

WELCOME (BACK) TO THE ERA OF LEPRECHAUN ECONOMICS

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Ireland U-turns to oppose EU pharma reforms

Lobbying blitz by pharma industry convinced Government to backtrack

Proposed reforms sought to broaden access to new drugs and medicines

JACK POWER

Ireland has performed a U-turn to oppose contentious European Union reforms aimed at broadening access to new drugs and medicines, following a blitz of lobbying from big pharmaceutical companies over recent months.

The proposed reforms would cut back an eight-year window pharma companies currently have to exclusively sell new drugs they produce, before cheaper generic competitors enter the market.

Taoiseach Micheál Martin, Ministers and senior civil servants have all been on the receiving end of a significant push from the pharma sector, to get Ireland to adopt a pro-industry position in the EU debate.

Irish officials had been keen on the reforms improving access to new drugs

Irish health officials had been keen on the reforms improving access to new drugs. Allowing generic drugmakers into the market earlier would potentially result in cheaper prices for the Health Service Executive when buying medicines for public patients.

Speaking yesterday, Minister for Enterprise Peter Burke confirmed the Government had shifted its stance. It now “accepted” companies should retain the eight years of market dominance over new drugs they developed, he said.

Ireland has joined Denmark, Germany, Italy, Sweden and several other EU countries who support the pharma industry’s position ahead of a forthcoming vote in Brussels.

A compromise that would encourage companies to conduct more clinical trials in EU states, to earn back one lost year of protection from generic rivals, is the other option on the table in the vote.

The original idea was to allow companies win back extra years of “protection” over their research and data from

clinical trials if they rolled out new drugs across the EU more quickly.

Pharmaceutical firms oppose the proposals, which they claim would make companies less likely to develop new medicines in Europe.

Several pharma giants based in Ireland, such as Pfizer, Eli Lilly, Novo Nordisk and Johnson & Johnson (J&J), stepped up pressure on the Government to back the industry line, new logs of lobbying disclosures show.

Much of the lobbying focused on getting the ear of Mr Martin and Department of the Taoiseach secretary general John Callinan.

Oliver O’Connor, head of the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IPHA), argued there were alternative ways to improve access to new medicines, in recent correspondence to several departments.

The industry group chief wrote to Mr Martin directly, calling for the Government to take account of the major role the pharma sector played in Europe’s economy.

A lobbyist from J&J raised the matter with Robert Watt, Department of Health secretary general, on the margins of a think tank event in Dublin earlier this year. The pharma firm followed up in writing afterwards, making the case for “protecting” the system.

When the new Government was formed both Minister for Health Jennifer Carroll MacNeill and Mr Burke got letters of congratulations from the head of J&J’s Irish operations, Michaela Hagenhofer.

The US pharma company asked that support for companies’ intellectual property rights “be reflected” in Ireland’s position at the European level, according to filings disclosing the lobbying.

Danish pharma giant Novo Nordisk, which makes the blockbuster weight-loss drug Ozempic, also made representations. The head of Novo Nordisk’s Irish operation, Nina Therese Hovland, lobbied Minister for Finance Paschal Donohoe at a dinner hosted by consulting firm EY.



Mescal
on deck
Cannes
red carpet

Irish actor Paul Mescal attends the photocall for The History of Sound during the 78th annual Cannes Film Festival yesterday.

Photograph:
Clement Bilans / EPA

Today’s film reviews:
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‘Historic’ skort vote a ‘fantastic victory for choice’

GORDON MANNING

Croke Park hosted a landslide victory last night, but one like no other after 98 per cent of delegates at the Camogie Association’s Special Congress voted in favour of allowing players the choice to wear shorts or skorts.

The shorts-skorts issue has generated huge debate over the last three weeks since the Dublin and Kilkenny players were told to change clothing ahead of their Leinster semi-final.

Subsequent player protests and a huge level of public discourse on the matter prompted camogie president Brian Molloy to call a Special Congress, and at Croke Park last night it took the 133 delegates less than half an hour to make one of the most historic decisions in the 121-year history of the association.

“There was a very strong round of applause as soon as the vote was announced,” said Molloy.

“People are very happy about this, people are very positive about this and the key piece, and I said it in the note that I issued out to the chairs two weeks ago, is that we’re not getting rid of skorts.

“Tens of thousands of girls around the country enjoy playing camogie in skorts and tens of thousands of girls around the country would prefer to wear shorts and that’s what we’ve now enabled.

“We’ve enabled that within



■ Brian Molloy said the vote would give players a choice between shorts and skorts.

our association and it’s a historic day for the association because it comes into effect from midnight tonight.”

With a raft of championship games scheduled this weekend,

Saturday will see camogie players wear shorts in competitive action for the very first time.

Last night’s meeting, which started at 7.30pm, was held in camera but members of the media, assembled in another room in Croke Park, were informed just before 8pm that a result had been reached.

“From my perspective it’s a fantastic victory for choice, it’s a fantastic victory for the players and it’s a fantastic opportunity for us to attract more play-

ers who maybe don’t like playing in skorts,” added Molloy.

“I personally have two daughters who play and they would be advocates of skorts. I got so many messages over the last number of weeks, obviously the high profile messages were about girls who wanted to play in shorts but I got loads of messages from people who prefer to play in the skort.”

➔ Players can wear shorts from today: page 14

‘Extreme’ marine heatwave in waters off Irish coast

SEÁN DUKE

Sea temperatures off the western and southern coasts of Ireland are above normal and constitute a marine heatwave, climatologists have said.

UK Met Office data placed the marine heatwave at the “extreme” end of the spectrum, with sea surface temperatures up to 4 degrees above normal.

“Yes, it is a marine heatwave currently,” said Paul Moore, a climatologist at Met Éireann.

“This background warming is always there, but when atmospheric conditions are favourable, as they have been in our region during spring, this can enhance the warming in localised areas, leading to marine heatwaves.”

Data showing above average temperatures has been confirmed from a number of sources, including figures gathered

by Europe’s Copernicus earth-monitoring satellite, and the Irish Marine Data Buoy Observation Network.

This spring was dominated by high-pressure weather conditions, mostly just to the north of Ireland and Britain, said Mr Moore. This has resulted in above average sunshine, he said, and below average winds, generally coming from an easterly direction.

“This has led to the top layer of seas around us warming up at an increased rate, leading to the sea surface temperatures we are seeing now.”

The last time Ireland had sea surface temperatures this high was in June 2023.

“This followed a very dry and sunny period during the second half of May and early June that year. Research has linked the marine heatwave then to the record warm June in both Ireland

and the UK.”

The reason the west and south coasts had been most affected, said Mr Moore, was because of the mostly easterly winds those areas experienced during May. These easterlies carry warmer air off the land, and this warms the sea faster.

Marine heatwaves have had “devastating consequences” in other parts of the world over the last few years, said Moore.

“They can potentially cause widespread bleaching of coral reefs, the proliferation of harmful algal blooms, the displacement of marine species, and the disruption of entire food chains.”

Dr Manuela Truebano, from the school of biological and marine sciences at the University of Plymouth, said the marine heatwave is “unprecedented because it is happening so early in the year”.

Weather

Cloud will build from the west, bringing outbreaks of rain. Highs of 14–19 degrees

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Tourism: The CSO has met tourism bodies over concerns that declining inbound tourist data is out of kilter

Sports Friday

FAI: Colin Healy doubles down on claims he was told he would keep assistant coach role with Republic of Ireland women’s team. [Page 17](#)

Rugby: If Leinster reach the URC final on June 14th, they are understood to have plans in place to host the match in Croke Park. [Page 15](#)

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