

**Submission
No 56**

**INQUIRY INTO INQUIRY INTO PFAS CONTAMINATION
IN WATERWAYS AND DRINKING WATER SUPPLIES
THROUGHOUT NEW SOUTH WALES**

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Personal submission to:

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Select Committee into PFAS contamination in waterways and drinking water supplies throughout New South Wales.

Brad Withyman

Dear Members,

My submission addresses several aspects of the Inquiry's terms of reference.

PFAS awareness in NSW has mostly been associated with firefighting foams, it's becoming evident, mostly by researchers in the US that PFAS compounds are widely used and added to a broad range of commonly used and manufactured products impacting our waterways. I'll highlight two circumstances authorities here have chosen to ignore.

My experiences are mostly related to my local catchments and estuary systems on the Mid North Coast, to which I've spent considerable time as a recreational Fisher, citizen scientist and Founder/Advocate of River Guardians. I've kept detailed records of my research and interactions with relevant Government Authorities relating to environmental risk and harm to estuarine ecosystems.

As an Angler, you're constantly monitoring conditions and the environment. It became evident fish stocks were collapsing in my local system, so I started looking closer into all the impacts affecting the water's health. Two practices had me alarmed.

Used Chemical Drums as marine floatation

The broad use of used chemical drums by NSW aquaculture as floatation devices and the spraying of herbicides along drains, and water catchments.

Back in 2021, I began investigating the use of used chemical drums for marine floatation, predominantly by the Oyster industry. Mauser Drums as they are commonly known are designed and made to store hazardous chemicals that contain PFAS, such as;

- Agricultural Chemicals
- Industrial Chemicals & Solvents
- Paints, Inks & Dyes
- Petrochemicals & Lubricants
- Pharmaceuticals & Cosmetic



The empty drums end up at recycling yards and sold to the public. They are not certified cleaned before being sold. These drums are manufactured from HDPE, a plastic polymer known to have polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). There are tens of thousands of these drums being used as floatation devices across dozens of NSW estuaries now. Not only are they photo-degrading into micro-plastic, due to not being marine-grade plastic, but the chemical residues are also leaking and leaching into these waterways.

All of my supporting research, information and evidence were provided to the EPA. In fact, samples taken from recovered floatation drums and delivered to EPA's office. EPA's responses were either non-existent or buck-passing.



Reported to the EPA and LGA 2021



Drum samples left with EPA

Herbicides entering Waterways.

Herbicides have been widely known to contain PFAS contaminants. PFAS compounds assist in the effectiveness of Glyphosate by providing heat and water resistance. This means residues from spraying herbicide along drains, gutters and any catchment do not get absorbed into the ground, as big Ag suggests, but remain active as they are eventually flushed into our water supplies and waterways.

The endless spraying of herbicide along the sides of our highways and roads by local and state government authorities is alarming. Even more concerning, the practice mostly fails to be properly reported and monitored. Therefore, it's difficult to quantify how much, where and when these chemicals are being released into the environment. This brings me to the main point of my submission.

Monitoring and Reporting.

From my own experience and from following NSW EPA's performance, it's evident there is a culture within this agency that avoids accountability. It's not only blame-shifting, but a deliberate attempt to ignore serious reports of environmental threats by any means possible. By not actively monitoring our waterways for potential harmful impacts, the agency avoids having to meet its obligations to the environment and the people of NSW.

PFAS contamination has been ignored for far too long by the NSW EPA. You only need to look at the progress of the US, UK and EU agencies on PFAS contamination. Their actions to reduce its production and remediate affected sites is well in advance of anything the NSW EPA is doing.

If the NSW DPI can not or will not recognise the serious threat from thousands of used chemical drums in open waterways, after being provided with the evidence, then surely this inquiry needs to be asking why. When will they start taking PFAS contamination seriously by taking immediate action on known and potential contaminations?

I'm prepared to share all the evidence to further support this submission and inquiry by the members of the select committee, including to appear as a witness.

Yours Faithfully

Brad Withyman