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Britain Seeks Feedback on Northern Ireland Rules for Protected Food and Drink Names

Defra says the consultation will shape domestic procedures for geographical indications and spirit drinks enforcement required under the Windsor Framework

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The British government is seeking feedback on proposed rules for how geographical indications and spirit drink standards would be handled in Northern Ireland, in a consultation that will remain open until January 4, 2027.

The consultation, published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, focuses on changes to domestic legislation needed to support two European Union regulations that apply in Northern Ireland under the Windsor Framework. One is Regulation (EU) 2024/1143, which covers geographical indications, and the other is Regulation (EU) 2019/787, which sets rules for the labeling and composition of spirit drinks.

Defra said the consultation is not about whether those EU rules should apply in Northern Ireland. It said the United Kingdom is already required under the Windsor Framework to give effect to the relevant EU requirements there. Instead, the department is asking for evidence on how the domestic procedures and enforcement system should work before a statutory instrument is finalized.

The proposal reaches beyond narrow legal drafting because it affects how protected product names could be applied for, challenged and enforced in one part of the U.K. market that remains subject to specific EU regulatory requirements. For drinks producers, that could shape the process for protecting names linked to wines and spirits, as well as the compliance checks tied to spirit drink labeling and composition.

Geographical indications, often called GIs, protect names used for products whose qualities or reputation are linked to a particular place. In the drinks trade, that can include wines and spirits whose names depend on regional origin and recognized production methods. The Defra consultation says the government wants views on whether the proposed national system for applications, objections and appeals is clear and workable.

The department is also asking whether the same basic procedure should be used across agri-food, wine and spirit drink geographical indications. That question matters for businesses and trade bodies that operate across different categories and may prefer a single process rather than different tracks for separate products.

Another part of the consultation concerns how applicants and objectors would be expected to consult each other and prepare consultation reports. That element points to the practical side of disputes over protected names, where producers, industry groups and other stakeholders may have competing views about eligibility, market

impact or the risk of confusion.

On spirit drinks, Defra is seeking views on updated domestic enforcement provisions linked to the EU regulation on labeling and composition. That includes the practical effect of those enforcement changes, as well as any costs, savings, implementation impacts and unintended consequences. The consultation materials do not propose reopening the underlying EU standards. They focus on how those standards should be enforced in Northern Ireland through domestic law.

That could be significant for distillers, importers, distributors and retailers that sell into Northern Ireland. Labeling and composition rules can affect how products are described, what ingredients or production methods qualify under certain categories, and how regulators respond if a product does not meet the standard. In a market where EU rules continue to apply in these areas, the domestic enforcement framework can determine how predictable and burdensome compliance becomes for businesses.

The consultation page says respondents can submit their views through an online survey. Defra has also published supporting documents, including a privacy notice, a consultation paper on Northern Ireland geographical indications and spirit drinks, and a consultation letter.

The exercise forms part of the continuing legal and administrative work tied to the Windsor Framework, which created a distinct post-Brexit trading and regulatory arrangement for Northern Ireland. In this case, the government is trying to translate EU obligations into domestic procedures that officials, producers and enforcement bodies can use in practice.

For companies in the beverage sector, the outcome could influence how protected names are managed and defended in Northern Ireland and how spirit drink rules are policed on the ground. That is especially relevant for businesses dealing with wines and distilled products that depend on origin claims, category definitions and label approval to preserve market access and brand value.