

**CHURCH OF SCOTLAND
CHURCH AND SOCIETY COUNCIL
EAGLAIS NA H-ALBA**

*121 George Street, Edinburgh, EH2 4YN. Tel: 0131 225 5722 Fax: 0131 240 2239
Email: churchandsociety@cofscotland.org.uk Web: www.churchofscotland.org.uk
Charity Number: SCO11353*



Official Response

SUBJECT: Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) (Scotland) Bill Call for Evidence
REQUESTED BY: Health and Sport Committee, The Scottish Parliament
REFERENCE: OR-10
DATE: 7 December 2011
SUBMITTED BY: Church and Society Council of the Church of Scotland

Establishing a minimum alcohol sales price based on a unit of alcohol

The Church and Society Council of the Church of Scotland strongly supports the introduction of a minimum price per unit of alcohol. The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland discussed and supported the principle of minimum pricing in 1983, 1986 and 1987 and reaffirmed this position in 2009. Over this 28 year period the basic arguments have remained the same: there is a consistent body of evidence from medical and academic sources that indicates that there is a direct relationship between the availability of cheap alcohol and excessive, and therefore harmful, drinking. The Church of Scotland submitted evidence to the Health and Sport Committee in January 2010 in relation to minimum pricing proposals contained within the Alcohol (Etc.) (Scotland) Bill, and our position remains unchanged.

The social costs of increased health problems requiring NHS resources, increased violence in our towns and cities and damage to family relationships are borne by us all. If an increase in the minimum price of alcohol will reduce consumption of alcohol and reduce the resulting problems for individuals and our society then it is not a case of penalising the majority in order to discourage the minority. This is a choice that we, as a society, could make in order to improve our collective health and wellbeing. Taking an approach to excessive drinking that focuses purely on individual behaviour fails to acknowledge that we live in a society in which the consequences of excessive drinking are shared by us all. It is up to us, as a society, to say that an individual does not have a right to unlimited access to cheap alcohol when such access is detrimental to the common good.

When the proposal to introduce a minimum price per unit of alcohol was originally proposed as part of the Alcohol (Etc.) (Scotland) Bill in 2009, the Church and Society Council of the Church of Scotland ran a campaign to raise awareness of the evidence in support of minimum pricing and encouraged church members to lobby alcohol producers and MSPs in support of the proposed policy. We continue to believe that it is not appropriate for the alcohol industry to be driving health policy as there is clearly a conflict of interest between their business and the needs of society.

Setting the level of minimum pricing

On the matter of the exact price to be determined, we acknowledge that this is a matter for experts to decide. However, it is important that the minimum price set is high enough to have an impact on purchasing.

It is acknowledged that the introduction of minimum pricing will not, in isolation, resolve the current alcohol related problems in Scotland. We continue to call on the Government to invest in social programmes to support families, generate attitudinal change which will enable positive choices about the role of alcohol in our lives and improve support and treatment for those who need it. However, we welcome the introduction of minimum pricing as a significant step in the right direction.