



Deputy Premier of Western Australia  
Minister for Health; Tourism

Our Ref: 25-34565



Hon Simon O'Brien MLC  
Chair  
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs  
Parliament House  
PERTH WA 6000

Dear *Simon* Chair

**RE: PETITION 8 – CESSATION OF CHLORINATION OF BUSSELTON'S WATER SUPPLY**

Thank you for your letter of 18 June 2013 advising us of Petition 8 and requesting an update on the current status of health complaints from the public in relation to chlorination of Busselton's water supply.

I have noted your advice that the terms of Petition 8 are the same as Petition 166 from 2012, which lapsed at prorogation prior to the State election, and that your enquiries into this matter will take into account the submissions and other evidence you obtained in relation to Petition 166.

I can confirm that the content of my previous reply on this matter, dated 16 October 2012, remains relevant to your considerations, and would like to reiterate my closing remarks from that submission:

*“Despite claims made in the submission, there is simply no evidence that chlorination of the Busselton water supply has introduced any harm, nor is there evidence that it has been ineffective, nor is there any evidence that the risk management process employed by Busselton Water or its agents was inadequate or was inconsistent with the multi-barrier risk management framework set out in the “Australian Drinking Water Guidelines”.*

*I can confirm for the Committee that, in the absence of any evidence of a health risk presented to me by the DOH, there are no sound public policy grounds or public health grounds for acceding to the petitioners' request to immediately cease chlorination of Busselton's drinking water supply or to convene an Inquiry.”*

I am pleased to provide the following additional comments in relation to your specific questions.

- ***Has the DOH received notification of any chlorine-related illness caused by Busselton's water supply? If so, please provide details of the number and nature of those complaints.***

The Department of Health (DOH) has established a reporting process with Busselton Water to record any complaint of alleged adverse health effects, and suggest to the complainant that they see their local general practitioner in the first instance. This is coupled with an invitation to all general practitioners in the Busselton area to refer to the DOH the medical details of patients who are willing to have their cases investigated by the DOH, where the practitioner believes on medical grounds that it would be reasonable to consider chlorination of the Busselton water supply as a factor in causing the clinical effects seen.

I am advised that, to date, no claim of adverse health effects has been accompanied by any medical evidence, nor has any case been referred to the DOH by a medical practitioner for investigation.

The DOH has received one telephone enquiry from a member of the public from the Busselton area, in June 2013, in relation to symptoms of skin irritation experienced by a family member.

- ***If the DOH has received notification of chlorine-related illness, have these complaints been investigated and confirmed by the DOH?***

In relation to the one telephone enquiry referred to above, I can advise that, in accordance with the agreed protocol, the DOH advised this person to see their general practitioner. The DOH stands ready to investigate this single case further, if referred by the patient's general practitioner in the belief, on medical grounds, that chlorination of the Busselton water supply should be considered as a possible factor in causing the skin irritation.

It should be noted that skin irritation can have a wide variety of causes, such as individual sensitivity to pH, use of soaps and detergents, and exposure to various environmental allergens, all of which would need to be considered in the course of any investigation.

Based on existing evidence from the scientific literature, there is no plausible mechanism whereby drinking water with the minimal level of residual chlorine, as seen in Busselton, would be expected to cause adverse health effects of any kind.

- ***What, if any, further action will the DOH take in relation to this matter?***

DOH stands ready to investigate in good faith any case referred to it by a medical practitioner in Busselton, where the practitioner believes on medical grounds that it would be reasonable to consider chlorination of the Busselton water supply as a factor in causing the clinical effects seen.

In June 2013, the DOH again contacted members of GP *down south*, Busselton District, asking for referral, where appropriate criteria are met, of any cases of possible clinical effects from chlorination of the Busselton water supply.

The DOH has asked doctors in the Busselton area for a response on this matter before 31 July 2013 if possible. The DOH would accordingly not be in a position to report any possible (new) cases of clinical effects from chlorination of the Busselton water supply to the Committee until August 2013. I have instructed the DOH to keep me informed on this matter and will advise the Committee further if any cases emerge.

Nevertheless, to date, and despite intensive local media coverage and local publicity generated in Busselton since mid-2012 about the introduction of chlorination to the Busselton water supply, no claim of adverse health effects has been accompanied by any medical evidence, nor has any case been referred to the DOH by a medical practitioner for investigation.

I trust the information provided is of assistance.

Yours sincerely



Dr Kim Hames MLA  
**DEPUTY PREMIER  
MINISTER FOR HEALTH**

11 JUL 2013