

An underwater scene with a blue-green tint. In the foreground, a red crushed can and a blue crushed can lie on the seabed. Above them, two clear plastic bottles are suspended in the water. The background is dark with some light rays filtering through. At the top right, there is a decorative border of white icons representing various environmental and recycling symbols.

Keep Wales Tidy

A Deposit Return Scheme for Wales – Will it move us ‘Beyond recycling?’



cadwch keep
gymru'n wales
dac'lus tidy

About Keep Wales Tidy

More than what you might think...

“An independent charity with a vision for a beautiful Wales, cared for and enjoyed by all”

Putting prevention, community action and the circular economy at the heart of stronger Welsh communities.

- **Eradicate Litter and Waste – *Litter data, policy, behavioral expertise, research, university partnerships***
- **Setting Standards for Environmental excellence– *Local Places for Nature, Green Flag Award for Parks, Blue Flag Award for beaches, Community development***
- **Empower Young People – *Eco- Schools programme (teachers and pupils), Eco-Tots, Youth Board***

and more...!

What does the proposed Deposit Return Scheme for Wales look like and what does it mean for transitioning 'beyond recycling' and building a more circular economy?

- ***Behavioural perspective***
- ***Cultural (and structural) shifts***
- ***Littering***
- ***Practical elements for Local Authorities to think about***
- ***Radical collaboration...***



A DRS for Wales

Where are we now?

- 2017 – Scotland is the first country in the UK to announce intentions for a DRS 
- 2018 - Michael Gove committed to DRS in UK new Waste Strategy 
- 2019 - England & Wales Joint Consultation on DRS with a (then) proposed launch date of 2023  
- 2021 – Republic Of Ireland officially committed to a Deposit Return Scheme and published regulations 
- 2023 – After several delays, Scotland Scheme fails under **IMA challenge** as UK Government refused to grant exclusions 
- 2023 – Scotland DRS plans aligned with England and NI 
- 2024 – (February) Republic of Ireland Scheme launches 
- 2024 – (November) Welsh Government announces it will ‘forge it’s own path’ on DRS with glass and reuse as their stated ‘re lines’ which UK Government did not want to adopt. 
- 2025 – (January) UK (excluding Wales) DRS regulations laid in Parliament 
- 2025 – (April) UK DMO (England, Scotland and NI) established 
- 2025 – (May) Welsh Government announces plans for Welsh system which includes glass (without deposit) and reuse 
- 2025 – (July) Wales Reuse Consultation launched (closes November 2025)  ←
- 2026 – (March) Wales DRS Regulations expected 
- 2027 – (October) Expected launch date of UK wide DRS (with Wales specific differences)  

A DRS for Wales

What is it?

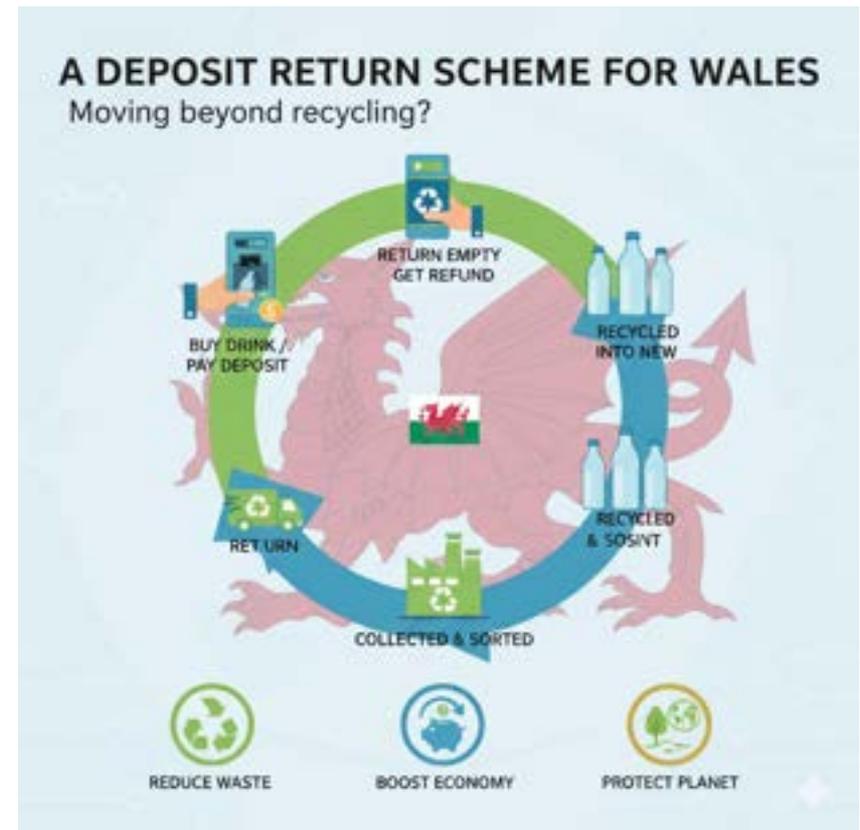
“ A system where a small deposit is charged for certain types of drinks containers, such as plastic bottles and cans, at the point of purchase.

“This deposit is refunded to the consumer when they return the empty containers to a designated collection point, typically a reverse vending machine.”

Producers of waste are made responsible for the production AND disposal of their products.

Transfers the cost of this to companies and away from the taxpayer and local government.

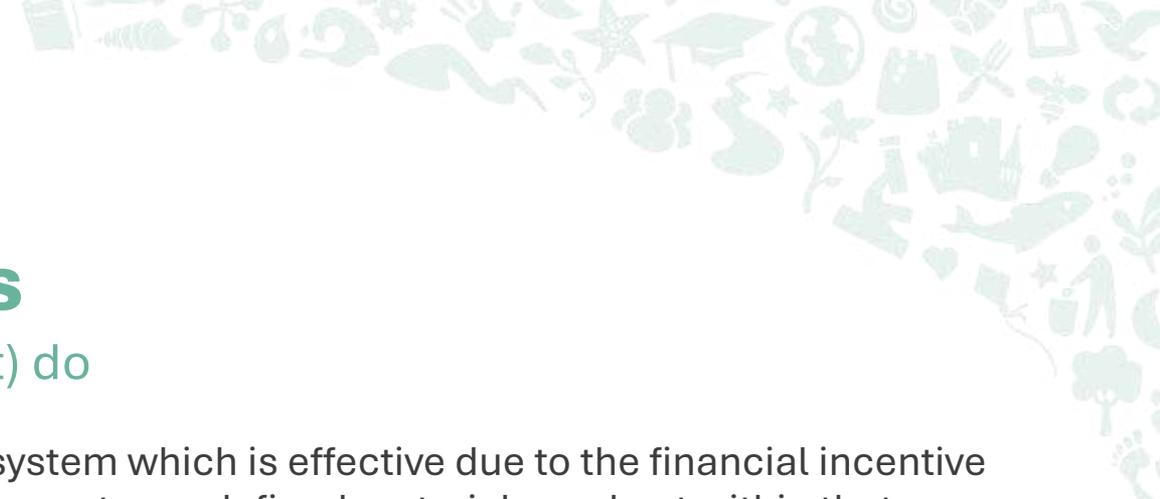
DRS is an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) mechanism



Extended Producer Responsibility

“ An environmental policy approach where a producer's responsibility for a product extends to the post-consumer stage of its lifecycle, including final disposal.”





A DRS for Wales

What A DRS can (and can't) do

- A DRS is essentially a proven system which is effective due to the financial incentive BUT it is a closed loop recycling system – defined materials are kept within that system and the system's infrastructure.
- As a form of EPR, it falls on the producer to pick up the costs of the scheme and transfer costs away from local and national government.
- Digital DRS (sometimes called DDRS) is an idea, not an established concept (although not to say there is not the potential for complementary digital innovation in the future).
- Few DDRS pilots have progressed to larger scale systems (not there yet?) – amongst other concerns, the DDRS model when applied at scale would put lot of responsibility back to local waste management

Evidence from DRS schemes elsewhere in the world have shown:

- Increased quality of recyclate
- Reduction of litter (not just drinks containers)
- Cost-benefits to Councils (dependent on scheme design)

Why does it matter?

Tackling Litter

- 56 countries (not including a number of states in America and Australia) currently have Deposit Return Schemes for drinks containers.
- The main reasons for introducing a DRS are to tackle litter and increase the quality and quantity of recycling.
- Consistent evidence that Deposit Return Schemes reduce litter, not just of drinks containers but for other litter items too.
- A study undertaken by Eunomia in 2017 assumed that a DRS in England would lead to an 80% reduction in littering of beverage containers, and a 32% reduction in litter overall

Estonia:

Drink containers made up just 10% of litter within the first two years (down from 80%).

Queensland, Australia:

54% reduction in drink container litter and elimination of 3 billion containers in the environment.

Germany:

In Spain, which does not have a DRS, the number of drink containers littered per km was 13 times higher than in Germany, where a DRS is in place.

GLÂN (Geospatial Litter ANalysis) Data

DRS as litter (so far this year)



Data from the new GLÂN litter monitoring system - baseline data for DRS being collected throughout 2025/26. Significant expansion from the LEAMS methodology which was only streets. Contact LEQ@KeepWalesTidy.Cymru for more information

A DRS for Wales – Reuse?

Consultation and intent

Welsh Government has proposed an ‘all in Scheme, like the rest of the UK but in addition, intends to:

- Include glass (without deposits until at least 2030) (Internal Markets Act)
- Has reuse embedded from Day #1

Victims of our own recycling success?

Not common but not the first (Lithuania, Denmark some aspects in other countries / states)

BUT certainly the most ambitious and first to have it built in from the start.

Industry has struggled with this diversion

- Would reuse at scale happen without inclusion in a DRS?
- Would producers make these changes in the absence of legislation?



Current open consultation :

- Targets for reuse
- Expansion of reuse items
- Road map (to be set by DMO)
- Items vs Materials
- Opportunities for innovation

Critical challenges for reuse

Materials, Markets and the will to make a difference



Materials

- We need to focus on materials, not content
- Material diversity expansion (possibly as an unintended consequence of EPR) is the biggest threat to waste prevention and reuse efforts.

(Secondary) Markets

- Secondary markets, including the infrastructure required for reuse operations are currently limited.
- For greater impact and to avoid additional transport burdens, these markets need to be created IN Wales
- If we build it, will they come?

Political and Producer will – can it be maintained?

IF DRS succeeds in these aims, then we have the beginning of a truly circular transition BUT it's always worth remembering that DRS (and current UK EPR) only covers food and drink packaging.

Critical challenges for reuse

Applying the principles of Circular Economy across all waste sectors

What about: Construction? Agriculture? WEEE?



Single use vape ban – good example of loopholes (although too early to tell true impact)

Moving Beyond recycling

A roadmap to Reuse – the beginning of a cultural shift

Welsh Government has laid down the ambition and well written regulations will see industry change (e.g Latvia)

Bringing this in through an EPR scheme means that there will be new infrastructure driven, in part, by producers

How do we build on that opportunity?

- Literally: Where do we build? Do we prioritise job creation? How will we consider water usage? What about renewable energy? How will the infrastructure be distributed geographically? What will public bins look like?
- Every single new facility could be an opportunity for engagement and education – how do we bring communities along with us?

What role does the third sector play? Currently, Community engagement with the circular economy is almost entirely driven by charities who are persistently at risk of funding and volunteering is decreasing due to current cost of living (e.g: Repair cafes, Benthylg)

Have LA's considered the CE approach themselves? Where is your waste going? Where is it coming from? (Corporate plans?)

- Have you considered borrowing/ hiring less frequently used items from other LA's?

Moving Beyond recycling

A roadmap to Reuse – the beginning of a cultural shift

“If it can't be reduced, reused, repaired, rebuilt, refurbished, refinished, resold, recycled or composted, then it should be restricted, redesigned or removed from production” – *Pete Seeger*



“The circular economy is a solution framework that offers better growth while addressing the most pressing global challenges.”

ELLEN MACARTHUR | FOUNDER, ELLEN MACARTHUR FOUNDATION

“Nobody hold all the answers, we can only move forward through collaboration”

– *Dr. Anne Velenturf, Leeds University*

A Circular Society is not an unreachable utopia. All that we need is a stronger and more radical approach to collaboration.