



19<sup>th</sup> October 2016

Dear Sirs

**Re: Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill**

We congratulate the Executive Minister in tabling the above legislation and welcome the opportunity to contribute to the committee debate.

We apologise for not responding as requested but unfortunately the draft bill does not take account of the micro brewing sector and therefore there is no draft to help the entire industry.

Mourne Mountains Brewery was imagined into being around June 2014. It began production from a 10-barrel plant in Warrenpoint around February 2015 and bottle production around September 2015. It currently employs 3 full time employees with 2 more on an as needs basis. Our aim is to offer tourists something different when they visit the Mourne area.

We have many barriers here in the Northern Ireland to increasing the market share of craft beer from an uncompetitive environment through to legislation. The legislation is where we hope this draft bill can help.

We are members of Beer Ireland, an all-island approach to micro brewing and also members of the NI Artisan Drinks Producers Group which was established between brewers, cidery and distilleries coming together across NI to seek amendment to legislation, in particular The Licensing (Northern Ireland) Order 1996. Unfortunately, that does not seem to be moving anywhere and we feel within the legislation being tabled there could be scope to try and enhance the offering locally from breweries etc.

The first part of the bill being tabled is about licensing. Currently Northern Ireland is one of a small number of places in the world where microbreweries cannot sell on premises to people wanting to visit so-called "tasting rooms". Every week we are contacted by tourists coming to the area looking a tour of the brewery and the availability to taste beer and take some away as souvenir's. Existing legislation does not allow this. Within the draft bill we feel that an amendment could be made to allow manufacturers of craft products such as our beer (defined in HMRC) to sell from our premises or electronically online. This would allow ourselves as well as the 25 (approx.) other breweries in NI to offer something to the local tourism product. Currently we participate in many council events but to date have been unable to sell a single drop. The product is always well received but if we want to increase local employment and opportunity we need to be able to sell our wares.

A second amendment could be that of a licence to sell online. In 1996, when the Order was completed the drinks industry in NI was very different and the internet was only starting. Today, 20 years on, there is a need to have some sort of online facility which would boost the labour intensive artisan drinks producers in NI.

With the governments support of local produce and the expansion of tourism in Northern Ireland, to have changes to this legislation would see artisan craft drink producers being able to showcase their produce alongside other local producers, as well as the possibility of introducing tours/trails to the premises in support of NI tourism industry.

A third amendment could allow us to sell at festivals and craft fairs across NI.

Artisan drinks producers actively promote sensible consumption and are socially responsible. Packaging is clearly labelled as per government alcohol guidelines. We would welcome a tightening by Environmental Health officers to ensure that all products are of the same labeling standards.

Our produce is aimed at consumers that will savour and enjoy our products; the products have a story to be told about the history of the company making them, the origin of the ingredients and the manufacturing process from farm to table.

Craft drinks producers in GB are able to sell their products from their premises, and at events. This has been a critical source of income, enabling their businesses to be viable and has played a key role in the development of a flourishing craft beverage industry in GB. The absence of similar provisions in Northern Ireland has inhibited the development of the craft drinks sector, and makes it difficult for local producers to compete with those from England, Scotland and Wales.

We would extend an invitation to you to visit our manufacturing premises to discuss this matter in more depth, as we feel that as a manufacturing company we now have an opportunity to create more jobs, and maintain the current jobs. We are also seeking to develop tourism initiatives and help put The Mourne on the world map as an area of outstanding beauty, culture, food and drink. Your support in helping us overcome the red tape preventing us sell directly to the public, creating an even playing field with competitors in GB would be greatly appreciated.

Your faithfully

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