

Response provided to Journalist

3 April 2019

Question

Hello I am writing a story about the Oakey PCAS contamination and would like to know the following:

- When was the most recent Environmental Site Assessment Report carried out at Oakey?
- Can you confirm what Aquifer Oakey sits on and in which direction the aquifer is flowing?
- Is it correct that the three class actions from Williamstown, Katherine and Oakey will now be heard at a combined hearing which will start on August 12, and where?
- Is it correct that Defence is currently pumping water from the acquirers at Oakey, Williamstown and Katherine and treating with filters sourced from the United states and repumping back into the aquifer.

Response

The Department of Defence has completed a detailed environmental investigation into the nature and extent of per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) resulting from historical use of firefighting foams on, and in the vicinity of, Army Aviation Centre Oakey (AACO). This includes the completion of an Environmental Site Assessment and Human Health Risk Assessment

In 2016, a preliminary Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA) was completed which identified further works were required to address data-gaps and uncertainties. These works culminated in the completion of the ERA in October 2018 and formed the final investigation report for the AACO detailed environmental investigation.

Based on information collected during the detailed environmental investigation, it was determined groundwater under AACO flows to the west, which is the regional groundwater flow direction.

The outcomes of the investigation are being used to develop a PFAS Management Area Plan which will outline the best management and remediation solutions for the unique circumstances at Oakey.

Since September 2017, a water treatment plant has been operating at AACO. The plant is removing PFAS from contaminated groundwater on the base and then reinjecting the treated water back into the Alluvium aquifer.

More information on water treatment activities at AACO, including the results of routine water sampling, is available at:

<http://www.defence.gov.au/environment/pfas/oakey/managementactivities.asp>

Similar water treatment plants are also in operation at RAAF Base Tindal and RAAF Base Williamtown. More information on management activities across the PFAS Investigation and Management Program, is available at:
<http://www.defence.gov.au/Environment/PFAS/ManagementActivities.asp>

The Federal Court has set aside hearing dates commencing 12 August 2019 to hear the Katherine, Williamtown and Oakey community class actions. Each of the class actions was commenced in the Sydney Registry of the Federal Court and it is expected the hearings will take place in Sydney.