

Response provided to journalist 28 August 2018

Questions:

What does the Department say to claims that PFAS causes testicular cancer, thyroid cancer, kidney cancer, excessively high cholesterol, reproductive issues and other diseases?

Are residents of Katherine being given bottled water? Is it correct to say there isn't potable water in Katherine?

Will the government consider compensating people whose land has lost value as a result of PFAS contamination?

Why doesn't the government adopt the more cautious approach of the US and Europe to PFAS?

Response:

Defence conducts all investigation and management activities in accordance with the guidance provided by the relevant federal departments. Questions regarding Health-Based-Guidance-Values should be directed to the Department of Health.

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

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 27 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 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 Northern Territory (NT) Government and Power and Water Corporation regarding the long term solutions for Katherine town water.

Power and Water Corporation are the water utility provider for the Northern Territory, including Katherine. Power and Water Corporation advise that Katherine's water is high quality and safe to drink straight from the tap. Power and Water Corporation constantly monitor water quality and carry out extensive testing to confirm the Katherine drinking water is safe.

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 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/>

Based on the knowledge and evidence available at this time, the Australian Government is not considering a land purchase program as a result of PFAS contamination.

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