

**Response provided to journalist
10 August 2018**

Questions:

I'm doing a story on the recent class action filed against Defence in regards to PFAS chemicals used on Base Tindal, near Katherine.

I understand the department is working on its defence now so is the department able to comment on how it will fight the class action?

Does the department still maintain there is no link between PFAS chemicals and human disease?

Has Shine Lawyers discussed with the department how much in monetary damages they will be seeking?

I understand the department has taken a number of steps to assist Katherine residents who were left with contaminated water and food. Is the department able to outline the steps it has taken?

Would the department consider buying the houses, which residents describe as "worthless", from people wanting to leave Katherine but are unable to do so?

Response:

On 2 August 2018, Shine Lawyers lodged a representative proceeding in the Federal Court, funded by IMF Bentham Ltd, relating to the Commonwealth's historic use of aqueous film forming foam products at RAAF Base Tindal.

The proceeding was served on the Commonwealth on 7 August 2018.

The claim will be handled in accordance with the Attorney-General's *Legal Services Directions 2017*.

It would be inappropriate for Defence to comment further on legal proceedings.

Defence is not an expert on matters relating to population health and relies on the expertise of relevant health authorities. Defence refers to the guidance issued by the Environmental Health Standing Committee (enHealth) when assessing and managing any potential risks to human health posed by PFAS. The enHealth guidance statements advise there is currently no consistent evidence that exposure to PFAS causes adverse human health effects. However, because these chemicals persist in humans and the environment, enHealth recommends human exposure to these chemicals is minimised as a precaution. In May 2018 this advice was reaffirmed by the findings of the independent Expert Health Panel for PFAS which took into account evidence available from both Australian and international scientific research.

As a precautionary approach to minimise PFAS exposure, Defence has implemented Interim Response Management Activities as the detailed environmental investigation into PFAS at and around RAAF Base Tindal progresses. These actions include the provision of alternative water, rainwater tanks and the installation of a water treatment plant.

**Response provided to journalist
10 August 2018**

**Response provided to journalist
10 August 2018**

As a precaution, Defence is providing bottled water to eligible residents who are not connected to town water, rely on bore water for drinking and are located within the investigation area surrounding the base. As of 9th August, there is currently one property in the Katherine region receiving alternative bottled water.

Defence has supplied and installed rainwater tanks as a long term alternative water source for residents previously reliant on bore water for drinking. The installation of rainwater tanks has been completed at 61 of the programmed 65 properties in the Katherine region. The installation of the remaining water tanks is scheduled to be completed by the end of the 2018 dry season.

In September 2017, Defence installed an interim water treatment plant to remove PFAS from the bore providing town water to Katherine residents. As at 8 August 2018, approximately 260.10 million litres of water has been treated by the water treatment plant at the Katherine Power and Water Corporation Facility. The treated water is being blended with treated river water and incorporated into the town's reticulated water supply. Ongoing testing by Northern Territory (NT) Power and Water Corporation continues to confirm the PFAS level in town water remains below the Food Standards Australian New Zealand drinking guidelines. Defence is currently working with the NT Government and Power and Water Corporation regarding the long term solutions for Katherine town water.

Defence has entered into a contract to install and operate two water treatment plants at RAAF Base Tindal to reduce the amount of PFAS within the environment. It is anticipated the first plant will be delivered by the end of 2018, with full operations commencing in early 2019. The second plant is expected to be delivered during the second quarter of 2019.

Defence has commenced planning to undertake soil management activities at RAAF Base Tindal. The soil management activities may include removal of PFAS contaminated soil from the Fire Training Area and other source areas within the Base. These activities are likely to occur during the 2019 dry season.

The findings of the detailed environmental investigation will be used to develop a PFAS Management Area Plan which will provide options to guide Defence's future management actions. The focus of management activities will continue to be to reduce PFAS migration and mitigate the exposure risks identified in the investigation.

Defence will continue to work with the Katherine community and the Northern Territory Government as it investigates, and implements strategies to reduce, PFAS exposure.

Further information about the PFAS investigation and management activities at Katherine is available at:

<http://www.defence.gov.au/environment/pfas/Tindal/>

Property buybacks is a matter for the Federal Government.

**Response provided to journalist
10 August 2018**