

Alcohol charities fear conflict of interest

A key civil servant who has been part of a team responsible for the implementation of Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) in Scotland has been confirmed as the incoming Chief Executive of the Scotch Whisky Association (SWA). The SWA announced last week that Mr David Frost, currently Director of Europe, Trade and International Affairs at the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills will take up the SWA post next year.

Scottish and European health campaigners expressed surprise that a current senior civil servant in a key Department dealing with the implementation of Minimum Unit Pricing for alcohol has been confirmed as the incoming Chief Executive of the Scotch Whisky Association.

Mariann Skar, Secretary General at the European Alcohol Policy Alliance, Eurocare, shares the concerns of the Scottish organisations: ***“What is happening in Scotland is a situation where there is a clear conflict of interest. Federal Governments should impose a minimum of 12 months quarantine periods before regulators may return to private enterprise.”***

Dr Peter Rice, chair of SHAAP said: ***“His appointment raises some questions. Will he continue to represent the UK government in trade discussions involving alcohol until he takes up his SWA post? When did his relationship with the SWA start and what role has he played in the development of his Department’s policy on minimum unit pricing?”***

Dr Evelyn Gillan, Chief Executive of Alcohol Focus Scotland said: ***“AFS has been closely involved in countering the SWA’s challenge to minimum unit pricing by presenting the evidence that it will reduce harm and save lives. We were delighted that the Court found in favour of the Scottish Government in May and disappointed that the SWA and their allies immediately appealed, further delaying implementation. Mr Frost’s appointment to the organisation opposing minimum pricing is an obvious conflict of interest and another example of the revolving door between the public and private sector where gamekeeper turns poacher.”***

The Scotch Whisky Association is currently involved in legal action in Scottish courts which is delaying the implementation of the Minimum Unit Price legislation passed by the Scottish Parliament in May 2012. Part of the SWA’s campaign against MUP has been focused on the trade implications for Europe.

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EUROCARE (The European Alcohol Policy Alliance) is an alliance of non-governmental and public health organisations with around 50 member organisations across 23 European countries advocating the prevention and reduction of alcohol related harm in Europe.

www.eurocare.org

Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP) SHAAP was established in 2006 by the Scottish Medical Royal Colleges and Faculties to raise awareness about alcohol-related harm and to promote solutions based on the best available evidence. It operates as an Advocacy Body to provide a coordinated, coherent and authoritative medical voice on reducing the impact of alcohol-related harm on the health and well-being of the people of Scotland.

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Alcohol Focus Scotland (AFS) is national charity working to reduce the harm caused by alcohol. Our vision is to create a culture where low alcohol consumption is the norm and people who choose not to drink are supported in their choice.

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FACTS AND FIGURES ON ALCOHOL

- Europe has the highest drinking levels in the world, the highest alcohol per capita consumption and the highest alcohol- related harm problems.
- Chronic diseases, to which alcohol is the 3rd main contributory factor, are in the top of global risks next to such threats like fiscal crises and are expected to cost global economy over 30 trillion USD over the next two decades.
- €155.8 billion is the social costs attributable to alcohol in the EU on a yearly basis
- 1 in 4 of male deaths between 15-29 years are due to alcohol
- Alcohol is a major contributory factor in accidents; 1 in 4 of all road traffic deaths are caused by alcohol
- Alcohol is a risk factor in some 60 diseases such as cancer, liver cirrhosis etc. Taking all diseases and injuries at global level into account, **the negative health impact of alcohol consumption is 31.6 times higher than benefit**