

BRIEFING PAPER
FOR
FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE REFERENCES
COMMITTEE

CONTAMINATION OF AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE FACILITIES
WILLIAMTOWN RAAF BASE

WILLIAMTOWN
TUESDAY 22 DECEMBER 2015

WILLIAMTOWN RAAF BASE CONTAMINATION

The chemicals including fire-fighting foam have contaminated surface and ground water systems on and off the base.

The plume has spread across the Port Stephens flood plains and via table drains into Port Stephens via Tilligerry Creek and Newcastle Harbour via Fullerton Cove part of the Hunter River estuary which is also a world listed "RAMSAR" Wetland.

THE EFFECTS OF THE CONTAMINATION ARE:-

1. Polluting Fullerton Cove and Tilligerry Creek waterways. This has caused a complete ban on Commercial and Recreational fishing and prawning.
 - a. Fishing ban until June 2016.
 - b. Prawning ban through current season.
 - c. Oyster previously under consideration.

2. Polluting groundwater – causing EPA to recommend bore water not to be used.
 - a. Residents and Farmers off base unable to use bore water for drinking, vegetable growing and livestock.
 - b. Residents unable to consume locally grown eggs.
 - c. Uncertainty on health issues, in particular breast feeding and expectant mothers and mental health.

3. Put at risk Newcastle City water supply. Hunter Water not pumping from Tomago Sand Beds bores close to contamination site.
 - a. Now 3 bores have been closed off – 2% of the cities drinking water.
 - b. Threatens long term drought and industry use of aquifer and future of.

THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE RESPONSE

1. Defence notified EPA of contamination in 2012.
2. In September 2015, EPA notified the public by media release of contamination on and off Base.
3. October 2015 commenced bore water testing programme. Fifty tests in 9 weeks out of 650 properties. The residents have conducted 20 of their own in 2 weeks. Defence did not test surface or drain channel water only private bores.
4. No progress at containing contamination on base to stop further spread of pollution off base.
5. Only fishing community offered minimal compensation.
6. A water purifying plant is to be used to deal with contaminated ground water around civil works on base, in particular air strip extension, but claim the process cannot be used to treat Lake Cochrane (a major source of continued pollution). Construction de-watering is ongoing on site sending more contaminated water downstream. Air Base development is being placed above resident health.
7. On Base child care closed (air noise levels blamed) yet playgroup remains open on the base amongst contaminated soil.

The contamination has expanded via two main drains leaving the base:

Moore's Drain
Dawson's Drain.

Moore's Drain feeds into Tillergerry Creek and on to Port Stephens.

Dawson's Drain is also fed from the overflow of a large collection dam on base (Lake Cochrane). This system drains to Fullerton Cove and Newcastle Harbour.

CRITICAL PATH RESPONSE

The Contamination Spread Must Be Stopped.

1. All contamination sites cleaned up and remediated, starting with Lake Cochrane.
2. Adequate compensation for all affected parties.
3. Health Study is required to establish a base line for future health monitoring. Health Department is not convincing in their persuasion against this. Refer other Country.
4. Current Base construction moratorium until safe working methods are established.
5. Protection for landowners of their land titles and land values – review of logical land zoning in future.
6. Access to safe drinking water i.e. piped town water at no cost. Note: Fullerton Cove not on town water.
7. Review of longer term effects on food chain, chickens, eggs, pigs, ducks, beef, sheep etc.
8. Review of effect on Rare and Endangered species, including koala and the 44 migratory birds and habitat in RAMSAR wetlands, downstream.
9. Define a strong long term protection to the remaining Nationally recognised Aquifer reservoirs and the Groundwater Dependant Ecosystems of this area, to ensure future industry or mining does not damage the aquifer any further.

