# Irish officials unite to defend whiskey industry against potential US tariffs



Senior Irish officials are rallying together to protect the country's whiskey sector as concerns mount over the potential for devastating US tariffs on whiskey exports. The situation has reached a critical juncture, with small producers warning that impending tariffs pose the "greatest threat since Prohibition."

Currently, the Irish drinks industry exports over €800 million to the US, a significant portion of which comprises €450 million in whiskey sales. However, these exports are now in jeopardy due to threats from US President Donald Trump, who is considering imposing tariffs that could soar up to 200%.

In the United States, Taoiseach Micheál Martin has expressed his deep concerns about the situation, labelling the threat of tariffs as "a very serious issue." His sentiments were echoed by Ireland South MEP Michael McNamara, who stated he has "the gravest of concerns" regarding how the proposed tariffs would not only hurt small independent producers but the wider Irish economy, including local jobs and tourism.

Industry insiders have highlighted the dire implications for the country's small distilleries. A source within the whiskey industry remarked, "Irish whiskey faces its greatest threat since Prohibition," emphasising that US market sales account for a substantial profit margin, unlike sales within the European Union and the UK. Most small distilleries rely on the US for up to 40% of their profit, which could vanish entirely in the face of new tariffs.

Peter Cooney, export sales director at Boann Distillery, which operates in Drogheda and Clonmel, remarked on the potential fallout, asserting, "It would completely cut off the USA market if 200% tariffs are put through. No one is going to pay that type [of figure] on the shelf so it's game over for us in America." Cooney emphasised the importance of the American market, citing its status as the world’s largest consumer market, despite it currently only representing 35% of business revenue for his distillery.

Reflecting on past tariff challenges, Cooney recounted that a 20% increase in tariffs previously resulted in a corresponding 20% decrease in sales, demonstrating a quick and tragic shift for distillers in response to tariff changes.

Concerns over the broader economic impact are not limited to the whiskey industry. Independent TD Michael Fitzmaurice highlighted the potential negative effects on rural economies and agriculture in Ireland. He warned against losing the "spirit of innovation" brought by small distillers, emphasizing the unique character they contribute to Ireland's beverage offerings.

Fianna Fáil MEP Barry Cowen has called for urgent discussions across Europe to tackle the impending crisis. Additionally, economic expert Brad Setser from the US Council of Foreign Relations pointed out that Ireland is "uniquely exposed" to these tariffs, given its dependence on foreign direct investment and the need for adaptability in the evolving global market.

As the situation develops, the Irish whiskey industry faces an uncertain future, heavily reliant on the decisions made across the Atlantic. The potential imposition of tariffs could reshape the landscape for both small distilleries and larger producers, highlighting the fundamental need for strategic engagement with international markets to safeguard Ireland's cherished whiskey heritage.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.newstalk.com/newstalk/irish-whiskey-producers-fear-severe-us-tariffs-2145284> - This article supports the claim that Irish whiskey producers are facing severe tariffs, potentially up to 200%, which could significantly impact their US market presence. It highlights concerns from industry leaders about the devastating effects on small producers.
* <https://www.ibec.ie/drinksireland/news-insights-and-events/news/2025/03/13/irish-whiskey-association-statement-on-european-commission-announcement-on-tariffs> - This statement from the Irish Whiskey Association emphasizes the importance of maintaining tariff-free trade between the EU and US, highlighting the risks of a trade war to the Irish whiskey sector. It also notes the significant export value of Irish drinks to the US.
* <https://www.distilledspirits.org/news/distilled-spirits-council-president-and-ceo-chris-swonger-statement-in-response-to-the-eus-announcement-to-reimpose-tariffs-on-american-whiskey> - This statement from the Distilled Spirits Council discusses the EU's decision to reimpose tariffs on American whiskey, which mirrors the concerns faced by Irish whiskey producers. It highlights the historical success of zero-for-zero tariffs between the US and EU.
* <https://www.mass.gov/guide-to-evidence/article-xi-miscellaneous> - This source does not directly support the article's claims but provides a broader context on legal and trade-related matters. However, it does not specifically address the whiskey tariffs issue.
* <https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/media/pdf/ap20-seminar-task-2-iwa-directions-and-stimulus-materials.pdf> - This document is unrelated to the specific topic of whiskey tariffs but discusses research methodologies and argumentation, which could be applied to analyzing trade disputes.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This is the source of the original article, providing context on the concerns over US tariffs on Irish whiskey exports and their potential impact on the industry.
* <https://businessplus.ie/news/whiskey-industry-tariffs/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data