

FIRE WATER

Australia's Industrial Fluoridation Disgrace

Exposing the systematic industrial waste poisoning of Australian drinking water supplies

Peter Kavanagh – Interview Transcript

**Interview conducted by
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[00:00:33]

Peter: My name's Peter Kavanagh. I'm a DLP, Democratic Labour Party member for Western Victoria in the Victorian Parliament. I don't have scientific credentials, I have a lot of non-scientific academic credentials but not scientific ones.

[00:00:49]

Jaya: Great. Well welcome. (Laugh)

Peter: Thank you.

Jaya: Ok. So the first thing I'd like to ask is, how did you become involved in the water fluoridation issue; and as a second part, what actions have you taken to represent your constituents on this issue?

[00:01:04]

Peter: Well ah as a member of the Democratic Labour Party, I feel democracy is important and I do think that real democracy means local people deciding local issues. It's a much more democratic system I think if we have people deciding for themselves, perhaps differently from other areas, ah, their response to issues like fluoride. If people decide at a local level then more people get what they want than through any other means, from a national system where the whole country is fluoridated or not fluoridated. And as far as the issue of fluoridation goes I'm not, I became rather concerned through the democratic principle that reading pretty extensively, I did become rather concerned about fluoride because I think there are reasons to believe that ah it's not actually efficacious in terms of ah tooth decay, preventing tooth decay, and that it could be harmful in other respects as well to health. I mean there are a lot of experts forming this opinion now and in Europe they're basically taking fluoride out of their water supplies to a large extent. I think it's an antiquated technology basically, which could be quite harmful ah and ah I suspect we are probably better off without it. In terms of what I've done I did actually get a private members bill past the upper House of Victorian Parliament at the end of 2007 and the private members bill would have required the Victorian Government to obtain the consent of affected people before new areas, new parts of Victoria could be fluoridated. Ah it passed the

Upper House, which was quite an achievement, but the government I would say probably sabotaged it in the Lower House and saw that it didn't get anywhere there. Ah, so unfortunately it didn't become law but I feel there was something of a moral victory to get it passed in one house anyway.

[00:03:03]

Jaya: So what course of action would you recommend other politicians take if they are considering opposing mandatory, *mandatory* water fluoridation?

[00:03:11]

Peter: Well I think they should come out in favour of ah plebiscites as a condition to fluoridation. I think generally speaking that if it is a requirement most people would vote against compulsory fluoridation. There are good reasons to vote against it if you've got the chance, and I think politicians should support that, support that view and they should tell members of their party and argue for that position within their own parties.

[00:03:41]

Jaya: So I have an adjunct to that question which I'm going to ask. I almost didn't ask this one but I'm gonna ask it. I'm gonna kind of put it a little bit more that is written on the page here cause I represent mothers (PK: right) and there are many mothers that are pretty upset about this. So my question is quite bluntly: Are Australian politicians lacking the proverbial "balls" or spine to investigate, let alone oppose, the fluoridation issue? What are your thoughts on that?

[00:04:15]

Peter: In a word I think probably yes and I think probably because it's too easy to associate anti-fluoride people with a bit of an 'extremist' element. And I think that kind of detracts from the credibility of it, unfortunately, and that's why probably a lot of mainstream politicians don't want to get too involved in the issue.

[00:04:42]

Jaya: Then I would perhaps forward that if mothers are upset that their children are being poisoned without their knowledge, because politicians refuse to look at the science that's now available – If Europe have banned this as a banned neurotoxin, and Australia is hell bent on continuing to fluoridate, haven't mothers got the right to be angry about this?

[00:05:08]

Peter: I think you're...

Jaya: Why, why then?...

Peter: ... Probably putting the case a bit strongly I think.

Jaya: ... That's how people feel about.

[00:05:14]

Peter: There are parts of Europe where they're taking it out or making it difficult to put it in as well. The European Court has said that it can't be done without the consent of affected people, I believe. Ah, now as far as it being a poison goes, well, technically that's right – it is a registered poison.

Jaya: Neurotoxin.

[00:05:32]

Peter: I wouldn't like to give the impression myself that we are all about to drop dead if we drink a glass of fluoridated water though. I think on the whole it's probably harmful to health, but probably not dramatically so. I think we want to be a bit careful and we don't want to scare people, so I think you're better off without fluoride in the water but the scientific evidence is not consistent. There are some studies that show there's some benefit. Others show there's more danger than benefit, so on the whole I think ah we'd be better without the fluoride but, um, maybe put our case rather calmly. I mean in Europe they ah – it's not hysteria about it; it's just a rational decision know on balance it's better not to do it, so I think that's the right decision.

[00:06:22]

Jaya: The Health Fluoridation Act offers protection from rights of action for water supply authorities. If fluoridation is completely safe, why would such a pre-emptive legislative measure be necessary?

[00:06:36]

Peter: Well of course, it's outrageous really isn't it? (laugh) You can't sue the government for fluoridating your water even if it's shown to be harmful. I think that's obviously wrong in principle isn't it.

[00:06:49]

Jaya: What would it take from a political and legislative perspective to halt fluoridation in Victoria; and what would it take to remove it from areas already fluoridated?

[00:07:02]

Peter: Well I guess it would ah take a change in public perception and that would to a large extent mean public knowledge. Now you have to acknowledge I think that the scientific studies are not all against fluoride, but ah it would take people knowing more about the science I think and seeing that it's much more dubious than pro-fluoride people generally claim I think.

[00:07:29]

Jaya: So what, if you feel um, if, if it got to the point where people understood they didn't want to have it – from a legislative perspective I ask the question again. What would it take to halt fluoridation?

[00:07:44]

Peter: Well at the moment I think there are three candidates who are standing in the State Election and voting for them, after they vote for DLP would probably be a good start. (Laughter)

[00:07:53]

Jaya: Cool.

Peter: (Laughter Contd.)

Jaya: And what would it take to remove it from the areas?

Peter: That would probably be harder I think. Look, I think it would take a fundamental shift in the peoples' perception about the value of fluoride, you know, at the moment probably it's like any issue most people actually don't

care, one way or the other and leave it to others to decide, but of those who do have care it's probably 2 to 1 probably mildly in favour of fluoride. And you'd probably have to change that to being 2 to 1 mildly against it.

[00:08:24]

Jaya: Without referenda how can community feelings be properly gauged, thus how can someone like yourself adequately represent the community?

[00:08:33]

Peter: Well I guess you look at things like letters to the editor and speaking with people and the sort of (pause) when you discuss this issue, if there are public meetings and so on, there've been huge public meetings in Geelong – hundreds of people – 500/800 people; down in Warrnambool, I think there were 1000 people – biggest meeting they've ever had I think in Warrnambool, against fluoride. It's pretty clear that a lot of people are very concerned about it and you meet individuals who say they've been made sick through fluoride, and ah they're not pretending, I mean there's medical evidence for it, but ah there is medical evidence that fluoride does adversely affect some people at least. Perhaps they have a particular susceptibility but there are people who are harmed by fluoride, by drinking fluoride.

[00:09:25]

Jaya: But I have to go back again about the question of referenda. Um, in Mildura they did a referendum and 96% of population who participated in that referendum said no. That was presented and tabled, and yet it was still ignored, and fluoride has gone in. Now if that's just one community, there's many communities in Australia they're not given the chance for referenda as for letters to the Editor they don't get past the editor. I only know personally of one newspaper that has actually publishes letters (PK: Yes) if people have sent letters in, especially in Queensland is the case, they're not even published.

[00:10:05]

Peter: Well you're talking to someone whose just a member of a party where we had a campaign and didn't get a mention in the newspaper or television before the, during the whole campaign; and ah though it looks like we've probably won anyway, we do understand it's difficult to put your point of view. It's much more difficult than it should be I think. I mean if you're looking for a forum, probably the talkback radio is a very good one. And, well I would still try letters to the editor even though it's pretty hard. I've never had a letter to the editor published in the Age, although I've probably sent in 1 or 2 hundred of them, to the Age. It's pretty difficult to get them published.

[00:10:50]

Jaya: (laugh) So, ah, the issue of referendum – do you think that that is a democratic right?

[00:10:55]

Peter: I think so, yeah. I think, as I said, democracy really means local people deciding local issues – not just fluoride but I think fluoride is a typical one. If there were one town where, you know, everyone wanted fluoride then they had it that would be fair enough, then the next town if they didn't want it (J: Yes) they shouldn't get it. So...

Jaya: That is democracy.

Peter: ... That's real democracy, I think, where most people get what they want from the system and not just elect a federal government that decides the whole country has it or doesn't have it...

Jaya: Yep.

Peter: ... Or a state government.

Jaya: So what are you personally hearing from your constituents; and are people concerned about fluoridation?

[00:11:31]

Peter: In Geelong I think they are concerned about fluoridation. I've had a lot of people expressing concern to me, and I'm sure they're concerned, when you go to one meeting of 6 or 7 hundred people in Geelong another one of 5 or 6 hundred people. I mean, you don't get people out into a hall on a political issue unless they really are concerned and, ah, it's pretty hard to get anyone away from a TV set to go and sit in a big hall. It's very difficult.

[00:12:01]

Jaya: What do you believe are the ethical or even legal implications of using public water systems to deliver drugs?

[00:12:08]

Peter: Well look I think it should only be done with -- I'm not sure whether you'd call fluoride a drug, maybe, not sure what the correct terminology would be. Under the Poisons Act it is actually a poison. But, look, I think the European Court of Justice got it right that you don't medicate people without their permission, and you know you shouldn't be giving it even it were good for people. It should only be done with their consent.

[00:12:40]

Jaya: If fluoride is forced into water, what would stop other drugs also being forced into water supplies to treat the human body?

[00:12:47]

Peter: Well um drugs or medical therapeutic I don't know what you call it but ah look I suppose in the long term not much would stop it would there, but in the practical terms I don't know that there's any other plans for delivering another medication through the water supply. I'm not sure. I don't know of another one, but ah yeah I think in summary, the evidence that it's beneficial is pretty weak. The evidence that it's harmful is plausible. In that situation you're better off being careful and not adding the stuff to your water supply.

[00:13:27]

Jaya: I actually have one more question, which has come to mind. In America on the American Dental Association's website, there is a warning to mothers to not use fluoridated water in infant formula. However no such warning exists on any Australian dental authority website. Why... why do you think this is so and shouldn't it be a moral obligation to warn mothers not to use fluoridated water, which is at least a hundred times more than is found in natural breast milk?

[00:14:01]

Peter: Look I think America does lead on this kind of consumer protection sometimes. For example we've just got the contents ingredients or chemical content of food listed now, I think they've had that for 30 years or something in America. So in certain respects America is a leader and we're a follower, I guess. Interesting on the fluoride because I believe that on most fluoride toothpaste it will actually say "do not swallow." So, ah, and there've been cases where people have successfully sued for swallowing fluoride and yet we're deliberately adding it to [the] water supply. Fluoride apparently it's been shown now any benefit is topical it's from contact with the tooth, but you know, you might benefit from putting mercurochrome on a cut on your hand it doesn't mean you drink a bottle of mercurochrome, does it?

[00:14:55]

Jaya: That's right. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Peter: Oh I think you've covered it pretty thoroughly.

(Both laugh)

Jaya: Than you very much for your time.

[00:15:03]