

**JOINT ALLIANCE FOR NATURAL HEALTH/
IRISH ASSOCIATION FOR HEALTH STORES
PRESS RELEASE**

For immediate release

21st January 2009

**SUCCESS IN EUROPE AS IRISH PETITION
ON FOOD SUPPLEMENTS IS KEPT OPEN**



On Monday, the Irish Association of Health Stores (IAHS) defended its petition in the European Parliament against the European Commission's planned setting of EU-wide maximum limits for dosages of vitamins and minerals in food supplements. The petition, submitted originally in December 2007 with the support of 60,000 Irish citizens, claims that measures to harmonise maximum levels of vitamin and mineral food supplements under the Food Supplements Directive (2002/46/EC)—soon to be implemented by the European Commission—will unduly impact consumers, health stores and practitioners in Ireland.

Instead of being closed down, the apparent goal of the European Commission, the European Parliament's Petitions Committee chairman insisted that the petition be kept open.

Further, the chairman requested that the issues be referred to the European Parliament's Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) for further consideration. Additionally, the European Commission has been asked to provide a written response to the Petitions Committee on the challenges raised in yesterday's discussions.

All four Irish members of the European Parliament's Committee who attended and participated in the discussions expressed concerns over the Commission's proposals and their potential impacts on businesses and consumers, as did the only UK MEP partaking in the discussion, Roger Helmer. There were no dissenting voices among any of the MEPs.

Irish MEP Kathy Sinnott, Vice-Chair of the Petitions Committee and host of the petition, said: *"This Directive is unreasonable and controlling. It has become a great worry to people all over Ireland who shop in local Health Food Stores and who use vitamins and minerals to improve and maintain their health."*

Referring to the proposed regime, Ms Sinnott added, *"In the case of my own son, while the new regulation might aim to 'protect' him from higher dose supplements, these are the very supplements that have protected him from malnutrition and that have saved his life. Yet they are now at risk of being banned."*

Dr Robert Verkerk, scientific advisor to the IAHS—who presented on behalf of the petitioners—said, *"There are numerous scientific flaws in the risk management methods being considered by the European Commission and the European Food Safety Authority, and small businesses and health-conscious consumers will be the real losers if the approach is not altered to reflect the known science."*

Dr Verkerk urged that real scientific debate should begin following the imminent release of the Commission's 'draft' proposals for maximum levels. He also warned that the imposition of blanket, EU-wide maximum levels for vitamin and mineral supplements would encourage,

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through the internet, a black market of completely unregulated products that would potentially expose consumers to significant risks. Verkerk said, *“the inevitable development of a black market would fly in the face of the Commission’s stated objective of bringing in this measure to protect consumers.”*

The European Commission’s case was presented by Basil Mathioudakis, Head of the Food Law, Nutrition & Labelling Unit. Mr Mathioudakis indicated that he expected that the Commission would be ready to publish draft maximum levels at the end of February or in March. In his response to the Irish petition he stated that the main purpose of the proposed law was to ensure consumers were adequately protected. He also mentioned that there were political as well as scientific pressures towards the lowering of dosages of supplements in countries like Ireland, the UK, Holland and Sweden, which presently allow higher doses than most of the rest of the EU.

Irish MEP Marian Harkin, commenting on yesterday’s meeting, said: *“Good science is the primary requirement here. The models used by the Commission need proper validation.”* She asked: *“How can you set limits for nutrients that don’t take into account the variations in food quality between different geographic regions in Europe or between seasons, where it may be hard to get fresh, nutritious produce during the winter months?”*

“There is a very strong case for some degree of national competence being retained”, added Ms Harkin, *“and for bringing in partial rather than total harmonisation of these levels. This could create a win-win situation for all parties, while ensuring risks from both over-consumption and under-consumption of vitamins and minerals are minimised.”*

Jill Bell, chair of the IAHS, who was also present at the meeting of the Petitions Committee, said, *“The IAHS is delighted with the support MEPs gave our petition and with chairman Libicki’s evident willingness to give us a good hearing. We look forward to the opening of more detailed discussions and are optimistic that the importance of up-to-date science may now impact on EFSA’s deliberations. Any delay in the setting of MPLs is to be greatly welcomed if based on the application of sound science and proportionate law, and all parties should be pleased if such a meeting of minds can be achieved.”*

The issue will be debated further at an open meeting of the Food Safety Consultative Council of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) in Dublin on 27th January. Dr Robert Verkerk, Mr Basil Mathioudakis, Dr Mary Flynn (from FSAI) and Dr Alan Ruth (from the Irish Health Trade Association) will be the main speakers.

For further information, see

www.fsai.ie/consultative_council/Consultative_Council_Open_Meeting_Invite_2009.pdf

ENDS./

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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NOTES TO THE EDITOR

ANH Briefing Notes

1. Link to position on the Food Supplements Directive:
http://www.anhcampaign.org/files/080630_ANH-Briefing-Paper_FSD-general.pdf
2. Link to position on Maximum Permitted Levels (MPLs):
http://www.anhcampaign.org/files/080630_ANH-Briefing-Paper_FSD-MPLs.pdf

About Kathy Sinnott

Personal website: www.kathysinnott.ie

European Parliament website:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/members/public/geoSearch/view.do?country=IE&partNumber=1&zone=South&language=EN&id=28119>

Further statements about the IAHS petition:

Kathy Sinnott argued that the Petitions Committee was one of the only places where ‘the people’ were able to express their views. She proposed that the risk-focused view of the Commission, which ignores all consideration of benefits, means that although any future ban on higher dose supplements might well guard against the very small risk of minor and reversible adverse effects in even the most sensitive people, it would not allow individuals with higher than average requirements to meet their needs.

Background:

Kathy Sinnott is a Member of the European Parliament for Ireland South. She has campaigned particularly on health, disability, education and environmental issues.

About Marian Harkin MEP

Personal website: www.marianharkin.ie

European Parliament website:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/members/public/geoSearch/view.do?country=IE&partNumber=1&zone=North+West&language=EN&id=28116>

Further statements about the IAHS petition:

Ms Harkin expressed concern over a total harmonisation measure that wouldn’t allow for the differences in intake between, for example, the Irish or Scandinavians and, say, southern Europeans, the latter having much better access to fresh fruit and vegetables as well as to vitamin D-inducing sunlight.

Background:

Irish Member of the European Parliament for the North and West European Constituency of Ireland.

Marian Harkin speaking about the value of the Petitions Committee:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKwv1YUIrQA>

About the Alliance for Natural Health

www.anhcampaign.org

Further statements about the IAHS petition:

The 2005 ruling by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) on the Alliance for Natural Health's case stated that only "the most reliable scientific data available and the most recent results of international research" should be used in risk assessments. "In short", said Dr Verkerk, "the ECJ made it clear that this means good science must be deployed. Nothing less will do. If the Commission, in the interests of SMEs and consumers, needs to delay publishing final levels in order that they can withstand intense scientific scrutiny, then it should do so."

Background:

The Alliance for Natural Health (ANH) is an international, non-governmental organisation, based in the UK. It was founded in 2002, and works on behalf of consumers, medical doctors, complementary health practitioners and health-product suppliers worldwide, to promote natural and sustainable health, using the principles of good science and good law.

About the Irish Association of Health Stores

www.irishhealthstores.com

The IAHS is a professional trade association, which represents over 80% of the health stores in the Republic of Ireland.

Health food is the fastest growing sector of food retailing in Ireland, and representing over 100 member stores, the IAHS exists to ensure that health food retailing is ethical, responsible, truthful and professional.

Founded in 1986, the Association operates under a written constitution and member stores are required to adhere to a strict Code of Ethics