

NSW Government Response

Select Committee on PFAS Contamination in
Waterways and Drinking Water Supplies
Throughout New South Wales – Report 1,
September 2025

December 2025



Acknowledgement of Country



The NSW Government acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land and pays respect to Elders past, present and future.

We recognise Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to place and their rich contribution to society.

Artist and designer Nikita Ridgeway from Aboriginal design agency – Boss Lady Creative Designs, created the People and Community symbol.

NSW Government Response

Copyright and disclaimer

© State of New South Wales through Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water 2024. Information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing, December 2025, and is subject to change.

Contents

Acknowledgement of Country	ii
Executive Summary	5
NSW Government response to recommendations	6
Recommendation 1	6
Recommendation 2	6
Recommendation 3	7
Recommendation 4	7
Recommendation 5	7
Recommendation 6	8
Recommendation 7	8
Recommendation 8	9
Recommendation 9	9
Recommendation 10	9
Recommendation 11	10
Recommendation 12	10
Recommendation 13	11
Recommendation 14	11
Recommendation 15	11
Recommendation 16	12
Recommendation 17	12
Recommendation 18	13
Recommendation 19	13
Recommendation 20	13
Recommendation 21	14
Recommendation 22	14
Recommendation 23	14
Recommendation 24	15
Recommendation 25	15
Recommendation 26	15
Recommendation 27	16
Recommendation 28	16

Recommendation 29 16
Recommendation 30 17
Recommendation 31 17
Recommendation 32 17

Executive Summary

There is whole-of-government work underway in NSW to best respond to and manage the impacts of PFAS contamination.

The NSW Government appreciates the community's concerns about PFAS and we are committed to continuously improving our approach in line with national guidelines and the latest evidence. Our management of PFAS is informed by the best science and evidence, and we continue to operate with an abundance of caution when it comes to the presence of PFAS in drinking water.

In NSW, public drinking water is supplied to communities by Sydney Water, Hunter Water, or 83 local water utilities, most of which are owned and operated by local councils.

On 25 September 2024, a Legislative Council select committee was established to inquire into and report on PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) contamination in waterways and drinking water supplies throughout New South Wales. The committee published its final report on 11 September 2025.

During the 12 months of the inquiry, the committee received evidence from a range of stakeholders including scientists and academics, local councils, industry stakeholders, and NSW Government authorities. It held hearings in the Blue Mountains, Newcastle and Wagga Wagga as well as Sydney, to hear from communities affected by PFAS contamination.

The NSW Government thanks the committee for inquiring into this matter and for its detailed examination of the issues.

The committee made 16 Findings and 32 Recommendations. Of the 32 recommendations made, the NSW Government supports 11 in full, 11 in principle, and 1 in part. The responses below outline action the NSW Government is committed to undertaking or has undertaken since the inquiry commenced. Where the government commits to act through an alternative pathway to the recommendation, we have provided an explanation.

Our work dealing with this legacy contaminant is ongoing in NSW with more than 1,100 legacy sites assessed by the NSW Environment Protection Authority, and the NSW PFAS Expert Panel and PFAS Technical Advisory Group established to provide cross-government assessment and advice.

The NSW Government is working to ensure all NSW water supplies – in metropolitan and regional areas – are equipped with long-term solutions to ensure effective management of PFAS risks including treatment if needed. The NSW Government is working to support all regional water utilities to test their drinking water for PFAS.

NSW Government response to recommendations

Recommendation 1

That the NSW Government ensure regular PFAS testing of water across New South Wales and that this require:

- risk-based testing of source water, water at treatment plants before and after treatment, and water in the distribution system
- testing to a set of pre-determined standards, consistent with current best practice with requirements for periodic review, and
- timely, accessible public disclosure of the results.

Response: Supported

The NSW Government supports water utilities, as the public entities responsible for supplying drinking water, undertaking risk-based monitoring for PFAS in line with the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines and reporting all drinking water monitoring results, including PFAS, to their communities. NSW water utilities include Sydney Water, Hunter Water, Water NSW and local water utilities.

The Australian Drinking Water Guidelines recommend water testing and also include guideline values for assessing the risks from test results for a range of characteristics. Water utilities should rely on laboratories that hold appropriate National Association of Testing Authorities accreditation.

Recommendation 2

That in publishing data concerning PFAS, government agencies do so in a format that:

- is easily searchable and accessible, and
- makes extracting and understanding the data as easy as possible

in order to aid research and better inform the public around PFAS.

Response: Supported

The NSW Open Data Policy requires data to be open by default, and protected where required.

The NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) routinely publishes PFAS data on its website in a suitable format that is easily accessible to the public. The EPA is examining publication options for PFAS data including increasing spatial content and using open data platforms such as the Sharing and Enabling Environmental Data (SEED) in NSW portal.

Recommendation 3

That the NSW Government formally adopt standards for the levels of PFAS chemicals in drinking water and designate the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines as minimum standards in New South Wales.

Response: Supported

The NSW Government expects all water utilities to comply with the health-based guidelines in the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines.

The major water utilities are required to comply with the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines under their operating licences.

The question of minimum standards, including consideration of PFAS and other contaminants, for local water utilities will be considered in the implementation of the NSW Government response to the recommendations of the NSW Productivity and Equality Commission's *Review of Funding Models for Local Water Utilities*.

Recommendation 4

That the NSW Government support blood testing for any willing Blue Mountains residents to:

- determine whether PFAS concentrations are higher in the blood of Blue Mountains community members when compared against the general population
- determine whether higher PFAS concentrations, if any, are associated with a higher incidence of adverse health effects e.g. high cholesterol and cancer
- help inform any clinical interventions on an individual level, if relevant, to prevent the progression of disease.

Response: Not supported

This recommendation is not supported as the NSW Health Expert Advisory Panel on PFAS has provided advice on this in their recommendations of August 2025, noting that current scientific evidence indicates that there is no clinical benefit for an individual to have a blood test for PFAS. The NSW Chief Health Officer has accepted these recommendations.

Recommendations are located at <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/Documents/pfas-recommendations.pdf>.

Recommendation 5

That relevant government authorities liaise directly with local community members who have raised concerns about elevated PFAS levels, and who have corroborated this with privately obtained test results, to ensure clinicians and community members are supported in interpreting and communicating information related to PFAS.

Response: Supported

Local public health units are available to support community members with concerns about PFAS, and NSW Health has worked with primary care providers to support patients concerned about exposure to PFAS, and will continue to do so.

The EPA is committed to working closely with all relevant government agencies, to closely monitor the progress of investigations, and to keep local communities informed. Further information about the EPA processes can be found at the NSW Government PFAS Investigation Program webpage here: <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/Your-environment/Chemicals/PFAS-in-NSW/nsw-government-pfas-investigation-program>.

Recommendation 6

That, as a matter of priority, the NSW Environment Protection Authority:

- write to the Federal Department of Defence, calling on them to invest to clean up the Williamtown Management Area, and communicate health and dietary advice to the community
- call on the Federal Department of Defence to undertake ongoing community consultation and information.

Response: Noted

As part of its response to the *Independent Review of land uses around key Defence bases impacted by PFAS contamination*, the Australian Government established a Williamtown Working Group through the PFAS National Coordinating Body, with representatives from Commonwealth, state (including the NSW EPA) and local government. This working group will specifically consider community engagement and advice.

Under its 2019 PFAS Management Area Plan, the Department of Defence prepares an annual Ongoing Monitoring Report detailing remediation activities and PFAS levels at Williamtown RAAF Base. The NSW EPA reviews these reports to consider whether a review of precautionary advice is required. The EPA engages with Defence on the outcomes of those reviews.

Recommendation 7

That the Federal Department of Defence undertake regular monitoring of PFAS levels and potential health effects in Williamtown residents along with a follow-up study to complement the Australian National University's PFAS Health Study, which reported in 2021.

Response: Noted

The NSW Government notes that Recommendation 7 is an action for the Australian Government Department of Defence.

The NSW Government is aware that the National Health and Medical Research Council has funded a follow-up study of the Australian National University's 2021 PFAS Health Study.

Recommendation 8

That the NSW Government undertake an audit of the state's 'high conservation value' and 'slightly to moderately disturbed' freshwater ecosystems to determine which do not meet the 99 per cent ecological water quality guideline for PFAS, and take action to identify source pollution and prevent and remediate contamination wherever possible.

Response: Supported in principle

The EPA has commenced a state-wide PFAS ambient monitoring program.

The program includes surface water and sediment sampling in a range of different land-use catchments, including 'high conservation value' and 'slightly to moderately disturbed' ecosystems. The program will be delivered in accordance with the PFAS National Environmental Management Plan (NEMP) 3.0.

Recommendation 9

That, in investigating the cause of elevated PFAS levels within waterways, it be standard procedure for government investigators to consult with Fire and Rescue NSW about whether historically there have been any significant traffic accidents on nearby roadways at which large amounts of PFAS-containing foam has been used and, if so, there be follow-on investigations as to where that foam flowed.

Response: Supported

When investigating potential sources of elevated PFAS levels in waterways, which may include significant traffic accidents, the EPA regularly liaises with Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW) and the Rural Fire Service (RFS) and will continue to do so.

FRNSW and RFS note the difficulties associated with providing complete data due to the incomplete nature of historical records, often requiring significant manual intervention.

The NSW Government will continue to provide information to inform broader PFAS investigations.

Recommendation 10

That the NSW Government include load limits within environmental protection licences issued under the *Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997* as to the amount of PFAS chemicals industry and treatment plants can discharge into waterways in New South Wales, with the aim of meeting ecological guidelines.

Response: Noted

Since 2018, the NSW Government has been a party to the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) on the National Framework for Responding to PFAS Contamination. The PFAS IGA commits states and territories to implement the PFAS NEMP. The PFAS NEMP provides nationally agreed guidance on the management of PFAS contamination in the environment, including prevention of the spread of

contamination. It supports collaborative action on PFAS by the Commonwealth, state and territory and local governments around Australia and the government of New Zealand.

The PFAS NEMP 3.0 provides guidance for managing PFAS based on PFAS concentrations, rather than total load. As an objective indicator of risk, concentration is a better indicator than total load. The EPA will request further advice on the applicability of PFAS load assessment and load limits from the Heads of EPA Australia and New Zealand (HEPA) to ensure a nationally agreed approach.

The outcomes of the ambient monitoring program referred to at Recommendation 8 will provide baseline information about PFAS concentrations in waterways relative to the ecological guidelines.

Recommendation 11

That the NSW Environment Protection Authority inform the community about the possible PFAS contamination in the Belubula River including to avoid any contact with the foam.

Response: Supported

This recommendation has been completed. The EPA has published information on environmental sampling in the Upper Belubula river on its website at <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/Working-together/Community-engagement/updates/environmental-sampling-upper-belubula-region#surfacewater>.

In addition, signage outlining precautionary advice in relation to consuming fish and avoiding contact with foam, if present, has been installed at popular fishing locations along the Upper Belubula river.

Recommendation 12

That the NSW Government commission an independent person or panel of persons to conduct a review to determine the financial impact of PFAS contamination on local water utilities in regional New South Wales, including the costs of:

- increased PFAS testing and monitoring of water
- PFAS treatment of water, and
- the provision of alternative water supplies where previous sources do not meet required water quality standards

having regard to water quality standards under the new Australian Drinking Water Guidelines, published in June 2025.

Response: Supported

The NSW Government supports this recommendation, to be led by the DCCEE Water Group. The Water Group will commence the process of commissioning this work, including identification of a suitable person or panel of persons.

Recommendation 13

That, drawing on the results of the NSW Productivity and Equality Commission's review of local water utility funding models and any independent review to determine the financial impact of PFAS contamination on local water utilities in regional New South Wales, the NSW Government urgently allocate sufficient funding to local water utilities for:

- ongoing PFAS testing and monitoring of water
- PFAS treatment of water, and
- provision of alternative water supplies where previous sources do not meet required water quality standards.

Response: Noted

The full financial impact of PFAS on local water utilities will not be understood until the independent review sought under Recommendations 12 and 14 is complete. The NSW Government will consider funding mechanisms available to local water utilities as part of its ongoing work to respond to the findings of the NSW Productivity and Equality Commission's review of local water utility funding models.

Recommendation 14

That in commissioning an independent person or panel of persons to conduct a review to determine the financial impact of PFAS contamination on local water utilities in regional New South Wales, the NSW Government request the reviewer/s to specifically factor in the cost of PFAS testing for private water tanks and bores.

Response: Supported

The NSW Government will include this as part of the review discussed at Recommendation 12, noting that the government has limited jurisdiction over private water supplies.

Recommendation 15

That the NSW Government support PFAS blood testing for willing participants in:

- Tarcutta, Warialda, Narrabri and Dubbo, and in any Local Government Areas where elevated PFAS levels are found in drinking water supply systems
- Wagga Wagga more broadly, having regard to the PFAS contamination emanating from Wagga Wagga's Defence bases
- areas exposed to contaminated sections of the Belubula River

in close collaboration with local councils.

Response: Not supported

This recommendation is not supported as the NSW Health Expert Advisory Panel on PFAS has provided advice on this in their recommendations of August 2025, noting that current scientific evidence indicates that there is no clinical benefit for an individual to have a blood test for PFAS. The Chief Health Officer has accepted these recommendations.

Recommendations are located at <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/Documents/pfas-recommendations.pdf>.

Recommendation 16

That the NSW Government establish a dedicated fund or program to train environmental contamination consultants, providing them with the high level skills in PFAS remediation that are increasingly in demand across the state.

Response: Noted

Establishing a dedicated fund or program to train contaminated land consultants is not considered necessary. The EPA already administers the NSW Site Auditor Scheme, which provides a strong pool of professionals to support the industry. The EPA has also supported the development of the targeted 'contaminated site assessment, remediation and management' short course series with University of Technology Sydney to address the growing need for skilled professionals. Additional training for contaminated land consultants is also readily available through other private course providers.

Training in this field is highly specialised, typically supported by tertiary qualifications and driven by private sector demand.

Recommendation 17

That the NSW Government increase funding for the FRNSW PFAS investigation program to speed up its work, including funding to attract environmental contamination consultants who currently have the required high level skills to steer PFAS remediation works under the program.

Response: Noted

The NSW Government will continue to provide funding to FRNSW to support the long-term management of its PFAS program to minimise PFAS impacts to the NSW community and the environment.

In 2025, FRNSW has undertaken multiple site investigations through the procurement of suitably qualified environmental consultants and is actively managing 38 sites across NSW. Over the past two years, 6 properties have been remediated

It is also worth noting that the RFS has its own investigation and remediation program, which currently includes 350 open sites (this includes sites under assessment (127) and still to be assessed (223)) and is projected to continue to between 2035 and 2039. This program is likely to increase over time as more potential investigation and remediation sites are added.

Recommendation 18

That the NSW Government establish a central register of any issues relating to land contamination for each parcel of land in New South Wales, including when land is within a PFAS management area, when a contaminated property has been remediated, and, if so, the standard to which any such remediation has been undertaken.

Response: Supported in principle

The NSW Government supports having information about land contamination readily available for each land parcel, but a central register may not be the best or only solution. Information about land contamination is already collected and/or shared through several mechanisms including council planning certificates, land title documents, the EPA's public registers and the NSW Government PFAS Investigation Program webpage.

Recommendation 19

That the NSW Government establish a register, to be kept by Fire and Rescue NSW of:

- the firefighting foam and hazardous chemicals purchased and stored, by location, at each Fire and Rescue NSW site across the state
- any such materials having been used including the location of use, the circumstances (e.g. at a training exercise or firefighting incident), the amounts used, and the names of the personnel involved, and

the register be made available to relevant government agencies.

Response: Supported in principle

FRNSW has an existing electronic system to assist with managing chemical inventory. It provides access to the current Safety Data Sheets (SDS) and storage locations and supports the creation of chemical manifests, risk assessments, reports and associated documents.

The Electronic Automated Incident Reporting System (eAIRS) is a purpose-built digital platform designed to support the accurate and timely reporting of operational incidents. It enables firefighters to log incident details efficiently, ensuring the critical information is captured, tracked and reviewed for continuous improvement and compliance. A key feature of eAIRS is its capability to record the use and type of firefighting foam at incidents.

Recommendation 20

That the NSW Government undertake a review to determine workforce, resourcing and training requirements that are needed across New South Wales to optimise the handling of firefighting incidents and to minimise contamination of waterways by firefighting foam and other chemicals.

Response: Supported in principle

Apart from some limited exceptions, PFAS firefighting foam is banned under the Industrial Chemicals Environmental Management Standard (IChEMS). NSW Government firefighting agencies have policy and recommended practice doctrine for the use of firefighting foams.

In addition, FRNSW is conducting a review of training requirements which will be circulated to agencies with firefighting responsibilities.

Recommendation 21

That the NSW Government consider amending the Workers Compensation Act 1987 to expand the list of cancers presumed to be work-related, where they occur in firefighters with qualifying periods of service.

Response: Supported

The NSW Government has committed to exploring the expansion of the list of cancers presumed to be work-related for firefighters.

Recommendation 22

That the NSW Government commission independent, specialised research on the potential health impacts of historical PFAS use on firefighters in New South Wales; and that such research informs the government's consideration as to whether specific guidelines need to be created to manage the possible health effects for firefighters who have worked with PFAS-containing firefighting foam.

Response: Supported in principle

The NSW Government supports completion of further research and notes that Monash University is currently undertaking a National Health and Medical Research Council funded study into the health effects of PFAS in firefighters.

NSW Health and Safework NSW will continue to monitor and review the outcomes of the study when completed.

Recommendation 23

That the NSW Government consider additional funding to upgrade FRNSW fire stations across New South Wales where necessary to bring them into line with safe working practices and to facilitate appropriate storage of chemicals and other hazardous materials.

Response: Supported in principle

The NSW Government will consider providing additional funding to support the long-term improvement and upgrade of fire station facilities to ensure safe working environments.

Recommendation 24

That the NSW Government call on the Australian Government to regularly review the available evidence on PFAS and incorporate other relevant chemicals in the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines when appropriate.

Response: Supported

The NSW Government works with the National Health and Medical Research Council and jurisdictional colleagues to ensure timely reviews of the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines. The NSW Government advocates for a consistent approach between reviewing PFAS and other emerging contaminants of concern, noting there may be other contaminants that could pose danger to human health.

Recommendation 25

That the NSW Government call on the National Health and Medical Research Council to conduct more regular reviews of the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines, for PFAS, ensuring these align more closely with international best practice and are informed by the latest toxicological evidence.

Response: Supported in principle

The NSW Government has raised the question of timely review of the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines with the National Health and Medical Research Council and jurisdictional colleagues. A review of any particular chemical is justified when new evidence emerges, which may dictate how regularly a review is conducted.

Recommendation 26

That the NSW Government require all water utilities in New South Wales to provide complete PFAS testing data to NSW Health and the National Health and Medical Research Council, and to notify those bodies of any spikes or emerging trends and continue to keep the community up to date.

Response: Supported in part

The NSW Government supports water utilities to meet Australian Drinking Water Guidelines. PFAS results should be included as part of water quality testing results, published by water utilities, to provide a full picture of water quality, rather than reporting separately on PFAS. NSW Health would expect to be notified of non-compliant results for any health-related characteristics, including PFAS.

The NSW Government notes it is not the role of the National Health and Medical Research Council to receive complete PFAS testing data. When the National Health and Medical Research Council reviews guidance on PFAS and other characteristics, NSW Health and health agencies in other states provide collated data for consideration.

Recommendation 27

That the NSW Government advocate for and support the introduction of mandatory labelling of PFAS in consumer products at the national level, and push for the establishment of a comprehensive national PFAS product register to improve transparency and traceability across supply chains.

Response: Supported

The NSW Government advocates for mandatory national product labelling for PFAS. Mandated national labelling of consumer products for PFAS, and a national PFAS product register, will require a collaborative approach between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments. The NSW EPA will lead on the NSW Government position working with other agencies to help drive potential national arrangements through intergovernmental forums such as the HEPA, Environment Ministers' Meeting Senior Officials Group and Environment Ministers' Meeting.

Recommendation 28

That the NSW Government work via National Cabinet on a plan to phase out all non-essential uses of PFAS in consumer, commercial, and industrial products by 2030, in line with emerging international best practice, and work with other jurisdictions to establish clear criteria for defining essential uses.

Response: Supported in principle

The Industrial Chemicals Environmental Management Standard (IChEMS) prohibits the import, export, manufacture and use of the highest risk PFAS on their own, in mixtures or in articles. Exemptions exist for essential uses and other limited circumstances which are defined depending on the specific PFAS. This standard applies to industrial chemicals, but does not apply to agricultural or veterinary chemicals, chemicals used for a therapeutic purpose or chemicals used in food or food additives.

The phase out of all non-essential uses of PFAS not captured by the IChEMS framework will require new legislation and national harmonisation. The NSW Government will work with the Commonwealth, other agencies and jurisdictions to progress national alignment for the approach to PFAS regulation. The NSW Government will support advocacy by officials and ministers through relevant intergovernmental forums such as the Environment Ministers' Meeting Senior Officials Group and Environment Minister's Meeting.

The NSW Government can also utilise HEPA as another forum for taking action on harmful chemicals, including PFAS, by aligning and coordinating regulatory approaches.

Recommendation 29

That the NSW Government urgently undertake a comprehensive, statewide audit of past and current sites where biosolids have been applied, including agricultural land, forests, mine remediation sites and composting facilities, to identify and monitor potential PFAS contamination.

Response: Supported in principle

The EPA commenced a biosolids compliance program in early 2025. This program will provide data required to adequately identify and monitor potential PFAS contamination.

Recommendation 30

That the NSW Government expand the PFAS Investigation Program to specifically include biosolids as a focus area, and ensure monitoring occurs downstream from biosolid application sites, including testing of soil, groundwater, and adjacent waterways.

Response: Supported in principle

The EPA recently sought feedback on the *NSW Biosolids draft resource recovery order and exemption*. These draft instruments prescribe limits for biosolids. If adopted, further monitoring downstream of biosolid application sites will not be necessary.

Recommendation 31

That in keeping with the 'polluter pays' principle in New South Wales, the NSW Government investigate the imposition of a specific levy on polluting industries to fund:

- PFAS treatment research
- PFAS water treatment, especially in regional areas of New South Wales where PFAS contamination has been identified.

Response: Supported in principle

The NSW Government will investigate options to hold identified polluting industries to account for the costs of research and treatment, consistent with 'polluter pays' principles.

Recommendation 32

That the NSW Government consider opening a tender calling for experts to provide advice about:

- how many potentially contaminated sites there are in New South Wales
- the number of potentially contaminated sites in New South Wales that may be PFAS contaminated
- how many of the potentially PFAS contaminated sites are known to the NSW Environment Protection Authority
- which of the potentially PFAS contaminated sites should be prioritised for testing.

Response: Not supported

The NSW EPA routinely publishes PFAS data that is publicly accessible for external experts. Appendix C of the PFAS NEMP 3.0 lists activities associated with sources of PFAS contamination. The list is extensive and includes activities such as airports, hardware retailers, general chemical

storage, a broad range of manufacturing activities, commercial laundries and dry cleaners, and battery use and disposal.

Activities associated with sources of PFAS contamination are common and widespread. Calling for experts to provide advice about the number of potentially PFAS-contaminated sites may have little use or value and would be challenging to validate.

The EPA is already leading an investigation program to assess the legacy of PFAS use across NSW. The program uses internal technical and operational expertise as well as leveraging knowledge across all levels of government. The current PFAS investigation program prioritises sites where PFAS has been used or stored in large quantities.