



Department of Trade and Industry

Fair Markets Group

V 416
1 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0ET

Tel +44 (0)20 7215 0109
Fax +44 (0)20 7215 2452
Enquiries +44 (0)20 7215 5000
Minicom +44 (0)20 7215 6740

www.dti.gov.uk
Lynnette.Falk@dti.gsi.gov.uk

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EUROPEAN COMMISSION CONSULTATION ON THE UNITS OF MEASUREMENT DIRECTIVE

Dear Stakeholder,

I am writing to draw your attention to the publication by the European Commission of a consultation on changes to the Units of Measurement Directive (80/181/EEC) and in particular on the future use of supplementary indications. A copy of the Commission's consultation may be accessed electronically here:

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/prepack/unitmeas/uni_ms_en.htm

The Commission is seeking views on whether supplementary indications should continue to be permitted after the existing derogation ends on 31st December 2009 and any cost implications of their removal. Under Directive 80/181/EEC metric units are authorised for economic and certain other purposes in all Member States (subject to certain derogations noted further below). However, other units may be used alongside metric units as supplementary indications until 31st December 2009, so long as they are not larger or more prominent than the metric units. This date has been extended twice from the date in the original Directive of 1989, first to 1999 and then to 2009. The Commission has published its consultation now to seek views on whether the date should be extended for a further fixed period or whether it should be extended indefinitely.

The rationale for continuing to permit the use of supplementary indications is to allow for dual labelling of goods that are placed on both

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the European and US markets. If supplementary indications were no longer permitted, European manufacturers would be required to produce separate labelling for the USA showing US customary units, and US manufacturers would be obliged to label in metric only for products being placed on the European market. This would increase costs for UK businesses exporting to the US and could act as an unnecessary barrier to trade. The Government believes this argument remains strong and intends to support the continued use of supplementary indications after 2009 for an indefinite period.

In addition to the issue of dual labelling, the Commission also raises the implications for the future use of specific units such as the katal, arbitrary units such as pH, ratios, and non-metric units used in traditional industries or new markets which may currently be permitted as supplementary indications.

In its analysis the Commission recognises that there is reason to extend the use of supplementary indications indefinitely.

The Commission has also taken this opportunity to address a number of other points in addition to the supplementary indications review. Of particular interest to the UK is the question of the scope of the Directive. The Directive contains derogations permitting the continued use of certain imperial units for specific purposes (the pint for draught beer and cider, and for milk in a returnable container, the mile for road traffic signs, the acre for land registration and the troy ounce for precious metals). The Commission is seeking the views of those operating in those markets on whether the continuation of these derogations has created any problems for them. The UK believes that the derogations do not adversely affect trade between Member States and intends to propose to the Commission that, in line with the principle of subsidiarity, the future of these derogations should be a matter to be decided by the individual Member States which make use of them.

The Department would encourage stakeholders to submit their views on the future of supplementary indications or any of the other points raised, together with any cost or benefits estimates to the Commission at entr-metrology@ec.europa.eu by their deadline of 1 March 2007 and would appreciate if any submission were also copied to lynette.falk@dti.gsi.gov.uk.

Lynnette Falk