

# Letter from Scotland

**The Scottish Government's efforts to save the planet, and tidy up our streets and countryside, have exposed a whole landfill site of pungent issues.**

All week we've been discussing the "deposit return scheme" (DRS) for drinks containers, in increasingly rattled tones, as one special interest jostles against another.

There are those for, and those against, glass bottles being included. There are businesses complaining about the cost of the scheme and its halting introduction. There are awkward comparisons with deposit return schemes across Europe and the proposed schemes for England and Wales. There's a row over Westminster interference in Scottish affairs. There's a row within the SNP over their coalition with the Greens whose project this is. Saving the planet has become the last thing on people's minds.



Has Scotland got the bottle ? The politics of DRS.

According to Zero Waste Scotland, we “deposit” 40,000 plastic bottles a day, by simply dropping them in the street or throwing them from car windows as we drive along country roads. They are washed into the sea or remain in the ground as ever-lasting memorials to our throw-away culture. It amazes me we have allowed the general production of these contaminants and not banned them, like we ban dangerous chemicals, or indeed the ban already in force on the use of single-use plastic, such as plastic straws and cups. Producers soon find alternatives.

As planned by Lorna Slater, the Green MSP and Circular Economy Minister, all producers and large retailers of drinks sold in plastic bottles, tin cans and glass bottles have to pay to join the scheme. They can then charge a 20p deposit to customers which is returned when the bottle is returned. The bottles are then stored in the shop and collected later for re-cycling. It’s thought the incentive to return bottles rather than throw them away will reduce litter by up to 90 per cent.

Entering stage right, the UK Government has insisted that glass bottles be taken out of the scheme. It can so insist, apparently, under the Internal Markets Act which replaced the European single market after the Brexit catastrophe. The reason being given is that glass is well recycled already, with business and household collections, and glass will not be included in the scheme in England when it is introduced in 2025. The Internal Markets Act, of course, is seen by the SNP as a Tory project to undermine devolution. It all gets rather complicated and Ms Slater is now “running the numbers” to see if the deposit return scheme can go ahead next March without glass.

The whole debate is a classic example of everyone agreeing on a general principle – saving the environment – and then disagreeing on how it should be done. The result is that

nothing is done. There must be a long German term to describe this dilemma.

We had another example this week. Everyone agrees that the air in our cities needs cleaning up but the low-emissions-zone (LEZ) introduced in Glasgow city centre on Thursday has been greeted with moans and groans by taxi drivers, owners of old cars and vans whose vehicles do not comply with modern (ie European) standards and by black-coated representatives of the "night time economy." Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen will be going through the same "klimat-angst" next year.

We've been feeling the heat from rising global temperatures this week. For most of us, it's meant pleasantly mild weather but at Cannich near Beauly there's been a major wildfire. It blazed for several days, finally being brought under control on Wednesday, but not before it had destroyed 3,000 hectares of woodland, some of it in the RSPB's Corrimony nature reserve. Early in May, there was a similar wildfire at Glenuig in Lockaber which was the largest forest fire in Britain since 2008.

Finally, there is one valiant Scotsman who is staying cool and getting away from it all, on the rocky outcrop of Rockall, 220 miles west the Outer Hebrides. Cam Cameron, marine biologist and former soldier from Buckie, is camping on the top of this 21m by 30m rock and "enjoying" the pleasant airs, sprays, gales and seagulls of the Atlantic Ocean. He's hoping to set a record of 60 days continuous habitation. He is only the fifth person to stay overnight on this exciting rock.

No one quite knows who owns it – Britain, Scotland, Ireland, or does it just belong to the planet we are all trying to save.



Photo by Craig Adderley on [Pexels.com](https://www.pexels.com)