

Questions:

The Border Mail newspaper which covers the Albury Wodonga area is reporting today that the water surface samples taken at Jack In The Box Creek were above the Department's recommended level and lead found in the same area was three times the recommended level. It is also reporting that lead levels within the Bandiana base were found to be seven times the guidelines. It also says that further testing is to be carried out to establish the extent of contamination.

Can I have the above information verified and also a current status of what if anything has happened at Puckapunyal?

Response:

In 2016, Defence engaged GHD to conduct a Preliminary Sampling Program (PSP) at a number of Defence sites, including the Bandiana Military Area, to determine if per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are present on, or in the vicinity of the Base. As a result of the findings, it was determined that a detailed environmental investigation into PFAS will be conducted.

As noted within the PSP report, the NEPM heavy metal suite was also analysed. This included sampling for lead. Bandiana is currently being assessed for contamination as part of a national environmental program. This is separate to, and in addition to, the PFAS investigation. Remediation for contamination including heavy metals will be further assessed to identify the nature and extent of the risks of contamination.

In July 2017, Defence engaged independent environmental consultant, Golder Associates, to conduct a detailed environmental investigation to identify the nature and extent of PFAS on, and in the vicinity of, the Bandiana Military Area. The investigations' findings will be used to inform mitigation strategies to minimise long-term PFAS exposure to the local community and environment.

The first stage of Golder's investigation, the Preliminary Site Investigation (PSI), has now been completed. This stage involved the historical review of firefighting foam use at the base to identify on-base sources, to develop an understanding of PFAS migration pathways, and identify potential receptors. Limited on-base sampling was conducted for the PSI to assist in the development of a sampling and analysis plan for the second stage of the investigation, the Detailed Site Investigation (DSI).

The DSI commenced at the start of October 2017 and will involve sampling of soil, sediment, groundwater and surface water both on- and off-base as well as bore drilling and the installation of groundwater monitoring.

As part of the investigation, the Bandiana community has been invited to fill out a voluntary Water Use Survey to collect information about water supply and use on properties around the base. The survey findings assist in determining if additional sampling is required to be undertaken for the investigation.

Response provided to journalist
23 October 2017

To date, the initial findings from the investigation and the surveys collected have not identified any residents using groundwater for domestic purposes. As a result, no properties in the vicinity of the base are receiving alternative drinking water.

After a review of historical legacy firefighting foam use across the Defence Estate, Defence has determined there is a low risk of significant PFAS contamination issues at Puckapunyal or surrounding properties. As a result, a detailed environmental investigation into PFAS is not considered required at Puckapunyal at this time. Defence will continue to assess the potential risks associated with PFAS contamination at Puckapunyal, including through water quality monitoring.

Defence understands community concerns in relation to PFAS detections and is committed to engaging with the community regarding this issue. As a result, Defence conducts face-to-face community engagement activities at the commencement of each investigation and at key milestones of progress. Defence has also established dedicated community telephone lines for each site and a website for the National Investigation and Management Program.

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