

Lake Toolooma: PFAS investigations

Precautionary dietary advice

Key points

- Anglers are advised to catch and release Australian Bass caught in Lake Toolooma, within the Heathcote National Park near Waterfall, after detections of per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) were found in this species.
- It is still safe to swim in Lake Toolooma.

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 foam 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.

Why was testing undertaken in Lake Toolooma?

PFAS investigations are being undertaken at locations across NSW 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.

The NSW Rural Fire Services (RFS) conducted fire-fighting training in a vacant area of land, off the Princes Highway, near Waterfall. Because of this, the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and Department of Primary Industries - Fisheries (DPI) conducted testing of water, sediment and fish to determine if the lake is affected by PFAS.

RFS continue to use the site for fire-fighting training however, PFAS-containing foams are not used.

What is known so far?

Investigations have found PFAS in water and sediment and PFOS within fish at Lake Toolooma.

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

Can I still fish in Lake Toolooma?

Yes. You can continue to fish in Lake Toolooma however, you should practice catch and release. Signage has been installed at the lake to advise anglers and the community.

Can I still eat fish I catch from Lake Toolooma?

No. As a precaution, Australian Bass caught in Lake Toolooma should not be consumed. This precautionary dietary advice will minimise exposure to PFAS.

What are the next steps?

The PFAS investigation at Lake Toolooma has now concluded.

Where can I find more information?

More information on catch and release fishing can be found at

<https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fishing/recreational/fishing-skills/catch-and-release>

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**.