

Still no sign of natural products legislation

Legislation the natural products industry is awaiting, which will clarify the rules on health claims and to establish an auditing system, is now unlikely to be passed before the election, delegates at an industry summit heard. **Michelle Norton** was there

Government officials have told natural health products companies not to get their hopes up for the start of a new product regulation system before the national election.

The natural health industry has been eagerly awaiting the Natural Health and Supplementary Products Bill to be enacted – which would regulate products based on permitted health claims and ingredients, and aims to give consumers confidence the products are true to label.

Minister for Conservation and Housing Nick Smith, who officially opened the Natural Products New Zealand Industry Summit (20 March) said the “long convoluted story” of the bill will come to an end, but he does not know when.

“I am confident that it will be passed this year, although there is a question mark as to whether it will be pre or post-election,” Dr Smith says.

The election is set for 20

September this year.

The Health Select Committee earlier recommended the bill be enacted by no later than 3 January this year.

However, the Government

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commends the growth of the natural health product industry – now worth \$1 billion, he says.

Exporting makes up a large chunk of natural health product

sales and growing New Zealand product exports is a Government priority, Dr Smith says.

Ministry of Health New Regulations Establishment Unit manager Donald Hannah says the ministry is now developing a permitted ingredients list and a health claims list.

Health claims will be based on either scientific or traditional evidence for the ingredients.

Companies will need to provide this evidence to the regulator if it requests it for the purpose of an audit.

But, the regulator wants a “light-touch regime” so it will avoid “heavy audits”.

However, Phytomed Medicinal Herbs managing director Phil Rasmussen is concerned the proposed regulatory system is not placing enough emphasis on enforcing GMP [Good Manufacturing Practice] standards and that this will make exporting difficult.

Mr Rasmussen spoke to *Pharmacy Today* following the summit.

“At this stage [the natural health products industry] we do not know what level of manufacturing standard the Government is thinking of stipulating as part of this legislation,” Mr Rasmussen says.

In all other developed countries, certification under the pharmaceutical code of manufacturing is compulsory for natural health products which make any health claims.

“Just because natural health products are natural, doesn’t mean they are always safe.

“Unless the Government makes GMP a requirement under this bill, then the entire industry is at risk of having its reputation seriously damaged, should it incur a Fonterra-type *Clostridium* botulism or even worse scare,” he says.

“Without physical audits and a robust but industry appropriate code of GMP, some companies will continue to produce products for human consumption, with minimal raw material testing or quality assurance measures in place to ensure consumer safety,” Mr Rasmussen continues.

Mr Rasmussen is also concerned



Alison Quesnel

this could mean natural health companies will incur two sets of fees – if Australia does not accept New Zealand’s legislation, as is currently the case.

Speaking to *Pharmacy Today* after the summit, Natural Products New Zealand executive chair Alison Quesnel says it is disappointing the bill is taking so long to progress. However, on the whole, Natural Products New Zealand’s members are pleased with the proposed legislation.

“There is going to be a permitted [ingredients] list, which we [the industry] hoped not to have, but we are happy if it will stop at that and we believe that permitted list will be as wide as possible.”

In terms of the “light-touch” auditing process, every industry has its “cowboys” but Natural Products New Zealand is confident that the proposed auditing system will be sufficient.

Natural Products New Zealand members hope the auditing system will be accepted in both Australia and New Zealand, so companies no longer have to get their products accepted under two different systems.