



Choice on Units of Measurement: Markings and Sales

June 2022



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Foreword

The UK has a long and proud history of using imperial measures and their use is closely associated with our culture and language. Despite the transition to metric units in the late 1990s we commonly refer to our walks in miles, our babies in ounces and our fuel economy in miles per gallon. We also buy our beer and milk in pints. Imperial units therefore continue to play a role in our everyday shared experience.

Now we have left the EU, the UK can take back control of its measurement system and take decisions in the best interests of British businesses and consumers. The ‘metric martyrs’, on whether street traders could sell loose fruit and vegetables in imperial measures, was a totemic case in the debates on the supremacy of EU law. The Government’s commitment to review the current law on units of measurement was announced as part of its plans to capitalise on [the benefits of Brexit](#).

The purpose of the review is to identify how we can give more choice to businesses and consumers over the units of measurement they use for trade, while ensuring that measurement information remains accurate.

The evidence gathered from the consultation will be used to inform the Government’s plans to legislate to provide a choice on weights and measures for consumer transactions once a full review has taken place. These changes will affect businesses and consumers buying and selling goods by quantity.

This consultation seeks views from those affected. The Government wants to hear from a broad range of stakeholders that have an interest in consumer transactions based on quantity including businesses, trade associations, enforcement authorities, consumers and consumer organisations.

General information

Purpose of this consultation

The purpose of this consultation is to gather information for the Government review of units of measurement for consumer transactions.

This is an opportunity for us to invite and listen to a wide range of views on selling and labelling by quantity to ensure the review results in a policy that provides businesses and consumers with greater choice and freedom.

Consultation details

Issued: 3 June 2022

Respond by: 26 August 2022

Enquiries to:

Metrology Policy Team
Office for Product Safety and Standards
4th Floor Cannon House
18 The Priory Queensway
Birmingham
B4 6BS

Email: UnitsofMeasurement@beis.gov.uk

Consultation reference: Markings and Sales in Imperial Units

Audiences:

We want to hear from a broad range of stakeholders that interact with all consumer transactions based on units of measurements – including businesses, trade associations, enforcement authorities, consumers, and consumer organisations.

While it may not be possible to implement this policy in the same way in Northern Ireland at present due to the current provisions of the Northern Ireland Protocol, we still welcome views about the implementation of these changes in Northern Ireland when we are able to do so.

Input Sought from Audiences in: England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland

How to respond

You can download a response form through the link below and send in via email, or post it to the address given below.

Email: UnitsofMeasurement@beis.gov.uk

Write to:

Metrology Policy Team
Office for Product Safety and Standards
4th Floor Cannon House
18 The Priory Queensway
Birmingham B4 6BS

Choice on Units of Measurement: Markings and Sales

The response form is available on the [GOV.UK consultation page](#).

When responding, please state whether you are responding as an individual or representing the views of an organisation.

Your response will be most useful if it is framed in direct response to the questions posed, though further comments and evidence are also welcome.

Confidentiality and data protection

Information you provide in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be disclosed in accordance with UK legislation (the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004).

If you want your information treated as confidential please tell us, but we cannot guarantee confidentiality in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not be regarded by us as a confidentiality request.

We will process your personal data in accordance with all applicable UK data protection laws. See our [privacy notice](#).

We will summarise all responses and publish this summary on GOV.UK. The summary will include a list of names or organisations that responded, but not people's personal names, addresses or other contact details.

Quality assurance

This consultation has been carried out in accordance with the [Government's Consultation Principles](#).

If you have any complaints about the consultation process (as opposed to comments about the issues which are the subject of the consultation) please address them to:

Email: enquiries@beis.gov.uk

1 The current law on selling in Imperial and Metric units

- 1.1 Imperial units have been in use for centuries in the UK and remain part of our national identity. The imperial system of units plays an important part in the history of our nation.
- 1.2 The UK officially adopted the metric system in stages between 1995 and 1999. However imperial units remain widely used among the public and remain legal as primary indications of measurement for certain areas such as draught beer and cider, road signage, and milk in reusable cartons.
- 1.3 UK law currently requires metric units to be used for all trade purposes with only limited exceptions. Our legal framework reflects the requirements placed upon the UK as part of its membership of the EU by the requirements set out in EU Directive 80/181/EC (as amended) which concerns units of measurement. That Directive was intended to ensure consistency in the use of units of measurement used for all purposes across member states of the EU. As a result, in general, while imperial units can be used alongside metric units, the imperial markings must be no larger or no more prominent than the metric ones. Currently, imperial units are only authorised for use on their own in specialised fields, such as for sales of draught beer and cider and milk in returnable containers, where the pint is be used, and transactions in precious metals where the troy ounce is used. There are sanctions for non-compliance.
- 1.4 While consistency in measurement supports fair trade and empowers consumers, there has been consistent opposition to the current law on units of measurement by some traders and consumers who consider it to be overly prescriptive and an unnecessary restriction on freedom of choice. This consultation will explore the appetite of businesses and consumers to buy and sell in imperial units. In recognition that there will be people in the UK who have no experience of imperial measurements, the consultation also explores whether there should be a requirement for the equivalent metric measurement to appear alongside the imperial measurement where imperial units are used.
- 1.5 Measurement accuracy and traceability remain vital for fair trade. Any changes to the units of measurement permitted would not affect the need for measurements and measuring instruments to continue to be accurate and calibrated.

2 Brexit opportunities

- 2.1 The UK's exit from the EU has created an opportunity to review the law on units of measurement for consumer transactions and to take back control of our measurement system so that it better reflects the needs of British businesses and consumers.
- 2.2 The Government announced its intention to review the ban on the use of imperial units for sales and marking on 16 September 2021, as part of a wider announcement of a range of regulatory reforms taking advantage of Brexit. It also follows on from a recommendation made by the independent Taskforce on Innovation, Growth and Regulatory Reform. The Taskforce's Report to Government published on 16 June 2021, recommended that the Government should amend the Weights and Measures Act 1985 to allow traders to use imperial measures without metric equivalents.
- 2.3 The purpose of the review is to identify how we can give more choice to businesses and consumers over the units of measurement they use for trade, while ensuring that measurement information remains accurate.
- 2.4 The review will take into consideration all consumer transactions made on the basis of measurement, with the aim of providing greater freedom for businesses and consumers.
- 2.5 We recognise that metric units remain essential for both science and international trade and the review will be focussed on the use of units of measurement in domestic trade.

3 Consultation aim

- 3.1 The Government wants to hear from a broad range of individuals, businesses and organisations that interact with consumer transactions based on quantity, including businesses, trade associations, consumers, consumer organisations and Local Authority Trading Standards.
- 3.2 The consultation will feed into the announced review to identify where the Government can provide greater choice around the units of measurement used.
- 3.3 The consultation seeks to understand the areas where the current legislation has been burdensome to consumers and businesses, and any barriers it has created. It is an opportunity to share views around this, as well as identify potential areas of inclusion and exclusion for review.
- 3.4 From businesses, the consultation seeks to understand the likely uptake of selling solely in imperial measures, or in imperial units with a less prominent metric equivalent; and the costs and benefits related to both options. It also asks for businesses views on potential impacts to their customer base and suppliers.
- 3.5 From consumers, whether the introduction of the use of imperial units (as the only or primary unit of measurement) will change their shopping habits is of interest.
- 3.6 For Local Authority Trading Standards, we are interested in understanding any potential impacts on regulatory activity, including any costs or benefits.
- 3.7 The Government are also keen to hear views on specific areas that should be included in any potential policy around imperial units, as well as specific areas that should be excluded.

4 Next steps

- 4.1 This is an early-stage consultation to gather views and evidence and will feed into the review on the current law on units of measurement.
- 4.2 We will analyse your feedback to the consultation and publish a Government Response in due course.
- 4.3 You will be able to [return to this page](#) once we have finished our analysis to review the outcome to this public feedback.
- 4.4 In due course, the Government will legislate as appropriate once a full review of units of measurement has taken place.
- 4.5 There will be a separate Government review on specified quantities relating to the measurements wines and liquors are legally sold in. This legislative area does not fall within the remit of this consultation.

Catalogue of consultation questions

Consultation Questions	
1	<p>For All,</p> <p>a) Are there any specific areas of consumer transactions that should be a priority for allowing a choice in units of measurement, and why?</p> <p>b) Are there any specific areas that you think should be excluded from a choice in units of measurement, and why?</p> <p>c) If an item is sold in imperial measures, should there be a requirement for a metric equivalent alongside it?</p>
2	<p>For Businesses,</p> <p>What would be the consequences of your business having the freedom to sell products in imperial measures, if you wished?</p>
3	<p>For Consumers,</p> <p>a) If you had a choice, would you want to purchase items:</p> <p>(i) in imperial units?</p> <p>(ii) in imperial units alongside a metric equivalent?</p> <p>b) Are you more likely to shop from businesses that sell in imperial units?</p> <p>c) Do you foresee any costs or benefits to you from businesses being permitted to sell:</p> <p>(i) solely in imperial units?</p> <p>(ii) in imperial units alongside a less prominent metric equivalent?</p> <p>d) Do you have experience of buying solely in imperial units?</p>
4	<p>For Trading Standards,</p> <p>What potential impacts might there be on regulatory activity, including any costs or benefits?</p>

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Alternative format versions of this consultation are available on request from enquiries@beis.gov.uk