

Questions:

Re: Amberley Investigation

- 1) The report notes that landfill placed by Defence at the southern end of the base had tested above the clean fill criterion. Does Defence believe that it has acted appropriately by placing this land fill which contained levels above clean fill guidelines in a location that is so close to Warrill Creek?
- 2) Will Defence be undertaking act further work to stop chemicals from this material leaching into the creek?
- 3) Given the report notes the risk to construction workers will Defence contact these workers to warn them of the risks and recommend they get testing done?

Response:

The Department of Health established an Expert Health Panel (the Panel) to advise the Australian Government on the potential health impacts associated with PFAS exposure and identify priority areas for further research. The Panel's findings support the previous Environmental Health Standing Committee's (enHealth) advice in 2016 that there is no consistent evidence that exposure to PFAS causes adverse human health effects.

As PFAS substances persist in humans and the environment, enHealth recommends that human exposure is minimised as a precaution.

The Detailed Site Investigation (DSI) was conducted as part of the environmental investigation into PFAS at RAAF Base Amberley and nearby areas. The focus of the DSI was to determine the nature and extent of PFAS within the Investigation Area. This involved a comprehensive sampling and analysis program as well as the identification of PFAS source areas and migration pathways.

Potential source areas were reviewed based on information of past activities that have occurred on the Base, such as known landfilling of materials. The DSI identified an area located south of the Base where elevated levels of PFAS were detected in soil from past activity of placing waste soil material from construction or excavation activities to establish flood mitigation measures for a low lying area, approximately 40 metres from Warrill Creek.

The material was tested prior to use. Defence sought the advice of its experts and the material was classified as suitable for reuse on-base in accordance with the adopted screening criteria. Since the establishment of PFAS National Environmental Management Plan Defence had adopted the relevant screening criteria for soil to inform its soil management initiatives.

Response provided to journalist
16 November 2018

A Human Health Risk Assessment and an Ecological Risk Assessment are currently being undertaken to establish a better understanding of potential exposure risks to PFAS for people, plants and animals within the Investigation Area. Once completed, the overall detailed environmental investigation findings will be used to inform a PFAS Management Area Plan (PMAP). The PMAP will inform the activities that Defence will undertake to manage and reduce the risks of PFAS exposure, where required, within the Investigation Area. The PMAP recommendations may include actions to address PFAS in soil.

All works undertaken on the Defence estate must comply with requirements in the Commonwealth Work Health Safety Act (Cth) 2011 (WHS Act) and the occupational health and safety requirements contained in environmental management frameworks and Work Health and Safety Manuals.

All construction workers on the base are briefed on the PFAS exposure risks and precautions which should be adopted to avoid exposure including the use of appropriate personal protective equipment. Defence expects these precautions to reflect industry standards.

Response provided to journalist
16 November 2018