

Press release for Monday 8 December

Irish natural health organisations call on European leaders to respect Irish ‘No’ vote

A group of leading Irish natural health organisations and their supporters are calling on European leaders attending this week’s European Council meeting in Brussels to respect the Irish ‘No’ vote on the controversial Lisbon Treaty. Citing their deep concern regarding the European Commission’s undemocratic and opaque way of approving GM food and farming products, the European Union’s proposed restrictions on the sale of both vitamin supplements and herbal medicines, and its failure to protect consumers in Ireland from hazardous waste fluoride in drinking water, they say that should a second referendum be held on the treaty they will be advocating that it should again be rejected.

The organisations - which include the GM-free Ireland Network, the Leitrim Organic Farmers Co-operative Society, the Irish Association of Health Stores and the Irish Institute of Nutrition & Health – say that the European Union is increasingly having such a damaging effect on their sector that to expect them to vote ‘Yes’ for the Lisbon Treaty would be absurd and akin to expecting them to vote in favour of the contamination of the Irish ecosystem and food chain by GM crops; the continued removal of people’s freedom of choice to avail themselves of safe, natural approaches to healthcare; and the ongoing pollution of the drinking water supply by industrial waste fluorides.

Michael O’Callaghan, Coordinator of the GM-free Ireland Network, said: “The European Commission still refuses to recognise the right of EU Member States and Regions to establish blanket bans on GM crops, despite the fact that the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales — along with 10 governments, 175 regional governments, 3,500 local authorities and thousands of smaller areas across 22 EU member states — intend to implement such bans, or have already done so. Worse still, it keeps on placing new GM food and feed products on the EU market — against the wishes of the vast majority of retailers and consumers – and automatically legalises them when member states don’t reach a Qualified Majority Vote for or against. The Lisbon Treaty would extend similar undemocratic decision-making to many other areas that affect our daily lives. Building the architecture of Europe on such shaky foundations is a recipe for long-term political, economic, environmental, health and ecological disasters. Like human beings everywhere, European citizens want more democracy, not less!”

John Brennan, on behalf of the Leitrim Organic Farmers Co-operative Society, is also calling on the EU to respect the Irish vote on the Lisbon Treaty: “Our members remain very concerned about the lack of democracy illustrated by the approval process for GMO’s in agriculture and the role of the EU Commission and European Food Safety Authority in this process. In addition, co-op members who are involved in health food businesses are gravely concerned about the Food Supplements

Directive and the effect it will have in preventing consumers from accessing supplements and natural medicines that are proven to maintain good physical and mental health in the population who rely on them.”

Kathy Sinnott, Member of the European Parliament for Ireland South, commented: "Under existing treaties, Irish consumers exposed to hazardous waste fluorides in their drinking water have been failed by non-enforcement of several key Directives that are supposed to protect human health and the environment. We already have the Food Supplements Directive, which poses a real threat to our vitamin and mineral supplements. Under the Lisbon Treaty, we will have even less influence over European legislation as regards our health, nutrition and other vital aspects of our lives."

Jill Bell, health store owner and president of the Irish Association of Health Stores added: "Last year over 60,000 consumers in Ireland signed a petition objecting to over-regulation by the EU which threatens to remove from public sale the majority of effective natural health supplements on the market and to stifle innovation. Why should our culture of promoting and safeguarding our health by natural means be banished in order to promote "harmonisation" throughout the EU? The EU should respect differences of tradition between Member States. Its attempts to impose sameness overall, specifically in relation to natural health care, will win no friends if the Lisbon Treaty referendum is re-run."

Richard Burton, director of the Irish Institute of Nutrition & Health, said: "Millions of Europeans routinely take vitamins and minerals to supplement their diet and support their health. Despite the enviable safety profile of these natural, essential nutrients the EU wants to regulate them as potential toxins, like drugs, rather than as foods. This will outlaw supplements having therapeutic potential, which represents a violation of our basic right to care for our own health in safe and effective ways."

Paul Anthony Taylor, Coordinator of the European Referendum Initiative, pointed out that Ireland is by no means alone in not having ratified the Lisbon Treaty: "I find it particularly ironic that despite German Chancellor Angela Merkel having appealed to the Irish people to vote yes to the Lisbon Treaty, even her own government has not as yet been able to ratify it. As such, and bearing in mind the reason why German ratification has not taken place – namely, the fact that legal challenges have been brought against it on the grounds that it infringes the principle of democracy – it is increasingly clear that with the Czech president now signalling that he won't sign the treaty unless it is ratified by Ireland, and Poland also not as yet having ratified it, Irish natural health supporters are by no means alone in opposing the further loss of control over their lives that this treaty's enforcement would usher in. Without doubt, had citizens in all 27 member states been permitted to exercise their democratic rights by voting in referendums on this treaty, it would have been abandoned long ago."

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EDITORS NOTES

GM-free Ireland

The GM-free Ireland Network is an association of individuals and organisations collaborating to keep the island of Ireland off-limits to the environmental release of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) including viruses, algae, bacteria, seeds, crops, trees, insects, molluscs, crustaceans, fish, poultry and livestock. It supports farmers' rights to a sustainable future and consumers' rights to choose safe GM-free food. Calling for mandatory GM labelling of meat, poultry and dairy produce from livestock fed on GM ingredients, and of GM food sold by hotels, restaurants, pubs and the catering industry, it encourages a voluntary phase out of GM animal feed, to give Irish food the most credible safe GM-free food brand in Europe. GM-free Ireland represents 130 organisations, 19 local authorities, and over 1 million citizens whose elected representatives have declared their local areas off limits to GM crops.

Irish Association of Health Stores

The Irish Association of Health Stores (IAHS) is a professional trade association, which represents over 80% of the health stores in the Republic of Ireland. Founded in 1986, the Association operates under a written constitution and member stores are required to adhere to a strict Code of Ethics. Its member stores are located nationwide and are unique in the Irish retail sector in the emphasis they place on training.

Irish Institute of Nutrition & Health

The Irish Institute of Nutrition & Health offers accredited programmes to educate adult learners in a balanced, holistic understanding and practice of nutrition in health, and to promote healthy eating throughout society.

Kathy Sinnott MEP

Kathy Sinnott was elected to the European Parliament as MEP for Ireland South in 2004. A member of the Parliament's Independence and Democracy group, she is Vice-Chairwoman of the Committee on Petitions and a member of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety as well as 7 other committees. Kathy has received numerous awards for her work and has a strong interest in natural health issues.

Leitrim Organic Farmers Co-operative Society

Farmer owned and run, the Leitrim Organic Farmers Co-operative has been promoting organic farming in County Leitrim since 1998 and now has over 100 members from Leitrim and its surrounding counties. Its aims are to provide market opportunities and outlets for members; to develop other services for members, including the organisation of education and training; to act as an advice centre for existing or aspiring organic farmers in the region; and to act as a lobbying group on issues of importance to the organic sector.

European Referendum Initiative

The European Referendum Initiative is a campaign for citizens to have the right to vote in a referendum whenever significant changes to laws affecting them are made at either national or European level. In particular, it believes that all European citizens should immediately be given the opportunity to vote in referendums on the Lisbon Treaty. An alliance of seven non-governmental organisations and political parties, the campaign collectively represents citizens from all 27 European Union (EU) countries.

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