



**Response to the Department of Communities Consultation
Liquor Licensing Laws in Northern Ireland**

From: Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance (NITA)

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Summary

Before the collapse of the NI Executive in 2016, work was ongoing to take a Bill through the committee stage to move forward the liquor licensing legislation and we welcome this consultation on amending the legislation. NITA does not support a complete deregulation of licensing legislation. We support responsible drinking and the introduction of the Joint Industry Code for the Responsible Promotion of Alcohol (NI).

The Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance was established in August 2018 to provide a single, independent voice for the Tourism Industry in Northern Ireland. NITA's membership covers a wide range of sectors making up the tourism economy including: Accommodation Providers; Hospitality; Destination marketing organisations: Major Tourist Attractions; Tour Guides; Passenger and Public Transport; Airports; Ports; Airlines; Local Councils; Tourism NI; Tourism Ireland; Education providers

NITA's role, as the single representative body for the tourism and hospitality industry in Northern Ireland, is to represent our members and ensure the voice of industry is listened to, to shape the future growth of tourism and lobbying at all levels of government and beyond to raise awareness of, and contributing to the solution of, major strategic issues affecting the industry, which include everything from the UK's exit from the European Union, the impact of APD, VAT, Skills, sustainability and creating an environment that enables the industry to be competitive.

NI faces unique challenges and competition when compared to the rest of the UK with regard to Liquor Licensing legislation. NI's Licensing legislation is outdated and out of step with the rest of the UK. There is a clear need for licensing legislation to be updated to reflect the needs of a modern market and to support the growth of the Tourism and Hospitality industry.

Tourism is one of the success stories in Northern Ireland. An industry that has seen 35% growth in the last 5 years generating almost £1bn in tourist spend in 2018 and employing 65,000 people (8.7% of total jobs in NI). Tourists from outside of NI accounted for over 70% of spend making it an export led economic sector. The ambition is to double the economic impact of the industry, growing visitor spend to £2bn and creating another 25,000 jobs. To enable this growth, we must be able to provide experiences that meet the needs of the modern tourist and this includes the update of our liquor licensing legislation.

The Hospitality Industry are a critical component of the tourism offer, and bringing the liquor licensing up to date will help to secure the sustainability of the sector.

RESPONSES to QUESTIONS

Category of Licenses

Do you think the current 12 categories of license are adequate? Please explain.

NO

We would support the introduction of another category of licensing to reflect the growing number of small independent breweries, distilleries and cider makers in Northern Ireland which has tripled over the last decade. Interest in local artisan drinks is rising. It is an important part of our food and drink tourism landscape and is a popular tourism experience with international and local tourists alike. Trying locally produced craft drink is a key part of an authentic visitor experience along with the opportunity to buy the product tourists have seen being made on the premises and our artisan producers should be able to provide this. There should also be the ability to sell locally produced craft drink at tourism, cultural and other special events.

From a consumption perspective this would be a limited license to facilitate sampling and we would refer you to the Guidance on the Implementation of the Responsible Retailing Code (3rd Edition January 2018) which provides guidance on sampling size.

Permitted Hours

Do you think the current permitted hours for licensed premises are appropriate? Please explain.

NO

With the trend for tourists to dine later and wanting entertainment later in the evening we would support the extension of the current permitted hours to be extended to from 1am to 2am. This would help with the sustainability of the hospitality industry, provide an improved evening experience for tourists and support the growth of the tourism economy.

NITA does not support a complete deregulation of licensing legislation. We support responsible drinking and the introduction of the Joint Industry Code for the Responsible Promotion of Alcohol (NI).

Easter Opening

Do you think the current opening hours for Easter are appropriate? Please explain.

NO

The current opening hours for Easter are out of date with the rest of the UK and we support the laws being brought into line with normal opening hours, please see our response to Permitted Hours.

This will meet the needs of a modern market place and growth of the tourism economy.

Major Events

Do you think the current licensing laws regarding major events are adequate? Please explain.

NO

The restrictive licensing laws present challenges to the hosting of 'Major Events' and as such we support the introduction of powers to vary permitted hours for sale of alcoholic drinks and to allow

certain off sales at 'Major Events' of economic or cultural significance taking place in Northern Ireland. This should also include major sporting events.

Northern Ireland is a world recognised destination for Food and Drink with an increasing number of local craft breweries, distilleries and cider makers. It is a missed opportunity that it is currently not possible to sell for consumption or off sale our locally produced craft drinks at 'Major Events'.

Codes of Practice

Do you think the Department should be allowed to formally approve industry codes of practice?

YES

We think that the Department should be allowed to formally approve industry codes of practice. A good example of industry led codes of practice is the campaign for the Responsible Retailing of Alcohol, championed by Hospitality Ulster, which led to the Joint Industry Code for the Responsible Promotion of Alcohol (NI).