

Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Contamination of Australia's Defence Force facilities and other
Commonwealth, state and territory sites in Australia – 22 December 2015
ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Defence

Topic: Communication with Hunter Water regarding contamination

Question reference number: 1

Senator: Rhiannon

Type of question: Spoken

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 25 January 2016

Question:

CHAIR: So it is not disputed that there is still contaminant moving off the base with last night's storm?

Mr Grzeskowiak: I would not dispute that.

Senator RHIANNON: In your communications with Hunter Water, when did you inform them of contamination near bore 9?

Mr Grzeskowiak: Defence would not have informed Hunter Water of contamination in a specific bore. Hunter Water would do the testing of their own bores. I might ask Alison Clifton to look through the time line. It was, as I think we said earlier, sometime in 2012 when Defence informed Hunter Water and the New South Wales authorities.

Senator RHIANNON: Can you take that on notice, please.

Answer:

- On 21 March 2012, Defence indicated in an internal email that it had flagged with Hunter Water that it had detected contamination in the groundwater.
- On 26 April 2012, Hunter Water was verbally advised by Defence that Perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS) and Perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) were detected at a number of groundwater wells and a meeting to discuss was organised.
- On 02 May 2012, Defence sent the New South Wales Environment Protection Authority (NSW EPA) an email advising of surface water detections off-site.
- On 10 May 2012, Defence met with Hunter Water and NSW EPA to discuss results from Defence water monitoring relating to the presence of PFOS in stormwater leaving RAAF Base Williamtown and in the groundwater at various locations around the base.

Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Contamination of Australia's Defence Force facilities and other
Commonwealth, state and territory sites in Australia – 22 December 2015
ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Defence

Topic: Defence Hotline

Question reference number: 2

Senator: Rhiannon

Type of question: Spoken

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 25 January 2016

Senator RHIANNON: Thank you very much. Today, a number of people made reference to the work of Greg Evans. Could you briefly explain what his job is or was.

Mr Grzeskowiak: Greg Evans is still working for us—very much so. Air Vice Marshal Evans was brought on to our team that is looking into this issue to be a spokesperson for, initially, Williamtown but with a view that, if we go to other areas, as we are going to do, to see if we have similar problems, he would become a national spokesperson as well. He is still very much engaged in the local community. I met with him last night and I meet with him at least twice a week. Every time I meet with him he tells me about the number of phone conversations he has had with local people and visits he has made and the like.

Senator RHIANNON: There has been frustration expressed today by a number of people, in terms of the follow-up. Is that because he is overworked? Why is that?

Mr Grzeskowiak: I have heard that frustration today and I will take away a few things to follow up. It is not acceptable to me, for example, that people are ringing a telephone hotline that Defence has put in place and it is not being answered. That is unacceptable, so I will chase that down. I have read the majority of the submissions that have been put in to this inquiry and in some of those submissions people are saying that Defence has not yet contacted them. I will make sure that those issues are followed up. We are trying our best to engage with the community as much as we can. We are in territory that we have not been in before. I think you have heard several people say today that this is uncharted territory. If we look back at the way things have been managed over the past three years, would we do it differently if we were doing it again? There are probably some things we would do differently. We always learn from experience and we are very keen to speak to anyone in the science and engineering community who thinks they have methods that can help us with decontamination.

Answer:

Defence understands the importance of community engagement, and is committed to engage and respond to community concerns as they arise. A community telephone hotline has been established, and is manned from Monday – Friday between the hours of 8:30 am – 5.30 pm AEST. The Community Hotline Number is 1800 011 443. Calls that relate to both Oakey and Williamtown are being addressed via this number.

In addition, Air Vice Marshal Evans continues to be proactive in answering calls, visiting homes and providing frank and honest responses to concerned community members. He will continue to fulfill his commitment as the spokesperson for Defence in Williamtown.

If members of the community feel that their concerns have not been adequately addressed, or if their call has not been answered, Defence would welcome the opportunity to address this. Enquiries, comments and feedback can be directed to the following email address: Williamtown.defence@urs.com.

Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Contamination of Australia's Defence Force facilities and other Commonwealth, state and territory sites in Australia – 22 December 2015 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Defence

Topic: Amount of time taken to respond to test results and the delivery of bottled water

Question reference number: 3

Senator: Rhiannon

Type of question: Spoken, Hansard page 69

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 25 January 2016

Question:

Senator RHIANNON: A number of local situations have been shared with us today and they have helped to give a useful picture of it. One that I am still trying to understand is that you are testing water for levels of contamination in people's water tanks. I will give you some information that was just shared with us. It seems surprising in terms of the way it has been handled. The woman, Rhonda, is 73 and is looking after her husband, Clive, who is 75. She is his carer. She was notified that the water tank has a high result—0.16 parts per million—and that she should not drink the water, but it is safe to bathe in. They left her 30 pallets of water bottles. Firstly, one thing that has come through to the committee, both formally and informally, is that people have all the water bottles that are not being collected. That is one thing that seems to be incredibly poorly managed. Rhonda purchased a water tank. She is obviously elderly. There are the practical things such as people getting their clean water tank linked up. We were also told that in the past seven days Greg Evans visited the site to assure Rhonda that it is safe to drink the water. It is quite a long story and I realise that we do not have time to go into all of it. You would not have all the details at hand, but it comes across as a level of mismanagement that adds to the uncertainty those people are living with. Are you conscious of this? Do you have ways of tightening up how you are engaging with people so that they can get their lives back on track?

Mr Grzeskowiak: We will strive to improve our engagement. We have already noted the issue of collection of water bottles and will seek to do that. I am advised that, I think today, there has been a resolution of the issue of connecting the water tank.

Senator RHIANNON: Four weeks passed when the Department of Defence did nothing to help her. That is a long period of time under the present circumstances. Does that surprise you?

Mr Grzeskowiak: What do you mean by nothing happened?

Senator RHIANNON: In four weeks she went from being told that she cannot drink the water, but she can bathe in it, to getting some bottled water, but still being uncertain about—

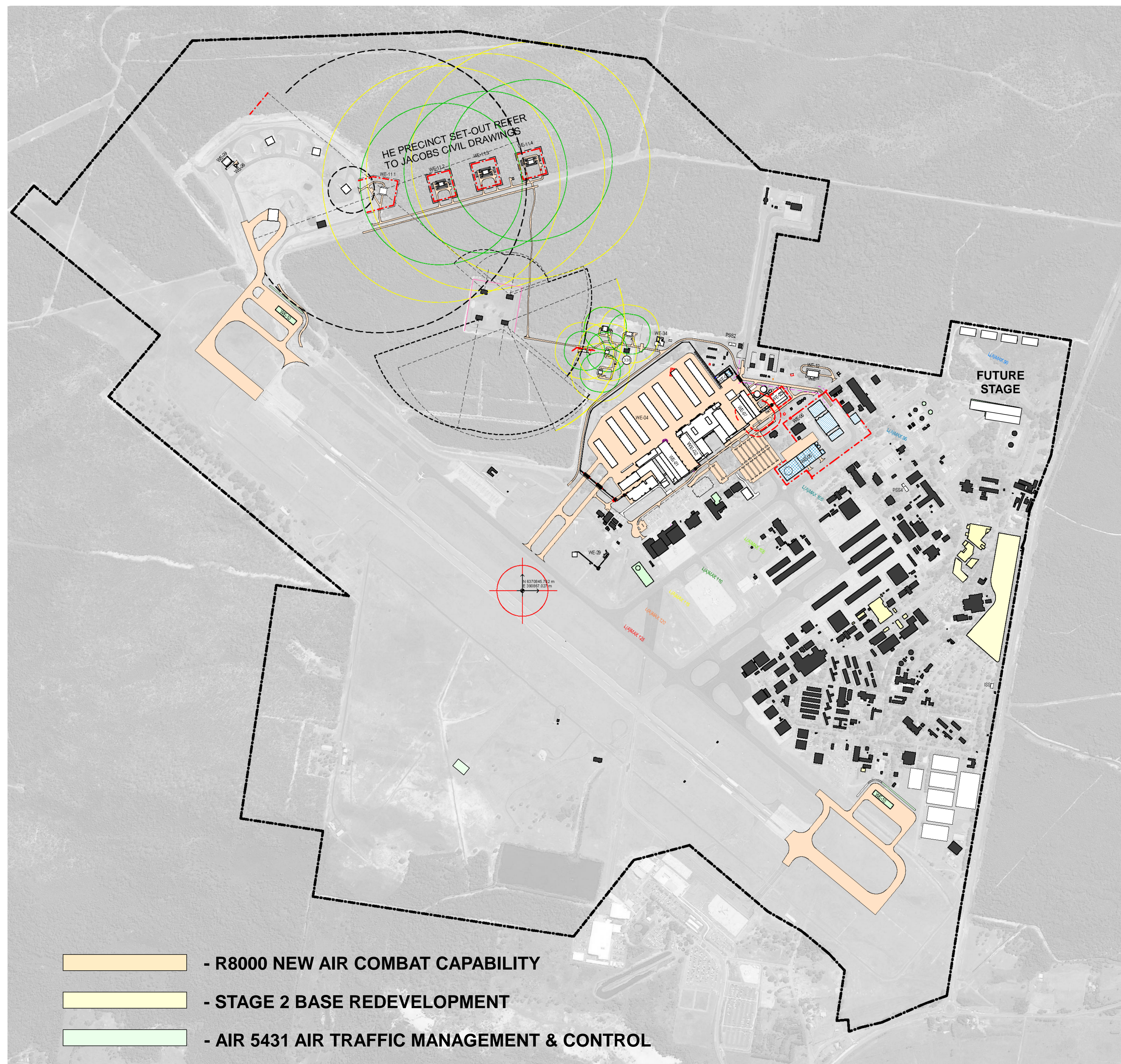
Mr Grzeskowiak: It would surprise me that four weeks went by between Defence delivering a test result that said the water was above the threshold level and Defence delivering bottled water. I would be surprised by that. I will take that away and investigate. My recollection is that there was not a four-week gap, but I will have that checked.

Answer:

Defence received technically verified results on 23 November 2015. Mrs Robinson was advised of the results on 26 November 2015, and a shipment of water bottles was delivered on 26 November 2015. Water was delivered to her property within 2 hours of Air Vice Marshal Greg Evans's arrival on her property to advise of the test results. Defence has been advised that Mrs Robinson was not present on her property at the time of delivery.

Defence has reimbursed Mrs Robinson for the purchase price of her rainwater tank and has taken action to plumb the tank to her home.

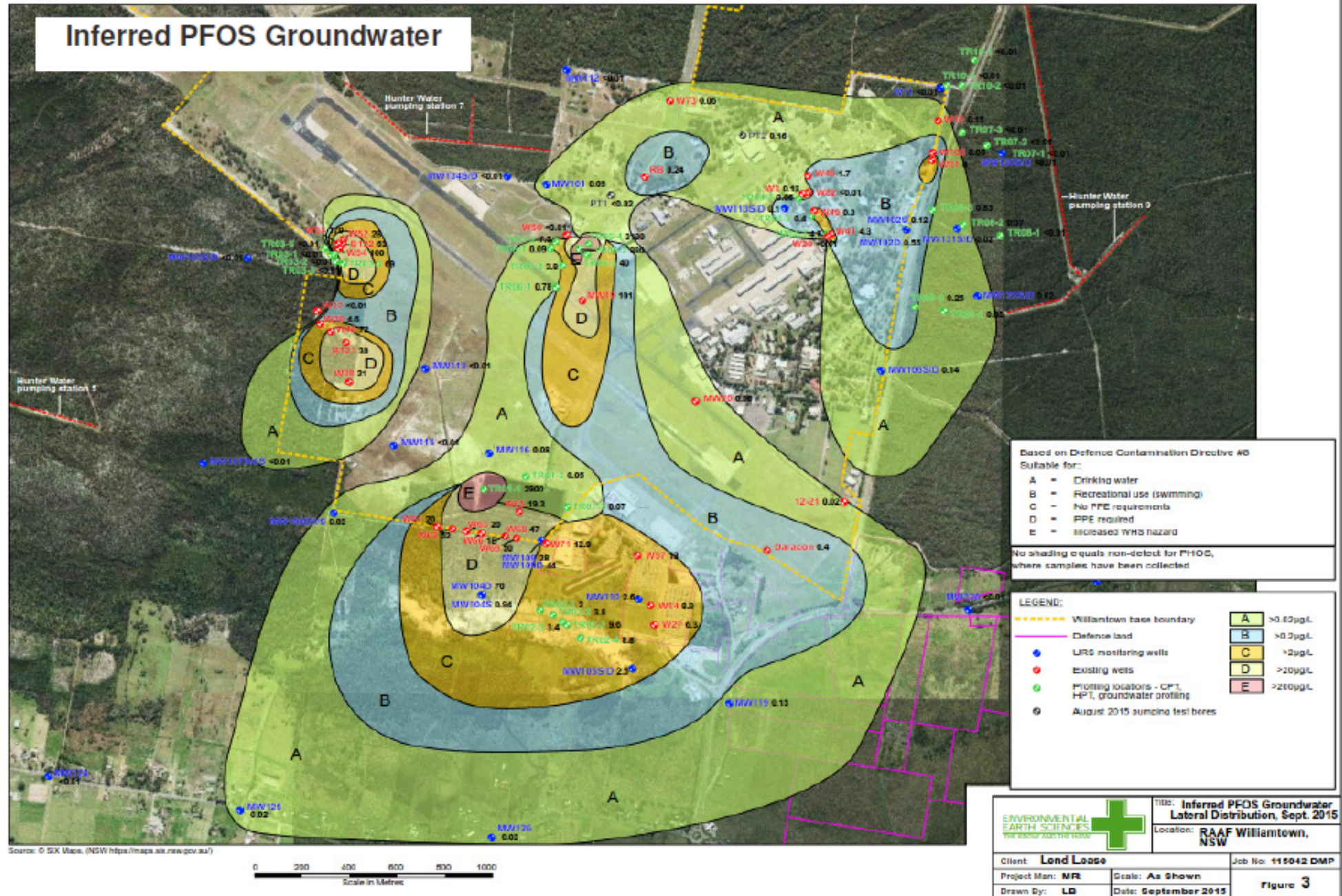
Defence has revised the content of the letters which will accompany future water deliveries to include more detailed information regarding the disposals process. The revised letter includes contact details for Port Stephens Council, which is the responsible body for managing the pick-up and disposal process.

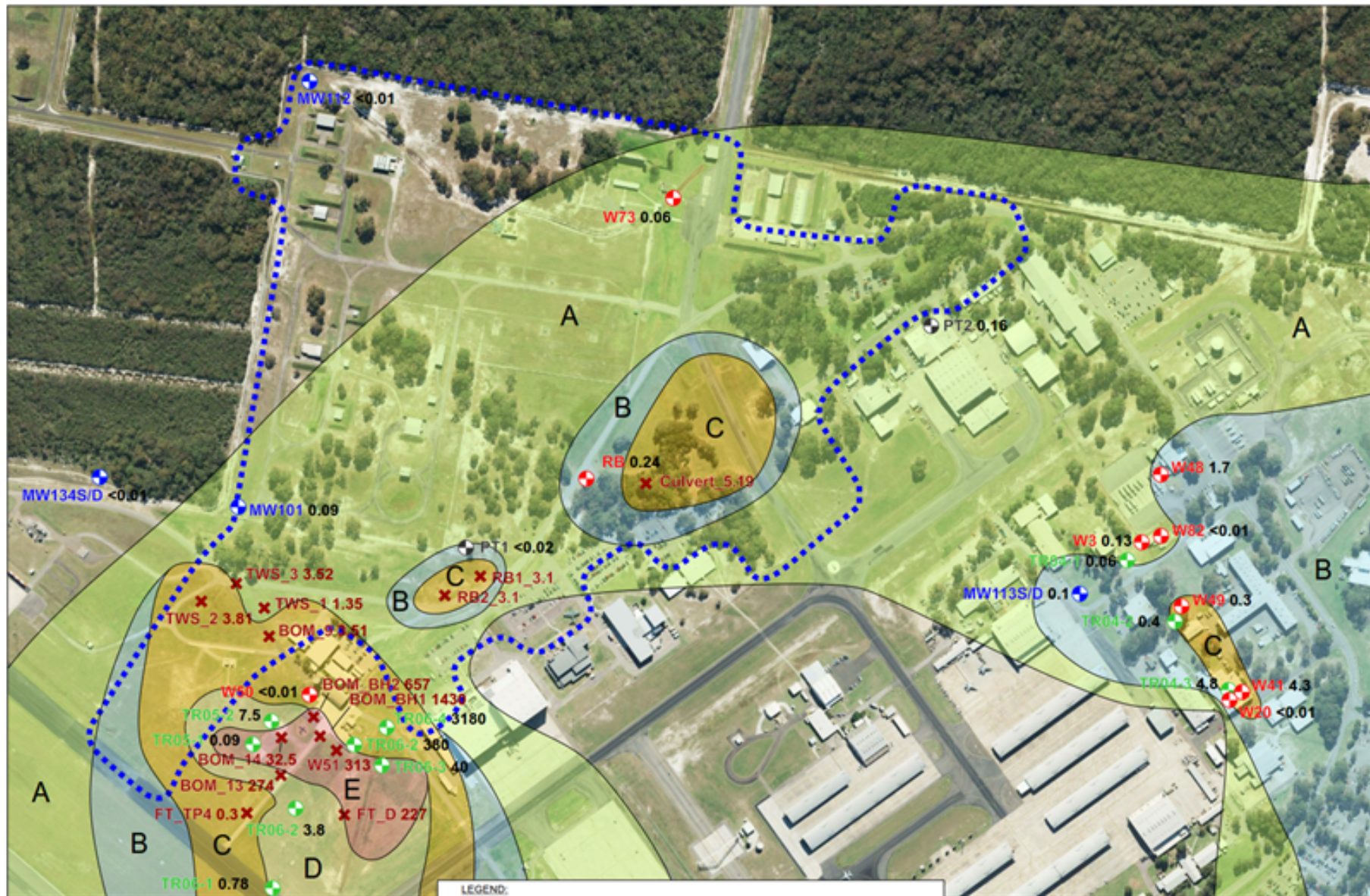


RAAF BASE WILLIAMTOWN PROPOSED CAPITAL FACILITY WORKS



Inferred PFOS Groundwater





Source: © Google Pro

0 50 100 150 200 250
Scale in Metres

LEGEND:

- NACC precinct area (approximate)
- URS monitoring wells
- Existing wells
- Profiling locations - CPT, HPT, groundwater profiling
- August 2015 pumping test bores
- ✕ Grab sample collected via test pit or NDO

PFOS Discharge
Criteria Limit

- <0.02µg/L
- A 0.02 - 0.2µg/L
- B 0.2 - 2µg/L
- C 2 - 20µg/L
- D 20 - 200µg/L
- E >200µg/L



Title: **NACC Precinct**
Location: **RAAF Williamstown, NSW**

Client: **Lend Lease**

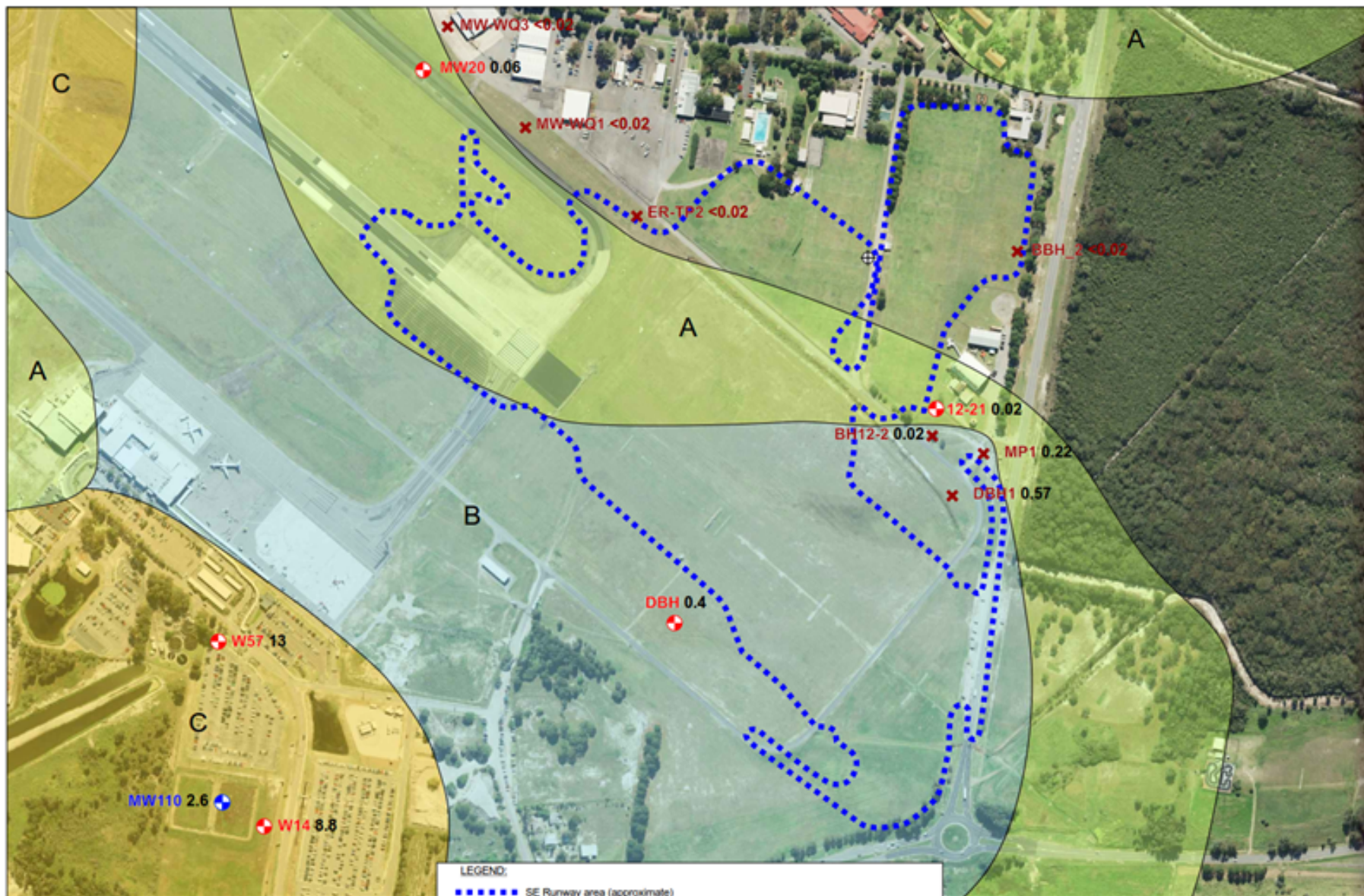
Job No: **115042 DMP**

Project Man: **MR**

Scale: **As Shown**

Drawn By: **LB**

Date: **November 2015**



Source: © Google Pro



Title:

SE Runway

Location: RAAF Williamstown, NSW

Client: Lend Lease

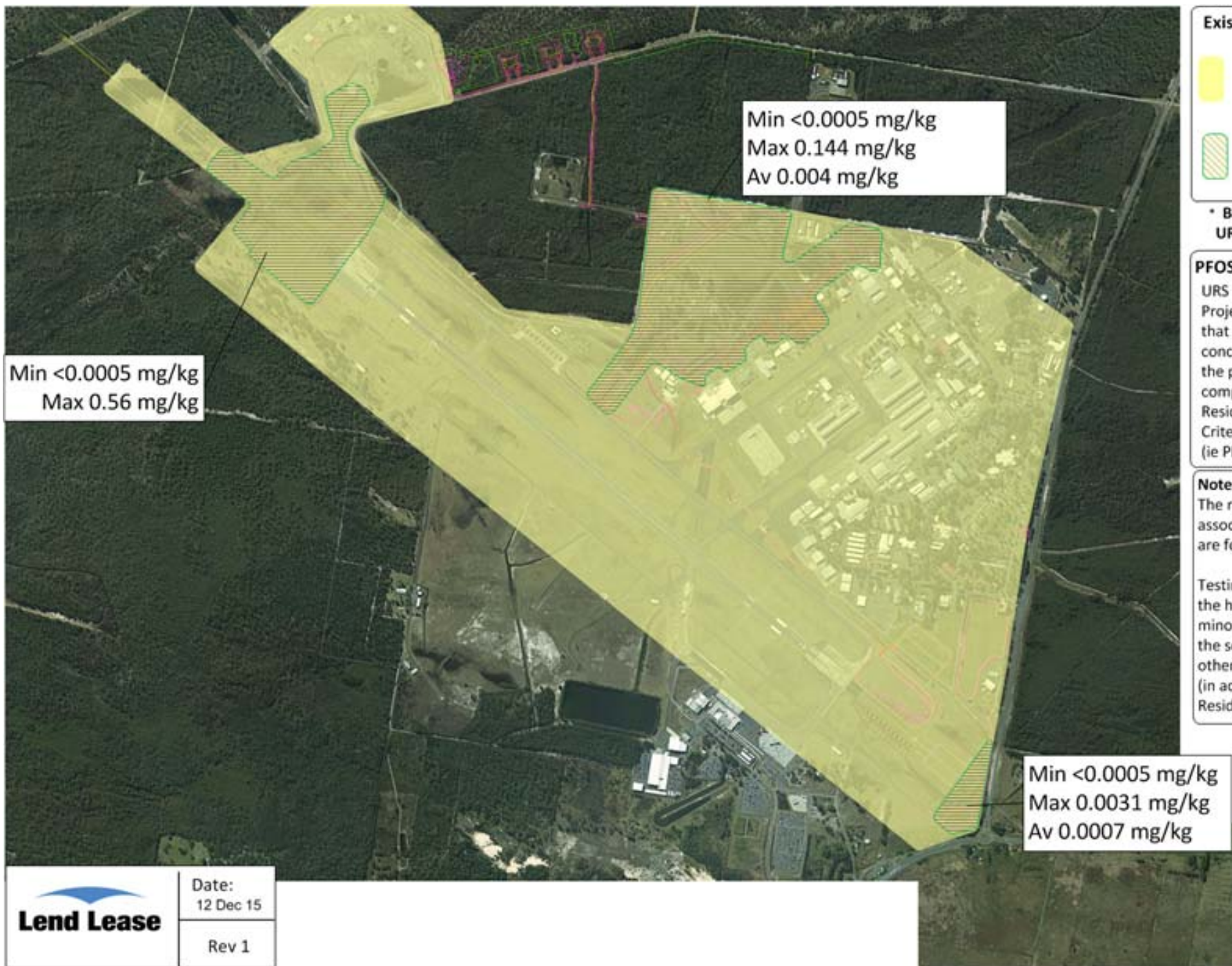
Job No: 115042 DMP

Project Man: MR


Scale: As Shown


Drawn By: LB

Date: November 2015



Existing soil Results

 Residential Land Use Criteria or better *

 NACC Project in-situ soil test areas

* Based on combined URS and NACC data

PFOS Results:

URS and NACC Project data shows that soil PFOS concentration across the project area complies with the soil Residential Land Use Criteria (ie PFOS <6mg/kg)

Note:

The results shown, and associated classification are for PFOS levels only.

Testing of the topsoil in the hatched areas, with minor exceptions, shows the soil complies with all other chemical criteria (in addition to PFOS) for Residential Land Use.

Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Contamination of Australia's Defence Force facilities and other Commonwealth, state and territory sites in Australia – 22 December 2015 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Defence

Topic: Inferred contamination in construction zones at RAAF Base Williamtown

Question reference number: 4

Senator: Rhiannon

Type of question: Spoken

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 25 January 2015

Question:

Senator RHIANNON: Is it correct that Williamtown will be the base for the jet strike fighters?

Mr Grzeskowiak: Yes.

Senator RHIANNON: Are there massive upgrades going on at Williamtown to manage that?

Mr Grzeskowiak: We are currently doing building works to enable the Joint Strike Fighter to be based at Williamtown, yes.

Senator RHIANNON: What is the budget for that, please?

Mr Grzeskowiak: I might pass that to Brigadier Beutel.

Brig. Beutel: The total approved budget for the New Air Combat Capability Facilities Project, across Australia, is approximately \$1.5 billion. The component of works at Williamtown is, approximately, 0.9 or \$900 million.

Senator RHIANNON: Are any of those upgrades or new structures being built on contaminated land?

Brig. Beutel: There is a rigorous sampling and analysis plan for all worksites on RAAF Base Williamtown. That sampling and analysis plan is confirmation of previous investigations that we had done during development, and there are certain areas where there is contaminated soil and contaminated water. An understanding, here, is that with respect to dewatering, and some of the activities that some of the community have seen in relation to dewatering on the base and concerns that has raised, the only time we are looking to dewater is when we have to excavate below the existing water table. The water table at Williamtown, because of the sand aquifer, does vary up and down. But, in rough-order average, it sits quite close to the existing ground level. At the moment, it is sitting about around 600 or 700 millimetres. Where we have to excavate, to put in footings or foundations, there is a requirement to lower the water table, temporarily. The way we do that is through the spears, to dewater for that. The process we have in place, at Williamtown, to ensure that there is no potential for further contamination off the base is to undertake a treatment process of that dewatering material. That water is treated through various mechanisms, but the majority of it is an activated carbon prior to it being reinjected very close to the

aquifer. There are also aspects where there is contaminated soil below a screening criteria that is required. Most of the material we are excavating is for reuse on the base. Where it is above that screening criteria—we have not identified any yet—there is a proposed stockpile where that will be maintained until a decision is taken as to how to remediate. So, yes, there are certain areas within the base that have contaminated water and contaminated soil. However, there are very stringent risk-mitigation measures there to ensure that the works are not impacting upon or in relation to making the problem off site, off base, any worse.

Senator RHIANNON: Please take it on notice to provide the committee with a map of existing buildings, the existing concreted areas—runways et cetera—the areas of contamination and the areas that are being upgraded for the jet strike fighters. Also, you gave a figure of \$1.5 billion, overall, for the jet strike fighters. I understand that was for the infrastructure to assist them. Overall, the project is worth about \$17 billion to purchase all these jet fighters and to house them in Australia. Are we talking those sorts of figures?

Answer:

Maps of existing facilities and possible contamination areas are attached.

The information contained in the maps for possible contamination is inferred only.

The acquisition budget is \$17.8bn. The sustainment budget to 2024/25 is \$4.56 billion.

Included in the \$17.8bn is the budget for the New Air Combat Capability Facilities project across Australia. The overall facilities budget is \$1.5 billion, of which \$770 million is budgeted for works at Williamstown.

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Defence

Topic: Communication with Hunter Water and/or the NSW EPA

Question reference number: 5

Senator/Member: Rhiannon

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 25 January 2016

Question: What, if any, communications occurred between the Department of Defence (Defence) and with Hunter Water and/or the NSW EPA about the 2009 test conducted by Hunter Water between 2009 and 2012 (Committee Hansard, 22 December 2015, pp 7-8)?

Answer:

Defence has no records of communication between Defence and Hunter Water or the NSW EPA (between 2009-2012) about the 2009 tests conducted by Hunter Water.

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Defence

Topic: The Defence Submission and references to Hunter Water

Question reference number: 6

Senator/Member: Rhiannon

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 25 January 2015

Question: Why was there no reference to any tests undertaken by Hunter Water in the timeline included in the Defence submission?

Answer:

The tests conducted by Hunter Water were undertaken independently of Defence. Consequently, they were not referenced in the Defence submission, which is based on a timeline of activities that relate to relevant actions taken by Defence. The Hunter Water Corporation should be engaged directly for information regarding their tests.

Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Contamination of Australia's Defence Force facilities and other
Commonwealth, state and territory sites in Australia – 22 December 2015
ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Defence

Topic: Testing at Williamstown 2003-2004

Question reference number: 8

Senator/Member: Rhiannon

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 25 January 2016

Question: At the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee's estimates hearing on 21 October 2015, Ms Clifton from Defence stated that the Department was aware of the "emerging contaminants" in 2003 and in 2004 "restricted the use of the old firefighting foam at Williamstown" (Estimates Hansard, 21 October 2015, p. 80). At any stage in 2003 and 2004 were tests carried out at Williamstown, and if not, why not considering Defence was aware of the assessment of the firefighting chemicals as contaminants?

Answer:

No. At that time there was no National Association of Testing Authorities accredited process available for testing for Perfluorooctane Sulfonate or Perfluorooctanoic Acid.