



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Licensing and Registration of Clubs
(Amendment) Bill:
Food NI, Campaign for Real Ale,
Lacada Brewery, Armagh Cider Company

17 November 2016

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Colum Eastwood (Chairperson)
Mr Steven Agnew
Mr Andy Allen
Mr Jonathan Bell
Ms Nichola Mallon
Mr Fra McCann
Mr Adrian McQuillan
Ms Carál Ní Chuilín

Witnesses:

Ms Helen Troughton	Armagh Cider Company
Mr Tim Page	CAMRA
Ms Michele Shirlow	Food NI
Mr Laurie Davies	Lacada Brewery Ltd

The Chairperson (Mr Eastwood): With us today are Ms Michele Shirlow, chief executive of Food NI; Mr Tim Page, chief executive of the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA); Mr Laurie Davies, head brewer and director at Lacada Brewery; and Ms Helen Troughton, brewer at Armagh Cider Company. Folks, you are very welcome. We have had a number of perspectives on the Bill over the weeks, and we will have a few more today. I know that you are not here as one group, but we are trying to group people given the interest in the issue. You will have five minutes each, folks. Is that all right? Then we will open up the meeting to questions or comments. Maybe we will start with Michele.

Ms Michele Shirlow (Food NI): Thank you, Chairman, for the invitation to provide oral evidence. Food Northern Ireland is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. Our aim is to enhance the reputation of food and drink from Northern Ireland. We have 430 industry members who are local food and drink producers and restaurants. They are driving forward Northern Ireland's Year of Food and Drink 2016. We represent everybody from Moy Park to artisan producers. We are very close to the industry and see at first hand the changes taking place here in Northern Ireland.

When we started up in 2009, there were only a very small number of local drinks producers, only two of which joined us as members. Now, in 2016, we know that there are at least 35 drinks producers in Northern Ireland, and we have 26 members who are actively promoting their produce and looking to get export markets. In the past seven years, we have witnessed rapid growth in the craft drinks sector, which has high employment and export potential, as well as very high tourism appeal. It is very important because 75% of the hospitality sector here is driven by food and drink. We know that, when we take out accommodation, at least two thirds of tourism spend is based on food and drink.

We have seen a sector emerge that has potential to grow and make a real impact on the agri-food sector and the tourism sector. It is distinctive and it is creating economic growth. Food and drink tourism is huge business now and growing rapidly. It is overtaking golf tourism in importance. A recent Expedia survey stated that local food and drink are five times more likely to influence the destination choice of holidaymakers now than they were just three years ago.

From our experience of working closely with the industry on the ground, it is our view that the current licensing laws need to be modernised to meet this change in the industry. We believe that, at present, they prevent the establishment of visitor attractions and visitor experiences. Those are huge potential tourism drivers. It is no secret that the Guinness Storehouse is the most visited tourist attraction in Ireland. They are also economically significant. Saint Brendan's, for example, uses something like one third of the milk produced in the north-west.

The current laws have been a major restraint for us at significant food and drink events, specifically the BBC Good Food Show, Flavours of the Foyle, the Comber Earlies Festival and the Balmoral Show food pavilion. None of these existed five or six years ago. At the Balmoral Show food pavilion, for example, up to 30 international trade buyers come to the arena in order to spot future talent to list in retail. Even at the World Police and Fire Games, we had an opportunity to showcase our drinks industry but were unable to do so. Really, we want the opportunity to enhance the reputation of this region by showcasing the industry in its entirety.

I mentioned the Year of Food of Drink, which is coming to its final month. One of its key benefits has been the ability to bring in a lot of key influencers who are experts in their field, allowing them to experience the Northern Ireland industry for the first time. They include Charles Campion of 'MasterChef'; Adrian Tierney-Jones, a beer writer; and Pete Brown, who writes about cider. The overwhelming factor for us is that they were all highly impressed by the quality of food and drink produced here, and they take that message away with them. A particular comment that I want to mention is from Pete Brown, a prolific writer on cider. I have one of his books with me. After visiting Armagh, he came to us and said, "You have a really unique cluster here. You have one of the only clusters that still makes cider using pure juice". In a lot of manufacturing now, cider is made from reconstituted concentrate, but we had a lot of farm diversification, which has meant that there is a direct link back to the orchard. He also said that the cluster here was unique because we use a single variety in our ciders. He finished off by saying that, "You are definitely the only region that would put a Bramley apple anywhere near a cider". Not only did he say that, but he then wrote an article in that week's edition of 'The Morning Advertiser, a magazine for publicans that goes across the UK. He wrote, "If you are thinking of sourcing cider, why not come to Northern Ireland?".

Our submission lists a tiny fraction of the world awards that producers here are starting to win. Shortcross, for example, won a masters in ultra-premium gin at the world gin masters awards. It is now stocked in duty-free shops across the UK. The first to stock it was Belfast International Airport, and you will remember that we opened a shop there. Long Meadow cider has won a gold star taste award. Tempted and Mac Ivors came joint first in the Blas na hÉireann awards 2016, firmly making Northern Ireland the cider capital of Ireland. Finally, Kilmegan probably greatly annoyed everybody by coming second out of 600 ciders to become supreme reserve champion at the Bath and West cider championships.

These products are not cheap, and they are not targeted at a mass market. They are about quality and provenance, and they have high added value.

From our perspective, unfortunately, the laws have not kept up. We recommend a slight amendment to request the creation of a properly controlled new licence category for producers only to facilitate the growth of local brewers, cideries and distillers. We would like the licence to cover product that is made on site and to help to facilitate visitor experiences. We would like it to be transferable to designated quality food and drink shows and fairs, subject to endorsement that it is a bone fide producer and a legitimate food and drink event, so that companies such as Shortcross, Echlinville, Kilmegan, Long Meadow and Whitewater are in a position to open viable tourist attractions and take advantage of the growth of interest in this area. Then, at food and drink events that showcase the region, we could promote all this talent. Thank you very much for listening.

Mr Tim Page (CAMRA): Good morning. CAMRA has been in existence for 45 years and represents consumers of quality beer, cider and perry, which is the equivalent of cider but made from pears. CAMRA is a volunteer-led organisation that has no commercial motive. It is independent of the producers and retailers of the alcoholic drinks that we champion. The organisation was founded in

1971 by a group of individuals who were concerned about the increasing demise in the quality of beer available to drinkers and the fact that an increasing number of outlets were no longer stocking it.

Some of you will remember the prevalence of beers such as Watneys Red Barrel, Double Diamond and the like. The increasing monopoly of those large industrial producers was causing the demise of local producers. Some 45 years on, the situation has changed considerably, and there are now, across the four countries of the United Kingdom, more than 1,700 brewers of beer, many of them local, as is the case with the 27 brewers in Northern Ireland, producing artisan products of undoubted quality, as Michele said.

We represent 185,000 members, but, beyond that, we have been campaigning on behalf of discerning drinkers of beer, cider and perry for many years. We also campaign on behalf of those who favour drinking socially in public settings and licensed establishments as opposed to those who buy their alcohol in supermarkets and other off-sales establishments and take it home. Our position with regard to alcohol abuse is that we are keen advocates of moderate and responsible drinking. We believe strongly that that is best effected in establishments where the licensee has the responsibility in law to supervise what goes on in their establishment.

With regard to the matter in hand, we would strongly support the introduction of a licence for producers to enable them, as happens in the other three countries in the United Kingdom, to sell at source and invite visitors, most obviously tourists in Northern Ireland, into their premises to show them how the drinks are produced and then to be able to sell them. That would provide producers with an immediate economic advantage in being able to derive a greater income from the sale than if selling through wholesalers. Importantly, however, it meets the requirement of those who visit breweries and apple, cider and perry producers and who, perhaps, having sampled the product, want to take it away and subsequently access it. A large number of the equivalent producers to those here in Northern Ireland sell their products online, which, of course, they are unable to do here.

Whether it is to enable producers to sell in the brewery at the end of a tour, in a shop such as that which Bushmills has at its distillery, at festivals, farmers' markets or online, CAMRA strongly believes that it is to the benefit of consumers locally and those who visit from abroad to be able to buy at source. Of course, there is great economic benefit for Northern Ireland from the further development and growth of the brewing and cider production industries here. I am told that 16,700 people are employed in pubs or in the brewing industry here, and there is, I think, scope, through encouragement in law, for further development.

We also feel that it is time to create a more level playing field than that which currently exists, whereby brewers and producers of cider and perry who are based overseas are able to come here and more freely sell their products directly to customers than those based in Northern Ireland.

That is it. Thank you very much for the opportunity to present the opinions of the customers whom I represent.

Mr Laurie Davies (Lacada Brewery Ltd): I am the head brewer and a co-owner of Lacada Brewery. We are fairly new and have been on the go for about a year. Our 283 co-owners put in £100,000 to be shareholders in the company. We have just finished year 1 trading, so we are definitely at the coalface.

I will deal with three areas: sustainability, development and enrichment. Tim used the analogy of an uneven playing field. I would say that we are not even on the playing field sometimes; we are ballboys who stand at the side, and, when we do get on to the field, we are swatted away by the big boys. We have trade restrictions here, and the lack of a producer's licence means that we cannot sustain ourselves or grow. We have made a number of one-on-one sales directly to the public through occasional licences at festivals. In our first year of trading, the injection of that cash flow has been brilliant for the business — in some aspects, almost crucial. It also allows for feedback from the public and the educational element that goes with our product. We find that, because of the nature of the product, when we meet the public, we are able to sell it very well. Even when sampling, we cannot sell it. If we had a producer's licence, we could do that at our brewery. From going on brewery tours across the water, I know that some people walk away with a case of beer to take home. We are continually asked for a tour of the brewery and whether our beers can be bought at the end of the tour. They cannot, so there is an awkwardness, and it is also a significant income loss.

We are primarily a community-based cooperative and have always said that we will support primary and secondary employment and our hospitality industry. Being based in Portrush on the north coast,

we support the tourism industry as much as we can — our products are tied into that — and recently held our first Portrush beer and food festival. It was packed and people were queuing outside the door. That is when we can sell directly to the public, and we had breweries from across Ireland there. That is what I mean about enrichment: it is what we can do for the community when we meet people and can sell directly to them.

Tim commented on responsible drinking. Given the nature of our products, that is what we encourage, and it is what we get from the public.

If we had a producer's licence, we could sell on brewery tours and support the hospitality industry. We could also have a network of breweries across the North and even in the Republic of Ireland. People could have a map of where to visit in order to buy the product directly and meet the producers, chat to them and ask them questions. As it is, already this year, we have had people from breweries in Texas and Brazil coming along, having found out on the Internet where we are.

A producer's licence would also allow us to sell online. We have a website — most breweries have great websites — but the product cannot be sold online. We can display it, but we are restricted in that aspect as well.

As you know, there is a producer's licence across the water in Scotland, England and Wales. We do not have one here for various reasons. We need to catch up and support our burgeoning industry. Five years ago, it did not exist, bar two microbreweries. Cider producers have come galloping along as well. We have it all here. We just need to be allowed to trade more freely and meet our public. That is my pitch to the Committee.

Ms Helen Troughton (Armagh Cider Company): Thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to speak to you. We are a family business and have been growing apples for five generations. We were one of the first ones to do so. The Armagh Cider Company has led the rejuvenation of cider making in County Armagh. When we started in 2005, we were the only cider maker. Seven others now participate at various levels. We make cider from blossom to bottle on our home farm in Ballinteggart. That means that we grow the apples, harvest them, press them into juice, ferment them into cider, filter, blend and then bottle.

Under current legislation in Northern Ireland, we are prevented from selling our cider directly to the public. This is restricting the growth of our industry. To get products to market, we are compelled to use the services of an intermediary — an off-licence, bar or alcohol distributor. We rely on them to convey our story and sell our product for us. Indeed, many supermarkets and larger shops will deal only with distributors and not with small producers. To get our products listed, we have to compete directly against the mainstream brands on margin and volume, which is well-nigh impossible for artisan producers. The mainstream brands also have huge marketing budgets, enabling them to become household names through widespread advertising coverage. If we were based in any other part of the UK, we would be allowed to sell our cider directly to the public from our premises, as well as at festivals. This would give us the opportunity to tell our own story and gain some direct traction in the marketplace.

We and the other artisan cider makers are making quality, premium products that, in many cases, have won international awards. They are not cheap products. Cider is different from beer. Cider is like wine: it takes time to make. The apples that we are harvesting and pressing now will not be ready to bottle until next spring. We welcome groups to visit and see our orchards and our processing and bottling facilities. We are an active member of Open Farm Weekend, as we have been from the outset. People are interested in the whole process and also enjoy tasting the freshly pressed juice and ciders. If you visit a winery or cidery in France or England, after seeing around the vineyards or orchards, you are invited to sample the products and can purchase what you like. Here, you can visit, but, if you wish to purchase, we have to tell you which shops are stocking it and hope that you might remember to go along and buy some. The chance of that extra income for the producer is gone. This year alone, we have had four coaches of visitors from Scandinavia. They enjoyed their visit but had to leave us empty-handed. They had already visited Bushmills, where they were able to purchase. They found it really strange that they were unable to purchase the products directly from us as the producer.

Tourism is starting to happen in Northern Ireland, and Armagh has the Bramley apple as a USP. Creating a local food and drink event or tour is a great way to boost the local economy by creating jobs and increasing tourist numbers. As you know, the Armagh Bramley apple was awarded protected geographical indication (PGI) status by the EU in 2011, followed by the Lough Neagh eel. This has given County Armagh a food focus. The emphasis of Armagh's 'Integrated Tourism Development and

Marketing Strategy and Action Plan 2017-2022' is to utilise these unique strengths and assets to attract international visitors. It recognises that a key part of the experience for visitors is the ability to learn about the produce and to sample and purchase on the production premises. The council would also welcome the ability for artisan producers to sell their products at festivals as it believes that this would help to attract visitors to the rural parts of the borough. I have with me a letter from Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council in support of this, which I can leave with you.

How can the situation be improved? We would like a new category of alcohol licence, namely a producer's licence. It would be available only to genuine independent producers; not to agents. The difference is that the producer is the one who bears a financial loss if their product fails during production. That definition is one that is used in Australia. In England, everyone who sells alcohol has to have a personal licence. English cider makers have personal licences as well as premises licences for where their production takes place. They are permitted to sell cider directly to consumers on their production premises. Having both licences enables them to acquire temporary event notices, which, in turn, allow them to sell at regulated festivals. In Northern Ireland, licences to sell alcohol are linked to premises and the prices are extortionate, which puts them outside the scope of artisan producers. As a producer, we want to be allowed to sell only what we produce. We do not want to become an off-licence or a bar.

The growth of our industry will benefit many sectors. It will benefit producers, as already mentioned, and the apple industry, which is in need of support. Like many farming enterprises, it is under stress. With a vibrant local cider industry, apple requirements will increase, and, with that, there will be better returns for the growers. It will benefit employers. As the local cideries grow, more staff will be required. We employ seven people, and, if a producer's licence became available, that number would increase. It will benefit tourism. Food tourism is an up-and-coming trend. This year, food trails in Northern Ireland started. There are already several established tours available throughout Europe. In France, there is the cider route in Normandy as well as several wine trails. Cider tours in the UK, France and Spain are worth millions to their economy. This industry will benefit the Treasury — the bottom line. It already contributes to the Exchequer through the payment of excise duty. This year, Armagh Cider Company alone will have generated in excess of £80,000 in excise duty. That is not profit by the way; that is duty. With a little support, that figure will only grow.

Producers are responsible people. We appreciate the need for regulations. At no time do we advocate the sale of cheap alcohol. All that we ask for is the same facility as the rest of the UK: to be allowed to sell our products from our premises and at specific festivals. I hope that the Committee will look favourably on our request.

The Chairperson (Mr Eastwood): Thank you all very much. It is great to see you here. It is fantastic to see the explosion of craft cideries and breweries across the North. The Hilden brewery has been doing it for maybe 30 years, and it is great to see so many people taking up that mantle. It is very important for us to sell this place as somewhere where you can visit and enjoy the local produce that is not just made by large companies somewhere else.

We talked about the producer's licence. I am in favour of that, but I want to tease it out and play devil's advocate a bit. How do we decide what a bona fide producer is, so that it is not somebody producing beer in their bath and selling it out of wherever? How do we get to that point? I know that Helen gave us some suggestions around that.

Ms Troughton: At the moment, we, as a cider producer, have to be registered with customs. We have a cider producer's licence. Customs comes out and inspects the premises to make sure that we are doing it. That is one thing. As I said, in Australia, the line is that you make it and, if the product is wasted or lost, you lose the money.

The Chairperson (Mr Eastwood): Do you have to be registered with HMRC or something like that?

Ms Troughton: Yes, and we already are.

Mr Davies: You need a licence to brew. You also need to acquire a licence from Northern Ireland Water to discharge effluent, and you need a visit from your local environmental health officer.

The Chairperson (Mr Eastwood): So there are standards there that we could apply.

Mr Davies: Definitely. You could just set up shop, but the phone would be lifted fairly quickly.

Ms Troughton: The ironic thing is that HMRC told me that the licence that I have with it at the moment — my cider producer's licence — allows me to go to England to sell my cider.

Mr Page: There is undoubtedly more access to markets in England, Scotland and Wales for Northern Ireland producers than there is in Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson (Mr Eastwood): What we are trying to do in this Bill is to make it easier, but also to do it right and get the balance —

Ms Shirlow: There are fairly stringent controls at food events as well. In advance of anything, you have to show that the company has public liability insurance and food hygiene training, and is registered with the council at a satisfactory level.

The Chairperson (Mr Eastwood): How do you envisage it working? If someone goes on a brewery tour, for example, will they be able to buy packaged beer to leave with, or do you envisage someone coming to a brewery tour and staying all night drinking pints? What are the restrictions on the licence? I am trying to think about the other side of the argument.

Ms Shirlow: We see it as being part of experiential tourism. We see it being more about an experience whereby you could actually sit down, the way they do in Scotland with whisky tasting. They will maybe give you a sample of five different whiskies and then explain how they blend them together to make the particular brand that they produce at that distillery, and then a gift experience. I would like to hear from other people, but, from a food tourism point of view, there would be a certain amount of consumption on site. It would be more about experience, with tasting notes and maybe a tour guide taking you through why a cider or beer tastes different to another one and then going away with, hopefully, a gift pack or something like that.

Mr Davies: What is quite popular in micro-breweries in other places around the world is what is known as a tap room, where you can get draught beer poured to you. Obviously, you would probably want to look at the hours that that would be available. If there is abuse of that, someone might as well be running a pub. Tap rooms are very popular. They bring people in from outside the area. Because the product is on draught, it is different from serving it in bottles. Obviously, current licensed premises would be quite concerned about tap rooms being open all hours, I suppose.

Mr Page: The most usual experience is that a ticket bought for a brewery tour will incorporate the cost of the drinks provided in the manner in which Michele described.

The Chairperson (Mr Eastwood): I have done a few of those tours myself. I want to get the issues aired.

Mr McQuillan: You touched on a subject that I was going to touch on with Michele about how you would see it working at the food show, but you have already answered that. Each individual brewer will come with their own licence to that show and sell their product, and if they do not have a licence or a registration with the council, they do not qualify to go to the show to start off with.

Ms Shirlow: No, because there is a fair amount of investment in going to these shows. Even at Balmoral food pavilion, you would be looking at £1,500 just to purchase your stand before you even bring in your stock. These are commercial operators, and we ask them for their insurance and other details, such as a copy of their licence, a few months in advance. We want it to be more about the food experience. At some of these shows, we have tried to get the local bars to stock local beers, and people have done that, but it has not worked the same way. We have noticed that it is a very different type of consumer. They are very interested in standing talking to the producer about why they have called a beer this name or that name or, if it is Rathlin Red, why it comes from Rathlin. We find that it is almost like an education process, and that is happening more and more. In particular, at the BBC Good Food Show, we even had some large producers like Dale Farm who said to us, "Gosh, this was a really interested consumer. People wanted to talk about the ingredients and where they could find the product, and they were willing to pay". I think that the average spend per head at that show was over £100, so we are able to invest. If there had been ciders there at £4-50, I do not think that it would have been an issue to buy a bottle.

Mr Page: It reinforces the point about these being premium products. They are quite dissimilar to the mass-produced drinks that do not invite questions about the provenance and the difference between

one type of beer and another or one type of cider and another, the different ways of production and so forth. There is a great resurgence in interest in craft brewing and craft cider and perry production. Those who favour those drinks now have not only a thirst for the product but a thirst for knowledge and information about it.

Mr McQuillan: I just want to say to Laurie that Portrush food festival was very successful. I went there myself, and there was food and beer, so you are in heaven.

Mr Bell: Is that Portrush or the food and beer?

The Chairperson (Mr Eastwood): Sorry, hold on a wee second. Go ahead, Laurie.

Mr Davies: Just to tie in with your earlier question, we tie the beer and cider in with the food. It is not the same social gathering as going to a public house. It is a different thing altogether. The education thing that Tim is on about is quite interesting. We did a sampling in the Ulster Hall with winemakers last Tuesday, and, by the end of the evening, if some of my colleagues next to me explained what an Indian pale ale was once, they did it 20 times. So there is the education thing about the product. Sorry to interrupt you.

Mr Bell: No, no. Fine.

Ms Shirlow: There was a beer festival in Belfast for the first time at Custom House Square, and we giggled as we watched the elderly gentlemen with Moses sandals and beards queuing up — sorry, Tim. A distinctive demographic is interested in this.

The Chairperson (Mr Eastwood): It is a changing demographic, though.

Mr Page: As a gentleman with a beard, I would say that not all of them are old. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Bell: Thanks for the presentation. In a way, Michele, you have underestimated the success of Food and Drink Northern Ireland, and I think that you are being more modest than you could have been. There seems to be a very consensus in the Committee and in the Northern Ireland Assembly to change the licensing laws, and I am presuming that, if they were to change, we could achieve more targets. I am a strong believer that producers, in particular, should be able to sell from the site. Michele will know that, among other things, we had a group of investors over from China, and part of it was just a tourist tour in the Bushmills distillery. They went out with some of the best whiskeys — in fact, they could not buy enough of the best whiskeys. When I advised them that getting it on the plane back to London might prove difficult, they said, "Sure, we will enjoy it while we are here". From the little bit that I know, given that my father is from the orchard county, I know just strong it is.

I think that the Chair is absolutely correct: it is a changing demographic. The signal, if I have picked it up from all of the noise in the industry, is that people want to be more discerning about what they drink and the quality of what they drink, and they are prepared to pay for that. While it is not in the Bill, I think that there is a unique opportunity for this Committee to bring allowing the producers to sell on site into the Bill. I have had some discussions, with, let us say, critical people, around that matter, and they will be favourable to the Committee bringing forward an amendment. Sometimes, when a Bill has been about for so long, people nearly believe that this is not going to happen. I firmly believe that it is going to happen. The process has now started, and we can look very critically towards those particular amendments. Like a good barrister, I am probably asking a question I already know the answer to: will you work with us in seeking to get an amendment that works for everybody in the process?

Ms Shirlow: Yes.

The Chairperson (Mr Eastwood): I think that that is a yes, Jonathan.

Ms Shirlow: Yes.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Fra remembered the names of those beers, but I do not think that anyone else did. He says that he drank every one of them in vast quantities. *[Laughter.]*

Mr F McCann: I once visited a vodka factory in Poland. *[Laughter.]*

Ms Ní Chuilín: We will not go any further, Fra. We will cut it there.

The Chairperson (Mr Eastwood): I remind members that this is being recorded by Hansard. *[Laughter.]*

Ms Ní Chuilín: You are really asking for the same regime that Bushmills has, and that is reflected in the legislation. I think that everybody is keen to give you support. You are artisans, so that needs to be reflected, and the links to tourism are very evident. Also, the health and safety and responsibility regimes that you have to go through have all been done. One of the biggest complaints that we get, even from other businesspeople, should that be in haulage or whatever, is on the rigours that HMRC puts you through. If you are through the HMRC rigours, I suppose any questions that we are asking can be easily satisfied thereafter. We are keen to support you, and, as Jonathan and others said, it is clear that an amendment is needed for a special category for independent licensees as part of this amendment Bill. We are happy to see what that looks like and to work with you and for you to work with us and, indeed, with other Members who are not here. I think that you will find that there is a lot of support throughout the Assembly for this.

The Chairperson (Mr Eastwood): Thank you very much for coming in. I think that Carál summed it up well. Most significant parties are represented around this table, and I think that you are pushing at an open door. We now have to go away and figure out how to do this, but we are definitely supportive of your issues, and we know that you are already under enough of a regulatory burden. We do not need to be placing any more on you, so whatever we can do, we will do it.

Mr Page: There is the opportunity for you to sample some of the products that we have been speaking on. There is a CAMRA beer festival being run in the Ulster Hall, starting today. This afternoon, we are running some roundtable sessions, and I think that two members of this Committee have agreed to come, with other MLAs, to meet brewers and cider producers at those events. We welcome anybody to that.

The Chairperson (Mr Eastwood): Good luck with that. There is a beer festival next week in Derry as well, so I am sure that you will all be at that too.

Ms Shirlow: Can I make my plug too? After trying for eight years, we have our first local food section at the Christmas markets outside the City Hall.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Excellent. Well done.

Ms Shirlow: Unfortunately, we do not have any local drinks at it, but we do have a lot of local producers coming in and out. In one way, the Year of Food and Drink has been a great year of surprise, Jonathan. I wanted to say that we think that we are starting to get a reputation for good food, but our objective in the next five years is to get a great reputation for great food. This would be a big stepping stone in helping these small producers get up to the next level. Thank you very much.

The Chairperson (Mr Eastwood): Well done, everybody. Thank you.