

# **Westminster may trial deposit return scheme in Scotland**

**The UK Government is considering using Scotland as a test bed for the UK-wide Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) according to the BBC.**

The Scottish Government is at present awaiting an exemption from the internal market rules which would allow the Scottish scheme to begin operating next Spring. If Scotland had a scheme but the rest of the UK did not then it could create a trade barrier unless similar legislation was enacted there. It is believed that the UK Government may instead allow Scotland to proceed with its DRS on the basis that it is a pilot for one which would then be rolled out across the rest of the UK.

The Minister has responded to today's media reports, and in particular the fact that glass might be excluded from any DRS – something which was considered by The Scottish Government as essential.

Ms Slater said: "Once again the UK Government has shown utter disregard for devolution. Scottish ministers have, as yet, received no notice of their decision. This is treating the Scottish Parliament with contempt.

"If press reports are accurate, this would be an eleventh hour decision from the UK Government to unilaterally remove glass from Scotland's Deposit Return Scheme which would ride roughshod over the devolution settlement, undermine our efforts to protect our environment and reduce climate emissions. We can see no justification for their reported

actions, which would undermine their own climate targets.

“It would mean around six hundred million bottles that would have been collected by the scheme, will not be, despite businesses in Scotland having invested millions of pounds in preparation to include them. If this decision turns out as reported, many of these bottles would unnecessarily end up as broken glass on our streets, our parks and our beaches.

“We remain committed to the delivery of a successful Deposit Return Scheme, but we would need to fully consider the implications for the successful delivery of the scheme and discuss these with businesses and delivery partners. I intend to provide an update to parliament as soon as possible.”

In response to a question in parliament earlier this week, Ms Slater said there was strong public support for the scheme. Willie Rennie MSP suggested the scheme as in trouble. He said: “The minister must acknowledge that this scheme has been in trouble for quite a long time and certainly since well before this recent episode. Confidence in those who are expected to deliver the scheme is at rock bottom. Rather than stringing it along for yet more weeks and months, why does the minister not acknowledge that she needs to go back to the drawing board, come up with a new scheme and work with the UK Government to develop something that works?”

Ms Slater said: “I am rather shocked by the member suggesting that. The regulations for a deposit return scheme were passed by the Parliament in 2020. They were extensively consulted on and they went through the committee process and all the other stages of the Scottish Parliament. The deposit return scheme that is being delivered is in line with the work that was done at that time. It is absolutely my intention to deliver what the Parliament voted for, and that is what we are actively engaged with the industry on.”

The DRS was initially to be effective from this August but

following difficulties highlighted by industry the First Minister, Humza Yousaf announced it would be delayed until March 2024.



Lorna Slater. Photo © 2023 Martin P. McAdam  
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The Scottish Greens say such a move by Westminster would be vindictive, short-sighted and should spark outrage over its likely environmental consequences.

Mark Ruskell MSP said: “It would be short-sighted in the extreme and should spark outrage over its likely consequences not just for our streets and countryside, but for businesses too.

“Millions of pounds have already been spent preparing for this scheme. Dozens of countries around the world already include glass, and devolved nations including Scotland and Wales have made democratic decisions to pursue this path.

“For the UK Government to go against all that suggests this is

a decision taken not using logic or common sense, but spawned through a vindictive and self-serving attempt to undermine the will of the Scottish Parliament.

“Stop and think about it for a moment. What the UK Government has done is breach its own manifesto commitment, drive a coach and horses through devolution and condemn our communities to endure broken glass littering our streets, making our parks and beaches more dangerous, injuring our pets, harming our children and sparking wildfires for perpetuity.

“They have stuck two fingers up to businesses who have already invested millions and recruited hundreds of staff to make the scheme a success, all because Rishi Sunak’s government decided that real devolution doesn’t matter if Westminster disagrees.

“Shame on Alister Jack and shame on the UK Prime Minister for treating Scotland with such utter contempt and for betraying our future generations who are counting on our parliaments to protect the environment.

“I recognise that the Scottish Government will have to reflect very hard on this to decide its next move but I suspect this outrageous environmental travesty will spill out far beyond Scotland’s borders, and right up to the gates of Downing Street.

“Producers of huge brands such as Irn Bru, Coca-Cola, Pepsi and Britvic have invested millions and been working on their plans for years. Greenpeace, Keep Britain Tidy and the Marine Conservation Society warned the Prime Minister only days ago that glass has to be included in Scotland and the rest of the UK.

“Environmental charities, campaigners and business groups will now be looking towards the UK Government’s own diluted deposit scheme nervously, and asking how and why the Tories quite literally lost their bottle.”