



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Wednesday, 23 February 2005

FLUORIDATION OF PUBLIC WATER SUPPLIES AMENDMENT BILL

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (9.50 pm): How many times in public life do we hear people say, 'There should be a law for this', or 'There should be a law against something'? Often their intentions are pure, but they do not take into consideration that laws do not always fix people's social behaviours and they are not necessarily the appropriate way to go when we are talking about the rights of individuals.

When we are talking about legislating, it has to be done in the greatest public interest and it has to be balanced with individual rights. I believe that the current legislation achieves that more thoroughly than the proposed legislation which is before the House. The current law does not prevent fluoridation of public drinking water supplies. It does provide the opportunity for local governments to fluoridate where they have public support. It is important that people who are pro fluoridation realise that the opportunity exists to implement that in public water supplies. However, it requires the support of local governments and it requires public support. I believe that is a principle in this case which is too important to override.

The Nationals have always respected the power of the community and consequently embraces the principles of community empowerment. The Fluoridation of Public Water Supplies Act 1963 provides that empowerment. As the scientific evidence available presents strong arguments in favour, as well as against, the addition of fluorine in public water supplies, it is imperative that the people's voice is heard on this issue. Consequently, the Nationals believe that the provisions of the current act should stand. I wonder if the state Liberal parliamentary wing has consulted with the Brisbane City Council or the Caloundra City Council or the Gold Coast City Council about whether they should be forced to put fluorine in their water under this bill. The Local Government Association of Queensland certainly does not support the forced introduction of fluoride into public water supplies, and I suspect that these other local government areas of the members who support this bill also do not support it.

This is an issue that needs to be in the public arena. It is not good enough to force or mandate fluoridation of public water supplies in Queensland if the public does not support that. Where there are good arguments for fluoridation, it is not just about labelling people and accusing them of things. That is an emotional way to approach this. This argument for fluoridation needs to be in the public arena. It is not about forcing it down people's throats literally through legislation at the state level. Quite frankly, we have not seen that public debate swing in favour of fluoridation and forced fluoridation in this state. Until the public say that this is something that they are willing to have in their public water supplies, I believe that it would be totally wrong and immoral for it to be legislated at the state level in this way.

I have no doubt that those who are pro fluoridation have the best of intentions in regard to oral health. However, I equally believe that there are also those who are against fluoridation who have very legitimate concerns. It is not good enough to call them names and call members in this parliament names as a means of arguing in favour of forced fluoridation. Let this debate be one that is informed, that does take into consideration both sides, that does consider the scientific evidence but does not trample over the top of people's rights and the rights of families to choose whether or not they want their children to have fluoride in their water or fluoride as a supplement in their diet. Families who do want fluoride as a supplement in their children's diet have that choice now.

To force fluoridation of water supplies through legislation in this way would mean that those families who do not want to have fluoridation of their public water supply lose that choice. That goes back to the issue that I raised at the start. When consideration is being given to bringing in legislation, the public interest has to be balanced against the incursion on individual rights. In this case, I believe the wiser public policy is the legislation that we already have in place. But let the debate about the scientific pros and cons take place in the public arena with respect to those different positions. Do not force it down people's throats or ultimately people will revolt, and even if this law is passed it will not stand.