

Karratha Airport and firefighting foam

Airservices Australia's role at Karratha Airport

Airservices Australia (Airservices) is a Commonwealth Government-owned organisation established in 1995 to provide air navigation and aviation rescue fire fighting (ARFF) services. Airservices provided ARFFS at Karratha Airport from 1995 until 2003 and again from 2009. At other times, various other agencies provided these services at Karratha Airport.

Use of firefighting foam at Karratha Airport

Airservices does not currently use firefighting foam containing per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) at Karratha Airport nor at any other airport in Australia. Airservices began transitioning away from these foams in the 2000s when concerns first started to emerge about the possible environmental impacts of these chemicals. Airservices has been using PFAS-free firefighting foam since 2010.

From the early 1980s until the 2000s, a firefighting foam called 3M Light water was used by various industries in Australia and around the world, as the foam was particularly effective for fighting liquid fuel fires. This product contained perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) as an active ingredient and other perfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), such as perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA). Since 2010, Airservices has used a PFAS-free foam, Solberg RF6, at all civilian airports where it operates, including at Karratha Airport.

What action has Airservices taken at Karratha Airport?

Airservices is taking a proactive and evidence-based approach to managing PFAS contamination arising from legacy use of fire fighting foams containing PFAS on its leasehold sites:

- **Foam transition**

Airservices transitioned to PFAS-free foam Solberg RF6 at all its civilian airports in 2010.

- **Investigation and characterisation**

In 2016, Airservices commissioned an independent consultancy, AECOM Australia Pty Ltd (AECOM), to undertake a Preliminary Site Investigation (PSI) at Karratha Airport as part of Airservices' National PFAS Management Program, to better understand the potential use of and impacts from previous use of firefighting foams at Karratha Airport. The PSI includes a review of available information, site history and previous sampling results, inspections and interviews with Airservices and airport personnel, and limited sampling.

The investigation indicated that PFAS levels in soil and sediment did not exceed the adopted human health assessment criteria where collected. Results also showed that PFAS impacts

exceeded the adopted human health and ecological criteria in groundwater in the samples collected.

- **Consultation**

Airservices has engaged key stakeholders about its PFAS investigation at Karratha Airport, including the airport operator and the state environmental regulator, Western Australia Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (WA DWER). Airservices is committed to ongoing engagement and works collaboratively with key stakeholders to address and manage potential PFAS contamination arising from legacy AFFF use at Karratha Airport.

- **Next steps**

Based on findings from the PSI, Airservices is undertaking a further Targeted Site Investigation (TSI) to better understand the presence of PFAS, and any potential migration pathways and exposure risks.

Airservices intends to implement reasonable and practicable measures where available to manage or reduce PFAS impacts. Airservices will continue to engage key stakeholders about its work to investigate, monitor and, where necessary and practicable, manage PFAS contamination arising from Air services' legacy AFFF use at Karratha Airport.

More information

- The Karratha Airport PSI is available on the Air services' website:
<https://www.airservicesaustralia.com/community/environment/pfas/>
- For media enquiries, please call 1300 619 341 or e-mail media@airservicesaustralia.com
- For PFAS health related enquiries, please consult the Commonwealth Department of Health website: <https://www.health.gov.au/>
- For more information about PFAS in WA, please visit the WA DWER website:
<https://www.der.wa.gov.au/our-work/community-updates/416-pfas-investigations-in-western-australia>
- The WA Government Statement on PFAS is available here:
https://www.der.wa.gov.au/images/documents/our-work/community-updates/PFAS/WA_Government_Statement_PFAS.pdf