

Prime Minister urged to exempt the Scottish deposit return scheme – “a beacon for change”

The Scottish Greens say that Scotland’s deposit return scheme (DRS) can revolutionise our relationship with waste and be a beacon for environmental change across the UK and beyond.

The Scottish Government’s scheme will require an exemption to the Internal Market Act which the UK Government used to give itself veto powers following Brexit. In a message delivered by the Circular economy minister, Lorna Slater, to the Scottish Grocers’ Federation Mini-Summit on Thursday, the party now warns that the proposed scheme could be scrapped if the UK Government do not grant the exemption.

<https://twitter.com/ScotGrocersFed/status/1659186631574781957?s=20>

The Scottish Government paused the scheme when Humza Yousaf became First Minister and its implementation is delayed until March 2024.

On Friday a group of environmental NGOs, including Greenpeace UK, Keep Britain Tidy and the Marine Conservation Society, called on the Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, to ensure that Scotland’s DRS can come into force next year. This was in the

form of an open letter (which you can read below) to the UK Government also signed by the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland, Friends of the Earth Scotland, WWF, Scotland Keep Scotland Beautiful, Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful and Keep Wales Tidy. The letter mentioned that businesses in Scotland have spent “millions of pounds” to get ready for the scheme,

The scheme has been criticised by many in the drinks and hospitality industry saying it is unworkable. With 20p added to the cost of any drink in a container, the idea is that the money would be returned when the container is returned. But this means that not only supermarkets may have to install reverse vending machines, but also other businesses such as Edinburgh Leisure. Other smaller businesses may repay the deposit over the counter.

Circularity Scotland

The scheme, if it is granted the exemption, will be run by a not for profit organisation, [Circularity Scotland](#), whose CEO David Harris is to be paid £300,000 according to documents leaked to Scotland on Sunday earlier this year. Mr Harris appeared at the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee on 28 March when he was questioned about whether the body was ready to implement the scheme.

Towards the end of the meeting Fergus Ewing MSP questioned Mr Harris on the need to include glass in the scheme at all. He said that Zero Waste Scotland estimated that around 70 to 90% of glass bottles was already recycled, and that the machines to be used by Biffa would crush the glass into fragments which were too small to be remade into bottles. In the UK scheme glass is already exempted. While recognising that Circularity Scotland would not set the policy but merely implement it, he wondered if the scheme would not simply result in less recycling of glass.

Mr Ewing also raised the matter of small firms whose businesses will be seriously affected, some to the extent that they will make staff redundant. He wondered if Mr Harris recognised the anger and concern of these businesses when they read reports of the £300,000 salary being paid to Mr Harris.

The CEO defended himself saying he works full-time in the business. He said "At the moment I work in the region of 80 hours a week on Circularity Scotland. Industry approached me and asked me to take this job on. The board set my pay." He explained he has had to recruit people to run his one other business "so that I can devote to this one the time that is needed". But on further questioning by Edward Mountain MSP and Convener of the committee, Mr Harris admitted that he also receives a pension contribution on top of the salary.

The Scottish Greens environment spokesperson, Mark Ruskell MSP, has called on the UK Government to give the Scottish scheme the exemption it needs. He said: "Scotland's Deposit Return Scheme is a vital step towards cleaner streets and a better environment.

"It is a positive, ambitious and much-needed scheme that can revolutionise our relationship with waste. It is already creating hundreds of jobs here and now and can serve as a beacon for environmental change in the UK and beyond.

"It's a scheme that we are very proud of and, particularly with the inclusion of glass, it will put Scotland in line with the successful schemes across Europe and go far further than what is being proposed by the UK government.

"With so many leading environmental groups having come together to call for Downing Street to intervene and grant the required exemption, it is clear that there is a growing demand for action. I urge the Prime Minister to listen.

"The days and weeks ahead will be decisive. We cannot allow our climate to be treated like a political football. It is far

too important for that.

“Unless the UK government acts then the consequences for devolution will be severe, but the impact on our environment and the businesses who have signed up and started making preparations will be even worse.

“There are no second chances when it comes to climate action. We will only ever have one environment, we must do everything we can to protect it.”



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