

Rush to introduce Deposit and Refund Scheme Misguided

1.2 million kerbside collection points could be replaced with just 2,000 centralised collection points

Department's 'Independent Analysis' questionable

17 August 2020: The Irish Waste Management Association (IWMA) has called upon the Government to scrap current plans for a Deposit and Refund Scheme (DRS) for beverage containers.

The mis-guided rush to introduce the scheme will result in damage to the environment in the longer term and is counter-productive to its intended ambition of increasing recycling rates.

It has never been easier for consumers to recycle beverage containers with some 1.2 million kerbside collection points available to home-owners throughout Ireland. In terms of environmental impact, placing materials in kerbside recycling bins has a lower environmental impact compared to delivering them to centralised locations.

The global market for paper has collapsed, so the only items of value currently in the recycling bins are plastic bottles and metal cans. Removing these materials from the existing system is likely to result in the collapse of that system, with the loss of the 1.2 million kerbside collection points, leaving only the 2,000 centralised collection points mooted under the DRS system. This would make it more difficult, not easier, for householders to recycle and would have a devastating impact on Ireland's recycling rates.

Figures of enhanced recycling levels quoted from other countries are misleading. DRS is most effective in countries that do not have a well-established and comprehensive kerbside recycling system. Ireland is not one of those countries.

If the Government is serious in its attempts to achieve higher recycling rates and deliver a greener economy then it should first invest in infrastructure that enhances the current system of household and bottle bank collections. This includes local authorities providing recycling bins on the streets of the country. Recycling is most effective when it is clear, consistent and easy for the public, both at home and when on the move. We have great confidence in the public's good intentions with regard to recycling, so we just need to make street recycling as easy as household recycling to get the best result and to meet our recycling targets.

The public needs to understand how exactly a DRS will impact upon them individually. There are many negatives for the public, as follows:

1. People will pay more for the beverages that they purchase.

2. In order to get their deposit back, people will have to store the beverage containers uncrushed in their homes.
3. People will have to bring the containers to their local supermarket and place them individually into a machine that will give them store credit, rather than put them in the recycling bin at their front door.
4. They will then have to pay more for their household waste collection service as the value of the containers will be lost to their service provider or in the worst case scenario, the recycling service will collapse altogether as the remaining materials cost more to recycle than to recover as fuel in waste to energy plants.

A DRS is a lose-lose for the public and may well cause the collapse of the household kerbside recycling system, in which case recycling and the environment will also be losers.

The only winners in such a scheme are the companies that provide the reverse vending machines and potentially the producers that put the materials on the market. The extra income from deposits is likely to greatly exceed the cost of returned deposits which will result in greater profits for those that flood the market with single use beverage containers.

Finally, we question the independence of the report into DRS which was commissioned by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment. The company tasked with preparing an independent analysis of a DRS in Ireland (Eunomia), has previously lobbied an Oireachtas Committee in favour of such a schemeⁱ, which calls into question the independence of their report, which is expected to be published in the Autumn.

ENDS

ⁱ Houses of the Oireachtas, Joint Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment - Report of the Joint Committee on the Detailed Scrutiny of the Waste Reduction Bill 2017 [PMB] - 32CCA006 – 28th May 2018.

Table 6: Summary and categorisation of main stakeholder arguments

Proposal B: Deposit Return Scheme (DRS)	
Arguments	
Supportive	AGAINST
Eunomia VOICE	Convenience Stores and Newsagents Association (CSNA) Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment Food Drink Ireland IBEC PMCA Consulting Repak Retail Ireland