



PRIME MINISTER

Reference: MC18-009123

24 MAY 2018

Senator David Fawcett
Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs,
Defence and Trade
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Fawcett

Thank you for your letter dated 12 February 2018, regarding the Senate's December 2017 referral to your Committee of an inquiry into the management of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination. I apologise for the delay in responding.

As I am sure you appreciate, PFAS contamination is a highly complex issue. The whole-of-Government response has evolved as our understanding increases, further developments occur, and new complexities arise. I can assure you the relevant Ministers are working together to deliver activities that manage PFAS contamination and support affected communities.

On 7 May 2018, the PFAS Taskforce announced that the Australian Government is supporting local communities affected by PFAS contamination with a new \$73.1 million package of measures. This package includes \$55.2 million for a drinking water program, which has commenced in communities surrounding Army Aviation Centre Oakey and RAAF Bases Williamtown, Tindal and Pearce. The program provides alternative drinking water for property owners in these communities who use bores as their primary source of drinking water, and where PFAS is present at levels above the drinking water guidance value.

The package also included \$17.9 million to support the continued operation of the PFAS Taskforce within the Department of the Environment and Energy. This is consistent with the role Australia's environment ministers are playing in overseeing the implementation of the recently agreed *Intergovernmental Agreement on a Framework for National Responding to PFAS Contamination*, which is available on the COAG website.

This new package builds on the Government's extensive investments towards managing PFAS contamination of over \$100 million, which includes:

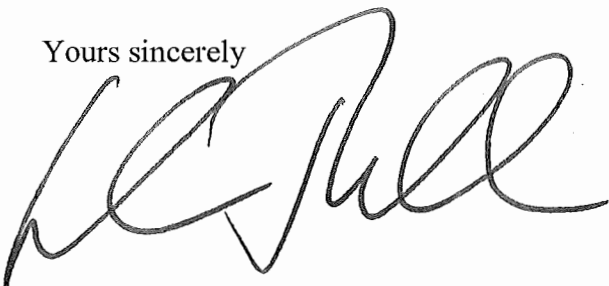
- \$55m for affected communities of Williamstown, NSW and Oakey, Qld to reduce exposure, manage the environmental impacts, and provide additional dedicated mental health and counselling services (\$3.5m), a voluntary blood testing program (\$4.5m), and an epidemiological study into potential health effects from exposure to PFAS (\$4m);
- \$5.7 million to support the Katherine community through access to the voluntary blood testing program, epidemiological study and additional dedicated mental health and counselling services;
- \$12.5 million for a National Research Program into the Human Health Effects of Prolonged Exposure to PFAS;
- over \$13 million for a National Research Grants Program to fund research into clean-up technologies to remove PFAS from the environment;
- investing a large amount of resources in a wide range of intensive activities, including:
 - conducting extensive investigations at Defence sites and other Commonwealth-owned sites where fire-fighting foams have been in use;
 - reducing exposure pathways from contaminated drinking water in investigation areas by providing alternative sources of drinking water; and
 - trialling water filtration and other remediation activities at multiple Defence sites;
- collaborating with state and territory governments to develop the *PFAS National Environmental Management Plan* (publicly released on 16 February 2018); and
- working on management options for a phase out of Perfluorooctane Sulfonate (PFOS) and related compounds as part of Government's decision-making on ratifying amendments to the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants.

In relation to your request for information on the progress of health research, I can advise that the Independent Expert Health Panel, established to advise the Australian Government on the potential health impacts associated with PFAS exposure, has publicly released its report. The report supports the enHealth advice that there is no consistent evidence that exposure to PFAS causes adverse human health effects. These findings support the approach taken to date by the Australian Government in responding to PFAS contamination.

The Australian Government is currently finalising its response to the *Senate Inquiry Report Part B – Army Aviation Centre Oakey and other Commonwealth, state and territory sites*. I am aware this response is overdue and have urged relevant Ministers to prioritise finalisation.

I have copied this letter to the Minister for Environment and Energy, the Minister for Defence and the Minister for Health.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MALCOLM TURNBULL', written in a cursive style.

MALCOLM TURNBULL