



Department for

Communities

www.communities-ni.gov.uk

An Roinn

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Department for

Commonities

Private Office

Level 9

Causeway Exchange

1-7 Bedford Street

Belfast

BT2 7EG

e-mail: Assembly.section@communities-ni.gov.uk

Telephone: (028) 9051 5234 (DD 75234)

Dr Janice Thompson
Communities Committee Clerk
Room 430
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

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Dear Janice

NORTHERN IRELAND BREWERY AND INDEPENDENT PUB ASSOCIATION RE TAP ROOMS

Thank you for your email dated 18 March in which you share correspondence issued to the Committee from William Mayne, on behalf of the Northern Ireland Brewery and Independent Pub Association and the Society of Independent Brewers, regarding taprooms.

Having considered the evidence from 2016, it was an error to state that there was no reference to taprooms during the passage of 2016 Bill, however no attempt was made to intentionally mislead the Committee.

During the Committee Stage of the 2016 Bill, which ran from 6 October to 8 December 2016, there were 21 oral evidence sessions over many hours, with one reference to tap rooms. This witness mentioned taprooms in passing while acknowledging the potential for abuse of the on-sales element resulting in taprooms effectively operating as pubs.

Discussion in respect of consumption on the premises focussed more on a tasting experience following a tour to allow customers to purchase for consumption off the premises.

Officials have engaged with local producers since 2015, visiting a number of breweries, cideries and distilleries. The key issues raised by all was the lack of ability to sell their products for consumption off the premises, including online; to sell their products at food and drink fairs; and to provide a tasting sample for those customers following a tour of the premises. The current Bill addresses these key issues for local producers.

Throughout these discussions with local producers, some specifically mentioned that they did not want the option for taprooms. There were a number of reasons for this including the location of

many of the premises were at the producer's home, suitability of premises and having to deal with issues arising from people consuming drink on the premises.

In responses to the Committee call for evidence on this Bill, Hospitality Ulster and the Law Society both cautioned against a move to widen the current provision in the Bill. The Institute of Public Health in Ireland also cautioned against "further expansion of the licence category as this may edge towards further normalising alcohol use".

Having reviewed the evidence given by officials to the Committee on 11 March, the Department is confident it was balanced. While recognising that there appear to be benefits to the introduction of taprooms for the owners of breweries, officials advised the Committee that no impact assessments had been carried out on the potential unintended consequences of allowing consumption on the premises. These assessments were not carried out as officials work under the direction of Ministers and increasing the number of premises where drink can be consumed on the premises has not been part of the policy.

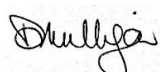
Mr Mayne also references a meeting with officials on 10 April 2019 and specifically quotes a comment allegedly made by an official. The Department holds a brief note of that meeting which lists the issues discussed as:

- the options for bringing forward a change in legislation to include local alcohol producers as a category of licence'
- the 2016 Bill and the general consensus of the Committee;
- the wish list of the producers; and
- legislation in ROI, GB and the USA.

This meeting was held during a consultation on special events by the Department which ran from 22 March and 3 May 2019. Mr Mayne requested the meeting, alongside a fellow brewer, to discuss the possibility of local producers being included in any potential legislation being taken through Westminster, in the absence of a functioning Assembly, to provide for a "special events" licence. Officials recall advising the attendees at the meeting that it was very unlikely that Westminster would take forward such legislation but not the attributed quote Mr Mayne refers to.

I hope you find this helpful and I would be grateful if you could share with Committee Members.

Yours sincerely



Diane Mulligan

Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer
Private Office