



Hon Stephen Robertson MP
Member for Stretton



Minister for Health

MI154599
MO: H/08/04298

20 MAY 2008

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Queensland Parliamentary Service
Parliament House
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BRISBANE QLD 4000

Email: TableOffice@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letter dated 16 April 2008, regarding Petition No 1007-08 in relation to water fluoridation.

Research has demonstrated that fluoridation – together with oral hygiene and good nutrition – can reduce tooth decay by up to 40%. We cannot ignore the extensive scientific evidence which shows that fluoridation is a safe and effective means of improving oral health, thereby reducing the considerable personal and financial burden of oral disease. The introduction of water fluoridation will shift the focus to prevention over cure.

This decision is about responding to the very clear wishes of the majority of Queenslanders who support the fluoridation of public water supplies. Surveys conducted over recent years by the Office of Economic and Statistical Research, the Local Government Association of Queensland, Central Queensland University and the Queensland Oral Health Alliance have consistently demonstrated that between 60% and 70% of Queenslanders support fluoridation. Given this level of public support, it is unnecessary to hold a referendum on the issue. At the same time, no other health issue is decided by referendum.

The introduction of fluoridation would allow the majority of Queenslanders to have their choice of easy access to fluoridated water, as is the case in all other States and Territories. This does not prevent the minority within the community who do not wish to receive the benefit of fluoride from accessing other sources of water such as tank, bottled or filtered (reverse osmosis) water. It is simply reversing the choice to favour the majority.

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Choice in a democratic society allows for individuals to take options that best suit their needs. However, the opportunities for people to make a choice are not always clear cut, with disadvantaged communities often being denied an opportunity to exercise choice. Unlike others in more advantaged communities, choices may be limited by financial and other restraints.

Government's role is to consider issues and take reasonable actions to ensure the needs of the community as a whole are met. In the case of fluoridation, this entails shifting the "choice burden" to those who are in a position to make it, and by providing easier options to those who are not.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping, fluid strokes that form a stylized representation of the name Stephen Robertson.

STEPHEN ROBERTSON MP