



HFMA UPDATE

by Graham Keen,
Executive Director

The Strasbourg circus



As I write this latest missive, I am preparing for my trip to Strasbourg next week, a beautiful and historic city on the French/German border that many will have heard of but very few actually visited, and which holds a position of huge historical significance in the context of pan-EU relations.

It is also a city that is logistically relatively difficult to get to which, aside from the time it takes to actually get there, also means it is quite costly compared to the Eurostar that I seem to spend far too much time on. So why am I going to Strasbourg, you may ask? I shall explain.

Whenever I visit Brussels I am still in awe of the outrageous enormity of it all, an unrelenting regulation-producing machine with all of the support services in place to make sure it continues. And yet there is one aspect of European Commission/Parliament activity that in years to come people will scratch their heads about and say 'why?' or 'really?'. Books have and will continue to be written on this subject, which has come to be known as the 'Strasbourg Circus'. Of all of the EU's most outrageous excesses, this one takes the biscuit!

Each month for just three days, the entire European Parliamentary process decamps from Brussels to Strasbourg. That means nearly 4,000 MEPs, officials and their retinues set off on the 300-mile trip to Strasbourg, taking a whole day out for travel time to and fro, so that the European Parliament can meet for those three days. And to support that process, 25 trucks carry 6,000 crates of files and paperwork needed to support this crazy exodus. When I first went

to the European Parliament in Brussels around 25 years ago – for those that remember it I was part of the industry delegation fighting to retain the name 'soya milk' – I remember seeing these crates, which actually reminded me of coffins, outside each of the MEP offices, and naively asked my host what they were for.

So that gives you a sense of how long this has been going on, and therein lies the answer to why it happens. The whole process is enshrined in the EU Treaty and is a legacy from the earliest days of the EEC, the precursor to today's European Union, and the insistence of the French authorities that it should maintain some dominion over the European Parliamentary process.

And the cost of this never-ending excess? It is conservatively estimated that around €150m is spent annually on the travelling circus. And that's not all, as it is reckoned that something like 10,000 tonnes of carbon monoxide emissions are created in the process. And the cost of my hotel room in the city is probably double what it would be if I travelled there at any other time of the month.

Finally, this crazy situation is being questioned and UK MEP, Ashley Fox, who has been leading the campaign to stop this exorbitant waste of money, recently commented that "this is the most powerful evidence yet that the wasteful Strasbourg travelling circus must be scrapped – and the sooner the better. When the EU's own experts are saying this is financial madness, surely it is time to listen".

In the meantime, I will travel to Strasbourg (via Amsterdam – there is still no direct flight from London!) and meet with some key UK MEPs that were not able to meet me in Brussels, and who are members of the influential ENVI – Environment, Public Health and Food Safety – committee, to bring them up to speed on our latest issues and concerns. First and foremost amongst these, of course, is the setting of maximum levels for vitamins and minerals in food supplements, after all these years still the single greatest threat to the future of this industry, in particular the independent sector and the countless SME companies that thrive within it. The future regulatory status of botanicals,

and the future for over 2,000 botanical health claims currently on hold is another key issue, as is the enforcement and application of both the Nutrition and Health Claims Regulation and the new Food Information to Consumers Regulation.

The really important point is that, whatever the challenges we face, or the process we have to deal with, including where that process is located, the HFMA is out there front and centre making sure that this industry has a voice.

A reminder now of the latest two events in our ongoing programme of educational seminars and workshops, for which places are still available:

■ LAPAD Labelling/FICR Workshop

Date: October 7, 2014

Venue: Society of Antiquaries of London, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London, W1J 0BE

■ Meeting the challenges of preparing quality dossiers for herbal medicines

Date: November 18, 2014

Venue: Friends House, London, NW1 2BJ

These events are open to both members and non-members of the HFMA, and the entry price for both events is £99 plus VAT for members, and £199 plus VAT for non-members. Information about both events can be obtained by contacting us at hfmahfma.co.uk. **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 graham@hfmahfma.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 hfmahfma.co.uk or call 020 8481 7100.

