



Tidy Britain 

# Public Perceptions of a Deposit Return Scheme

A report from the Tidy Britain APPG



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## FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIR



**Kim Leadbeater MP**  
Chair, Tidy Britain APPG

**Being an MP has its privileges, and one that I particularly relish is the opportunity to meet local groups in my constituency – people who go out into their communities to improve the environment on their doorstep for the benefit of everyone. During the Great British Spring Clean this year, the fantastic litter heroes in my constituency of Batley and Spen collected more than 250 bags of rubbish at a series of litter-picks.**

But that litter should not be finding its way into our environment in the first place. At the launch of the Great British Spring Clean in Parliament, we were fortunate to hear from volunteers from across the country. One described how litter-pickers such as herself were “mopping the floor”, whereas what was really needed was to “turn off the taps”. We need to make sure we are taking every step possible to keep our environment free from litter and, in the process, ensure that we are wasting less of our precious resources.

And that is why the Tidy Britain APPG has dedicated so much attention to deposit return schemes (DRS). Defra estimates that a DRS would reduce the littering of in-scope containers by 85% and predicts recycling rates of above 90% within just a few years. In one policy, we can take a serious step away from our current culture of litter and waste, and move towards a circular economy for drinks containers.

At our latest meeting in Parliament, we heard from industry, environmental groups and the Government on the challenges and opportunities that DRS offers, and we are determined to keep having these conversations. There is a real desire from all sides to make the scheme in England a reality. The recommendations included in this report have developed from these conversations.

I am pleased to present this report into DRS, particularly into public attitudes surrounding the scheme. Examples from around the world tell us that DRS is popular and that people are proud of the schemes they use, and this is reflected in this research. We should take encouragement from the level of support that is already out there for this project, which can have a positive impact on this country for generations to come.

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## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Any proposed deposit return scheme must include glass** to create a level playing field for materials and to stop the littering of glass bottles that present a danger to people, pets and wildlife and can act as a magnifier, causing grass and moorland fires.
2. **The deposit level should be set at 20p** to facilitate interoperability with the Scottish scheme.
3. **There can be no more delay to the scheme**, which is currently scheduled to come in a full seven years after it was first announced.

The exclusion of glass represents a huge missed opportunity to drive down the waste inherent to the current recycling system, under which 1.75 billion glass bottles are 'lost' to the system annually.<sup>1</sup> Glass has high CO2 emissions associated with its use, but melting recycled glass reduces the CO2 emissions by about 58%.<sup>2</sup>

In the UK, our glass recycling rate is stagnant at 74% - the median return rate for return-to-retail schemes is 90%. Schemes across the world have successfully included glass in their DRS, including Finland and Germany, which both recapture 98% of their glass drinks containers.<sup>3</sup>

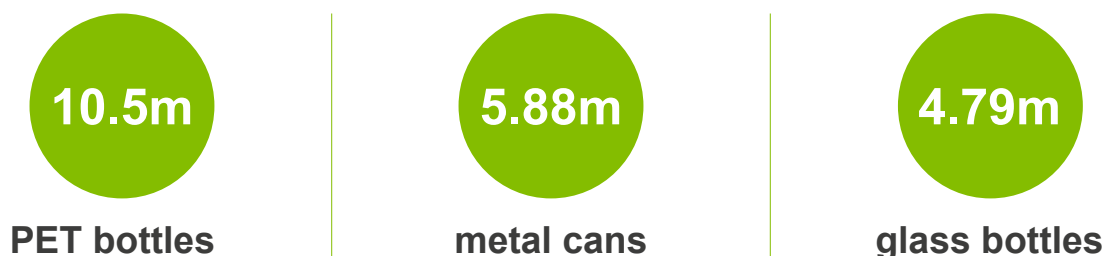
The Government's own impact assessment suggests that the net benefit of a DRS including glass is £5.88bn over the first ten years, compared to £3.58bn for a scheme that excludes glass.<sup>4</sup>

The exclusion of glass could destabilise the whole DRS system. Not only does it create divisions across borders and threaten interoperability between the UK nations, it also risks alienating the plastic and aluminium producers upon whose support the success of the scheme depends.

As a further aspect of consistency, a single deposit rate across the UK that is sufficient to incentivise return will facilitate a smooth operation of the scheme across borders. This is why the UK must match the 20p rate set in Scotland.

Finally, there can be no more delay to the scheme. Five years have passed since the announcement of DRS and precious little tangible progress has been made. Every day in the UK we waste millions of drinks containers. This needs to urgently be brought under control and only a DRS will have the level of impact required.

### Every day in the UK we waste



<sup>1</sup> Based on data from Reloop and the Government's annually published recycling data

<sup>2</sup> FEVE Life Cycle Assessment (2017)

<sup>3</sup> Global Deposit Book 2022: An Overview of Deposit Return Systems for Single-Use Beverage Containers (2022)

<sup>4</sup> Introducing a Deposit Return Scheme on beverage containers: Impact Assessment (2021)



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## PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS SURVEY

In April 2023, Keep Britain Tidy commissioned YouGov to survey a sample of the UK population in order to better understand the levels of awareness, comprehension and support relating to various aspects of deposit return schemes.<sup>5</sup>

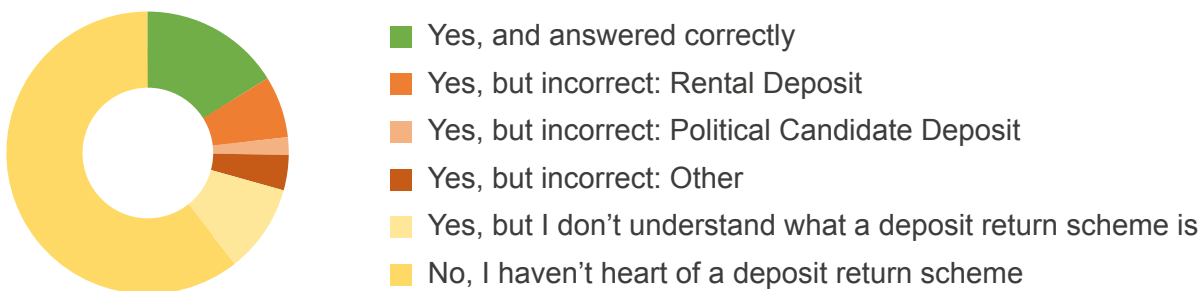
### Headline results:

- Just **30%** had heard of DRS and answered that they knew what it was
- When DRS was explained, **66%** supported it
- This rises to **69%** for 2019 Conservative voters, **72%** for Labour voters, **76%** Liberal Democrat
- Three-quarters of people polled (**76%**) believed that glass bottles should be included in DRS, the highest percentage, ahead of plastic bottles (**75%**) and aluminium cans (**69%**)

### Understanding

When asked if they had heard of a deposit return scheme, just 30% answered that they had, and that they understood what it was, with 60% saying they had not heard of it. Many of those who said they knew what it was were referring to other schemes, e.g. rental deposit protection or electoral deposits. So, in reality, roughly only 16% of people knew what DRS was when asked to provide an explanation.

### *Have you heard of a Deposit Return Scheme?*

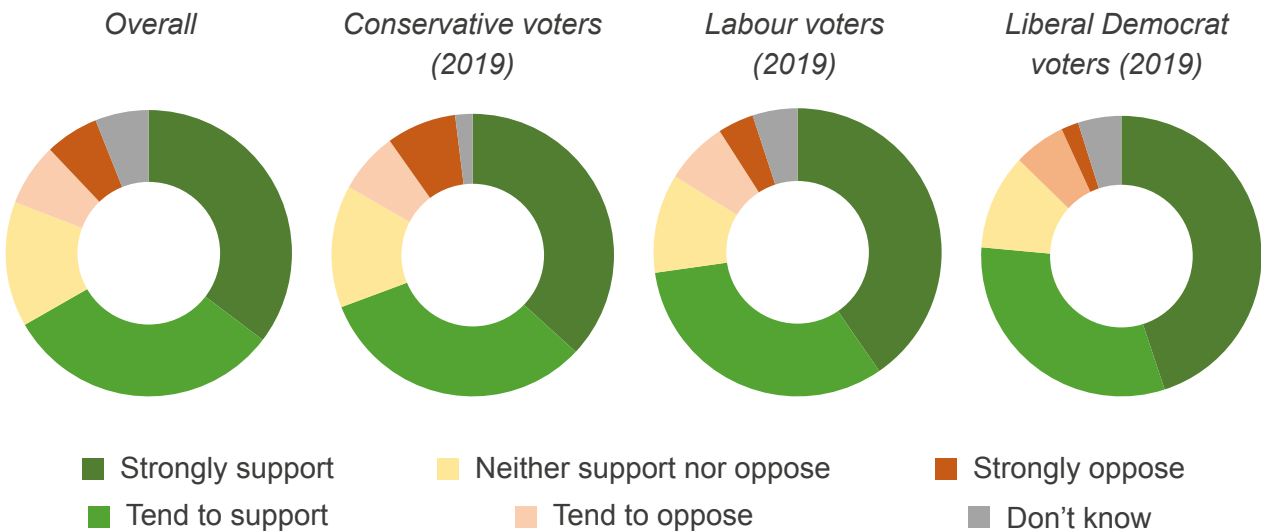


Considering the advanced timeline and increased media attention, it was unsurprising that knowledge of DRS was the highest in Scotland – with just over half of those questioned able to correctly define DRS.

<sup>5</sup> The total sample size was 2,061 adults. An online survey was carried out between 17th - 18th April 2023. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

## Support

DRS was then explained to the respondents in factual, neutral terms. At this point, 66% supported the policy, with only 13% opposing. Support was highest among 2019 Liberal Democrat voters (76%), but was above average for both Labour voters (72%) and Conservative voters (69%).



Unusually for environmental policy, it was most popular amongst voters 50+ (71% support) and less popular with 18-24 year olds, although a majority (58%) still supported it.



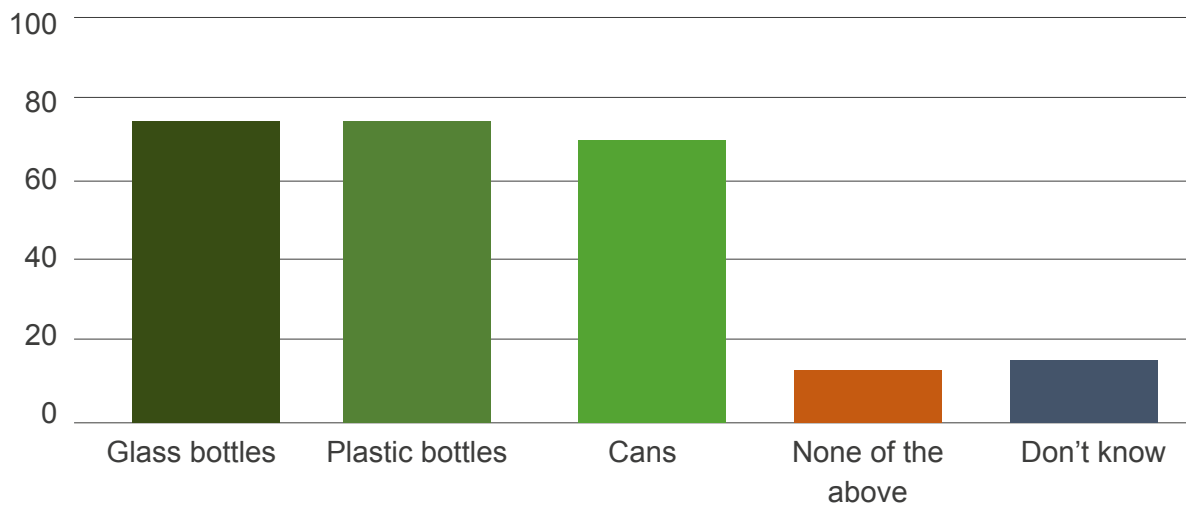
When asked about the effort it takes to return drinks containers, 64% of Britons said it was worth it to help protect the environment, compared to just 18% who said the benefits for the environment would be minimal and therefore not worth the effort.



When it comes to materials, three-quarters of people polled (76%) believed that glass should be included in DRS, the highest percentage, ahead of plastic (75%) and cans (69%).

Support for the inclusion of glass was above average in England (77%).

**Which of the following products, if any, do you think should be included in the deposit return scheme?**



***“A well-designed deposit return scheme will help us turn old bottles and cans into new ones, drive forward the circular economy and reducing litter.”***  
Aaron Patel, Head of Corporate Affairs, UK & Ireland, The Coca-Cola Company



## Perceptions

Among the benefits of DRS, the two most chosen by the respondents were a reduction in littering (60%) and more drinks containers being recycled (59%).



**6 in 10** expected a reduction in littering from DRS

**6 in 10** expected an increase in littering from DRS

**4 in 10** said they would be likely to pick up litter to claim the deposit

The two main challenges identified were people not having convenient places to return their drinks containers (59%) and the increased upfront purchase costs (42%).

## Behaviours

Almost a quarter of people (23%) said they would be more likely to buy drinks in glass bottles, rather than plastic or aluminium, if glass bottles did not carry a deposit while the other materials did.

40% of people polled said they would be likely to pick up littered/discarded bottles and return them to claim the deposit and this figure was consistent across all ages, genders and political affiliations.

## Conclusions

Once DRS is communicated to people in straightforward terms, there is overwhelming public support for it from across the political spectrum.

Support is strong for the inclusion of glass, plastic and aluminium containers. This is at odds with Defra's current policy to exclude glass from DRS in England and Northern Ireland – the two nations with the highest levels of public support for the inclusion of glass.



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## COMBATTING LITTER, WASTE AND CLIMATE BREAKDOWN THROUGH A DRS



**Allison Ogden-Newton OBE**  
CEO, Keep Britain Tidy

In March 2018, the UK Government announced that it would bring in a deposit return scheme on drinks containers following over a decade of work from campaigners. At the time of announcement, they said:

*“It is absolutely vital we act now to tackle this threat and curb the millions of plastic bottles a day that go unrecycled.”*

In the 1,849 days since that announcement, an estimated 18 billion plastic bottles, ten billion aluminium cans and eight billion glass bottles have been landfilled, incinerated or littered across the UK – resources that have been lost from the economy.

Through a DRS, we can, by the government’s own estimation, reduce littering of drinks containers by 85% and increase our stagnant recycling rates to more than 90%. It represents a vital step towards a circular economy that treats resources as they should be treated – as valuable, reusable commodities with an impact on the world.





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In that time, we've had a general election, in which 97% of English voters cast their ballot for parties with DRS in their manifesto. The Conservative manifesto promised to "introduce a deposit return scheme to incentivise people to recycle plastic and glass".

Keep Britain Tidy was set up to 'preserve the countryside against desecration by litter,' in 1955, when the primary driver of litter was glass bottles. Fast forward to 2023 and this has been joined by other materials, most notably widespread plastic pollution, but the glass remains. More than four and a half million glass bottles are wasted every day. When DRS has the potential to raise recycling rates to above 90%, we cannot afford to leave glass out of the scheme.

Last year, we launched our **#PainInTheGlass** campaign highlighting the dangers of glass litter. We were told stories of how pets, wildlife and people had been seriously harmed by broken glass. Hundreds of people wrote to their MPs asking for glass to be included in DRS in England as it is in Scotland and Wales. Broken and discarded glass is also a known trigger of wildfires, which in our warming climate are becoming a more frequent feature of British summers.

The inclusion of glass would be popular with the public, some of whom might be looking longingly back to the 1970s and the "pop-man". When YouGov asked what materials should be included, 76% of people said glass bottles – more than the 75% that said plastic bottles and the 69% that said cans.

MPs from across Parliament need to push for this system that is tried-and-tested the world over, a benefit for industry and will make a huge step towards ridding our environment of litter.



***“97% of English voters cast their ballot for parties with DRS in their manifesto.”***

Allison Ogden-Newton OBE  
CEO, Keep Britain Tidy

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Tidy Britain 

*The Tidy Britain APPG was established to bring together parliamentarians with an interest in policy surrounding litter and waste within their constituency and at a national level. The chair of the group is Kim Leadbeater MP and the secretariat is provided by environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy. Since its foundation, the membership has grown to more than 150 parliamentarians from the House of Commons and House of Lords. This is not an official publication of the House of Commons or the House of Lords. It has not been approved by either House or its committees. All-Party Parliamentary Groups are informal groups of members of both houses with a common interest in particular issues. The views expressed in this report are those of the Tidy Britain APPG.*

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