

Response provided to journalist
2 November 2017

Question

Can I please get an update on the PFAS investigations at RAAF bas East Sale and nearby Heart Morass wetlands?

I believe there was a briefing last Thursday (not public). Can we know what that information was, and is it available to us?

Response

In May 2016, Defence commenced a detailed environmental investigation into the nature and extent of per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) on and in the surrounding area of RAAF Base East Sale, including at the Heart Morass wetlands.

The second stage of the environmental investigation, the Detailed Site Investigation (DSI), commenced in September 2016 and was completed in June 2017. This stage involved the sampling and analysis of soil, surface water, groundwater, sediment, drainage lines and land vegetation on-base and in the surrounding region.

The results of the DSI identified a requirement for an assessment to be conducted on animals and plants including fish, eels, ducks, small invertebrates and aquatic plants within the Heart Morass to establish if there are risks associated with PFAS.

This assessment was conducted as part of the Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessment (HHERA) that commenced following initial results received as part of the DSI. The HHERA involves comprehensive on-base and off-base sampling to better understand potential risks posed by PFAS to people and the environment. The HHERA is expected to be finalised and published in late 2017.

Defence's priority remains the health and safety of the community and Defence personnel and also the management of potential impacts of PFAS exposure on the environment. Defence is working with the EPA to ensure that hunters and fishers are kept well informed as information is validated for consistency and accuracy.

On 26 October 2017, Defence met with a private property owner to discuss sampling results related to a particular property. For privacy reasons, Defence is unable to comment on the specific details of the meeting or sampling results. Sampling conducted by Defence on private property is considered on a case-by-case basis. De-identified information about private property sampling will be contained in the HHERA Report with the agreement of the property owner.

Defence is committed to keeping the community informed about the investigation findings and will hold another community information session in late 2017 once the assessments are finalised.

Details of this session will become available on the East Sale investigation website on: <http://www.defence.gov.au/environment/pfas/EastSale/>