

# ‘Big Tobacco’ company lobbied government to cultivate cannabis here

BY EVA SHORT

A Canadian supplier of medicinal cannabis, which is owned by one of the world's largest tobacco companies, lobbied the government to be allowed to set up cannabis production and cultivation facilities in Ireland, the *Business Post* can reveal.

Figr Group, a wholly owned indirect subsidiary of Pyxus International, a tobacco supplier, partnered with Green Leaf Agri, an Irish advisory firm, to seek regulatory changes to facilitate a potential move into the Irish market.

Green Leaf Agri retained the services of Vulcan Consulting, a consultancy led by husband-and-wife team Lucinda Creighton and Paul Bradford, both former Fine Gael politicians, to represent both it and the Figr Group.

Vulcan, on behalf of both firms, then arranged meetings and phone calls with representatives from the Department of the Taoiseach, the Department of Enterprise and Business and the Department of Health between October 2018 and January 2021.

In documents obtained by the *Business Post* under freedom of information, Vulcan said Figr saw “an enormous possibility of Ireland being its destination of choice for investing in a state-of-the-art production, processing, research and medicinal cannabis facility”.

It added Figr was “a 100 per cent medicinal cannabis-focused business” and

that it had “the agronomic and scientific expertise to be a responsible participant and leader in the medicinal cannabis market”.

“We believe Ireland, with a legislative framework, can become a global leader for the cultivation, manufacturing and export of medicinal cannabis,” Vulcan said.

A letter sent by Vulcan in November 2020, in advance of a virtual meeting with the Department of the Taoiseach, said companies in the medicinal cannabis space were making “long-term decisions as to where to locate such manufacturing facilities” and warned that Ireland could be “left behind” if it did not immediately signal its intention to bring in new regulation.

There is no legislative framework in place to allow for the cultivation of cannabis in Ireland for general medical purposes, and no licences have been issued for this activity.

“At a time of deep economic uncertainty for our citizens, we believe to miss this opportunity would be disappointing and regrettable,” the letter said.

Figr Group is composed of two companies in which Pyxus International owns a majority, controlling stake that it purchased in February 2018.

These firms, Figr East and Figr Norfolk, operate large-scale facilities in Charlottetown on Prince Edward Island and Simcoe in Ontario. These entities were consolidated under the Figr Group brand (also called Figr

Inc) in 2018.

The Figr Group produces both medicinal cannabis and cannabis for Canada's legal market, sometimes called recreational cannabis. Figr sells a range of cannabis strains with names such as ‘Mandarin Cookies’, ‘Afghan Kush’, ‘Black Cherry Punch’ and ‘Wappa’. Figr also produces CBD oils and cannabis vape products.

The *Business Post* previously reported that Green Leaf Agri had contacted government officials about the prospect of Ireland being established as a medicinal cannabis “export centre” for the EU. At the time it was not known it was doing so on behalf of Figr.

Michael Power, a chartered accountant and director of Green Leaf, told the *Business Post* that neither his firm nor the company he was representing, now known to be Figr, would advocate for the implementation of legalised recreational cannabis in Ireland, and that the medicinal cannabis legislation it was lobbying for would not be a “back door” for it.

When contacted on this occasion, Power said that Green Leaf Agri was contracted by Figr Inc, which sells both medicinal and recreational cannabis products.

“Figr Inc supplied medicinal and recreational cannabis only in those markets where there was a legislative framework in place. We in Green Leaf Agri Ltd advocated only for medicinal cannabis for the Irish market and supply to the European market place,” Power said.