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New EU Anti-Greenwashing Rules Force English and Welsh Wine Exporters to Reassess Green Claims

Lawyers say unsupported sustainability language on bottles, packaging and websites could expose wineries to scrutiny in the bloc.

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English and Welsh wine producers that sell into the European Union are being urged to review the environmental claims they make on bottles, labels, websites and marketing materials after new EU anti-greenwashing rules took effect on Sept. 27.

In a legal update published Oct. 5, U.K. law firm Birketts said exporters should pay close attention to the EU's Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition Directive, which now applies in EU member states and is intended to curb environmental claims that cannot be properly supported. The warning comes as the 2026 harvest has largely finished in England and Wales and as producers continue to seek growth in overseas markets, including the EU, the United States and Nordic countries.

According to Birketts, the directive limits a range of statements and symbols that have become common in consumer marketing. These include broad environmental claims that lack evidence, sustainability labels that are not based on recognized certification schemes or backed by public authorities, and "climate neutral" claims that rely on carbon offsetting alone. The rules also require that claims about future environmental performance be supported by credible commitments and evidence.

The change matters for wine producers because many brands in England and Wales have increasingly used sustainability and provenance as part of their commercial positioning, especially in premium categories. Birketts said environmental messaging has become a factor in sales growth, alongside consumer interest in how wine is grown, made and transported. That means a compliance issue in the EU can also become a commercial issue for wineries that depend on export markets and use sustainability language to distinguish their products.

The effect could extend beyond wine. Any drinks business that sells into Europe and promotes itself through claims about sustainable farming, low-carbon production, recyclable packaging or nature-friendly sourcing may face similar scrutiny. For beverage producers, the practical risk is that wording once used as general brand language may now need technical support, third-party certification or clearer limits on what exactly is being claimed.

Birketts highlighted several areas it considers especially sensitive. Generic terms such as “eco-friendly,” “sustainably sourced,” “climate positive,” and “regenerative viticulture” may create risk if producers cannot show clear evidence for them. The same applies to references to “natural wine,” a term that has no single settled meaning for consumers or regulators. Claims tied to carbon neutrality or net zero may also be problematic if they are based only on purchased carbon credits rather than emissions reductions achieved within a producer’s own operations.

The legal update also said biodiversity and nature claims may draw attention if they are not backed by measurable data, and that companies should be careful not to overstate what a sustainability certification actually covers. A certification might apply to one part of a process but not the entire product or business. In that case, broad marketing language could overreach the underlying evidence.

The warning is not limited to the wine itself. Birketts said producers should also examine environmental claims made about packaging, including bottles, closures and labels, as well as claims linked to transport methods used when wine is shipped overseas. That widens the scope of review for wineries because a sustainability message may appear at several points in the supply chain and consumer experience, not only in formal product descriptions.

For British producers focused mainly on domestic sales, Birketts said similar caution is needed under U.K. rules. The firm pointed to the Competition and Markets Authority’s Green Claims Code, which sets principles for environmental marketing, and noted that the U.K. Advertising Standards Authority uses AI-powered monitoring to identify potentially misleading online advertising. Birketts said that monitoring covers websites, search engines, social media and influencer content, increasing the chance that problematic claims can be detected outside traditional advertising channels.

That could be significant for smaller wineries and drinks brands that rely heavily on direct-to-consumer sales and digital promotion. In those cases, the same claim may appear on a bottle, in an online shop, in a social media post and in influencer content, creating repeated compliance exposure if the wording is too broad or cannot be verified. A phrase intended to signal brand values can become a regulatory problem

when it is presented as a factual environmental benefit.

Birketts said producers should now review all environmental claims that are either stated directly or implied in labels, promotional materials and online content. In its view, any statement related to sustainability, biodiversity, carbon reduction or production methods should be capable of being substantiated with objective evidence. The firm said businesses should take particular care where a claim depends on carbon offsetting, a proprietary certification system or a concept that may be interpreted differently by different consumers.

The law firm framed the new rules not as a ban on discussing genuine sustainability efforts, but as a push toward more specific, evidence-based and verifiable communication. For wine producers in England and Wales, that means the next stage of export planning may involve legal and compliance checks as much as vineyard and sales strategy, especially for businesses that see the EU as a growth market and have built part of their brand around environmental performance.