

**Media Release**

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**Communities have a right to know about hazardous PFAS contaminated soil to be moved from Yarraville to Bacchus Marsh in rural Victoria**

A large quantity of contaminated soil is proposed to be moved from the West Gate tunnel site in Yarraville to a site in Bacchus Marsh, in Victoria’s food bowl. The PFAS contaminated soil is a toxic legacy from the Victorian 1991 Coode Island fire, where huge volumes of PFAS fire fighting foam were used. In order to accept PFAS contaminated waste, an amendment to the Moorabool Planning Scheme is required. The normal procedure would involve community consultation, but a request has been made to bypass community consultation and allow this proposal to go ahead.

“The right to know about toxic and persistent chemicals like the PFAS chemicals is enshrined in international law. Communities have a right to be fully informed about hazardous chemicals coming into their communities, particularly when such large amounts of contaminated soil are too be stored and treated close to vulnerable populations like school children,” said Coleen Hartland, National Toxics Network member of the U.N. working groups on PFAS and Ex Victorian MP.

“It was well known the West Gate tunnel site was contaminated as environmental audits were required. It’s beyond comprehension the Victorian Government or Transurban did not have a plan to deal with this highly contaminated soil. The lack of a plan has left communities feeling at risk and asking why they in the west should be seen as a dumping ground for this highly toxic soil,“ she said.

PFAS (Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) chemicals occur in a wide range of consumer and industrial products, including firefighting foams in the past. They are toxic to human health and associated with thyroid disease, immune suppression, reduced fertility and a range of cancers. They are also extremely persistent and capable of moving through air, dust and water.

“Exposure to PFAS chemicals poses a serious risk because they bioaccumulate and can build up in the bodies of children,” said Dr Lloyd Smith, NTN Senior Adviser.

“Australia is out of step with the international community and has set quite high levels for “acceptable” PFAS exposure. This is despite two PFAS chemicals (PFOS, PFOA) having been listed on the U.N. Stockholm Convention for Persistent Organic Pollutants, an international treaty to eliminate the worst man-made toxic chemicals,” Dr Lloyd Smith said.

“While the Australian government continue to dismiss PFAS health concerns, the U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) has recommended substantially reducing the US EPA’s current health advisory level for PFOS and PFOA of 70 parts-per-trillion (ppt) to less than 12ppt for some PFAS chemicals due to the finding that exposure above 12ppt could be dangerous for sensitive populations like infants and breastfeeding mothers. U.S. levels are well below those set in Australia”.

Information regarding what will happen to the soil after it is been moved is scant. However, treatment technologies, particularly those requiring earthmoving operations, may generate significant dust and emissions and should be conducted well away from sensitive land uses, such as agriculture, homes and schools.

“Communities have a right to know what the Government and Transurban plan to do with the contaminated soil. They must stop this ad hoc approach and sit down with communities and local government to ensure the right plan and consultation occur. This is not the only contaminated soil the government will need to deal with and all parties need to get on with developing adequate strategies for dealing with contaminated sites and soil into the future,” said Hartland.

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**West Gate Tunnel Project**

