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LORD HOWE ISLAND BOARD

Business Paper

OPEN SESSION

ITEM

NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) Per- and Poly-fluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) Strategy

RECOMMENDATION

Submitted for the Board's information.

BACKGROUND

The EPA is leading an investigation program to assess the legacy of PFAS use across NSW.

PFAS are chemicals that have historically been used in a number of different products in Australia and worldwide due to the unique heat and chemical resistance, most notably as an essential ingredient of certain fire-fighting foams. Aqueous Film-Forming Foams (AFFF) have been used extensively by emergency services across the world to extinguish Class B fires involving flammable fuels, such as those involving vehicles, aeroplanes and chemicals.

PFAS are very stable chemicals that bioaccumulate, do not break down, and can persist for a long time in the environment. Due to their widespread use in a range of industrial and consumer products over many decades PFAS contamination is commonly found in the environment at low levels.

In October 2017, the EPA contacted the Lord Howe Island Board requesting the provision of information on current and historical use of products containing PFAS, which the Board subsequently supplied.

In November 2017, the EPA requested that preliminary investigations be undertaken at the airport and other known training sites involving the use of fire fighting foam as well as the Board depot as it is a known storage site. The investigation was to obtain sufficient information to determine the extent of contamination and to assess any potential contamination impacts to the surrounding areas and local community.

In December 2017, the Board engaged experienced consultants AECOM Australia Pty Ltd to undertake the preliminary investigations. On Island field works were conducted in January 2018 collecting samples of soil, sediment, surface water and groundwater. After laboratory analysis and technical review, the final report was delivered to the EPA on 6 April 2018.

From the preliminary investigation it was identified that PFAS was present at the sites investigated.

On 20 April 2018, the EPA requested the Board to undertake a detailed site investigation into the nature, extent, fate and transport of PFAS at the identified contamination sites and at appropriate off-site locations.

The EPA requested before the commencement of investigation that a Sampling and Analysis Quality Plan (SAQP) be provided to the EPA and a communication plan be developed in collaboration with the EPA, to ensure consistent messaging occurs regarding PFAS on the Island.

The Communication Plan will continue to be implemented by the Board to assist in providing information through factsheets, letters to residents, website (the Board/EPA) and community drop-in sessions if required.

CURRENT POSITION

In the last week of October 2018 the EPA completed testing of all the bores/wells for the presence of PFAS and to see if there was any immediate action required. The results from these tests are not publically available and will be communicated directly to the leaseholders by the EPA. We do know that initial results were very encouraging and that no short term measures are required or risks identified. It is noted that ground water is not recommended (anywhere) for drinking, cooking and personal hygiene (including cleaning teeth and bathing) without testing and appropriate treatment including disinfection.

In January 2019 the Board, NSW EPA and AECOM agreed on the SAQP, obtained a Marine Parks Permit and the Detailed Site Investigation field work was completed during the week of 18 February 2019. Samples from these field works will be progressively sent to Australian Laboratory Services for analysis, as room on the plane allows. It will be a number of weeks before any results from this sampling are realised.

The current take home message remains that low levels of PFAS have been identified at locations on the Island in both the soil and groundwater. However, until the Detailed Site Investigation is completed and assessment results available, it is unclear as to what further action may be required.

RECOMMENDATION

Submitted for the Board's information

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Attachments: Nil