



MEDIA RELEASE

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Government has lost control of contamination crisis

The Government has lost control of the growing contamination crisis caused by toxic PFAS chemicals leaking into soil and water supplies, a parliamentary inquiry in Canberra will be told on Friday.

The Coalition Against PFAS (CAP) says two months of hearings held around Australia by a parliamentary inquiry into the management of PFAS contamination in and around Defence bases, has exposed the Government has no answers for dozens of communities who are impacted.

“We’ve heard harrowing community testimony of lives destroyed through contamination of homes and business,” said CAP President Lindsay Clout. “What is most frightening, is we’ve learned the Government has no answers.”

Mr Clout said facts brought to light in recent months included:

- The Defence Department conceding it had lost control of managing PFAS contamination coming off its bases and it could be better “for someone else to step in to rectify the problem.”
- Both the Victorian and South Australian State Government’s highlighting an ongoing lack of cooperation and openness from Defence in regard to investigations into PFAS contamination at its bases.
- The head of the Government appointed “Expert Health Panel” into the risks of PFAS telling community members he was “dragged” into doing the job and someone “better qualified” should have steered its investigation.
- Australasia’s peak medical body, GP’s and environmental medical experts telling the Inquiry the health advice relating to PFAS needed to be changed now.

“What is clear from the last two months is that the Government is using a fig leaf of “uncertainty” regarding the known and growing health risks of exposure to PFAS as an excuse for inaction,” said Mr Clout

“Well, 171 countries have already signed the Stockholm Agreement to ban PFAS related chemicals given their toxicity and health risks and our Government can’t even bring itself to do that.

“When the day comes that someone finally fronts up from the Government and says – “if only we had known how dangerous this chemical is” – well they did know, and they did nothing,” said Mr Clout.

“The swinging door of inaction, evasion and blame-shifting needs to end at all levels of Government and from all political parties because like the PFAS chemicals that last 70 plus years in our environment, this issue and our communities are not going away.”



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Mr Clout will meet with the Chair of the Inquiry Mr Andrew Laming MP, Friday morning to pass on a letter detailing evidence given to the inquiry in recent months highlighting Defence's inability to manage the contamination and the Government's erroneous health findings.

That letter can be viewed at www.cappfas.com/letter

For further information please contact:

Lindsay Clout: 0437 300 377 or Chris Fogarty: 0420 928 824

Background on CAP and PFAS:

CAP is made up on representatives from communities around Australia with the foundation members being from Williamstown, Oakey and Katherine.

Those communities were among the first in Australia to learn that PFAS associated chemicals used in firefighting foam have leached into their community. These toxic plumes spread via waterways, with the bio-persistent nature of PFOS related chemicals meaning it can take over 70 years for them to break down.

International studies have highlighted increased risks of cancer and other major diseases from exposure. In Australia impacted communities have received conflicting levels of advice, but most are warned not to drink water or eat food of their land due to health risks.

The RACP in a formal submission to the Government stated the current advice in relation to PFAS is: *"likely to be confusing for the public."* and that *"we advocate for a change to the national health advice that incorporates the latest international evidence for adverse human health effects."*

The Parliament of Australia has been undertaking an Inquiry into the Government's management of PFAS contamination in and around Defence bases.