

Munmorah and Colongra power stations: PFAS Investigations

Update for local residents

Key points

- The community can continue to eat seafood caught in the Tuggerah Lakes system, as part of a balanced diet.
- The testing for PFAS in popular seafood species was undertaken by Snowy Hydro, as part of Generator Property Management and Snowy Hydros PFAS investigations at the Munmorah and Colongra power stations.
- Investigations have found PFAS on and offsite at the Colongra and Munmorah power stations, but groundwater is generally moving towards the centre of the sites.

What are PFAS?

PFAS (per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances) are a group of manufactured chemicals that include perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS), perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorohexane sulfonate (PFHxS).

Due to their fire retardant, waterproofing and stain resistant qualities, these chemicals have been widely used in many industrial and consumer products worldwide.

PFAS can also be found in food packaging, non-stick cookware, fabric, furniture and carpet stain protection applications, clothing and some types of fire-fighting foam.

PFAS are very stable chemicals that can gradually accumulate over time in living things such as humans and animals. PFAS do not easily break down, and can persist for a long time in the environment. PFAS are being phased out around the world.

Are PFAS a health risk?

PFAS are what's known as an 'emerging contaminant'. This means international research is yet to completely determine if there are any health effects.

The Australian Government's PFAS Expert Health Panel has concluded that, while there is no current evidence that suggests a person's health will be significantly impacted from high levels of PFAS, important health effects cannot be ruled out either.

A factsheet providing more information on PFAS and human health is available from the Commonwealth Department of Health website at www.health.gov.au/pfas.

What do I need to know for this area?

Investigations have found PFAS on and offsite at the Colongra and Munmorah power stations.

As such, testing of seafood in the Tuggerah Lakes System was undertaken to determine if the community could be exposed to PFAS through eating seafood. The community can continue to eat seafood caught in the Tuggerah Lakes system as part of a balanced diet.

It is understood that groundwater is generally moving towards the centre of the Munmorah and Colongra sites, meaning that exposure to PFAS from the groundwater is limited.

The detection of PFAS is not unexpected given the past use of PFAS-containing fire-fighting foams at the sites. PFAS has also been used in many domestic and industrial products and background levels may be present from these other sources.

Can I fish in the Tuggerah Lakes?

Yes, you can fish in the Tuggerah Lakes.

It's important to remember that no fishing within the power station's canals or water systems is permitted.

A pre-existing ban on net fishing in Budgewoi Creek and the seasonal night time ban on fishing in the Munmorah Power House outlet canal or Budgewoi Lake is not related to PFAS. These are long-standing closures unrelated to PFAS investigations currently underway.

More information on existing fishing closures, including a recreational fishing guide to the area,

can be found at
<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fishing/closures/location-closures/lakemunmorah-and-budgewoi-lake>

Can I eat the fish I catch from the Tuggerah Lakes?

Yes. You can eat fish from the Tuggerah Lakes however, you might want to consider the general advice from Food Standards Australia New Zealand to consume no more than 2-3 serves of seafood a week as part of a balanced diet.

Can I sell the fish that I catch in the Tuggerah Lakes?

Yes, this fishery remains open. Local commercial fishers can continue to sell fish harvested in the river.

Why was testing undertaken at Munmorah and Colongra?

Munmorah

Munmorah Power Station operated for almost 50 years. During this time, there were occasions that PFAS-containing fire-fighting foams were deployed to deal with issues arising from plant operation.

Colongra

Snowy Hydro took ownership of this site from Delta Electricity in 2015. Prior to this, there was historical use of PFAS-containing fire-fighting foams at a fire-fighting training facility adjacent to the site.

Since purchasing the power station, Snowy Hydro has not used any PFAS-containing foams.

What seafood species were tested for PFAS?

A range of popular edible fish and crustacea species were tested, including:

- Sea Mullet
- Yellowfin Bream
- Dusky Flathead
- Luderick
- Silver Biddy
- School Prawns
- Eastern King Prawns; and
- Whiting.

I work at the power station. Should I be concerned?

The risk to workers at both sites is low. Neither groundwater or surface water is used for drinking or cooking purposes, and there is no produce grown on site that is used for food.

What is the State Government's role?

The EPA is working closely with Generator Property Management, Snowy Hydro, NSW Department of Primary Industries, NSW Health and NSW Food Authority to ensure timely and robust investigations are undertaken.

This collaboration ensures an appropriate, scientific and risk-based approach to protect the community and environment.

Where can I find more information?

More information on the NSW Government's response to PFAS can be found at www.epa.nsw.gov.au/pfas.

If you have any questions or concerns, call the 24/7 NSW Environment Line on **131 555**.