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**MEDIA RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – 11/2/00  
HEMP Expose Media Misunderstandings  
over Marijuana.**

**HEMP SA is concerned that recent media speculation stemming from an initial report on Radio National 's Background Briefing program (first aired last November) and uncritically regurgitated in the Sunday Mail, and most recently The Australian, have created a false picture of the South Australian Cannabis laws and the Cannabis economy in this state.**

**Carol Altmann's piece in the Weekend Australian (5-6/2/00) typifies this. The picture that these reporters have painted can be summarised by her subtitle: "Lax laws in SA have created a horticultural boom [with] organised crime getting the benefit."**

**All of these allegations are erroneous. SA does not have "lax" laws – as far as large-scale commercial cultivation and supply go SA has the toughest laws in the nation. At the street level meanwhile, police admit the CEN laws make enforcement quicker and easier – reflected in the massive increase in the number of fines issued over the last ten years (the net-widening effect). SA's laws have been subject to intense scrutiny recently (see The Social Impacts of the CEN System report) and are demonstrably more effective and less harmful than total prohibition alternatives as practiced elsewhere in Australia, (although both are fundamentally flawed).**

**Claims that SA is the nations' Cannabis capital are simply wrong and misleading. The Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence and leading economists Access Economics have both estimated the value of the illicit Cannabis market in the region of A\$5-7 Billion dollars. Queensland, (which has the toughest laws for personal possession – up to 15 years jail and life imprisonment for commercial cultivation) grows about \$600 million of Cannabis a year according to the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) , making it that states' second largest cash crop!**

**For SA to be larger than Qld say, SA would need to be producing and exporting over \$10 Million dollars worth of cannabis per week! At \$200 per ounce, rounded off to \$3000 per pound, this equals over 3,333lbs per week – more than a tonne a week! A far cry from the "hundreds of kilos a week" put forward by Police spokesperson and the former head of the Drug Task Force, Det.Supt. Denis Edmunds.**

**It is undeniable Cannabis is grown, sold and in some cases, exported from SA, but this is despite some of the toughest penalties in Australia for commercial cultivation, sale and supply, not because of our CEN laws. It is the prohibition of Cannabis that makes it so lucrative, not our CEN system.**

**Nor can hydroponics be blamed. Whilst hydro has certain advantages (climate control, gender selection and security) Police admit large scale commercial crops are still grown outdoors – four large crops of several thousands plants each recently being busted in SA being proof of this.**

**The critical point that recent media "investigations" have failed to report is the fact that the previous 10-plant limit under the CEN system in SA flattened the Cannabis supply pyramid. This reduced the relative income, power and corrupting influences of the few Mr. Bigs and organised crime, creating instead thousands of Mr. & Ms Smalls – or disorganised crime as Mike Elliott MLC puts it.**

**Noted criminologist Dr. Adam Sutton agrees: The widespread cottage industry as existed under the 10 plant regime was better from a social, economic and law enforcement perspective than the smaller more hierarchical criminal structure it replaced. Fewer, bigger players controlled larger market shares and could more easily trade in other drugs, and corruptly influence police, judicial and political institutions.**

**Organised crime and corruption are inevitable wherever prohibition exists, yet it is arguable that our current laws have reduced corruption on the scale we saw demonstrated in the NSW Wood Royal Commission and the Qld. Fitzgerald Enquiry.**

**Claims that SA laws are benefiting organised crime are probably opposite to the truth. Organised crime has lost its' control over the cannabis market, but if current moves to criminalise small scale producers succeed, could possibly regain it again as the "competition" is taken out under the guise of reforming the laws.**

**Release Ends.**

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