

Inquiry - Improving Queensland's Container Refund Scheme

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Submission to Queensland Parliament Health, Environment and Innovation Committee: Inquiry into Improving Queensland's Container Refund Scheme

Introduction:

We, at **10 Cent Tom Limited**, are writing to submit our support for the continued success of Queensland's **Containers for Change** (C4C) scheme and to offer our perspective on how an increase in the container refund amount from 10c to 20c, could significantly improve both the effectiveness of the program, and its positive social impact.

As a registered charity with a focus on sustainability and improving the lives of people living with disabilities, we believe that an increased refund amount would enhance our capacity to contribute to a cleaner environment, create more employment opportunities, and drive community engagement.

About 10 Cent Tom Limited:

Established to promote sustainability, reduce landfill waste, and create job opportunities for people with disabilities, **10 Cent Tom** has become a vital organisation within Queensland's recycling sector. We collect eligible beverage containers, sort them, and return them through the **Containers for Change** scheme to fund our mission. Our charity not only works to improve the environment but also empowers individuals with disabilities, by offering them meaningful work, training, and skills development in a supportive environment.

(See Addendum 1: [More About Thomas Pirie, AKA 10 Cent Tom, and the charity as a whole](#))

Since registering with the Containers for Change scheme in 2020, we have successfully recycled the following amounts of containers:

- **17 Aug 2020 – 31 Dec 2020:** 49,411 containers
- **1 Jan 2021 – 31 Dec 2021:** 620,199 containers
- **1 Jan 2022 – 31 Dec 2022:** 987,234 containers
- **1 Jan 2023 – 31 Dec 2023:** 976,481 containers
- **1 Jan 2024 – 31 Dec 2024:** 1,258,738 containers
- **1 Jan 2025 – 27 March 2025:** 455,884 containers (to date)

These numbers reflect our ongoing commitment to reducing waste, while providing vital employment opportunities to people with disabilities.

The Case for Doubling the Refund: Social and Environmental Benefits

1. Increased Donations and Revenue Generation:

The proposed increase in the container refund from 10c to 20c would directly incentivise greater participation from the public and businesses, resulting in a significant rise in container returns. For 10 Cent Tom, this would mean an increase in funds, which would allow us to expand our services, create more employment opportunities, and enhance our training programs.

Currently, the revenue generated through container returns is crucial for our operations, but a 20c refund would provide a solid financial foundation, enabling us to plan for long-term projects without the uncertainty of fluctuating income. This increased stability would help us grow our charity and provide better wages and benefits to our employees with disabilities.

Currently: 1 x full recycling bin (240-litres) = 1 x hour of employment for a person with disabilities.

2. Enhanced Financial Stability and Job Creation:

By increasing the refund amount, we would have the resources to establish additional collaborative agreements with recycling depots across Queensland, thus creating more opportunities through new career paths, job roles, and training programs for individuals with disabilities.

The creation of additional job roles would also allow us to empower individuals with disabilities to become more independent, improving their quality of life while contributing to the state's environmental goals.

3. Greater Community Engagement and Support:

A 20c refund would serve as a stronger incentive for households, businesses, and individuals to donate their containers to our charity. People are more likely to engage in a program if they can directly see the benefits. Doubling the refund would make recycling a more attractive option, resulting in greater public buy-in and higher recovery rates.

In turn, this would foster a sense of community engagement, helping to create a culture of sustainability. Local businesses and residents would feel more motivated to contribute to the recycling efforts, which would benefit both the environment and social good.

4. Inclusivity in Recycling:

The increase in the refund would empower more people, particularly those with disabilities, to engage in recycling activities. The added incentive would encourage greater participation, especially in underrepresented communities where job opportunities for people with disabilities can be scarce.

This inclusivity aligns with the values of **10 Cent Tom**, as we believe that recycling should not only serve the environment but also create social impact by providing meaningful work for those who are often excluded from mainstream employment opportunities.

5. Community Initiatives and Local Business Support:

We have already worked closely with local businesses and residents to promote recycling and environmental awareness. For example, we have collaborated with a number of corporate partners, shopping centres, sporting facilities, hotels, taverns, and ad hoc music festivals, to set up container collection points and conduct recycling drives. This kind of community-driven effort has helped foster a culture of sustainability in our local area.

An increase in the refund amount would further incentivise these partnerships, making it easier for businesses, as well as individuals to become active participants in the scheme, and support their local communities.

Environmental Benefits of a 20c Refund:

In addition to the social and financial benefits, the environmental impact of a higher container refund is also significant. Doubling the refund would directly increase recycling rates, which would reduce the amount of waste sent to landfills and decrease the pollution associated with littering. Higher recycling rates would also lead to lower greenhouse gas emissions and reduced energy consumption, contributing to Queensland's broader sustainability goals.

Suggestions for Improvement Based on International Models:

In addition to the proposed increase to 20c, we would like to draw inspiration from the Canadian model of deposit-refund systems. Under this system, consumers pay a deposit refund fee at the point of sale, making recycling a more integrated part of the purchasing process.

For example, a bottle of Coke would cost \$4.00, with an additional 20c deposit for the container refund, bringing the total to \$4.20. This model could help encourage a wider pool of consumers to recycle by providing a clear financial incentive at the point of purchase.

Additionally, we propose that heavier items, such as wine or glass bottles, incur a higher deposit fee (e.g. 30c), reflecting the higher environmental cost of these items, and further encourage their return.

A Couple of Pain Points:

A current challenge with Containers for Change, is the Partners for Change program. New customers wanting to sign up with their program to have bins from COEX provided, is taking 4-8 weeks to receive bins. 10 Cent Tom has been encouraged by COEX to convert our current donors to switch over to Partners for Change - for auditing and accounting purposes for CDS to track the numbers accurately. This long delay discourages new customers to sign up to the program. We feel that it is vital for the program to have bins ready to distribute to new customers in a timely manner, to ensure eligible containers are not going into landfill.

Finally, it is essential that C4C depots operate efficiently and without long wait times. If the process is too slow or inconvenient, consumers are less likely to participate. Ensuring that customers can quickly and easily return their containers, will be key to the ongoing support and success of the program.

Conclusion:

We strongly believe that increasing the container refund amount to 20c will have a positive impact on the effectiveness of the **Containers for Change** scheme, the environment, and local communities. For NGOs like **10 Cent Tom**, the increase would enable us to continue our mission, but also enable us to double our impact across:

- Contributing towards a cleaner and greener environment
- Creating more jobs
- Expanding our operations and community engagement
- Improving the lives of people with disabilities

By supporting this initiative, Queensland Parliament would be making a significant contribution to both social inclusion and environmental sustainability.

We urge the committee to please consider these points favourably in its report, and look forward to the continued success and future enhancement of the **Containers for Change** program.

Thank you for your consideration.

Carolyn Pirie, Director

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<https://youtu.be/JKVaZ5jZMI>

Addendum 1: More About Thomas Pirie, and 10 Cent Tom Limited

THOMAS PIRIE – ‘10 CENT TOM’

Young Entrepreneur | Environmental Advocate | Disability Inclusion Champion

Thomas Pirie, affectionately known as **10 Cent Tom**, is a young Australian with an unstoppable spirit and a mission to change the world – one recycled container at a time. Living with severe scoliosis and an intellectual impairment, Tom has transformed personal challenges into a powerful platform for environmental action and social inclusion.



As the founder of 10 Cent Tom Limited, a registered charity, Tom leads a grassroots movement that combines recycling with meaningful employment for people with disabilities. Since 2020, he has helped recycle more than 3 million containers, inspired over 200 local businesses to get involved, and become a celebrated figure across the Gold Coast and beyond.



RECYCLE, REINVENT, REIMAGINE...



With national media recognition, major fundraising achievements, and support from both government and private organisations, Tom continues to grow his impact. His charity's partnership with Return-It Burleigh is creating inclusive job opportunities, while championing sustainability at a local level.



YouTube Video: <https://youtu.be/JKVaz5jZMII>

Tom's message is simple but powerful: "The future depends on what we do today."

Through his tireless efforts, contagious positivity, and unwavering 'can-do' attitude, 10 Cent Tom is proving that true leadership is inclusive, community-driven, and fuelled by purpose.

