Submission No 35

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

Organisation: Sutherland Shire Council

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Ms Cate Faehrmann MLC
Chair Legislative Council
Email: Cate.Faehrmann@parliament@nsw.gov.au

Dear Ms Faehrmann

Submission to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the PFAS contamination in waterways and drinking water supplies throughout New South Wales

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on behalf of Sutherland Shire Council to the Select Committee inquiry into PFAS contamination in waterways and drinking water supplies throughout New South Wales.

The Sutherland Shire boasts a diverse and picturesque landscape, characterised by its extensive waterways, including the iconic Port Hacking and Georges River, which provide vital ecological habitats and recreational opportunities.

Our proximity to defence land, such as the Holsworthy Military Reserve, underscores the strategic importance of our region. However, this also brings unique challenges, particularly in managing bushfire risks that are exacerbated by climate change. Additionally, the Shire hosts a significant waste facility, presenting both challenges and opportunities. This facility underscores our commitment to sustainable waste management and offers a platform to educate and engage the community and stakeholders on best practices.

Our strategic goals focus on protecting and enhancing our natural environment, ensuring that development is sustainable, and fostering a resilient community that can adapt to environmental challenges.

Please find attached Council's part submission to the terms of reference.

I look forward to the Committee's findings.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact Council's Acting Senior Manager Health & Building Regulations, Grant Rayner on or email

Yours sincerely,

Clare Phelan
Chief Executive Officer

Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into PFAS contamination in waterways and drinking water supplies throughout New South Wales

With respect to the *Terms of Reference* for the Committee's Inquiry:

(e) **sources of exposure to PFAS, including through historic and current firefighting practices**

While it is true that firefighting practices, particularly those involving aqueous film-forming foams (AFFF), have been a notable source of PFAS contamination, it is important to recognise that the discussion about PFAS exposure should not be limited to this one industry. The impact of PFAS from historical and current firefighting practices has been significant, particularly in contaminated groundwater near military bases, airports, and firefighting training sites, and deserves attention. However, focusing exclusively on firefighting overlooks the far larger and more pervasive sources of PFAS in the environment.

PFAS are found in a wide range of consumer products, and collectively, these products contribute much more to overall environmental contamination and human exposure than firefighting foam alone. Items such as clothing (especially water-resistant or stain-resistant fabrics), makeup (cosmetic products like foundation, mascara, and lipstick), food packaging (such as microwave popcorn bags, pizza boxes, and fast-food wrappers), non-stick cookware (like Teflon), and even carpets and furniture all contain PFAS chemicals.

(j) **public sector resourcing and coordination amongst relevant agencies in preventing controlling and managing the risks of PFAS to human health and the environment**

One key strategy for managing these risks is enhancing local government involvement, particularly by providing funding to local councils to conduct PFAS mapping in their areas.

Local councils are well positioned to identify potential sources of PFAS contamination and assess its spread within their communities. By conducting comprehensive PFAS mapping, councils can collect data critical for understanding the scope of contamination, potential exposure pathways, and the impact on local environments and public health. This localised data is vital for informing more accurate and targeted impact assessments.

Moreover, funding local councils for PFAS mapping can facilitate a more responsive and coordinated approach to managing PFAS risks. It would allow state authorities to engage in early detection, prioritise high-risk areas, and develop tailored risk management strategies.

Coordinating with relevant agencies, such as the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) and Department of Health, will help ensure that PFAS management efforts are both effective and efficient.

Incorporating local council-led mapping into broader state lead PFAS management frameworks could also help fill critical data gaps and contribute to more comprehensive risk assessments. Ultimately, this bottom-up approach supports evidence-based decision making, local government involvement, and strengthens the overall response to PFAS contamination, ensuring that public health and the environment are protected more effectively.

(o) **any other related matters.**

Landfills are a major source of PFAS contamination, as these chemicals often leach into the environment from waste disposal sites. To reduce the impact of landfills on PFAS contamination, alternative disposal methods should be considered. For example, incineration at high temperatures may be an option, though it must be carefully regulated to prevent the release of toxic byproducts. Additionally, concentrating PFAS during water treatment processes poses challenges in safely disposing of the concentrated chemicals. Research into safe, environmentally sound disposal methods, such as chemical degradation or encapsulation should be a priority to prevent further environmental harm.