



news release
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New figures show substantial 3.2 per cent fall in UK alcohol consumption

UK alcohol consumption fell by just over three per cent in 2008, according to new figures compiled by the British Beer & Pub Association (BBPA). Evidence of this sharp fall has resulted from a BBPA analysis of data from HM Revenue & Customs for 2008.

According to the Government's own calculation of alcohol harm, this fall has resulted in a saving to the economy of £804 million, this year alone. This means there can be no justification for further, punitive alcohol tax increases and red tape that will put many more pubs out of business, says the BBPA.

The latest fall confirms the pattern of a downward trend in alcohol consumption since 2004.

Other key indicators of overall UK alcohol consumption are:

Alcohol consumption was six per cent lower in 2008 than in 2004 – 8.9 litres per head against 9.5 litres per head

Consumption has fallen by 4.6 per cent since the introduction of the Licensing Act in 2005, resulting in a saving to the economy of £2.3 billion over the last three years.

The current reduced level of consumption in 2008 could save the economy £8.0 billion over ten years, according to the Government's own figures – even without any further decreases in consumption.

Of 20 countries where comparable data is available, the UK ranks only 14th in alcohol consumption per head – well behind consumption levels in France and Germany.

The industry believes the sharp downward trend in consumption should give the Government pause for thought as it continues to press ahead with plans for tax increases and a mandatory code for pubs, contained in the Policing & Crime Bill at a time when 20,000 jobs have been lost in the sector and 2,000 pubs have closed in the last 12 months.

As the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, said yesterday: "We do not want the responsible, sensible majority of moderate drinkers to have to pay more or suffer as a result of the excesses of a small minority."

Mark Hastings, BBPA Director of Communications, comments:

“These figures show that the persistent perception of rising alcohol consumption in the UK is false. The amount we drink as a nation is falling and this is now a consistent trend since the introduction of the Licensing Act in 2005.”

“Based on the Government’s own method of calculating alcohol related harm, the figures show that current trends are cutting billions from the nation’s alcohol harm bill. This calls into question the case for pressing ahead with further punitive increases in tax increases and costly red tape, as the Government seems determined to do. Government policy should be based on the facts not reflect the myths on alcohol.

“The current economic downturn is undoubtedly having a depressive effect on consumption. However, it is equally the case that what is now an established four year downward trend has been heavily influenced by the consistent communication of responsible drinking messaging. The industry’s investment in and promotion of responsible drinking messages to consumers and initiatives like Drinkaware is helping people make more informed and better choices about their drinking patterns and behaviours.”

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Notes to editors

1. The British Beer and Pub Association is the UK’s leading organisation representing the brewing and pub sector. Its members account for 98% of the beer brewed in the UK and own nearly two thirds of Britain’s 56,000 pubs.

2. The BBPA’s analysis of alcohol consumption figures since 2004 show the following: (source: BBPA and HM Revenue and Customs, BBPA Statistical Handbook 2008)

UK Consumption of alcohol - Litres per head of 100% alcohol

2004	9.5
2005	9.4
2006	9.1
2007	9.2
2008	8.9

This fall could save the economy £8.0 billion over ten years according to the Government’s own regulatory impact assessment for the Policing & Crime Bill. This says: “a 1% fall in alcohol consumption is estimated to yield a benefit over ten years of £2.514 billion” (‘Impact Assessment for a Code of Practice for the Alcohol Industry’)

3. UK beer sales (‘000 barrels - source: BBPA quarterly Beer Barometer)

2004	33,441
2005	32,659

2006	32,160
2007	30,897
2008	29,120