



NIIRTA Submission to Community for Communities Consultation on the Licensing Bill 2016

Introduction

The Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association (NIIRTA) welcomes the opportunity to give evidence to the above Bill.

NIIRTA is the representative business organisation for the independent retail and wholesale sector in Northern Ireland. Our 1600 members include independent retailers of all kinds, wholesalers, suppliers to the sector and affiliated Chambers of Commerce and Traders' Associations.

Hospitality Sector

Given that our Hospitality and Retail sectors are the key drivers in supporting the economy of our high streets and town centres, we fully support the proposals of our colleagues, Hospitality Ulster, for the sensible modernisation of the Licensing Bill to support their members.

The promotion of town and city centres has to be more than just retail; it has to be about the social side, café culture and night-time economy. It has to be an effective partnership between our retail and hospitality sectors to make our town centre destinations to shop and socialise.

Town centres are living and breathing spaces where consumers can enjoy a rich and diverse experience that is not available on-line or in a retail park. Unique and characterful shops, cafés, restaurants, essential services, brand name retailers and cultural events are an essential part of what makes the high street different and appealing.

Former Social Development Minister Nelson McCausland summed it up very well recently when he launched the department's High Street Taskforce report:

"The nature of retail has changed in recent years and the long-term challenge is how we move from retail-led towns and cities, to developing their value as multifunctional social centres that revitalise our High Streets not just in daylight hours, but also to maximize our evening economy."

As the Association of Town & City Centre Management rightly says we need to think of the strategic positioning of town centres to reclaim them to their rightful position and role as places that serve their communities, visitors, businesses and key stakeholders, with a quality of experience that encourages them to keep coming back, and staying longer.

Clause 12: Restrictions on off-sales drinks promotions in Supermarkets

The misuse of alcohol is a blight on the community and in many instances it is the retailer who is at the forefront of the negative consequences it often induces.

There can be little argument that the huge growth in large retailers offering heavy discounts has fuelled significant growth in the quantities being purchased and consumed. It is they who sell the vast majority of the alcohol now purchased in Northern Ireland and it is they that have live up to the responsibility that this brings.

NIIRTA off-licence members are responsible retailers who have avoided the irresponsible drinks promotions such as selling lager cheaper than water.

There is clearly a need to address the increasing problem of unfair competition which is destroying many independent retailers as the large multiples use the alcohol sales as a tactic to generate trade, fully aware that smaller rivals cannot compete and therefore driving them out of business. These multiples account for approximately 70 per cent of all alcohol sold, and it is often used as a loss leader to attract trade. This is a tactic which small businesses cannot match nor one with which they can even adequately compete.

The availability of cheap alcohol has had a serious negative impact on health amongst many in the community. Likewise it has also fuelled a rise in antisocial behaviour – a particular problem for many small businesses, in particular retailers.

Much of this Bill talks about ‘Supermarkets’ and does not even mention independently owned small off-licences. We do welcome that a previous proposal to include a physical wall completely separating the off-licence from the rest of the store has been dropped considering the huge cost of such a proposal.

Clause 12 needs to be clarified to ensure that there is parity between large supermarkets and independent retailers.

It states:

3) In paragraph (2), the reference to the vicinity of licensed premises is to the area that extends 200 metres from the boundary of the premises.

There needs to be greater definition in terms of what constitutes the boundary of the premises. For instance, a large supermarket, which can have a car park in excess

of 200 metres long outside its store – would it be able to advertise drinks promotions in its car park beyond the limit of 200 metres?

Very few, if any, independent retailers would have a car park of that size and potentially would be at a competitive disadvantage. This clause needs clarification or an amendment to ensure there is a level playing field.

Some other Clause 12 points that need clarification include:

- Retailers advertise using A-boards outside of their store and posters on windows which face outside – would these be restricted?
- Also how would this apply to drinks manufacturers? For example, a manufacturer could advertise their brand of alcohol which does not reference any particular retailer – however the product could be sold in a shop within 200 meters of the poster. How are manufacturers to know where their products are sold when a number of retailers, including independent retailers, will purchase alcohol through a wholesaler rather than directly from the manufacturer?

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