



Hon Stephen Robertson MP
Member for Stretton



17 OCT 2008

Minister for Health

MI157559
MO: H/08/07785

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
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Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letter dated 29 August 2008, regarding a petition against the introduction of water fluoridation in Queensland, forwarded to me by the Honourable Craig Wallace MP, Minister for Natural Resources and Water and Minister assisting the Premier in North Queensland, for response.

Queensland Health reviewed the scientific evidence for water fluoridation as part of the decision making process to implement this significant public health measure. Fluoride plays a crucial role in the prevention of dental caries. While some water supplies have adequate levels of natural fluoride to protect against dental caries, most do not. The adjustment of fluoride in community water supplies has long been recognised as an effective method of preventing dental caries and is a major factor in the decline of the disease during the latter half of the 20th century.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare study released in 2007 reported 5–15 year old children from areas with fluoride in drinking water had less tooth decay than children from areas with low concentrations of fluoride in drinking water.

Evidence around the safety and benefits of water fluoridation is frequently re-evaluated. The National Health and Medical Research Council recent review of water fluoridation did not find any evidence of ill-health effects from water fluoridation. The review can be found on the National Health and Medical Research Council website at <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au>.

A number of other reviews also support the safety of water fluoridation.

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Numerous reviews of studies have repeatedly found the weight of evidence does not support water fluoridation being associated with hip fractures, cancer, lower intelligence, Alzheimer's disease or other ill-health effects. In fact, researchers have concluded that studies relating to claims have flawed methodology or conclusions are drawn from an unproven hypothesis. For example, the York Review in 2000 examined all studies purporting to associate fluoridation with lower intelligence, including the Chinese study, and found them to have the lowest quality of evidence and the highest risk of bias.

Recent extensive reviews of the scientific literature by reputable authorities around the world conclude that water fluoridation is not associated with any adverse health effects.

The issues you raised have been examined through extensive and rigorous reviews by qualified researchers. The Queensland Health website at www.health.qld.gov.au/fluoride has references to all credible research and the reviews dispelling claims that fluoride is a poison and causes ill-health.

Fluoride tablets rely on individual compliance, have proved to be less effective in reducing tooth decay, are less cost-effective than water fluoridation and can lead to accidental overdose.

Water fluoridation is the most cost-effective approach to reducing the incidence of tooth decay in communities. For example, fluoride tablets cost approximately \$1,200 per child for 18 years, compared to between \$10.00 and \$40.00 per child for water fluoridation. There is also an increased risk of fluorosis with use of fluoride tablets in the event that they are not used properly.

Water fluoridation is not "mass medication", but topping up the level of naturally occurring fluoride in the water to provide a substantial public health benefit.

Fluoride is a naturally occurring mineral which can be found in water, plants, rocks, soil, air and food and worldwide approximately 360 million people drink water that naturally contains fluoride.

Should you have any queries regarding my advice to you, please refer to the Queensland Health website at www.health.qld.gov.au/fluoride for the facts on water fluoridation.

Yours sincerely



STEPHEN ROBERTSON MP