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Water fluoridation gets political

By Ken Perrott (<http://sciblogs.co.nz/author/open-parachute/>) • 08/12/2016 • 2

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The new community water fluoridation legislation is now on the way in the New Zealand parliament. The Health (Fluoridation of Drinking Water) Amendment Bill was introduced on Tuesday and the parliamentary health committee has invited submissions.

It's worth watching the videos of the twelve speakers in the first reading.

Health (Fluoridation of Drinking Water) Amendm...



These give an idea of how the legislation will be received by the different political parties. They also give an impression that members of our parliament are well aware of the tactics of the anti-fluoride pressure groups – they fully expect to be inundated with irrelevant and pseudoscientific submissions. But they are also aware that the science currently finds community water fluoridation to be both effective and safe.

After watching the debate these are my initial conclusions:

1. The bill has almost unanimous support. Only New Zealand First voted against it.
2. Many of the speakers see the legislation as only a little better than the current situation. They describe it as a half-way house – kicking the can down the road. District Health Boards (DHBs) will be subjected to the same uninformed or misleading pressure that the

councils are at present. The government should have gone the whole hog and handed over responsibility for fluoridation decision to the Ministry of Health.

3. All the speakers declared their support for the science that shows community water fluoridation effective and safe. Most showed they are aware of, and accept, the New Zealand Fluoridation review commissioned by the Royal Society of New Zealand and the Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor.
4. None of the speakers showed any support for the arguments or activities of anti-fluoridation campaigners. In fact, there were many derogatory comments made about tin foil hats, etc.
5. New Zealand First is opposed because they prefer that communities make fluoridation decisions by referenda and are calling for these referenda to be binding. They criticised those councils like Whakatane and Hamilton that had ignored the wishes of the community.

Health Committee calling for submissions

The Parliamentary health select committee has called for submissions (<https://www.parliament.nz/en/get-involved/topics/all-current-topics/bill-seeks-to-extend-water-fluoridation-coverage/>) on the bill. Written submission will be accepted until February 2, 2017.

Information on making a submission is available on the Health (Fluoridation of Drinking Water) Amendment Bill website (https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/sc/make-a-submission/document/51SCHE_SCF_ooDBHOH_BILL71741_1/health-fluoridation-of-drinking-water-amendment-bill). And you can make your submissions online (<https://www.parliament.nz/en/ECommitteeSubmission/74343ef6-d54d-4590-b23a-a6d500ff3572/CreateSubmission>).

You can also give notice that you wish to make an oral submission to the Health Committee.

Possible issues of contention

From what speakers in the debate had to say I do not think the anti-fluoride lobby will get much sympathy. MPs are expecting the usual deluge of submissions from them but know from experience how worthless they will be.

However, several MPs stressed they did welcome submissions and particularly encouraged submissions from scientific and health experts. The Royal Society of NZ and the Prime Minister's Chief Scientific advisor may be specifically invited to make submissions.

The bill is not really about the science, however, and MPs expect that the real content – the processes for making fluoridation decisions and the body responsible for these, should be thoroughly discussed.

I expect there will be a strong push to strengthen the bill by moving responsibility to central government, the Ministry of Health, as MPs still see problems with DHB responsibility.

The issue of community consultation should also come up – particularly as New Zealand First is promoting the idea of binding referenda in communities. As it stands the bill does not define how consultation should occur so this may well be made more specific.

The Green Party seems keen to introduce mechanisms for better informing of the public about the science behind fluoridation. They are conscious that the anti-fluoride groups are fear-mongering on this issue and feel that this can be countered by better information. If this is discussed in depth in the hearings there may well be some interest in defining more specifically how government updates its understanding of the research on fluoridation and how they disseminate new research results to the public.

A role for you, the reader

Well, the process is underway. If you have views or concerns on the bill or on the decision processes involved with fluoridation now is the time to put pen to paper, punch away on your computer keyboard, or prepare for making an oral submission to the health committee. If you want advice on how to do this have a read of *Making a Submission to a Parliamentary Select Committee* (<https://www.parliament.nz/en/document/ooCLOOCMakingSubmission1>) and the linked documents.

Remember, written submissions are accepted until February 2, 2017, and we would expect the Health committee hearings to start soon after that.

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2 Responses to "Water fluoridation gets political"



Eric Crampton says:

08/12/2016 at 10:29 am (<http://sciblogs.co.nz/open-parachute/2016/12/08/fluoridation-members-parliament-call-submissions-scientific-health-experts/#comment-228175>)

1. Agree entirely that fluoridation is best, all else equal.
2. Totally makes sense for councils that already have chlorination plants in place or few bores to implement it.
3. Case gets harder for councils with multiple draw sites because then you need kit across a pile of places.
4. If DHBs make the call on fluoridation but Councils bear the costs of putting in the kit and Ministry of Health gets the savings on some of the kid dental bills, maybe central government should be chipping in towards costs in places where it's expensive to implement fluoridation.

[Reply (<http://sciblogs.co.nz/open-parachute/2016/12/08/fluoridation-members-parliament-call-submissions-scientific-health-experts/?replytocom=228175#respond>)]



Ken Perrott says:

08/12/2016 at 10:38 am (<http://sciblogs.co.nz/open-parachute/2016/12/08/fluoridation-members-parliament-call-submissions-scientific-health-experts/#comment-228176>)

Eric, your point 3 is accounted for in the bill.

MPs did raise your issue 4 so it may well be modified during the committee hearings.

You could always make a submission on that point. 😊

Reply (<http://sciblogs.co.nz/open-parachute/2016/12/08/fluoridation-members-parliament-call-submissions-scientific-health-experts/?replytocom=228176#respond>)

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Get in touch with the authors (<http://sciblogs.co.nz/open-parachute?action=contact>)

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