

Fluoride debate fuelled in Waikato

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TIME TO DEBATE: Thames-Coromandel District Council is holding a hearing on water fluoridation this Thursday, and Hamilton will host a tribunal on the subject in May.

As Hamilton prepares to finally put the highly controversial issue of water fluoridation before a tribunal, a Waikato District Health Board member has spoken out against mass medication through the region's water supplies.

Andrew Buckley went against the board's medical officer of health, Dr Felicity Dumble, when he said:

"There is overwhelming evidence to support the position that fluoridation of water is not only ineffective in reducing dental cavities, but there are also health risks arising from this arcane public health strategy.

"The main issue here is not which side of the argument is right or wrong. The key issue is that people should have the right to choose to medicate themselves, not have it forced on upon them by a government agency," Mr Buckley said.

Dr Dumble said there was overwhelming expert medical support and evidence in favour of adding fluoride to drinking water.

"It's vital that people know the truth about the benefits of fluoride in drinking water, particularly as various city and district councils seek community feedback for and against the issue."

Thames-Coromandel District Council is holding a hearing on the matter this Thursday, and Hamilton will host a tribunal on the subject in May.

Some of the members of a tribunal that will decide whether Hamilton should continue to have fluoride added to its water say they are open-minded about the matter.

Deputy Mayor Gordon Chesterman said he had agreed not to comment on the matter ahead of the tribunal. He thought the decision should be made by the Ministry of Health.

Cr Roger Hennebry said he had to keep an open mind. "It's such a controversial hot topic because you're damned whichever way you go, to be honest. Both sides of the argument are very good. I do believe there's new evidence coming through and we have to see that.

"If we don't do it fair this time, we're absolutely stuffed really. We don't want to keep litigating and keep coming to this every damn 12 months. We need to really put a lid on it one way or another this time."

He said there were issues last year when the Waikato District Health Board had spent a lot of money on experts who gave evidence, whereas those in opposition did not have the same resources available.

"This time there's going to be equal time given to both sides, so that's going to be fairer."

Cr Pippa Mahood was uncertain on whether she would be able to vote on the matter, given her involvement with the health board.

She was "keeping an open mind" until she could weigh up the pros and cons, and consider any new evidence, she said.

Cr Angela O'Leary said that while she too was keeping an open mind, she did for now have her own feelings on the matter.

"In my own personal view, I would like to see fluoride taken out of the water. I don't agree with medicating the population of a city for just a few people," she said.

Cr John Gower said people should have a choice about consuming fluoride in their water.

"Essentially I don't believe in this mass medication theory as some people do."

However, he wanted to hear all of the evidence presented at the tribunal before committing to a decision. "I think there are arguments both ways . . . Maybe there's an argument to leave it in because of the greater good."

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