

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs,
Defence and Trade
Submitted by email: jscfadt@aph.gov.au

5 July 2018

SUBMISSION TO:

**Inquiry into the management of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances
(PFAS)**

Dear Secretary,

I live in the Latrobe Valley Victoria and have been campaigning as an agricultural and community advocate at Federal and State levels on matters impacting our water quality and access to.

My regional area is Gippsland in Victoria which has contaminated sites from industry in Latrobe Valley, CFA at Fulham, Gippsland Water Waste Plant at Dutson Downs, East Sale RAAF base and ESSO Longford Gas Plant. I note differences with identifying, testing and scheduling between the government control Defence base and private industry. This anomaly is not to benefit the affected person.

I address the following terms of reference -

a) the extent of contamination in and around Defence bases, including water, soil, other natural assets and built structures;

This Committee Inquiry into the Department of Defence management of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination around Defence bases also includes the office of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade are co-regulatory parties to the PFAS contamination due to the export and trade of Australian agricultural products from PFAS impacted sites all over Australian separate to Defence bases.

To limit the terms of reference to contamination in and around Australian Defence bases only is to deny a voice to other impacted communities contaminated through industry pollution. This is important in the context of the Department of Agricultural & Water Resources being able to manage and track PFAS contaminated food stuff and livestock being exported based on changing food safety and quality guidelines.

If the number one objective is to identify sites with likely/potential direct exposure pathways impacting public health than the Federal Government can't just stop with Defence bases only if the Federal and State governments are to eliminate exposure pathways, improve coordination, testing and health standards.

b) the response of, and coordination between, agencies of the Commonwealth Government

This inquiry needs to address all routes of exposure to establish specific risks pertaining to ingestion of animals with PFC's since they bioaccumulate.

Environment Protection Authority (EPA) Victoria under the Environment Protection Act 1970 state their purpose,

- *is to protect and improve our environment by preventing harm to the environment and human health.*

EPA then serves remedial notices,

- *to prevent or remedy actual or likely pollution, environmental hazards and a range of non-compliances with the EP Act.*

Yet, the Victorian Chief Veterinarian, Charles Milne, has stated publically that farmers may sell livestock for slaughter but, privately to a farmer, has given advice that they may forward sell PFAS contaminated livestock.

The following ABC soundcloud link is important for this committee to consider as it notes the Oakley Defence base and Victoria with comments from AgForce, the Victorian Chief Vet noting PFAS contamination can be reduced if affected livestock are moved to "clean pasture" and comment from Barnaby Joyce on PFAS.

<https://soundcloud.com/red-zone-resident/abc-toxic-scandal-pfas-bim-struss-agforcevictorian-chief-vetbarnaby-joyce>

The Victorian Chief Vet has undermined the discussion about testing as it is not the total stock of sheep & cattle that are tested rather it was a very small proportion of different livestock so the amount noted by Milne is not in the dozens rather the contamination represents hundreds to thousands given the area of Gippsland contaminated. Additionally, farmers cannot place PFAS contaminated stock on clean pastures because their whole farm is contaminated. It is totally unrealistic that clean land will be provided for agistment to decontaminate livestock over a matter of weeks. The statement that Milne made is without foundation.

Therefore, **is the Federal Government allowing PFAS contaminated agricultural products to be exported?**

If no, then **is that same contaminated livestock, meat, dairy, fish & fish products, egg & egg products, plant & plant products then distributed (government condoned) into the domestic market for Australians to consume unknowingly.** Under these circumstances would the Federal Government consider this appropriate they are defining and are responsible for what is acceptable for people to consume denying a person a right to choose between contaminated and non-contaminated foodstuff.

If the **Dept of Foreign Affairs & Trade is allowing PFAS contaminated produce to be exported** then what insurance liability is offered for the legal procurement and movement of both declared and undeclared PFAS contaminated products and livestock in the event a buyer rejects the agricultural product anywhere in the supply chain. This is important for farmers in the signing of the National Vendor Declarations which the Meat and Livestock Australia have implemented to improve bio-security. As Victoria's Chief Vet notes, farmers must declare in good faith what they know and believe to be potentially contaminated.

There is a definite disconnect with lack of clarity and ethical integrity for food safety and quality guidelines from Meat and Livestock Australia, SafeMeat, Dairy Australia and other related food industries.

Any Committee of Management or governing body must act responsibly to prevent, or at the least reduce, the risk of exposure to their members and that of the public for those lands under their management.

All relevant Occupational, Health and Safety Acts should formulate new guidelines to reduce PFAS exposure pathways. Important to note that contaminated farmland is the workplace for farmers with dust from stock movement and cropping a normal part of farm business.

Another consideration is land transfers of PFAS contaminated properties within each states jurisdiction. Declarations of PFAS contamination, regardless of levels, must be made to prospective buyer.

There must also be a priority to reduce exposure pathways from waste facilities that generate so-called 'beneficial by-products' from PFAS contaminated water and soil. Examples are NuGrow fertiliser from Queensland and REVIVE fertiliser from Gippsland Water's Dutson Downs.

c) communication and coordination with state and territory governments, local councils, affected local communities and businesses, and other interested stakeholders;

The government finally need to admit that the genie is well & truly out of the bottle so the national communication network needs to be more consistent with the facts. The current answers to FAQ's & 'consistency of message' is not transparent and is certainly not credible given current international reports on PFAS health implications from cumulative exposures.

A national communication network needs to be more proactive to inform and coordinate with those entities and government agencies listed above under (b).

d) the adequacy of health advice and testing of current and former defence and civilian personnel and members of the public exposed in and around Defence bases identified as potentially affected by contamination;

The adequacy of health advice is not taken seriously. An example is Field & Game Australia managing wetlands contaminated by East Sale RAAF base runoff. In this case economics has won over legal obligations to reduce risks to other persons.

<http://www.gippslandtimes.com.au/story/5392377/no-pfas-link-to-cancer-panel/>

Field and Game Association spokesman Gary Howard said the report backed up the association's understanding that there was no evidence that PFAS levels found in ducks and eels at the Heart Morass were harmful to hunters.

"If we thought there was a danger we wouldn't have gone down that path (opening the wetlands to hunting)," he said.

Currently, PFAS trigger guidelines are being challenged in the USA with potential lowering of trigger levels significant for Australia. Consumption of Tolerable Daily Intake (TDI) for PFAS contaminated food and water was assessed by FSANZ in 2016 under advice of 'experts' that were already engaged by industry and government to reduce their liability so this is a huge conflict of interest.

- Are current methodologies for the analysis of PFAS actually identifying the many other additional PFAS compounds that transform in our environment? Is the sampling focus beyond PFOS & PFOA or of those PFS's that have PHA levels? These precursors should be tested for.
- Are all testing of PFAS samples utilising the Total Oxidisable Precursor (TOP) assay to improve a greater understanding of the PFAS risk in our environmental?
- All PFAS contamination up gradient of all water supply sources need to be properly & quickly identified as to any levels including lakes, reservoirs, waterways and wells. Alternative water supplies should be supplied promptly.

Blood testing is not available in Victoria unless you pay for your own. If people from impacted areas are to reduce their consumption or correctly identify existing health issues they need blood testing.

Testing has been inadequate in Gippsland. EPA has allowed ESSO to coordinate where and when they test. With the geographical boundary I did challenge EPA why, as the responsible authority, did they not determine how best to conduct testing to ensure reduction of exposure to human health. With many properties dependent on bore water for drinking water the 'go slow' approach by ESSO for testing was irresponsibly tolerated by EPA.

e) the adequacy of Commonwealth and state and territory government environmental and human health standards and legislation, and any other relevant legislation;

As a consequence of the current human health standards, risks are assessed as low but the bioaccumulation of PFAS is not factored anywhere–

- Human health effects from drinking water and recreational use have been assessed as being low with further assessment being undertaken on a precautionary basis.
- Human health effects from consumption of impacted livestock produce have been assessed as being low. Further assessment by testing animal blood is being undertaken as a precautionary measure.
- Human health effects from consumption of irrigated crops have been assessed as being low. Source – EPA 022718 Cleanup notice for ESSO ID-90008551

Down-gradient groundwater users for domestic/stock watering/irrigation purposes are currently not a priority under Victorian EPA oversight for private industry non-compliance of license conditions.

What legislation is protecting or managing risks to protected beneficial uses of -

- land
- surface water with the following beneficial uses having potential impact by contamination
- groundwater with the following beneficial uses having potential impact by contamination

g) what consideration has been given to understanding and addressing any financial impact to affected businesses and individuals.

To understand the financial complications to the businesses or individual is to admit that contamination has and will continue to have a significant dollar impact on business/farmers and individuals.

Worst though is the health impacts on families through long and short term exposures that have and will continue to affect their wellbeing with future severity of health implications unknown. Physical pain and suffering or even death entails significant cost burdens for families that will need consideration.

In Gippsland, farms and private properties have contaminated sources of ground and surface water supply accumulating in soils and pasture. No farmer or individual can manage a business in these circumstances nor can that land be used for food production forever more. Bank loans cannot be accessed nor can they sell their land due to it being unusable or greatly devalued.

The only option is just compensation but what is just and fair that is agreeable to both the landowner and the polluter?

So how will this inquiry ensure the relevant departments review and provide appropriate food safety guidelines which recognise PFAS should not be in our water, on our pasture or in the food we eat affirming the background levels of PFAS in our food and water is ZERO?

Yours sincerely

Tracey Anton

