

Endorsed Minutes

19 January 2017

Meeting: Williamtown Contamination Investigation Community Reference Group (CRG)

Date: 19 January 2017

Location: Newcastle Airport Boardroom Time: 3.45m to 6.45pm

Number: 1701

Chairperson: Jodie Calvert | Principal Coordinator | Department of Premier and Cabinet

Secretariat: Cheryl Clarke | Senior Coordination Officer | Department of Premier and Cabinet

Attendees: Glenda Briggs | Regional Manager | Department of Primary Industries
 Marcus Jeffery | Estate and Infrastructure | Department of Defence
 Air Commodore Craig Heap | Department of Defence
 Adam Gilligan Regional Director North | Environment Protection Authority (EPA)
 Karen Marler | Manager Hunter Region | EPA
 Evelina Hendry | Senior Stakeholder & Communications Officer | EPA
 Dr Karl Bowles | Office of Environment and Heritage
 Kathy Kent | Department of Human Services
 Chris Birrer | First Assistant Secretary | Department of Defence
 Vicki Pearce | PFAS Branch | Department of Defence
 Helen Horn | Department of Defence
 Garbis Avakian | PFAS Branch | Department of Defence
 Wayne Wallis | General Manager | Port Stephens Council
 Dr Kat Taylor | Hunter New England Local Health District
 Darren Cleary | Hunter Water
 Nick Marshall | Salt Ash Community First
 Don Burgoyne | NSW Farmer's Association | Community Member & Oyster Farmer
 Lyndsay Clout | Fullerton Cove Resident
 Kim Smith | Salt Ash Community First
 Robert Gauta | Manager, Commercial Fishermen's Coop
 Cain Gorfine | Williamtown and Surrounds Residents Action Group
 Katie Price | Intern | EPA Career Trackers Program
 Flight Lieutenant Donna Watts-Endresz | Staff Officer to Air Commodore Heap

Apologies Scot MacDonald | Parliamentary Secretary for Hunter and Central Coast
 Dr David Durrheim | Hunter New England Local Health District
 Sarah Davis | Project Officer | Department of Defence
 Cindy Toms Health Protection Policy Branch | Department of Health (Cmwth)
 Justin Hamilton | Fullerton Cove Action Group & Williamtown Salt Ash Flood Group
 Phil Blanch | Community Member and Fisher's Representative

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Cornelius Disselkoen | Maria's Vegetable Farm | Community Member

Andrew Smith | CEO Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council | Community Member

Mark Salm | NSW Farmer's Association | Community Member & Oyster Farmer

Attendees

Cain Gorfine noted that agency personnel beyond CRG nominated members were in attendance and questioned the purpose of their involvement in the meeting. He requested that rules be enforced regarding attendance and that notice be provided to all members. The Chair noted that approval was sought and granted for the attendance of Dr Karl Bowles to present on air monitoring, Katie Price EPA Intern as an observer and for the CRG to meet Flight Lieutenant Watts-Endresz, the new Staff Officer to Air Commodore Heap.

The Chair noted that DPC is sometimes not advised of who will be attending and will raise this issue with the agencies out of session.

Number	Action Item	Responsible	Due Date
1701-1	CRG community members to advise DPC whether the 2.2.17 is suitable for the Lake Cochran Tour	All	completed
1701-2	Defence to clarify sampling programs and circulate information to the community by letter box drop	Defence	24.2.17
1701-3	Agencies to update the CRG Roadmap with actions and timelines and return to DPC by 1 February	All agencies	1.2.17
1701-4	DPC to circulate EPA and Dr Karl Bowles' presentations to CRG members	DPC	completed
1701-5	EPA to prepare and circulate a plain-English version of the report by Dr Karl Bowles	EPA	24.2.17

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Meeting minutes

1. Endorsement of Minutes – 17 November 2016

Minutes of 17 November endorsed out of session and circulated.

2. Actions List

1613-10 Defence has held further discussions with the big 4 banks and peak groups to build awareness of the progress of investigations and to try and clarify the existence of any policy on lending. Defence is seeking an appropriate contact at each lending institution that the community can approach when they experience lending issues locally. DPC advised that agencies such as EPA have been able to support individuals experiencing lending difficulties with a bank/building society (where such difficulties are directly linked to the Williamstown contamination) by providing an explanatory letter in certain circumstances to provide to the bank. DPC will seek to engage with building societies given their relatively high market share in residential lending. The CRG acknowledged that ultimately lending institutions will make their own commercial decisions.

1613-15 The CRG reinforced to Defence that the recommendation for a Future Fund seeks to protect the community against exposure to future and unforeseen costs arising from the contamination. This could relate to further testing being required for residential/commercial developments or future remediation works. This was originally raised in the September 2016 meeting.

1615-6 Defence advised that the Lake Cochran Water Treatment Plant (WTP) has completed the optimisation process and commenced removing PFAS from the water in Lake Cochran prior to its outflow into Dawsons Drain. The WTP is removing PFAS from the environment; allowing room within Lake Cochran for heavy rain events; and reducing migration of contaminated water coming off the base. Defence continues to work with other agencies to find a long term solution for Lake Cochran. A tour of the WTP to be held on 2 February 2017 was offered to the CRG members.

CRG community members to advise DPC whether this date is suitable by cob 23 January 2017

1616-6 Associate Professor Martyn Kirk was to be available on teleconference for discussion with the CRG. However, there were difficulties in contacting Dr Kirk and an update on the epidemiological study was unable to be provided to the CRG.

3. CRG Roadmap

Water Reticulation Program

Defence continues to work with Hunter Water to deliver a safe and reliable connection to the town water reticulation network for residents within the investigation area and to those where the street is divided by the investigation area boundary.

Agreement has been reached for Defence to fund Hunter Water to consult with residents regarding their private plumbing and connection to the reticulated water network. Hunter Water will assess the works required to private plumbing to allow a safe and reliable connection to the reticulated water network and implement any works required to achieve this.

The delivery of infrastructure to the Salt Ash area will commence in January 2017.

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Lindsay Clout expressed the view that there is a need to recognise the urgency for this work to be completed given the elevated PFAS readings in blood being detected in local residents. He also reiterated the need to consider the voices of residents outside of the investigation area that are currently excluded from the reticulation program. This is specifically relevant to Fullerton Cove where residents who have followed precautions have elevated blood levels. Decisions to connect residents to the town water reticulation network should not be based on whether there has been a detect or not on a property. Lindsay Clout and Chris Birrer to speak off line about an individual resident's situation so that Defence can pursue discussions with the individual concerned.

Dr Kat Taylor noted the importance of remembering that if there is historical exposure then due to the long half-life, PFAS will still be detectable in the blood many years later. It is anticipated that the epidemiological study will attempt to correlate exposure and blood levels, however, linking exposure to health risk will be much more difficult. Whilst a 'normal' PFAS range is not available in Australia or internationally, the Commonwealth Department of Health website provides information on general population data to assist general practitioners to interpret blood test results in post-test consultations.

Moors Drain

Defence advised that more work is to be completed for the functional assessment and a copy of the report, when finalised, will be made available to the community.

Additional Sampling

Defence clarified that there are currently two sampling programs being conducted simultaneously:

- (i) Annual residential sampling of bores/tanks - residents involved in previous sampling of their bores/tanks will be approached for a further sample to be taken with the exception of bores that are no longer being used for drinking. Defence will seek signed permission to access the property and request permission to use the data for inclusion in reports. Residential sampling will still be undertaken and results provided to the property owner even if permission is not given for the broader use of the data.
- (ii) Additional testing for the Environmental Investigation – Defence may seek permission to access properties and take samples to fill in data gaps in the Human Health Risk Assessment. Defence will seek signed permission to access the property. Environmental Investigation testing will only be conducted where permission is given by the property owner to use the data for reports.

Cain Gorfine noted activity around Cabbage Tree Road and requested Defence conduct a letter box drop to inform residents what is occurring with sampling activities.

Defence to clarify sampling programs and circulate a newsletter to the community by letter box drop

Vicki Pearce noted the commencement of research on base into the uptake of PFAS in fruit and vegetables. The research will consider PFAS absorption in different types of fruit and vegetables including exposure to varying levels of contaminated water through irrigation. Defence is also conducting research into the uptake of PFAS in eggs. This research is being conducted in Oakey, but the results will be applicable to the Williamstown area. Similar to the research into fruit and vegetables, exposure to various levels of contaminated water will be considered.

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Cain thought the community would be interested in this research and requested that the information also be included in the newsletter.

All agencies to update the CRG Roadmap with actions and timelines and return to DPC by 1 February 2017

4. Discussion Items

4.1 Drain Sampling Program

Karen Marler advised that the sampling program in and around the drainage network located in the areas of Williamstown, Fullerton Cove and Salt Ash areas has been completed. This is to better understand the impact of PFAS in the drains and banks prior to mechanical weed clearance by the Office of Environment and Heritage as part of the Hunter Valley Flood Mitigation Scheme. A copy of the laboratory results was circulated to CRG members and will be uploaded to the EPA website. The sampling results showed that PFOS was the dominant PFAS in drains, PFAS in vegetation was lower than in soil bank samples; PFAS in sediments ranged from below the laboratory limit to the highest at Dawson's drain.

Following analysis of the samples, it was concluded that:

- the overall benefits of clearing the drains are likely to be greater than any additional risks caused by disturbing the PFAS in contaminated drains;
- whilst clearing may cause an increase in the flux of PFAS to Fullerton Cove and Tilligerry Creek, it is not likely to be significantly different from that which has occurred over the period of time contamination from the Base has taken place.
- Sediment spoil contains higher levels of PFAS than surrounding soils and will need to be disposed of to a licensed landfill facility rather than be placed on the banks. A waste management plan will be required for this work and can be made available to the CRG.

A communication plan will be developed ahead of mechanical weed clearing.

Cain Gorfine complimented the EPA on an excellent data report.

Council noted that they follow the same protocol as OEH regarding drain management and waste management.

DPC to circulate EPA presentation on drain sampling to CRG members

4.2 Air Monitoring Request

Karen Marler provided background information regarding the community's concerns that dust inhalation might be a possible exposure pathway given elevated levels of PFAS being found in residents' blood tests. Whilst EPA has confidence in the Human Health Risk Assessment that air is a very low and acceptable risk, they took on board the community's concern and brought together a group of experts who requested Office of Environment and Heritage Science Division to:

- Consider whether volatile PFASs present sufficient risk to justify monitoring
- Refine the risk assessment already undertaken by incorporating available monitoring data for particulate concentrations in area and using worst case scenarios of PFAS concentrations in soil
- Refine the risk assessment undertaken for the incidental ingestion of indoor soil/dust using worst case scenarios of PFAS concentrations in soil as for dust inhalation
- Use the results of the refined risk assessment calculations to inform if ambient air monitoring for PFAS is required

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- Investigate whether laboratories exist in Australia or worldwide, with appropriate capabilities and experience in measuring either particulate or volatile PFAS in air.

Dr Bowles, Science Division, Office of Environment and Heritage provided a presentation to the CRG which outlined the results of the re-assessment; how risks are calculated; how exposure to PFAS from the air occurs; what is relevant for Williamtown and what the results of the risk assessment mean.

Key points from the presentation:

- Some PFASs aren't charged so they are volatile and can exist in air. These chemicals are not used in the foams used at Williamtown.
- An assessment of the type of PFASs used in firefighting foams found that these PFASs do not evaporate to form a gas but can exist in the air attached to air-borne particles. For this reason, OEH only considered PFAS attached to particles (such as PFOS and PFOA) in their calculations.
- Volatile PFASs are likely to be no higher in the investigation area than other locations in Australia.
- Live data from six air monitoring sites across the lower hunter was reviewed with the highest readings from Stockton used given its location for exposure to wind-blown sand and coal mine dust.
- The modelling assumed constant exposure at the highest level 24hrs p/d /365 days p/a.
- The re-assessment found that the risk from inhalation exposure to soil-derived dust is extremely low and the risk from incidental ingestion of contaminated soil and dust (eg on household surfaces) is low.
- These findings are consistent with the findings of the Human Health Risk Assessment (AECOM 2016) regarding exposure risks. Consequently, air quality monitoring for PFAS in the Williamtown Investigation area is not required to further inform understanding of exposure and risk.
- No laboratories were identified in Australia or overseas with NATA accredited methods (or equivalent) for quantifying PFASs in air.
- CSIRO has previously developed, in conjunction with a commercial laboratory in New Zealand, sampling and analysis methods for PFAS in ambient air and applied these at locations around Australia.

DPC to circulate presentation to CRG members

EPA to prepare and circulate a plain English Information Sheet for the community.

4.3 CRG Review

Jodie Calvert circulated a summary document of the CRG Review Report. As the CRG Review report is still in draft and considered confidential, the summary document is not to be circulated outside of the CRG. The final draft report has been provided to the Assessment Panel (DPC, Defence, EPA and Lindsay Clout, community member) who will convene and finalise the report by mid-February. The Assessment Panel hopes to present to the CRG at the March meeting.

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5. Information Items

5.1 Table of questions from Salt Ash Community First

The Chair noted that the list of questions from Salt Ash Community First and Williamtown Surrounds Reference Group were referred to agencies for response and a completed table with responses circulated to CRG members ahead of the meeting. The Chair explained the reason for question 19 not being answered related to the tone of the question and the allegation within it which is representative of ongoing inappropriate communication over some time.

The Chair noted that there have been many instances of discourteous and defamatory language displayed within emails by some CRG community representatives, often with those being sent to local MPs and the media. The chair acknowledged the frustration and emotions of community members but considered that if the CRG is to continue it must do so in a respectful and collaborative way which is seen to be valuable to the community. The Chair noted her tolerance of full and frank discussions within the meetings but, as a CRG member, all representatives should understand the need to apply courtesy when communicating with others, most especially when sending broadcast emails.

Representatives from Salt Ash Community First and Williamtown and Surrounds Reference Group responded to the Chair. Nick Marshall noted his professionalism was not up to scratch. He referred to his profession as a truck driver and advised he is not a paid professional trained to control his emotions. Don Burgoyne noted that the issue had nothing to do with being a truck driver but more so the need to apply courtesy. Cain noted he would prefer to have impassioned people on the CRG and believes disrespect comes from delays by agencies.

All comments were noted and accepted by the Chair with the offer for further discussion outside of the meeting if members believed this needed to occur.

6 General Business

Blood tests for health checks

CRG noted the advice from the Commonwealth Department of Health that if a GP wishes to request testing for other conditions that may be clinically indicated, they can do so under the usual Medicare Benefit Schedule arrangements.

7. Future meetings:

Consideration will be given to the CRG meeting date following confirmation of the arrangements for the Tour of Lake Cochran.

Meeting closed: 6.45pm

Next meeting:

to be advised