



Hampshire MPs pledge to put on hold Southampton decision to fluoridate water

LONDON | 11th June 2009. Yesterday, opponents of fluoridation met in Westminster to discuss the South Central Strategic Health Authority's decision to fluoridate the water supplies of nearly 200,000 people in the Southampton and South West Hampshire area. Campaigners from Hampshire Against Fluoridation were able to cite 15,348 objections to the fluoridation plan from the local area.

If implemented, Southampton and environs will become the first area of the UK to fluoridate following a law change in 2003. The Water Act 2003 gives health chiefs the power to instruct water companies to mass medicate their customers with fluorosilicic acid via their water supplies. The Southampton case is seen widely as a 'test case' which will significantly influence the decisions of other Strategic Health Authorities around the country. Opponents of fluoridation, including a contingent of some 35 concerned citizens from Hampshire Against Fluoridation were hosted by the All Party Parliamentary Group Against Fluoridation. Present were three Hampshire MPs, Julian Lewis (Conservative) Sandra Gidley (Lib Dem) and Alan Whitehead (Labour).

Lone pro-fluoridation proponent, Alan Whitehead, surprised the meeting, saying that he agrees with fellow pro-fluoride Southampton Labour MP John Denham that the decision to fluoridate should be put on hold until public confidence has been restored.

Mr Whitehead explained that he was concerned about due process and the fact that 72% of respondents to the Consultation were opposed to fluoridation. Despite his belief that the benefits of fluoridation outweighed the risks, he said any decision by the Strategic Health Authority to implement fluoridation "*would need to command public confidence*". This confidence, he said, was lacking because of "*the flawed and biased nature of the consultation*" which was conducted by South Central SHA. He added, "*it would not be right to take this decision in full defiance of the 72% who had said no when asked for their opinions.*"

Sandra Gidley, Shadow Public Health Minister for the Liberal Democrats, emphasised the weakness of the science used to justify fluoridation by the health authorities and said that she felt mass medication was inappropriate for vulnerable groups like babies and pregnant women particularly because it was difficult to estimate total fluoride intake from other sources.

Julian Lewis, MP for Totton, one of the areas near Southampton that will be affected by the decision, vowed to work to stop the Strategic Health Authority from fluoridating

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the Hampshire water supply. He said he'd raise relevant questions to Harriett Harman, Deputy Leader of the Labour Party. To applause from the audience present, he indicated that he *"would bang the drum for as long as was needed"*.

Robert Verkerk PhD, executive and scientific director of the international campaign group, the Alliance for Natural Health, also a Hampshire resident, said he was greatly concerned about the risks of artificial fluoridation on the most vulnerable, namely babies and infants. He explained that a one-month-old baby fed with infant formula made with fluoridated tap water would consume approximately twice the level considered safe. He went on to say that European laws on food and drugs would ultimately make fluoridation illegal because *"fluoride used to treat or prevent tooth decay can no longer escape medicinal classification. Fluorosilicic acid has never been evaluated or approved as a drug. An opinion on this by a top flight European law barrister would confirm this view and make possible a case for legal action if South Central decides to proceed with the fluoridation proposal from Southampton City PCT."*

A spokesman for National Pure Water Association indicated their hope that the political parties would come together and investigate the scientific issues properly free from bias. He said, *"We are delighted that Julian Lewis is taking a lead on this and will be pushing to get his party (Conservative) to consider the issues and hopefully take a stand against fluoridation"*.

Robert Pocock, an Irish campaigner against fluoridation representing the Voice of Irish Concern for the Environment (VOICE), spoke about the dire consequences of Ireland's 40-year history with fluoridation. He said, *"fluorosis (tooth mottling, discolouration or pitting) caused by fluoride has increased 700% since we started fluoridating the water supply. We now have a staggering 37% of teenagers suffering from dental fluorosis of concern."*

After the meeting, the Alliance for Natural Health, the National Pure Water Association and VOICE committed themselves to collaborating with a view to exploring the potential of a legal challenge as means of halting deliberate fluoridation of the public water supply in both the UK and Ireland. It was agreed that any effective challenge would likely need to be referred to a European court and be headed by a leading barrister in European law.

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