

# Local Government (Empowering Councils) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

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Local governments are empowered to make decisions which impact the health of Queenslanders, a current example is with Water fluoridation. Unlike other states in Australia, Queensland empowers local governments to decide on this public health measure under the Water Fluoridation Act 2008 which is outside the scope of this bill. Most local governments in Queensland that are also water suppliers have voted against water fluoridation despite Queensland Health claiming to encourage local councils to adopt and maintain water fluoridation as part of a comprehensive approach to improving oral health. The result of this policy is that there are well over a million Queenslanders represented by that do not have access to fluoridated water.

In December 2024, Cairns Regional Council affirmed its position to be the largest water supplier in Australia that does not provide fluoridated water to its residents. The position includes that: "oral health is, and always has been the responsibility of the state government" - despite CRC's legislated responsibility for this decision and having already provided fluoridated water from ~2009-2013; and lack of community consensus - despite a majority of support in its 2016 & 2024 community surveys on adding fluoride, and no current policy which requires community consensus for this decision.

Queensland Health recognises that it cannot direct a local government as to how they determine whether fluoridation is in the best interests of a community, despite having agency for the relevant legislation. As this is a decision for local government, only the Minister for Local Government can intervene in the case of an unsound decision under the LGA. Through my engagement with the Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteers is that the current circumstances do not warrant such an action to be taken. This is despite the consequence, which is a continuation of poor oral health outcomes for residents of Cairns compared to Queenslanders who do have access to fluoridated water.

If this bill is intended to promote good governance and decision-making there should be more stringent provisions around local government decisions which impact the health of Queenslanders and that such decisions are held to higher scrutiny by the state government.