

minutes

Meeting: Cross Party Group and All Party Parliamentary Group on Scotch Whisky

Location: Online video call – MS Teams

Date Held: Wednesday 11 November 2020

Attendees: **MPs:** Alan Brown, Wendy Chamberlain, Martin Docherty-Hughes, Brendan O’Hara, Christopher Stephens, Alison Thewliss, Gavin Newlands, Christine Jardine.

MSPs: Liam McArthur, David Stewart, Tom Mason, Colin Smyth.

Other attendees: Stacey Adam (George Adam MSP Assistant), Tim Allison (in-House), Susy Atkinson (Edrington), Karen Betts (SWA), Aoife Clarke (Beam Suntory) Peter Finnie (SEPA), Karen Freel (Perspectiva Consultants), Keir Greenway (GMB), Fraser Grieve (SWA), Steve Kerr (Caledonia Public Affairs) Graeme Littlejohn (SWA), Willie MacLeod (UK Hospitality), Gordon McKee (Assistant Ian Murray MP), Sarah Masson (Gordon MacDonald MSP Assistant) Beatrice Morrice (SWA), Declan Pang (SWA), Ian Smith (Diageo), David Saer (Portman), David Williamson (Wm Grant).

Brendan O’Hara MP chaired the meeting.

1. Impact of Covid-19

Karen Betts, SWA, provided information on the impact of COVID-19 on the Scotch Whisky industry, tourism and hospitality. She underlined that Scotch Whisky exports had reduced and that overall alcohol consumption had decreased during lockdown. She explained that Scotch Whisky tourism had been impacted, that some of the newer companies rely on income from tourism and that ongoing support was important. Karen reiterated that the safety of members’ staff and customers was of upmost importance however she questioned whether evidence had been used to make decisions relating to hospitality restrictions.

Willie MacLeod, Executive Director for Scotland, UK Hospitality, provided information on the hospitality industry stating that they had invested around £80-90 million to make venues Covid-safe. He stated that the current measures were putting 70-80,000 jobs at risk, despite 0.48% of staff reporting a positive test result through track and trace, and 0.1% of customers.

He explained that effective two-way discussions between government and industry needs to improve and that support for businesses should be provided if restrictions are to continue.

The discussion covered many areas including questions regarding scientific evidence and the importance for industry to work together and have effective communications on lockdown exit/reopening strategies.

Action

2. US Tariffs

Graeme Littlejohn provided an update on US tariffs. He explained that Scotch Whisky exports to the US had decreased by 31% this year and that the industry continues to actively press for a resolution. He stated that trade talks were ongoing throughout the administration change and highlighted the need to keep up the pressure. Members agreed to reach out to US groups and politicians going forward.

3. Duty Reform

Graeme provided information on the UK Government's duty reform consultation. The SWA's response underlines the need for a more rational and fairer system. Members were asked to keep up the pressure on Treasury Ministers for a speedy review.

4. AOB

Beatrice Morrice stated that the SWA will be launching the industry's reviewed Sustainability Strategy in January. Members will be updated on the detail soon.

For more information please contact Beatrice Morrice: bmorrice@swa.org.uk