

‘A Deposit Return Scheme for Scotland’ Consultation response

Response from Friends of the Earth Scotland - September 2018

Summary

- the Deposit Return Scheme should apply to all drinks, including both ‘on the go’ and more general products, and should apply to all container materials
- the deposit level should be at least 15p and preferably 20p
- the rate of the producer fee should be varied to incentivise manufacturers to use the most appropriate materials
- the public should be able to take containers back to shops that sell drinks and to other locations
- the Deposit Return Scheme should be part of a package of policies designed to reduce the use of single-use containers and increase the use of refillable containers.

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to give our views on this subject, we answer a selection of the consultation questions below. We also support the response submitted by Scottish Environment LINK.

About Friends of the Earth Scotland

Friends of the Earth Scotland exists to campaign, with partners here and across the globe, for a just transition to a sustainable society. We work in Scotland for socially just solutions to environmental problems and to create a green economy; we campaign to end the degradation of our environment and to create a society which cherishes and protects the natural world on which we depend; we think globally and act locally, enabling people to take individual and collective action. We are part of Friends of the Earth International - the world's largest grassroots environmental network, uniting 75 national member groups, over 2 million members and 5,000 local activist groups around the world. We are an independent Scottish charity with a network of thousands of supporters, and 10 active local groups across Scotland. Friends of the Earth Scotland's vision is of a world where everyone can enjoy a healthy environment without exceeding their fair share of the planet's resources, now and in the future.

MATERIALS IN SCOPE

1. Which of the options do you prefer? Please chose one or more options from below and explain your reasoning.

We would like the system to include the widest range of materials possible – including all of those listed. The Cabinet Secretary has already committed to including cans, glass and PET, we would like to see this extended to other plastics as well, including HDPE and cartons as mentioned in this section of the consultation. Further action is needed, probably through producer responsibility mechanisms, to ensure that containers are designed for recycling. The Deposit Return Scheme is very welcome but should not deter the government from working to reduce the use of single-use items such as coffee cups.

2. Do you think the scheme should start with a core set of materials and then be expanded as appropriate?

The scheme needs to be designed to deal with new materials and new products as they come onto the market and the scheme should be designed so that inclusion of any new materials is the automatic default.

2a. If yes, which materials should it start with?

All the materials in question 1 would be a good starting point for the scheme. It is important to cover all common materials from the start to avoid inadvertently providing an incentive for manufactures to switch to materials which are not covered and to avoid public confusion. The producer fee should be used to incentivise manufacturers to use the most appropriate materials and to maximise the content of recycled material used to manufacture their products.

Disposable cups are conceptually and materially quite different and should be targeted to be phased out rather than dealt with via the Deposit Return Scheme.

2b. If yes, which materials do you think should be added later?

It is possible that the scheme could be adapted at a later date to include dealing with refillable containers, to maximise recovery and help move action up the waste hierarchy.

3 Are there any materials that you think should not be included?

No

5. Are you aware of any materials currently in development that should be included? For instance, there is currently a great deal of interest in making ‘bioplastics’ either from starch derived from plants or food by-product streams. Whilst these can look and behave like plastic, it is often important to ensure they are kept separate from plastic in the waste stream as they are recycled differently.

The Deposit Return Scheme will have to deal with sorting a range different materials, bioplastics would not be an insurmountable technical challenge. However, bioplastics should be approached with great caution. Their widespread uptake could have disastrous land-use consequences, particularly in the developing world. Oxo-degradable plastics should not be used at all.

6. What are your views on the cost implications for local authorities?

If the scheme is designed and implemented well it will save or even make money for local authorities, through reduction in costs dealing with litter and recycling, and through their direct involvement in the scheme.

PRODUCTS IN SCOPE

7. Do you think the material the container is made from or the product it contains should be the key consideration for deciding the scope of the scheme?

The key consideration for inclusion of an item should be the product it contains. An important aspect of any scheme is how easy it is for the public to understand and use. A scheme which applies to all drinks is best to avoid public confusion.

8. Are there any product categories that should be excluded from the scheme?

No, all of the products listed can be included, which again keeps the scheme simple to understand and maximises the material recycling which results. This also prevents manufacturers reformulating products to put them into an exempt category.

9. Are there any product categories listed above that you broadly agree with but think that certain products within them should be excluded?

No.

11 & 11a. Do you think that the deposit return scheme should be limited to “on the go” only?

No, as the consultation acknowledges, it is difficult to clearly differentiate between ‘on the go’ and more general consumption of products. Although products consumed at home may often end up in a recycling collection, the Deposit Return Scheme will in general lead to more high quality separation and better eventual recycling or reuse.

DAIRY ISSUES

12. Specifically on dairy products, do you think including dairy carries hygiene or related risks above those posed by other products? Please provide evidence.

As the consultation acknowledges, the inclusion of dairy products should not lead to problems for a well-run system.

13. Should any dairy products be excluded from the system?

No, there is no valid reason to exclude them.

RETURN LOCATION

14. Which option for return location do you prefer?

Takeback to a place that sells drinks - other countries find that schemes where the public take back their container to the shop where they bought it get higher return rates. This is also easier for the public to understand. So the minimum should be that those who sell the container should be part of the scheme, with appropriate exemptions for smaller retailers, although they should be able to be part of the scheme as well if they want to be. Allowing other locations to also accept materials would generally be beneficial and could be a source of income for local charities and schools.

16. Do you agree that online retailers should be included in the scheme?

Yes, this is particularly important for people in remote areas or who find it difficult to get to shops. Online retailers are included in the schemes in Germany and Norway.

FINANCING MODELS

17. Do you agree that deposit return should be seen as a form of producer responsibility?

Yes and the producer fee should be varied to encourage the use of the most appropriate materials. More generally producer responsibility should be extended to more materials and to cover all of the cost to society of the materials in question.

19. If the scheme administrator maintains ownership of the material, should it prioritise maximising profit from sales or should it seek to achieve additional benefits?

Achieve additional benefits – the scheme should be set up so that it is economically viable but the scheme administrator should be aiming to maximise environmental and social good. Ideally the system operator would be a social enterprise or part of the public sector and so not looking for profit.

20. Should any excess funding or unredeemed deposits be ringfenced for the continued maintenance or improvement of the system, or do you think it would be appropriate to divert funding to other purposes?

Funding should be ringfenced to the operation and development of the scheme.

CONSUMER INFORMATION

22. Do you agree that producers should be required to put deposit return scheme-related information on each container?

Yes

22a. If yes, should those putting small amounts of material onto the market in Scotland be exempt from this labelling requirement?

No

22b. Rather than be exempt, should small importers be required to put a label with deposit return-related information onto the existing packaging?

Yes

FRAUD PREVENTION

23. Which option for labelling do you believe offers the best balance between reducing potential for fraud and managing costs to producers and retailers?

Specific barcode, as well as information on the scheme on the packaging, as mentioned in Q.22.

DEPOSIT LEVEL

25. Do you have a preference for what level the deposit should be set at? Please indicate what level you think it should be and explain your reasoning for choosing this level.

At least 15p but preferably 20p would be enough to maximise the levels of return without being difficult for the consumer. The scheme should be set up so that the level of the deposit can be varied easily when necessary.

26. Do you think that certain types of drinks containers should carry a different deposit level?

On balance simplicity is helpful so the deposit should be the same for all containers, with the producer fee varied to incentivise appropriate choices by manufacturers.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND LOGISTICS

27. Which sorts of take back do you think the system should include?

- Reverse Vending Machines
- Manual take back
- Combination of the two

Combination of the two

HOW TO CREATE ADDITIONAL BENEFITS FROM THE SCHEME

30. Do you think a deposit return scheme for Scotland should pursue any additional benefits?

Yes

31. Are there additional benefits we have not covered that you think should be considered?

As well as improving recycling rates and quality, better product design and charity funding, the scheme will also reduce climate emissions and litter as well as helping the public understand the concept of a more circular economy.

49. Do you think being part of a UK-wide system would be beneficial for deposit return in Scotland?

Yes, eventually. Clearly a scheme which is the same across Britain or the UK has major advantages in terms of clarity for consumers, multi-site retailers and producers. However the uncertain prospect of a UK-wide scheme should not be allowed to delay the introduction of a Scottish scheme.