

Endorsed Minutes

20 October 2016

Meeting: Williamtown Contamination Investigation Community Reference Group (CRG)

Date: 20 October 2016

Location: Newcastle Airport Boardroom Time: 4.10pm to 6.00pm

Number: 1615

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
 Air Commodore Craig Heap | Department of Defence
 Sarah Davis | Project Officer | 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
 Evelina Hendry | Senior Stakeholder & Communications Officer | EPA
 Kathy Kent | Department of Human Services
 Mike McIntosh | Port Stephens Council
 Don Burgoyne | NSW Farmer's Association | Community Member & Oyster Farmer
 Phil Blanch | Community Member and Fisher's Representative
 Lyndsay Clout | Fullerton Cove Resident
 Nick Marshall | Salt Ash Community First
 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
 Justin Hamilton | Fullerton Cove Action Group & Williamtown Salt Ash Flood Group
 Wayne Wallis | General Manager | Port Stephens Council
 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

Endorsed Minutes

Number	Action Item	Responsible	Due Date
1615-1	DPC to write to the Office of the Chief Scientist requesting information on Expert Panel's future focus and how best to communicate with the CRG	DPC	4.11.16
1615-2	Defence to provide timeline for Item 2.4 in the CRG Roadmap	Defence	2.11.16
1615-3	Robert Gauta and DPI to provide information on the Campaign stages for distribution to the fishers	Gauta/DPI	2.11.16
1615-4	DPI to provide a copy of the finalised Information Flyer to DPC Chair and Secretariat for circulation to the CRG	DPI/DPC	2.11.16
1615-5	DPI to provide feedback to the Expert Panel re: the inclusion of King Prawn in the seafood dietary table	DPI	28.10.16
1615-6	Defence to consider the CRG community request for a tour of the Lake Cochran Water Treatment Plant	Defence	8.11.16
1615-7	Circulate Commonwealth Health presentation to CRG, when available	DPC	completed
1615-8	Recirculate Fact Sheet on Voluntary Blood Testing program	Defence	2.11.16
1615-9	Defence to provide an update on the Water Reticulation Program at the next CRG meeting	Defence	17.11.16

Endorsed Minutes

Meeting minutes

1. Endorsement of Minutes – 22 September 2016

Amend Fisherman's Coop to Fishermen's Coop

Minutes of 22 September endorsed with amendment.

2. Actions List

1612-3 EPA advised that information on the preliminary sampling activities will be distributed to the community next week by way of letter box drop.

1613-5 Lindsay advised that a decision on release of a US EPA report he referred to in support of Nick Marshall's request for air monitoring has not been made as the Fullerton Cove Group committee has not met since the last CRG meeting. Lindsay considered that the FCG has intellectual property over the document as it was sourced by their researcher. Adam Gilligan requested the name or link to the report given it appears to refute the Expert Panel's view. Lindsay indicated that it was a matter for the EPA and Expert Panel to find relevant reports.

1613-10,15 Marcus Jeffery advised that questions around the establishment of a Future Fund and provision of loans have been escalated within the commonwealth government.

1614-1 (by email) Hunter Water advised that the water reticulation project remains on track for completion by June 2017. Water reticulation in Fullerton Cove is now available with three properties connected; two properties with private pipework installed and awaiting connection; and ten properties having submitted a connection application to Hunter Water. Design work for Salt Ash is complete and tenders for construction of the work have been called.

1614-4 Jodie Calvert noted that further discussions had been held with Justin Hamilton. Jodie also advised that she had been contacted by the Commonwealth Bank Government Section who advised that the Bank did not have a blanket policy to withhold lending in the area. A copy of the Bank's response to the recent Senate Inquiry into Banking is expected to be made available to Jodie. Lindsay was advised that a resident's property valuation was cancelled as the property's address was included in the National Australia Bank's Exclusion List. Jodie advised that a subgroup of representatives from Defence, EPA and DPC is considering how best to progress discussions on lending with local banking and mortgage services.

1614-7 The EPA has updated its advice and advised Port Stephens Council that water management plans are not required for minor Development Applications in the Williamstown Investigation Area. It will be a matter for Council to decide if the updated guidelines will apply to development consents already issued. Lindsay advised that Justin will provide to the Chair information on costs associated with remediation activities for Development Applications.

1614-8 The Chief Scientist has extended the Expert Panel to 30 June 2017

DPC to write to the Office of the Chief Scientist requesting information on Expert Panel's future focus and how best to communicate with the CRG

Endorsed Minutes

3. CRG Roadmap

Items 5.4, 5.5 - Wording for actions relating to long term management strategies
Karen Marler advised that EPA met with Defence on 10 and 19 October 2016 to discuss long term remediation. EPA has requested a written response from Defence regarding their strategy and how they will comply.

Item 2.4 - Qualitative Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA)

Nick Marshall requested advice on the expected completion date of the ERA for inclusion in the Roadmap.

Defence to provide timeline for Item 2.4 in the CRG Roadmap

4. Discussion Items

4.1 Seafood Brand Damage campaign (stage 2)

Rob Gauta advised that work is progressing on Stage 2 of the Seafood Brand Damage Campaign. Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) has funded market research to ascertain current public perceptions. A subgroup will meet next week to review the outcomes from the research and help shape the campaign design. It is likely to be similar to the successful Love Seafood – Love Port Stephens campaign. Don Burgoyne noted the importance of preparing 2-3 spokespersons in anticipation of media interest and Phil Blanch emphasised the importance of training for co-op staff and fishers.

Robert Gauta and DPI to provide information on the Campaign stages for distribution to the fishers

4.2 Media article

Rob Gauta referenced a recent media article where Nick Marshall was reported as commenting on the safety of eating seafood. Rob noted that this type of media is damaging to the fishers. Rob Gauta and Phil Blanch advised the CRG that Eastern King Prawns are not in the river. They come out of the Estuary and go out to sea where they are caught approximately 5kms out.

4.32 Seafood Dietary Advice

Nick Marshall advised that a resident advised him that there are seafood dietary guidelines on the DPI website, however, he had not been made aware of this advice by the CRG. The Chair acknowledged a gap in communication on this occasion. Glenda Briggs had forwarded the information to the CRG Chair for distribution however this did not occur as the Chair was absent on sick leave. Glenda Briggs noted that DPI were committed to talk to the fishers first and did so on 27 September 2016. At the time the CRG meeting was held on 20 September, the Expert Panel had not finalised their recommendation regarding the lifting of the fishing closures and dietary advice. The DPI media release included a reference to a Fact Sheet and dietary advice which is available on the DPI and EPA website and interviews were held by the Deputy Director General.

Discussion identified confusion on the part of the community representatives as to:

- whether the new fish dietary advice had replaced the previous post Human Health Risk Assessment recommendations
- the difficulty of needing to consider two separately published sets of tables in order to minimise PFAS exposure
- the seafood advice being a new (additional) restriction imposed on them without due explanation

Nick Marshall expressed concern that the NSW Government was no longer taking a precautionary approach that put their health above the financial interests of fishers.

Health, EPA, DPI and DPC assured the community that this was an extension of existing precautionary closure. Health, also stressed that public health was the first and foremost consideration and that the recent advice adopted a conservative approach based on comprehensive and critical assessment of the data now available.

The fishing industry, DPI, EPA and Health jointly stressed that the seafood advice was a refinement of the existing advice based on detailed review of the HHRA in light of the recently confirmed enHealth Guidelines.

Dr Durrheim also advised that questions regarding seafood dietary advice and concerns around daily intake continue to be asked and answered at community drop-in events.

DPI is currently finalising an Information Flyer that will be distributed to the community by way of letter-box drop next week. A draft was provided to the CRG community reps, in confidence, for feedback within 48 hours. Kim Smith considered that people are overloaded with information and will not read the flyer. Nick Marshall suggested that warning signs be erected at boat ramps to alert recreational fishers. He indicated this would ensure that no person is exposed any more than necessary and that health must have priority over business.

The fishing industry representatives raised significant concern that signage at boat ramps (as well as recent media) would raise undue alarm, would increase community confusion and was not based on the risk assessment undertaken by the Expert Panel that occasional eating of fish by recreational fishers in the general population posed a low level risk.

Dr Taylor advised that the dietary advice serves-per-week was based on 20% of the whole TDI for PFAS thus leaving 80% of the TDI available for exposure through other routes to which they might be exposed. The advice is much more conservative than what is initially apparent and this should be made clearer in messaging.

Rob Gauta noted that the seafood dietary advice contains a reference to King Prawn. However, this is not commercially fished in the Hunter River.

DPI to provide feedback to the Expert Panel re: the inclusion of King Prawn in the seafood dietary table.

DPI to provide a copy of the finalised Information Flyer to DPC Chair and Secretariat for circulation to the CRG members.

Dr Matt Taylor gave an update on the current DPI initiatives including the commencement of discussions with Defence and Fishers about further sampling and the depuration studies. Depuration relates to the ability of an animal to remove contaminants over time when not continuing to be exposed to the contaminant. Dr Taylor spoke of the fast depuration rate for prawns and mud crabs. Don noted the fast depuration rate for oysters over 38 hours including a 50% drop in the first 24 hours. A depuration study will shortly commence on dusky flathead. It is expected to take around 2 months followed by physical analysis and data analysis.

4.2 Water Reticulation - outside of Investigation Area (IA)

Lindsay Clout sought information on the progress of town water connections outside of the IA. Marcus Jeffery advised Defence and Hunter Water representatives have met twice since the previous CRG meeting and good progress is being made. Hunter Water has completed design for provision of town water in the Investigation Area and has gone to tender.

Defence has requested Hunter Water include all properties on Chris and Shady Avenues in Salt Ash where the current IA boundary line splits the street.

In addition Hunter water has provided some initial options to extend the area serviced beyond the IA which the Commonwealth will consider further.

Marcus noted that Defence is working with Hunter Water to consider what would be a reasonable demarcation point if the scope of works was to progress beyond the IA.

Lindsay requested an update at the next CRG meeting.

Defence to provide an update on the Water Reticulation Program at the next CRG meeting

4.3 Lake Cochran Water Treatment Plant (WTP)

The WTP is undergoing an optimisation process and, at this stage, the water is not being released but is circulating back to Lake Cochran. The optimisation process is expected to be completed by early November 2016. The plant is working towards processing up to 70 litres per/second. Lindsay Clout and Nick Marshall requested a tour of the WTP by the CRG. Defence will take the question on notice. The Chair requested Defence consider releasing media as a good news story for the community once the WTP is fully operational.

Defence to consider the CRG community request for a tour of the Lake Cochran Water Treatment Plant

4.4 Commonwealth Department of Health – Walk-In Event

The Commonwealth Department of Health conducted a walk-in event on 14 October 2016. Defence representatives attended. NSW Government agencies did not attend as the session related only to the Commonwealth Government's commitment to the epidemiological study and voluntary blood testing. NSW Health is not involved and has not received any detailed information from the Commonwealth on the epidemiological study. Kim Smith noted that a funding commitment of only 2 years for the study has not instilled confidence in the government's commitment. Dr Durrheim considers the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, Australian National University, is well equipped to conduct the study and Associate Professor Martin Kirk is highly regarded in the field. Dr Durrheim noted that scoping of the study usually occurs in the first six months and it is likely that the project team will engage with community at future walk-in events.

Dr Durrheim noted several concerns with a PFAS cross sectional epidemiological study including significant variation in individual's blood test results, variation in the rates that individual's PFAS levels decrease in their blood and the relatively small community size affected. These factors will complicate interpretation.

Defence advised that the presentation will be available to the community on the Commonwealth Health website following the Oakey Walk-in event.

Circulate Commonwealth Health presentation to CRG, when available

4.5 Moors Drain Functional Assessment

Defence advised that the assessment is completed with the report yet to be provided to Port Stephens Council.

Endorsed Minutes

5. Information Items

5.1 Community Liaison Officers

Kathy Kent advised that she has been working with individual community members. Evelina Hendry advised that she is active talking with community groups such as CWA, Rotary, and providing information and getting feedback for an engagement strategy.

5.2 Site Inspection in Williamtown to Campvale area

A site inspection in the Williamtown to Campvale area of the Tomago Sandbeds was conducted on 23 September 2016 attended by Hunter Water and Salt Ash Community First representatives. The inspection was to groundtruth a desktop study of the potential for contaminated surface water from the RAAF Base to flow overland into Campvale Swamp and then into Campvale Canal. The study relied on topographical information that was derived from aerial LiDAR Survey. The concern of SACF was that the aerial survey may not show all on-ground drainage features. Dr Berghout, Hunter Water, advised that at all locations inspected, it was clear to all parties involved in the inspection that the on-ground situation reflected the LiDAR ground elevation imagery and there was no evidence of surface water flow paths crossing the assumed surface water divide. At the CRG meeting, Nick Marshall advised that he agreed to the expert's definition of drainages, however, he considered that until there was actually water in the particular area, one would not see what happens.

5.3 Property NSW

Port Stephens Council (PSC) has received advice from Property NSW regarding new valuations effective from 1 July 2016. Council is not required to refund rates for the past two rating years. Property NSW has acknowledged that their letter to residents was confusing and has apologised for this confusion. PSC will write to affected residents advising them of the clarification. PSC website will also be updated to clarify this matter.

6 General Business

6.1 Community Walk-in session 2 November 2016

Defence will host two community walk-in sessions at the Murrook Culture Centre - 10am to 1pm and 4pm-7pm. The sessions provide an opportunity to local residents and business owners to ask questions one-on-one with the project team. Defence has invited the Commonwealth Department of Health to participate particularly in relation to the voluntary blood testing program expected to commence in November. NSW agencies confirmed they will be in attendance with possible representation from Hunter Water, Port Stephens Council and Food Authority.

Recirculate Fact Sheet on Voluntary Blood Testing Program

6.2 Out of Sessions Questions

Lindsay Clout noted that the process of responding to questions out of session is working well.

6.3 Further Testing of Oysters

Don Burgoyne noted that he had been in contact with the Food Authority concerning comparative data for oysters in Tilligerry Creek. As they already have the necessary data, no more testing is required and they will monitor the levels.

6.4 Respectful communications

Endorsed Minutes

Rob Gauta requested everyone to be mindful of language and tone when communicating by email and ensure respectful exchanges.

7. Future meetings: The next meeting will be held in one month.

Meeting closed: 6.00pm

Next meeting: The next meeting will be held on 17 November 2016 from 3.30pm to 6.00pm.