



Press Release

CAN EUROPE'S KAVA MARKET BE SAVED?

Kava Stakeholder Strategy Meeting on 25th /26th August in Brussels, Belgium

The kava story goes on: On 25th and 26th August a European-Pacific kava strategy meeting will take place in Brussels, Belgium, to hammer out a plan to try to rebuild the EU kava market which has all but collapsed due to regulatory restrictions in most EU member states. The meeting, sponsored by PRO€INVEST (*Note 1) www.proinvest-eu.org and the EU-ACP Center for Development of Enterprise (CDE) (*Note 2) www.cde.int is part of an initiative to support the Pacific herbal industry, which has suffered greatly from restrictions placed on the sale of Kava within the European Union.

The kava crisis began in late 2001, when German and Swiss health authorities began restricting the sale of kava-containing food and medicinal products due to a small number of cases of adverse reactions reportedly associated with the use of kava (*Piper Methysticum*). On June 14th 2002 BfArM (the German Federal Institute for Drugs and Medical Devices) became the first regulatory authority to ban the sale of kava products thereby effectively closing the huge German market.

Aside from Germany, France and Japan, kava bans and recalls have more recently taken place in England, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Switzerland and Singapore, as well as voluntary recalls in almost all other European countries.

The negative publicity from these actions, together with the numerous kava bans, alerts and market recalls, has led to an economic disaster for the South Pacific kava industry predominantly located in Vanuatu, Fiji, Samoa and Tonga. The restrictions resulted in a mass cessation of exports costing these countries millions of dollars in export revenue. The Pacific kava industry is

in danger of collapse seriously threatening the livelihood of many Pacific people depending on the cultivation and trading of kava.

In February 2002, in response to this economic threat, kava exporters attending the CDE co-sponsored Pacific Herbal Business Forum in Vanuatu (www.pacificherbs.com) formed a crisis committee and with the help of Fiji based Forum Secretariat requested assistance from CDE to take their case to Brussels and to help them try to re-open these closed markets on terms acceptable to the EU regulators.

CDE responded by commissioning Phytopharm Consulting, Berlin, Germany to prepare a detailed report of the scientific and technical evidence, which led to the crisis and an evaluation as to whether or not the kava restrictions initiated by European member states could be effectively discussed and the concerns addressed on terms acceptable to the EU regulators. The report entitled “In-depth investigation into EU member states market restrictions on kava products” provides a complete and comprehensive scientific analysis of all kava information currently available and the development of a possible strategy to re-open these markets.

This detailed report indicates that there has been over two thousand years of traditional use of Kava. The efficacy and safety of kava in the treatment of conditions of nervous anxiety, stress, and restlessness have, moreover, been proven through more than 20 clinical trials involving more than 10,000 patients; it is also supported by international post marketing experience and reviews by several expert panels commissioned by the German Health Ministry.

“The severe hepatotoxic effects of kava, claimed by drug regulation authorities, cannot be regarded as clearly proven” states Dr Joerg Gruenwald who prepared the CDE report. “Of the 76 reported cases, which we re-evaluated only 4 could possibly be linked to the intake of kava. This view is moreover supported by many well renowned scientific kava experts, who all believe that regulatory authorities should reconsider the restrictions so far placed on the sale of kava.”

It is against this background that the Brussels meeting has been called not only to review the evidence presented in the report but to allow both European and Pacific kava interests the chance

to join forces to develop a concrete and coordinated action plan for the future which could persuade the regulators to reverse the restrictions on safety terms acceptable to them.

The European delegation at the meeting will include leading European manufacturers like, Finzelberg, Gehrlicher, Carlo Sessa S.p.A. while Barbara Steinhoff (BAH) and Anthony Bush (EHPM) will represent their respective trade associations; leading experts in the field of phytomedicines including Dr Mathias Schmidt (Society for Medicinal Plant Research), Prof Dr Fritz-H Kemper and Simon Mills (ESCOP).

The Pacific delegation will include five of the largest Pacific kava exporters as well as leading Pacific scientists Dr Joji Malani (Fiji Medical School), Prof S. Sotheeswaran and Dr William Aalbersberg (University of the South Pacific, Fiji).

The stakes at the meeting are high. If the delegates fail to come up with an action plan, which can convince EU regulators to re-open discussions on this matter prospects for the Pacific kava look gloomy indeed.

For further details on the meeting and follow up activities please contact:

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*Note 1: PRO€INVEST is a EU-ACP partnership programme developed and undertaken by the European Commission on behalf of the ACP countries. PRO€INVEST is managed by the CDE under the supervision of the EuropeAid Co-operation Office of the European Commission.

*Note 2: CDE is a joint EU-ACP institution devoted to private sector enterprise development in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific under the Cotonou Agreement.