

**Response provided to journalist
28 October 2019**

Statement in regards to questions about the RAAF Base Amberley Investigation and blood testing.

Response:

Defence is undertaking a detailed environmental investigation into the nature and extent of PFAS at RAAF Base Amberley and in the surrounding area.

As part of the environmental investigation, a Detailed Site Investigation (DSI) has been completed. The DSI involved sampling of soil, sediment, surface and ground water to collect information and better understand how PFAS moves through the environment. The DSI report and a factsheet which summarises the findings are available on the Amberley investigation website: www.defence.gov.au/Environment/PFAS/amberley/publications.asp

In August 2019, Defence held a community information session to present the findings of the Human Health Risk Assessment (HHRA) for RAAF Base Amberley. The HHRA has assessed potential PFAS exposure risk scenarios for people within the Investigation Area. The HHRA Report and a factsheet which summarises the findings are available at: www.defence.gov.au/environment/pfas/Amberley/publications.asp

Sampling of fish as part of the HHRA, indicated there was a potentially elevated PFAS exposure risk from eating fish caught from the Bremer River and Warrill Creek. Queensland Health advice states not to consume fish caught from the Bremer River in areas adjacent to RAAF Base Amberley and downstream to Cribb Park and not to consume fish caught from Warrill Creek, adjacent to RAAF Base Amberley.

The Queensland Health advice was issued as a precaution and does not necessarily mean that PFAS levels are dangerous. The Australian Government's Expert Health Panel for PFAS found that, although the scientific evidence in humans is limited, reviews and scientific research to date have provided fairly consistent reports of an association with several health effects. The health effects reported in these associations are generally small and within normal ranges for the whole population. There is also limited to no evidence of human disease or other clinically significant harm resulting from PFAS exposure at this time. As a precaution, enHealth recommends exposure to PFAS be minimised wherever possible while further research is undertaken on the potential health effects of PFAS exposure.

Defence is now conducting an Ecological Risk Assessment which will evaluate potential PFAS exposure-risks for plants and animals within the Investigation Area. Defence will also publish an addendum to the HHRA, which will assess PFAS exposure-risks in the expanded part of the Investigation Area. These reports are expected to be published in the second quarter of 2020.

At the end of the investigation, Defence will use the findings to develop a PFAS Management Area Plan which will recommend actions to monitor and manage PFAS on and near RAAF Base Amberley.

Commencing in November 2016, the Australian Government offered a free blood test for PFAS to people who live or work, or who have lived or worked, in the Williamtown and Oakey investigation areas and who have potentially been exposed to PFAS. In March 2018, this program was extended to include the RAAF Base Tindal Investigation Area as part of a Government support package to the Katherine community.

On June 30 2019, the Australian Government's PFAS Voluntary Blood Testing Program concluded. More information about this program is available at: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-pfas-bloodtesting.htm>

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Human Health Risk Assessments for each of these sites, Williamtown, Oakey and Tindal, demonstrated that those communities had long-term, continuous exposure to PFAS across multiple exposure pathways, including drinking water sources used by residents being impacted by PFAS.

Throughout the investigation, Defence has sought information from residents within the RAAF Base Amberley Investigation Area to understand how people are using water including water use surveys. Defence is not aware of anyone in the Investigation Area currently using bore water for drinking purposes which is a primary pathway for PFAS exposure. No residents in the RAAF Base Amberley Investigation Area are receiving alternative water due to potential exposure through PFAS impacted drinking water.

The next community engagement event for RAAF Base Amberley is expected to occur in the second quarter of 2020 to present the final investigation reports including the Ecological Risk Assessment and the Human Health risk Assessment Addendum as well as the PFAS Management Area Plan.