



Speech by

**John-Paul Langbroek**

**MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE**

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## **FLUORIDATION OF PUBLIC WATER SUPPLIES AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr LANGBROEK** (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (10.23 a.m.): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

I rise today to introduce a bill to protect our children's teeth by embracing the beneficial effects from fluoridating drinking water throughout Queensland to reduce tooth decay and improve general oral health. Water fluoridation was introduced in all Australian states in the 1960s and 1970s and about 80 per cent of most states' populations now receive fluoridated water supplies. However, Brisbane is the only capital city with unfluoridated water and, at present, only about five per cent of the Queensland population has fluoridation of their water supplies.

Recent dental evidence indicates that by the age of six, Queensland children have the highest rate of decayed, missing or filled primary teeth—almost 50 per cent above the national average—and that Queensland's 12-year-old children also have the highest rate of decayed, missing or filled permanent teeth, more than 50 per cent above the national average. The variance in tooth decay rates between Queensland and the rest of Australia is directly attributable to the failure of the Queensland government and local councils to add fluoride to their water supplies.

The Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies Amendment Bill 2004 will strengthen our children's teeth and free up a public dental health system struggling under the strain of Queensland's above average level of decayed teeth, which comes at a great economic cost to the public.

Mr Speaker, in consideration of the time, I seek leave to have the remainder of my speech incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Although I am proud to be the first Dentist to be elected to the Queensland Parliament since 1938, it is not a feat that I can take lightly. It places a responsibility on me to ensure that this House takes all measures in its power to ensure that the Government provides Queenslanders with a high level of oral health care. When I graduated from the University of Queensland some 20 years ago I gave an undertaking that I would do all in my power to assist public oral health care. I say to each and every member of the Queensland Parliament that you have the ability today to assist every Queenslanders to maintain a high level of oral health care.

This bill seeks to amend the Fluoridation and Public Water Supplies Act 1963 and mandate that all controlling entities of public water supplies, be they local governments or other providers of water to the public, add a specified level of fluoride to the water supply. The bill also provides an exemption for small communities. Fluoride occurs naturally at varying levels in almost all public water supplies. In places where the natural level of fluoride in water is around half to one part per million, much lower levels of tooth decay in both children and adults are found. The first inclusion of fluoride into a water supply in Australia occurred in Beaconsfield, near Launceston, Tasmania in 1953. Over 300 million people are currently receiving fluoridated water worldwide, in addition to those receiving naturally fluoridated water. Other countries with water fluoridation schemes include the United States, the United Kingdom, Ireland, South Africa, Israel, South Korea, Vietnam, New Zealand, Canada, Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong. In Australia, about 11.5 million people now receive fluoridated water.

In Queensland in 1963, the Nicklin Government introduced the Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies Act which conferred responsibility for proposing this public health measure to communities, and carrying out their decisions, on individual local governments. The addition of fluoride to the public water supply is a scientifically proven measure to reduce the quantity and severity of tooth decay and tooth loss suffered by children and can aid oral health care into adulthood. A survey released in 1999 showed that "... out of 38 countries for which comparable national data are available, Australia has the second lowest average number of decayed, missing or filled permanent teeth in 12 year-old children. "However, within Australia the figures vary widely. Especially in Queensland,

where only about 5% of the population receives fluoridated water. The survey found Queensland 6 year-old children had the highest rate of decayed, missing or filled primary teeth, almost 50% above the national average, while 12 year-old children had the highest rate of decayed, missing or filled permanent teeth, more than 50% above the national average.

Further evidence of the benefits of fluoridated water can be found in the 1991 study that examined children from Brisbane (unfluoridated) and Townsville (fluoridated) and found a striking difference. Decay rates were significantly lower among children in Townsville than in Brisbane, both in primary and permanent teeth. The study stated that "if the 201,084 children aged five to fifteen years in Brisbane were to achieve the benefits of fluoridation apparent from this study, there would be approximately 300,000 fewer tooth surfaces with caries (incidences of tooth decay). "The World Health Organisation has stated that "community water fluoridation is safe and cost-effective and should be introduced and maintained wherever it is socially acceptable and feasible" and the US Surgeon-Generals has stated that "community water fluoridation continues to be the most cost-effective, practical and safe means for reducing and controlling the occurrence of tooth decay in a community. "The fluoridation of public waters is further supported by the various medical and health association in Australia.

I would like to take this opportunity to repeat what the Australian Medical Association and the Australian Dental Association presidents have said about the fluoridation of water. Dr Don Anning, President, Australian Dental Association (Qld): Queensland spends twice the national average per person on dental treatment in public dental services yet our waiting lists continue to grow even longer and Queenslanders still have the worst teeth in Australia. This is not a coincidence. The fact that less than 5% of Queenslanders enjoy the benefits of water fluoridation is the greatest triumph of quackery over science that I am aware of. In the face of the "big lie" perpetrated by anti-fluoridationists, it is time for the Queensland public to be aware of the facts and demand the long overdue introduction of one of the great preventative public health measures of modern times and Dr David Molloy, President, Australian Medical Association (Qld): "Healthy teeth can mean a healthy body. Evidence is mounting that poor oral health can impact adversely on your body's well being. Your mouth and teeth can leak inflammation into your body that can increase your risk of heart attack, stroke and even premature labour if you are pregnant. Keep your teeth and body healthy with nature's gift—fluoride." The Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies Act (1963) authorises local governments in Queensland to decide whether or not to fluoridate public water supplies under its control.

The Act states that a local government may add fluoride to any public water supply under its control without conducting a poll of eligible voters within the local government's area. However a local government may not add fluoride to a public water supply if it has conducted a poll and the proposition of adding fluoride to the public water supply is defeated. Brisbane is the only capital city with unfluoridated water, and at present, only about 5% of the Queensland population have fluoridation of their water. Despite a number of councils introducing water fluoridation to public water supplies, currently only Dalby, Mareeba, Moranbah, and Townsville currently have fluoridated water supplies in Queensland.

A complication with regard to the decision of allowing local governments to fluoridate public water supplies is the trend of local governments to share water sources and treatment facilities. Under the current Act, if local governments that share a water treatment facility were to hold a joint referendum regarding fluoridation, and just one local government area voted against fluoridating the public water supply then all local governments are bound by that decision. As I stated previously, this bill seeks to amend the Fluoridation and Public Water Supplies Act 1963 and mandate that all controlling entities of public water supplies, be they local governments or other providers of water to the public, add a specified level of fluoride to the water supply. I commend the Bill to the House.