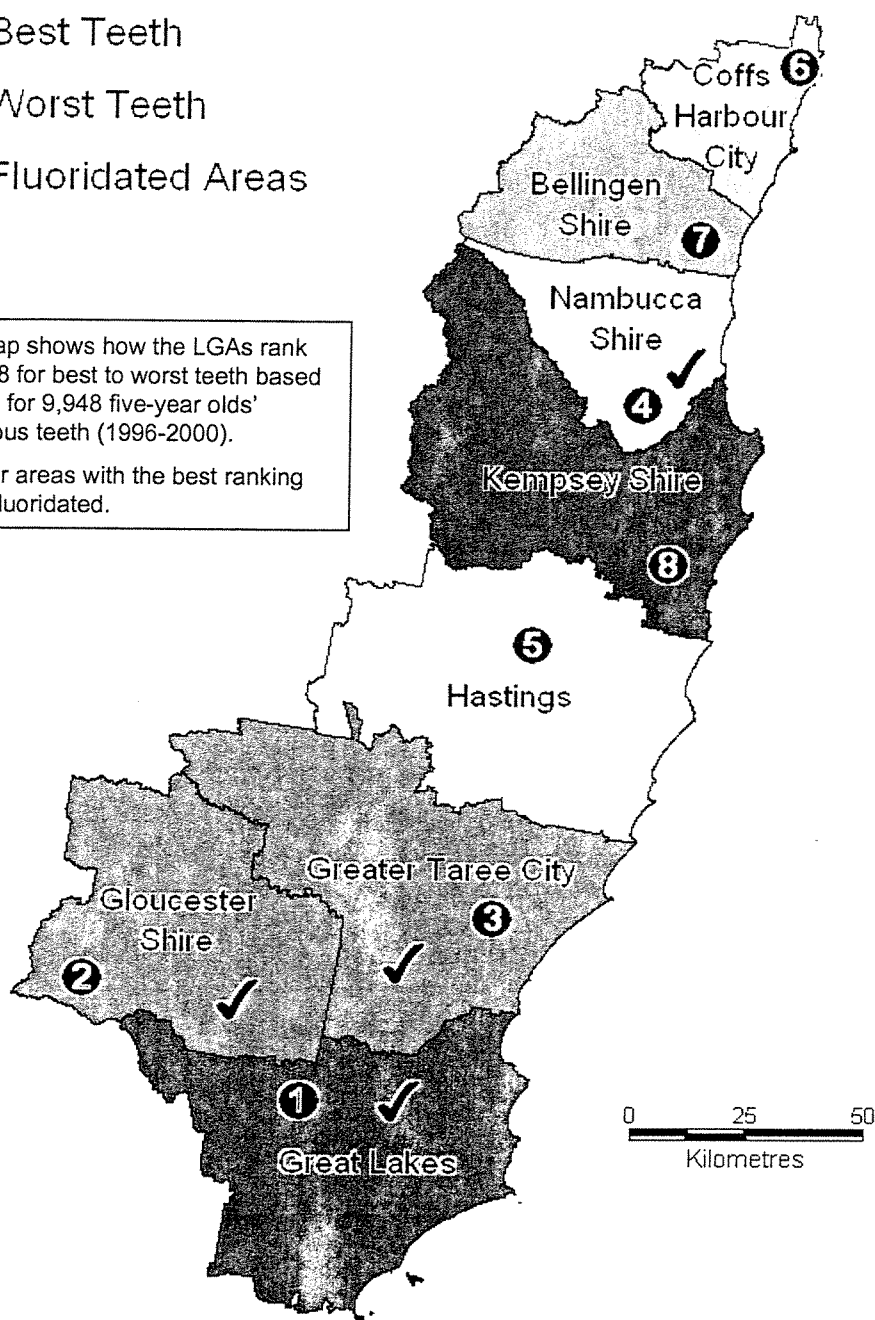


## Ranking of Councils - Deciduous Decayed, Missing and/or Filled Teeth- Mid North Coast AHS - 5 years olds

- 1** Best Teeth
- 8** Worst Teeth
- ✓ Fluoridated Areas

This map shows how the LGAs rank from 1-8 for best to worst teeth based on data for 9,948 five-year olds' deciduous teeth (1996-2000).

The four areas with the best ranking are all fluoridated.



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# Dental decay crisis: new call for fluoride

By Sue Paterick

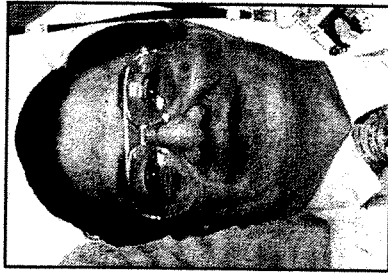
THE Mid-North Coast has higher dental decay rates than the NSW average with Kempsey ranked highest for the worst teeth.

Of the eight shires in the region four have a fluoridated water supply and four do not - and of the eight, the best four all have fluoride.

Mid-North Coast Area Health Service (MNC-AHS) oral health project manager John Irving hosted a videoconference across the region on Tuesday to highlight the growing dental decay problem.

He said the aim was to draw attention to the looming decay crisis and examine practical solutions, but one of the safest and surest solutions was fluoridation.

The health service said the most equitable, fastest and cost-effective preven-



Dr Bernard Chan

tion action was fluoridation of public water supplies because it could reduce dental decay by about 50 per cent in a relatively short time.

Documentation supplied at the conference showed the World Health Organisation called fluoridation of water supplies one of the most effective health measures of the 20th century.

Mr Irving said dental decay was increasing on

the Mid-North Coast as a result of inappropriate diet and nutrition, inadequate oral hygiene, inability to access dental care and the lack of fluoridation in half of the region's local government areas.

"One of the chilling facts about the rise is it is reversing the trend of decreasing decay rates seen in this country over the past several decades," he said.

At the conference Durrri Aboriginal Medical Service dental program coordinator Jonine Gilmour said people did not realise that there was a crisis in the Macleay Valley every day.

"Dental clinicians are presented with the same thing and it hasn't changed for 20 years," she said.

"A high proportion of children have dental disease, which is preventable."

Retired dentist Dr Ber-

nard Chan also attended the conference and said in general dental health in Kempsey had improved over a 30-year period but for low socioeconomic groups it was still very bad.

"Fluoride is a most effective, low cost way of preventing dental decay," he said.

Kempsey Shire Mayor Janet Hayes was at the conference and told The Macleay Argus it was the

first foray into finding a solution for dental decay. Cr Hayes said she found the conference fascinating yet horrific and believed more discussion would be held about the issue.

"I'm aware of how emotive the issue (of fluoridation) is but it's one that must be considered," she said.

For Cr Hayes there were also issues about would pay for infrastruc-

ture, implementation and ongoing costs.

The Health Department has offered funding to fluoridate water supplies.

A spokesman for the health service said the Department of Health had the authority to direct a council to put fluoride in its water supply if it was a public health issue.

Have your say: email to editor.macleay@ruralpress.com



# ANDREW STONER MP

Member for Oxley



I-19

PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

31 March 2004

Mr Allan Burgess  
General Manager  
Kempsey Shire Council  
P O Box 78  
WEST KEMPSEY 2440

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Dear Mr Burgess, *Allan*

The Mid North Coast Area Health Service is attempting to address the dental decay crisis on the Mid North Coast through a prevention program called *Teeth for Life*. The project involves health promotion initiatives to improve community awareness of diet, teeth cleaning and regular check-ups. These, however, will take time to be effective because they are asking a significant proportion of the local community to change entrenched behaviour.

People who do not eat a balanced diet, nor clean their teeth, nor visit a dentist regularly, are unlikely to reverse their behaviour overnight. On the Mid North Coast, unfortunately, a larger proportion of the population than the State average falls into this category.

There is an option available to this group. It is one considered safe and effective by every major health body in the world – fluoridation. It has, in fact, been described as one of the top ten public health measures of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (US Centre for Disease Control, 1999).

Though fluoride occurs naturally in all water on the Mid North Coast\*, it is generally at levels too low to help people's teeth. By topping up the natural level to around one part per million, fluoride does protect teeth for people of ALL ages

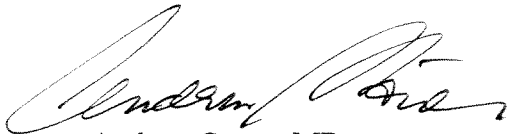
Your council's water supply is currently unfluoridated. Compared with Mid North Coast LGAs with fluoridated water, decay levels are higher amongst your citizens. The high incidence of oral disease is totally preventable through diet, cleaning, dental check-ups and fluoridation. A reduction in oral disease, moreover, will lead to better general health for all age groups.

I fully support the Mid North Coast Area Health Service's initiative in dealing with this major health problem. It is also hoped that your council will give its full support to work with the Area Health Service to provide equitable, safe and effective solutions. Under the Fluoridation Act a council can seek advice from the Director General of Health on fluoridation. The Mid North Coast Area Health Service has indicated it will fully assist facilitate such an approach.

You may be interested to know Deniliquin Council ran a plebiscite on fluoridation last Saturday. The community voted a resounding "Yes" – because the levels of dental decay were reaching crisis levels. NSW Health, the Oral Health Branch and the Area Health Service, as well as local health professionals, provided the community with factual information which indicated not only the rate and extent of decay, but also the safety and effectiveness of fluoridation. As plebiscites are prone to "No" results, this is an outstanding victory for commonsense.

For the sake of your community's dental and general good health, the Mid North Coast Area Health Service urges your full support of the Teeth for Life project.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Stoner MP

**MEMBER FOR OXLEY**

\*Seal Rocks, near Forster has NATURALLY optimally fluoridated water. For the rest of the MNC it is around 0.04 ppm