



KATHERINE TOWN COUNCIL

Media Release

TO: ALL MEDIA

DATE: 30 October 2017

FROM: Katherine Town Council

At the October 2017 meeting of Council, Katherine's Elected Members unanimously endorsed a letter to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull seeking his urgent and determined leadership to more effectively deal with the impacts of PFAS to our people, environment and economy.

The letter seeks support for all in our community; from those RAAF Tindal firefighters who have been highly exposed to PFAS as well as those living in the most impacted area near the base, through to our industries, residents and visitors.

"This letter to the Prime Minister marks another milestone in the ongoing advocacy by Council for our community on the PFAS issue in Katherine." said Mayor Fay Miller.

"Since Council was made aware of the issue, we have been getting on with the work of advocating for our community through countless meetings and discussions with our community, Federal and Territory governments. Our Elected Members and a team of five key officers have worked many hours and through the night at times to ensure that our community is best supported." she said.

Some of the results of this work have been a greater focus on informing the community, a transparent process of releasing results when available, a precautionary decision to close the pool, securing funding from Defence and a 'Katherine first' focussed view on the issue.

"On-the-ground' people from Defence, NT Government and Council are doing their best to respond to the issue, but as well observed by the Katherine Times, despite the progress made, we need the increased leadership of our federal government at this critical time." she said.

Council CEO Robert Jennings said that "Whilst the issue has emanated from PFAS used at our RAAF Tindal Base, Council have taken an approach of getting on with solving the problem in a strategic manner, rather than creating additional problems to be solved. We have chosen to show respect, collaboration and integrity whilst still setting clear boundaries and speaking out strongly for our community."

As stated at the October Council Community Forum, Council are seeking to put together a practical long term framework to deal with all aspects of the issue and will work to respond to this challenge with those best able to attain this outcome. Defence are a key player in the history and future of our town and to date have provided program funding without question.

Mayor Miller summarised the process by stating that "We are still at the beginning of this journey. Now is the time for resilience and forward thinking. We do not want to perpetuate a legacy of Katherine being defined by PFAS, but instead will lead the campaign of a township defined by its united people who will create their own enriching and sustainable future in agriculture, tourism, economic development, natural wonders, regional services, aboriginal and non-aboriginal culture and arts."

"We know this is possible, as our people have been tested many times before through floods, so let us not fail this current test of our township and let it make us greater." she said.

For further information contact CEO Robert Jennings: Ph 08 8972 5500 Fax 08 8971 0305
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27 October 2017

The Honourable Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull MP
Senator the Honourable Marise Payne – Minister of Defence
The Honourable Greg Hunt – Minister for Health
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Prime Minister Turnbull, Senator Payne and Minister Hunt

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR KATHERINE

Katherine Town Council write on behalf of our community in seeking your leadership to more effectively deal with the impacts of per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) to our people, environment and economy.

Whilst there has been some genuine work by your Australian Government 'on-the-ground' staff working in partnership with Northern Territory Government and Katherine Town Council to provide solutions to issues as they arise, there are three key areas that we seek your immediate intervention:

1. At a human level, we seek immediate availability for testing of PFAS levels in humans, especially those who are in the zone of greatest influence around and on the base as well as those RAAF staff members who have worked with the aqueous film forming foam (AFFF).

Whilst the confirmed position of waiting for the 'human health impact assessment' report to be released in April 2018 initially appears defensible, the emotional trauma on the whole community associated with the unknown is slowly damaging the integrity of our social fabric whilst we wait. This trauma is being supported by the media in their sensationalist reporting to date.

This situation is not unique to Katherine and we also advocate for the same services (such as counseling and being part of a national epidemiological study) being provided to townships such as Williamtown and Oakey.

2. At a communications level, it is well past time for a highly considered, genuine and deliberate strategy that provides the necessary range of

engagement methods to inform, consult, collaborate and empower our community through the planning and action stages of this process.

Northern Territory Government and Katherine Town Council stand ready to continue to provide the support to best reach our community through our local knowledge and existing relationship structures.

3. The communications and problem solving to date have been reactive in nature. It is time to put together a powerful group of local decision makers with the strong support of federal government (both financially and by those best placed to make decisions) to provide a proactive approach to the unwinding economic, community and environmental issues that are beginning to take effect.

Already the many tourists who are a key part of our economy are beginning to ask if it is safe to come to Katherine and soon it will be the residents and businesses leaving. The resulting compensation claims and other costs from this scenario need not occur if the right decisions are made now.

To assist in the implementation of points 2 and 3 above, it is Council's recommendation that greater support and decision making abilities be provided to the 'on-the-ground' staff from the Department of Defence to enable them to make immediate and binding decisions in partnership with NT Government and Council to achieve the above goals. Specific mechanisms that should be achieved by such delegation could include:

- Recommendations of the Project Control Group (PCG) Meetings for RAAF Bases Darwin and Tindal as well as the Community PFAS Committee to be progressed with the greatest priority, with the necessary funding and authority to be allocated to achieve these recommendations.
- The ability for the PCG team to provide a more responsive and tailored communications strategy and achieve a wider scope of works as indicated in points 2 and 3 above. Currently, discussions on Facebook raised by community members are not able to be addressed in a timely manner and result in unnecessary delays through the Defence media processes.
- More regular shop front attendance for the duration of the period until the Human Health Impact Assessment is released early in 2018.
- Address the delays in processing of results associated with testing PFAS levels from the six approved laboratories in Australia.

Whilst the PFAS issue is something that other communities in Australia, and in fact much of the developed world will be dealing with, Katherine (at least in Australia) are in the unique position of humans drinking water that contains PFAS.

Katherine is a service town for the region with a strong future based on industries such as tourism, agriculture, defence, transport and government services. Most of all, it is the unitedness and resilience of the town and its peoples that has made us able to succeed.

Katherine Town Council are prepared to work in a united manner with all stakeholders (and especially with federal government as the primary stakeholder) to support our community achieve outcomes that will lead to a sustainable future and provide a model for other communities in Australia.

We seek your urgent and determined leadership in the three areas identified above and can meet with you to advocate for our community in Canberra if required.

Yours sincerely



Fay Miller
MAYOR OF KATHERINE



Robert Jennings
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

cc: Michael Gunner, Chief Minister, Northern Territory
Natasha Fyles MLA, Minister for Health, Northern Territory
Sandra Nelson MLA, Katherine, Northern Territory
Gary Higgins MLA, Opposition Leader, Northern Territory
Warren Snowden MP, Member for Lingiari
Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion, Minister for Indigenous Affairs
Senator Malarndirri McCarthy, Senator for Northern Territory
Andrew Tatnell, Commanding Officer, RAAF Base Tindal, Northern Territory