

Response provided to journalist

31 August 2018

Question

I'm writing a story about PFAS in Wreck Bay from FOI documents released by ACT Health.

1. Did the Defence Department fail to act on a remediation action plan to address contamination issues outlined in the Coffey report?
2. Have the Detailed Site Investigation and Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessment for the Jervis Bay Territory's PFAS contamination been completed and what are their findings?
3. What health advice resulting from investigations into contamination has been given to the Wreck Bay community?
4. Has Defence investigated PFAS contamination and its impact on the health of the Wreck Bay community quickly enough?
5. Will there be further investigations of any links between PFAS and complaints of a cancer cluster in the Wreck Bay community?
6. Is the PFAS contamination detected in Wreck Bay at levels unsafe to human health?
7. Has Defence made enough effort to gain the trust of the Wreck Bay community?
8. Why was Wreck Bay treated differently to Williamstown (eg. contaminated area not closed off immediately), when the levels of contamination and the population are similar?
9. Has the situation of Wreck Bay being a Commonwealth territory or self-regulating Indigenous community complicate the way the contamination is dealt with?

Response

Defence is conducting a detailed environmental investigation into the nature and extent of PFAS at the Jervis Bay Range Facility and the surrounding area.

It is anticipated the Detailed Site Investigation Report and Human Health Report will be published and presented at a community walk-in session by the end of this year, with event details advertised closer to the date.

The Coffey Report relates to hydrocarbon contamination, not PFAS contamination. The report identified hydrocarbon contamination on the Jervis Bay Range Facility that was migrating into the headwaters of Mary Creek. Defence engaged environmental consultants to develop a remediation action plan in 2004, with remediation conducted and validated in 2006. As part of the current PFAS investigation, samples from Mary Creek were also tested for the presence of hydrocarbons.

Defence is not a health authority, and therefore provides all sampling results to the relevant State and Territory agencies for them to determine if precautionary health advice is required. The Federal Department of Health advises there is currently no consistent evidence that exposure to PFAS causes adverse human health effects, however, as a precaution, they recommend that exposure to PFAS is minimised. The Wreck Bay and Jervis Bay communities have been provided with this information.

Defence understands the concerns of the Wreck Bay Community and has put considerable resources into conducting the environmental investigation promptly, while respecting the indigenous culture and unique access requirements of the area. Defence and its environmental consultant have worked closely with the community to ensure:

- the investigation scope incorporates indigenous culture and lifestyle;
- the sampling activities are appropriately supervised by community representatives; and
- a permit to access aboriginal lands was granted.