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**INTERNET PIRACY COURT CASE IS THROWN OUT BY JUDGE;
RECORD LABELS LOSE BATTLE**

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IRISH music lovers can continue nicking tunes from the internet after a judge threw out a piracy case brought by the world's biggest record labels.

Tiny web provider UPC scored a landmark victory against Warner Music, Universal Music, Sony BMG and EMI Records who had pushed for a "three strikes and you're out" rule to stop people downloading songs.

But the High Court ruled laws to identify and cut off internet users illegally copying music files were not enforceable in Ireland.

The decision may have serious implications for an out-of-court agreement the giant companies secured with Eircom last year.

It is understood Vodafone and Meteor are in talks over the threat of illegal downloads while O2 and 3 Ireland were also awaiting the outcome of the case.

Mr Justice Peter Charleton warned recording companies were being devastated by internet piracy.

He said: "This not only undermines their business but ruins the ability of a generation of creative people in Ireland and elsewhere to establish a viable living.

"It is destructive of an important native industry."

But the judge added laws were not in place in Ireland to enforce disconnections over illegal downloads despite the record companies' complaints being merited. He also said this gap in legislation meant Ireland was not complying with European law and therefore a substantial portion of UPC's 150,000 customers were illegally downloading music. UPC said it would work with all parties to identify and address main areas of concern over downloads.

A spokesman added: "UPC has repeatedly stressed it does not condone piracy and has always taken a strong stance against illegal activity on its network."

The four music labels have seen sales fall by EUR64million from 2005 to 2009.

Dick Doyle, director-general of the Irish Recorded Music Association, said they were "disappointed" with the outcome and they will pressurise the Government to reform the law.

Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources Eamon Ryan is to meet music industry bosses and internet providers to discuss the issue and to "formulate an agreed approach", a spokeswoman said.

EUR64M How much Warner Music, Universal Music, Sony BMG and EMI have lost in four years

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