

minutes

Meeting: Cross Party Group on Scotch Whisky
Location: David Livingstone (committee room 6), Scottish Parliament
Date Held: Tuesday 26 May 2015
Present: MSPs: Claudia Beamish, Chic Brodie, Gordon MacDonald, Jamie McGrigor, and Mary Scanlon.

Other attendees: David Frost (SWA), Rosemary Gallagher (SWA), Liam Hughes (SCDA), Lauren McArthur (SWA), Tony Reeman-Clark (SCDA), Devin Scobie (Caledonia Public Affairs), Neil Sinclair (Scottish Government), Ian Smith (Diageo), Richard Walsh (Visit Scotland), and David Williamson (SWA).

	Action
Mary Scanlon chaired the meeting and welcomed attendees.	
1. Minutes	
The group approved the minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2015.	
2. Election of Officials	
The Group held its annual general meeting. Gordon MacDonald and Mary Scanlon were confirmed as co-conveners, with Claudia Beamish and David Stewart approved as deputy conveners.	
3. Scotch Whisky tourism	
Rosemary Gallagher (Head of Communications, SWA) presented on the key findings of new research on Scotch Whisky related tourism.	
Key findings included:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1.5 million distillery visitors in 2014, an increase of 6% on 2013 (and up 15% since 2010).• Whisky distilleries collectively, in terms of visitor numbers, are as popular as some of the best-known UK attractions, including Edinburgh Castle, Stonehenge and London Zoo.• Visitor spending equated to £50m, up from £27m in 2010.• Average visitor spend is £32.50.• The main visitor nationalities were British, German and French.	
The Group welcomed the positive impact of whisky tourism and discussed investment within the sector to provide a premium experience for visitors to Scotland. The success of the Speyside and Islay Festivals, as well as Whisky Month and the Year of Food & Drink, was recognised.	
4. Scottish Craft Distillers Association	
Tony Reeman-Clark (Chairman, SCDA) provided an overview of the SCDA's vision, goals and objectives. Set up in 2013, its objectives include promotion, market development and establishment of an	

accreditation scheme. The organisation represents distillers of a variety of spirit drinks, including gin, vodka, and whisky. It had received advice and support from the likes of the International Centre for Brewing & Distilling (Heriot Watt), Interface Food & Drink, SDI/Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Government and the SWA.

The Group welcome the trend of new small-scale Scottish distillers and the jobs/investment being created. 10 new distilleries should be in operation by the end of 2015, with another 20 at different stages of development. There was positive engagement going on across the wider industry, with Ian Smith (Diageo) highlighting the support being given by his company and other existing distillers.

From a policy perspective, the SCDA highlighted its interest in securing a lower excise duty rate for small distillers and the cost and administrative issues its members encountered with the HM Revenue & Customs spirit drinks verification scheme.

The SWA noted that the first two year round of verifications should complete by the end of 2015 and that there would likely be a review at that point which would allow the industry as a whole to feed in its views and experience. There needed to be a balance between the protection of the Scotch Whisky geographical indication and minimising the burden on companies. The SCDA was invited to provide the Group with a note on verification issues.

SCDA

5. Future work programme

It was agreed that the group would next meet on Thursday 17 September (1-2pm in TG20/21), with a final meeting in 2015 to be held on Thursday 3 December (1-2pm in TG20/21). One of those meetings would explore in more depth the industry's environmental sustainability strategy, which is currently being refreshed by the SWA.

SWA

6. Islay whisky tasting

To mark the week of the Islay Whisky Festival during Scotland's Year of Food & Drink, David Williamson (SWA) gave an overview of the industry's Islay heritage, the sector's economic importance to the island, and introduced group members to three Islay Single Malt whiskies.

For more information please contact Beatrice Morrice bmorrice@swa.org.uk or call 0131 222 9247.