



17 June 2008

Time to Scotch alcohol misuse say distillers

Scottish Government plans to tackle alcohol misuse are a starting point for future debate on how to change the drinking culture in Scotland, said The Scotch Whisky Association (SWA) today.

“We agree with Government that attitudes to alcohol in Scotland must change” said the SWA, noting support for a number of industry measures in the Government plan. However, the SWA also raised concerns that certain proposals “risk undermining Scotch Whisky in its home market.”

Whilst commending Government support for all alcohol to be taxed on the same basis according to alcohol content, the SWA said that the discussion paper “had failed to answer the exam question” on any future minimum pricing scheme by not including a competition law assessment of proposals leading to politicians interfering in the commercial market.

Concerns were also raised in relation to new rules that could prevent the promotion of Scotch Whisky in licensed premises, including tasting a dram at the end of a distillery tour, negatively impacting on rural visitor centres and local tourism.

The SWA welcomed the plan’s support for strict enforcement of licensing laws, targeted health interventions, improved alcohol education, and a partnership approach to tackling alcohol misuse. Distillers will also work with Government on its plans to tackle irresponsible promotions.

Recognition of industry’s voluntary labelling scheme and the decision to allow valued distiller support for cultural and sports events at local and national level to continue was also welcomed.

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

“Scotch Whisky producers are committed to tackling alcohol misuse in partnership with government. There are a range of measures in this package that we can support and help to deliver. The plan could, however, have been better targeted on the minority who misuse alcohol and some of the blanket measures risk undermining Scotch Whisky in its home market.

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“A number of proposals undoubtedly cause industry concern and could have international implications. Minimum prices for alcoholic drinks set by politicians intrude in the commercial market. Advertising and promotion restrictions will also need to be carefully scrutinised as they could negatively impact on the sale of Scotch Whisky in licensed premises and rural distillery visitor centres.”

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Note to Editors:

1. The Scotch Whisky Association is a founder member of the Scottish Government & Alcohol Industry Partnership to tackle alcohol misuse. Partnership initiatives include the groundbreaking Alcohol Awareness Week, held in October 2007, and development of guidelines to deal with alcohol issues in the workplace.
2. The SWA's Code of Practice on Responsible Marketing and Promotion of Scotch Whisky governs the global promotion of Scotch Whisky. It is backed by an independent complaints panel process and financial sanctions. The Code is recognised as best practice by the EU Alcohol & Health Forum.
3. Most bottles of Scotch Whisky now carry unit information and a responsible drinking message, with new voluntary standards being rolled out in 2007 to include guidance on daily consumption benchmarks and on drinking when pregnant or trying to conceive.
4. For further information please contact Campbell Evans (020 7629 4384 or 07768 002 262) or David Williamson (0131 222 9230 or 07730 496 151).