

Press release: Deposit return scheme in fight against plastic

A deposit return scheme to increase recycling rates and slash the amount of waste polluting our land and seas will be introduced subject to consultation later this year, it was confirmed today.

UK consumers go through an estimated 13 billion plastic drinks bottles a year, but more than three billion are incinerated, sent to landfill or left to pollute our streets, countryside and marine environment.

To tackle this blight, the government has confirmed it will introduce a deposit return scheme in England for single use drinks containers (whether plastic, glass or metal), subject to consultation later this year. The consultation will look at the details of how such a scheme would work, alongside other measures to increase recycling rates. We hope to talk to the devolved administrations about the scope for working together on this important issue.

Similar schemes already operate in countries such as Denmark, Sweden and Germany. A deposit return scheme sees consumers pay an up-front deposit when they buy a drink, ranging from 8p in Sweden to 22p in Germany, which is redeemed on return of the empty drink container. Possible variants of a deposit return scheme include cash rewards for returning drinks containers without an upfront deposit.

This is often done through a network of 'reverse vending machines', where you insert your plastic or glass bottle or can and the machine returns your money. Once a bottle is returned, businesses are then responsible for making sure they are effectively recycled – a move that has led to a 97% recycling rate in Germany.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

We can be in no doubt that plastic is wreaking havoc on our marine environment – killing dolphins, choking turtles and degrading our most precious habitats. It is absolutely vital we act now to tackle this threat and curb the millions of plastic bottles a day that go unrecycled.

We have already banned harmful microbeads and cut plastic bag use, and now we want to take action on plastic bottles to help clean up our oceans.

Following receipt of the Voluntary and Economics Incentives Working Group report on single use drinks containers, Defra is now developing plans for a deposit return scheme for consultation later this year.

Today's announcement is the latest move in the government crackdown on plastic, following the plastic [microbeads ban](#) hailed as one of the world's strongest bans and the 5p plastic bag charge – which has [led to 9 billion fewer bags distributed](#). It sits alongside the [25 Year Environment Plan](#) commitment to eliminate avoidable plastic waste.

The consultation will follow the recent [call for evidence](#) by HM Treasury on taxes and charges to reduce waste from single-use plastics, so that all relevant findings can be fed into the proposals.

Plastic bottles and drinks containers have a significant impact on the environment, with discarded food and drink containers making up at least a fifth of rubbish on beaches. There are over 150 million tonnes of plastic in the world's oceans and every year one million birds and over 100,000 sea mammals die from eating and getting tangled in plastic waste.

Author Bill Bryson, a former president of Campaign to Protect Rural England, said:

Future generations will look back on this decision as a piece of supremely enlightened policymaking, and one that raises the prospect of the world's most beautiful country becoming free from drinks container litter at last.

The consultation will take into account views from producers, suppliers and consumers to ensure that any system introduced works across the country. The consultation will sit alongside a package of wider reforms of the current packaging waste system, which will incentivise producers to take greater responsibility for the environmental impacts of their products and to increase the amount of packaging they recycle.

Today's announcement comes ahead of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April, where member states will gather in London and agree measures to protect our oceans.