



## Background

In March 2017, Defence commenced an investigation into per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), related to the historical use of firefighting foams on RAAF Base Darwin. The objective of the investigation is to identify the nature and extent of PFAS in the environment and any potential exposure risks to people, plants and animals.

## Timeline



\*Dates may be subject to rescheduling

## What is PFAS?

Per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are manufactured chemicals used in products that resist heat, oil, stains and water.

PFAS have been used in Australia and around the world in many common household products and specialty applications, including:

- Non-stick cookware
- Fabric, furniture and carpet stain protection applications
- Food packaging
- Some industrial processes

As a result, most people living in developed nations have some PFAS in their body.

Legacy firefighting foams containing PFOS and PFOA as active ingredients were once used extensively worldwide and within Australia, including at Defence bases, due to their effectiveness in fighting liquid fuel fires. Perfluorohexane sulfonate (PFHxS) is also commonly found in the legacy firefighting foam as an impurity in the manufacturing process. PFOS, PFOA and PFHxS belong to the PFAS group of chemicals.

The release of PFAS into the environment has become a concern, because we've learned these chemicals can persist in humans, animals and the environment. There was little understanding of impacts for PFAS at the time of use of legacy firefighting foam and as such this is a legacy issue for Defence.

## Investigation update

In February 2018, the [Detailed Site Investigation Report](#) was released detailing the findings from sampling and analysis of soil, sediment, surface water, groundwater, small fish and edible produce. Given the tropical climate of the Northern Territory, additional water, soil, plant and animal sampling and analysis has occurred to understand how PFAS moves through the environment during both the Wet and Dry Seasons. The additional sample findings are being compiled as part of the Supplementary Detailed Site Investigation Report planned to be released in November 2018.

In June 2018, the [Human Health Risk Assessment Report](#) was released. The primary objectives of the Human Health Risk Assessment were to understand the potential PFAS exposure risks to people and to identify the main exposure pathways.

Defence is in the process of conducting an Ecological Risk Assessment to evaluate the potential risk of PFAS exposure to the natural environment. The assessment will investigate and identify what parts of the ecosystems are at risk of exposure. The findings are being compiled as part of the Ecological Risk Assessment Report also planned to be released in November 2018.





## Next Steps

The outcomes of the investigation are being used to develop a PFAS Management Area Plan. The aim of the PFAS Management Area Plan is to provide options to manage the risks of PFAS exposure near the Base and outline a plan for ongoing monitoring.

A Community Walk-in Session and Community Stand is being planned to provide the community

with the findings of the Supplementary Detailed Site Investigation, the Ecological Risk Assessment and the PFAS Management Area Plan. The events will provide an opportunity to ask representatives from Defence and other government agencies questions about the investigation. More information about the proposed Walk-in Session and Stand will be advertised in the coming weeks.



Figure 1: RAAF Base Darwin PFAS Investigation Area and PFAS levels in creeks surrounding the Base

## Key Contacts

### PFAS Project Team

[www.defence.gov.au/environment/pfas/Darwin/PFAS.RAABaseDarwin@coffey.com](http://www.defence.gov.au/environment/pfas/Darwin/PFAS.RAABaseDarwin@coffey.com)  
1800 592 616

### Media Enquiries

(02) 6127 1999  
[media@defence.gov.au](mailto:media@defence.gov.au)

### NT Environment Protection Authority

For more information on PFAS and the environment contact the NT EPA:  
[www.ntepa.nt.gov.au](http://www.ntepa.nt.gov.au)  
1800 064 567 (pollution hotline)

### Department of Health PFAS

Defence recognises that it is not an authority on public health. For health information please refer to the Department of Health:  
[www.health.gov.au/pfas](http://www.health.gov.au/pfas)  
1800 941 180

