

# Gold Coast Airport: PFAS Investigations

## Update for local residents

### Key points

- Airservices Australia is investigating potential per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination stemming from the historical use of fire-fighting foams at Gold Coast Airport.
- Investigations have found PFAS in groundwater to the eastern side of the airport and in surface water in Coolangatta Creek.
- No PFAS was found in any of the seafood species tested.
- You can continue to fish and eat seafood from the Cobakai Broadwater.

### What are PFAS?

PFAS 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 were widely used in some types of fire-fighting foams and other industrial products worldwide. PFAS can also be found in low concentrations in many consumer products like food packaging, non-stick cookware, fabric, furniture and carpet stain protection applications, clothing and shampoo.

The most common and prevalent sources of PFAS in the environment is where fire-fighting foams were used for training purposes, particularly on Department of Defence bases and at fire-fighting training facilities.

PFAS are very stable chemicals that do not easily break down and can persist in the environment.

Products containing PFAS are being phased out around the world.

### Are PFAS a health risk?

The Australian Government's PFAS Expert Health Panel, in its report to the Federal Minister for Health, noted there is no current evidence to suggest an increase in overall health risk related to PFAS exposure. However, the Expert Panel also said health effects cannot be ruled out at this time.

Because the risks are not fully known, the NSW Government takes a precautionary approach to limiting people's exposure to PFAS. This includes occasionally providing precautionary advice to help limit people's exposure to PFAS. The EPA is leading the PFAS Investigation Program to understand the prevalence of this emerging contaminant in NSW. This program will help NSW be better prepared to respond if any health and environmental impacts become known.

The Expert Panel's report and a factsheet providing more information on PFAS and human health is available at [www.health.gov.au/pfas](http://www.health.gov.au/pfas).

### Why is testing being undertaken at Gold Coast Airport?

Airservices Australia is conducting PFAS investigations at locations across Australia where there has been significant historical use of PFAS- containing fire-fighting foams. These investigations are looking at the extent of the impact of PFAS, and the potential risks to the community. PFAS foams were used at the Gold Coast Airport site in fire-fighting training and operations prior to the foams being phased out.

### What is known so far?

In October 2016, Airservices Australia announced that PFAS had been detected at the airport. Since then, PFAS has been detected in groundwater to the eastern side of the airport and in surface water in Coolangatta Creek.

In early 2017 Airservices Australia tested seafood, surface water and sediment at five locations across the Cobaki Broadwater, adjacent to the airport.

The species tested were:

- Sea Mullet
- Fantail Mullet
- Mud Crab
- Luderick

- Mud Ark
- Sydney Rock Oyster

There were no PFAS detections in any of the species tested, or in the majority of water and sediment samples.

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

### Do residents need to do anything?

Finding PFAS in the environment does not mean there is a human health risk. It is important to assess if there are exposure pathways through which people might ingest PFAS, such as drinking contaminated ground water or consuming food products watered with contaminated ground water.

The results indicate that seafood consumed from the Cobaki Broadwater is not an exposure pathway for local residents, and that the potential impacts to commercial and recreational fishing in the Cobaki Broadwater are low.

Regardless of PFAS detections, NSW Health recommends that people do not use groundwater for drinking, cooking and personal hygiene (including cleaning teeth and bathing) without testing and appropriate treatment.

### Can I still fish in the Cobakai Broadwater?

Yes. You can continue to fish in the Cobakai Broadwater.

### Can I still eat fish I catch from the Cobakai Broadwater?

Yes. You can continue to eat the fish caught in the Cobakai Broadwater.

### What are the next steps?

Additional investigations by Airservices Australia are underway to determine whether there are any potential impacts for the local community.

### What is the NSW Government's role?

The Gold Coast Airport site sits across the NSW/QLD border. Although the NSW Government does not regulate Commonwealth sites, Airservices Australia has agreed to conduct its investigations in

a manner consistent with the NSW Environment Protection Authority's (EPA) requirements.

The NSW Government is working closely with Airservices Australia and Gold Coast Airport Pty Ltd to ensure timely and robust investigations are undertaken.

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

### Where can I find more information?

More information, including detailed investigation reports, can be found on the Airservices Australia and the Gold Coast Airport Pty Ltd websites at <http://www.airservicesaustralia.com/environment/national-pfas-management-program/> and <https://www.goldcoastairport.com.au/corporate/regulatory/home>

More information on the NSW Government's response to PFAS can be found at [www.epa.nsw.gov.au/pfas](http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/pfas).

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

