

# Whisky a no go

January 26 2012

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The Scottish Government is in danger of sabotaging the nation's greatest export, according to a leading whisky expert.

Dr David Wishart, a researcher at the University of St Andrews, says that the whisky industry could be set for a serious downturn if the minimum pricing for alcohol bill is passed at Holyrood.

According to Dr Wishart, author of a new book on the national dram, whisky is one of the survivors of the recession, bucking the global trend, and its heritage should be protected.

As whisky drinkers around the world prepare to toast the birthday of Robert Burns with a tipple tonight (Wednesday 25 January 2012), Dr Wishart claims that the new bill could adversely affect the booming

Scotch whisky export industry.

Dr Wishart, who has researched the histories and profiled the whiskies of 100 distilleries throughout the UK, commented, “As we join hands to toast our national bard on Burns Night, it is perhaps worth recalling that, a year before his premature death from rheumatic fever aged 37, Robert Burns was an exciseman collecting duties for the Government.

“Burns might well reflect on the scale of excise duties on Scotch Drink today. The tax on alcoholic drinks is set to increase later this year, regardless of the Budget, if the Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) (Scotland) Bill is passed at Holyrood. It is estimated that a bottle of blended Scotch whisky will rise by £3.50 in Scotland from this summer. Aside from the impact on the domestic market, where Scottish retailers will be seriously disadvantaged, it will give immense succor to several export markets when they come to review their duties on Scotch whisky.”

According to the latest figures, exports of Scotch whisky increased by 22% last year to £3.5bn, with Singapore exports rising by 64%, Brazil by 56%, and Taiwan 45%. Dr Wishart says the Bill will encourage increased taxation in importing countries.

He explained, “The minimum pricing policy allows foreign markets to review their import tariffs on Scotch whisky. For example India, the world's largest whisky market, adds a surcharge of 150% on all Scotch whisky imports. At a time when the EU is trying to re-negotiate this tariff, the Indian line is, if your Government can surcharge your whisky, then so can we.

“It’s a massive shot in the foot for our most successful industry. Scotch whisky is our top export, with sales up 22% last year to £3.5bn, helping to meet the Scottish Government’s goal to increase Scottish exports by 50% by 2017.

“Business is booming abroad. But what does our Scottish Government do for Scotch whisky, our most successful exporting industry? Tax it at home, thus inviting swingeing taxes abroad.”

Dr Wishart published the first book to compare and classify single malt whiskies by flavour in 2002. Ten years on, his book ‘Whisky Classified’, is recognised as the definitive guide to tasting malt whisky. Already published in eight languages, including Portuguese for the booming Brazilian market, a new 2012 edition will be launched worldwide next month.

The St Andrews academic, who is also a Keeper of the Quaich for the Scotch Whisky Industry, warned, “Scotch [whisky](#) is the top export from Scotland, with distilleries being re-opened and newly built from Annan to Elgin to Lewis. Our industry, which currently employs 40,000 directly and many more indirectly, could be set for a serious downturn.”

Provided by University of St Andrews

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