

Statement by Professor Sir David Skegg, President of the Royal Society of New Zealand

The Royal Society is New Zealand's national academy of science, technology, and the humanities. It is an independent body established under an Act of Parliament.

Recently it was suggested that the Royal Society should prepare a statement on the fluoridation of water to promote oral health.

There has been extensive research over many decades indicating that fluoridation is a safe and effective measure for reducing the incidence of dental caries. A circular to the Fellows of the Royal Society (comprising nearly 400 of New Zealand's leading scientists and scholars) did not elicit any new information indicating that a further review would be of value at present.

The Council of the Royal Society decided not to proceed with a fuller inquiry at this time. Certain interested parties have interpreted this decision as an indication that there was some doubt about the scientific evidence. In fact the opposite is the case. Like most organisations, the Royal Society has limited resources and there would be little value in embarking on an investigation where the outcome is already clear.

As a medical epidemiologist and public health physician myself, I have taken a close interest in the evidence about the effectiveness and safety of fluoridation. While I will always keep an open mind, I believe that the current advice from the Ministry of Health is fully justified. My only concern is that children in several areas of New Zealand are currently being deprived of this effective public health measure.

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