

Tauro-Scatology and New Directives

Basil O'Saurus, our resident Professor of Tauro-Scatology has, as readers of *In Practice* will know, a great deal of empathy with the hard-pressed employees of our statutory agencies. He's always quick to leap to their defence and make sure that all IEEM members are aware of the enormous burden of responsibility that is laid upon their shoulders. He has also, regrettably, heard the occasional critical comment, implying that some of our esteemed public servants are incapable of organising a piss-up in a brewery. This month, he's going to meet these ill-informed critics head on. Over to you, Prof.

Thank you. I thought it was about time to explain to IEEM members just how hard it is to organise a piss-up in a brewery, especially now that we have to look to Brussels for so much of our legislation. I have been fortunate enough to take part in some of the early negotiations for the EU's forthcoming Piss-up in a Brewery Directive and, let me tell you, it is not as straightforward as some people seem to think.

What's the problem?

First of all, we have to define a 'piss-up', then we have to define a 'brewery' and that's before our troubles have even started.

Let's take it a step at a time. What's so difficult about defining a 'piss-up'?

Plenty. Every member state has a slightly different take on the point at which a night out with friends becomes a 'piss-up'. The Scandinavians, of course, with their high taxes on alcohol start to get giggly after a can or two of lager. On the other hand, some of our Central European brethren are more or less falling over before they admit that they have strayed beyond the boundaries of reasonable consumption.

How do you solve this problem?

Not easily. We did think about setting up special committees to compare and contrast alcohol consumption patterns around the EU. We thought about paying a group of people gathered from all around Europe to compare

national alcohol consumption practices. However, that idea was vetoed by the European Parliament.

Why?

Because they resented the idea of competition. In the end, we had to resort to the old fallback of committees of bureaucrats holding lots of meetings to try to reach common ground on what is really meant by terms like 'piss-up', 'brewery' and so on. It's going to be a long process, as I'm sure you'll appreciate.

What's so difficult?

Take the word 'brewery', for example. The straightforward definition, of course, is a premises used for brewing beer but we ran into a problem straight away, as all the southern Europeans wanted to know if this meant that piss-ups in wineries were excluded. Then the Romanians argued persuasively that they were, in theory, as capable of organising a piss-up in a brewery as the next member state but they had lots of cheap plum brandy which did the job much faster and without stretching their bladders.

It all just makes me glad that we don't have the same type of muddle-headed bureaucrats sorting out our environmental legislation.

Ahem. We had better move on pretty quickly now. The really big intellectual challenge came in defining 'piss-up' itself. Are there standard parameters that we can measure that will allow 'piss-up' to be defined in an incontrovertible manner? We examined four options: defining a piss-up in terms of the amount of alcohol consumed, the physiological manifestations, consequences or after effects. None is perfect, as you can imagine.

It sounds like you've done extensive tests.

I'm nothing if not dedicated. But, to cut to the chase, the expert group proposed a simple test which is that a 'piss-up' is best defined as an extended drinking session which leads to at least some of the participants bursting into spontaneous song. This has the great practical advantage of not requiring any invasive tests, as would be the case with measuring blood alcohol. All but one country agreed with this.

Who objected?

Belgium.

Belgium? Why?

Because some of their best beers are brewed by Trappist Monks so it follows that a piss-up in a Belgian brewery is not necessarily going to be a noisy affair.

So is it back to the drawing board?

Not quite. We resorted to Qualified Majority Voting which, as you know, means that we can steamroller any legislation through so long as France, Germany, Italy and the UK agree. Sorry Belgium.

Does this mean that there can be no piss-ups in Belgium breweries?

Not at all. It just means that we need to find an alternative way of quantifying piss-ups in Belgium. We'll give them an opt-out so that they can define a piss-up in terms of the quantity consumed, but only after a group of European experts have held a hands-on workshop to compare the inebriating effects of Trappist beer and cheap lager.

Tough work, eh, Prof?

I have, of course, nobly offered my services in this, and am helping to derive an appropriate protocol. Like all such activities, it needs a catchy acronym and I came up with Local Evaluation of Alcohol Consumption, or LEAC, which sounded appropriate.

So when is this Piss-up in a Brewery Directive likely to be passed by the European Parliament?

Not long now, I promise you. But it won't actually be called the Piss-up in a Brewery Directive. Once the Brussels Euro-mangle got hold of it, the name changed to the Mass Inebriation (and Associated Activities) in Non-Domestic Alcohol-Production Facilities Directive'. I'm not sure if this really is the best they can do or if they are disguising the real intent so that they don't provoke outraged headlines in the Daily Mail.

And then we can look forward to perfectly-organised piss-ups in British Breweries?

Not quite. In the next issue of *In Practice*, I'll explain the UK's implementation strategy in more detail.

We'll look forward to talking again before too long. Thanks for your time, Prof.