



Australian Government

Department of Health

Response to news articles regarding the Chair of PFAS Expert Health Panel

- On 24 July 2018, the Newcastle Herald and the Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) published news articles implying the Chair of the Expert Health Panel – Professor Nick Buckley – reluctantly participated in the work of the Panel and that he deemed himself not an expert.
- Professor Buckley wrote a letter of clarification to both the Newcastle Herald and SMH editors (see below). However, both media outlets declined to publish the letter.

LETTER OF CLARIFICATION

Dear Sir/Madam,

I write in response to the article published on 24th July in your paper, in respect of my chairing of the PFAS Expert Health Panel.

Some comments that I made at the start of the public meeting in Katherine have been misconstrued in your article. I did make clear that I have not previously been directly involved in PFAS research. I was asked to Chair the Panel as a doctor and academic expert in clinical toxicology, pharmacology and the rigorous evaluation of evidence. It was seen to be beneficial for the independent Chair of this Panel to have this background with the appropriate evaluation expertise, but without any preconceived views on PFAS itself. As I explained at the time (notably that next bit of the video was abruptly cut off), the panel also included several other independent panel members who have more expertise on the specific topic of PFAS. This covered occupational and environmental medicine and epidemiology, and an international expert on PFAS toxicology.

I was asked to and willingly agreed to undertake this role to ensure that independent scientific and medical evaluation in an Australian context could be provided to the community. The comments about being ‘dragged into the role’ were clearly self-deprecating. It is remarkable that some people apparently interpreted my comments literally. I regret that thereafter they have been used to question the serious work put in by all members of the Panel.

I believe that the Panel was highly qualified, comprised of an appropriate mix of experts and produced a valid scientific and strong report on the current state of evidence.

The conclusions of the panel on the evidence are in agreement with international agency reports and systematic reviews.

These reviews (including ours) consistently note that there are likely biological effects, and express concerns about possible health effects.

However, they also all agree that, despite there being many studies, there is not consistent evidence that any human diseases are definitely increased as a result of exposure.

Gross exaggeration of the risks beyond that for which there is evidence creates a lot of potentially unnecessary anxiety.

I understand some of the well intentioned motivations for doing this, but seriously question whether this ultimately serves the interests of the communities trying to deal with PFAS contamination.

Yours sincerely

Prof Nick Buckley,
Professor of Clinical Pharmacology, University of Sydney
Chair, PFAS Expert Health Panel.
