



HFMA UPDATE

by Graham Keen,
Executive Director

Electioneering

As I am sure most of you are aware, the European Parliament is elected for a fixed five-year term and that means that voters in 28 member states of the EU will be casting their votes in May elections this year, and the result of that will be a new Parliament, also known as the Plenary, composed of 751 MEPs. Following this, a new President of the EU Commission will be elected, followed by 27 individual Commissioners from the remaining 27 member states, after which a new President of the European Council and President of the European Parliament will also be confirmed. This is likely to be followed by a shake-up within the many Directorates-General (DGs) that carry out the workings of the Commission.

All of which means that, given that the new President of the European Commission is unlikely to be confirmed before November at the earliest, most of the rest of 2014 is likely to see very little happening in the way of effective government within the EU. Certainly many of those issues of most concern and impact for our industry are likely to remain well and truly in the long grass.

What you may not be so aware of is the phenomenon that is causing such a political stir here in the UK – the rise of the influence of right-wing parties and politicians – is actually certainly not unique to the UK. In fact, all over Europe the same thing is happening and this is causing great concern to the Brussels machine as it is almost always the generally declared aim

of these parties to not engage with the EU process and the work of the European Parliament, for example the many committees that are vital to the continued smooth running of the system.

There is conjecture that one result of this might be that the major political groupings within the Parliament, the European People's Party (EPP), the Group of Socialist and Democratic Parties (S&D) and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), which have traditionally opposed each other in the Parliament, might now find it necessary to forge some form of alliance to combat the right-wing influence and ensure that the Parliamentary process can continue. Without this there is every chance that the next five years will prove to be extremely challenging for the Parliament.

The particularly important statistic that is characteristic of EU elections, and quite different from what is usual with elections at a national level, is that typically around 50 per cent of those MEPs

elected are new to the

Parliament. This very high turnover rate is thought to be a direct result of the fact it is the generally received wisdom that

voters use their vote in EU elections to protest about their own national government, meaning that parties in opposition have a much greater chance of unseating incumbent MEPs than they might normally

have in a General Election. But this also represents a real opportunity to us to lobby all of those candidates seeking our support in May this year, and I would encourage everyone involved in our industry to be actively doing this in the few months remaining before the elections.

And in that vein the HFMA is, as you'd expect, on the case and has begun its outreach programme to prospective UK MEPs leading up to the May 2014 EU elections. With the help of our political advisers, we have compiled a list of 80 target individuals, both incumbent and prospective, from right across the political landscape and a broad geographical spread, and we are encouraging our members to contact them to make sure our issues and concerns are on their agenda as they lobby and canvass for the public's votes.

In the last two to three weeks, I have met with two UK MEPs, Jim Nicholson (Ulster Conservatives and Unionists, N Ireland) and Andrew Duff (Lib Dem, East of England). Given the high attrition rate of MEPs, both are something of a rarity in that they have completed their fifth and third terms in the European Parliament respectively, and both are standing once again in 2014. In each case, the meetings were very positive, with a high level of interest expressed for our issues and concerns, and with both MEPs agreeing to take affirmative action as needed on our behalf.

EHPM AGM

I had the pleasure of recently attending the annual meeting of EHPM (the European federation of associations of Health Product Manufacturers), the umbrella federation of natural products industry national associations

from 13 EU member states, of which HFMA was a co-founder nearly 40 years ago. The meeting took place at EHPM's new offices in Brussels, which it shares with an organisation called UEAPME, which, very appropriately, represents the interests of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) throughout the EU.

I'm pleased to report that EHPM has had a very strong first year since its restructuring and dramatic reinvigoration as an independent association with its own secretariat, director-general and offices in the heart of the action in Brussels. EHPM Chair Alban Maggjar, from the French association Synadiet, was able to report that EHPM is on a very sound financial footing and now has a much stronger relationship with the EU Commission, and at a higher level than was previously the case.

So, whatever the year ahead brings in the way of a new European Commission and Parliament, we here in the UK are well positioned to strongly engage, via the efforts of EHPM, and also those of the HFMA and its member companies. I'm pleased to say that EHPM will have a small stand at this year's Natural & Organic Products Europe at Olympia, so why not take the opportunity to go along and meet Patrick Ahern, EHPM's Secretary General, and learn all about what he is doing to influence this industry's key interests in the upcoming year. **hfb**

To help us in our efforts to protect this industry and benefit from the gold-standard advice we provide, join the HFMA at the earliest opportunity. To learn more about our activities, please contact me at graham@hfma.co.uk.

HFMA membership is vital to ensure that your company keeps abreast of the fast-changing regulatory environment. The HFMA is the UK's best source of information and most effective defender of our industry's interests. To help the HFMA defend your business at this most critical time contact hfma@hfma.co.uk or call 020 8481 7100.

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The Voice of the Natural Health Industry