



## **Unite response to consultation on 'Introducing a Deposit Return Scheme in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland'**

### **Introduction**

**This submission is made by Unite, Britain and Ireland's largest union with over 1million members across all sectors of the economy including manufacturing, financial services, transport, food and agriculture, construction, energy and utilities, information technology, service industries, health, local government and the not for profit sector. Unite also organises in the community, enabling those who are not in employment to be part of our union.**

Our response will not consider all elements raised in the consultation but will focus on some key priorities for Unite members working in the glass sector.

Unite demands positive interventionist policies to support the transition to a sustainable economy and the creation of new 'green' jobs. But there needs to be a 'just transition'. It is important that no worker is left behind and there are opportunities for skilled, sustainable employment.

In the context of this consultation therefore we consider that the consequences, intended or otherwise, for the future of glass workers is given important consideration. Our members are keen to ensure that the UK government pursues an industrial strategy encompassing ethical trade and tax policies that secures investment and growth across the UK glass sector delivering secure, well paid jobs. Our aim must be to proactively shape and transition the workplace to protect and advance the interests of workers in the glass industry in the long term.

Our response will focus on key priorities that our members in the glass sector have identified around the implementation of a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) policy.

Unite organises in workplaces across the UK glass industry, including in plants that contribute to the manufacturing of glass containers that will be impacted by implementation of the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS).

Unite is well represented within the glass sector. Manufacturing sites cluster primarily around the North West of England, with other sizeable companies in operation throughout the UK. Unite members are obviously concerned that any DRS policy

implemented to support a sustainable environment and - reduce pollution in the UK is cognisant of the need to maintain the competitiveness of UK glass plants in a sustainable manner that also ensures well paid, decent jobs, and opportunities for training and apprenticeships providing much needed skilled and sustainable employment across the UK.

1. Unite members in the glass sector are not convinced that the DRS system is the right solution for the glass industry. Our members believe that greater levels of kerbside collections and enhanced producer responsibility has the potential to increase the recycling levels of glass necessary to reduce pollution and the impact of litter. Furthermore, there is anecdotal evidence that the waste pollution linked to drinks containers is more prevalent in plastic and other material containers as opposed to glass.
2. Workers in - beer, spirits and wine glass manufacturing plants are concerned that the increase in price per bottle for glass products will have a detrimental impact on the production levels of glass in our economy and are increasingly apprehensive about the impact this may have on the future of glass plants in the UK. For instance, a move away from glass to other products that then results in a reduction in one line within any glass plant could see the loss of - jobs each time -(one of our workplaces representatives cited a figure of 45 jobs).
3. Unite would support the suggestion in the consultation that the implementation of the DRS scheme is delayed until at least late 2024. The full impact of the coronavirus pandemic considering the economic future and also social behaviour norms are yet to be seen. Our members are concerned that huge numbers of glass bottles will not be returned, and as lockdown eases there is evidence of glass beverage bottles being left behind in parks and on our streets. Our members do not believe that the implementation of DRS will reduce this. Our view is that extended producer responsibility and increased use of kerbside collections can ensure that glass recycling figures increase and we remain to be convinced concerning the DRS.
4. Unite workers in the glass sector are more supportive of a recycling scheme that is easy for purchasers, retailers and glass producers to understand. We would support the maintenance of continuing with 'bring sites' in rural areas with improved means of communication for citizens to understand the necessity of glass recycling.
5. There is a need to set ambitious recycling targets for glass and to ensure that messages are clear and robust. Our representatives in the glass sector understand the necessity of recycling to ensure that the sector can cut emissions, however remain unconvinced that the DRS including glass will be the solution to this problem. With recycling rates at around 70% we would support increasing these targets and supporting re-use of glass in the manufacturing process.

6. Within the DRS scheme recycling rates do not take into account re-melt targets therefore many of the glass products will be reused to make aggregate materials. Recycling and re-melt of glass is a fundamental part of closed-loop recycling in the glass sector with over a tonne of natural resources saved for every tonne of glass recycled. It takes less energy to melt recycled products compared to raw materials. Therefore closed loop recycling reduces the carbon footprint in the glass sector and helps decrease pollution as well as protecting our natural resources.
7. Market forces determine the size of bottle or jar needed to contain a given volume of fluid. Contrary to the government suggestion of limiting bottle size to 750 ml, this idea could lead to more emissions than less as it could mean producing substantially more glass to break down larger bottles or containers into smaller containers. Larger bottle sizes also can mean greater value for money for purchasers.
8. Unite can see few advantages and many disadvantages of including glass bottles in the DRS. Evidence shows that where a DRS has included glass there has been a significant move away from glass usage. Unite launched its 'Save our Scotch' campaign in 2017, with one of its key concerns being safeguarding the future of bottling plants where we have hundreds of members. The inclusion of glass in the DRS could result in jobs being lost in the very bottling plants Unite has been trying to protect.
9. Unite shares the concerns of companies and industry bodies regarding the impact on the drinks industry of including glass in the Deposit and Return Scheme. These concerns have been amplified by the coronavirus pandemic as well as overall trade concerns arising from Brexit. Any further costs must be carefully considered, no matter how well intentioned, in light of the fragility in the glass sector.

**Tony Devlin**  
**National Officer**  
**Unite the Union**

For further information please contact:

**Frank Gray,**  
**Research Officer,**  
**Unite the Union**