

## P-05-750 - Pwyllgor Deisebau 19.11.19 / Petitions Committee 19.11.19

### Petition text

The Marine Conservation Society calls on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to act upon the globally responsible Wales goal within the Well Being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015. Build on the excellent results achieved by the carrier bag charge, by implementing two further actions that would help Wales to achieve a zero waste, circular economy. Namely:

- Introduce a deposit return system in Wales for all single use beverage containers such as glass and plastic bottles and aluminium cans.
- Legislate that all fast food containers and utensils, as well as take-away cups and lids, if not reusable or refillable or collected for recycling in store, are fully compostable.

Deposit return systems are already in operation in over 40 countries around the world and have been proven to reduce litter, increase recycling by creating a more certain supply of affordable, high-quality materials, reduce costs for Local Authorities and create jobs.

Fast food wrappers and takeaway cups are a common litter item on our streets and making them refillable/reusable, easily recyclable or compostable would reduce litter.

Manufacturing new drinks containers and fast food containers and cups use up huge amounts of energy, which contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. The more we recycle, and the less we litter, the better for our environment and our economy.

- What are your thoughts on these documents?
- Do they adequately address the issues that you raised?
- Do you have further questions in response?
- Is there anything additional that you would like the Committee to know at this stage, either in response to these documents or as an update to the Committee?

### Marine Conservation Society (MCS) response to the Defra consultation response

#### Summary:

MCS are overall pleased with the outcome of this petition and its proposed actions. A deposit return scheme needs to deliver a model that will best achieve its aims as detailed in the Resources and Waste Strategy, including an emphasis on behaviour change to reduce littering on land, in rivers and the sea while improving recycling rates and reducing carbon footprint. The evidence is



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clear that an 'all-in' deposit return scheme is the best system economically, will achieve the best return and recycling rates, is the clearest system for the public to use and also ensures opportunities for scaling it up to a refill system in the future. Furthermore, an 'all-in' deposit return scheme would ensure compatibility across the UK, setting out a system for Wales that would work in harmony with Scotland's plans for a deposit return scheme and facilitate a simple rollout to England and Northern Ireland.

MCS's key asks in regard to a deposit return system are:

- The DRS should be as ambitious as possible
- Containers of all sizes should be included
- Containers of all materials should be included
- There should be a harmonised system across the UK
- The deposit should match Scotlands' system (20p)
- The DRS should be flexible and allow new products to be added as they come into the market
- The collection and recycling targets need to be sufficiently high to ensure that there is an incentive for the system to be most effective
- As a basic principle, all places that sell in scope drinks should take part and accept containers that they sell
- The DRS should include an option for online shoppers to take part in online returns
- Unredeemed deposits should be put back into the system for additional costs such as awareness campaigns and clean ups.
- The DRS should be used to support a shift to reusables across the UK by phasing out single use containers.

For a DRS to be truly successful in achieving a circular economy approach to waste it is imperative that a reusable model is adopted, with the aim of placing a ban on the most environmentally damaging materials. There is a lack of resources and infrastructure to deal with a shift from plastic to other single use materials such as 'compostable' and 'biodegradable' materials. Bio-based, 'biodegradable' or compostable plastics are not a solution to the plastic pollution crisis and will continue to pose risks to wildlife if they leak into the ocean or terrestrial environments. In line with the waste hierarchy, reduction should come as the first option rather than replacing conventional plastics with other single-use items and packaging. Such plastic can cause problems for conventional plastic recycling systems and could impact the success of the proposed deposit return system. We therefore recommend that measures should be taken to include these in DRS, depending on cost and environmental impact, or be subject to higher producer fees or bans where



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appropriate.

## **MCS specific comments on the Defra Response:**

### 1. MCS welcome the commitment from Defra within *Paragraph 10*:

*The introduction of a DRS is subject to receiving additional evidence and carrying out further analysis on the costs and benefits of such a scheme.... Our ambition is to implement a scheme which ensures regulatory consistency across the UK, noting the Scottish Government has already brought forward proposals for a wide-ranging DRS. We will continue to work with the devolved administrations to accomplish a coherent UK-wide approach.*

However, MCS are of the view that the UK government already have the information and facts they need to adopt DRS. The decision to hold another consultation has resulted in a delay in action which will result in increasing the cost, negatively impacting businesses and resulting in ongoing environmental impacts.

MCS recommends implementing a scheme that as a minimum, meets that of Scotland's DRS which would maximise high quality recycling and minimise littering, as well as minimising confusion particularly for those crossing borders. However, we would like to see the inclusion of milk containers in a Welsh DRS to maximise the amount of single use material captured in our system.

If a deposit system is limited to the most recyclable materials, some manufacturers may switch to a different material to avoid being part of the system. Cartons and other containers made up of multiple materials also feature in beach, urban and rural litter and we would ask that these are included in the scheme as soon as possible to avoid potential material switching by producers. This would further increase the effectiveness of the system, increasing recycling of these items and decreasing the amount that are littered and entering our oceans.

### 2. MCS have concerns over the timeframes suggested in *paragraph 13: Following the second consultation, a DRS would be implemented from 2023*

2023 seems unambitious for the earliest a DRS can be introduced. We are concerned about a delay and the environmental consequences, not just of pollution and littering but also the climate emergency. The Welsh Government should progress this as soon as possible, given that Scotland have already committed to this.

In additional DRS are already implemented in 40+ countries, Wales would therefore not have to

construct a system from scratch and can use successful schemes as best practice in implementing a scheme within Wales. In addition, many brands cater for a global market and will therefore be familiar to complying with DRS.

We understand there is limited legislative capacity within this Governments' term but as a minimum, we advocate that all measures are progressed and pre-consulted upon, to speed up any necessary regulation or legislation, allowing this to be progressed at the earliest opportunity.

3. We do not support *paragraph 12: We anticipate this could be drinks containers up to 3L in volume, but the final upper limit will be subject to the outcome of additional evidence and further stakeholder engagement.*

Limiting DRS by size can lead to a serious distortion of the market as producers seek to avoid their responsibilities by changing the size of the container. Countries where there have been limits on sizes have seen producers creating bottles outside of the system to evade their responsibilities e.g. creating a 3.1l bottle where the limit was 3l or a 499ml bottle where the lower size limit was 500ml. Such a system would allow for business as usual practice without enforcing important behaviour changes by producers.

4. We recommend that Welsh Government produce guidance to reassure local authorities over the perceived disadvantages a DRS system would have and direct them to the below research re *paragraph 20: a small number of local authority representatives considered that the DRS scheme, as currently proposed, would have a potentially detrimental impact on existing local authority kerbside collection schemes. Their views were that household waste collections are already recycling much of the material covered by the DRS, are convenient for consumers who do most of their recycling at home and represent an important income stream for councils. The impact on households who currently recycle at home (and might not redeem their deposit) will need to be considered.*

Research carried out by Scotland's Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee<sup>1</sup> suggests that the benefits from collection efficiency and reduced costs for disposal of materials outweighs the cost of a DRS on local authorities, "Costs to local authorities (in Scotland) are estimated to be £46m over the 25 years, based on increased sorting costs for remaining recyclate and lost income from selling materials. However, the report estimates an £237 million benefit over the same period from collection efficiencies and reduced costs for disposal of materials." Several respondents noted Government estimates that councils will make a net saving as a result of DRS and some referenced experience in South Australia where DRS



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made kerbside recycling more profitable.

Additionally, ReLoop<sup>2</sup> analysed 32 studies illustrating the positive impacts of DRS which included; the opportunities to reduce collections (reducing costs and CO<sub>2</sub>) and collect additional materials reducing residual waste. They also stated that DRS should not be seen as diverting from one system to another as it enables close-loop recycling while kerbside collections are often mixed and materials are as a result 'down-cycled' or sent to 'energy from waste' facilities".

5. MCS were pleased to note *paragraph 38: We acknowledge the overwhelming support from campaign responses and also the strong support through direct responses to the consultation for an 'all-in' model.*

MCS have been advocating an 'all-in' model and are pleased that this was supported by respondents. The evidence is clear that an 'all-in' deposit return scheme is the best system economically, will achieve the best return and recycling rates, is the clearest system for the public to use and also ensures opportunities for scaling it up to a refill system in the future.

6. MCS were pleased to note that *paragraph 57: 82% of individuals and 59% of manufacturers thought a DRS was required.*

We would draw this to the committee's attention that the majority of manufactures are in favour of DRS despite popular opinion to the contrary. Therefore, pre-consultation with manufactures and the possibility of a reduced consultation period are possibilities to expedite this process.

7. Re *paragraph 62: The introduction of a DRS is subject to receiving additional evidence and carrying out further analysis on the costs and benefits of such a scheme. In addition, we will carry out further analysis regarding the potential interface between a DRS and the current collections regime in Wales, to ensure the optimum solution which will support the progress already made on recycling in Wales."*

MCS are aware that the Welsh Government has already commissioned research by Eunomia Consulting Ltd entitled *Options for Extended Producer Responsibility in Wales*. Section E.2.1 of this report discusses the potential for increasing beverage container recycling in Wales and options for adopting a DRS.

In addition to the above, we would like clarification on what additional evidence and further



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analysis is being carried out, publication dates and actions arising.

8. Paragraph 66: *Following the publication of this Executive summary and next steps, we will seek general primary powers in the Environment Bill to introduce deposit return schemes."*

We hope that the with swift progress planned on the Environment Bill and that this will pass in summer 2020. It is imperative now that the government sets out the powers for introducing a deposit return system and that it promises to deliver the model that will best achieve its aims as detailed in the Resources and Waste Strategy, such as changing behaviour to reduce littering on land, in rivers and the sea and improving recycling rates.

As DRS are not novel legislation, Welsh Government can draw upon best examples and practice from other countries to expedite this process. Examples of which successful implementation include:

Croatia – 2016: return rate of 96% (PET), 83% (glass), 85% (metal)

Denmark – 2016: one-way return – 90% collection rate, refillable returns – 102% collection rate

Estonia – 2017: return rate of 87.8% (plastic bottles), 88.7% (glass), 73.5% (cans)

Finland – 2017: return rate of 91% (PET), 87% (glass), 94% (cans)

Germany – 2016: return rate of 98% (plastic), 96% (cans)

Iceland – 2014: return rate 90%

Lithuania – 2017: return rate 92%

Netherlands – 95% (PET), 90% (reusable glass bottles) no date given

Norway – 97% no date given

Sweden – 2017: return rate of 84% (PET), 81% (aluminium cans)



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## Marine Conservation Society (MCS) response to Welsh Governments statement

Written Statement: Plastic Waste, Hannah Blythyn AM, Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government, First published: 16 July 2019<sup>3</sup>

We welcome the acknowledgement of the need for extended producer responsibility (EPR), the development of the Litter Prevention Plan, £6.5m Circular Economy Investment Fund and refill nation initiative.

As noted above, we would urge as swift as possible implementation of DRS and are concerned over that lack of targets and deadlines, within the Deputy Ministers statement. There is also no clarity over the type of DRS Welsh Government are proposing.

Welsh Government's own consumer research states that an 'all-in' scheme, where all containers carried the same deposit cost, regardless of size, was considered to be the most effective scheme as it keeps things simple in terms of ease of use and minimal time spent at return points. Additionally, between 77% and 83% of survey participants reported they would use a DRS on all or most occasions for all five types of containers explored in the survey for drinks consumed at home and away from home including plastic bottles, glass bottles and metal cans for all soft drinks (including water and juice), alcoholic drinks and milk-containing drinks.

Further to this, a report by Scotland's Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee on the draft Deposit and Return Scheme for Scotland Regulations 2020 states that moving quickly to the broadest possible scope, including cartons and HDPE, would be the best way to mitigate the risk of material switching by producers.

### **Further considerations:**

When submitting this petition, it was deemed aspiration for Welsh Government to consider DRS. However, post 'Blue planet', much more is now possible. We would urge Welsh Government to look at this within the context of circular economy: Extended Producer Responsibility, Single Use Plastic Directive, beverage cup charge, review of single use plastic carrier bag charge, the climate change emergency and the biodiversity emergency.

In order to adopt a circular economy, business as usual practice cannot continue as it currently exists. Even the most efficient system will still have losses throughout it and therefore we need to look at preserving resources and shift to a reusable system where these items are valued over single use options. We need to see a fundamental shift away from single use items rather than an



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emphasis on recycling or reducing littering. If this does not take place, we will not be able to address the climate emergency and achieve sustainability.

The development of the litter prevention plan is welcomed; however, it does not address the preservation of resources and resource efficiency from the beginning of the waste cycle and instead deals with the end of life issues associated with litter. There needs to be an emphasis on sustainability right from the start and preventing loss of materials.

The introduction of EPR will ensure that producers deal with the full cost of resource recovery.

Whilst we are supportive of the Deputy Ministers Written Statement, we have raised directly with her concerns over the timescales of implementation of actions to reduce the use of SUP. We would advocate that all necessary regulation and legislation are in place as soon as the Environment Bill has Royal consent.

We would like to see Wales to be reinstated in its place as a world leader in waste minimization and prevention and Welsh Government have Welsh peoples support to do this.

*Gill Bell*

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Head of Conservation Wales

Marine Conservation Society