

Survey of Urban Water Supply Fluoridation

October 2005

Overview

There is very strong support for fluoridation of water supplies in Queensland with 73% of those expressing a view in favour. While support for fluoridation from those expressing a view is marginally lower in the Brisbane metropolitan area (70%) compared with the rest of the state (77%), it is nevertheless still strongly supported. This difference may be explained by the fact that the 5 communities with fluoridated water are outside the metropolitan area.

However, there is also a strong view that there should be a referendum before fluoride is introduced into water supplies. If the State is to mandate fluoride, almost 70% would like to see a State-wide referendum first. If the decision is to be made locally, almost 56% believed a local referendum should be mandatory. Those supporting fluoridation are however not as strongly supportive of the need for a referendum as those against fluoridation.

Survey Results

A survey of 400 persons connected to a reticulated water supply (200 metropolitan and 200 across the balance of Queensland) was undertaken between 17-19 October 2005.

The following provides a summary of the key results. Further analysis is contained in the detailed tables available separately.

Prior to questioning, respondents were provided with the following information “*You may know that in other states of Australia, urban water supplies are fluoridated to improve dental health. However in Queensland, it has been up to each council and community to decide whether to fluoridate or not. Only 5 councils in Queensland fluoridate urban water supplies and this covers only around 5% of the population.*”

Question 1.

Respondents were asked “*...do you consider that your water supply should be fluoridated to improve dental health?*”

Some 59.3% replied “yes”, that they believed their water supply should be fluoridated. Only 21.5% said “no”, while the remaining 19.3% said they did not know.

For those expressing either a positive or negative response, this equates to 73.4% in favour and 26.6% against, a strong support for fluoridation.

There was little significant variation by gender or age as shown by the following table.

Table 1: Should your water supply be fluoridated to improve dental health?

	Total	Male	Female	18-24 yrs	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45-54 yrs	55-64 yrs	65+ yrs
Sample	400	182	218	21	66	98	87	74	50
Yes %	59.3	56.6	61.5	47.6	56.1	57.1	63.2	63.5	56.0
No %	21.5	24.2	19.3	23.8	21.2	19.4	20.7	23.0	26.0
Don't know %	19.3	19.2	19.3	28.6	22.7	23.5	16.1	13.5	18.0

There is however, a difference in support in the Brisbane metropolitan area compared with elsewhere in the State. In Brisbane, 55% supported fluoridation compared with 63.5% elsewhere. When the ‘don’t know’ responses are removed this means that in metropolitan Brisbane 69.6% of those with an opinion favour fluoridation compared with 77% of those elsewhere in Queensland. This is likely to be a reflection of the fact that 5 communities elsewhere in the state already have fluoridated water.

Table 2: Support for fluoridation by location

	Total	Metro	Other
Sample	400	200	200
Yes %	59.3	55.0	63.5
No %	21.5	24.0	19.0
Don't know %	19.3	21.0	17.5

For those that responded ‘no’ to fluoridation, their reasons for that view were sought.

“Could be harmful” (23.3%), “a chemical poison” (22.1%), “not enough research done into effects” (22.1%) or “should be for individuals to choose to add” (20.9%) were the three most dominant reasons provided by those against fluoridation.

Question 2.

Respondents were then asked “Do you consider it should be mandatory to hold a local referendum to decide if water supplies are fluoridated or should it be up to the local council to decide or should the State Government decide?”

Some 55.5% believed a local referendum should be mandatory to decide if water supplies should be fluoridated. Only 14.8% felt their local council should decide, while 29.8% felt the State Government should decide.

Again there was no significant variation in views by gender or age, other than for those aged over 65 years who tended to favour the issue being decided by the State Government alone.

Those who supported fluoridation in Question 1 were less likely to believe a local referendum should be mandatory (43.5% supported) compared with those who did not support fluoridation (77.9% support a mandatory local referendum).

Table 3: Should it be mandatory to hold a local referendum or should it be up to the local council to decide or should the State Government decide?

	Total	Male	Female	18-24 yrs	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45-54 yrs	55-64 yrs	65+ yrs
Sample	400	182	218	21	66	98	87	74	50
Local Referendum %	55.5	57.7	53.7	52.4	62.1	65.3	49.4	58.1	38.0
State decide %	29.8	26.9	32.1	28.6	24.2	23.5	35.6	25.7	44.0
Council decide %	14.8	15.4	14.2	19.0	13.6	11.2	14.9	16.2	18.0

Again there was a difference in view about the decision process between those in the Brisbane metropolitan area and those elsewhere in the State. Metropolitan respondents were more in favour of a mandatory local referendum (61%) than those elsewhere in the State (50%). This correlates with the marginally lower level of support for fluoridation in the metropolitan area and the strong preference for a local referendum by those against fluoridation.

Table 4: Decision Process by Location

	Total	Metro	Other
Sample	400	200	200
Local Referendum %	55.5	61.0	50.0
Council decide %	14.8	10.0	19.5
State decide %	29.8	29.0	30.5

Question 3.

The next question asked “*If the State Government is to mandate fluoridation of water supplies should they first hold a state-wide referendum on the matter?*”

Some 63.8% felt that, if fluoridation were to be mandated, there should be a state-wide referendum first. Only 28.8% did not feel a referendum was necessary with only

7.5% not expressing a view. This equates to 68.9% of those responding positively or negatively wanting a state-wide referendum and 31.1% not wanting a referendum.

Again those over 65 years were least likely to support a referendum.

Those who supported fluoridation in Question 1 were less likely to support a state-wide referendum (54% supported) compared with those who did not support fluoridation (81.4% support state-wide referendum)

Table 5: If the State Government is to mandate fluoridation should they first hold a state-wide referendum?

	Total	Male	Female	18-24 yrs	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45-54 yrs	55-64 yrs	65+ yrs
Sample	400	182	218	21	66	98	87	74	50
Yes %	63.8	65.9	61.9	71.4	75.8	72.4	57.5	58.1	50.0
No %	28.8	28.6	28.9	9.5	22.7	19.4	39.1	28.4	44.0
Don't know	7.5	5.5	9.2	19.0	1.5	8.2	3.4	13.5	6.0

Again metropolitan residents were significantly more in favour of a state-wide referendum with 74.5% saying “yes” compared with 53% elsewhere in the state. This correlates with the marginally lower level of support for fluoridation in the metropolitan area and the strong preference for a referendum by those against fluoridation.

Table 6: Support for State-wide referendum by location

	Total	Metro	Other
Sample	400	200	200
Yes %	63.8	74.5	53.0
No %	28.8	21.0	36.5
Don't know %	7.5	4.5	10.5