

Cross-Party Group on Scotch Whisky

28th September 2023, Scottish Parliament, 13:00-14:00.

Minute

Present

MSPs

Murdo Fraser MSP

Rhoda Grant MSP

Emma Harper MSP

Gordon MacDonald MSP

Colin Smyth MSP

Non-MSP Group Members

Blair Bowman (Whisky Consultant)

Karen Freel (Perspectiva Consultants)

Graeme Littlejohn (Scotch Whisky Association – Secretariat)

Orchid Liu (UK Chinese Times)

Michael Taylor

Rosie Willmot (Scotch Whisky Association)

Speakers:

Graeme Littlejohn (Scotch Whisky Association)

Rosie Willmot (Scotch Whisky Association)

Apologies

Jackie Baillie MSP

Agenda item 1

Welcome, introduction and apologies

Gordon MacDonald MSP welcomed members, noting that this meeting was the AGM on the CPG. He said that it had been a really good session of the CPG, with a lot of engagement and useful visits, including a recent visit to the industry on Islay.

Agenda item 2

The minutes of previous meeting on 2nd March 2023 were approved.

Agenda item 3

AGM: election of office bearers

Gordon MacDonald informed CPG members that Jenni Minto MSP has been appointed a Scottish Government minister, and has submitted her resignation as an office bearer of the group.

Gordon MacDonald MSP and Murdo Fraser MSP were elected as Co-Convenors of the Group.

Colin Smyth MSP and Emma Harper MSP were elected as Deputy Convenors of the Group.

The Scotch Whisky Association was named as the Secretariat for the Group.

Agenda item 4

Scotch Whisky Tourism 2022, Graeme Littlejohn, Director of Strategy & Communications, Scotch Whisky Association

Graeme Littlejohn presented the 2022 Scotch Whisky tourism figures to the CPG. He thanked the office bearers for their enthusiasm for the Group, noting that there are competing demands on members interests, but a vibrant CPG was important to further MSPs knowledge of the industry and its importance to Scotland.

He noted that visitors were not back to pre-pandemic levels. In 2019, 2.2m people visited Scotch Whisky visitor centres, and in 2022 the figured reached 2m. This made Scotch Whisky visitor centres collectively Scotland's most popular tourist destination.

Average spend of the visitors was also up, and this was a trend within the industry. Due to the impact of the pandemic and for sustainability reasons, it was likely that the doubling of visitors the industry had seen over the past decade would not be repeated in the coming decade, but those visitors would continue to generate an increase in value to the industry and wider Scottish economy.

Gordon MacDonald noted the importance of sites like Johnnie Walker Princes Street to the 2022 figures and asked if this had a knock on impact to other distillery visitor centres. Graeme Littlejohn responded that different sites offered different perspectives of the industry, and often tourists visiting the capital would use JWPS and the Scotch Whisky Experience as a gateway before visiting the industry in other parts of Scotland. The Scotch Whisky industry was one part of Scotland's tourism offer to the world.

Murdo Fraser highlighted the recent CPG visit to Islay and its importance in understanding how tourism, and the industry more generally, is viewed.

Blair Bowman asked if the data showed a difference between the spend on tours vs the spend in retail at sites. Graeme Littlejohn said he didn't think the data went into that detail, but as tourism becomes more important to the industry that the survey was being refined to offer greater insights.

Emma Harper asked about data in the South of Scotland. Graeme Littlejohn said he would look into specific numbers and respond to the member directly.

Agenda item 5

Made to Be Measured Campaign, Rosie Willmot, Communications Manager, Scotch Whisky Association

Rosie Willmot presented on the SWA's Made to be Measured campaign.

She said the campaign had so far reached 1.3 million people in Scotland following the first two bursts of the campaign, in March and August, and was pleased that the Scottish Government had agreed to amplify the campaign to coincide with the next burst in the run up to the festive period.

Gordon MacDonald asked for more information about how this impacts consumers of alcohol in the on trade and off trade. Rosie Willmot said that the campaign was about informing people who choose to drink how to do so responsibly no matter the setting.

Colin Smyth praised the campaign, and asked how impact would be measured, as opposed to scale. Rosie Willmot said that the Count 14 campaign had shown that knowledge of the chief Medical Officer Guidelines and what a unit of alcohol is was low, and by the end of the campaign it was hoped more people would know. As the campaign develops, it is hoped that impact can be measured and a positive shift seen in data.

Emma Harper said that she had not been aware of the campaign, but colleagues on the Health, Social Care and Sport committee may be interested to learn more. The Scotch Whisky Association agreed to follow up with members of the Committee.

Michael Taylor asked if the 1.3m reached was in Scotland. Rosie Willmot confirmed that the campaign was focussed on Scotland, and through digital marketing the campaign had been able to target only people in Scotland, and people in the rest of the UK would not – at present – see or hear the campaign.

Agenda item 6

Proposals for future agenda items and any other business

Michael Taylor suggested the recent Scottish Government report of Non-Methane Volatile Organic Compounds.

Blair Bowman suggested investment in casks, with concerns in the industry around the creation of the Cask Whisky Association.

Emma Harper suggested carbon capture and anaerobic digestion. Gordon MacDonald said that the industry's journey to net-zero could be a focus for a future meeting.

Gordon MacDonald said that previous visits had been very useful to members, and a cooperage and/or bottling hall could be considered for future visits.

It was highlighted the date of the next meeting of the CPG Scotch Whisky would be held on **Tuesday 5th December**. Due to a diary clash for both Co-Convenors, it was agreed that the date of the meeting would be changed, and members informed in due course.

Meeting closed.