

Inquiry - Improving Queensland's Container Refund Scheme

Submission No:	24
Submitted by:	Elmer Ten-Haken
Publication:	Making the submission and your name public
Attachments:	See attachment
Submitter Comments:	

Submission to the Inquiry into Improving Queensland's Container Refund Scheme

13th March 2025

I have relevant experience of making use of the scheme, both for my private consumption of containers and for the collection of refundable containers for charitable/community organisations in the Whitsundays where I live.

Since 2018, I have collected bottles and cans at home. I don't drink soft drinks, so Initially, this netted a few bucks a year, which went into the donations tin at the local Whitsunday Catchment Landcare native plant nursery, where I volunteer. After I created an account and was able to donate my collected bottles and cans directly to WCL, I also started picking up stray cans on my morning walks, which improved the take from the scheme and reduced the severe local litter problem a little. I know that a lot of my fellow volunteers at the nursery did the same. Interestingly, there was a considerable uptick in the monetary benefit from the scheme for my favoured charity when wine and spirit bottles were included – probably a reflection of the demographic group which volunteers and takes morning walks around here.

Since November 2024, I have been collecting refundable bottles and cans from the Whitsunday Sailing Club and taking them to the collection depot on behalf of the Whitsunday Junior Sailors scheme. In that period, I have collected a significant sum and these funds have been used to fund entry to regattas for local junior competitors – a worthwhile effort because it only takes a couple of hours of my time each week, but only because the stream of containers is primarily from the club bar and has an almost zero level of contamination as a result.

I volunteered with Eco Barge Cleans Seas Inc [REDACTED] for many years. This group has collected 257,450 Kgs of marine debris since it began operating in 2009. It also runs a Clean Streets and Creeks program, aimed at removing rubbish from our coastal fringe before it is washed out to sea, and has partnered with organisations such as BHP Mitsubishi Alliance (BMA) to deliver the Mackay Coastal Cleanup program. From this involvement, I know from personal experience that the container deposit scheme has had an impact on the amount of litter in the Whitsundays – but it could still be much improved.

I see three factors which will restrict the objective of attaining the high container return rates seen in parts of Europe and the reduction of litter in our environment:

- 1. The deposit is nothing like enough! It does not incentivise people to collect items and the value is eroding over time.**

An immediate increase in the value of the deposit – to a minimum of a dollar per item – is needed. The fact that this significant increase in the retail cost of a drink is due entirely to the increased deposit should be made very clear on the label, something I'm sure that the manufacturers and retailers will only be too happy to do. The financial hit should improve the collection level at home and encourage people to take items to a collection centre, as well as have the additional benefits of reducing the consumption of unhealthy drinks of all forms and encouraging the uptake of reuseable bottles for the consumption of water, wine, draught beer etc. which will, in turn, result in less litter.

It will also of course bolster the coffers of charitable and community groups such as those for which I volunteer, taking the pressure off Government to fund them. These groups can benefit from that element of the community which will never be persuaded to collect the deposit on their bottles and

cans themselves, provided that the containers can be collected in such a manner as to reduce the contamination which currently occurs – which brings me on to the following point;

2. Not enough people participate in the scheme or care about it!

The Whitsundays is primarily a holiday destination. Visitors don't know where to, or can't be bothered to, take their bottles and cans to a local refund depot, so Eco Barge Cleans Seas Inc. saw an opportunity to use its volunteer power to collect refundable containers to help fund its environmental clean-up operations. They placed prominently marked bins at caravan parks and other hospitality outlets, where patrons of those businesses could deposit the empty containers from beverages they drank on site, knowing that the 10c deposits would go to a local community group. Initially, this looked like it would deliver a small but steady stream of money to the group, but it soon became obvious that the work involved in collecting the cans and bottles was too onerous to be undertaken by volunteers, **simply due to the contamination of the bins with other waste**. Why anybody would put food waste, fish guts and even used nappies into a bin clearly marked as a refundable containers bin placed by a local environmental charity group is beyond me, but it happened every week! Sorting this contamination out of the bin, and then having to dispose of it, simply made the idea unworkable. I notice that one of the local marinas has withdrawn its purple lidded bins, possibly for the same reason. If refundable containers could be collected reasonably easily from public areas there would be far more people doing it. Right now, all the people I know who collect for various local groups do so from licensed premises and hospitality businesses where the staff separate the containers from general waste at source. It seems that the current level of community participation is way too low and that perceptions about an individual's responsibility to sort waste and recycle need adjusting.

A concerted campaign to increase public awareness of the container deposit and refund scheme, and the benefits which can accrue from it, is essential. Every day I walk past builders skips in the streets of this town in which I can see a large number of refundable containers. Don't the tradies who throw them in there know that they are throwing away money? Do they not have favoured local community groups they can donate their cans and bottles to, or do they simply not care enough? There is also a common belief here in this regional area that all waste collected goes to landfill, be it from a yellow topped bin or from a container collection depot. This needs to change if there is ever to be an improvement in the percentage of containers collected. Knowing what the collected containers are recycled into something useful would help. We do see some markings on products which are packaged in recycled containers, but this does not happen often enough to make an impact. For example; all glass collected here in the Whitsundays is taken to Rockhampton and ground up to make roadbase – not new bottles. Local recycling industries are badly needed in regional areas.

Information about what clubs and community groups have done with the money they have made from the donation of refundable containers would perhaps help to improve participation. All the advertising I have ever seen about the scheme is aimed at how much an individual can make by collecting bottles and cans, not about what the local footy club was able to do with it. I know of one bowls club in a central Queensland town, with a dedicated team of container collectors, which has raked in over \$10,000 in funds since the scheme began. Stories such as this are not well known however.

3. Not enough items are included in the scheme!

It never ceases to amaze me that I find dumped cans and bottles all over the place. This is a party town, with a safe night precinct, and the volume of litter present in the main street on a Saturday or Sunday morning is staggering. Among that is a large volume of refundable cans and bottles, but also a lot of plastic cups and containers from takeaway food outlets.

If the objective is to reduce the volume of litter in the environment, takeaway food cups and other containers should also be added to the scheme. Take a look at the litter in the vicinity of any of the large franchised takeaway food outlets to see why this matters. Obviously, legislation to ensure that only recyclable containers are used needs to be enacted first.