

# Alcohol Industry Political Activity in South Africa: A Case Study based on Freedom of Information Requests Fact Sheet

## Why it matters

South Africa is reported to have one of the highest per capita rates of alcohol consumption globally, with alcohol harms exacerbating socioeconomic inequalities. The **Draft Liquor Amendment Bill 2016** (the Bill) proposed new restrictions for South Africa on alcohol advertising, availability, and liability of retailers and manufacturers for harm (1). To date, the Bill has not progressed through the legislative process.

## What the case study is about

This fact sheet is part of a wider campaign by FORUT, which includes a research project commissioned to study alcohol industry activity across sub-Saharan Africa. It includes documenting examples of marketing and corporate social responsibility activities in sub-Saharan Africa. The project focused on three transnational alcohol companies in which the Norwegian Government Pension Fund (the Fund) invests in: AB InBev, Diageo and Heineken. The project's research findings can be found in the FORUT report "Pursuing profit at the expense of public health? Case studies of alcohol industry political activity in sub-Saharan Africa." This fact sheet is based on:

Mitchell, G., Siwela, P., Goldstein, S., and Maker-Diedericks, A. (2025) Alcohol industry involvement in the delayed South Africa Draft Liquor Amendment Bill 2016: a case study based on freedom of information requests, *Globalization and Health* 21, 11  
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-025-01097-5>

This case study focused on Bill-related activity by the alcohol industry (the industry) within the **National Economic and Development Labour Council (NEDLAC)**, a multi-stakeholder forum that assesses socio-economic policies before they reach the parliament. Using Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, the research team was able to access information on the activities of the alcohol industry in the NEDLAC committees.

## What did the alcohol industry do?

Early 'regulatory capture' allowed the alcohol industry to shape the assessment of the Bill within NEDLAC. Regulatory capture is a form of co-optation in which public agencies, policymakers, or regulators are influenced to serve the interests of the commercial actors they oversee and regulate. (2) Such regulatory capture also facilitated access to other government departments. The participation of alcohol industry organizations in

NEDLAC caused delays in the passage of the Liquor Amendment Bill. The case study identified activity related to the Bill by 14 alcohol industry organisations between 2016 and 2022.

- **The industry participated in discussions about the Bill and connected with other government departments** through representation in five key NEDLAC committees. Community representation was, however, low across all committees.
- **The industry shaped evidence to manufacture doubt** by funding two socio-economic assessments of the Bill (in 2017 and 2022). This was facilitated by their role in NEDLAC and was instrumental in delaying the progress of the Bill.
- **The industry succeeded in framing self-regulation as a solution the NEDLAC report on the Liquor Amendment Bill.** The industry framed public health-oriented policy proposals – increasing legal drinking age from 18 to 21, advertising restrictions, restrictions on liquor outlet locations – as ‘bad solutions’ to alcohol harms. At the same time, the industry proposed self-regulation while framing the alcohol industry as socially responsible economic actors concerned with social justice.
- **The industry applied a carrot-and-stick approach** of legal threats and donations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Way Forward

- Governments and civil society organisations need to consider the alcohol industry’s role in impact assessments and public health policy formulation.
- Governments and civil society organisations should view the alcohol industry as a largely transnational commercial actor, rather than as a ‘social partner.’
- Civil society organisations and researchers should use freedom of information legislation not only to monitor alcohol industry political activity but also to expose the impact of alcohol industry political activity on public health.

## References

1. Department of Trade and Industry. Bill No. 1206 Draft Liquor Amendment Bill [Internet]. Republic of South Africa Government Gazette; 2016 [cited 2025 Mar 25]. Available from: [https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/201609/40319gon1206.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201609/40319gon1206.pdf)
2. Stigler, G. J. The Theory of Economic Regulation. The Bell Journal of Economics and Management Science. 1971;2(1): 3–21.