

# In Focus



QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOR ALCOHOL FOCUS SCOTLAND • ISSUE 10 April 2008

## Re-establish the National Licensing Forum

**In the light of recommendations from organisations such as Alcohol Focus Scotland, SHAAP and ACPOS, Dr Richard Simpson, Labour MSP for Mid Scotland and Fife, recently asked the Scottish Government that the National Licensing Forum be re-established to provide an overview of the effectiveness of the new licensing law and its local implementation.**

Kenny MacAskill, Justice Minister, responded that there are already other national fora that exist at which licensing matters are discussed. He stated that because the Scottish Ministerial Advisory Committee on Alcohol Problems (SMACAP), the Alcohol Industry Partnership (AIP) and local licensing forums all exist, he was not persuaded of the need for another forum at this stage in the implementation of the Act.

However, we believe that the issues which are surfacing just now are complex and deserve the attention of a specialist forum that focuses on the links between legislation and Scotland's alcohol problems. Both SMACAP and AIP consider many matters of which licensing is only one. We believe a re-established National Licensing Forum, which includes wide licensing expertise, is the best place to examine the impact of licensing decisions on health - Scotland's hard won extra licensing objective which unfortunately is in danger of slipping from sight in the flurry of implementation.

Currently the forty two licensing forums across Scotland are undergoing training to help them define their role and remit. We argue that at this stage in their development local forums are not in a position to debate issues of legislation or alcohol problems. That will come soon but will take time. The National Licensing Forum would support the local licensing forums in their future development.



A re-convened National Licensing Forum could inform the debate on UK issues such as taxes on beer, wine and spirits. The recent rise in taxes was a response to the warnings from doctors that supermarkets and corner shops were selling drink too cheaply and irresponsibly and that this was having an impact on health. However, it was reported in the national press that rather than putting up prices some stores are pressuring suppliers to absorb the cost of the rise to keep prices low for customers. The issue of price and promotions also requires more attention. A major store recently commented that they have no plans at present to change their policy of making special offers available to customers in the light of the current debate on price.

A recent group of experts brought together by AFS to consider "the price of alcohol" added their voice to the call for the re-establishment of the National Licensing Forum. One of the big issues the new legislation is meant to address is the problems arising from inconsistencies in how licensing issues were addressed across the country. The National Licensing Forum should be in a pivotal position to ensure consistency without interfering in local autonomy.

It's clear much is still to be done to make sure alcohol is marketed, sold and consumed responsibly in Scotland. The National Licensing Forum will exercise significant influence on changing our drinking culture.

It's important we don't replicate the mistakes of the past. We are in danger of doing this without the guidance of a National Forum.

## Welcome

Welcome to the April issue of In Focus, Alcohol Focus Scotland's quarterly newsletter.

In Focus aims to keep you up to date with alcohol news, events and initiatives from AFS and the wider alcohol field, so whether you're involved in health, community safety, licensing or any other alcohol-related area, hopefully you'll find In Focus of interest.

It's a time of real growth for us – we have several exciting new projects just starting or about to start over the coming months. More details inside and on our website.

If you have any comments on the newsletter or would like to contribute to the next issue, due out at the end of July, please get in touch.

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**gyna**  
gender issues network on alcohol

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promoting responsibility, reducing harm, changing culture

