COMMUNIQUE DE PRESSE

PRESS RELEASE

Contact: **Ophélie Spanneut: +32 (0)2 789 24 01**
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MEPs to lead the charge against unfounded baby food claim?

"*DHA intake contributes to the normal visual development of infants up to 12 months of age*" This is the unsubstantiated claim EU consumers could read on follow-on milk formula and baby foods unless MEPs oppose it tomorrow.

While the European Commission intends to authorize the use of such a claim for products enriched with synthesised DHA[1], a fatty acid which allegedly improves babies' eyesight, BEUC calls on MEPs to veto[2] tomorrow in plenary the use of this unsubstantiated and misleading claim.

Insufficient scientific support

Scientists disagree on the causal relationship between products enriched with synthesised DHA and better eyesight of babies. EFSA, the European Food Safety Authority, itself concluded[3] there is no evidence to claim effect on vision for follow-on formulas and baby foods. In addition, other scientists have expressed safety concerns[4].

With the scientific community in disagreement over the link between synthetic DHA and visual development and the questions over health implications, BEUC believes such a claim should not be permitted and further independent research should be conducted to address these knowledge gaps rather than promoting its purported benefits on infants, a particularly vulnerable group in our society.

Claims as mere marketing tool

Monique Goyens, Director General of BEUC, the European Consumers' Organisation declared:

"Consumers trust marketing claims relating to health and nutrition, it is therefore crucial parents are not misled when trying to make the best choices for their children."

"EU legislation[5] only allows for claims substantiated by 'generally accepted scientific evidence' and yet it does not seem to be the case here. We are therefore all the more concerned since baby food is involved. Infants' health should not be subject to industries' marketing strategies."

ENDS

For more details, please find attached the letter sent by BEUC to members of the ENVI committee ahead of vote

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[1] Docosahexaenoic acid
[2] MEPs adopted a draft resolution with 30/28 votes in ENVI committee on 16th March 2011
[3] Letter from EFSA to the European Commission on 03/09/2009: "*The evidence, however, does not establish that starting DHA supplementation at 4-6 months in infants who had received a control (DHA-free) formula in the first months of life would have an effect on the visual development of those children.*"
[4] Report in the British Medical Journal by Kathy Kennedy et al. in June 2010
[5] Regulation 1924/2006 on nutrition and health claims made on foods