

7 November 2024

Select Committee on PFAS (per and polyfluoroalkyl substances)

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Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

Hello,

Please find attached my submission for the **Select Committee on PFAS (per and polyfluoroalkyl substances)**.

Submission: Comprehensive Analysis of PFAS Contamination and Management in Australia

Executive Summary

This submission provides a comprehensive overview of PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) challenges in Australia, addressing critical concerns about environmental contamination, health risks, and necessary regulatory reforms. As a concerned citizen deeply invested in public health and environmental protection, I urge the committee to take decisive action to mitigate the widespread impacts of these persistent chemicals.

Key Areas of Concern

1. Extent of PFAS Contamination

Australia faces significant PFAS contamination challenges, particularly in:

- Military bases (Williamstown, Katherine, Rockhampton)
- Industrial sites
- Firefighting training facilities
- Water catchment areas

Recommended Actions:

- Comprehensive national mapping of PFAS contamination
- Mandatory reporting of PFAS presence in water, soil, and air
- Enhanced environmental monitoring protocols

2. Health and Environmental Impacts

Emerging scientific evidence demonstrates substantial risks associated with PFAS exposure:

Health Concerns:

- Potential links to:
 - Reduced immune function
 - Increased cancer risks
 - Hormonal disruptions
 - Developmental challenges

Environmental Impacts:

- Persistent bioaccumulation in ecosystems
- Long-term contamination of water systems
- Potential multigenerational effects on wildlife

3. Regulatory Frameworks and Recommendations

Current Limitations:

- Inconsistent national approach to PFAS management

- Inadequate regulatory standards
- Limited enforcement mechanisms

Proposed Reforms:

- Develop a comprehensive national PFAS management strategy
- Establish strict import and production regulations
- Implement mandatory phase-out timelines for PFAS-containing products
- Create robust compensation mechanisms for affected communities

4. Community and First Nations Engagement

Critical Considerations:

- Disproportionate impact on First Nations communities
- Need for culturally sensitive engagement
- Transparent communication about contamination risks
- Community-led remediation and monitoring programs

5. Research and Funding Priorities

Recommended Research Focus:

- Long-term health impact studies
- Advanced remediation technologies
- Comprehensive exposure pathway analysis
- Economic impact assessments

Funding Mechanisms:

- Establish dedicated PFAS research fund
- Ensure independent research free from industry influence
- Prioritise interdisciplinary and community-involved research approaches

Specific Recommendations

1. Immediate moratorium on PFAS-containing product manufacturing
2. Comprehensive national testing program
3. Develop world-leading remediation technologies
4. Create robust public health monitoring systems
5. Establish fair compensation frameworks for affected communities

Conclusion

The PFAS challenge represents a critical environmental and public health issue requiring immediate, comprehensive, and coordinated national action. This submission provides a roadmap for addressing these complex challenges, prioritising public health, environmental protection, and community well-being.

References:

- [1] <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/health-advice/environmental-health/water/PFAS-review/draft-fact-sheet>
- [2] <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-02/enhealth-guidance-statement-per--and-polyfluoroalkyl-substances-pfas.pdf>
- [3] <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/pfas-nemp-2.pdf>
- [4] <https://www.unsw.edu.au/newsroom/news/2024/04/pfas-forever-chemicals-above-drinking-water-guidelines-in-global-source-water>
- [5] <https://www.health.gov.au/topics/environmental-health/about/environmental-toxins-and-contaminants/pfas>
- [6] <https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/topics/policy-sub-issues/risk-management-risk-reduction-and-sustainable-chemistry2/pfas-country-information/Australia.pdf>
- [7] <https://www.pfas.gov.au/government-action/regulatory-guidance>
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- [9] <https://rembind.com/news/new-study-proves-that-pfas-remediation-using-rembind-is-stable-long-term/>
- [10] https://www.foe.org.au/pfas_chemicals_in_australian_drinking_water_a_summary
- [11] <https://www.epa.vic.gov.au/for-community/environmental-information/pfas/pfas-and-health>