



Connecting, supporting & empowering our community

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Submission to the ***Inquiry into the management of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination in and around Defence bases*** (the Inquiry).

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission to the Inquiry on behalf of the Bullsbrook Residents and Ratepayers Association Inc (BRRRA). We respectfully request that you accept this late submission on behalf of our community. We have only recently received the report from GHD the consultants undertaking the inquiry into the extent of PFAS contamination around RAAF Base Pearce in Western Australia on behalf of the Department of Defence and did not want to make a submission prior to receiving this report. We wanted to ensure the information we had was up to date and accurate. The investigation has been ongoing for over two and a half years and we are still waiting for the environmental risk section of the investigation to be completed.

Compared with other Defence bases around Australia, the area of contamination in Bullsbrook and the number of private affected properties is small, however the negative impacts on and the importance of the health and wellbeing of residents is the same as in other contaminated communities. We were very disappointed to note there is no Western Australian representation on the committee conducting this inquiry and that the inquiry will not be holding a public hearing in Western Australia. To some extent we feel like the forgotten people of this inquiry.

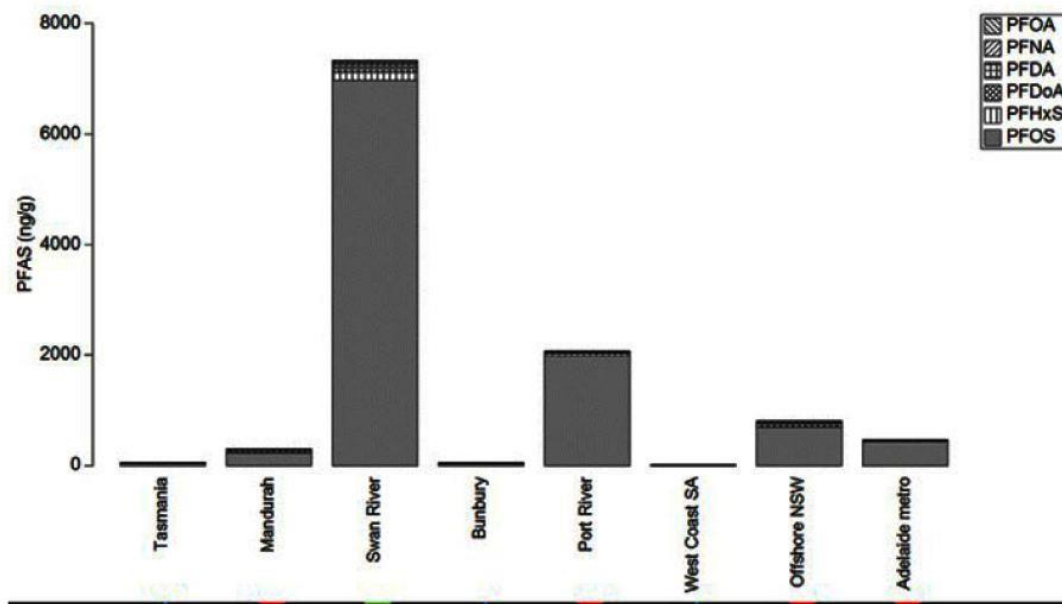
BRRRA represents the local community surrounding RAAF Pearce. We have been and continue to be instrumental in working with Defence personnel and GHD employees in providing local information for the investigation and keeping our community informed with up-to-date information about the investigation and its findings. However, we also believe that the time has come now for Defence to take responsibility for the contamination they have caused and must commit to the provision of clean, safe water for drinking and other household purposes including for garden use at the affected properties. Our residents are stressed, anxious and concerned for the future, they have been waiting now for more two and a half years for a response from Defence as to how the contamination will be addressed and the time has come now for action.

Our submission addresses the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry as relating to the community of Bullsbrook, in particular West Bullsbrook, and RAAF Pearce.

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

- Contamination has been found on RAAF Pearce and on private properties to the east (1) and the west (21) of the Base. However, while the Base was thoroughly tested, these results do not necessarily accurately reflect the extent of the contamination on private land as not all of the bores in the West Bullsbrook townsite were tested.

- The impacts of contamination on private land is worse in West Bullsbrook as residents only have the option of bore water or rain water on their properties – there is no scheme water currently available here. PFAS contamination has been found in water from people’s private bores, in soil and in hens’ eggs. It has also been found in biota in the area. This is detailed in GHD’s report available from <http://www.defence.gov.au/environment/pfas/Pearce/>
- Cattle destined for human consumption graze on Defence land in the Bullsbrook investigation area and drink from the contaminated Ellen Brook. These cattle have not been tested for PFAS.
- There is evidence that PFAS is migrating from Defence land through a number of pathways including via the Ellen Brook which runs from north to south through the Base and eventually into the Swan River. We acknowledge that PFAS from Pearce is not the only source of PFAS contamination in the Swan River. The dolphins in the Swan River have been assessed as having the highest levels of PFAS in their systems of any dolphins tested in Australia and 100 times higher than the dolphins in Bunbury Western Australia.



(https://www.epa.sa.gov.au/files/12580_report_pfas_marine.pdf, 2017).

- During the period of the Bullsbrook investigation, GHD has come to understand that the hydrology of our area is more complex than was originally thought and they are unable to adequately explain the variation in contamination on private properties. For example, one house might not have any PFAS detected in their bore water sample yet the properties on either side have positive PFAS readings. GHD cannot predict the future movement of the contamination plumes and as such cannot guarantee that properties that currently have no PFAS detects will continue that way in the future. Thus local residents cannot be assured of their bores being PFAS free into the future – this is a cause of great anxiety and stress to many and in particular to those families with young children. It is of great concern that the human risk analysis section of the GHD report minimizes the impact of existing and potential PFAS contamination on our community.

b) the response of, and coordination between, agencies of the Commonwealth Government, including, but not limited to, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Department of Health, the Department of the Environment and Energy, the Department of Defence and the Australian Defence Force;

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

- At the time of writing local residents have only been contacted by Defence and their consultants. There has been no communication from state or local governments on this matter. We are aware that employees of the Western Australian state and City of Swan local governments have attended the various community information sessions held by Defence over the past couple of years, however when asked they consistently state it is a commonwealth government matter to investigate and resolve. The seriousness and extent of the poisoning of our water and soil means the cleanup is going to require cooperation across the three levels of government and their various departments. There currently seems to be a reluctance for the different local, state and federal agencies to accept co-operative responsibility for responses to and remediation of the contamination crisis.
- We understand there are inconsistencies in the reported results of testing by state and federal government agencies of the water in the Ellen Brook outside of RAAF Pearce grounds. As such we are not sure whose results to believe this adding further to stress and anxiety.

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;

- Testing has not been offered to local members of the public who have been exposed to PFAS from the Base.
- Local doctors and other health professionals have little knowledge or understanding of the PFAS issue.

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

f) remediation works at the bases; and

- We understand that contaminated soil on RAAF Base Pearce is being removed and stored under plastic until it can be disposed of.
- To our knowledge no remediation of local groundwater or water in the Ellen Brook has occurred or is planned to occur. So the pollution of our community continues.

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

- No consideration at all to our knowledge has been given to understanding and addressing any financial impacts on affected businesses and individuals in Bullsbrook. In particular, there is evidence from local property owners and real estate agents of negative impacts on the value of properties in the contaminated area of West Bullsbrook. Sales of private properties have fallen through when potential buyers have become aware of the PFAS investigation and contamination. Residents report bank valuations of their properties have fallen and as such they are unable to redraw on their loans for home improvements. As one local resident explained "I thought I was ok with my yellow envelope from Defence nothing over the recommended health levels in my bore. Went for a loan and got told your in a groundwater contamination zone. My house value had dropped by \$80 000. Anyway that's a part of my story I want to forget."

The use of PFAS chemicals by the Department of Defence personnel on RAAF Base Pearce has directly resulted in contamination of our water, soil, food sources and livestock. Through no fault of their own, local residents are suffering the negative lifestyle, health and financial impacts of Defence's actions, yet other than the supply

of bottled water for drinking and cooking, nothing else has been offered to address and compensate for the effects of PFAS contamination on their lives.

In order to address the issues of ongoing access to safe water for drinking, cooking, bathing, gardening and other household uses; supporting the mental health and wellbeing of residents; access to up-to-date information; and compensation for those who want to leave the area, we believe the only acceptable outcomes are the following:

1. To ensure everyone in West Bullsbrook inside the investigation area has access to safe water we request
 - Scheme water be brought to West Bullsbrook as soon as possible at the Department of Defence's cost. Water rates for current owners to be covered.
 - Water tanks be installed for those who would like them. Water to be supplied if necessary.
 - Bores to be deepened for those who would like this option.
2. To ensure support for affected residents' mental health, provide written information for all residents detailing available support options.
3. Put a noticeboard in West Bullsbrook (maybe at the Museum) to keep residents up to date on PFAS information (especially for those who don't have internet).
4. Department of Defence to purchase properties of current owners in the contamination zone who want to leave the area.

It is now time for these issues to be addressed. We have effectively been "on hold" for over two and a half years. The Department of Defence has had adequate time to investigate the extent of the contamination and now needs to immediately apply workable solutions that address the individual needs of affected residents in our community so they can safely get on with their lives.

Yours sincerely
Dr Anne Sibbel
President
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