

Questions:

Journalist enquired about the incidence of cancer among residents of Cabbage Tree Road, Williamstown in the last 15 years.

I assume Health is the lead agency for this one but I let me know if Defence wanted the opportunity to comment.

Secondly, after we independently tested Dawson's Drain (where it intersects with Cabbage Tree Road), we got the following results:

- 92 mg/l (PFOS)
- 44 mg/l (PFHxS)

As far as we are aware, this is the highest ever recorded reading off the base and of many orders of magnitude higher than results of testings by AECOM (5.17 mg/l) in the drain and the OEH.

- Can you explain why levels of PFOS in Dawsons Drain have increased by such an extraordinary amount since your tests were performed?
- Does this indicate that the operation of the water treatment plant on Lake Cochran is either failing or acting to increase the level of PFOS in Dawsons Drain?

Response:

Defence can not comment on laboratory results reported for samples collected by other parties.

The independent environmental consultant appointed by Defence (AECOM Australia Pty Ltd) to conduct the environmental investigation into PFAS at RAAF Williamstown has collected a number of surface water samples from that portion of Dawsons drain. Between 2014 and 2017 approximately 60 surface water samples have been collected from Dawson's Drain at the crossing with Cabbage Tree Road. Of these samples, the highest PFOS concentration was 2.60 µg/L and the highest PFHxS concentration was 3.26 µg/L. These results are understood to be consistent with sampling conducted by NSW Government in 2016. These results are considered representative of the PFOS and PFHxS concentrations in the drain over the period of monitoring (approximately 3 years).

The differences in the levels identified by Newcastle Herald could be related to a number of factors including:

- high rainfall events
- differences in sampling methods
- inadvertent inclusion of sediment into the surface water sample
- cross contamination
- differences in laboratory analysis methods.

Defence notes that the unit of measure identified in Newcastle Herald's enquiry is different to that normally used in relation to laboratory analysis of water samples.

Response provided to journalist
9 July 2017

The Lake Cochran Water Treatment Plant (WTP) is an interim measure to treat water leaving Lake Cochran prior to exiting the base through Dawsons Drain. The WTP treats the surface water to below the Health Base Guidance Value criteria.

Defence is committed to openly communicating the conduct and outcomes of PFAS management activities. Results from the Lake Cochran WTP demonstrate that it is reducing PFAS levels and these results can be viewed by the public at the following website: <http://www.defence.gov.au/ID/Williamtown/LakeCochran.asp>

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