

Post-2026 Regulatory Overview and the NZHIA Seed Project

Understanding New Zealand's New Industrial Hemp Framework

Growing Knowledge • Building Value Chains • Enabling Markets

Foreword

For growers of industrial hemp (iHemp) the regulatory reforms introduced by the Ministry for Regulation on **28 May 2026** represent the most significant changes to New Zealand's industrial hemp industry since commercial cultivation resumed 26 years ago.

A summary of the key points and links to government guidance documents can be found [here](#), the key points include removing the need for a Ministry of Health licence to grow iHemp and process hemp seed. The THC content was raised from 0.35% to 1%. And leaf, flower and roots are now restricted to use in the Medicine Cannabis Scheme or Export.

The revised industrial hemp regulations 2026, introduced a more practical approach to **growing** industrial hemp, replacing a licence, with a simple notification to the [Police](#) and [MPI](#).

This is great news for the growers and the supply chain but offers little for the value chain. With health and wellness products now heavily restricted to only medical cannabis scheme pathways. And the ban on using iHemp with [production and companion animals](#) remains (MPI ruled this out of scope of the Ministry for Regulation review)

To help growers, researchers, processors, investors and the wider community understand these changes, the New Zealand Hemp Industries Association (NZHIA) has developed the **Industrial Hemp Knowledge Series**, a series of live (updatable) publications for use in the NZHIA Seed Project.

Each publication explains one part of the industry—from understanding the regulatory framework through to crop production, harvesting, seed stewardship and processing. Together they provide a practical pathway for anyone wishing to learn about industrial hemp in New Zealand.

This publication, introduces the post-2026 regulatory framework and explains how the NZHIA Seed Project contributes to the future development of New Zealand's industrial hemp industry and the Aotearoa/New Zealand Bioeconomy

Introduction

Industrial hemp is one of the world's oldest cultivated crops. For thousands of years, it has been grown for nutritious seed, strong natural fibre and a wide variety of health and wellness applications and is now used as a raw material in a wide variety of industries.

The multiple uses of iHemp as a sustainable raw material for many sectors, make it a crop of significant economic interest and will add to the NZ Inc legacy of primary production.

Globally the iHemp industry continues to achieve a double-digit compound average growth rate and is set to become an important part of the emerging circular bioeconomy.

Consumers are calling out for transparency and are supporting industries that have a great provenance story, based on sustainability, the environment and fit for purpose products.

Manufactures are following suit and are looking for sustainable raw materials, that meet their specifications and can be continuously supplied, this is creating new opportunities for industrial hemp which is an annually renewable crop.

The number one objective of the NZHIA is to get industrial hemp out of the Misuse of Drugs Act, we are not a drug crop. And being treated as a prohibited plant is confusing and makes it difficult for the industry to access many commercial opportunities.

We need to have full plant utilisation, making use of all parts of the plant, roots, stems, seeds, leaf and flower. Thereby improving the economics of the industry, allowing all of the crop grown by farmers to be used in the food, fiber and health & wellness industries.

This NZHIA Seed Project has been set up to help small (non-commercial) growers to access the industry. Allowing cottage industry, trialists, researchers and Iwi, to get growing and prove the point.

By encouraging best practice and sharing information the NZHIA wants to help the industry self-regulate, be aware of the risks and present a professional new primary industry for the regions.

What is Industrial Hemp?

Industrial hemp is hemp is *Cannabis sativa L.* grown specifically for industrial purposes (fibre and seed) or horticultural purposes. (UN Definition exempting iHemp from the UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs) Low THC industrial hemp is not a drug and does not need to be controlled in the same way high THC cannabis is.

Although industrial hemp belongs to the same botanical species as medicinal and adult use cannabis, compliant industrial hemp cultivars naturally produce only very low concentrations (often less than 0.1%) of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the psychoactive cannabinoid responsible for intoxication. (5-25+%)

THC remains a controlled drug under the **Misuse of Drugs Act 1975**, while cannabidiol (CBD), although naturally present in iHemp, continues to be regulated separately as a prescription medicine under **Medicines Act (1981)**.

Industrial hemp should not be confused with medicinal cannabis (high and low THC), who have a separate Medicinal Cannabis Scheme and regulations. Understanding these distinctions is fundamental for anyone entering the industrial hemp industry.

The post-2026 regulations provide a clear framework for growing hemp, but no additional help for the value chain, as many markets Animal (both companion & production) and Health and Wellness sectors are closed, due to the wider regulatory framework related to THC and CBD

The 2026 Regulatory Reforms

Industrial hemp is cannabis, it is regulated under, the UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs 1961, because of the historic need to control THC.

The Ministry of Health has recognised iHemp as “low risk” and is no longer interested in the admin involved to issue licences for an agricultural crop under the 2006 iHemp regulations.

Key outcomes of the reforms include:

- Medicinal Cannabis wins – hemp can be used as a starter material in any amount, by a medicinal cannabis licence holder, previously restricted to 20 plants and 50 seed
- Improved certainty for growers and processors – supply lines can be established
- Recognition of industrial hemp as a legitimate agricultural crop – helping remove stigma
- Reinforces the need for investment in primary processing and infrastructure
- Improved opportunities for seed development and future cultivar improvement
- Highlights the need for research & development, plant breeding and innovation

Although industrial hemp remains regulated, the new framework better reflects the low-risk characteristics of low-THC iHemp cultivars. And challenges the industry to adopt best practices and self-regulate as the industry scales up.

The reforms also recognise that successful industry development depends upon collaboration between government agencies, researchers, industry organisations and growers. Highlighting the need to create a

local market for the crop, to develop processing technology to scale the industry and export opportunities for both products and services.

The NZHIA are looking forward to the Ministry for Regulations review in 2028

The Regulatory Framework

Several government agencies contribute to the administration of New Zealand's industrial hemp framework.

Agency	Primary Responsibility
Misuse of Drugs Act 1975 (Moda)	Establishes the legal distinction between industrial hemp and the controlled drug THC, treats Cannabis as a prohibited plant
Industrial Hemp Regulations 2026	Now revoked, regulated approved industrial hemp activities, cultivation and compliance requirements.
Medicines Act (1981)	Controls CBD as a prescription medicine, restricting its use to only the Medicinal Cannabis Scheme
Ministry of Health	Administers medicinal cannabis scheme and approves import/export licences for controlled drugs.
New Zealand Police	Administers notification processes for eligible low-THC cultivation activities, notifications last one year.
Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI)	Oversees biosecurity, seed importation, food safety and animal food guidance. And must also be notified prior to growing.
ACVM	Regulates agricultural compounds and veterinary medicines, has banned iHemp for use on both companion and production animals.
Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ)	Regulates hemp seed food products and labelling.

Together these organisations provide a framework that protects consumers and enables domestic and international trade.

Activities and Compliance

Different activities within the industrial hemp value chain have different regulatory requirements. Understanding these requirements helps participants determine which approvals, standards and responsibilities apply to their activities.

Activity / Issue	Key Considerations	Why It Matters
Growing industrial hemp	Notifications, low THC cultivars, THC compliance and record keeping	Legal cultivation and supply chain confidence.
Importing seed	Must comply with Import Health Standards for sowing and processing	Biosecurity – protects against pests and diseases
Processing hemp	Food safety, traceability, health and safety	Quality, meeting buyer specs and market access
Food production	Food standards	Consumer protection
Research	Funding and approving research to benefit the whole industry across many sectors, farming, food, fiber and health	Supports innovation and development when foundational research is applied commercially
Exporting	licenses required for export (and import) of controlled drugs - THC	International trade, meeting importing jurisdictions requirements
Plant breeding	Genetic integrity. Increase traits like yield and fiber content	Future cultivars improving returns for farmers and processors
Regulatory reform	To be reviewed by Ministry for Regulation in 2 years. Get out of MODA, resolve animal issue and create Natural Health Products legislation	Industry development depends on full plant utilisation and access to secondary markets (animals) and Health and Wellness markets

Compliance is not simply about meeting legal obligations. Good record keeping, traceability and responsible stewardship contribute to a trusted and professional industry that benefits all participants.

Emerging Opportunities and Future Development

The 2026 regulatory reforms mark the beginning of a new chapter in the iHemp journey to becoming an increasingly important contributor to New Zealand's agricultural and manufacturing sectors.

Opportunity	Current Position	Future Direction
Health & Wellness (1)	CBD is regulated as a prescription medicine	Support evidence-based innovation and development of a Natural Health Products framework
Minor Cannabinoids	Research constrained	Encourage research
Terpenes & Flavonoids	Limited opportunities	Enable evidence-based development
Animal Feed	ACVM restrictions apply. Due to perceived “trade risk”	Quantify risk and allow trials for production animals and access for companion animals as they are not exported
Secondary Markets	Additional controls remain on leaf, flowers and roots And co products from hemp seed food production	Support Full Plant Utilisation. Allow these co products to be used by all animals
Processing & Manufacturing	Building markets and raising awareness through education	Support domestic value chains, so we can scale into export markets

(1) Hemp seed oil, used in foods, cosmetics, dietary supplements. NZ does not have a Natural Health products regulation, so leaf, flower and root default to the Medicines Act and MODA

Global trends have placed the unique qualities of industrial hemp at the forefront of the bioeconomy's demand for sustainable annual crops with multiple end uses.

Our biggest hurdle to overcome, is to find markets and attract investment to scale into them.

Industry Responsibility

Every grower contributes to the future of New Zealand's industrial hemp industry.

Whether growing a few plants in a home garden or managing a larger planting, responsible growing practices help maintain confidence in industrial hemp and support the industry's long-term development.

Growers are encouraged to:

- understand and comply with the Industrial Hemp Regulations
- maintain good crop records
- use quality seed with known provenance
- follow good growing and harvesting practices
- communicate with neighbouring growers where pollen movement may be a consideration
- share knowledge and support industry development.

Industrial hemp cultivation remains the responsibility of the grower. While NZHIA provides educational information and practical guidance, every grower is responsible for complying with current legislation and ensuring their crop is managed appropriately.

Working together helps build a professional, collaborative and respected hemp industry for the benefit of all participants.

Continue Your Learning

Publication 0 provides the foundation for understanding New Zealand's post-2026 industrial hemp industry.

The remaining publications in the [NZHIA Knowledge Series](#) build progressively on this introduction:

- **Publication 1 – Introduction to Growing Industrial Hemp:** Planning, site selection and crop establishment.
- **Publication 2 – Harvesting and Storage:** Maintaining crop quality after harvest.
- **Publication 3 – Seed Integrity, genetics and pollen management,** cross pollination risk
- **Publication 4 – Growing for Food Markets:** Producing high-quality food-grade hemp seed.

- **Publication 5 – Growing for Medicinal Supply:** Understanding regulated medicinal cannabis supply chains.

Together, these publications provide a practical guide for small scale growers, NZHIA Seed Project participants and anyone interested in understanding and contributing to New Zealand's industrial hemp industry.

Disclaimer

This publication has been prepared by the New Zealand Hemp Industries Association (NZHIA) as general educational information for home growers, participants in the NZHIA Seed Project and members of the industrial hemp industry.

The information is intended to support good growing and harvesting practices but should not be relied upon as legal, regulatory, agronomic, food safety, medicinal cannabis or commercial advice. Requirements may vary depending on the intended end use of the crop, applicable legislation and processor specifications.

Growers remain responsible for complying with all relevant legislation, licence conditions and contractual obligations. Readers should consult the [Ministry of Police](#), [Ministry for Primary Industries](#) (MPI), the [Ministry of Health](#) and other relevant authorities for current regulatory guidance.

NZHIA encourages all participants to contribute to a professional, innovative and trusted industrial hemp industry that delivers lasting economic, environmental, health and social benefits for Aotearoa New Zealand.