

**Response provided to journalist
09 August 2018**

Questions:

We are seeking a response from Defence regarding the issue of PFAS contaminants in the effluent at Wagga City Council's Forest Hill Sewerage Treatment Plant.

1. Wagga City Council states that it has reached an agreement with Defence that it (Defence) will come with a solution to the contamination issue within 18 month.
 - a. What might this solution involve?
 - b. How achievable is the 18-month timeframe?
2. What steps will Defence be taking now to address the contamination issue?
3. Had the EPA made Defence aware of the Order it had place against Council regarding the discharge of effluent from the Forest Hill Sewerage Treatment works?

Response:

In May 2017, Defence commenced a detailed environmental investigation to better understand the nature and extent of per- and poly- fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination on and around RAAF Base Wagga. A detailed report containing all investigation findings was published in June 2018, and is available for download from the Defence website:

<http://defence.gov.au/environment/pfas/Wagga/>

As part of the detailed environmental investigation, samples were taken at RAAF Wagga and in the surrounding area, including the Forest Hill Sewerage Treatment Facility. This investigation detected PFAS in the treatment facility's effluent ponds. As a result, Defence committed to undertake additional sampling to better understand the nature and extent of PFAS concentrations.

The next step of the detailed environmental investigation is to conduct a Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessment (HHERA) report. The report will consider the results of all sampling undertaken to assess a range of exposure risks in the vicinity of RAAF Wagga, including in association with the Forest Hill Sewerage Treatment Facility. The risk assessment report is expected to be finalised and presented to the community in the fourth quarter of 2018.

Defence met with the Wagga City Council on Monday 6 August to discuss this matter. During the meeting, Defence advised it would continue to update the Council and local community as additional information becomes available. Defence committed to cooperating with the Council to understand the nature and extent of any PFAS in the sewage system that might have originated from RAAF Wagga.

Defence is committed to reducing the exposure pathways from PFAS to affected communities through management activities based on the findings of the environmental investigations. Where required, Defence will consider any potential management decisions which are technically sound and take the findings of the HHERA report into consideration.

Questions regarding the Council's actions should be directed to the council.

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