



Taituarā

Local Government Professionals Aotearoa

**Submission of Taituarā to the
Health Select Committee
regarding the
*Health (Fluoridation of Drinking Water) Amendment Bill –
Supplementary Order Paper***

What is Taituarā?

Taituarā thanks the Health Select Committee for the opportunity to submit regarding the Supplementary Order Paper to the Health (Fluoridation of Drinking Water) Amendment Bill.

Taituarā (formerly the NZ Society of Local Government Managers) is an incorporated society of approximately 860 members drawn from local government Chief Executives, senior managers, and council staff with significant policy or operational responsibilities.¹ We are an apolitical organisation. Our contribution lies in our wealth of knowledge of the local government sector and of the technical, practical, and managerial implications of legislation.

Our vision is:

Professional local government management, leading staff and enabling communities to shape their future.

Our primary role is to help local authorities perform their roles and responsibilities as effectively and efficiently as possible. This includes ensuring that legislation, regulations, and policy give best effect to the Government's policy direction and can be implemented effectively.

Taituarā supports this Supplementary Order Paper in its totality. This would strengthen the original bill by placing responsibility in a single agent (the Director-General) who is best equipped to make science-based judgements.

¹ As of 1 May 2021.

Is there a cross-over with the role of Taumata Arowai?

The Bill has assigned the decision-making role to the Director-General of Health (by which we mean the position, not the incumbent position holder).

One of the findings of the Inquiry into the Havelock North Water Contamination was that the regulation of the drinking water industry was overly fragmented with a consequent loss of accountability. These concerns led to the creation of Taumata Arowai as an independent drinking water regulator. While we accept that this is a decision about the medicinal benefits of fluoride, we submit that it is not entirely helpful to the result Taumata Arowai was created to achieve. While perhaps not a matter for the Select Committee, we would hope that communication between the two would be frequent and clear.

The Ministry should be meeting the costs of any decisions the Director-General makes

Additionally, we note the Bill comes into effect four weeks after royal assent. That means that regardless of the outcomes the three waters reform process there will be a period – most probably of 24-30 months where the Director of Health will be providing any directions about fluoridation to local authorities. While the costs of fluoridation are not great, the separation of the decider from the funder is a breach of standard public finance and policy design principles. We take comfort in the recent statements of the Associate Minister of Health, Hon Ayesha Verrall, that: *"Local Councils are responsible for the capital and operational costs of fluoridation. There will be funding available to support local councils with fluoridation related infrastructure work".*²

The Director-General should regularly report on the science of fluoridation

This is an area that attracts more than its fair share of 'fringe' science and conspiracy theories. The thought occurs that some of this might be eliminated if the Ministry were to periodically prepare, or cause preparation of, a report that sets out an overall assessment of the evidence available on the impacts of fluoride. This might be undertaken once every five years or so (to allow for a reasonable amount of fresh research or other evidence) with the first such assessment to be undertaken within two years of the date of enactment.

² Hon Ayesha Verrall (2021), *Strengthening water fluoridation decisions*, press release of 18 March 2021, downloaded from <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/strengthening-water-fluoridation-decisions> on 12 June 2021.

Recommendation

That the Select Committee agree that the Bill be amended to require the Director-General to publish an assessment of the existing science of fluoridation at regular intervals.