

MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday 17 September

Consensus of global experts agree: PFAS harms health, environment and economy

100% of international experts have agreed that PFAS are widespread, difficult to clean up and will persist in the environment for a long time.

The Adelaide PFAS Consensus emerged from an international expert process at the CleanUp 2026 conference this week.

The vast majority — 93% of experts — agreed that PFAS harm human health, depending on the level of exposure, toxicity, people's vulnerability, and the type of environment. 93% also agreed that the long-term costs of PFAS are large, and should not be passed on to future generations. Most also agreed that avoidable PFAS use should be stopped because prevention is better than cure.

PFAS are a large and diverse group of chemicals that have been widely used because of their resistance to heat, water, oils and chemicals. The experts agreed that PFAS are widespread in the environment, including food, soil, water, waste, sea spray, rain, polar ice and wildlife. Their long life in the environment has led to them being called 'forever chemicals'.

CleanUp 2026 conference organiser and crcCARE Managing Director, Laureate Professor Ravi Naidu, said the Adelaide PFAS Consensus reflected a growing recognition that detecting PFAS was only the beginning of making good decisions about contamination.

"Finding PFAS does not tell us the level of risk. We need to understand where people and ecosystems are exposed to the greatest risks, and what action will deliver the greatest benefit," Professor Naidu said.

He said the highest priority must be prevention. "The least costly contaminant to manage is the one we never release."

The Adelaide PFAS Consensus calls for action to stop avoidable PFAS uses and releases, and to prioritise drinking water, food-producing systems, vulnerable communities and sensitive ecosystems where exposure and consequences are greatest. It also says remediation should be assessed against its overall environmental benefit, including PFAS reduction, and not elimination, energy and water use, emissions, waste, cost and long-term performance.

Professor Naidu said that most experts agreed that PFAS replacements need to be safe and not create new problems.

"Filters, membranes, excavation and soil washing can protect people and ecosystems, but they can also leave behind PFAS-rich waste that still needs to be safely managed or destroyed."

Professor Naidu also said, for PFAS, remediation should not be judged solely by how much PFAS is excavated or removed.

"It should be judged by whether sources are controlled, exposure pathways are interrupted, migration and bioavailability are reduced, receptors are protected, and any residual risks remain acceptable and verifiably managed over the long term," he said.

"Remediation is not the pursuit of zero contamination; it is the achievement of acceptable, protective and sustainable risk."

The Adelaide Consensus emphasises a broader message from the CleanUp 2026 conference – that contamination should be treated as a challenge that connects soil, water, air, food, ecosystems and human health. Presentations from the international conference also highlighted the need to prevent pollution, better

understand exposure pathways, improve site characterisation and ensure remediation remains effective under climate change.

“CleanUp has always been more than a conference about cleaning up the past,” Professor Naidu said. “It is a forum for preventing pollutants from emerging in future.”

Media enquires

Alysha Huxley, Scientell, 0459 223 089, alysha@scientell.com.au

Simon Torok, Scientell, 0409 844 302, simon@scientell.com.au