

**Response provided to journalist  
22 January 2019**

**Response**

(Addressing an enquiry about the Murray Cod Hatcheries)

The Defence Investigation into the nature and extent of PFAS at, and around, RAAF Base Wagga has confirmed that PFAS is leaving RAAF Base Wagga via the stormwater network, which drains into Gumly Gumly wetland near the Murray Cod Hatcheries. This has resulted in PFAS concentrations detected in both surface water and groundwater. The findings have been published on the Defence website in the Detailed Site Investigation Report and Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessment (HHERA) Report, and discussed with stakeholders during local Community Information Sessions. Defence is currently preparing a PFAS Management Area Plan which will consider management options to reduce the risks of PFAS exposure identified in the risk assessments. This plan is expected to be presented to the Wagga Wagga community during the second quarter of 2019.

Testing conducted as part of the environmental investigation at the Murray Cod Hatcheries has identified PFAS concentrations in finfish up to 103 times greater than the Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) trigger point for investigation for PFAS (5.2µg/kg). This information was used to inform the HHERA. Defence assessment of aquatic biota from Murray Cod Hatcheries only extended to analysis of PFAS concentrations. As noted in our previous response, there is limited information available about the effects of PFAS on ecology and the HHERA does not seek to assess the potential effects of PFAS on specific species. As such, the HHERA presents a focussed assessment of potential PFAS exposure risks to humans, and a screening level assessment of potential ecological risks.

All test results for samples collected from Murray Cod Hatcheries have been presented to the hatchery operator in person, to provide a factual explanation of test results and discuss next steps in the Defence investigation. NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) has also participated in this engagement.

Defence is not a health authority and as such does not provide specific health advice. Any questions relating to advice previously provided by NSW EPA or the NSW Department of Health are best addressed to these agencies directly. Similarly, Defence does not have jurisdiction to impose restrictions on the disposal of water from Murray Cod Hatcheries. As such, Defence is unable to comment on these claims.

The Australian Government Community Support Packages, comprised of the Voluntary Blood Testing Program, Epidemiological Study and additional dedicated mental health and counselling services, are being offered in the Williamstown, Oakey and Katherine investigation areas where the extent of PFAS contamination and the human exposure pathways (i.e. mainly through drinking water or food) are well understood. The Australian Government Department of Health is responsible for delivering these packages.

Given the different circumstances of each site, the Australian Government will consider whether an extension of the Community Support Package arrangements, including voluntary blood testing, is required on a site by site basis, as further evidence becomes available.

Please note that on an individual level, blood testing for PFAS is not recommended as there is insufficient evidence for a medical practitioner to be able to tell a person whether their blood level will make them sick now or later in life. It is also unable to tell you if any current health problems are related to the PFAS levels found in your blood or guide clinical management. If the potential exposure pathways can be identified, and eliminated or reduced, over time an individual's PFAS blood levels would be expected to decline.

The Voluntary Blood Testing Program is being run concurrently with the Epidemiological Study to improve the understanding of the potential health effects relating to PFAS exposure at a population level. While the study and associated voluntary blood testing are not focused on Wagga, the findings will be relevant to PFAS exposure in any region.

Further information on blood testing can be obtained from the Australian Government Department of Health by phoning 1800 941 180, emailing [health.pfas@health.gov.au](mailto:health.pfas@health.gov.au) or by visiting [www.health.gov.au/pfas](http://www.health.gov.au/pfas).