



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

**COMMITTEE FOR COMMUNITIES**

**Please use this form to submit written submissions in relation to the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill. Return to [committee.communities@niassembly.gov.uk](mailto:committee.communities@niassembly.gov.uk) by Wednesday 19 October 2016.**

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**Organisation: The Church of Ireland Church and Society Commission**

**Date: 11/10/16**

We note that the provisions in the proposed legislation to amend certain laws in licensed premises are largely consistent whether speaking of licensed premises or licensed clubs. Therefore the response below, which speaks to general principles, can be seen to apply to both parts one and two of the proposed bill. Where there are specific matters relating to one or the other that merit comment, this will be apparent.

***The Church of Ireland and Alcohol***

The Church of Ireland does not take a specific position on the consumption of alcohol as opposed to abstinence – in general terms such things are left to the conscience of the individual. Nonetheless, we ‘encourage...temperance in the sense of restraint and self-control to avoid over-indulgence’, as articulated in a report to the General Synod in 2004. The same report in 2004 noted the importance of robust legislation in combatting misuse of alcohol. Furthermore, in 2014 the Church of Ireland General Synod passed a resolution calling for the governments of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to introduce minimum unit pricing for alcohol and to strengthen the powers of Customs and Excise Authorities to allow them greater effectiveness in dealing with illegal importation of alcohol.

The Church and Society Commission wishes to encourage the NI Assembly to ensure that any changes to the licencing laws would continue to promote the need to treat alcohol consumption with responsibility and accountability.

### ***Easter***

We note that one of the proposals in the Bill is to extend opening hours on licensed premises on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Good Friday is the day when Christians the world over reflect on the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Son of God as he died on the cross for our sins. Easter Day celebrates his resurrection and the victory he promises through his conquering death. While recognising the reality that Easter is not a religious celebration for everyone, nonetheless the structure of our working year recognises the Church Calendar. Holy Week and Easter are the most solemn and significant days of the Christian year; there is already provision for licensed premises to be open during Good Friday, albeit for a limited period. While acknowledging the breadth of NI society, the Easter holiday exists in recognition of this important festival. The Commission endorses the current law which recognises the significance of the day. Furthermore, Easter Monday and Easter Tuesday are public holidays in Northern Ireland while Good Friday is not; it would seem unnecessary to make provision to extend Good Friday licensed hours as in any case it is a normal working day for many people -perhaps most especially those who might not celebrate its religious significance. Therefore, the Commission does not endorse the portions of the Bill that seek to extend licensed hours on Good Friday, although we recognise that this may be a minority opinion among respondents.

### ***Extended hours special license/drinking up time/alignment with ents. license***

The provisions within the bill to offer extended hours in certain circumstances, to extend drinking up time to one hour and to align alcohol licenses with catering and entertainment licenses are all reasonable, insofar as they have potential to allow more responsible approaches to alcohol consumption – eg by extending drinking up time there is less pressure on licensees to clear out their premises, leading to less aggravation as people leave premises. It is important that the provisions from various legal authorities granting special permissions be strictly maintained, monitored, enforced and its effectiveness reviewed on a regular basis. Furthermore, where premises have permission to be open for the purposes of entertainment and also hold a liquor license it is reasonable that there should be consistency between the two. Therefore, we have no objections to these provisions.

### ***Children/Young People and Licensed Premises***

Alcohol consumption is not in and of itself evil, but it comes with risks and the need for a responsible approach is paramount. Therefore, the Commission urges extreme caution around any changes to the law that would either make alcohol more accessible to young people or be seen to encourage drinking among young people. Any permissions to allow young people on appropriately licensed premises (eg where there is also food or non-alcoholic provision) must be done in the context of appropriate supervision from adult guardians. The use of licensed premises for underage functions may be welcome, as it provides responsible businesses with an opportunity to provide safe, entertaining venues for young people where there is no risk of their consuming alcohol. The Commission does not oppose these new provisions in the bill, but recommends review and rigorous scrutiny.

***Display and Promotions***

The Commission welcomes the provisions within the bill to prohibit the promotion of alcohol and deals on the purchase of alcohol anywhere other than in licensed premises. In the context of supermarket off-licenses especially this is to be strictly enforced. Where Codes of Practice for such businesses arise, the Commission urges that particular attention be paid to whether supermarkets might provide support for parents who use instore off licenses but who do not wish to bring their children through that section in the store.

***Self-Service and Vending Machines.***

The principle thus far articulated is that of responsibility and accountability. Therefore the Commission considers it extremely important that licensees should not allow customers to operate dispensing equipment or set up vending machines.

***Codes of Practice***

Are only to be encouraged if the department considers that they will be effective, and is subsequently willing to monitor this efficacy with realistic and measurable criteria.

***Authorising Bodies***

Where special provisions are to be made, by police, courts or clerks, it is important that these decisions and the reasons for taking them are thoroughly considered, and that evidence from each stage of the considerations be made available for scrutiny.

In summary, the Church and Society Commission of the Church of Ireland broadly welcomes the effort made by the Department of Communities to rationalise certain sections of licencing laws and to recognise the importance of legislation reflecting the society to which it applies. The Commission urges the minister to 'err on the side of caution' when it comes to these provisions, making sure that they are enforced and reviewed. The Commission cannot endorse any changes to the legislation that would dilute the significance of Good Friday.

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