

European Parliament votes to block DHA formula health claim - but not by a large enough majority to guarantee action by the Commission

Press release 6 April 2011

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Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) voted today in favour of a Resolution to block a disputed DHA health claim on follow-on formula labels, but were short of the absolute majority of all MEPs (including those not present) required to compel the European Commission to act. The vote was 328 for the Resolution and 323 against, but this was insufficient to block the claim: "DHA intake contributes to the normal visual development of infants up to 12 months of age".

This is the first time since the Health Claims Regulations were passed in 2006 that the Parliament has voted to on a claim. The Resolution came to the full Plenary following a positive vote by the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) Committee in March.

Campaigners say the influence of the baby food industry was revealed in some of the arguments used to back the health claim. Patti Rundall OBE, Policy Director of Baby Milk Action, said:

"Authorisation of this claim hands the industry the marketing tool they desired - and brings the important process relating to health claims into disrepute. There is clearly no proven benefit from DHA in follow-on formulas, and possible risks. The DHA claim makes a mockery of the authorisation system which is touted as a Gold Standard, and has for the most part provided very important safeguards to European consumers and thrown out many, many other bogus claims, but has failed parents and babies today. If there really was evidence to support this claim, it should have triggered a review of the composition requirements to remove inferior formulas from the market.

"Those in favour of the claim did not secure a majority of the votes. We won the vote today, but without the level of majority required to compel the Commission to act. However, unelected officials clearly need to take the Resolution very seriously and overhaul the process as it relates to infant foods."

In a letter to Glenis Willmott MEP, one of the proposers of the Resolution, WHO said:

"WHO does not have a recommendation about the addition of docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) to formula milk.....to date no solid evidence exists to be able to say that adding DHA to infant formula will have important clinical benefits. Were WHO to give such a recommendation, it would have to follow a strict guideline development process based on grading of all available evidence collected through systematic reviews by expert panels free from conflict of interest."

For further information and an exposé of baby food industry tactics, see the online version at: <http://info.babymilkaction.org/pressrelease/pressrelease06apr11>