

Response provided to journalist

17 January 2019

Questions:

The Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade has wrapped up its inquiry and in November 2018 released its report. In light of this report, my editor is keen to have the Defence Department's latest available comments on PFAS contamination.

Response:

The Assistant Minister for Defence and Minister for the Environment issued a joint statement on 3 December 2018 welcoming the release of the Joint Standing Committee's report. As noted in the release, the Government is carefully considering the Committee's recommendations and will provide a coordinated whole-of-Australian-Government response through the PFAS Taskforce in the Department of the Environment and Energy.

The Department of Defence PFAS Investigation and Management Branch has commenced investigations into the impacts of per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), at 27 locations around Australia; 13 of which have been concluded and progressed to the management stage. These investigations are conducted in accordance with the National Environment Protection (Assessment of Site Contamination) Measure 1999 (NEPM).

Defence is committed to being open and transparent about its environmental investigations, management and remediation efforts at PFAS-affected Defence bases and in communities. Defence acknowledges that there is community concern around PFAS, and is committed to provide support and assistance to those affected.

According to The Environmental Health Standing Committee (enHealth), there is currently no consistent evidence that exposure to PFOS and PFOA causes adverse human health effects. Because these chemicals persist in humans and the environment, enHealth recommends that human exposure to these chemicals is minimised as a precaution.