



Office of Hon Peter Dunne

MP for Ohariu

Minister of Internal Affairs

Associate Minister of Health

Associate Minister of Conservation

06 MAR 2015

Ref. 1500127

Dear

Thank you for your email of 5 February 2015 to Hon Dr Jonathan Coleman about the fluoridation of drinking-water supplies. I am responding as the matters you raise fall within my portfolio responsibilities as Associate Minister of Health. I appreciate that there are strongly held views on water fluoridation and that this can be a controversial issue for some people.

Under the Health Act 1956, water fluoridation is not compulsory, and local authorities are able to make decisions about fluoridation as part of their duty to improve, promote and protect public health in their districts with input from interested groups and people in the community.

As you know, the Ministry of Health strongly supports water fluoridation as a public health measure to improve oral health. Specifically, the Ministry recommends the adjustment of fluoride to between 0.7 and 1.0 mg/litre in drinking water, the optimal level to improve and protect oral health while minimising the risk of dental fluorosis.

You may be interested to know that in August 2014, the Royal Society of New Zealand and the Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor jointly published the report *Health effects of water fluoridation: A review of the scientific evidence*. This report found that community water fluoridation within the range of concentrations currently recommended by the Ministry and used in New Zealand poses no health risks, and provides compelling evidence of dental health benefits for New Zealanders. This report is available on the Royal Society's website (www.royalsociety.org.nz) and can be found under the 'Commissioner Reviews' tab.

The Ministry's policy on community water fluoridation is consistent with other leading health organisations, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the World Dental Federation, and with other countries we most often compare ourselves with, including Australia, that have community water fluoridation schemes. Organisations within New Zealand, including Te Ao Marama, the New Zealand Medical and Dental Associations, the New Zealand Cancer Society and Plunket, also support water fluoridation.

You refer to a recent amendment to the Medicines Regulations 1984 made under the Medicines Act 1981. The amendment has no impact on councils or their ability to fluoridate water supplies. The amendment simply clarifies the existing status quo that fluoride substances used to treat drinking water (and fluoridated water itself) are not, and never have been considered to be medicines under the terms of the Medicines Act.

The consultation period before this amendment was made to the Medicines Regulations opened on 25 November 2014, and allowed six weeks for people to make submissions. Details were available on the Medsafe website. More than 1,300 submissions were received by the Ministry before the closing date of 9 January 2015.

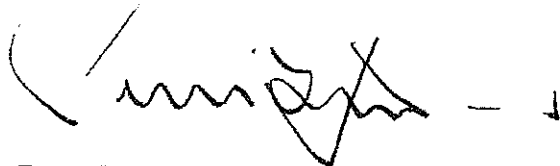
Fluoride is classified as a medicine when used for a therapeutic purpose and is scheduled under the Medicines Regulations. The recommended level of fluoride in drinking water is up to 1mg/litre. This concentration is lower than the minimum concentration level included in the schedule of medicines for fluoride of 10mg/litre. Controls on the dose of fluoride and other chemicals that can be added to drinking water are covered by the Health Act 1956 and the Drinking-water Standards for New Zealand.

The Ministry appreciates that confidence in access to safe water is an important issue for communities. Fluoride is naturally present in all water, but in New Zealand it is necessary to top up the level to achieve benefits to oral health. While some people may regard adjustment of the fluoride level as an infringement of their choice, this has not been supported when tested by judicial and statutory bodies mandated to examine such issues.

The levels of fluoride used in community water fluoridation in New Zealand are carefully monitored and are within the guidelines of the WHO and other international public health agencies. In New Zealand, the fluoride purchased from chemical supply companies for water treatment conforms to industry standards for quality and purity.

Thank you for sharing your concerns.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Dunne', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Hon Peter Dunne
Associate Minister of Health