



Tackling Alcohol-related Harm: The Brewers are Part of the Solution

In June 2001 the EU Health Ministers, under the Swedish presidency, invited the Commission to put forward proposals for a comprehensive Community strategy to reduce alcohol-related harm. A "First draft working paper" was therefore sent by the Commission to national health experts and the stakeholders, in the course of the summer 2004, for comments. The document was drafted by an official who was seconded by the Swedish authorities for a six-month period to DG SANCO, the Commission department responsible for Health and Consumer Protection.

The first part of the document (definition of the problems) emphasises the negative impact of alcohol and is clearly based on the theory that the aim is to reduce overall per capita consumption, rather than specifically target the misuse. The second part then outlines 7 key areas for action: Drinking and Driving; Under-age drinking; Commercial communications; Consumer information; Availability; Protection of third parties; Data and Research. This second part specifically encourages the Member States to favour alcohol control measures, criticises self-regulation of commercial communications, and positions the industry in an "implementing partner" role.

The Brewers of Europe therefore sent to DG SANCO, in September 2004, a "First Submission", in the context of the above-mentioned draft document. Within the First Submission which may be found on our website, it was stressed that the European brewing industry has already been working to confront this issue for many years, and stands ready to continue to be part of the solution.

Since harm is caused by harmful patterns of consumption of specific consumers, the aim should however be to target alcohol-related harm and its causes without compromising the right of millions of adults to enjoy drinking beer. There is no evidence to suggest that reducing the overall level of consumption is an effective means of reducing misuse, and limiting physical availability merely fosters an unnatural, un-adult attitude to beer.

Whilst the brewing industry broadly agrees with DG SANCO's choice of seven key actions areas, it has reservations about many of the means proposed for tackling these areas. Europe's brewers are already engaged in many successful partnerships with the Commission, national governments, local authorities, road safety agencies etc. and lessons should be learnt from these examples of best practice.

The Brewers of Europe believes that it is of utmost importance that any strategies to tackle alcohol-related harm:-

- be based on reliable, independent evidence;
- take fully into account the wide variety of societies, economies, cultures, traditions and local particularities across the enlarged European Union;
- target the problem of misuse;
- involve a broad coalition including the brewing industry;
- include education at the core of their policies;
- be preceded by impact assessment and stakeholder consultation;
- include the sharing of experience, knowledge and best practise of all interested parties, including the brewing industry.

Europe is a cultural and societal patchwork, so therefore any initiative or measure taken at the appropriate level must take fully into account Europe's diversity of economies, societies, cultures and traditions. Across Europe the majority of the millions of adults who drink beer do so without causing themselves or others any harm. However, alcohol misuse by a small section of the population in some European countries is causing problems. The Brewers of Europe and its Members take these problems seriously, are opposed to the misuse of our products and wish to continue to play an important role in raising awareness of the implications of inappropriate consumption.

The Brewers of Europe has met with the Commission's services and other stakeholders in order to establish the way forward, but the European brewing industry wishes to be treated fairly and considered as a partner in the process, in order to continue to be part of the solution.

DG SANCO aims to issue a Commission communication by end 2005.

Currently 21 national associations are members of The Brewers of Europe, the voice of the European brewing industry to the European institutions and international organisations, and representing more than 90% of the beer produced in the EU 25