

Endorsed Minutes 17 January 2019

Meeting: Williamtown Community Reference Group (CRG)
Date: 17 January 2019
Location: Murrook Culture Centre 2163 Nelson Bay Rd, Williamtown NSW 2318
Time: 3:30pm
Number: 1806

Chairperson: Melissa Gore | Deputy Director | Department of Premier and Cabinet

Secretariat: Astrid Stephens | Senior Coordination Officer | Department of Premier and Cabinet

Attendees: Group Captain Peter Cluff | RAAF Base Williamtown | Department of Defence
Chris Birrer | First Assistant Secretary | Department of Defence
Sarah Davis | Project Officer | Department of Defence
Nick Marshall | Salt Ash Community First
John Donahoo | Community Member
Michelle Butler | Senior Liaison Officer Williamtown | Department of Defence
Kim Smith | Salt Ash Community First
Lindsay Clout | Fullerton Cove Action Group & Williamtown Salt Ash Flood Group
David Durrheim | Hunter New England Local Health District
Glenda Briggs | Regional Director, Hunter & Greater Sydney | Department of Industry
Bianca Morton | Williamtown PFAS Community Engagement Officer | EPA
Michelle Earnshaw | Community Member
Wayne Wallis | General Manager | Port Stephens Council
Nicola Powell | A/g Director, PFAS Taskforce, Commonwealth Department of the
Environment and Energy
Sharon Nelmes | Department of Human Services
Sue Walker | Community Member
Andrew McIntyre | Office of Environment & Heritage
Apologies: Sharon Molloy | Office of Environment & Heritage
Don Burgoyne | NSW Farmer's Association | Community Member & Oyster Farmer

Leanne Sansom | Community Member

Justin Hamilton | Fullerton Cove Action Group & Williamtown Salt Ash Flood Group

Danielle Playford | EPA

Carrie Ford | EPA

Cain Gorfine | President, Williamtown and Surrounds Residents Action Group

Karen Marler | Manager Hunter Region | EPA

Phil Blanch | Community Member and Fisher's Representative

Rob Gauta | Manager, Commercial Fishermen's Coop

Number	Action Item	Responsible
1806-01	Community representatives to send the Chair details of local services providers who have not received the PHN mental health information. Chair to forward to the PHN for follow up	Community representatives
1806-02	DPC to circulate statement from DPI to CRG, regarding Action Item 1805-07	DPC
1806-03	The Chair to circulate the letter from EPA to Community Helping Community to CRG	DPC
1806-04	PFAS Taskforce to follow up with Commonwealth Department of Health on scope and timing of the enHealth review of its PFAS guidance statements and report back to CRG	PFAS Taskforce
1806-05	EPA to provide advice on dust sampling to CRG	EPA
1806-06	EPA to circulate the Waste Management Plan to CRG members	EPA
1806-07	EPA and OEH to consider a process to clear the entire drain network in the Management Zone and report back to CRG	EPA & OEH
1806-08	Chair to confirm status of the Elected Representative Group with the Parliamentary Secretary for the Hunter and Central Coast	DPC
1806-09	Kim Smith to send PFAS Taskforce the details of the six PFAS types showing in community member's blood test results	Kim Smith

- 1806-10 PFAS Taskforce to seek further information on PFNA and provide PFAS Taskforce to the CRG
- 1806-11 John Donahoo to send a copy of letter from Kate Washington to John Donahoo
CRG members
- 1806-12 DPI to confirm dates and results of last fish testing and advise DPI
when next testing will be done
- 1806-13 NSW Health to ask NSW Chief Health Officer to review DPI NSW Health
advice regarding Action 1805-07 and report back to CRG
- 1806-14 Chair to contact fishing industry representatives regarding CRG DPC
representation
- 1806-15 Chair to confirm with Hunter Water why pump stations and bores DPC
have been disconnected and capped off

Meeting Minutes

1. Welcome and Introductions

Chair welcomed all attendees and gave an Acknowledgement of Country.

The community experiencing PFAS land contamination was acknowledged by a community representative.

2. Minutes of Previous Meetings

2.1 Amendment to the Minutes from 15 November 2018

John Donahoo provided a statement to be included in previous minutes under *Item 5. Community Updates*.

'At each meeting, we acknowledge the traditional owners of the surroundings lands. However, we should also acknowledge the plight of the existing PFAS affected landowners. I know of a case of one landowner who has developed diabetes which he blames on stress, of which the PFAS issue was a major contributing factor to that stress. Another landowner takes days to mentally recover every time he attends a meeting dealing with PFAS. He has attended numerous meetings with politicians and bureaucrats, and after each of these meetings, no action occurs. The Federal Government has caused the PFAS problem, and after three years they have done nothing of substance to fix that problem. Accordingly, the actions and inactions of the Federal Government are deemed by the local community to be unjust, indecent and immoral. Chris Birrer was requested, and he agreed, to pass on the foregoing sentiments to his political masters.'

Defence confirmed that the above statement was passed on to the relevant ministers. The recent media release by the Minister for the Environment and the Assistant Minister for Defence, acknowledged the hardships being experienced by communities experiencing PFAS land

contamination and welcoming the release of the parliamentary inquiry.

Minutes were adopted and finalised.

2.2 Update on Action Items

1805-01: Chair enquired about distribution of Primary Health Network (PHN) information on mental health to local GPs. Community representatives reported that while the information has been distributed, some individual service providers have not received the information.

Action: Community representatives to send the Chair details of local services providers who have not received the PHN mental health information. Chair to forward to the PHN for follow up.

1805-06: Defence outlined that the PFAS Management Action Plan (PMAP) is a plan to manage and reduce the risks of PFAS exposure for Williamstown and the surrounding community. The PMAP will prioritise the ongoing implementation of practical solutions to prevent or minimise PFAS migrating from the Base. The PMAP will outline actions to:

- Reduce the PFAS contamination source;
- Reduce the concentration of PFAS in migration pathways; and
- Manage the exposure risks for the community such as consumption of groundwater.

The PMAP will be based on a review of the sources of the contamination and the key ways it is migrating into the wider community. It will compare and evaluate a range of available PFAS management activities to identify possible options for Williamstown and the surrounding community. Once finalised, the PMAP will be reviewed annually, or more frequently if new information or technology arises which has the potential to impact the PMAP objectives.

The PMAP will include an Ongoing Monitoring Plan (OMP) which will outline the sampling program that will be undertaken by Defence to monitor and track the PFAS contamination over the coming years. The OMP will provide an evidence base for the ongoing management of the PFAS contamination, including looking at the changes in concentration and geographical spread. It will assist Defence to evaluate the progress and success of the management activities being undertaken or identify where more might need to be done. The OMP will be regularly reviewed, including review by the NSW PFAS Expert Panel, and if required changes to the monitoring frequency or locations of sampling may occur.

Defence will continue to work closely with the NSW Government and Port Stephens Council during the implementation of the PMAP. Defence will give a formal presentation to CRG when the PMAP is finalised. It is expected to be completed in the upcoming months, subject to consultation outcomes. Once finalised the PMAP will be publically available.

1805-07: DPI has prepared a response to the request to reconsider testing cattle living within the Management Zone. Any questions regarding the response can be sent to Glenda Briggs.

Action: DPC to circulate statement from DPI to CRG, regarding Action Item 1805-07.

1805-08 Defence is currently reviewing its coverage of town water bills for residents who were connected to the Hunter Water Supply Network in 2016. Defence has previously committed to pay resident's water usage and charges for three years from the date of connection, with a review to occur before the conclusion of this period to determine whether Defence would continue to pay for residents' water usage and charges beyond this period. Defence acknowledges that due to reimbursement of some residents' water usage and charges, this period is notionally approaching for some residents in May 2019. Notwithstanding, Defence will continue to fund water usage charges until further notice. Once a formal position on timeframes has been agreed, Defence will liaise with individual land-owners and will communicate the outcome to the community. No action to change

responsibility for payment of water usage and charges will occur without prior consultation with residents.

[Note - Post meeting: Hunter Water have confirmed that the period approaching for some residents is July 2019, not May]

Additionally, Defence has advised community members who have declined reticulated water, that Hunter Water will be contacting them to determine what is required to enable use of a rainwater system on an ongoing basis.

A community representative advised that the purpose of the three year timeframe was because of the unknowns surrounding remediation, and therefore shouldn't Defence continue to pay water usage charges beyond the three year timeframe. Defence advised that all issues would be considered in the review.

1805-09: Defence made representations to Minister Fawcett's Office about engaging with the Williamstown community. Defence advised that Minister Fawcett is aware of community concerns about PFAS land contamination and is working on this issue with his parliamentary colleagues. The Minister is also aware of the invitation to engage with the Williamstown community.

1805-11 The Chair confirmed the NSW PFAS Expert Panel did review the community garden proposal and determined that exposure to PFAS had been sufficiently minimised.

Action: The Chair to circulate the letter from EPA to Community Helping Community to CRG.

A community representative noted that some community members don't want the community garden and queried the lack of communication about it at CRG. The Chair, NSW EPA and the Department of Human Services advised that there are members within community who do want the community garden and a grant has been given. The project can still proceed despite not all community members supporting it. The group who received the grant has followed the right process, the proposal was appropriately reviewed and it has been supported.

A community representative asked if concerns about not eating the produce have been resolved. The Chair stated that the precautionary advice relates to produce grown straight out of the ground. The community representative expressed concerns that community members will think they can start eating home grown produce again. It was noted that Salt Ash Community First object to an edible community garden.

Health advised that the current precautionary advice still stands regarding eating vegetables grown in contaminated soil, or which have been exposed to contaminated water. A community representative stated that this advice will need to be reinforced with the community if the community garden proceeds.

Health advised that enHealth are clarifying wording to ensure precautionary advice is consistent across states, as differences in wording is leading to differences in interpretation.

Action: PFAS Taskforce to follow up with Commonwealth Department of Health on scope and timing of the enHealth review of its PFAS guidance statements and report back to CRG.

A community representative noted the community are also advocating for dust sampling in the area.

Action: EPA to provide advice on dust sampling to CRG.

A community representative commented that the community garden project is something that should

occur after the contaminated land is remediated. The community representative suggested that there is a misguided view that community members will bond over the community garden and make it appear that the contamination risk is passing. They also suggested that efforts should be directed to cleaning up PFAS contamination instead and tasks such as clearing drains should be more the focus as opposed to a community garden. A community representative speculated that OEH had determined their Waste Management Plan to be prohibitively expensive and compared this with the amount of money Defence have spent on-base excavating drains. They added that the Defence approach to excavating drains is what the community have asked for off-base, not a community garden. The Chair clarified that an independent community group is responsible for the community garden and applied for grant funding to implement it and that this initiative, whilst proposed to be located within the Management Zone, is not solely in response to the PFAS issue. A community representative further stated that the community's response to a community garden will be divisive and that will have a negative effect on the community.

CRG members are invited before each meeting to propose agenda items (e.g. the remediation and drainage items raised in this meeting). The agenda enables agencies to gather information in response to such items in a timely manner. The Chair advised that the community garden item was put on the agenda by a community representative which is why discussions have continued in this forum. However, whether the community garden project proceeds is not a decision for the CRG.

The EPA's plan for off base drain cleanup was referred to. OEH advised it had undertaken work and it had already been completed. A community representative commented that only part of work was done and that the soil was removed from the drain but left on the property. The community representative requested that the EPA plan be revisited with a commitment to take contaminated soil offsite.

OEH advised that Dawson's Drain was not cleared because they do not have landowner consent. A community representative advised that is because the soil would not be removed after clearing.

A community representative advised that Moors Drain also hasn't been cleared, and the community want the whole drain system to be cleared. OEH advised that they cleared the parts of the drain that needed it, which were confirmed by sampling results. The exception was Dawson's Drain where owner consent was not granted. They also advised that removing some of the material wasn't feasible due to the amount of aquatic vegetation and amount of water. The logistics prohibited the removal of the soil.

Action: EPA to circulate the Waste Management Plan to CRG members.

A community representative reiterated that the community want the sediment taken out of the drain and treated as Defence has done on base. Defence clarified the reason they had to remove sediment and vegetation from the airfield drains was because of the risk to aircraft safety caused by dust and foreign object debris (FOD). A community representative queried the boundaries of clearing the drains, and Defence confirmed they cleared drains to the boundary fence and disposed of the soil. Defence advised that sampling of the sediment in the airfield drains returned a waste classification of 'general solid waste'.

It was acknowledged that Defence cannot clear the drains off base however a community representative suggested they could pay for any work above and beyond standard practice. OEH advised that leaving soil on the property was standard practice.

A community representative requested a review of the drain management plan, with the purpose of clearing all drains, should be undertaken and acted upon.

OEH advised that they will be doing further drain clearing to remove woody debris from drains. A

community representative commented that it would be good to begin clearing all drains quite quickly – now is a good time as the drains are low.

Action: EPA and OEH to consider a process to clear the entire drain network in the Management Zone and report back to CRG.

Port Stephens Council has a different practice for clearing drains. They undertake soil, sediment and water testing before clearing. If PFAS is found, Council removes the soil. If there is no PFAS, the soil is put back on the land. Currently Council is doing the bare minimum to keep drains functioning. Nothing further is being done until the PFAS source is remediated by Defence.

3. Community Updates

A community representative commented that the wording “There is no consistent evidence....” is poor wording and could be considered propaganda. Defence advised that the Chief Medical Officer has asked enHealth to review that advice, however that is currently considered the formal advice. The PFAS Taskforce reiterated the Chief Medical Officer’s acknowledgement at his recent presentation to community, that while it is technically correct, there are problems with the message in its interpretation.

Defence was asked about the remediation of PFAS contamination and when the community will be provided with a list of options for fixing the problems, including design specifications and costings. Defence noted the information that was made available at the community walk in sessions held in October last year. The table dedicated to PFAS management and response was the most popular table. They received lots of enquiries from community about treatment technology. The PMAP will contain information on remediation. Defence were asked why the PMAP hasn’t been given to the community. Defence responded that the EPA and Health needed to provide comments first and the community will have access to it when it is finalised.

The mental health services provided by PHN was raised, noting that this was only treating the symptoms and not the cause. The community representative noted that the Commonwealth needs to address the issue of PFAS land contamination and hopes that compulsory acquisition or compensation will be taken up as per the recommendation in the Inquiry. In relation to timing of the Australian Government response to the Inquiry, the PFAS Taskforce advised that they are coordinating the response and are working to complete it within the requisite timeframe. However, the timing of a response is ultimately a decision for Government.

A community representative questioned the integrity of the process. The PFAS Taskforce noted for the record an objection to this comment and in particular the insinuation that public servants working on this issue are anything other than honest, ethical and dedicated to doing their best for the Australian public.

[Note: An apology for any offence occurred by the statement during this discussion was issued by the community representative to the PFAS Taskforce representative on 25 January 2019. This apology was accepted.]

The Chair was asked by a community representative if the Elected Representative Group was still meeting.

Action: Chair to confirm status of the Elected Representative Group with the Parliamentary Secretary for the Hunter and Central Coast.

Defence was asked by a community member if PFAS contaminated water was still exiting the base via the drainage network. Defence responded that it was.

4. Agency Updates

4.1 PFAS Taskforce

The PFAS Taskforce is coordinating the Government response to the Inquiry and continuing the PFAS Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) review.

A community representative asked whether PFNA was being tested for. Defence responded that there are thousands of types of PFAS and there is only knowledge about a small number of those. A community representative commented on New Hampshire's Department of Environmental Services' proposal to revise drinking water standards, which included references to PFNA.

The PFAS Taskforce commented that the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Energy is aware that there are a number of other PFAS's of emerging concern and it is something that authorities are looking into, nationally and internationally. The Defence representative cited the example of GenX, used in clothing manufacturing, and its association with health concerns. A community representative asked Defence if they could test bores for the six PFAS types that are showing up in community members' blood tests. Defence responded that there are currently only guidance values for three types of PFAS (PFOS, PFOA and PFHxS) and the exposure pathways for others are undefined. Defence were asked if they were aware of PFNA. It was confirmed they are aware of it and PFNA has been detected.

Action: Kim Smith to send PFAS Taskforce the details of the six PFAS types showing in community member's blood test results.

Action: PFAS Taskforce to seek further information on PFNA and provide to the CRG.

4.2 Defence

Defence received a trend analysis from the contractor who is operating the treatment plant on the former firefighting training site. The water treatment plant began pumping water at the site in February 2018, with average concentrations of 88 µg/L. By August 2018 it had reduced to 58 µg/L, and in October 2018 reduced further from 58 to 52 µg/L. Furthermore since soil was dug out from around the pit and removed, results from December 2018 showed average concentrations were down to 31 µg/L. This is a positive result relating to treating a source area and removing concentration in water.

A community member queried the rainfall statistics over this time. Defence confirmed that the results relate to groundwater which would not be impacted by rainfall. A community member queried the depths of the bores. Defence advised that the results are an average of the area. It was acknowledged by a community member that they have been fighting the PFAS land contamination for a long time, and it is easy to forget that the battle is being won.

4.3 NSW EPA

No formal update was provided from EPA.

A community representative advised that local MP Kate Washington had written a letter to the Premier following up on the Premier's promise to seek legal advice on whether the Land Contamination Act applies to the Commonwealth.

Action: John Donahoo to send a copy of letter from Kate Washington to CRG members.

Defence advised that whether a Commonwealth EPA is formed is a matter for Government. If it was created, Defence would work with them.

4.4 NSW Health

No formal update was provided from NSW Health.

4.5 NSW DPI

No formal update was provided from NSW DPI.

A community representative queried why DPI is not regularly testing fish in the area. DPI advised that they will take the question on notice however confirmed initial testing was done in 2016 and 2017 on behalf of Defence and there is a testing schedule. Defence confirmed that fish sampling is part of the OMP.

Action: DPI to confirm dates and results of last fish testing and advise when next testing will be done.

A community representative queried progress on Action 1805-07 and whether it was acceptable to have contaminated beef coming from contaminated lands. NSW Health committed to asking for a review of the methods of the risk assessment underlying current advice relating to beef from the NSW Chief Health Officer

Action: NSW Health to ask NSW Chief Health Officer to review DPI advice regarding Action 1805-07 and report back to CRG.

A community member asked why no fishing industry representatives have been attending CRG. The Chair confirmed that they are still members of the CRG and are being included in all correspondence and receiving meeting invites. The community representative advised that others from the fishing industry have been raising questions to other CRG members.

Action: Chair to contact fishing industry representatives regarding CRG representation.

4.6 NSW OEH

No formal update from OEH

4.7 Port Stephens Council

Council advised that the NSW Premier had visited Port Stephens to announce funding to complete works on Nelson Bay Road. There will be significant intersection works over coming weeks and in the middle of year. These are Roads and Maritime Services' (RMS) roads however Council has been awarded contracts for them. Council advised that communication relating to the road works is being managed by RMS.

A community representative queried a current development within the Management Zone and its requirements for addressing soil contamination and drain issues. Council explained that any Development Application (DA) has to comply with EPA requirements. Council advised that they can check the specific details if they have the address of the development.

4.8 DPC

No formal update from DPC.

4.9 Hunter Water

The Chair communicated the below update on behalf of Hunter Water:

Provision of rainwater tanks for primary management area

The NSW Government is currently considering funding the provision of rainwater tanks for non-drinking water uses (e.g. providing water for pets or livestock) in the primary management zone.

Defence Proclamation over Hunter Water and National Park Land

A Defence Area has been declared over approximately 85 hectares of the Tomago sandbeds and will ensure Defence can support a compliant 10,000 foot runway for the Joint Strike Fighter aircraft operations. The proposed will remove 7.6 hectares of native vegetation. A further 15.5 hectares of native vegetation will be modified or 'lopped'. The remaining land is required to ensure Defence can comply with Civil Aviation Safety Authority regulations. The area includes Hunter Water infrastructure relating to monitoring bores associated with the Tomago Sandbeds. While the infrastructure is not physically affected by the Defence Area Declaration, Hunter Water needs to travel through this land to access the bores. Hunter Water are currently negotiating with Defence about maintaining access.

Summary of Water Reticulation Project Status

Of the properties identified for potential connection:

- 84% have connections complete and have water
- 7% are affected by aboriginal heritage
- 6% at various stages from arranging a meeting, contracts out for signing, or plumbing work progressing
- 3% have declined

All water mains have been laid apart from the streets affected by Aboriginal heritage (George St and Coxes Lane). Aboriginal heritage test excavations have been undertaken and an Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment report has been prepared. The report has been issued to the Aboriginal community groups for their review and comment. It is planned to submit the report to OEH in early February and therefore aiming to do remaining reticulation works during April and May.

Water tank refills commenced on 21 December 2017 and since then 315 deliveries have been made for 4,978,000 Litres of water.

In regards to Defence's proclamation over Hunter Water and National Park Land, a community representative expressed concern about conservation land being taken away, given it is a koala habitat. Defence advised that Defence takes seriously its environmental obligations, and that any vegetation clearance would only be undertaken in an environmentally responsible manner.

A community representative asked if the acquired land could be used as a detention basin to capture water coming off the base. Defence have no plans to do this as the land is up gradient of the source areas on the Base. Defence advised they are making progress with treating surface and groundwater. They are now working on installing a water treatment plant to treat the plume in the area known as 'the southern area'.

Defence advised that they have written to people who declined reticulated water regarding rainwater tank infrastructure. A community representative queried if reticulated water has been installed along George Street. The Chair responded that these are properties affected by heritage issues.

A community representative asked the Chair to clarify why pump stations 9 to 11 and approximately 20 to 30 bores have been disconnected and capped off.

Action: Chair to confirm with Hunter Water why pump stations and bores have been disconnected and capped off.

5. General Business

No general business items were raised.

6. Next Meeting

Next meeting to be held on 21 March 2019.

Meeting closed 5:22pm.