

16 JUN 2017

PH.15.3
I-44094



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Health**
Office of the Director General

Your Ref: PH.15.3/O-31238
Our Ref: D-AA-17/22693
Contact: Environmental Health (08) 9388 4999

Ms Louise Gee
Acting Chief Executive Officer
Shire of Wyndham East Kimberly
PO Box 614
KUNUNURRA WA 6743

Dear Ms Gee

Thank you for your letter of 3 May 2017 regarding the introduction of fluoridation to the Kununurra community water supply. I thank you for your Shire's interest in the important public health issue of oral health for children and adults in Kununurra.

I note that you have similarly written to the Minister for Health. I do not propose to reiterate the detail in the Minister's reply, beyond endorsing fluoridation of community water supplies as an effective part of Western Australia's (WA's) oral health strategy, with the benefits and safety of fluoridation being supported by overwhelming scientific evidence and being supported both in the *WA State Oral Health Plan 2016-2020*¹ and the Commonwealth Government's National Oral Health Plan.

Fluoridation of drinking water is supported by an extensive range of authoritative health research agencies and government bodies in Australia and worldwide, including all State and Territory Government health agencies in Australia, the National Health and Medical Research Council (Australia) (NHMRC), the Australian Research Centre for Population Oral Health, the Australian Dental Association, the Australian Medical Association, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (United States of America), the World Health Organization and numerous others.

In relation to your query about feedback from the Kununurra community, I am aware that there is a level of community opposition to the move in Kununurra, as expressed in the petition, and I acknowledge the petitioners' views on this matter.

However, whilst community surveys are important to inform public health decisions and to provide a social context to those decisions, the overriding driver for public health decisions always remains the protection of the health of the community as a whole.

¹ Details at: <http://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Reports-and-publications/State-Oral-Health-Plan>

Ultimately, it is not possible to design a community information strategy that will satisfy those opposed to fluoridation, or to ensure that every individual community member supports such initiatives. A balance must thus be struck between accommodating the views of individuals and protection of public health.

I believe that the Department of Health (DOH) has achieved this balance with respect to the recent moves to extend the benefits of fluoridation within WA and is aware of the cross section of views on this subject from individuals in the Kununurra community.

I am also satisfied that extension of water fluoridation to Kununurra will provide significant improvements to the oral health outcomes in this community, life-long reduction in incidence of dental caries and reduction in future demand for dental surgical facilities. I encourage all parties to view water fluoridation as a significant positive step for Kununurra and a key step to providing the best possible health outcomes for your community, particularly for children.

A further community information session for Kununurra is planned for just prior to the commencement of fluoridation in December 2017, along with an update of the information on the DOH website. I suggest that further queries can be cordially raised at the community information session and invite the Shire, as in 2016, to at the appropriate time assist in arranging and publicising it.

I trust this information will assist you in answering queries from your residents.

For further information about community water fluoridation in the meantime, residents may wish to send an email query to the DOH, at ehinfo@health.wa.gov.au or peruse fluoridation information on the DOH website at:
<http://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/F/Fluoridation>

Yours sincerely



Dr D J Russell-Weisz
DIRECTOR GENERAL

of June 2017