



Hon Stephen Robertson MP
Member for Stretton



17 DEC 2008

Minister for Health

MI159224
MO: H/08/09706

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letter dated 13 November 2008, enclosing Petition No. 1156-08 on behalf of Ms Joan Hoare, regarding water fluoridation and purified recycled water.

Firstly with regard to the issues raised in relation to water fluoridation, Queensland Health has been canvassing the views of Queenslanders for many years, and since 2004, between 60-70% of the Queensland population has been consistently in favour of water fluoridation. Given this level of public support, it was considered unnecessary to hold a referendum on the issue.

The Government often proclaims laws that limit individual choice for a greater community benefit. Examples include mandatory wearing of seat belts and anti-smoking laws. 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. Recent polls show that most Queenslanders, particularly those considered to be disadvantaged, want to drink fluoridated water, and the introduction of water fluoridation would allow people to have this choice as they do in all other Australian states and territories.

The minority within the community who do not wish to receive the health benefit of fluoridated water can access other sources of water such as tank, bottled or filtered (reverse osmosis) water, however the government will not provide reverse osmosis systems to those people. Mild dental fluorosis is the only known health risk associated with water fluoridation at optimal levels and the benefits of water fluoridation in significantly reducing tooth decay clearly outweigh the low risk of dental fluorosis.

Reverse osmosis filters will also filter out other beneficial minerals. Drinking significant quantities of reverse osmosis-filtered water may increase the risk of developing certain conditions that may result from the consumption of low-hardness water. For this reason, on balance, Queensland Health recommends that consumers of drinking water are better off with water that has not had most of its minerals removed.

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Purified recycled water is the end result of a '7-barrier' treatment process that produces drinking water from waste water. It is important to note that purified recycled water is required by law to meet a large number of strict quality control and health guidelines before being added to existing drinking water storages. Furthermore, over 40 years experience with the augmentation of drinking water supplies with purified recycled water around the world has shown that its consumption has not been associated with any adverse health effects.

Despite the proven safety of purified recycled water, the Queensland government has decided that purified recycled water will only be used as an emergency response. Purified recycled water will be added to Wivenhoe Dam when combined South East Queensland dam levels drop to 40 per cent.

Queensland Health has developed chemical and microbiological standards for purified recycled water which are included in the *Public Health Regulation 2005*. All health related standards are derived from the *Australian Drinking Water Guidelines* and the *Australian Guidelines for Water Recycling: Augmentation of Drinking Water Supplies*.

The standards for microbial contaminants require that no human pathogens or microbial indicators of faecal contamination are detected in purified recycled water. The standards require monitoring for 'indicator' or 'surrogate' organisms which, due to their similarities with the most common human pathogens known to occur in wastewater, are scientifically proven to provide an accurate measure of the disinfection process. In other words, if these organisms are not detected in the purified recycled water, then it can safely be assumed that pathogens are not present either. The maximum limit for *all* viral, bacterial and protozoan pathogens in purified recycled water is zero.

The standards for chemicals are conservative. Safety factors incorporated into the standards mean that the likelihood of impacts on human health is negligible. All testing of purified recycled water from the advanced water treatment plants in south east Queensland shows that treatment is effectively removing such contaminants to meet all Queensland Health standards.

If you would like to access additional information about water fluoridation please refer to the Queensland Health website (www.health.qld.gov.au/fluoride) or Australian Dental Association (www.ada.org.au/OralHealth/FLN/flnfront.aspx).

For further information about purified recycled water go to the Queensland Water Commission's website at: <http://www.qwc.qld.gov.au/Purified+recycled+water> or Queensland Health's Factsheet at: http://www.health.qld.gov.au/ph/documents/ehu/prw_factsheet.pdf.

Yours sincerely



STEPHEN ROBERTSON MP