Decision-Making on the Fluoridation of Drinking Water Supplies

On 30 March 2016, the Cabinet Social Policy Committee:

1. noted that, in spite of significant improvements in oral health status, New Zealand still has high levels of dental decay;

2. noted that there is strong evidence for the effectiveness of fluoridation as a means of improving dental health status;

3. noted that:
   3.1 around 2.3 million New Zealanders have access to fluoridated drinking water;
   3.2 that this number has not increased over the last 15 years;
   3.3 that there is potential to extend coverage to an additional 1.45 million people;

4. agreed to transfer responsibility for decision-making on fluoridation from territorial local authorities to district health boards (DHBs);

5. noted that net savings of more than $600 million over a 20-year period are likely to result from extending fluoridation, with most savings accruing to consumers;

6. noted that the total direct costs of extending fluoridation to populations not receiving fluoridated water are estimated to be $144 million over a 20-year period;

7. agreed that:
   7.1 business-as-usual costs should be met from baseline funding of DHBs and the Ministry of Health;
   7.2 the direct costs of fluoridation should be met by local authorities;

8. noted that should local government seek funding from the Crown to meet costs associated with the proposal, this would be subject to future Budget discussions;
agreed to:

9.1 amend the Health Act 1956, through the Drinking Water provisions at Part 2A;
9.2 amend the New Zealand Public Health and Disability Act 2000,
9.3 consequential amendments required to give effect to the decisions above;

agreed to the inclusion of a bill to give effect to the above decisions in the 2016 Legislative Programme, with a category 5 priority (to be referred to a select committee in 2016);

invited the Minister of Health and the Associate Minister of Health (Hon Peter Dunne) to issue drafting instructions to the Parliamentary Counsel Office to give effect to the policy decisions;

noted that the submission under SOC-16-SUB-0027 will be proactively released in due course, subject to any material being withheld as necessary if a request for release had been made under the Official Information Act 1982;

noted that the Minister of Health and the Associate Minister of Health (Hon Peter Dunne) intend to release the report of the Sapere Research Group, *Review of the benefits and costs of water fluoridation in New Zealand*, at the appropriate time.