



Briefing to Welsh Members by the Marine Conservation Society

MCS - Aled Llywely

Deposit Return Scheme

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Our Key Ask:

An all-inclusive Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) must be introduced as a matter of priority and the concept of a digital DRS must not add delay.

Background

A Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) is a system where an amount (such as 20p) is added when purchasing a drink. This money is refunded in full when the empty container is returned. This deposit incentivises people to return their container, thereby reducing litter and increasing the quality and quantity of recycled material. Countries with a DRS such as Germany have seen 98% return rates¹ and litter reduction by up to 80%². In 2017, Sky Ocean Rescue reported that six out of seven bottles on the Norwegian west coast came from non-deposit bearing countries³.

A DRS was first recognised by Welsh Government as a solution over 12 years ago⁴, and although there is support from the public and cross-party, it is yet to be implemented. An MCS-commissioned 2021 YouGov survey, revealed that 72% of adults in Wales support the introduction of a DRS, consistent with a similar survey ran in 2017⁵. Over the last five years, MCS year-round beach clean data shows that Welsh beaches had, on average, 64.5* drinks littered per 100m stretch. In 2020, MCS inland cleans found drinks-related litter (including lids) in 99% of cleans across the UK⁶.

What technology is used in a DRS?

DRS uses the latest technology to collect, handle, sort and facilitate recycling and has been shown to help drive green jobs and support those in areas where opportunities are more limited⁷. It is the only system introduced across the globe that is proven to ensure the separated, high-quality collection of more than 90% of the materials included⁸.

How is a digital DRS different?

The concept of digital DRS is based on the use of existing kerbside systems, but requires additional technology and infrastructure to allow tracking of each and every bottle, can or container throughout the supply chain. Rather than the public returning their empties at a shop, they would return their drinks containers at existing kerbside bins or new "smart bins". Crucially, while the technology and benefits of a DRS are well-documented, a digital DRS is still in its infancy. It has not been applied in any other country, with only one, very high-level economic assessment currently available⁷. In June 2021, a pilot was conducted with 550 households in Conwy, North Wales where a smartphone app was used to receive a 20p digital token on specially coded individual containers. However, this pilot, like the rest of the small number of digital DRS pilots that have taken place, did not trial all the elements of a digital DRS system.

For more information, please contact Laura Foster and Angie Contestabile at the Marine Conservation Society.

References:

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2. <https://www.reloopplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/DRS-Litter-Fact-Sheet-Summary-14June2021.pdf>
3. <https://news.sky.com/story/sky-ocean-rescue-calls-for-uk-plastic-bottle-deposit-scheme-10741655>
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5. <https://www.mcsuk.org/news/public-remains-steadfast-in-their-call-for-deposit-return-schemes/>
6. https://media.mcsuk.org/documents/Source_to_Sea_Education_Pack.pdf
7. <https://www.reloopplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/DRS-Factsheet-Jobs-5FEB2021.pdf>
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* Based on 7.0 plastic bottles, 48.2 lids, 5.5 cans, 3.8 glass bottles



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