

**Response provided to journalist
19 October 2018**

Questions:

I have been talking with Bullsbrook residents who live near RAAF Pearce, who are calling on Defence to:

- Ensure everyone in West Bullsbrook has access to safe water via scheme water, water tanks or by deepening their bores
- Purchase the properties of current owners in the contamination zone who want to leave the area

Could you please advise whether Defence is seriously considering or plans to take this action? And also whether Defence has any other response to these claims.

Response:

The Department of Defence is currently conducting a detailed environmental investigation into per- and poly- fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) on, and around, RAAF Base Pearce. As part of this investigation, Defence detected PFAS in some groundwater beneath Bullsbrook.

Defence refers to the guidance issued by the Environmental Health Standing Committee (enHealth) when assessing and managing any potential exposure 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.

The Australian Government is providing \$55.2 million over five years from 2018-19 financial year for a drinking water program, to remove exposure pathways for eligible community members identified through Commonwealth PFAS investigations. The program, which has commenced, includes property owners in the community surrounding RAAF Pearce, who use bores as their primary source of drinking water, and where PFAS is present at levels above the drinking water guidance value. Defence has and continues to be committed to removing potential exposure pathways to PFAS for affected communities. As of 12 October 2018, Defence is providing alternative water to 135 properties within the Investigation Area as a precautionary measure to prevent potential exposure to PFAS.

The Detailed Site Investigation and Human Health Risk Assessment Reports for RAAF Pearce are now complete and Defence has commenced an additional round of sampling to assess the supply of alternative water to properties within the Investigation Area. The results of these samples will help Defence to determine the ongoing supply or withdrawal of alternative water.

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In line with the drinking water program and Defence's management actions to break exposure pathways, supply will continue to any property where detections of PFAS exceed the Health Based Guidance Values for drinking water. Arrangements will be developed to transition residents from an interim alternative drinking water supply to a sustainable water supply where required. Defence has commenced a feasibility study to identify possible options for longer term water strategy for effected residents in the Investigation Area.

The Australian Government has considered all the available information relating to PFAS contamination, including site investigation results, community views, expert advice, and scientific data, and is responding to PFAS in a way that is consistent with the available evidence. 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.