government, State and local health authorities and practitioners.

Defence relies on the enHealth Guidance Statements available on the Department of Health website:

www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/health-pubhlth-publicat-enviro.htm.

Residents are welcome to contact the national hotline by phone or email 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.

Keeping the Community Informed

Defence is committed to regularly updating the community throughout the investigation including at key points when investigation reports are released.

The project website will be updated and community information sessions, direct mail and factsheets will be provided as the investigation progresses.

If you have any enquiries or requests relating to individual properties please contact the Defence project team.

Useful Links

The Australian Government Department of Health has established a PFAS webpage:

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/ohp-pfas.htm>.

Department of Health PFAS hotline: 1800 941 180

NSW Environment Protection Authority:

<http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/MediaInformation/pfasinvestigation.htm>.

NSW Health:

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ):

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-pfas-hbgv.htm>

Contact the Project Team

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