



MEDIA RELEASE

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LOW LEVELS OF PFOS PFOA IN WATER NOT UNEXPECTED – TOWN WATER REMAINS SAFE TO DRINK

Advances in the technology used to test local drinking water means Hunter Water can now detect the compounds perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) at levels 35 times below the safe threshold for drinking water, as adopted by the US EPA.

PFOS and PFOA have recently come to public attention due to their presence in the Williamstown Investigation Area, via firefighting foam historically used at the Williamstown RAAF Base.

PFOS and PFOA have however also been used in a wide variety of products due to their water proofing and stain resistant properties, since the 1950s in a range of common household products and specialty applications. This has included food packaging, non-stick cookware, fabric, furniture and carpet stain protection applications.

There have been five low level detections of PFOS/PFOA in Hunter Water's catchments and water network since the testing regime was expanded beyond the Tomago Sandbeds in October 2015. There was a further detection in a bore on a private property at Campvale which was subsequently confirmed via resampling.

On three of these five occasions PFOS at low levels was detected in Campvale Canal, which is pumped into Grahamstown Dam when required under Hunter Water's water management licence. The Campvale catchment contributes just 5 – 10% of the inflow into Grahamstown Dam. The single highest PFOS detection was from the Allyn River near Gresford, more than 60km from the Williamstown RAAF Base. This detection was less than one third of the US EPA safe drinking water guideline of 0.07ug/L. Subsequent testing of the Allyn River has not detected either compound.

Low level detections are not unexpected in Campvale Canal, as international research has identified that PFOS and PFOA can occur in urban stormwater. A University of Queensland study in 2011 found trace detections of PFOS and or PFOA in the water supplies of every Australian capital city and in many regional cities. The concentration of PFOS and PFOA intermittently detected in Campvale Canal has been so low that subsequent testing in Grahamstown Dam has failed to detect either chemical.

Hunter Water regularly tests for PFOS and PFOA at all six of its water treatment plants, at Campvale Canal, and at eight locations in the water reticulation network in the Williamstown area including Grahamstown Dam. This testing program has recently been expanded to include locations throughout Hunter Water's entire water network. Testing at a number of wastewater treatment works is also undertaken.

The testing of water is contracted to Australian Laboratory Services (ALS). ALS's recently implemented enhanced testing methods improve the limit of detection for PFOS/PFOA from 0.01ug/L to 0.002ug/L. This makes it now possible to detect trace levels of the compounds 5 times lower than the previous method.

Hunter Water Chief Operating Officer Darren Cleary said that the low level detections are not surprising given how common PFOS and PFOA are in household and commercial products and the new improved limit of detection.

"Our enhanced testing means that Hunter Water can now detect PFOS and PFOA compounds at concentrations of parts per trillion. This is equivalent to one tenth of an eye drop in an Olympic sized swimming pool of drinking water.

"The most likely source of the low levels of PFOS detected at Campvale Canal is stormwater from the Medowie area.

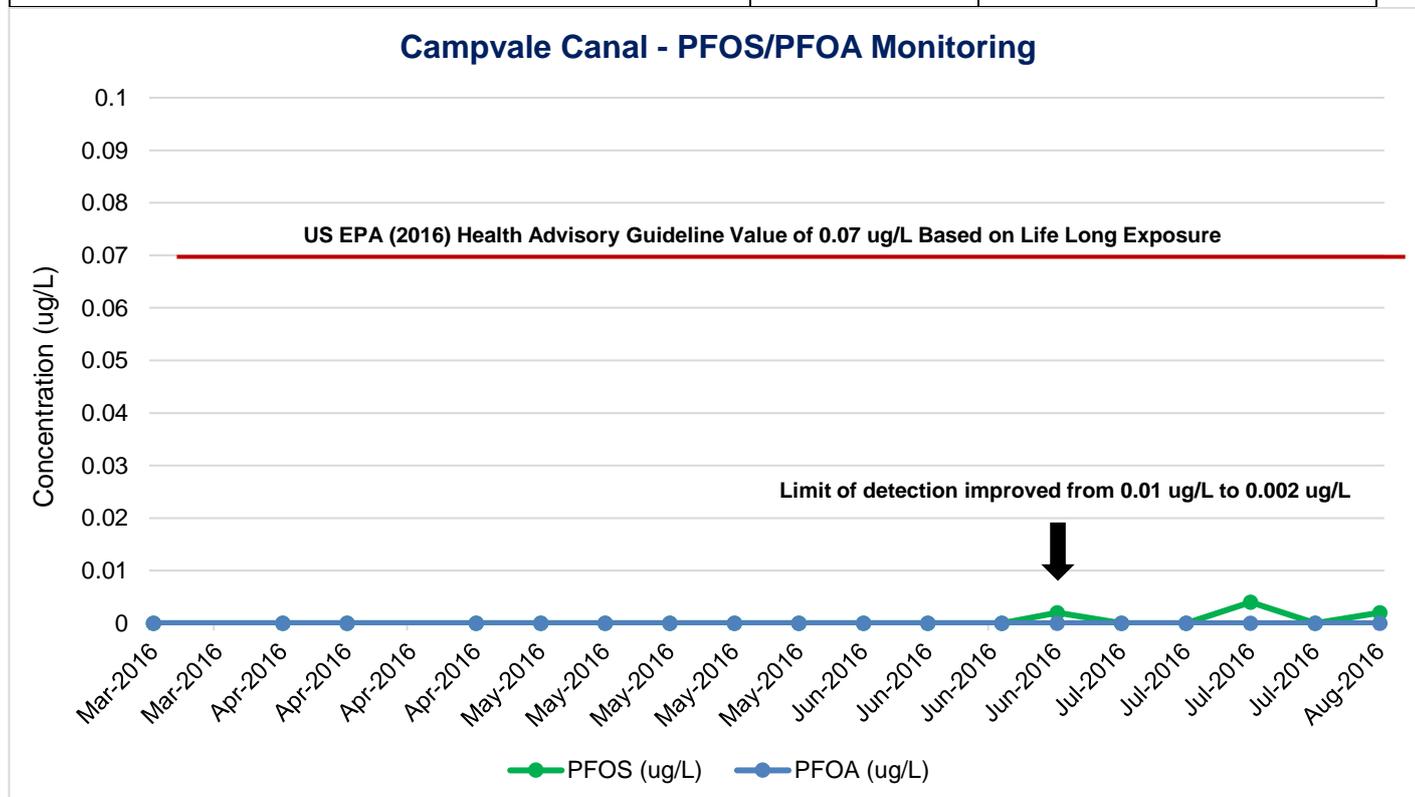
“The levels are exceptionally low and have been shared with NSW Health and the NSW EPA. NSW Health has confirmed to Hunter Water that there is no evidence to suggest that PFOS and PFOA in such low concentrations in drinking water poses any risk to human health.

“In all three detections in Campvale Canal, the result was so low that it was only detectable due to the recently improved testing capability that can now detect the compounds at concentrations that are up to 35 times below the safe drinking water limit recommended by the US EPA.

“The contours of the land, and the movement of both surface and ground water make it impossible for contaminated water from the RAAF Base to have naturally moved from the Investigation Area to Campvale Canal. The two areas are hydrologically disconnected from each other,” he said.

Hunter Water has recently expanded PFOS and PFOA testing across its entire water network to develop a routine monitoring program that is in line with other water quality analytes. Results will be published on the Hunter Water website, which is current practice for other compounds tested in the water network.

Sampling Location	Sample Date	PFOS Detected ug/L
Allyn River	9/02/2016	0.02
Campvale Canal	28/06/2016	0.002
	19/07/2016	0.004
	2/08/2016	0.002
Richardson Road, Campvale (private resident's bore) Resample of above location	18/02/2016	0.06
	14/03/2016	0.08
Williamtown sampling point	21/04/2016	0.01



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