## **PFAS** INVESTIGATION AND MANAGEMENT PROGRAM



## HMAS Cerberus

### June 2024 – Program update

#### **Overview**

In October 2018, Defence completed investigations to better understand per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination on and around HMAS *Cerberus* resulting from historical use of firefighting foams on the base.

These investigations included a detailed investigation of groundwater, surface water and sediment, on and around the base.

The investigations found that PFAS is mostly concentrated in areas where firefighting foams were previously used, stored or disposed of. These are commonly referred to as source areas. At HMAS *Cerberus*, seven source areas were identified.

The fire training ground was determined as the main source area on the base, with the other six areas considered low risk due to low PFAS concentrations in soil within these areas.

Findings from the investigations were used to develop a PFAS management area plan. This plan outlines actions to manage and reduce the risk of PFAS exposure for the community living and working at HMAS *Cerberus* and surrounding areas. This included remediation of the fire training ground to reduce the amount of PFAS leaving the base. Remediation at the other six low risk areas was deemed not practical.

Defence has completed the actions set out in the PFAS management area plan. An independent technical advisor, who is an appointed environmental auditor by the Environment Protection Authority Victoria, is currently evaluating the actions undertaken and will develop a remediation determination report.

#### **Program timeline**



#### What are PFAS?

PFAS are manufactured chemicals that have been used in Australia, and globally, in many common household products and specialty applications.

Legacy firefighting foams containing PFAS have historically been used worldwide by both civilian and military authorities because they are effective in fighting liquid fuel fires.

The movement of PFAS from source areas into the environment has become a concern because these chemicals can persist in humans, animals and the environment.

#### Australian Government Defence

# **PFAS** INVESTIGATION AND MANAGEMENT PROGRAM



#### **Remediation activities**

In April 2023, Defence completed remediation of the former fire training ground. Infrastructure from the area was dismantled and 15,000 m<sup>3</sup> of PFAS-impacted soil and concrete were placed in a purpose-built containment cell on the base.

The cell has a base liner, capping layers and a leachate collection system. Over time the remediation will reduce the amount of PFAS migrating from the base in surface and groundwater.



While it is not possible to remove all PFAS from the environment, Defence anticipates that over time, the remediation works will reduce PFAS leaving HMAS *Cerberus* by 80%.



#### Containment cell under construction at HMAS Cerberus

#### **Ongoing monitoring**

Ongoing monitoring of surface and groundwater is an important part of PFAS management at HMAS *Cerberus*. This sampling helps Defence understand changes to where PFAS has been found, and the levels of contamination in the environment.

Ongoing monitoring on and around HMAS *Cerberus* is undertaken each year in May and November.

Monitoring will continue now that remediation has been completed. This will allow changes to be identified, and if further action is required. Defence also anticipates that monitoring over time will also show the effects of remediation.

The results of the monitoring are regularly reviewed. Based on these reviews, Defence updates the monitoring frequency and/or locations of sampling, or takes action as required.

Defence shares all monitoring results with Environment Protection Authority Victoria and publishes results in an ongoing monitoring report and factsheet on the Defence website.

#### Number of samples collected and analysed

Groundwater	Groundwater is water beneath the earth's surface. It often supplies bores, wells or springs.	50 samples collected from 54 groundwater monitoring locations (on and off base).
Surface water	Surface water is water that collects on the ground and can be in the form of creeks, rivers, lakes, wetlands, oceans and more.	28 samples collected from 33 surface water locations (on and off base).

#### Latest monitoring results

Results from November 2023 sampling found:

- no first time detections of PFAS at monitoring locations
- concentrations of PFAS identified were generally consistent with previous monitoring results.

Investigations completed in 2018 found the exposure risk from PFAS to community members was low. The latest monitoring results indicate there is no change in risk to community members.

# **PFAS** INVESTIGATION AND MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

SERVICE COURAGE RESPECT INTEGRITY EXCELLENCE

#### **Next steps**

Defence has completed the actions set out in the PFAS management are plan, including remediation.

While low levels of PFAS remain in surface water and groundwater, the human health risk to the community is low. Defence will continue to monitor PFAS on and around the base, and take further action if required.

The technical advisor will complete their evaluation of completed actions to determine if remediation has been completed to the extent practicable. This will be documented in a remediation determination report.

In the future Defence:

- will continue monitoring surface water and groundwater on and around HMAS Cerberus, with the next round of sampling scheduled to occur in November 2024
- will continue publishing monitoring results on the Defence website
- will implement an updated long term management plan that outlines how Defence will continue to manage PFAS on and around the base. The technical advisor will verify this plan and Defence will provide a copy to the Environment Protection Authority Victoria for their review.

Defence has consulted with the Environment Protection Authority Victoria throughout the program, and will continue to keep them informed.

If future monitoring results indicate changes to Defence's understanding of PFAS on and around the base, Defence will respond and take appropriate action.

### Looking for more information?



Scan the QR code below to find out more about Defence's PFAS Investigation and Management program, or visit: www.defence.gov.au/pfas/



#### Alternatively, you can contact:



1800 333 362



pfas.enquiry@defence.gov.au

#### **Media enquiries**

Media enquiries should be directed to the Defence Media Centre on (02) 6217 1999 or via email at media@defence.gov.au

## Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National)



For translation assistance, TIS National provides interpreting services 24 hours a day via telephone from anywhere in Australia for the cost of a local call\*.

For more information contact **131 450** or visit: <u>www.tisnational.gov.au/</u>

\*Calls from mobile phones may attract a higher rate.

PFAS INVESTIGATION AND SERVICE COURAGE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Australian Government

