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Government ignores Inquiry report, dumps Liberal MP as Chair

- The Government has refused to respond to a parliamentary inquiry calling for immediate action to clean up toxic chemicals leaking from Defence Department bases.
- Inquiry Chair and Liberal MP Andrew Laming warned eight months ago of the “enormous damage” being done to communities from PFAS contamination.
- Mr Laming now removed from the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade and no new PFAS sub-committee chair appointed.

A bi-partisan Federal parliamentary inquiry that warned communities “legitimate” concerns about toxic contamination of their properties by the Defence Department could no longer be ignored, has had its own report snubbed and Chairman dumped.

More than 230 days after the *Inquiry into the management of PFAS contamination in and around Defence bases*, report detailed the emotional, physical and financial impact on communities, there has still been no Government response.

“This was a bi-partisan parliamentary inquiry, chaired by Liberal MP Andrew Laming, that heard testimony from communities in Katherine, Williamtown and Oakey along with dozens of medical and other experts,” said Coalition Against PFAS (CAP) President Lindsay Clout.

“Their December 2018 report called for immediate action to address the long-term health and environmental impacts of now banned PFAS chemicals used in firefighting foam which continue to leak off Defence bases nationally.

“If that report wasn’t clear enough for the Government than surely Mr Laming standing up in parliament in December last year to tell all sides of the House; *“No family should be trapped on contaminated land. Justice delayed is justice denied.”* might have caught their attention,” he said.

Mr Clout said CAP members across Australia had this week written to Mr Laming and the committee asking then to push for his recommendations to be implemented and warning that people in contaminated communities were at breaking point.

In doing so they noted Mr Laming had been removed from the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, responsible for the Inquiry, and that no new PFAS sub-committee Chair had been appointed.



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“We would hope that in having the conviction to speak out for communities impacted by PFAS contamination, Mr Laming has not been subject to political pay back by his own Party.”

Mr Clout said the Inquiry committee saw that first hand, the pressures communities were under and the injustice of the polluter in Defence refusing to take responsibility for their actions.

“The mental strain of being trapped on property where your land has been polluted, where your health is at risk and where the financial strain of not being able to sell up or get out, is now becoming close to unbearable for some.

The irony of a recently elected Prime Minister consistently attacking other political parties that don't take a unified stance on matters of 'national importance' is not lost on us.

Every State in Australia has now identified sites with significant PFAS contamination, every politician who has visited those sites has promised action,” he said

“Inquires, taskforces, community visits, public meetings and visits to Canberra have all resulted in one outcome – complete and utter community disillusionment as to our political leadership's ability to act in their interests,” he said

“The only tangible development since the report was released in December 2018 is Defence Department officials confirming they have set aside more than \$50 million in legal fees to take on communities who are now forced to go to court to fight against the contamination of their own land.

“If it was a corporation or business liable for this toxic contamination, and not the Defence Department, does anyone seriously think the Federal Government would be seeking to protect them?”

For further information please contact:

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The letter to Andrew Laming and further details of the Inquiry and its recommendations can be accessed at <http://cappfas.com/government-inquiry/>



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Background on CAP and PFAS:

CAP is made up on representatives from communities in New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, Northern Territory and Western Australia.

Those communities are 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.