About the Investigation

The Department of Defence is undertaking a long-term environmental investigation and assessment of the groundwater beneath the RAAF Base Williamtown site. The purpose of the investigation is to understand how the groundwater may have been impacted by the historical use of fire-fighting foams between 1970 and the late 2000s.

These historical formulations of aqueous film forming foams (AFFF) contained perfluorooctane sulphonate, known as PFOS, and perfluorooctanoic acid, known as PFOA.

In 2012, Defence commenced Stage 1 environmental sampling across the site. Stage 2 commenced in April 2014, sampling on-Base and off-Base.

The Stage 2 Environmental Investigation took samples of groundwater, surface water, soil, sediments and vegetation on and off the base. Aquatic and marine fauna samples were taken at some locations off the base.

Site investigations and assessments are continuing to identify the extent of the impacted area.

Defence continues to liaise with other Federal and State government departments in relation to the possible health and environmental effects of these compounds, recognising that those Federal and State agencies have statutory and policy responsibilities in these areas.

Sampling and testing

Sampling as part of the Stage 2 environmental investigation commenced in June 2014.

The sampling program comprised of:

- 230 soil samples
- 185 groundwater samples
- 20 surface water samples
- 35 sediment samples
- 30 vegetation samples
- 18 aquatic fauna sample

Keeping the community informed

Defence is committed to regularly updating the community throughout the investigation.

The project website will be updated as the investigation progresses. Community information sessions, direct mail and information sheets will occur as new information is identified.

Next Steps

If you live within the investigation area please complete the water usage survey and indicate if you would like your bore water tested. Defence will action these requests in a priority order, dependent on location within the investigation area and actual water usage.

Further assessment into the extent of contamination in the investigation area will continue in the coming months.
What are we testing for?

This investigation involves testing for PFOS and PFOA. These chemicals are present at RAAF Base Williamtown and in the surrounding area.

As well as their use in fire-fighting foams, PFOS and PFOA have been used for many years in a wide variety of common household and industrial products such as cleaning products, textiles, and paper and packaging products; they are present at trace levels throughout the environment.

PFOS and PFOA are ‘emerging contaminants’ and while extensive research into the possible health impacts of these chemicals is ongoing both in Australia and overseas, there are currently no conclusive links to health impacts.

Defence is actively engaged with industry professionals to review information from these studies and its relevance to the Environmental Investigation.