

Questions:

I am seeking information on when the report into PFAS contamination at Defence Bases will be released (for Jervis Bay)?

Which bases will be covered by those reports?

Can you please give me any other information about what testing has been carried out and any preliminary results?

I would appreciate any other information on this issue that you can provide.

Response:

In January 2017, Defence commenced a detailed environmental investigation into the presence of per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) on and in the vicinity of Jervis Bay Range Facility (JBRF). Due to its proximity, HMAS Creswell falls within the Investigation Area and is also being considered as part of the JBRF investigation.

The detailed environmental investigation is being conducted in accordance with the National Environment Protection (Assessment of Site Contamination) Measure (NEPM) framework.

Defence has completed the first stage of the investigation, the Preliminary Site Investigation. The key findings from the Preliminary Site Investigation included:

- soil, sediment, surface water and groundwater onsite have been impacted by PFAS at concentrations above the health-based guidance values
- based on surface water runoff and groundwater flows there is a potential for PFAS to have travelled offsite
- PFAS was not detected in surface water at Lakes McKenzie and Windermere and drinking water tanks at the Jervis Bay Training Area water treatment plant.

To reiterate, preliminary sampling of Lake Windermere - the primary source of Jervis Bay Territory's drinking water - has returned results below limit of reporting. Sampling of the Jervis Bay Territory's water treatment plant also returned results below the limit of reporting.

The limit of reporting is the lowest concentration level that the laboratory is able to measure in a sample. Where the laboratory results show a result below limit of reporting, it means that if PFAS is present in the sample, it is too low for the laboratory to measure with any degree of certainty. These readings are within the Health-based guidance values for safe drinking water, as set out by Food Standards Australia and New Zealand.

Defence is currently in the process of conducting the Detailed Site Investigation. This stage of the investigation will focus on testing surface water, sediment, soil, ground water, plants and animals.

Testing will occur in locations identified as 'source areas' - where firefighting foams containing specific types of PFAS perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), as active ingredients, have previously been used. Sampling will also occur along drainage lines, creek lines and underground water aquifers, which flow away from the source areas.

The sampling of soil, existing water bores and surface water on the bases has begun. New groundwater monitoring bores are also being installed in the Investigation Area to assist in gathering samples. Sampling will involve:

Response provided to journalist
12 February 2018

- sampling of surface water and sediment at Mary Creek, Summercloud Creek, Flat Rock Creek, Captains Lagoon, Blacks Waterhole, Lake Windermere and Lake Mckenzie
- collection of soil samples predominantly on-base at the JBRF and HMAS Creswell sites, to assist with the identification and confirmation of source areas
- sampling of soil will also occur off-base as part of the procedure for installing groundwater monitoring wells, at a number of locations across the Jervis Bay Territory
- establishment of monitoring wells on-base, to better understand how PFAS may be migrating into groundwater and moving away from source areas
- additional monitoring wells to be established off-base to determine if PFAS is migrating away from JBRF.

The findings of the Detailed Site Investigation, including the sampling results, will be made publically available in a detailed report, anticipated to be released in the last quarter of 2018.

Based on the initial investigation findings, a Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessment (HHERA), is also underway. This assessment will evaluate potential PFAS exposure risks to the human population and ecology, and inform actions to mitigate the risks that are identified. This will include the sampling of local fish, crustaceans, molluscs, traditional bush foods, home grown vegetables/fruit as well as different components of the pre-established ecological 'food web', such as plants consumed by animals, insects and yabbies.

The HHERA is expected to be completed and findings released in the last quarter of 2018.

Because of the geographical placement of the investigation, Defence investigators often consult with the following key stakeholders:

- NSW Health and ACT Health - (Defence cannot provide health advice as this is the role of respective State and/or local health authorities and practitioners)
- NSW Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) and ACT EPA - (engagement on investigation planning and environmental methodologies)
- Jervis Bay Territory Administration - (within Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities who coordinate the provision of services to Jervis Bay Territory)
- Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community Council Board - (engagement on investigation planning and aboriginal land access approvals)
- national parks (within the Department of Environment and Energy for national park managed land access approvals).

Further information on the Jervis Bay Range Facility Environmental Investigation is available at: www.defence.gov.au/environment/pfas/JervisBay