

## *Fluoridation Amendment Bill 2009*

### Second Reading Speech

Mr Speaker – the main purpose of this Bill is to facilitate a user-pays funding arrangement for the fluoridation of public water supplies in Tasmania in line with the government's wider reform of water and sewerage services.

Fluoridation is one of the most cost-effective, preventive public health measures we can undertake.

Australia's National Oral Health Plan states that for each dollar invested in water fluoridation, estimates in the savings in dental treatment costs alone range from \$12.60 to \$80, with the greatest health benefits accruing to those who are most disadvantaged.

Indeed, Tasmania is a leader in the fluoridation of public water supplies - being the first to introduce it in Australia back in 1953.

Currently, fluoridation in this state is undertaken by the three bulk water authorities, Hobart Water, Esk Water and Cradle Coast Water on behalf of the Government.

These authorities also manage fluoridation operations undertaken by local councils in their respective municipalities.

My Department and the Fluoridation Committee, established under the Act, regulate and oversee fluoridation in the state.

On 1 July this year, the Government's water and sewerage reforms will see three new water corporations assume the management and operation of water and sewerage infrastructure from local councils.

These three corporations will also be responsible for the continued fluoridation of public water supplies, with fluoridation assets to be transferred from State ownership to the corporations.

This Bill will remove the provisions in the Fluoridation Act obliging the Government to fund fluoridation services in Tasmania.

The removal of these clauses will mean that the water corporations will be required to supply fluoridation under the Act but the costs of that service will now fall to the water corporations to bear.

These costs will in turn be recovered from residents on a user pays basis.

Given that only those who are on a reticulated water supply benefit from fluoridation, it is appropriate that the service is provided on a user pays basis.

The services costs associated with fluoridation of public water supplies has been estimated at between \$2 to \$3 for per person per year.

An allowance for the corporations to recover the efficient costs associated with the provision of fluoridation services has been included in the Government's draft Interim Price Order, which sets out the maximum allowable price increases to be charged by the water corporations.

The Interim Price Order provides for an annual review of the costs allowed to be recovered by the corporations, which will ensure that users will pay no more for fluoridation services than is necessary.

Mr Speaker, I note that public consultation on the Interim Price Order closed on 15 May 2009 and it is expected to be finalised shortly.

The Bill also makes a number of changes to allow for compliance monitoring against a Code of Practice.

The Code, to be approved by the Fluoridation Committee, will establish best practice in the operation and design of fluoridation systems.

The Fluoridation Committee will also be empowered to report to the Minister on the water authorities' level of compliance with the Code.

The regulation making powers have been extended to allow for the prescription of matters addressed in the Code of Practice, including the fluoride concentration range for public water supplies, the quality of fluoride to be used, and notification and maintenance requirements.

The Bill also introduces a number of small but important amendments:

- to modernise the membership of the Fluoridation Committee

- to increase the maximum penalty for offences under the Act and

- to update the reporting requirements between the water authorities, the Director of Public Health, the water and sewerage Regulator and the Minister to reflect the new regulatory structure.

Mr Speaker - These amendments will assist the continued delivery of effective and sustainable fluoridation services in Tasmania.

I commend the Bill to the House.