Question on Notice
No. 474
Asked on 15 April 2008

MRS PRATT asked the Minister for Health (MR ROBERTSON) –

QUESTION:

With reference to fluoridation of water supplies –

(1) How much research has the Government conducted on the possible effects to wildlife and the ecology as fluoridated water pours into our river systems?

(2) What research has the Government done on the accumulative effects of fluoride on soil and all living organisms?

(3) Has the Government consulted any of the countries that have decided to quit fluoridating their water supplies?

(4) Did the National Health and Medical Research Council tender document in late 2006 mention fluoride intake may be unsafe for those with kidney impairment but failed to mention it in its review in late 2007 and if so, why that omission?

ANSWER:

(1) Numerous international studies and reviews by leading health authorities such as the World Health Organisation have consistently demonstrated that water fluoridation does not pose a risk to the environment. [1-6]

(2) The water supplies of the majority of other Australian states and territories have been fluoridated for around 35-50 years, with no adverse environmental effects. [7]

(3) In making its decision to fluoridate, the Government has referenced documented evidence on the reasons why some cities have chosen to cease water fluoridation and taken this into account.[8] In many European countries, water fluoridation is not an efficient way to provide fluoride to the community as they do not have large centralised public drinking water sources. Countries such as Switzerland, Germany, France and Austria use salt fluoridation as a practical alternative to water fluoridation.

(4) Officers from the National Health and Medical Research Council have advised that while kidney impairment as a consequence of fluoride intake was considered in the background to their review, it was considered in the context of the broad issue of fluoride and health. This included, but was not limited to, issues relating to cancer, oral and skeletal health. No health concerns from water fluoridation related to kidney impairment were found.

[1] World Health Organisation (2002): *Environmental Health Criteria 227 FLUORIDES.* World Health Organisation. Geneva.
[2]World Health Organisation, (1970): *Fluorides and human health.* Geneva: World Health Organisation Monograph Series No 59.
[3]World Health Organisation Expert Committee on Oral Health Status and Fluoride Use, (1994): *Fluorides and Oral Health. WHO Technical Report Series No. 846.* Geneva: World Health Organisation.
[4] Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, (2002): News Release: Fluoridation/SEPA Study. Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department: Tacoma.
[5]Dixon E, Sutton A, Young W, (2000): *Proposed Environmental Quality Standards for fluoride in water.*
WRc R&D Technical Report P99. Bristol: Environment Agency.
[6]Osterman JW, (1990): Evaluating the impact of municipal water fluoridation on the aquatic environment. *American Journal of Public Health,* 80:1230-1235.
[7] There are no reputable reports of adverse environmental effects from water fluoridation in the literature. Informal consultations with WA, NSW, Vic, SA and Tasmania Oral Health State Management units occurred to seek advice re any adverse events. None were reported by other states or territories consulted.
[8] Forum on Fluoridation, 2002. Irish Government Publication Sales Office, Dublin. Countries where fluoridation has ceased: Kilmarnock (Scotland), Anglesey (Wales), Basle(Switzerland), cities in Holland and Netherlands.