

# PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

## Department of Health Disability and Ageing

### Select Committee on PFAS (per and polyfluoroalkyl substances)

#### Inquiry into the extent, regulation and management of PFAS

10 June 2025

PDR Number: IQ25-000046

#### PFAS blood testing

#### Written

**Senator:** Lidia Thorpe

#### Question:

2. The committee has heard from a number of regulators that they do not provide PFAS blood testing—and are unable to provide advice or support to those exposed to high levels of PFAS—because there is no stipulated level of PFAS blood contamination which is considered to be high risk.

- a. Are there any efforts underway to try and nominate specific PFAS blood concentration levels which indicate a higher risk of disease, or other detrimental health effects?
- b. If not, why not? What is preventing Australian regulators and research bodies from seeking to quantify what constitutes a 'high' or 'risky' PFAS blood concentration level?

#### Answer:

- The Australian Government provided funding to the Australian Bureau of Statistics to ensure the inclusion of PFAS biomarker testing as part of the Intergenerational Health and Mental Health Study. This study now provides a benchmark for PFAS exposure in Australia.
- The results indicate a baseline level of key PFAS in the blood of most Australians, arising primarily from the historical use of these chemicals. The ABS results were published on 27 May at <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/per-and-polyfluoroalkyl-substances>.
- In June 2016, the department commissioned Food Standards Australia New Zealand's (FSANZ) to develop final Health Based Guidance Values for PFOS, PFOA and PFHxS for use in site investigations in Australia. The Australian Health Based Guidance Values, expressed as Tolerable Daily Intakes, developed by FSANZ, indicate the amount of a chemical in food or drinking water that a person can consume regularly over a lifetime without any significant risk to health.

- The FSANZ 27th Australian Total Diet Study, published in 2021, found PFAS levels in the general food supply are well below Australian health-based guidance values, and there is no need to consider food regulatory measures, such as maximum levels in the Australian New Zealand Food Standards Code. FSANZ remains confident that the Australian Health Based Guidance Values (Tolerable Daily Intakes) relevant to the risk assessment for PFAS in food remain protective of public health.

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## **Department of Health Disability and Ageing**

### **Select Committee on PFAS (per and polyfluoroalkyl substances)**

#### **Inquiry into the extent, regulation and management of PFAS**

**10 June 2025**

**PDR Number: IQ25-000050**

#### **enHealth guidance review regarding PFAS and updates to the Drinking Water Guidelines**

##### **Written**

**Senator:** Lidia Thorpe

##### **Question:**

8. During his appearance in Canberra, Assistant Secretary of the Environmental Health and Climate Change Branch in the Interim Australian Centre for Disease Control within the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, Mr Stephen Bouwhuis said: 'We have a review currently underway that is looking at PFAS evidence, and we would anticipate that that'll feed into a revised enHealth guidance. The enHealth guidance was updated recently in February 2024 but there's a recognition by the enHealth committee of the need to update that further. We are pulling together some analysis of the literature on PFAS and the different studies to inform enHealth ahead of their consideration, should there be a need to update the guidance—which that committee has recognised there is a need to do'. He later said that the results of this review are expected later in 2025. (Committee Transcript, 10 June 2025, pp. 37-40)

- a. What was the catalyst for the current review?
- b. Has an announcement on the revised Drinking Water Guidelines been delayed until this review is complete? Are the two processes linked?

##### **Answer:**

- In 2017, as part of its response to the growing understanding of the extent of PFAS contamination in Australia, the Australian Government established an Expert Health Panel to advise the Government on the available health evidence.
- Since the release of the Expert Health Panel's report in 2018, there has been ongoing public interest in PFAS exposure, and recent international developments such as the outcomes of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) evaluation of PFOA and PFOS highlighted the need to review the latest developments in the health science on PFAS.

In addition, the 2022 Parliamentary Inquiry into PFAS remediation in and around Defence bases and the 2024 Independent Review of land uses around key Defence bases impacted by PFAS contamination both reference the need for expert advice.

- To address these ongoing concerns, the department engaged Allen + Clarke Pty Ltd to conduct a review of domestic and international PFAS health advice since the release of Expert Health Panel report in 2018, taking into account international health advice on PFAS, the work done by the NHMRC for the review of the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines, and the work produced by the IARC.
- The Environmental Health Standing Committee (enHealth) independently decided to review the enHealth Guidance Statement of PFAS given developments since February 2024, including the revised PFAS values in the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines and the work produced by the IARC. It is anticipated the enHealth review will be completed by the end of 2025.