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American Whiskey Association Asks U.S. to Remove Trade Barriers in 17 Export Markets

In comments for the 2027 National Trade Estimate report, the group pointed to tariffs in India, retail limits in Canada and rules that raise costs across other markets

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The American Whiskey Association asked the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative on Tuesday, November 10, to push for the removal of trade barriers in 17 foreign markets, saying tariffs, retail restrictions and regulatory rules are limiting exports of bourbon, Tennessee whiskey, American rye and American single malt.

The request came in formal comments submitted for the 2027 National Trade Estimate Report on Foreign Trade Barriers, the annual U.S. government review that catalogs obstacles facing American exporters abroad. The filing is a policy request from an industry group, not a new trade agreement or an approved change in U.S. trade rules.

The association said its submission covered a wide range of commercial and regulatory obstacles that, in its view, make it harder for American whiskey producers to compete overseas. It did not publish a total estimate of losses tied to the barriers as a group, and it did not provide a comparable earlier count that would show whether the number of markets cited has risen.

The Washington-based group said its top priorities include lower tariffs in India, including for bulk shipments, and renewed access to provincial retail markets in Canada where American spirits remain restricted. It also called for stable tariff-free trade with the European Union and the United Kingdom, along with action against what it described as restrictive marketing rules, discriminatory excise tax measures and other policies that can affect sales.

In markets across Asia and Latin America, the association said producers also face labeling, certification, customs and other regulatory requirements that can delay shipments or add costs. It urged the U.S. government to seek what it called fair, reciprocal and predictable market access and to press for rules that are transparent and consistently applied.

The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, part of the Executive Office of the President, uses submissions from companies and trade groups as it prepares the annual report. Those comments can help shape future negotiations or enforcement efforts, but they do not by themselves trigger policy changes.

The association represents whiskey producers and companies in the broader supply chain in all 50 states. In its statement, it argued that export access matters beyond distilleries because whiskey production supports farmers, barrel makers, manufacturers and freight providers.

American whiskey is a large part of U.S. spirits exports. The association, citing data from the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States, said American whiskey accounted for 54% of total U.S. spirits exports by value in 2024, with about $1.3 billion in export revenue.

Michael Bilello, the association’s president and chief executive, said in the statement that American whiskey producers need predictable access to foreign markets to compete. He said the group wants the administration to keep removing tariffs and other measures that, in its view, put U.S. producers at a disadvantage.

The filing places special focus on India, one of the world’s largest alcoholic beverage markets and one that U.S. distillers have long viewed as difficult to enter on competitive terms. The association said the U.S. should seek “meaningful tariff reductions” and commercially workable access for American whiskey, including shipments sent in bulk rather than only bottled product. It also said producers face regulatory uncertainty and treatment that favors other suppliers.

Canada was identified as another priority because of limits in some provincial retail systems. The association said those restrictions affect a market that has historically been important for American spirits exports. Canadian provinces control much of the sale and distribution of alcohol, and market access can vary by jurisdiction.

For Europe, the group’s message was focused less on opening a new market than on preserving current access and avoiding renewed trade disputes. American whiskey has previously been caught in retaliatory tariff battles tied to broader disagreements between the United States and its trading partners. The association said the U.S. should protect tariff-free access and guard against new retaliatory measures in the European Union and the United Kingdom.

The filing also asked the U.S. government to expand recognition and protection for distinctive American whiskey products. That can include efforts to preserve product definitions in foreign markets and to ensure that names such as bourbon or Tennessee whiskey are treated according to U.S. standards and trade commitments.

The association said it is coordinating with other industry organizations, including the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States and the American Distilled Spirits Alliance, as well as member companies and international partners. That coordination suggests the industry is trying to present a broader front as the administration reviews foreign trade complaints and sets priorities for the 2027 report.

The submission arrives as U.S. spirits producers continue to look abroad for growth while facing uneven rules from one country to another. Some barriers involve import duties, while others involve how products are labeled, approved, distributed or marketed after they enter a country. Industry groups often argue that those behind-the-border rules can be as restrictive as tariffs because they raise costs or limit shelf space.

For now, the association’s filing serves mainly as a marker of what the American whiskey industry wants the U.S. government to pursue in upcoming trade discussions. Whether any of the requests lead to negotiations, enforcement actions or market-opening deals will depend on decisions made by the administration and by foreign governments named in the comments.