



## HFMA UPDATE

by Graham Keen,  
Executive Director

# A wealth of nations

Regular readers of my articles will know that I reported very positively this time last year on the excellent meeting of the members of our European federation, EHPM, in Budapest. I said then that one thing never changes – it doesn't matter where in Europe you are from, we all face the same threats and challenges and it is always good to share our experiences and discuss potential solutions.

This was never more evident than at this latest meeting, attended by 43 delegates from 10 EU member states, and a strong issue-driven agenda was augmented by the contributions of three excellent guest speakers, the European Commission's Alexandra Nikolakopoulou, Lorenza Romanese, from the European Industrial Hemp Association, and George Paraskevavakos, representing the International Probiotics Association.

It may seem rather obvious to say this, but I ought to mention at this point that this was my first visit to Athens, and it turned out to be not just a city of staggering history and beauty, but also one of the safest and friendliest places in the world that I have visited. If you haven't yet been, then do so if you can – you will not be disappointed.

The meeting itself had moments of real significance, given an agenda that included presentations and discussions about:

- The French ban on titanium dioxide.
- The future for CBD food supplements.
- On-hold botanical health claims, the Commission's review and an alternative EHPM-driven approach to the assessment of these claims.
- Red yeast rice and hydroxy anthracene derivatives (HADs).
- A global approach to address the future for probiotic products.
- Borderline products and



European case law implications.

- The interactions between drugs and food supplements.
- Positive economic impact of food supplements and national healthcare cost savings.
- The social value of food supplements.
- The setting of harmonised maximum levels for food supplements.

So, what do I mean by significance? Well, for example, if you have been following the saga that is the quagmire that on-hold botanical health claims have found themselves in, then you will know that this all came about because the Commission created two new concurrent pieces of legislation, the Nutrition and Health Claims Regulation (NHCR) and the Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive (THMPD), both with the intention of being a mechanism for formal approval of individual health claims. All very fine, except they created two entirely different standards for the 'scientific' assessment of those claims.

Essentially, this means that botanical health claims under the NHCR are held to a higher grading of assessment than for those **same claims** under the THMPD. One of the essential differences is that the THMPD allows for the history of safe traditional use to be taken into account, which has been consistently refused for botanical health claims under the NHCR – therefore, a major stumbling block. So, to hear the Commission official

say in Athens that there was “an openness to explore traditional use” was indeed truly significant.

On the issue of the most profound significance to us in the UK market, the imposition of harmonised maximum levels, it was acknowledged that the reason we do not have harmonised pan-EU levels after over 10 years is “because of intense lobbying by the UK primarily”. But there was also



the implication that a post-Brexit departure of the UK might enable the Commission to force this through.

At the meeting, I argued strongly that human nutrition is not a political philosophy – i.e. harmonisation for harmonisation's sake – and that it was simply daft to continue to argue that a level of, for example, vitamin D for a man living in Athens should be the same as for a woman living in Stockholm. The official at the meeting expressed some sympathy for this argument, so maybe we can prevent a 'one size fits all' approach for at least another 10 years!

So, to sum up, this meeting left me with one clear conclusion. Whether we are 'in' or 'out' of the EU, as an industry, we need to stay close to developments within the EU. And for that reason, we will continue to play a very active role within our European federation. These meetings could continue with or without us, but they are all the better for having an active and vocal UK involvement.

I cannot end this article without making reference to my great friend, Neil Traylen. As I write this, I just received the awful news of his passing and this has hit me, and many others in this industry, very hard. Aside from being the finest man to walk the earth, he was loved by everyone who knew him as a person of engaging warmth, great humour and massive integrity. I

worked for many years with Neil, both as a colleague and a fellow HFMA Council member, and we had some great laughs (and not a few scrapes!) over the years. But above all else, he was a great friend and his passing leaves the world a lot darker and certainly a lot less fun! **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](mailto: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](mailto:hfma@hfma.co.uk) or call 020 8481 7100.

