

Speech: Dr Liam Fox speaks at the All-Party Parliamentary Beer Group

Good evening.

What a pleasure it is to be here tonight. I find that, whatever the stresses of the day, I always leave these meetings with a warm glow of contentment and a sense that all is right with the world.

It must be the company.

Despite my personal interest in this APPGs work as a regular in-market supplier, I am here this evening in an official capacity as Secretary of State for International Trade.

Beer is a significant export industry for the UK. Indeed, the rest of the world is beginning to understand what we have always known – that British beer is the best in the world.

Every year, more and more UK-brewed beer is sold overseas – in 2017 some £526 million worth, or more than 1.1 billion pints.

Of course, our overseas friends have not always had such a taste for our national drink.

In 1562, a young tourist from Venice, Allessandro Magno, visited Tudor London and left us an account of the beer he tasted in a local inn.

English Ale was, he declared:

“Healthy, but sickening to taste. It is cloudy like horses’ urine, and has husks floating on top.”

An unfavourable review, to put it mildly. And not familiar even to those of us who’ve ventured into the more exotic corners of the CAMRA good beer guide!

Thankfully for the UK’s breweries, times have changed, and people across the world have acquired a taste for our beer.

Today, we export beer to over 120 countries around the world. It is enjoyed by the pint everywhere from equatorial rainforests to the Arctic Circle, putting paid to traditional complaints about the ‘warm’ British pint.

Beer is one of the UK’s top 10 food and drink exports.

Compared to, say, financial services, the pure economic impact of beer exports may seem less significant.

But the fact is that food and drink is perhaps the most highly visible export from the United Kingdom.

Certainly, it enjoys a well-deserved global reputation for quality, and thanks to this often leads the way in opening new markets.

In the course of my current role I have been fortunate enough to travel all over the world, including to some of the most far-flung parts of Asia and Africa and South America.

I can say confidently that, 99% of the time, I have been beaten there by several bottles of British beer – a far more capable Ambassador for the UK than any politician could ever hope to be!

Our beer is undoubtedly a global success story.

But we want to build on these accomplishments – my Department for International Trade is committed to supporting UK beer companies to begin exporting, or to expand their existing operations overseas.

Across the UK, we have experienced trade advisors on hand to help breweries large and small to begin their exporting journey.

As well as this, we proactively engage with industry trade associations, and promote our beer around the world through the GREAT campaign.

In our overseas network too, beer is taken seriously.

As seriously as you would expect by groups of British people sent to work in hot countries.

Our staff in Post actively engage with overseas beer buyers, exploring opportunities that we can then present to breweries here at home.

We even bring them to the UK to take part in bespoke 'meet the buyer' events across the country.

A recent example, and one close to my own constituency, I assure you by coincidence, was the event held in Bristol in September last year.

Over a 2 day period, DIT led a group of 12 international beer and cider buyers on a tour of 6 breweries across the South West, as well as arranging one-to-one sales meetings with 40 other more smaller beer and cider producers.

It was a vital opportunity for smaller producers to make their first foray onto exporting, and see their fantastic products gain a toehold in the international market.

Orders have been placed with companies such as Wimborne's Eight Arch Brewery, Bristol's Moor Beer, Taunton's Exmoor Ales, and many more.

It is a small start, but for these breweries such events are an invaluable opportunity.

All of us are here this evening because we appreciate the impact that a

healthy local brewing industry can have, not just on the morale of our constituents, but also on employment and associated industries.

That is why we welcome the British Beer and Pub Association's 5-year export strategy, and their ambition to see British beer exports grow by £100 million by 2022. We look forward to helping in any way we can.

My department is, of course, primarily concerned with overseas trade. But that does not mean that we are uninterested in the success of domestic industries.

UK pubs, and the wider hospitality sector, have a vital role to play in showcasing everything that the UK beer industry has to offer.

After all, going to a pub for a pint is top of the list on any tourist itinerary. Indeed, research for Visit Britain indicates that pubs are the third most popular attraction for visitors, after the British Museum and the Tower of London.

As well as this, staying in pubs is fast becoming the preferred option for visitors wishing to experience local hospitality.

There are over 5,500 pubs in the UK that offer somewhere to sleep, officially that is, boasting some 50,000 rooms between them.

So it is easy to deduce that the success of Britain's pubs is directly linked to the success of our beer exports. In this way, beer is a prime example of how the success of local businesses in each of our constituencies translates directly to exporting success, and the economic health of the whole United Kingdom.

Fundamentally, almost all of DIT's work is designed to help UK businesses to export, grow and prosper, and to attract inward investment to the UK.

Even our most high-profile work – negotiating potential free trade agreements – helps to boost the UK beer industry.

The countries with which we have trade working groups are also some of the world's largest beer importers, including the USA, China and Canada.

We want to see the United Kingdom take its rightful place as the beating heart of international free trade – a hub of international commerce, and a truly global Britain.

And as we go out and into the world, there will be truly unlimited opportunities for the UK beer industry to expand and grow.

There's only one thing to say to that:

Cheers.