

# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT

First Delegated Legislation Committee

DRAFT WINE (REVOCATION  
AND CONSEQUENTIAL PROVISION)  
REGULATIONS 2023

*Monday 4 December 2023*

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**The Committee consisted of the following Members:**

*Chair:* GRAHAM STRINGER

† Ansell, Caroline ( <i>Eastbourne</i> ) (Con)	† Loder, Chris ( <i>West Dorset</i> ) (Con)
† Baillie, Siobhan ( <i>Stroud</i> ) (Con)	† Morris, Grahame ( <i>Easington</i> ) (Lab)
† Barker, Paula ( <i>Liverpool, Wavertree</i> ) (Lab)	† Osborne, Kate ( <i>Jarrow</i> ) (Lab)
Duffield, Rosie ( <i>Canterbury</i> ) (Lab)	† Quin, Jeremy ( <i>Horsham</i> ) (Con)
† Edwards, Ruth ( <i>Rushcliffe</i> ) (Con)	† Spencer, Mark ( <i>Minister for Food, Farming and Fisheries</i> )
† Fletcher, Colleen ( <i>Coventry North East</i> ) (Lab)	Timpson, Edward ( <i>Eddisbury</i> ) (Con)
† Fletcher, Mark ( <i>Bolsover</i> ) (Con)	† Zeichner, Daniel ( <i>Cambridge</i> ) (Lab)
† Hudson, Dr Neil ( <i>Penrith and The Border</i> ) (Con)	Natalia Janiec-Janicki, <i>Committee Clerk</i>
† Jones, Andrew ( <i>Harrogate and Knaresborough</i> ) (Con)	
Lewis, Clive ( <i>Norwich South</i> ) (Lab)	† <b>attended the Committee</b>

**The following also attended (Standing Order No. 118(2)):**

Morrissey, Joy (*Lord Commissioner of His Majesty's Treasury*)

# First Delegated Legislation Committee

Monday 4 December 2023

[GRAHAM STRINGER *in the Chair*]

## Draft Wine (Revocation and Consequential Provision) Regulations 2023

4.30 pm

**The Minister for Food, Farming and Fisheries (Mark Spencer):** I beg to move,

That the Committee has considered the draft Wine (Revocation and Consequential Provision) Regulations 2023.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. The regulations were laid before the House on 25 October. I am proud to support our thriving wine market, which is one of the largest in the world and which had a total value of over £11 billion in 2022. The Government want to provide a regulatory landscape that enables the wine industry to be as innovative and productive as possible.

With this statutory instrument, the Government seek to take advantage of leaving the European Union. For the first time in decades, we can set our own wine regulations. We are therefore delighted to take the first historic step in providing flexibility for our wine industry. This instrument brings welcome flexibilities on how wine can be produced and labelled. These reforms are pragmatic and respond to calls for change from the wine industry.

First, the instrument will amend importer labelling requirements by removing the requirement that imported wine must show the prefix “importer” or “imported by” before the address of the business responsible for importing the wine to England. Doing so will apply general food law to wine labelling, and the intention is that the change will reduce the need for winemakers and bottlers to have separate labels for the UK and EU markets. That will reduce costs and remove administrative burdens.

The second change removes a restriction on new applications for wines with a protected designation of origin. That will enable new wines with a protected designation of origin to be produced from any permitted grape variety or hybrid variety, rather than just from the species *Vitis vinifera*. The change will ensure that our domestic wine sector increases resilience in the face of climate change and diseases.

Thirdly, the instrument will allow producers in England the scope to produce and sell piquette—a beverage produced by adding water to grape pomace, which is then fermented. That is an exciting and interesting opportunity, which the Government wish to offer our wine producers.

The Government will continue to support the already thriving wine industry by enabling the blending of imported wine in England. That will enable the wine industry to blend different varieties of wine from the same or different origins, including wines from third countries, to achieve greater consistency in its products and to create entirely new products that respond to

consumer tastes. The Government are delighted that the measure also offers the prospect of more British jobs in English wineries and bottling plants.

The instrument will remove the mandatory requirements for foil caps and mushroom-shaped stoppers to be used in marketing sparkling wine. It will also remove the wine certification scheme in GB. The Government opposed the policy as a European Union member. Now that we have left, we can seize the opportunity to remove that pointless burden.

**Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): I thank the Minister for that explanation. There is general acceptance that this is a positive measure. I was just reading the briefing note from the Wine and Spirit Trade Association, and I did not realise that we are the second biggest importer of wine in terms of quantity—we import 1.3 billion litres—and the 12th largest exporter. I looked through the impact assessment, but what impact will the bottling of blended wines have on employment? Will it be a positive as a result of this legislation?

**Mark Spencer:** We are really hopeful that it will be a significant positive and give flexibility to wine blenders here in the UK. It will also allow them to improve the quality of what they sell in UK markets and around the world. We very much hope that it will give the industry the freedom to be flexible and to respond to consumers’ changing tastes at the same time.

**Jeremy Quin** (Horsham) (Con): Sussex is very proud of its wine industry, which is growing year by year. There is a huge amount to be proud of—

**Caroline Ansell** (Eastbourne) (Con): Hear, hear!

**Jeremy Quin:** My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne concurs from a sedentary position.

To pick up on the point made by the hon. Member for Easington, the growth of the wine industry brings benefits not only to the industry itself but to tourism. I very much welcome these proposals, and we see a lot of potential in Sussex for us to grow not only the industry itself but, more broadly, its positive impact on tourism.

**Mark Spencer:** My right hon. Friend is a great advocate and consumer of wine. He will be aware that Sussex is quite unique: it has its own geographical indicator and protections for its English wine and its English sparkling wine. I am grateful for his support and that of his constituents.

**Jeremy Quin:** I thank my right hon. Friend for what I believe is a compliment.

**Mark Spencer:** To get back to the matters at hand, the majority of these reforms will apply only in England. However, the Welsh Government and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs have agreed to pursue future reforms together, allowing the benefits to flow to the wine industry across both nations, and we continue to encourage Scotland to make similar reforms.

Together, these changes will liberalise the growing wine industry and address issues faced by our wine businesses. I hope I have said enough to assure members of the Committee of the need for this instrument. It is the first part of a broader package of reforms that will give our thriving wine and alcoholic drinks sectors greater flexibility and support in the future.

4.36 pm

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure, as ever, to serve with you in the Chair, Mr Stringer, and to hear the Minister's introduction. I start by reassuring him and the Whips that we recognise the constructive approach the Department has taken with the industry on this instrument and that, given the support the industry has expressed, we will not oppose it. That said, there are of course some issues, which were aired in last week's debate in the other place and on which more clarity would be helpful.

As we have heard, the wine sector makes an important contribution to this country's economy, and I thank the Wine and Spirit Trade Association for its help in preparing for this debate. I noticed that it is quoted in the impact assessment as saying that the UK wine market was worth over £10 billion in 2022—I think the Minister said £11 billion, but what is 1 billion between friends. However, it is certainly a very large amount of money in off-trade and on-trade sales, with large volumes of wine imported, bottled and re-exported across the world. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Easington, we are the world's 12th largest exporter by value. Wine is a very important part of our highly successful food and drink sector.

As has been said, the vast majority of wine consumed here—99%—is imported. We recognise and accept the need for the rules inherited from the European Union to be updated and streamlined to help the sector operate even more efficiently. I also appreciate that efforts are being made in this legislation to provide consumers with clearer information and to reduce unnecessary packaging—for instance, by removing the foil and mushroom cork requirements for sparkling wines—and we have heard that the Minister intends to bring in another two instruments to make further changes and to consolidate legislation.

I understand that today's instrument needs to be in place before 1 January—just a few weeks away—which rather answers the question raised in the other place: why not do all three together? To put it kindly, DEFRA is clearly a just-in-time Department; putting it less kindly, this is all rather last-minute. Perhaps the Minister can explain why this could not all have been done a bit earlier, and therefore in a more rational way.

I also understand that the Department has yet to reach an agreed way forward to ensure alignment across the GB internal market. Of course, this is not the only such issue, as it has also failed to agree a UK deposit return scheme, which could accept wine and other glass bottles. Will the Minister therefore provide more clarity around what exactly the other two instruments will do? How will they impact on the labelling requirements? What further changes is the Department planning for 2024-25? What is getting in the way of it reaching the agreements needed with the devolved Governments on this and other important matters? Perhaps the Opposition could help. How exactly does the Minister plan to reach a consistent regulatory approach across the GB internal market?

We are grateful to the House of Lords Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee for its useful report on this instrument, which makes for sobering reading and is worded quite strongly. In addition to the questions I have asked, it expresses concerns about the potential

negative impact on consumer confidence if labelling ends up providing less information for consumers or is just less clear. It states:

"it will be important that all products are labelled clearly so that consumers can make an informed choice of what they are buying."

The issue was raised in the other place, but the response of the Minister's colleague there was a little vague.

I am sure that many of those present today study wine labels closely, and many of our constituents who buy wine will be used to seeing specific information showing the origin; the grape varieties used; by whom, how and where the wine is produced; and other important details, such as the percentage alcohol content and units, whether the wine is fair trade or organic, and whether it contains sulphites or egg white. They may feel wary of that sort of information being presented in a different and perhaps more generic or less informative way. Will the Minister clarify exactly what the changes in the regulations will mean in practice for the information on wine bottle labels? How does the Department plan to inform consumers, so that their confidence can be maintained?

In conclusion, much in the regulations is to be welcomed, but if we dig into the detail, support for some of the measures was not as strong as the explanatory memorandum suggests. It would be sensible to pick up some of the points when the other instruments are brought forward, so that the new regime can be considered as a coherent whole.

4.41 pm

**Mark Spencer:** I am grateful for the support of the shadow team, and I will address some of the points made by the hon. Member for Cambridge.

Of course, it would be much better to do these things across the whole UK. It is a question of ensuring that we take our friends in Scotland and Wales with us. The hon. Gentleman slightly pressed me on why we are bringing the regulations forward so close to the deadline. We have been engaged in many conversations with our friends in Wales and Scotland, cajoling them along the same route. To be clear, they have not said that they will not do this; they are still considering what they would like to do. We are helping and supporting them in that decision-making process and to come on board and do some of these things in Scotland and Wales. Those conversations are ongoing, and we will continue them.

We are doing this SI first, and we will do the other two when we get to them, but more detailed work is needed with the industry to ensure that we get the legislation right.

**Daniel Zeichner:** May I press the Minister slightly? In a few weeks' time, will we not end up with produce being regulated differently in different parts of Great Britain?

**Mark Spencer:** To be clear, absolutely not. We will not have products that are regulated differently, but we will have an industry that is regulated differently in terms of blending. It will be possible for a winemaker in Cambridge to blend a wine in Cambridge and to sell it throughout the United Kingdom—it will still be possible to sell Cambridgeshire wine in Cardiff and Edinburgh—but it will not be possible for someone to blend a wine in Cardiff and to sell it in Cambridge. However, we hope our friends in Wales and Scotland will catch up.

[Mark Spencer]

The hon. Gentleman asked some specific questions about labelling, and it is important to get across that it is fundamental to these changes that the consumer is not misled, and nothing in them will mislead consumers. People will have to be absolutely clear. It will not be possible for me to buy in some Australian wine, blend it with three grapes from Sussex, bottle it in Nottinghamshire and call it Nottinghamshire wine. Clearly, that would be misleading, which is not permitted under these regulations. We must be clear about the percentages, the blends of grapes being used and the origin of the wines.

That is all clear for those who are doing it, but the regulations do give importers flexibility to blend different varieties and types of wine to maintain a standard product throughout different seasons, because wines can change, and they can also change in transport.

**Grahame Morris:** I am grateful for that explanation, but I support the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge on the Labour Front Bench. It would be in everyone's interests to have a clear system of labelling, particularly when half the wines we import are bulk wines that are subsequently blended. Is there a

particular point of contention with the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly? Is there a particular issue that is concerning them?

**Mark Spencer:** I am not aware of any specific concerns; I think it is more a question of timing. I do not want to imply any criticism of the Scottish or Welsh devolved Administrations, because positive conversations are taking place, and I am sure Scotland and Wales will get to these regulations in time. There is a much more established wine sector in England—certainly on the south coast—so it is probably a higher priority for the UK Government to facilitate these changes in England. That said, there is quite an established wine sector in Wales, which I am sure the Welsh Government will want to support as we move forward. However, the conversations remain positive and constructive, and I am sure any issues will be resolved in due course.

With that in mind, Mr Stringer, I ask the Committee to support the regulations, and I shall cease to speak.

*Question put and agreed to.*

4.46 pm

*Committee rose.*



