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RHĀNZ supports water supply fluoridation proposal

The Rural Health Alliance Aotearoa New Zealand (RHĀNZ) has written to Health Minister Doctor Jonathan Coleman to show its support for a proposal to give District Health Boards responsibility for deciding whether to add fluoride to water.

RHĀNZ is a peak organisation with 40 member organisations, all interested in the health and wellbeing of rural communities.

RHĀNZ Chief Executive, Michelle Thompson, and RHĀNZ Chairperson, Dr Jo Scott-Jones, applauded the Minister's announcement, which proposes changes to legislation that would enable District Health Boards to make the decision to add fluoride to water.

"It is clear that health authorities have the scientific capability to properly assess the claims and counter claims about the safety and efficacy of fluoridation and that this decision would be better made under the auspices of health authorities," Dr Scott-Jones said.

"Rural communities and their local councils are currently given the responsibility to make judgements on the validity or otherwise of complex research concerning the value of fluoride and claims of potential harm.

"The threat of litigation and confusing information presented leads many smaller rural communities to either avoid the debate altogether, or to change policy from time to time. As a consequence, many smaller rural communities do not have the opportunity to benefit from fluoridation," he said.

RHĀNZ's local authority members asked the organisation to support the request that Government amend legislation to empower health authorities to make this decision.

"We are pleased to report wide ranging support amongst our members for this change. We look forward to the opportunity to supporting the process of legislative change in the near future," Dr Scott-Jones said.

RHĀNZ believes these decisions warrant national consistency and are well placed under the responsibilities of the Director General of Health, who currently sets other water standards.

"We understand the importance of elected community representatives on District Health Boards being involved in this decision but hope the legislative change will include provision for them to be advised centrally that this is a public health issue that is of key importance to small rural communities across the nation," Dr Scott-Jones finished.

For more information contact:

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Note to Editors:

The Rural Health Alliance Aotearoa New Zealand was established in May 2012 and represents a united voice from across multiple rural sector organisations. Its aim is to provide solutions and influence policy affecting the health and wellbeing of rural communities www.rhaanz.org.nz.

Current members: <http://www.rhaanz.org.nz/membership/current-members/>