

Endorsed Minutes 17 November 2016

Meeting:	Williamtown Contamination Investigation Community Reference Group (CRG)		
Date:	17 November 2016		
Location:	Newcastle Airport Boardroom	Time: 3.30pm to 6.15pm	
Number:	1616		
Chairperson:	Jodie Calvert Principal Coordinator Department of Premier and Cabinet		
Secretariat:	Cheryl Clarke Senior Coordination Officer Department of Premier and Cabinet		
Attendees:	Marcus Jeffery Estate and Infrastructure Department of Defence Sarah Davis Project Officer Department of Defence Lauren Bourke Senior Operations Officer EPA Evelina Hendry Senior Stakeholder & Communications Officer EPA Wayne Wallis General Manager Port Stephens Council Cindy Toms Health Protection Policy Branch Department of Health (Cmwth) (by phone for item 4.1) Dr Tony Merritt Hunter New England Local Health District Darren Cleary Hunter Water Justin Hamilton Fullerton Cove Action Group & Williamtown Salt Ash Flood Group Lyndsay Clout Fullerton Cove Resident Kim Smith Salt Ash Community First Robert Gauta Manager, Commercial Fishermen’s Coop Rhianna Gorfine President, Williamtown and Surrounds Residents Action Group		
Apologies	Scot MacDonald Parliamentary Secretary for Hunter and Central Coast Air Commodore Craig Heap Department of Defence Dr David Durrheim Hunter New England Local Health District Glenda Briggs Regional Manager Department of Primary Industries Adam Gilligan Regional Director North Environment Protection Authority (EPA) Karen Marler A/Manager Hunter Region EPA Kathy Kent Department of Human Services Nick Marshall Salt Ash Community First Don Burgoyne NSW Farmer’s Association Community Member & Oyster Farmer Phil Blanch Community Member and Fisher’s Representative 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 Cain Gorfine Williamtown and Surrounds Residents Action Group		

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Number	Action Item	Responsible	Due Date
1616-1	EPA to advise CRG of the last meeting date of the Expert Panel	EPA	30.11.16
1616-2	EPA to request an inclusion to the seafood precautionary advice table of 'caught in the Hunter River'	EPA	30.11.16
1616-3	Defence to advise the CRG when the Lake Cochran Water Treatment Plan is optimised	Defence	15.12.16
1616-4	Defence to followup on progress and respond directly to the resident concerned	Defence	22.11.16 Out of session
1616-5	DPC to recirculate current and previous roadmap versions for any feedback from CRG	DPC	completed
1616-6	Commonwealth Health to attend the next CRG meeting and to request a representative from the ANU to attend the next CRG meeting to report on progress of the epidemiological study	Comm Health	19.1.17
1616-7	Distribute Drain Sampling Communication Strategy	DPC	completed
1616-8	Distribute copy of PSC letter from the Office of Local Government to CRG	DPC	completed
1616-9	Provide advice on results of air monitoring considerations to the CRG out of session	EPA	ASAP
1616-10	Ascertain process and timelines for the Expert Panel to comment on Ecological Risk Assessment and finalisation by Defence	EPA	5.12.16

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Meeting minutes

1. Endorsement of Minutes – 20 October 2016

Include community request and action item for Defence to provide an update on the water reticulation program at the next CRG meeting.

Minutes of 20 October endorsed with amendment.

2. Actions List

1615-1 The Expert Panel has been extended to 30 June 2017. A meeting will be held soon and the terms of reference reviewed and updated.

EPA to advise CRG of the last meeting date of the Expert Panel

1615-5 Feedback from the Expert Panel on the inclusion of King Prawn in the seafood dietary table was emailed to CRG. Advice was '*King Prawn can occasionally be captured in the estuaries and all of the advice is specific to seafood captured directly in the specified areas, not elsewhere, so it is unlikely that people might think differently for King Prawn. Consequently, given that the advice provided is precautionary, and already public knowledge (including on the distributed flyers), changes at this stage were not considered to be justified*'. Rob Gauta noted the rarity of catching king prawns in the Hunter River; the possibility of reaching the stated consumption level being zero and the high potential for reputational damage to ocean harvested king prawns. He requested the reference to king prawn be removed or the inclusion of the statement 'caught in the Hunter River'.

EPA to request an inclusion to the seafood precautionary advice table of 'caught in the Hunter River'

1615-6 Defence advised that a tour of the Lake Cochran Water Treatment Plant facility will be considered once the plant is fully commissioned. It is still undergoing optimization and is expected to be operational by the end of November 2016.

Defence to advise the CRG when the Lake Cochran Water Treatment Plan is optimized

1615-9 Darren Cleary advised that the Water Reticulation program for residences within the investigation area remains on target for completion by June 2017. Fullerton Cove is completed; the contract for delivery of infrastructure to Salt Ash is expected to be awarded before Christmas; and the design for Nelson Bay Road will be completed by February 2017. Marcus Jeffrey advised that Defence and Hunter Water are finalising arrangements for Hunter Water to connect residents' private plumbing to reticulated water on behalf of Defence. It is envisaged that private plumbing arrangements will be in place by the time Salt Ash residents are being connected to town water supply.

Lindsay Clout raised the situation of a resident outside of the investigation area that has an increased second test result in their tank. Defence advised that they have been in regular personal contact with the resident and a solution is being progressed. Matters relating to individuals are to be discussed and progressed outside of the CRG meeting.

Defence to followup on progress and respond directly to the resident concerned

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Justin Hamilton noted that a roadmap is required to canvass actions that respond to issues such as the migratory nature of the contamination. He suggested a summary be developed of what has occurred so far which could illustrate gaps. The Chair agreed and noted the importance of a strategic plan to be developed and will consider a way forward.

3. CRG Roadmap

The Ecological Risk assessment is expected to be completed by mid-December 2016. DPC has reworked the Roadmap to remove completed actions and to focus on current agencies' activities over the short (0-6mths), medium (6-12mths) and long term (beyond 12mths). A copy of the revised roadmap has been distributed to the CRG for feedback.

DPC to recirculate current and previous roadmap versions for any feedback from CRG

4. Discussion Items

4.1 Blood testing Program/Epidemiological Study

Cindy Toms, Commonwealth Department of Health, provided a progress report on the Australian Government's voluntary blood testing program. Key points included:

- The Department is negotiating with a supplier to put the program in place within the next few weeks. This is part of normal government procurement processes that apply to both Commonwealth and State governments where departments are required to ensure that tendering activities achieve best value for money in supporting the delivery of services.
- The process is likely to resemble having any other blood test. A person will visit their GP for a referral to a preferred provider and then return to the GP for the results of the blood test. Dr Merritt noted the importance of GPs having contextual information to inform discussions with patients and is awaiting the Commonwealth Government's guidance on pre- and post-blood test counselling.
- The cost of the blood test will be met by the Commonwealth and no payment is required from community members.
- The blood tests will be offered to any person that has ever lived or worked within the investigation area, regardless of their current situation.
- The community will be informed through local and national media (newspaper and radio) as well as through the Commonwealth Primary Care network and the CRG community network when the program is ready to be rolled out.

There was discussion around the different commonwealth and state government positions on the role of blood testing. NSW Health's position remains that individual blood test results are presently unable to inform clinical management, including diagnosis, treatment or prognosis in terms of increased risk of particular health conditions over time and are difficult to interpret. Cindy agreed that there is no prognostic tool available but the Commonwealth government has responded to requests by some residents to have the test.

Cindy noted that the Australian National University (ANU) is developing a protocol for the epidemiological study. The Chair noted that it will be important for the community to have an understanding of the methodology and engagement strategies by the ANU.

Commonwealth Health to attend the next CRG meeting and to

request a representative from the ANU to attend the next CRG meeting to report on progress of the epidemiological study.

4.2 Drain Sampling Program

EPA distributed a map which outlines the area covered under drain sampling program. It is anticipated that the program will be conducted between 28 November and 9 December 2016, weather permitting. A communication plan has been developed and includes:

Phase 1 – identification of stakeholders nearby, identification of locations where access to private property will be required, contact with stakeholders to discuss access options.

Phase 2 – communication with residents including letter box drop, personal contact by phone 24 hrs before sampling activity at their location.

Phase 3 – following completion of sampling, the CRG and stakeholders will be advised that it is completed and details of the methodology for the full drain clearing program by OEH will be presented to the CRG.

Timing for the drain clearing program will be dependent on the results of the analysis and formulation of the management response. As a result, drain cleaning is not expected to occur until around February 2017.

Distribute Drain Sampling Communication Strategy to CRG

4.3 Correspondence on rates waivers

Wayne Wallis has provided a copy of a letter from the Office of Local Government to Port Stephens Council which formalises previous advice that the Local Government Act 1993 does not provide an option for waiving of rates.

Distribute copy of PSC letter from the Office of Local Government to CRG

4.4 Feedback on Walk-in session 2.11.16

There was general discussion on the community walk-in session held on 2 November 2016. Comments included:

- The different format was well received by community.
- There could be benefit in having a community representative table to give community members someone to recognise and provide referral information to the agency tables.
- Significant community interest in Commonwealth Government initiatives and the need to ensure they participate at future walk-in sessions.
- The venue of the Murook Culture Centre was well received, in particular, parking, access and location.
- Walk-in sessions should not be restricted to only occurring when there is new information. They also provide valuable opportunities for people to ask more questions or for those who were unable to attend previous sessions.

4.5 CRG Review

Judy Harwood, JC Harwood Consulting, gave a presentation to the CRG on progress of the review. Judy utilised four key methods to gain insight into the current CRG process including surveys, interviews, focus groups and research. She

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also attended a CRG meeting and the walk-in session on 2 November. A draft report will be forwarded to the CRG Review Assessment Panel for consideration.

5. Information Items

5.1 Seafood Campaign stage 2

Robert Gauta noted good progress is being made with Port Stephens Council and it is anticipated the campaign will be ready for the Christmas season.

5.2 Department of Primary Industries November update (distributed by email to CRG members)

Ongoing support for fishers

Commonwealth Department of Human Services has issued updated information on the finalisation of payments to fishers impacted by the closures in place until 31 September 2016. Whilst all fishers are now able to return to work some commercial fishers rely significantly on flathead catches from the Hunter River (including Fullerton Cove). DPI has asked Defence to identify if additional financial support can be provided to those fishers. With the reopening of commercial fishing, DPI has responded to fishers requests to defer the proposed final component of the fully subsidised training package for Fishers. The aim of this training is to help fishers acquire additional skills to become more resilient to impacts including natural disasters, pollution events, markets and regulations.

Informing key groups of the changes

The precautionary dietary advice is relevant to very specific groups, rather than those who may occasionally use local boat ramps. NSW DPI subsequently identified that direct, targeted communication approaches were the most appropriate. In addition to the initial media releases and web-based information, DPI developed and distributed a flier setting out the changes to fishing closures and recommended dietary advice to all local residents by letter box drop as well as to local tackle/ bait stores. NSW DPI also attended the community walk in event on 2 November to answer community and recreational fisher's inquiries about the changes. DPI staff will also continue to alert local fishers and local fishing groups. NSW DPI continues to keep local commercial fishers informed about the commercial closures and dietary advice via multiple channels, including meetings, newsletters and ongoing contact with DPI commercial fishers Liaison Officer, Joshua Foster.

Sale of cattle and Food Authority regulations

- There are no restrictions on the sale of cattle in relation to PFAS in NSW or Qld.
- The National EnHealth Guidelines established recommended TDI for PFAS and the Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) is subsequently reviewing health based guidance values for PFAS to assist jurisdictions manage food related matters associated with affected sites and to be used as the basis for any possible future control measures. This work will continue for an extended period (until at least late 2017)
- NSW Food Authority is normally advised of the FSANZ proposal before any change to the Food Standards Code is gazetted, but until then we cannot predict what might be decided.
- FSANZ's work may establish Minimum Residue Limits for various food products - or they may adopt non-regulatory management approaches.

6 General Business

The CRG acknowledged community anxiety around recent media reporting of PFAS levels detected in blood. Blood testing has been the trigger. The community noted it

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has placed community members into the public spotlight and emphasised the slow progress of government response. The message to the government has now become – Stop the leak, clean up the mess and heal the people.

The community reiterated their request for PFAS testing of air as they have received advice that people who have taken all precautionary measures have high levels of PFAS in blood. Lauren Bourke noted the EPA position that the current modelling and data do not support dust as a significant exposure pathway, however, EPA understands the community concerns and will consider possible options. EPA is not aware of nationally approved standards for measuring PFAS in air.

Provide advice on results of air monitoring considerations to the CRG out of session

The Ecological Risk Assessment is due to be completed by mid December 2016. The report will be provided to the Expert Panel for comment.

Ascertain process and timelines for the Expert Panel to comment on Ecological Risk Assessment and finalisation by Defence

7. Future meetings: Depending on timelines for finalization of the ERA and considerations around air monitoring, a meeting may not occur in December 2016. Any progress or issues arising can be communicated to CRG out of session.

Meeting closed: 6.15pm

Next meeting: The next meeting will be held on 19 January 2017 from 3.30pm to 6.00pm.