



GARY HIGGINS

OPPOSITION LEADER

Media Release
3 December 2017

\$5.7 million community support package for Katherine welcomed

The Leader of the Opposition has welcomed the \$5.7 million community support package for Katherine, announced today by Minister for Health, the Hon Greg Hunt MP, Minister for Defence, Senator the Hon Marise Payne and Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion.

The Federal Coalition support package is for people impacted by Per- and Poly-fluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) emanating from the RAAF Base Tindal in Katherine.

The funding package includes:

- **a voluntary blood testing program** for those who live or work, or have lived or worked, in the RAAF Base Tindal Investigation Area;
- **additional dedicated mental health and counselling services** to assist those in the Katherine community affected by PFAS contamination; and
- **an epidemiological study** that will look at potential causes and patterns of health effects in the Katherine community

In welcoming the announcement, the Leader of the Opposition, Gary Higgins said that the support to be provided was imperative for the community of Katherine.

“The detection of PFAS has had a big effect on the community of Katherine, and I have written to the Prime Minister reinforcing my concerns around the impact it was having on the town.

“I welcome today’s announcement by our Federal Coalition colleagues and thank them for prioritising the welfare, and health of Territorians,” said Mr Higgins.

ENDS

Media contact: Georgina Murphy 0432 679 567

Please see letter to the Prime Minister from the Leader of the Opposition on the following pages.



LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

Parliament House
State Square
Darwin NT 0800
[Opposition Leader@nt.gov.au](mailto:OppositionLeader@nt.gov.au)

GPO Box 3700
DARWIN NT 0801
Telephone: 08 8936 5659

The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister *Malcolm*

The Katherine Town Council has recently written to you and your colleagues Senator Marise Payne and the Hon Greg Hunt to outline for you the impacts the detection of PFAS is having on their community, in particular the economy, the environment and most importantly the people of the town and its surrounds.

Let me say from the outset that I applaud the efforts of Commonwealth Ministers to genuinely address this complex issue for the people of Katherine and the significant and ongoing co-operation Senator Payne has specifically provided to the Opposition in listening to local feedback and suggestions. The increased provision of information to the public and the acquisition of the interim water treatment plant are two such significant examples. You will recall I acknowledged Senator Payne's work when we met in Darwin some weeks back.

The unfortunate reality is that, despite the significant efforts of the Commonwealth, the people of Katherine don't see any real hope into the future, they are unable to borrow money, sell their properties at a reasonable price and they are fearful the economy will collapse. As well tourists are asking whether it is safe to travel to Katherine and the agribusiness sector is seeking assurances in relation to the safety of their products for public consumption.

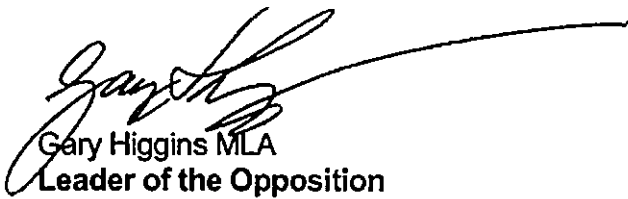
The biggest fear of Katherine residents as presented to me is that they and their children will have long lasting ill health effects because of the contamination. Unfortunately one of the biggest impacts I experience every time I travel to Katherine is the apparent effect on their mental well-being and the hopelessness, frustration and often anger in their words and attitudes. I would urge you to consider a small team of specialist mental health personnel who can work with the community to support them and together with other health personnel and testing address the widespread fears that are not reducing, but in fact continuing to escalate.

I am conscious that there is a class action underway and that the community is totally consumed with the contamination. Many Katherine residents will be driven to this class action in the absence of any meaningful action by the Federal Government. When I speak to residents they ask me why they can't have the same level of medical assessments as those undertaken interstate at Williamstown and Oakey. They make a very valid point in regard to equity of services and the absence of blood and epidemiological testing only exacerbates the situation.

People in the town and the Town Council in particular tell me they want to see the Human Health Impact Assessment accelerated, ongoing provision of information through the shop front, delegation of decision making to the local level within the Defence Department and faster release of PFAS testing results from approved laboratories. You can be assured that the Opposition will continue to raise these matters with Senator Payne.

The Opposition will continue to work with the Commonwealth, the NT Government and the Katherine Town Council on behalf of the people of Katherine. I would be pleased to discuss this important matter further with you at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely,



Gary Higgins MLA
Leader of the Opposition

13 November 2017

Cc Senator Marise Payne, Minister for Defence
The Hon Greg Hunt MP, Minister for Health
Mrs Fay Miller Mayor of Katherine
Senator Nigel Scullion