

**Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee**  
**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**  
**Budget Estimates 2017 - 2018**

**Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio**

**Department/Agency:** Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

**Outcome/Program:** Outcome 1: Prime Minister and Cabinet

**Topic:** Base Contamination - Per- and Poly-Fluoroalkyl Substances Taskforce

**Senator:** Gallacher

**Question reference number:** 254

**Type of question:** Written

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 7 July 2017

**Number of pages:** 4

**Question:**

Regarding the taskforce referenced in answer to question reference number 196 from Finance and Public Administration additional estimates 2016-17 “A taskforce has been established in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) to oversee and coordinate the whole of government response to per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination at Commonwealth owned sites and affected communities”:

1. What is the role of the taskforce?
2. What is the scope or the terms of reference of the taskforce?
3. What other Commonwealth agencies are represented on the taskforce?
4. Are any state or territory entities represented on the taskforce?
5. When and how often does the taskforce meet?
6. Has the Taskforce considered any requests for compensation from business owners in Williamstown, Oakey or any other sites affected by contamination for losses following the PFAS contamination?
7. Has the taskforce directed any compensation claims to be paid?
  - a) If so, how many?
8. Has the Taskforce formulated a recommendation regarding the buyouts of homes of residents affected by the PFAS contamination?
  - a) If so – When is it likely to be acted on?

**Answer:**

1. The role of the Per- and Poly-Fluoroalkyl Substances Taskforce (the Taskforce) established in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) is to oversee and coordinate the whole of government response to per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination at Commonwealth owned sites and affected communities.
2. The objectives of the Taskforce are at Attachment A.
3. The Taskforce comprises of 18 staff from PM&C and other Commonwealth departments, including the Departments of: Defence, Health, Agriculture and Water Resources, Environment and Energy, Infrastructure and Regional Development and the Attorney-General's Department.
4. No.
5. The Taskforce has been established as a division in PM&C for the 2017 calendar year.
6. The Commonwealth Government has committed to considering a range of policy options to assist people and businesses in affected areas.
7. No.
  - a) Not applicable.
8. Policy decisions will be informed by the new health-based guidance values, outcomes of site investigations, outcomes of human health and ecological risk assessments.
  - a) This is not something that can be rushed given the complex considerations of setting national policy approaches for addressing the issue of PFAS contamination.

**OBJECTIVES**  
**PFAS Response Taskforce**

Per- Poly- Fluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) contamination is a critical matter of concern for all governments and requires ongoing collaboration and coordination at the Commonwealth Government level, and with states and territories and other key stakeholders, to help ensure a nationally consistent response.

A proactive, comprehensive and appropriate response to managing the issue is required, as site investigations progress, and further evidence on the impact on communities becomes available.

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) Per- and Poly-Fluoroalkyl Substances Taskforce (the Taskforce) provides whole of government strategic and operational oversight, to ensure that actions are delivered in a timely way and that people in affected communities are appropriately supported.

Individual Commonwealth agencies and portfolio Ministers continue to be responsible for implementing the activities for which they are accountable. PM&C provides strategic and operational oversight of this work in order to ensure that actions are delivered in a timely way, that people in affected communities are appropriately supported, and there is a direct line of sight to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet.

**Role of the Taskforce**

The Taskforce, working with relevant Commonwealth agencies, and with state and territory governments:

- coordinates and drives the delivery of the Commonwealth Government's election commitments, other key decisions and future activity to support impacted communities
- coordinates work to determine the scale of the issue of PFAS contamination and the Commonwealth's responsibilities
- provides advice on further options to support families and communities impacted by PFAS contamination.
- provides strategic communications to ensure consistency of whole of government communication and community engagement activity
- works with states and territories, through COAG and relevant Ministerial Councils, to develop a nationally consistent approach to managing PFAS contamination
- considers options to improve levels of coordination and collaboration of efforts at the local, regional and state and territory level
- works with stakeholders to further build the evidence base in relation to the impacts of PFAS contamination and appropriate responses, including drawing on international evidence
- monitors and reports regularly on activity to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet.

The Taskforce is supported by an interdepartmental committee of relevant Commonwealth agencies, which provides strategic leadership and guidance, facilitates information sharing and reports to Secretaries and Commonwealth Ministers on key issues as appropriate.

**Membership**

The Taskforce comprises of officials from PM&C and secondees drawn from relevant Commonwealth agencies, including:

- Department of Health
- Department of Defence
- Department of the Environment and Energy
- Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development
- Department of Agriculture and Water Resources
- Attorney-General's Department.

**Reporting**

The Taskforce reports regularly to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet on the status of activity that is underway to manage PFAS contamination.