

DEFRA: Call for evidence on voluntary and economic incentives to reduce littering of drinks containers and promote recycling

Surfers Against Sewage: Crib Sheet

This sheet has been written to provide evidence and guidance to SAS supporters wanting to respond to the above Defra consultation. The details provided are not exhaustive and are deemed key to answering questions in the consultation. It is important that individuals and organisations use this sheet as guidance and add to the consultation as they see fit, rather than copy and paste all answers. This will provide detailed evidence to Defra when analysing responses, but also ensure consistency in responses.

If you have any questions relating to this sheet, please contact david@sas.org.uk

Baseline information

Each year 14,052 million individual single-use plastic bottles and 21,535 million individual cans are used in the UK.

(38.5 million single-use bottles and 59 million cans per day)¹

It is estimated that 58% of single use plastic bottles on the market each year in the UK are collected via kerbside and on the go collections.²

England's estimated relative collection rate for plastic bottles is 58% (based on household share of UK)

Full breakdown per nation³:

England: 58%

Scotland: 51%

Wales: 74%

Northern Ireland: 59%

¹ Recycle Now, What To Do With Plastic Bottles

² RECOUP (2017) UK Household Plastics Collection Survey

³ RECOUP (2017) UK Household Plastics Collection Survey



Drinks packaging makes up 40% of all litter (by volume)⁴

Estimates show that 8.1% of single-use drinks bottles placed on the market are collected via bring and recycle on the go schemes. (approx. 28,000 tonnes)

16 million single use plastic bottles do not get recycled every day in the UK (either heading to landfill or littered) 5.8 billion every year.

It is estimated that 700,000 bottles are littered daily in the UK (2.5 billion yearly)⁵

SAS beach cleans in 2016 removed nearly 50,000 plastic bottles. They are consistently in the top ten items found on our beaches.⁶

MCS Beachwatch statistics show there are more bottles on our beaches than ever before – 160 per mile.⁷

The public are in favour of systems to reduce the amount of plastic seen in our environment. SAS recently delivered a petition to Downing Street with over 285,000 signatures supporting calls for a mandatory introduction of a DRS.⁸

A recent YouGov poll shows that 73% of the population would support or strongly support an introduction of a DRS.

A recent 38 Degrees survey shows⁹:

- 86% of population said plastic litter is a problem or big problem where they live

⁴ Hogg, D., Elliott, T., Gibbs, A., Jones, P., von Eye, M., Hann, S. (2015) A Scottish Deposit Refund System. A report for Zero Waste Scotland

⁵ Hogg, D., Elliott, T., Gibbs, A., Sherrington, C. (2017) Impacts of a Deposit Refund System for One-way Beverage Packaging on Local Authority Waste Services.

⁶ <https://www.sas.org.uk/our-work/beach-cleans/big-spring-beach-clean/>

⁷ <https://www.mcsuk.org/beachwatch/>

⁸ <https://www.sas.org.uk/news/pressure-for-deposit-returns-grows-as-270000-signatures-delivered-to-downing-street/>

⁹ <https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/bring-back-bottle-deposits-to-stop-plastic-pollution-in-our-oceans-1>



- Top two ways to reduce litter would be to reduce plastic packaging and get a deposit return system for bottles
- 66% of respondents said a DRS would encourage them to recycle more
-

SAS volunteers contribute over 150,000 hours yearly to cleaning their beaches – this equates to nearly a million pounds saved by the UK coastal economy.¹⁰

Current Situation

Since 2012 kerbside recycling has only risen by 2%. The rate of recycling has stalled in spite of increased funding and initiatives. It is now necessary to introduce new measures to increase rates to prevent litter entering the environment.

Plastic pollution is prevalent throughout our oceans, seas and across our coastlines and is increasing exponentially. The volume of plastic produced between 2002 -2012 is more than the total combined volume of plastic produced before that time. It's estimated there will be more plastic in our oceans than fish by 2050. Waste and recycling strategies are not keeping pace with plastic production of single-use of 'throwaway' plastics, whilst levels of plastic pollution continue to grow.¹¹

Evidence of existing Deposit Return Systems

In terms of litter rates, this is something that is difficult to prove from data, but can be extrapolated by logic if a DRS is in place – i.e. if 95% of containers are collected, that has to result in a reduction of litter.

Estimates expect overall littering rates to reduce by 30% in the UK following an introduction of a DRS.¹²

¹⁰ <https://www.sas.org.uk/our-work/beach-cleans/>

¹¹ The New Plastic Economy: Rethinking The Future Of Plastics. Ellen Macarthur Foundation, 2016

¹² Hogg, D., Fletcher, D., Elliott, T. von Eye, M. (2010). Have We Got the Bottle? Implementing a Deposit Refund System in the UK: A report for the Campaign to Protect Rural England.
<http://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/energy-and-waste/litter-and-fly-tipping/item/1918-have-we-got-thebottle>



Examples of other nations that have introduced a DRS show that recycling rates can increase dramatically almost overnight.¹³

Germany: The introduction of the deposit on one-way beverage packaging was a big success with 98.5% of refillable bottles being returned by consumers –highest in the world

Sweden: 80 -90% recovery rates of drinks containers following a DRS

Norway: 75 – 90% recovery rates of drinks containers following a DRS

Local authorities across England could save up to £35 million every year if a deposit refund system (DRS) for drinks containers was introduced in England.¹⁴

Local authorities would lose some income as there would be a reduced number of cans and plastic bottles in the kerbside collections to sell to recyclers. However, the savings made from having fewer containers to collect and sort, as well as reduced levels of littering and reduced landfill charges will actually create savings that outweigh the loss of revenue.

With local authority resources under increasing pressure, these findings provide evidence that, rather than negatively affecting local authority waste services, a DRS could actually support them and reduce the costs of delivering the service, while also delivering cleaner streets and reducing the amount of plastic entering our oceans.

A Reloop report compiling municipality impacts of DRS found that in all 20 cases, local authorities showed net cost savings following introduction of DRS.¹⁵

Recycling drinks containers could reduce CO₂ costs by two-thirds compared to existing single-use bottles.¹⁶

Generally, reprocessors view materials collected through DRSs very favourably because of the high quality of the stream, and because it is generally a well-defined stream.

¹³ <https://www.zerowasteurope.eu/2010/09/beverage-packaging-and-zero-waste/>

¹⁴ Hogg, D., Elliott, T., Gibbs, A., Sherrington, C. (2017) Impacts of a Deposit Refund System for One-way Beverage Packaging on Local Authority Waste Services.

¹⁵ CM consulting, Reloop (2017) Deposit Systems for One Way Beverage Containers: Global Overview

¹⁶ <https://www.zerowasteurope.eu/2010/09/beverage-packaging-and-zero-waste/>



Additional employment benefit from a UK wide DRS was estimated between 3,000 and 4,300 full-time equivalents. Most of the jobs will relate to collection operators or those involved in running the system, including administration or counting centre operators.¹⁷

Key findings of a report looking at the benefits of introducing a UK wide DRS investigated costs of implementation and operation:¹⁸

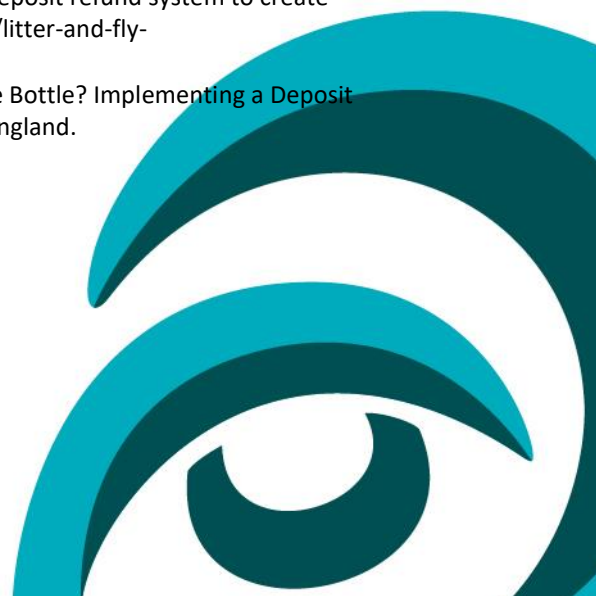
- a) Likely to cost around £84 million to set up if well designed;
- b) Likely to cost around £700 million per year to run (net of revenues);
- c) Unlikely to introduce very significant costs to producers. Even at 90% return rates, in our modelling, the unclaimed deposits fund around 70% of system costs;
- d) Likely to generate savings to local authorities (and hence, reduce the burden of taxation) of around £160 million;
- e) Likely to deliver strong environmental benefits in terms of:
 - i. Reduced greenhouse gas emissions and air pollutants, mainly from increased recycling, in the region of £69m; and
 - ii. Additional benefits associated with the reduction in the disamenity associated with litter, potentially in the region of £1.2billion. The benefits associated with litter reduction are particularly large and generate the overwhelming majority of the environmental gain.

A Cardiff University study showing a significant change in attitudes and behaviours of English shoppers in the year after the introduction of English carrier bag charge showed approximately 90% of people in England take their own bags with them when food shopping as a result of the plastic carrier bag charge. This has increased from 70% before the charge was introduced and was independent of age, gender or income.

The study found that the small economic incentive made shoppers stop and think whether they really need to use a single-use plastic bag for their shopping and then change their behaviour, supporting more environmentally progressive actions.

¹⁷ Dr Dominic Hogg, Dr Debbie Fletcher, Maxine von Eye, Kate Mulcahy, Timothy Elliott, Campaign to Protect Rural England, 2011, From waste to work: the potential for a deposit refund system to create jobs in the UK, <https://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/energy-and-waste/litter-and-fly-tipping/item/download/865>

¹⁸ Hogg, D., Fletcher, D., Elliott, T. von Eye, M. (2010). Have We Got the Bottle? Implementing a Deposit Refund System in the UK: A report for the Campaign to Protect Rural England.



This evidence coupled with the strong public support presented by the Message In A Bottle Petition calling for a mandatory DRS in the UK (285,000 signatures) and a recent YouGov Survey showing nearly 3 in 4 people support a DRS, highlight consumers are not only ready for up-front deposits on plastic bottles but are actively encouraging it.

Looking at other nations where DRS has been introduced alongside existing recycling measures – such as household and kerbside, we see that capture rates of bottles has increased dramatically. In Germany, where there are also convenient kerbside recycling services that could be used, the return rate following the introduction of DRS is 98.5%. The deposit value is higher than most other systems, but it shows that the presence of other convenient recycling services is not a barrier to high return rates and that the value of the deposit does motivate high rates of return.

Now is the time to create a joined up system for DRS in the UK, with progress being made in both Scotland and Wales, it is essential to work alongside devolved nations to ensure a cross-border system which would eliminate fraud and create fairness among businesses.

Focusing on enforced recycling targets (with increased taxation or fines for failing to meet targets) will allow for a variety of systems to be installed in the UK and provide best practice for local and national businesses and services. This would also ensure behavior change across all actors within the manufacturing and handling process leading to a more effective and readily accepted system.

DRS will ensure investment is sustained in the UK, creating jobs, increasing recycling material and saving money for local councils. During a time of uncertainty for the economy and environment in the lead up to Brexit, a DRS could be a crucial measure in mitigating any negative effects and enhancing any benefits to leaving the European Union.

Other measures

Deposit Return Systems are tried and tested and, to date is the most effective way of capturing single use beverage containers before they enter the environment.





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Other systems such as refill schemes have localised proven success and can go some way to eliminating the demand for plastics [#OneLess¹⁹ and Refill.org.uk²⁰]. These methods should be promoted where possible as part of a comprehensive and joined up waste management plan for the UK.

The UK has the opportunity to learn from the best systems to develop a bespoke DRS, talking the most appropriate and effective measures from existing DRSs to dramatically reduce litter, increase recycling, reduce carbon emissions and support the economy. There is overwhelming evidence to support the belief that the most effective and easy way to implement a solution to tackling ocean plastics is a DRS as part of a well-designed waste management system.

¹⁹ <https://www.onelessbottle.org/>

²⁰ <http://www.refill.org.uk/>

