



DOC16/393143

Mr Steven Grzeskowiak
Deputy Secretary Estate and Infrastructure
Department of Defence
Brindabella Park
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Steve

PFAS Contamination at the Williamtown RAAF Base – Next steps

I refer to the ongoing Department of Defence investigation into per- and poly- fluoroalkyl substance (PFAS) contamination from the Williamtown RAAF Base.

I note that Defence is continuing to pursue its investigation work in a manner generally consistent with the NSW framework for contaminated sites, and further note the imminent release by Defence of the Human Health Risk Assessment (HHRA) and Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) as two key reports in this process.

Data limitations

From an initial review of the draft reports by the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and the Williamtown Contamination Expert Panel, it is clear they represent a substantial step forward in understanding the extent of the contamination and the potential exposure pathways and risks. For many of the potential exposure pathways we consider there is adequate data to enable assessment of risk to a sufficient degree of confidence and provide advice to the community.

The reports also identify several important potentially complete exposure pathways where there remains too much uncertainty, limiting our ability to provide clear advice to the community. This is due to a range of factors including the sampling of eggs, fruit and vegetables too long after the advice to the community to not use bore water; the lack of a time series data set to identify the potential for temporal variations in contaminant concentrations; and the absence of monitoring data in some key locations to better define different zones of contamination.

It is the EPA's expectation that as a priority following the release of the ESA and HHRA, Defence conduct further investigations to address the data limitations. The investigation should cover three key objectives:

- To address the critical data limitations identified in the HHRA and ESA;
- To provide sufficient and appropriate data to inform additional advice to the community on managing exposures; and

- To provide additional data to inform the consideration and selection of containment and remedial options that can be meaningfully implemented in the near, medium and longer term to return the maximum amenity to the local community.

To ensure that these investigations are timely and appropriate the EPA would appreciate the opportunity to discuss the scope with key Defence staff and relevant advisors. Additional areas requiring further investigation may also be identified once the EPA and Expert Panel have the opportunity to review the finalised HHRA and ESA in detail.

On a related matter, I understand that appropriate measures have been put in place to ensure the safety of Hunter Water's town water supply. However, further investigations are required to understand any potential impact of the RAAF Base contamination on future operation of the Hunter Water groundwater assets in the Investigation Area.

Containment and remediation

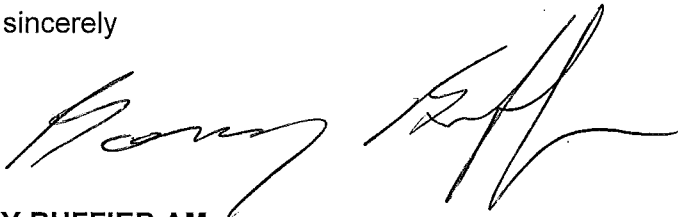
With the extent of the contamination now generally confirmed, it is critical that Defence moves quickly to set out the steps it is going to take to determine appropriate containment and remediation measures to clean up and minimise PFAS migration from the Base, and further minimise exposure risks for surrounding communities.

It will be important that appropriate community consultation be included in this process, so as to determine their values for remediation priorities, which will assist Defence to identify and assess potential remediation approaches.

It is the EPA's expectation that remediation of the Base and surrounding areas is progressed, and all future works conducted at the RAAF Base must be managed with the objective of returning the surrounding lands to a condition such that restrictions can be progressively lifted over time.

The EPA is seeking a commitment from Defence that further investigations will be completed and containment and remediation action will initiated as a matter of urgency. I would appreciate if you could respond to me as soon as possible with information on Defence's strategy and timelines for undertaking this work.

Yours sincerely



BARRY BUFFIER AM
Chair and CEO
Environment Protection Authority

Cc: Chris Birrer, First Assistant Secretary Infrastructure, Department of Defence