



MAYORAL MEMO - 2 AUGUST 2023

In New South Wales, an impressive 96 per cent of residents have access to fluoridated drinking water. While I am personally at ease with consuming fluoridated water, as an elected representative, my primary responsibility is to represent the views of our community. I recognise and respect the community's right to voice opinions on water fluoridation.

The recent total failure of Dubbo's fluoride dosing system and the subsequent complete lack of transparency was not only disappointing but undermined public confidence in Council. It has also brought forward some residents who wish to debate the merits of water fluoridation. Let's delve into the historical context and current regulations surrounding this matter.

Beaconsfield in Tasmania proudly pioneered community water fluoridation in 1953. Yass was the first community in NSW to follow. Guiding this practice in NSW is the Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies Act 1957. This Act is pivotal for us, as Dubbo operates under its provisions being a water supply authority. Notably, Section 6B (1) of the

Act stipulates that an approved water supply authority cannot discontinue fluoridation unless given permission by the Secretary.

In 1963 Dubbo commenced its water fluoridation. An official direction in the New South Wales Government Gazette No. 121 on 29 August 1980 sanctioned the newly amalgamated Council to continue to fluoridate Dubbo's water supply. Discontinuing this practice without appropriate approvals would be an offence under the Act.

The Act does not highlight the process, but it does permit cessation of fluoridation. It would require the Secretary to revoke the initial direction after being informed by recommendations from the Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies Advisory Committee. Such a revocation typically arises from substantial public support that prompts an appeal to the water authority, urging the latter to seek a determination from the Secretary.

However, it's worth noting that gaining such a revocation might prove challenging. NSW Health staunchly supports water fluoridation, championing it as a tried-and-true method for preventing tooth decay. Their endorsement stems from decades of concrete evidence and unwavering support from the National Health and Medical Research Council. Consequently, NSW Health continually assists councils and water utilities with the addition of fluoride and ardently encourages communities to embrace this crucial public health measure.

Should there ever be a deliberation to retract fluoridation dosing, NSW Health would seek perspectives from a diverse group: their own officers; affiliated agencies; dental experts and the aforementioned Advisory Committee. This holistic approach ensures that any decision taken prioritises the overall wellbeing of the community.

While the door remains open for community dialogue on water fluoridation, any shift in our policy would need to navigate the intricate maze of legislative and health guidelines. As Council, we are committed to listening to and advocating for the interests of our residents, while also upholding the legal and health directives that safeguard our community's wellbeing.

Councillor Mathew Dickerson

Mayor of Dubbo Regional Council

Last Edited: 01 Aug 2023