

Questions:

1. How is the Creek contaminated by the firefighting chemicals at the navy base? Reports say it is because of run-off, how long has this been going on?
2. Did the Defence Department restrict people from accessing the water? Was this announcement in a media release or to the community itself?
3. In recent reporting it said you asked to investigate the contamination that came from firefighting chemicals, what exactly was this investigation?
4. Are people still accessing the water today?

Response to journalist:

In January 2017 Defence commenced a detailed environmental investigation into the nature and extent of per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) at, and around, the Jervis Bay Range Facility. Defence is currently finalising the Detailed Site Investigation Report and Human Health Risk Assessment Report. The findings of these reports are expected to be published and presented at a community walk-in session before the end of this year. Once confirmed, details of the session will be advertised. Further information on the PFAS investigation at the Jervis Bay Range Facility is available at: www.defence.gov.au/environment/pfas/JervisBay/

The initial findings from the investigation indicate:

- PFAS is present on the Jervis Bay Range Facility in soil, sediment, surface water and groundwater
- based on surface water runoff and groundwater flows, there is a potential for PFAS to have travelled off the Jervis Bay Range Facility to Mary Creek
- PFAS was not detected in surface water at Lakes McKenzie, Windermere or drinking water tanks at the Jervis Bay Territory (JBT) water treatment plant (which supplies drinking water to the JBT).

Firefighting foams containing PFAS, such as perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS), perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorohexane sulfonate (PFHxS), were used extensively worldwide and within Australia by both civilian and military authorities due to their effectiveness in extinguishing liquid fuel fires. In 2004, Defence commenced phasing out its use of legacy firefighting foam containing PFOS and PFOA as active ingredients. These foams are no longer in use at Jervis Bay.

As Defence is not a health authority, it provides all sampling results to the relevant State and Territory agencies for them to determine if precautionary health advice is required. The Department of Health advises there is currently no consistent evidence that exposure to PFAS causes adverse human health effects, however, as a precaution, they recommend that exposure to PFAS is minimised.

Response provided to journalist
6 September 2018

The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Chief Health Officer closed Mary Creek in 2016 following PFAS sampling conducted by the ACT. The ACT Government should be contacted with inquiries on how this information was distributed to the community.

Defence has put considerable resources into conducting the environmental investigation promptly, while respecting the indigenous culture and unique access requirements of the area. Defence and its environmental consultant have worked closely with the community to ensure:

- the investigation scope incorporates indigenous culture and lifestyle
- the sampling activities are appropriately supervised by community representatives
- a permit to access aboriginal lands is granted.