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MEDIA RELEASE

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GOVERNMENT TAKES FURTHER ACTION ON WILLIAMTOWN RAAF BASE CONTAMINATION

Environment Minister Mark Speakman has announced two reviews into the management of contaminated land sites, following the Williamtown RAAF base contamination.

“It is critical that the community has confidence in our environmental regulation, and understands that public health is at the forefront of any actions we take,” Mr Speakman said.

“While at this stage I’m advised that any risk to human health from contamination from the Williamtown RAAF base is low, the NSW Government is taking a precautionary approach to this issue to ensure any risk is properly identified and managed,” Mr Speakman said.

The first review, led by the NSW Chief Scientist, Mary O’Kane, will advise Government on the planned and ongoing management of Williamtown RAAF base contamination.

“Under the Chief Scientist’s leadership, the Environment Protection Authority, NSW Health, the Department of Primary Industries, NSW Food Authority, Hunter Water and independent experts in contamination and public health will assess and confirm the nature of any potential risk of the contamination and what has to happen next. This will inform the NSW Government’s dealings with the Department of Defence, from whose land contamination has originated,” he said.

The second review, by Professor Mark Taylor of Macquarie University, will have a broader remit and consider the EPA’s implementation of the findings of the Auditor-General’s 2014 report into managing contaminated sites.

The Auditor General’s report found that the EPA’s prioritisation and assessment of sites was inadequate and that its monitoring and management of significantly contaminated sites needed to improve. Since then, the EPA advises that it has implemented the majority of the recommendations of the Auditor General’s report on time and will also implement the remaining recommendations on time.

The purpose of the second review announced today is to independently verify the

EPA's implementation of the Auditor General's recommendations and see whether there is further scope for improvement. The review follows confirmation that the EPA, some other agencies and Port Stephens Council were made aware two years ago by the Department of Defence that the contamination from the RAAF base at Williamtown had moved off-site to surface water and drain sediment, but not at that stage to ground water.

The terms of reference for the review are as follows:

- Review the EPA's implementation of the findings of the Auditor General's report of 10 July 2014 into managing contaminated sites;
- Make any recommendations deemed appropriate regarding the EPA's management of contaminated sites;
- Provide an interim report with any recommendations deemed appropriate regarding the EPA's past management of the Williamtown RAAF base by 30 November 2015; and
- Provide an interim report with any recommendations deemed appropriate regarding the EPA's past and future management of perfluorooctanesulfonic acid / perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS/PFOA) contaminated sites, both known and unknown, by 31 January 2016.

The EPA will address questions regarding Williamtown RAAF base contamination at a public meeting organised by the Department of Defence at 6.30 tonight at Stockton RSL.