

Owen Derbyshire
Chief Executive Officer
Keep Wales Tidy
Spark / Sbarc
Maindy Road
Cardiff, CF24 4HQ

20 January | Ionawr 2026

Dear UK Government Secretaries of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, Business & Trade, and Wales,

We are writing as a coalition of environmental and civic organisations to express our strong encouragement to the UK Government to approve the proposed exclusion under the Internal Market Act in relation to Wales's Deposit Return Scheme (DRS).

Wales has a strong and well-established record of environmental policy innovation. Measures such as the plastic carrier bag charge were pioneered in Wales, delivered clear environmental and economic benefits, and were subsequently adopted more widely across the UK. This is how devolution is intended to work: allowing different nations to develop approaches best suited to their context, with successful policies spreading by example.

A Deposit Return Scheme is exactly the kind of policy intervention devolution was designed to enable. It sits clearly within devolved competence, has been developed over several years through engagement with businesses, local authorities and civil society, and was legislated for in good faith by the Senedd.

In Wales, DRS-target materials (plastic bottles, cans and glass bottles) are found on over half of our public spaces, with broken glass present on around 8% of locations. The problem extends beyond urban areas too. Marine Conservation Society data shows 49% of surveyed Welsh beaches having littered glass bottles (2024), further demonstrating the scale of the issue across both inland and coastal environment

This has clear implications for public safety, environmental harm and clean-up costs. Public support for a glass-inclusive scheme is also strong, with UK-wide consultation evidence showing that 86% of respondents supported including glass within a Deposit Return Scheme.

Sbarc, Ffordd Maindy, Caerdydd, CF24 4HQ | Spark, Maindy Road, Cardiff, CF24 4HQ

☎ 02920 025695 🌐 keepwalestidy.cymru ✉ info@keepwalestidy.cymru

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It is also worth noting that the inclusion of glass was originally a core part of the proposed UK-wide Deposit Return Scheme. Subsequent decisions by the UK Government to narrow the scope of the scheme are what have created divergence, rather than any departure by Wales from an agreed or established approach. Wales's proposals therefore reflect continuity with the original ambition for a comprehensive DRS.

Comprehensive deposit return schemes, including glass, are internationally normal and economically viable. The large majority of schemes currently operating worldwide include glass, and experience from federated systems such as Canada and Australia demonstrates that variation between states or nations is both manageable and effective.

Preventing Wales from implementing its scheme at this stage would have consequences far beyond recycling policy. It would raise serious questions about whether democratically accountable devolved governments can plan, consult and legislate with confidence, even in areas where responsibility is clearly devolved.

Ensuring Wales is able to proceed as planned would support environmental progress, provide regulatory certainty, and further demonstrate how devolved policy innovation can deliver benefits that extend across the whole UK.

We therefore urge the UK Government to work constructively with the Welsh Government and allow Wales to proceed with its proposed Deposit Return Scheme, including glass and provision for reuse.

Signed on behalf of signatory organisations,

O Derbyshire

Owen Derbyshire, CEO, Keep Wales Tidy
Sandy Luk, CEO, Marine Conservation Society
Giles Bristow, CEO, Surfers Against Sewage
Dom Ferris, CEO, Trash Free Trails
Gail Davies-Walsh, CEO, Afonydd Cymru
Karen Whitfield, Director, Wales Environment Link
Kate Oprava, Chair Cardiff Rivers Groups

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