




Speech By
Patrick Weir

MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE

Record of Proceedings, 14 June 2016

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Oakey, Water Supply

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (11.57 am): Today I rise to speak on an issue that is causing great concern and angst in an area of the electorate of Condamine. The residents of the township of Oakey are facing serious health issues and significant land valuation reductions due to the contamination of the water and land at the Oakey aviation centre from the use of firefighting foams over the period from 1997 until 2003. This firefighting foam is the substance known as 3M Light Water or aqueous film-forming foam and was used as a fire suppressant. It contained the chemicals perfluorooctane sulfonate and perfluorooctanoic acid, more commonly known as PFOS and PFOA for obvious reasons.

This product was used in firefighting drills on the base at least once a month from 1977 to 2003. It is estimated that approximately 1.2 megalitres of the concentrate was discharged on the base in these drills during this time. Over the 16 years of usage these chemicals have leached through the soil profile and contaminated the shallow underground aquifer that lies beneath the town of Oakey. Until 1997 the town of Oakey, which has a population of approximately 4,500, drew its town water supplies from this underground system. There are also many private bores in the area which are used either wholly for domestic supply or to supplement supply. It would appear that the defence department became aware that there may be a problem in 2010 when some initial investigations began into possible contamination issues and more comprehensive tests followed in 2011. In 2013 and 2014 water testing was completed beyond the Defence perimeter to determine the extent of the footprint. It is now believed that the contamination affects an area of 24 square kilometres.

In July 2014, the defence department publicly announced that the groundwater had been contaminated by the use of these firefighting foams and that residents should not drink the water. This, of course, caused a lot of anger and questions within the community. The defence department held a public meeting in Oakey, where one of the officials speaking at the meeting told the packed hall that PFOS was the new asbestos.

Blood tests on some residents, both by the defence department and privately, have shown readings many times the internationally accepted level. While some residents with these elevated levels have used bore water extensively, others have had little contact with the bore water, raising the question of why their levels are so high. It would appear that some of the affected residents may have been exposed to the chemical through secondary means, such as eating meat, poultry and vegetables produced with the contaminated bore water. Although the defence department warned the residents not to drink the water, it did not warn people against eating food that was produced from irrigating with the bore, nor did it mention anything about showering, cooking or washing with the bore water.

There are many unanswered questions surrounding this whole issue. There are conflicting reports as to the long-term health effects of people having a high level of PFOS and PFOA in their bloodstream. While it has been stated by some in the medical profession to have a probable link to some forms of cancer, this has not yet been proven conclusively.

This issue is having a widespread impact on the town and its district. Many home owners have very real concerns about the impact that this issue is having on the value of their largest asset, their home and their land. There are several racehorse trainers based in Oakey. These trainers now have owners removing horses from their stables as they are concerned for the welfare of their animals. There are a number of agricultural properties within the contaminated plume area. They have real concerns about the water contamination and what that could potentially mean for the produce they are selling, whether that be milk, meat, lamb, lucerne, hay or vegetables.

This morning Marise Payne, the Minister for Defence, announced that Defence will be continuing to fund the monitoring of underground water in the bores around Oakey and would now fund the blood tests for residents. Although that may ease the minds of Oakey residents to some extent, there has been nothing forthcoming about addressing the devaluation of people's properties.

Like the people of Oakey, I have been very disappointed in the role that the state government has played in this incident. I table a list of questions that I have asked of the Premier, the natural resources minister and the health minister, who have all said that this is a federal issue and have directed my concerns there. The people of Oakey are disgusted by the lack of support of this government.

Tabled paper: Questions on notice and questions without notice, various dates, asked by the member for Condamine, Mr Pat Weir MP, regarding groundwater contamination at the Army Aviation Centre Oakey [\[866\]](#).