

# RAAF Base Wagga: PFAS Investigations

## Update for local residents

### Key points

- The Department of Defence is investigating potential per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination stemming from the historical use of fire-fighting foams at RAAF Base Wagga.
- These investigations have included a Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessment (HHERA), which assesses the potential risks to human health and the environment
- Investigations have found PFAS in biota, soil, surface and groundwater both on and offsite.
- The Department of Defence is conducting further testing to determine whether there are any potential impacts for the local community.
- A small number of residents at surrounding properties have been supplied with tailored precautionary advice to reduce their exposure to PFAS. This advice does not apply to the wider Wagga community.

### 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 RAAF Base Wagga?

The Department of Defence 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 RAAF Base Wagga in fire-fighting training and operations prior to the foams being phased out.

### What is known so far?

Investigations have found PFAS in biota, soil, surface and groundwater both on and offsite.

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.

A small number of residents at surrounding properties have been supplied with tailored precautionary advice to reduce their exposure to PFAS. This advice is specific to those properties and does not apply to the wider Wagga community.

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 and eat what I catch from local waterways?

The NSW PFAS Taskforce has assessed the levels of PFAS found in fish from Marshalls Creek and the Murrumbidgee River and determined that no dietary advice is required at this time.

Regardless of PFAS detections, Food Standards Australia and New Zealand recommends that only 2-3 serves of seafood a week should be consumed from a variety of sources and species. This advice is designed to limit exposure to mercury in fish across Australia. By following this advice, you will also minimise your exposure to PFAS in fish caught and consumed from Marshalls Creek and the Murrumbidgee River.

### What are the next steps?

The NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) has requested that the Department of Defence undertake additional work to develop a Groundwater Model. This will provide a better understanding of the migration and extent of the PFAS contamination. It is expected that this will be completed in conjunction with a PFAS Management Area Plan (PMAP). The PMAP will provide a framework for the management and remediation of PFAS contaminated areas.

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

Although the NSW Government does not regulate

Department of Defence sites, they have agreed to conduct investigations in a manner consistent with the EPA's requirements.

The NSW Government is committed to working with the Department of Defence 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 Department of Defence website at

<http://www.defence.gov.au/environment/pfas/>

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**

