



Senator Lidia Thorpe
Chair
Select Committee on PFAS (per and polyfluoroalkyl substances)
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senator Thorpe

The Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water is pleased to provide the briefing material attached to this letter to assist the Senate Select Committee on PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) at the first hearing of the Senate PFAS Inquiry on 13 November 2024.

This briefing material outlines the roles and responsibilities of the department in relation to the regulation and management of PFAS.

We remain committed to delivering a comprehensive, formal submission to the Committee by 19 December 2024.

Yours sincerely

Dean Knudson
Deputy Secretary

04 November 2024

Inquiry: Select Committee on PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances)
Agency: Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
Topic: Briefing material ahead of the public hearing on 13 November 2024

Per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances

- Per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a family of over 4,700 synthetic chemicals that resist heat, stains, grease, and water.
 - There is discrepancy as to the exact number of PFAS being used globally because they have been defined in different ways.
 - The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has defined PFAS as organic chemicals with a certain number of fluorine atoms attached to each carbon atom. This is a broad definition which hypothetically includes a very large number of chemicals that have never been used commercially.
 - The most recent estimate from the OECD is that approximately 4,730 PFAS may have been used commercially.
- In Australia, PFAS have been used for a long time in a wide range of consumer products and industrial applications, including certain firefighting foams.
- Some PFAS have been found to be harmful to the environment because they can be toxic to plants and animals, bioaccumulate, do not break down naturally, and travel long distances in the environment.

The role of the Australian Government and DCCEEW

- The Australian Government works closely with state, territory and local governments, industry and the community to achieve environment protection goals.
 - The roles of the Commonwealth and states and territories in achieving environment protection goals are driven by the Australian Constitution and further defined in the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment signed in May 1992.
 - In relation to chemicals and contamination, the Australian Government is responsible for matters of foreign policy and engagement in international agreements, controlling the Australian border, facilitating development of national standards and guidelines, and management of chemicals and contamination in Commonwealth areas.
 - The day-to-day management and regulation of chemicals is primarily the responsibility of state, territory and local governments.
- DCCEEW leads Australia's response to climate change and sustainable energy use, and protecting our environment, heritage and water. The department achieves this through policies and programs that deliver positive outcomes in its areas of responsibility.

- DCCEEW collaborates with other agencies across the Commonwealth and states and territories to help deliver Australia's chemical management framework.
- DCCEEW takes a risk proportionate, pragmatic approach to management of chemicals to protect the environment, ensuring efficient and effective use of departmental resources.
- DCCEEW is responsible for:
 - Leading Australia's engagement on global agreements and initiatives for chemicals, including the:
 - [Stockholm Convention](#) for Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)
 - [Rotterdam Convention](#) on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade
 - [Montreal Protocol](#) on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer
 - [Basel Convention](#) on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal
 - [Waigani Convention](#) to Ban the importation into Forum Island Countries of Hazardous and Radioactive Wastes and to Control the Transboundary Movement of Hazardous wastes within the South Pacific Region
 - [Global Framework on Chemicals](#) - For a planet free of harm from chemicals and waste, and
 - Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution.
 - Leading the [Australian Antarctic Program](#), including administering Commonwealth laws in the Australian Antarctic Territory to ensure strict environmental protection.
 - Setting national environmental standards and guidelines in consultation with states, territories and other stakeholders under the:
 - [Industrial Chemicals Environmental Management Standard](#) (IChEMS)
 - [Australian and New Zealand guidelines for fresh and marine water quality](#)
 - [National Environment Protection \(Assessment of Site Contamination\) Measure](#).
 - Developing national guidance such as the [PFAS National Environmental Management Plan](#) in consultation with states, territories and other stakeholders.
 - Encouraging nationally consistent and environmentally sound management practices through:
 - Continued promotion of the [National PFAS Position Statement](#) which sets clear objectives for reducing the release of PFAS of concern for all sources in Australia.

- Data sharing and harmonised reporting of [hazardous waste data](#).
- Preparing advice on the [environmental risks](#) of industrial chemicals for the Executive Director of the Australian Industrial Chemicals Introduction Scheme (AICIS).
- Providing technical advice on chemicals and contamination, including advice on environmental impacts to support decisions under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.
- Identifying safer alternatives to chemicals of concern.
- Providing strategic policy advice to government on preventing and addressing harm to Australia's environment.
- DCCEEW engages with states and territories on PFAS matters through forums such as the Environment Ministers Meeting, and meetings of senior officials and Heads of Environment Protection Agencies (HEPA).