

Publican News:

Scottish smoke ban takes toll

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Three hundred and fifty pubs shut in two years since ban began

A total of 350 pubs have closed in Scotland since the smoking ban was introduced two years ago today.

The number, from CGA research, is double the amount predicted by the Scottish Licensed Trade Association (SLTA) at the outset.

SLTA chief executive Paul Waterson said: "It confirms what our members have been telling us and what we have seen for ourselves.

"We see the ban as having been great for supermarket drink sales – nothing else.

"The new customers we were promised didn't arrive, and even the loyal regulars definitely go to the pub less often, and spend less."

It's a view shared by licensee James Hughes of Utopia bar in Edinburgh's Easter Road.

He said: "We've seen customers do the obvious - buy drink from supermarkets, where it's a fraction of the price, and take their cigarettes home where they can do what they like."

Outspoken opponent of the ban Mary Moriarty, of the Port o' Leith Bar, said: "Everyone would have accepted a partial ban, but they weren't having it – so they have ruined perfectly good bars for no good reason whatsoever."

She added: "It isn't over. Next they'll try to stop you smoking outside pubs altogether – it's already happening."

The Scottish Beer & Pub Association accepts some recent closures are due at least partly to the effects of the ban.

But chief executive Patrick Browne said: "Things have been tough for some operators, much tougher for some than others, but the vast majority have emerged stronger as a result of the smoking ban and with a much stronger customer offer thanks to developing their food product and diversifying their businesses."

And Glasgow trade entrepreneur Colin Barr, who this month launched his fifth Republic continental-style beer-with-food venture in the city, said: "The ban was the best thing that ever happened to bars, and in my pubs we saw takings rise 50 per cent almost overnight."