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The United States lifts its 10% tariff on Scotch whisky imports

Drinks executives now hope Washington will extend tariff relief to Irish whiskey, Champagne, Cognac and other European categories

Tuesday, July 28, 2026



The United States has removed its 10% tariff on Scotch whisky imports, a move that took effect last week and is already raising expectations in the drinks industry that other alcohol categories could also see relief.

The change was confirmed after Friday, July 24, and reverses an earlier path that would have raised tariffs on single malt Scotch to 25% this year. The decision followed King Charles III’s state visit to the United States in April, according to the report.

For Scotch producers, the rollback closes a chapter that began in April 2025, when the tariff was imposed. The Scotch Whisky Association had said the measure led to losses of about £150 million for the sector.

Industry executives quickly framed the decision as more than a win for one category. Nodjame Fouad, chief executive of Pernod Ricard’s aged spirits and champagne division, said the company now hopes to see further progress on tariffs affecting other spirits and wine categories, including Irish whiskey, Champagne and Cognac. He said broader tariff removal would benefit consumers, producers and hospitality businesses on both sides of the Atlantic.

That response matters beyond Scotch. In the beverage sector, tariff changes on one imported alcohol category can signal a wider shift in trade policy and pricing conditions. If Washington extends similar treatment to wine, sparkling wine or other spirits, import costs could ease and competitive dynamics could change for distributors, restaurants, retailers and producers that depend on transatlantic trade. Any broader relief remains uncertain, but the Scotch decision is being read by parts of the industry as a sign that more negotiations may be possible.

Scottish First Minister John Swinney also welcomed the move, saying it would help businesses and workers on both sides of the Atlantic. He said the benefits would reach not only whisky producers but also the businesses and communities across Scotland that support the industry.

The tariff issue has carried weight well beyond distilleries. Import duties can affect shelf prices, restaurant beverage programs and margins for importers and wholesalers. In sectors such as fine wine, Champagne and aged spirits, where products often compete in premium price bands, even a 10% duty can influence buying decisions and inventory planning. That is one reason drinks companies are watching closely to see whether U.S. trade officials consider similar steps for other European categories.

The latest decision also comes at a sensitive time for hospitality operators in both the United States and Europe. Bars, restaurants and specialty retailers have faced pressure from higher operating costs and uneven consumer spending. Lower import duties on major beverage categories can offer some relief by reducing landed costs or limiting future price increases, though the final effect depends on exchange rates, shipping expenses and distributor pricing.

For now, the immediate impact is clear for Scotch whisky entering the U.S. market: the 10% tariff is gone. What remains unclear is whether this will stay an isolated measure tied to one product and one diplomatic opening, or become part of a broader reset in alcohol trade between the United States and Europe. Executives in spirits and wine are signaling that they want the latter, especially for categories that still face tariff pressure.