



European Parliament rejects high sugar content in baby foods

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Brussels

Members of the European Parliament are placing pressure on the European Commission to follow World Health Organization recommendations limiting the amount of sugar in baby foods. They voted by a majority of 393 votes to 305 to reject the commission's proposal to maintain the current European Union permitted level. This is three times the WHO guidelines.

The British Green MEP Keith Taylor, who led the parliamentary opposition, said that the vote showed a determination to place the health of babies and children first. "The health risks associated with excessive sugar consumption are now widely accepted. The role of regulation should be to try and address this risk, particularly for infants and children, who are the most vulnerable consumers," he added.

MEPs said that the commission's proposal was "contrary to all health advice from WHO and from scientific committees in member states who have recommended significant reductions in total sugar intake." They argued that it would add to rising levels of childhood obesity and could affect children's developing taste preferences.

The rejection was welcomed by Patti Rundall, the director of Baby Milk Action. "We are delighted with this vote on this issue that we have been working on for decades. We've been calling on the commission to do something about sugar levels since 2006," she said.

The commission's proposal would have let sugars provide up to a third of the total energy intake from baby food. WHO

recommends limiting the intake of free sugars to less than 10% of total energy intake, with a further reduction to below 5% for additional health benefits.

Taking note of the opposition, the commission said that the legislation would have set clear rules for manufacturers and enforcement authorities, ending any possible regulatory uncertainty.

In the meantime, the current EU levels will continue to apply. The commission, under pressure from MEPs, agreed to consult the European Food Safety Authority "on the totality of the compositional requirements for processed cereal based food and baby food, including with respect to their sugar levels and taking into account the latest scientific evidence." On the basis of that advice, the commission will table new draft legislation.

MEPs also called for a ban on the use of genetically modified organisms and nanotechnologies in processed cereal based food and baby food. They said that labelling and marketing of processed baby foods should make clear that the products are not for use by infants younger than 6 months old, and they should not undermine the WHO's recommendation for six months of exclusive breast feeding.

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