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Defence Portfolio

INQUIRY QUESTION

(Question No.)

Senator Lidia Thorpe asked the Department of Defence the following question, upon notice, on 5 September 2025:

1. Can you please provide a breakdown of legal costs of PFAS legal cases that Defence has incurred to date, including:
 - a. Settlement amounts.
 - b. Department's legal costs.
 - c. Number of ongoing class actions
 - d. Payments for claims made outside of class actions.
2. Can you please provide copies of any briefings that you have provided to the Minister on litigation against PFAS manufacturers here and overseas?
3. What legal avenues are available to the federal government to litigate against PFAS manufacturers, particularly if they are found to have knowingly covered up scientific findings on the impacts of PFAS on health and the environment?
4. What actions has Defence taken to address the concerns of the Wreck Bay community around PFAS contamination since January this year (which is when this committee visited the community)?
5. Back in January, it was criticised that there haven't been any community engagement sessions in years.
 - a. Have you since held a community engagement session?
 - b. What was discussed during this session?
6. Have you made any changes to how you engage with the Wreck Bay community since then?

Defence provides the following answer:

Five class actions have been settled by the Commonwealth in relation to PFAS contamination around Defence bases. Defence is not currently involved in any PFAS-related class actions.

As at 30 June 2025, Defence has settled 354 litigated and non-litigated PFAS-related claims at a cost of \$408 million. Three non-litigated PFAS-related claims have been resolved by way of departmental policy resolution.

Defence continues to consider all options that may be available to it in connection with PFAS suppliers and will not respond to advice that it has or will provide to Government.

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Wreck Bay

Defence is progressing its remediation program at Jervis Bay Range Facility and at the headwaters of Mary Creek. Remediation works include the excavation and offsite disposal of PFAS-impacted soils and infrastructure such as concrete, asphalt and tanks to remove primary and secondary sources of contamination. Civil works have diverted clean surface water away from impacted areas, and allowed for capture of contaminated groundwater and surface water for treatment. These measures aim to reduce the movement of PFAS into the Mary Creek catchment and surrounding environment.

A temporary water treatment plant operates on-site until a permanent treatment plant is installed. As of August 2025, over 30 million litres of surface water has been treated, with weekly testing confirming no PFAS detections above the Australian recreational guidelines (Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water: *PFAS National Environmental Management Plan* version 3 February 2025). Water from this plant is not used for drinking water supply to the Wreck Bay community. The Jervis Bay Territory Authority provides reticulated drinking water to community.

Since January 2025, Defence has held two community engagement sessions with the Wreck Bay community. In February 2025, Defence hosted a community barbeque at the request of the Wreck Bay community, and in July 2025 Defence met with the Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community Council Board (WBACC). Defence conducts monthly walkovers of the Mary Creek PFAS remediation site for WBACC representatives. The walkovers provide opportunities for community to see the works, receive updates, and ask questions. In May 2025, Defence delivered training and equipment to support WBACC Rangers to undertake independent PFAS sampling at off-base locations of community interest.

Defence is working collaboratively on signage; WBACC Rangers are installing temporary precautionary signage. Co-design work is underway with WBACC Junior Rangers and Wreck Bay Primary School students to develop new signage that reflects community feedback. Defence recently distributed a community survey to understand how residents interact with the environment to update the Human Health Risk Assessment and signage strategy. The survey remains open while WBACC Rangers continue gathering feedback.

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