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## Peers back minimum alcohol price for UK

Shaun Connolly

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The Scottish government wants to bring in minimum pricing for alcohol but is locked in a legal battle with the Scotch Whisky Association

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Minimum unit pricing for alcohol should be introduced across the UK if it proves to be a success in Scotland, a parliamentary committee has urged.

If the decision of the Holyrood parliament to introduce a 50p base level for alcohol units survives legal challenges and is shown to be effective in cutting excessive drinking, it should be rolled out nationwide, the Lords select committee on the Licensing Act 2003 said.

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The committee called for the Licensing Act in England to be redrawn to abolish local authority licensing committees and hand their role to planning watchdogs at councils.

The Scottish government wants to bring in minimum pricing but is locked in a legal battle with the Scotch Whisky Association over the issue. A final decision will be made by the Supreme Court in London in the coming months.

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Alcohol Focus Scotland, which has worked closely with the government on minimum pricing campaigns, believes that cheap booze encourages shoppers to buy more than they had planned and then to drink more. Minimum pricing would raise the price of strong ciders and vodkas but would also affect some premium wines, whiskies and beers.

The Scottish Retail Consortium believes the licensing system north of the border is already restrictive and complicated and that minimum pricing would add to the administrative burden for retailers. The Lords select committee believes licensing systems throughout the UK are not stringent enough.

Baroness McIntosh of Pickering, chairwoman of the committee, said: "The Act is fundamentally flawed and needs a major overhaul.

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“The committee was shocked by some of the evidence it received on hearings before licensing committees. Their decisions have been described as ‘something of a lottery’, ‘lacking formality’, and ‘indifferent’, with some ‘scandalous misuses of the powers of elected local councillors’.”

Lady McIntosh also called for relevant legislation to apply at airports and warned that regulations covering late-night openings do not work.







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**HenryV** 7 days ago

I'd better get the demi-johns out of the cellar!

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**Bryan Attewell** 7 days ago

Working as a volunteer ranger it is not uncommon to pick up half full or even unopened cans of alcohol left by, presumably, under age drinkers.

To quote my neighbour, who works for that NHS and sees the results of excessive alcohol consumption on a daily basis, "alcohol is as cheap as (bottled) water".

Minimum pricing is long overdue, it won't affect the punter going to the pub or the couple enjoying a nice bottle of wine, but it might reduce the incidence of juvenile alcoholism.

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