

Neil Bibby launches Protect Our Pubs campaign

Friday, 17 February 2017

Neil Bibby launches Protect Our Pubs campaign

Labour MSP Neil Bibby has lodged a draft proposal in Holyrood that could transform Scotland's pubs and give customers more choice over the drinks on sale. A consultation on the proposal is set to open on Monday. You can read the consultation document [here](#).

The proposed Member's Bill would make it fairer for tenants of pubs who have a 'tied' arrangement with large owning companies – often known as 'pubcos'.

This comes in the same week that the Competition and Markets Authority announced that they are to investigate Heineken's proposed acquisition of part of the Punch Taverns pubs portfolio.

Under the current arrangements, these tenants often have a contractual obligation to buy some or all products from the pubco, which can restrict the choice of beer, cider, wine and spirits available – as well as forcing tenants to sell more expensive drinks.

Mr Bibby's proposed Bill would provide Scottish licensees the same opportunities afforded to their counterparts in England and Wales.

A Pubs Code came into force in England and Wales in May 2016 that introduced more relaxed rules. A new voluntary code was recently introduced in Scotland, but is not adhered to by all pub companies and does not go as far as the statutory code in England and Wales.

It is estimated there are nearly 1,000 tenanted pubs in Scotland. The proposal has been welcomed by the Scottish Licensed Trade Association, the Campaign for Real Ale and GMB Scotland.

Scottish Labour MSP Neil Bibby said:

"This proposal is about fairness, choice and jobs. Fairness for Scotland's publicans, greater choice for pub customers, and an opportunity to protect and create jobs in Scotland's pub and brewing industry.

"Scottish pub tenants should have the ability to opt out of the tied arrangements if they wish. I know from speaking with tied pub tenants in my own area in the west of Scotland how one-sided these arrangements can be.

"Access to a fair and reasonable market rent for premises, without strings attached, should be a right for Scottish publicans. They will then be free to source and purchase products as they see fit, on the same basis as other pubs in Scotland, and pubs in England and Wales.

"Times are tough in the pub sector. Scottish licensees that choose to opt out should have the flexibility they need in a crowded and competitive market place to react to changes that could affect their business – from new pubs opening in their area to changes in the way people socialise. My proposal would give them that flexibility."

Paul Waterson, chief executive of the Scottish Licensed Trade Association, said:

"The SLTA are delighted to support Neil Bibby's bill advocating protection for Scottish pub tenants. It is only fair that Scottish tenants are afforded the same rights and safeguards as their counterparts in England and Wales.

"With more and more pubs closing in Scotland each week, it's crucial the government takes action to protect tenants who are the most vulnerable operators in our trade. The SLTA and many others from within the brewing industry have been campaigning for the government to legislate progressively on this issue for a number of years, and we hope that Neil's bill will add further weight to our collective position on the matter."

Colin Valentine, CAMRA's National Chairman, said:

"CAMRA fully welcomes the new consultation that has been launched into the tied pub sector by Neil Bibby. We expect that it will paint a picture of pubs struggling to survive across Scotland, with examples of large pub companies taking more than is fair or sustainable from individual publicans' profits.

"Earlier this year, the Scottish Government carried out its own research into the tied pub sector. That report concluded that there is no need for reform after surveying just 25 pubs – only 10 of which were tied to large companies. This represents less than 0.5% of the 4,600 pubs across the country, and cannot be considered a representative sample.

"The Scottish Government's inaction on this issue is letting the pubs sector down. Pubs in Scotland deserve the same level of protection as they have in England and Wales, and we hope this new research will persuade the Scottish Government to make the appropriate reforms."

GMB Scotland Organiser Martin Doran said:

"GMB Scotland supports the proposed Tied Pubs Bill because by tackling the pubco giants, it can deliver fairness for tied pubs tenants, give more choice for punters and help create a more level playing field for Scottish brewers.

"Ultimately, this can help create better conditions for the protection and growth of brewing jobs across Scotland, which is good for our members in the likes of the historic Tennent's Wellpark brewery and for the working-class communities supported by their employment.

"This intervention is not before time and our members will warmly welcome Neil Bibby's efforts to bring about changes to the industry that can only benefit Scottish jobs and the Scottish economy in the long run."