

Dear Mr. Hegarty,

I understand you are looking for evidence about cask beer from brewers. I'm not sure if you're familiar with Moor or myself. I've had the brewery for over 14 years, moving over from the US because of my love for real ale and British pubs, so this is very close to my heart. Along the way we've helped influence the industry by starting the unfiltered beer movement, have been recognised by CAMRA as the world's first brewer of can conditioned real ale, and I was awarded Brewer of the Year. I also do a lot of export ambassadorial work for both Moor and real ale in general. So this topic is quite important to me!

Below are some of my key thoughts.

- Volume – it's no secret that cask beer has been in terminal decline. When we started we were 100% cask focused, with that declining over the years to around 40% as keg and small pack became more popular. Last year cask beer was virtually 0.
- Risk – Landlords often talk about the risk of stocking cask beer, with it being the least stable format of beer and needing to be consumed within 3 days of opening. As we are speaking with landlords about re-opening, it is not surprising that cask is the last area they will consider investing in, which has a knock on effect to us brewers not wanting to risk producing it. The worst situation we've experienced is actually with the pub companies. Prior to Covid we had a year long programme agreed with one particular pub company so we started stocking up for it in excess of 600 firkins. We shipped maybe a few pallets before lockdown hit, and due to the one-sided nature of dealing with pubcos, we were stuck with it. That equated to 5% of our annual production. As you can imagine, that created a huge problem for us with everything from cash flow to warehousing. The industry cannot operate with great shocks like this, so it is essential that a) there is never a lockdown again, and b) something is legislated to share the risk between parties, although I am always wary of unintended consequences with legislation.
- Container Size – With the fragile nature and risk aversion to cask beer, we've had lots of requests to supply in pins instead of firkins. Whilst in theory this sounds great, it is not practical for several reasons. First, the cost of purchasing a pin is not much different to the cost of a firkin. Second, there is no rental market to rent pins, but there is for firkins. Third, the effort and cost to clean and fill a pin is also not much different to a firkin. Fourth, and probably most important, the cost of delivering a pin is the same, but the value and volume of the sale is half, which makes it largely unviable and also worse for the environment. Fifth, pins are easily stolen and are harder to recover. In short, whilst pubs would prefer to reduce their risk by stocking smaller containers, this is largely not an option for brewers, apart from certain exceptions.
- Price – Despite being a premium, high risk product, it is most often undervalued by the brewer selling, the landlord, and the consumer, sadly giving cask beer a cheap image. I'm a CAMRA member and huge supporter personally and professionally, but CAMRA has really done itself a disservice in this area, especially with discount vouchers and some members insisting on discounts in venues almost by right. The pricing structure of places like Wetherspoons firmly illustrates the problem.
- USP – Cask ale dispensed by gravity or hand pump in a pub is a definite USP for British hospitality and tourism. Indeed it is one of the reasons I moved here and is in the top 10 list of things tourists want to experience when visiting Britain. I don't think it is hyperbole to state that cask ale is seriously under threat of extinction if normal market forces are left unchecked. Alongside the great British pub, cask beer must be preserved as part of the national heritage.

- Redressing the balance - I am not normally one who advocates government intervention, and I do greatly fear unintended consequences, but I'm sure there are some methods that can be employed to help balance the negatives that are associated with stocking cask beer for brewers and publicans. Examples being discussed include tax reductions for draught / cask beer, which could also be a good way to help level some of the disparity with cheap supermarket prices. It's quite clear that supermarkets have been big beneficiaries of things like Minimum Unit Pricing, and indeed Covid where they have been one of the only outlets for beer. I would much prefer, and I think it would be beneficial for society in general, to see responsible alcohol consumption in licensed premises as opposed to unrestrained binge drinking of cheap alcohol at home or in open public spaces. Given the unique nature of cask beer, it is the perfect item to focus relief on.

I hope this gives you more evidence as to what is being experienced with stocking cask ale from a brewer's perspective. If you would like to discuss further please let me know.

**Justin Hawke**

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**Bristol**