

ALMR Press Notice

Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers

Pubs in need of help in charge towards a smoke free industry

The strength of feeling in Parliament surrounding smoking in public places was overwhelmingly demonstrated this week and it is clear that the national mood is swinging against smoke and smokers. It is only right that the *ALMR* recognises this and responds in a constructive and helpful fashion.

We are certainly relieved that there is to be equal treatment for all under a straightforward and universal smoking ban. Pub operators will hope that this level playing field will ultimately be reflected in future pub visits and beer sales as non-smokers take advantage of smoke free pubs and smokers are sufficiently catered for with outside facilities.

The pub industry is now at the vanguard of the smoke free legislation. We will be at the heart of the culture change that this legislation will inevitably drive. If this leads to a healthier nation then this can only be of benefit to society, the economy and our industry.

However, the criticisms that we, and others, made of the ban remain valid. There is a very real fear that many pubs could go to the wall. The industry is flexible and dynamic and will recover and continue to thrive in the long term. However, there will be a medium term impact on profit margins - that is not in doubt. As such, pub operators will need all the help they can get - certainly from their trade associations and professional bodies. The crucial support will however, be from government, and now is the time for DCMS to be the champion of the hospitality industry and to prevent licensees worst fears becoming a ghastly reality of lost jobs and livelihoods. In particular:-

- Before finalising the date DCMS should look hard at the lessons of next month's Scotland ban and create a transition timetable that recognises the experience of operators there.
- Recognise that only 9 months ago businesses were contemplating a ban (with possible exemptions) at the end of 2008. The summer of 2007 is no time at all to prepare the operating plans and funding for alternative outside facilities for smokers.
- Seek to achieve an imaginative and sympathetic planning regime that will allow outside shelters and other structural work to replicate the successful Ireland model.
- Devise positive PR that promotes the smoking ban to the public, pub customers and the landlords and staff as well. In particular reconsider the enforcement regime and the punitive fines that have been announced - a 50-fold penalty (£2500) for allowing an offence compared with offending itself (£50) is patently disproportionate.

Nick Bish, Chief Executive of *ALMR* commented that: "We all want to see a healthier Britain, but we don't want it to be to the detriment of one of the country's most loved icon – the pub. Obviously the level playing field is welcome and gives pubs a sporting chance of competing with membership clubs. The government must now listen to the industry and ensure that the impact on jobs and pubs is minimised. Pubs will be hardest hit by the legislation and it is only fair that the Government takes this into account in order to save thousands of jobs in the transition to a smoke free industry"

The Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers
9B Walpole Court, Ealing Studios, London, W5 5ED
Tel: **020 8579 2080** Fax: 020 8579 7579 E-mail: info@almr.org.uk