


Inquiry - Improving Queensland's Container Refund Scheme

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Submission Regarding Queensland Container Exchange Scheme Inquiry

This submission addresses the Queensland Container Exchange Scheme Inquiry, focusing on its failure to meet its obligations as outlined in the Waste Act 2011.

Further, it will highlight the myriad operational, administrative, and governance issues not only with COEX as the Product Responsibility Organisation, but with the criteria laid out in the Bill itself.

I make this submission as a private resident who has been directly and negatively impacted by the COEX refund point in Oakman Park, Taringa, under the tenancy of West Juniors AFC.

My experience has revealed significant shortcomings and systemic failures in the scheme's current implementation and management, specifically in the context of the large "Bag Drop" container in Oakman Park, and the inadequacies demonstrated by both COEX and West Juniors AFC in managing the site.

Key points

- *99H (b) reduce the number of empty beverage containers that are littered or disposed of to landfill*

The operational failures at the Oakman Park refund point demonstrate a failure to meet the scheme's objectives of reducing litter.

In fact, the container has led to increased traffic, increased litter and illegal dumping, permanent (and constantly worsening) environmental hazards like broken glass embedded in every surface surrounding the container.

- *99J (1)The Product Responsibility Organisation's main function is to administer and provide governance for the scheme.*
- *(2)Without limiting subsection (1), the Organisation has the following functions—
(g)to receive and deal with complaints relating to the scheme from members of the public and entities participating in the scheme;*

This refund point also demonstrates a total failure to responsibly administer and provide adequate governance for the scheme.

The persistent problems with broken glass, overflowing bins, and the host's failure to manage the site responsibly have diminished our community amenity and created an ongoing environmental issue. These impacts are a direct result of inadequate management and oversight of the refund point.

Despite communication involving the host club, COEX, Council's Community Facilities Operations Team, and the local Councillor's office over several years (from at least Jan 2023 to Feb 2025), the issues persist and continue to worsen. This highlights the multi-layered, complex, ineffective complaints resolution pathway.

- Lack of accountability

Furthermore, due to the convoluted relationships between parties, there is no direct line of accountability. For example, the Oakman Park container was put where it was without any consultation with community, and this falls under the football club's tenancy agreement with council rather than its position as a de facto co-operator of the bin under the Waste Act.

This makes it functionally exempt from adhering to performance requirements under the Act, or at the very least it gives the club and COEX a feasible way of sidestepping responsibility and passing the buck when it comes to complaints and criticism.

- Conflict of Interest

The financial incentive for the host organisation (West Juniors AFC receiving fees/percentages) conflicts with their responsibility to address community complaints.

I believe the governance arrangements are fundamentally inappropriate and create a system ripe for abuse. The potential conflict of interest for host organisations, combined with a complete lack of transparency in the approval process, suggests a system where financial incentives are prioritized over community well-being and where there is significant potential for biased decision-making.

In my opinion, the scope and objectives of the scheme, as implemented at Oakman Park, are fundamentally flawed and fail to meet the needs of the community. The location of the refund point is demonstrably inappropriate, and the type of facility is entirely unsuitable for a residential area.

The scheme's stated objectives of promoting recycling and reducing litter are directly contradicted by the negative impacts on local amenity and the creation of environmental hazards.

In summary:

- Third-Party Mismanagement: The experience highlights significant challenges with ensuring adequate site maintenance, adherence to operating hours, and responsible management by third-party community groups hosting refund points.
- Complaint Resolution Effectiveness: The protracted nature of the issue despite engagement with multiple parties (host, COEX, Council) underscores inherent

weaknesses in the overall complaint resolution framework for the scheme.

- **Residential Amenity Impacts:** By being able to sidestep the usual checks or balances, COEX and the football club were given carte blanche to ignore any consideration of noise, traffic, visual impact, and safety hazards when siting the refund points in a park in a residential area.

I am particularly concerned about the way the scheme is being promoted as a funding source for community groups, as they clearly lack the expertise and resources to manage these facilities properly. The ineffectiveness of the complaint resolution process further exacerbates these issues.

Recommendations:

To address the issues outlined above, I recommend the following:

1. **Establish Stricter Siting Criteria:** Implement significantly stricter criteria for the siting of refund points, particularly large-scale facilities, in or near residential areas. This must include mandatory and comprehensive community consultation processes, conducted *before* any approval is granted. Further, these refund points should not fall under tenancy agreements for their governance.
2. **Enhance Host Accountability and Enforcement:** Develop and *enforce* clear, detailed, and legally binding agreements with host organisations, outlining their responsibilities for site maintenance, adherence to operating hours, and waste management. These agreements must include robust mechanisms for monitoring compliance, and impose substantial penalties for non-compliance, including fines and potential termination of the hosting agreement.
3. **Ensure Transparent Approval Processes:** Mandate a fully transparent approval process for all refund point installations. This process must include publicly accessible records of all applications, assessments, and decision-making rationale. The reasons for approving or rejecting a site must be clearly documented and made available to the public.
4. **Streamline and Expedite Complaint Resolution:** Establish a streamlined, clearly defined, and easily accessible complaint resolution pathway with guaranteed response times and escalation procedures. This pathway must include independent mediation options and the ability for residents to seek redress through a dedicated ombudsman or tribunal, bypassing the current multi-layered and ineffective system.
5. **Review Host Financial Incentives:** Conduct a comprehensive review of the financial incentives provided to host organisations, with the goal of minimizing

potential conflicts of interest.

6. **Implement Regular Performance Audits:** Institute a system of regular, independent performance audits of all refund points, with a focus on compliance with operational standards, community impact, and complaint resolution effectiveness. The results of these audits should be made public, and should be proactively enforced.
7. **Re-evaluate Community Organisation Model:** Conduct a fundamental re-evaluation of the reliance on third-party hosts, particularly community organisations with limited waste management expertise. Ensure these organisations are made accountable for their management of these bins, especially in terms of environmental impact and impact on surrounding neighbours.

Conclusion

The implementation of the Container Exchange Scheme at Oakman Park has resulted in significant and ongoing negative impacts on the local community. These impacts, including increased noise, litter, safety hazards, and decreased property values, stem from a combination of operational failures, inefficient administration, inappropriate siting, and fundamentally flawed governance arrangements.

The current system involves private contractors and third-party organisations, which leads to inadequate oversight, transparency and accountability, and this has proven to be unsuitable.

To ensure the scheme's objectives of promoting recycling and reducing litter are met without compromising community amenity, I urge the Inquiry to adopt the recommendations outlined above.

These recommendations address the systemic issues identified in this submission and provide a pathway towards a more effective, responsible and sustainable container refund scheme.