



25/05/2020

PRESS RELEASE

Ireland's hemp industry is excluded from state Covid-19 enterprise support but pharma companies are welcome to apply.

Enterprise Ireland (EI) has told Irish SMEs, many of whom have been in business for more than 20 years, that it is EI policy not to support them. EI's Covid-19 Online Retail Scheme, **announced on April 29th**, excludes all cannabis-based products not intended for the medicines market. The ban is due to unspecified EI concerns over possible **'reputational damage'**.

Hemp Federation Ireland said this is just the latest in a long line of disabling interventions by Irish state agencies. Our views have never been sought and we are at a complete loss to understand who is informing Irish government policy in relation to our industry.

A spokesperson for the federation said "**pharmaceutical companies** have a very specific interest in how the Irish hemp industry is positioned. It is therefore entirely inappropriate, in our view, that taxpayer support for the pharmaceutical sector should be expressly aligned to the exclusion of our businesses from markets we built from the ground up over the past quarter-century".

On April 30th, Hemp Federation Ireland wrote to EI asking if the exclusion would apply to agri-based products such as hemp food and carbon-negative construction materials.

On May 5th, Enterprise Ireland replied stating that ***“it is EI policy not to support these kinds of companies”***

Chris Allen, Executive Director of Hemp Federation Ireland said “there is a firmly established taxonomic difference between marijuana and industrial hemp and **there is no valid basis for the existence of such a policy**”. Last week's ruling from the European Court categorically establishes this and it supports Hemp Federation Ireland's demand for the withdrawal of the recent FSAI market survey report.

Ms. Allen said, Irish farmers are inspired by what hemp has to offer and there are **compelling environmental and economic reasons why state policy should be supporting them**. Instead, we have **pharmaceutical executives setting up food companies to grow synthetic hemp in laboratories** while our agri-food sector is being regulated out of existence.

Ms. Allen said, ‘the drugs card’ was being allowed to shut down every conversation, and until that problem is addressed by commentators, the transfer of our markets to the corporate sector will continue”.

On May 7th HFI responded to Enterprise Ireland seeking clarification and a review of EI policy. On the same date the nonprofit body also wrote to **Minister Humphreys**.

Ms. Allen said, 'given the length of time our industry has been in existence and given the extraordinary agro ecological context, we had hoped that Minister Humphreys would intervene to allow our Irish companies access to state Covid-19 business support; it is very disappointing that there has been no response either from EI or from the Minister", she said.

The application window for the Covid-19 Online Retail Scheme **will close on May 27th**.

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