

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Remediation of PFAS-related impacts ongoing scrutiny and review

22 October 2021

PDR Number: IQ21-000275

The name of the Northern Territory Government Department communicating with livestock and agricultural producers in the surrounding areas of Darwin.

Spoken

Hansard Page number: 12-13

Senator: Malarndirri McCarthy

Question:

Senator McCARTHY: I have a request in relation to the Northern Territory, in particular about the Katherine region and certainly just south of Darwin in our horticultural area—but in Katherine in particular because of the concerns around PFAS. Have there been any issues raised directly with you concerning PFAS with regard to the produce we have in the Katherine region?

Ms Hambridge: We did some initial work a couple of years ago in providing technical input into that area, but since that time we haven't had any more input into work in that area.

Senator McCARTHY: What was that technical input?

Ms Hambridge: It was looking at the concentrations in the foods that were sampled in that area, looking at potential dietary exposure to the particular foods, and then allowing the military jurisdiction to put together the relevant risk management in that particular jurisdiction.

Senator McCARTHY: In what year was that?

Ms Hambridge: It was 2018.

Senator McCARTHY: And what foods were you sampling?

Ms Hambridge: We didn't undertake that sampling. That was information provided to us for that particular area. It was particularly fish and seafood from Darwin waters, fruit and vegetables, and also some animal products.

Senator McCARTHY: What was the communication with the livestock and agricultural producers in those particular areas? What kind of communication took place?

Mrs Leemhuis: That wasn't communication undertaken by FSANZ; that was communication undertaken by the jurisdiction.

Senator McCARTHY: What does that mean?

Mrs Leemhuis: FSANZ did not undertake any communication. We were just communicating with the Northern Territory government.

Senator McCARTHY: Which department in the Northern Territory government?

Mrs Leemhuis: I will have to take that one on notice. I am sorry, I am not quite sure.

Senator McCARTHY: Was there any kind of report that came from that interaction in 2018, any formal report by Food Standards in relation to that technical support you provided?

Ms Hambridge: My understanding was that some information was published by the jurisdiction but not specifically by us.

Senator McCARTHY: So when you say 'the jurisdiction', do you mean the Northern Territory government?

Ms Hambridge: Yes.

Senator McCARTHY: Will you find out which department that was?

Ms Hambridge: Yes.

Answer:

Food Standards Australia New Zealand worked with the Northern Territory Department of Health in relation to PFAS monitoring of concentrations in food and dietary exposures.

Subsequent to this, risk management information was provided by the Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority and Northern Territory Government on their websites including advice on seafood and bush food consumption for the Darwin and Katherine areas.

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Internet links to studies on the levels of PFAS undertaken by Defence.

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Hansard Page number: 13

Member: Meryl Swanson

Question:

CHAIR: Following on from some of the questions we have had, has there been any study on PFAS levels in meat from animals from the affected properties?

Ms Hambridge: Can I just clarify, meat from—what was the rest?

CHAIR: Coming from affected properties. One of the questions I get asked quite a bit from farmers is: 'We have been told not to eat our own beef, lamb, whatever, but it is okay for us to sell it. Why is that?' I do try to understand why that is but have there actually been any studies on the levels of PFAS that would be in meat from animals that come from these affected farms?

Mrs Leemhuis: Not undertaken by FSANZ, no.

Ms Gaudio: I do understand that, as part of the detailed site investigations undertaken by Defence, they typically do include different types of food, including generally cattle, I believe, and probably other types of meat as well.

CHAIR: Are you aware of any of those studies?

Ms Gaudio: Yes, we are aware of a few of the latest ones. They are publicly available, I believe, on the Defence website.

CHAIR: To save a bit of searching, could you provide those studies or links to those studies to the committee?

Ms Gaudio: Are you looking for a particular area?

CHAIR: As I said, studies of meat from affected animals.

Ms Gaudio: Any particular geographical location? The site investigations are specific usually for a town or an area.

CHAIR: Any and all, basically.

Ms Gaudio: I will endeavour to do that.

Answer:

Reports from the Department of Defence PFAS Investigation and Management Program are available at: www.defence.gov.au/Environment/PFAS/Publications/reports.asp.

Questions about the reports, including where to find the most recent investigation of specific biota, such as cattle, should be directed to the Department of Defence.