

Make Irn-Bru as 'unacceptable' as smoking, say Scotland's health campaigners

IT MAY be Scotland's "other national drink", a fizzy amber liquid supposedly made from girders, but Scottish campaigners are calling for soft drinks like Irn-Bru to be made as unacceptable as smoking.

Leading Glasgow University academic Mike Lean, along with Cancer Research UK and Obesity Action Scotland, claim the UK Government's sugar tax – due to be implemented on soft drinks in 2018 – does not go far enough and says the Scottish Government, which is developing a new obesity strategy, must take a stand to stop hundreds of thousands of deaths from type 2 diabetes, breast and bowel cancers. They are also demanding that the Government ban billboard adverts and sponsorship deals with soft drink companies. It comes as Irn Bru makes AG Barr announced it was likely to cut 10 per cent of its workforce as it railed against the "punitive" sugar tax.

However, obesity experts said that far from being "unnecessary", far more should be done to drive a culture change to make overly sweet drinks less socially acceptable. Professor Linda Bauld, Cancer Research UK's cancer prevention expert based at the University of Stirling, backed moves to make sugary drinks as socially unacceptable as smoking. "At the moment the Scottish Government is legislating on banning electronic cigarettes and removing all the billboard advertising for e-cigarettes," she added. "So we know that they have the power to make that change." She also claimed that the "unfortunate" sponsorship of the Commonwealth Games by Irn Bru sent "the wrong message to the public". Along with other organisations including Obesity Action and Diabetes UK, Cancer Research UK is calling on the Scottish Government to ban sugary drinks in hospitals and for more action to be taken in schools.

Bauld said: "It's taken us 50 years to reduce smoking rates from 80 percent in men in the 1950 to less than one in five. It's not just that it went out of fashion, we took comprehensive action, pushing at a number of different buttons. The big four for me are price, promotion, the place of sale and the content of products themselves. We can't do it all in one day but if we could have some changes in the strategy that would be really welcome."

Lean, chairman of human nutrition at Glasgow University, agreed that sponsorship deals were damaging. "When Irn-Bru sponsored the Commonwealth Games it was great for shareholders, it sold lots of Irn Bru," he said. "The legacy might have been better for public health if it had been decided that it was not appropriate for the Commonwealth Games to be sponsored by a sugary drink. I think that would have sent a much stronger message and had a greater impact on health in the long-term if we had celebrated our great Scottish water."

He described claims that sales figures would be affected by the sugar tax as "utter rot". Figures show one in four adults, and up to one in three children, are obese. Teenagers of between the ages of 11 and 18 consume about three times the amount of sugar recommended by Government guidelines – in Scotland, sugary drinks are the biggest source of this sugar, making up about 30 per cent.

A Scottish Government spokesperson said: "Obesity is an ongoing issue for Scotland, as it is for most Western countries, and the current levels of obesity remain too high. While there is no simple solution, we have to maintain a wide range of activity to make it easier for people, including children and their families, to be more active, to eat less, and to eat better." A spokesperson from AG Barr claimed Irn-Bru Sugar Free accounts for more than one in three

purchases and said that following the launch of the sugar-free Irn-Bru Xtra it was on target to make a 20 per cent reduction in sugar by 2020.

http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/14777126.Make_Irn_Bru_as_unacceptable_as_smoking_say_Scotland_s_health_campaigners/?ref=mr&lp=13

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