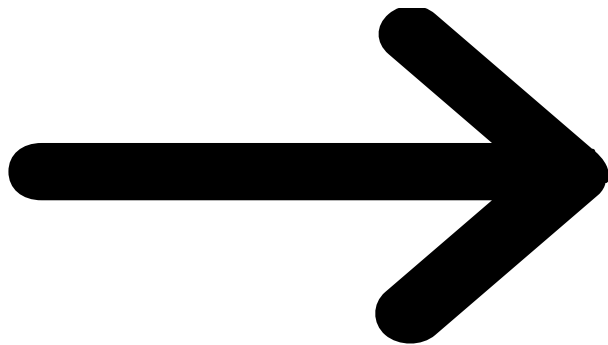


Role of sunset clause crucial in minimum pricing law

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The role of a five-year sunset clause will be a crucial part of new alcohol minimum pricing legislation, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

Health secretary Shona Robison confirmed today that she intended to introduce the law from May 2018, six years after the idea was formally brought forward by the Scottish Government.

Deputy leader Jackson Carlaw, who negotiated the original inclusion of a sunset clause allowing the scheme to be dropped if it wasn't working, said it was important the measures came in quickly.

And he stated the role of a sunset clause could be used across other contentious health policies in future, particularly in areas of public health like obesity.

In her statement to Holyrood today, Ms Robison added that the Scottish Whisky Association would pay the Scottish Government's costs for a recent Supreme Court legal battle, which ministers eventually won.

The Scottish Conservatives support the concept of minimum unit pricing, on the condition there is a sunset clause and that the case is legally sound.

Statistics released today showed there was a two per cent increase in people admitted to hospital because of alcohol last year.

It means nearly 100 people a day are hospitalised as a consequence of drink, while it was reported earlier this year that alcohol-related deaths are at a record high north of the border.

Scottish Conservative deputy leader Jackson Carlaw said:

"This is a welcome step and the Scottish Government is right to introduce this as soon as possible.

"There is also a discussion to be had about the 50p rate. Not only is that figure now five years old, but will it be suitable for another five years as this policy develops?

"We sincerely hope this legislation leads to a reduction in the number of lives lost in Scotland to alcohol.

"This is also the first time a sunset clause has been used.

"It will be challenging to monitor the impact of this, and that's something the Scottish Government will have to do very carefully over the coming years.

"But the sunset clause could also be a model for future controversial health legislation."