

SUBMISSION

INQUIRY INTO:

ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION (BEVERAGE CONTAINER
DEPOSIT & RECOVERY SCHEME) BILL 2009

SUBMISSION FROM:

AFROCAB (Australians for Refunds on Cans and Bottles)

Convenor: Peter Cook

AFROCAB is an informal network of volunteers who clean up litter. From this work we know what the main litter items are. We support the introduction of a National Container Deposit System because we know it will give us a cleaner Australia.

We support The Environment Protection (Beverage Container Deposit and Recovery Scheme) Bill 2009 for the following reasons:

[1] AN UP TO DATE APPROACH

This Bill successfully incorporates the old and the new. Firstly, it includes things that have been good about the South Australian system since that system was introduced in the 1970's. Secondly, it combines that with contemporary features that will enable this legislation to operate successfully in the modern world. It also incorporates features from successful systems that operate in parts of Europe and North America.

[2] A NATIONAL APPROACH

Beverage litter is a significant problem in all states and territories, except South Australia. A nationwide problem requires a uniform, national response.

[3] A PROVEN SOLUTION

Experience in South Australia, shows that their Container Deposit System does significantly reduce the problem of drink container litter.⁽¹⁾ This is also the case in countries and states that have container deposit systems in other parts of the world.⁽²⁾

[4] FAILED POLICIES

In the last 20 years many different policies and strategies have been trialled. None have been successful. More of the same will not address this problem.

[5] PUBLIC SUPPORT

Public support for refund systems is very high. This has been shown in a number of opinion polls ⁽³⁾. Community support is a vital prerequisite for an effective and successful litter policy.

In South Australia this is because people see the difference their system makes to litter. Also, they appreciate the financial benefits that individuals and community groups derive from their refund system.

In other states and territories it is because people remember the refund system on glass bottles when they were children. They see refund systems as a practical, common sense solution to a highly visible problem.

In Victoria, in 2008, 220 community groups registered their support for a state container deposit system. These groups were from all over Victoria and from all backgrounds ⁽⁴⁾.

[6] HIGH RECYCLING RATES

As can be seen in the table below recycling rates are much higher in South Australia than other parts of Australia. This is very important because drink containers are high in embodied energy and most are made from finite, non renewable resources.

Having higher recycling rates with drink containers also has positive impacts on other types of recycling (5).

TYPE	SA RECYCLING RATE	NATIONAL RECYCLING RATE
PET Bottles	74%	35%
Aluminium Cans	65%	84%
Glass bottles	80%	40%

Figures supplied by EPA South Australia in 2006

[7] REDUCED CO2 EMISSIONS

Because drink containers are very high in embodied energy the much higher recycling rates seen with refund systems result in reduced energy use to produce new drink containers compared with using virgin materials.

For example, the 2007 Stakeholders Report into a Container Deposit system for Western Australian found that a deposit system there would reduce CO2 emissions in WA by “tens of thousands of tonnes per year”. This report also said a deposit system there would save “millions of litres of water” (6).

[8] LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Councils carry the main burden of cleaning up litter. Figures in the 2006 National Litter Index showed that drink containers are the number one litter item by volume and the number three litter item by quantity. With much less drink container litter Councils will have reduced litter clean up costs. Councils will also benefit because drink containers will no longer be taking up finite landfill space.

[9] FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY GROUPS

In South Australia, refunds from drink containers are a significant source of fundraising for a wide variety of community groups. This same benefit would apply nationally if this legislation was passed by the Federal Parliament.

This means, as litter, drink containers will cease being a financial burden on the community and instead become a financial benefit.

[10] PROTECTING OUR WATERWAYS

At least 3 billion drink containers are not recycled in Australia every year. Many of these are littered and end up in our waterways. (This is cumulative). A national container deposit system will protect our environment from this problem.

[11] IT WILL COMPLEMENT EXISTING KERBSIDE RECYCLING SYSTEMS

Contrary to beverage and packaging industry comments, the South Australian experience shows that container deposit systems do not undermine kerbside recycling systems. Also, the 2007 Western Australian Stakeholders Investigation Report into a container deposit system for WA found that a container deposit system there, would be “complementary to and supportive of the existing system of kerbside recycling provided by councils” (7).

CONCLUSION

For many years the beverage and packaging industry has worked hard to prevent the introduction of State or National Container Deposit Legislation. These efforts have been successful despite ongoing community requests for governments to fix the drink container litter problem.

The reasons for their success underline the reasons why this inquiry needs to look at this issue with fresh eyes.

Firstly, industry puts forward self serving arguments to justify continued inaction. While it is understandable that they would not want their products to be the focus of specific litter policies, lawmakers we believe, should view their arguments with a degree of scepticism.

Secondly, via their involvement with litter research and survey programs around the country they have successfully concealed the extent of the problem of drink container litter.

Dividing drink containers into 38 different categories in the 2006(and previous) National Litter Index with the result that drink containers did not appear in the list of top ten litter items is just one example (8).

Because of this lawmakers should also be sceptical of figures presented by organisations associated with industry which suggest that the extent of the beverage litter problem is overstated.

Because a refund system has almost universal support in the community, so too should it get bipartisan political support in Parliament. It will be good for both the community and the environment.

Peter Cook

ENDNOTES

1. A - Community Litter Report. (www.AFROCAB.org.au) In 2005-06 we conducted 109 roadside litter surveys around Victoria. We also did 27 surveys in South Eastern South Australia. There

were 21 drink containers per kilometre on major roads and highways in Victoria and 7 per kilometre in South Australia. **B** – The 2006 National Litter Index: Where it showed 503 drink containers in South Australia, the average for all states was 1038.

2. Relevant quotations. **A** - “As a tourist oriented state whose major attraction is its natural beauty, we are very aware of the contribution of the deposit system in keeping our roadsides clean”. *Angus King, Governor of Maine, 1996*. **B** - “Our 20 year old Bottle Bill has been a phenomenal success at keeping millions of drink containers out of our landfills and off our streets in the form of beverage litter”. *New York State Attorney General, Eliot Spitzer, 2002*
3. A Newspan survey commissioned by AFROBAC conducted amongst 300 Victorians, in October 2006, found that 94% were in favour of the State Government introducing a container deposit system in Victoria. 3% were against a deposit system and a further 3% did not have an opinion.
4. See attached list from the The Age.
5. In 2002-03 the Municipal recycling rate in SA was 39%. That was the highest rate of all States and Territories. Also, SA had the second highest recycling rate per capita, after ACT, in that year. See www.zerowastewa.com.au/ourwork/specificprograms
6. The WA Stakeholders Advisory Group Report can be found at www.zerowastewa.com.au/ourwork/specificprograms
7. See 6. above
8. We looked at the National Litter Index figures reported for each State and the numbers for every type of drink container. When treated as one type of litter item, the figures from the 38 different types of drink containers, when combined, showed that drink containers, by volume, were the number one litter item. By quantity they were the number three litter item (after cigarette butts and general paper). See Community Litter Report at www.afrobac.org.au