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THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS

STATEMENT OF

REAR ADMIRAL BLAKE CONVERSE
DEPUTY COMMANDER, U.S. PACIFIC FLEET

RED HILL BULK FUEL STORAGE FACILITY: THE CURRENT CRISIS, THE RESPONSE,
AND THE WAY FORWARD

BEFORE THE

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS

January 11, 2022

Chairman Garamendi, Ranking Member Lamborn, and distinguished members of the HASC Subcommittee on Readiness, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. Your strong support for the work we do ensures our Navy has the ability to carry out vital missions around the world to protect and advance the national security interests of the United States. This support of Congress is vitally important today as the Navy takes action to resolve the contamination of the Navy's drinking water system on Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam (JBPHH). Nothing is more important than the health, safety and well-being of our people, their families, our neighbors, and the communities we call home. I want to take this opportunity to thank the Members and Staff of this Committee as we work diligently to restore water distribution to our service members, their families, and the members of the community impacted by this event.

Beginning on November 28, 2021, residents living in and around JBPHH reported vapors, discoloration, and contamination of water provided by the Navy. The Red Hill Shaft, a Navy water supply well, was immediately suspected to be the source of this contamination as the Shaft was the source of the drinking water for the residents reporting drinking water problems. The Shaft was shut down that same day (November 28th), and has remained isolated since that time. Samples from the Red Hill Shaft subsequently confirmed the presence of petroleum contaminants. As an immediate response to the crisis, Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet (COMPACFLT), ADM Samuel Paparo, convened a joint crisis action team (CAT) on November 29, 2021. ADM Paparo appointed me to lead this CAT, and to focus on meeting the immediate needs of impacted residents, removing contaminants from the water, restoring safe drinking water, and remediating the Red Hill well. Invoking his authority as the Senior Officer Present

pursuant to U.S. Navy Regulations, ADM Paparo also established formal responsibilities of cognizant Echelon 2 Navy Commands to ensure an enduring response to the crisis.

COMPACFLT retained authority as the Senior Officer Present to take precautions as necessary to preserve the health of persons under his authority, and remains the overall supported commander with responsibility to direct, supervise, and restore the water system.

COMPACFLT directed the following commands to assume overall lead for planning in the following areas:

Commander, Navy Installations Command (CNIC) is the supported commander to:

- Provide support to families and residents, and
- Lead environmental compliance and regulatory coordination actions.

Commander, Naval Facilities and Engineering Command (NAVFAC) is the supported commander to:

- Remediate the Red Hill well to protect the aquifer, and
- Restore the Navy water system at JBPHH with safe drinking water.

I also want to provide you an overview of COMPACFLT's current investigative efforts. In the aftermath of a November 20, 2021 fuel spill, COMPACFLT initiated a Judge Advocate General's (JAGMAN) investigation to conduct a comprehensive review of both the May 6, 2021 fuel leak and the November 20, 2021 fuel leak. As the Navy's Senior Officer Present in Hawaii, COMPACFLT was best postured to direct and supervise an independent, fact-based, and comprehensive investigation into both incidents. The scope of the investigation includes determining the facts and circumstances that caused these incidents; calculating the quantity of

the fuel released into the environment; identifying the role and impact of the material failures, technical competence, and human error; evaluating whether the reporting of both incidents was timely, accurate and thorough; and recommending appropriate remedial actions. After residents in the JBPHH area began reporting contaminated water, COMPACFLT modified the scope of the investigation on December 3, 2021 to include whether the May 6 or November 20 incidents contributed to or caused the water contamination in and surrounding JBPHH.

As a matter of quality assurance, the investigating officer is consulting with the following entities to provide an independent assessment, technical support, and expertise to the investigation: (1) Austin Brockenbrough and Associates: to validate total leak calculations and engineering assessments of recent Red Hill incidents; (2) GSI North America: to validate the pathways for fuel into the Red Hill Shaft well; and (3) a local fuel system operator, Signature Flight Support, to assist in comparing and contrasting Navy and industry best practices. The investigation is ongoing and will be submitted to COMPACFLT no later than January 14, 2022.

In addition, the Secretary of the Navy directed an independent third party assessment of operations and system integrity of the Red Hill Underground Storage Tank Facility and to determine whether there are any design and operational deficiencies. The independent third party assessment shall address, but not be limited to: Process Safety Management, Risk Management, and Integrity Management detailing the integrity of operations, tanks, pipelines, valves, pressure vessels, and associated systems. The third party assessment shall also address the protection and preservation of the Hawaiian environment. The third party assessment will provide recommendations on:

- (1) Safeguards for hardware and human actions to prevent or mitigate future incidents;
- (2) Work plan and implementation schedule to address identified design and operational deficiencies; and
- (3) Cost estimates to correct any deficiencies that do not meet industry standards.

The Navy is fully committed to a thorough and impartial investigation. Looking forward, the Navy will take comprehensive measures to fix the Red Hill Shaft well, protect the aquifer, and put in place appropriate measures to prevent recurrence.

The water contamination at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam has required an intense and collaborative effort between the Navy, our other military service partners on island, the Hawaii Department of Health and Department of Land and Natural Resources, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the many local, state and federal legislators that have stepped in to provide assistance. This teamwork has produced a comprehensive water system recovery plan that is currently in execution. We are grateful for the partnership, expertise, and perspective of federal, state, and local government officials and Native Hawaiian leaders –they are tremendous advocates for the community.

The Secretary of the Navy established an Interagency Working Group comprised of agencies such as EPA, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and U.S. Department of Homeland Security to enhance coordination and cooperation among federal agencies and bring to bear the whole of government approach to solving this problem. In addition, an Interagency Drinking Water System Team (IDWST), with members from Navy, the Hawaii Department of

Health (DOH), the EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers, in consultation with subject matter experts from the U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Marine Corps was established, and approved a plan to restore the Navy's drinking water system. Standard operating procedures for flushing distribution lines were developed by DOH, EPA, Navy and Army. The Navy is closely coordinating with EPA and DOH to ensure all water is certified to meet all EPA and DOH safe drinking water standards. I would also like to express my appreciation to the Honolulu Board of Water Supply for their support to our efforts.

I want to thank this subcommittee and Hawaii's congressional delegation for the support and ongoing commitment to resolve the drinking water contamination at JBPHH. We recognize how much these events impacted the lives of so many and eroded the trust of the community. We are firmly committed to working with our federal and state partners to both provide safe drinking water to our families and neighbors and also earn the trust and confidence of the people of Hawaii. Our joint team will not rest until our families and neighbors using the Navy water system have access to safe drinking water and the Red Hill Shaft contamination is remediated.