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DEPSEC E&IG/OUT/2020/BS11167496

The Hon Dr John McVeigh MP

Member for Groom
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Dr McVeigh,

FIRST REPORT OF THE INQUIRY INTO PFAS REMEDIATION IN AND AROUND DEFENCE BASES

I write in relation to the First Report of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT) PFAS Sub-committee *Inquiry into PFAS remediation in and around Defence bases* (the 2019 Inquiry), which was initially released on 20 December 2019, and was tabled in the Parliament on 5 February 2020.

The report raises a number of important matters, including many which were discussed during the hearing on 2 December 2019, where my Defence colleagues and I provided the Sub-committee with an update on remediation activities the Department of Defence is conducting as part of its national program to investigate and remediate PFAS contamination.

Since the hearing, Defence has provided a range of responses to Questions on Notice asked by the Sub-committee, which are available on the Sub-committee's [website](#)ⁱ. The responses include information on

- Defence's approach to communicating information during and after environmental investigations, management activities and remediation;
- reviewing the quantity, clarity and focus of messaging to affected communities both in portfolio reporting and on Defence's website;
- further detail on remediation technologies and approaches.

I regret that these responses were not received in time to inform the first report, but trust that the information provided sufficiently addresses the issues raised by the Sub-committee.

Defence recognises the importance of this issue and continue to prioritise its work to address these issues. As such, I would like to take the opportunity to update you on some key developments since the 2 December 2019 hearing.

The Australian Government response to the recommendations from the 2018 *Inquiry into the management of PFAS contamination in and around Defence bases*.

On 28 February 2020, the Australian Government released its response to the 2018 JSCFADT *Inquiry into the management of PFAS contamination in and around Defence bases*. The response also addressed the outstanding Government response to the Recommendations from the 2016 JSCFADT report on *Firefighting Foam Contamination – Part B Army Aviation Centre Oakey and other Commonwealth, state and territory sites*.

The response provides important context to the Australian Government's approach on a number of issues raised in the Sub-Committee's First Report.

Settlement of class actions in Williamtown, Oakey and Katherine

On 5 June 2020 the Federal Court approved the in-principle agreement, reached by the Australian Government on 26 February 2020, to settle three Federal Court of Australia class actions relating to PFAS contamination in the communities of Williamtown, Oakey and Katherine. Of course, while reaching these settlements represents an important milestone on what has been a difficult journey, it does not represent the end of Defence's engagement with these communities.

Update on the PFAS Investigation and Management Program

Defence continues to address PFAS contamination in affected communities in a deliberate and evidence-based manner. Defence's PFAS Investigation and Management (PFASIM) Branch has now completed 18 of 28 investigations under its PFASIM Program.

At sites where investigations have concluded, the findings are used to develop a PFAS Management Area Plan (PMAP). The PMAP recommends actions to manage and reduce the risks of PFAS exposure and continued migration. Remediation actions recommended within PMAPs primarily focus on reducing contamination at source areas to prevent further migration. When implementing PMAP recommendations Defence consults with all affected stakeholders including any affected members of the community, and state and territory regulators. PMAPs will be reviewed annually, or more frequently if required to respond to any new information or technology that has the potential to impact the PMAP objectives.

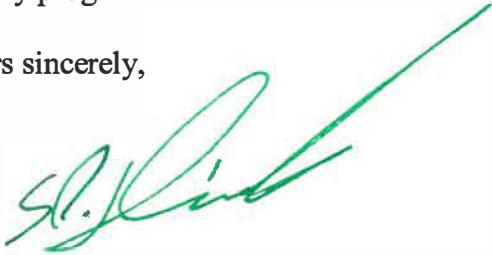
Each PMAP includes an Ongoing Monitoring Plan which outlines the sampling program that will be undertaken by Defence to monitor and track PFAS contamination over the coming years. This monitoring provides an evidence base for the continuing management of PFAS contamination, including looking at changes in concentration and geographical spread. It will assist Defence to evaluate the progress and success of management activities, and identify where more might need to be done. To continue to keep the community informed of progress, Defence will publish an annual Interpretive Report detailing results of the ongoing monitoring or each management site on its website.

Defence is continuing to support the Whole-of-Government response to COVID-19. After careful consideration of the advice from the Department of Health, we postponed all face-to-face PFASIM community engagements until further notice. However, Defence continues to engage with affected communities through a range of channels including the PFAS Investigation and Management website, factsheets, newsletters and dedicated information lines. Defence has brought forward plans to introduce online community updates as an additional communications channel. The updates will involve a pre-recorded video presentation, supporting factsheets, reports, and a forum for community members to

submit questions and provide feedback. This new format has been in planning for some time as the PFASIM Program has shifted focus from undertaking investigations to remediation and the ongoing monitoring of PFAS in the environment. This change in focus means the regularity of new or changed information requiring community updates will in many cases be less frequent and less complex than during the investigations phase.

Defence will continue to support, and remain responsive to, the Sub-committee as the 2019 Inquiry progresses.

Yours sincerely,



Steve Grzeskowiak
Deputy Secretary Estate and Infrastructure

22 June 2020