



21st April 2005

MSP proposal a threat to whisky industry

A Scottish Parliamentary motion, to be heard today (21 April), has been attacked by distillers as “short sighted and potentially deeply damaging to the future sustainability of Scotland’s leading export, and the thousands of jobs that depend on it.”

Scotch Whisky producers are committed, long-term supporters of Scottish cereal growers. Contrary to this support and both UK and EU law, the motion proposed by Andrew Arbuckle MSP would severely restrict the ability of distillers to source the best quality raw materials to produce Scotch.

Distillers warned that a ban on using non-Scottish cereals was gambling the industry’s future against the vagaries of the weather. A bad harvest would mean distillers could not source enough cereals of the right quality, constraining production. Such a restriction could damage Scotch Whisky’s international competitiveness and prevent it meeting growing demand in emerging markets, such as China and India.

Gavin Hewitt, Chief Executive of The Scotch Whisky Association, said:

“Over 90% of our barley requirements come from Scottish growers, clearly demonstrating distillers’ commitment to using Scottish cereals whenever possible. We are proud of the Scotch Whisky industry’s support for the rural economy.

“Restricting flexibility to source enough raw materials of the right quality would be short sighted and protectionist. We would be gambling with the industry’s future if Scotch could only be made from Scottish cereals.



“Distillers and the NFU Scotland both agree that such a restriction would be in no-one’s interests. Sustainability would be at the mercy of the weather and harvest, our ability to compete internationally could be restricted, and jobs across the whisky supply chain would be threatened.

“Scotch Whisky has been defined for over seventy years. That recognition, protected in UK and EU law, underpins its quality reputation for consumers worldwide. While production must take place in Scotland, there has, for very good reason, never been a requirement to only use Scottish cereals. Scotland does not produce a sufficient amount of the cereals necessary to meet whisky production requirements, and other market demands.”

Mr Hewitt concluded: “We cannot believe a Scottish Parliament committed to building Scotland’s economic future would support such a threat to Scotland’s leading export.”

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Note to Editors:

Motion S2M-2650, proposed by Andrew Arbuckle MSP, is the subject of a Scottish Parliament Members’ Debate on Thursday 21 April.

Scotch Whisky producers spend £700m a year with Scottish suppliers, including over £90m on Scottish cereals, supporting over 40,000 jobs. The overwhelming majority of industry barley and wheat requirements are bought in Scotland.

Scotch Whisky has been defined in UK law since 1933, with no requirement to use Scottish cereals, and is also recognised at both EU and WTO level. The international reputation of Scotch is established on the production process taking place in Scotland.

The motion calls for Scotch to seek protected geographical indication (PGI) status - however, this fails to understand that Scotch has already been protected in EU law for over 15 years. The motion would dilute existing protection, and, even if possible, would not require the use of only Scottish cereals.

Issued by David Williamson

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