A-anti-fluoride campaigners are challenging the chief dental officer to accept personal liability, if anyone suffers side effects, when water fluoridation goes ahead in Southampton and other areas that decide to pursue the same policy.

Fluoridation is a hot topic at the moment, after South Central Strategic Health Authority took the decision to add fluoride to water in Southampton and the surrounding area, against the wishes of many residents and campaigners. The government is pushing the policy, and health secretary Alan Johnson has called on all primary care trusts (PCT) to consider the move.

The campaigners are mirroring a similar challenge in Australia, when an anti-fluoride campaigner challenged the state premier of Queensland to back up her claims that there are no side effects to fluoridated water by signing a letter accepting responsibility if she was proved wrong.

In front of around 200 shocked people at a public meeting, Ms Bligh signed a document which read: ‘I, Anna Bligh, as the instigator of forced fluoridation in Queensland, give my personal guarantee that fluoridation causes no adverse health effects, and in the event that it does, I will accept full liability and will provide financial compensation.'

The process to fluoridate the water supplies of 3.7m Queensland residents began late last year and was introduced by state premier Anna Bligh – great-great-great-granddaughter of William Bligh, the captain of HMS Bounty during the famous mutiny in 1789 – shortly after she took office.

Around 70 per cent of Australians already receive fluoridated water, and Ms Bligh claimed there was no evidence of any side effects and, in the face of opposition, introduced it in her state.

Anti-fluoride campaigners in the UK would like to see a similar commitment to accept personal responsibility from health chiefs here, or senior politicians who have backed fluoride, like Health Secretary Alan Johnson or even Gordon Brown.

Doug Cross, from UK Councils Against Fluoridation, said: ‘Would Mr Brown, or the chief dental officer, like to approach a bank and take out a loan to cover themselves for this? Maybe they would like to offer us their assurances that, like mercury vapour from tooth fillings, fluoride is indeed safe, and they will put their own houses and personal wealth on the line as surely for the practice that they are trying to force on the British public?'

Meanwhile in Suffolk, health chiefs are waiting for the results of a tooth decay survey before it decides whether to use fluoridation to combat tooth caries.

NHS Suffolk’s consultant in dental public health, Richard Ward, said the trust would not make any decision until it got the results from a large survey of tooth decay in five-year-olds in the county.