

Caricom commission to study marijuana legalization

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In this Aug. 29, 2013 file photo, farmer Breezy shows off the distinctive leaves of a marijuana plant during a tour of his plantation in Jamaica's central mountain town of Nine Mile. A Caribbean trade bloc has created a commission to study whether the region's people should be allowed to use medical marijuana and how courts should handle possession of small amounts of the drug. Leaders said Wednesday, July 2, 2014 that the commission is expected to submit reports by February 2016. The plant is still illegal in Jamaica, where it is known popularly as "ganja." (AP Photo/David McFadden, File)

A Caribbean trade bloc has created a commission to study whether the region's roughly 15 million people should be allowed to use medical marijuana and how courts should handle possession of small amounts of the drug.

Leaders said late Wednesday that the commission is expected to submit reports by Caricom's next summit, scheduled for February 2016.

A recent preliminary report from Caricom found that decriminalizing medical marijuana could help boost the region's economy.

Activists in Jamaica, St. Lucia and other islands have been pushing to legalize marijuana use and Jamaica's government recently announced it plans to partially decriminalize small amounts of pot and to allow possession for religious, scientific and medical purposes.

Uruguay recently became the first country to approve nationwide pot legalization, while the U.S. states of Washington and Colorado passed laws allowing recreational use in 2012. In addition, 20 U.S. states and the District of Columbia already have medical marijuana laws.

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