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## Australian Greens additional comments

### **Pollution and accountability**

1.1 The Australian Greens initiated the inquiry into contamination at the Williamstown RAAF Base because of the extent and seriousness of the issue.

1.2 The Department of Defence has not provided adequate support for Williamstown residents. There has been a lack of transparency on the issue by the Department. This approach has compounded the problems arising from the contamination in the Red Zone and the surrounding area.

1.3 Section 6.7 of the report notes that the failure to quickly notify local residents has resulted in community confusion and mistrust, and has impacted upon the community's ability to undertake proper precautionary measures against consuming harmful levels of PFOS and PFOA. As the report notes proper remediation of the site 'could take many years, or may prove impossible' (6.27).

1.4 The Australian Greens believe that recovery from incidents like this should be focused around community support, environmental remediation and health improvement, not deflections and public relations strategising by government departments.

1.5 The Australian Greens recognise that in many cases local residents and businesses are still in the dark about the impact that this contamination has had on their own health, water sources and the local environment.

1.6 Many residents, living inside the Red Zone and near the Red Zone, have formed residents' action groups to share information and campaign for remediation, compensation and adequate health and environmental tests. The Australian Greens note that the tenacity of these residents and action groups has been a great asset to the inquiry.

1.7 As identified by the report the most serious issue arising from the contamination has been the 'lack of Commonwealth Government leadership and a reluctance to take full responsibility' for both the issue and the handling of the issue (6.9).

1.8 The Department of Defence's failure to formalise a compensation scheme reflects poorly on the Turnbull Government. Other federal government agencies including Centrelink and the Department of the Environment have also not demonstrated adequate responsibility. The Australian Greens consider the Department of Defence's response to be passive at best.

1.9 The Australian Greens thank the committee secretariat, participating Senators, hearing witnesses and all other community members who contributed to this inquiry, including those who made submissions.

**1.10 The Australian Greens agree with the committee's report and its recommendations. We support the inclusion of the recommendations below, and we urge that the Department of Defence act on all recommendations immediately.**

1.11 The committee report notes NSW EPA's argument that 'there needs to be a regulatory regime to incentivise Defence to adhere to the same environmental standards applied to the rest of the community, and there needs to be an authority to regulate contamination issues' (5.36). The report also notes that there is no federal oversight of Defence's environment activities, nor are there national environmental standards in Australia for levels of the chemicals that have been used in firefighting foams (5.37; 5.43).

### **Recommendations**

- **The Department of Defence and other relevant departments to work together to develop national environmental standards for firefighting foam chemicals, in line with world's best practice.**
- **Regulatory mechanisms should be developed to regulate contamination issues and ensure Defence adheres to environmental standards.**
- **In the interim, Defence to follow the NSW EPA's advice (5.48) and immediately take steps to contain contamination in Lake Cochrane.**

1.12 The Committee report notes that, although it is not in a position to make specific recommendations regarding remediation, Defence has committed to follow-up remediation strategies as a priority (6.36).

### **Recommendation**

- **The Department of Defence to provide a report updating the committee on its progress on remediation strategies within six months.**

1.13 The committee report recommends that the federal government publicly commits to compensating both fishers and residents for any losses caused by the contamination. The Australian Greens note that these losses may include the devaluation of properties. Further the Committee recommends an initial compensation package for affected commercial fishers (6.20).

1.14 The Australian Greens note that section 6.18 of the report advises that a more thorough compensation program should be designed immediately with the input of local relevant stakeholders.

### **Recommendations**

- **The Department of Defence and related government agencies to proactively offer immediate, adequate compensation schemes for residents and workers who have been affected by the contamination.**
- **Compensation to be offered to those who have incurred loss of income, business damage, property devaluation, medical and health costs, and other hidden costs.**
- **The term "fishing" also include prawning.**

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1.15 The Department of Defence and related government agencies should offer voluntary acquisition of properties which have been significantly damaged or devalued, either due to irreparable environmental damage or due to perceptions of diminished value of the real estate. Recommendation 5 of the report sets out that the Turnbull Government should undertake the voluntary acquisition of properties which are 'no longer fit for purpose'.

**Recommendation**

- **The federal government offers voluntary acquisition of properties which have been significantly devalued by the contamination due to perceptions of diminished value of the real estate.**

1.16 The Australian Greens are in agreement with the Williamstown and Surrounds Residents Action Group that existing or proposed developments within the 'Red Zone' should be suspended until the NSW EPA, NSW Health and hydrology experts advise otherwise (5.55).

**Recommendation**

- **The Department of Defence to suspend plans for current and proposed developments at the Williamstown RAAF Base until the contamination is removed.**

1.17 The Defence Department should install a program to fully fund blood testing for residents and all workers who may have been exposed on the base, in and around the 'Red Zone', on an annual basis. The Australian Greens note such testing will help to contribute to international knowledge about the effects of PFOS/PFOA chemicals.

**Recommendation**

- **The Department of Defence to be proactive about offering this testing to residents and workers.**

**Senator Lee Rhiannon**

