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## ***Community awareness and acceptance of Container Deposit Legislation***

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*Prepared for the Environment Protection Authority by McGregor Tan Research  
to report on the community's awareness and acceptance of Container  
Deposit Legislation (CDL) and the extension to the legislation in January 2003*





## Background

In the 1970s, when non-refillable containers were introduced by the beverage industry without a return system, they became a visible part of the litter scene and posed a threat to the environment. The South Australian Government responded quickly to the issue and in 1975 introduced the Beverage Container Act to deal with the threat of litter from the containers.

In January 2003, significant extensions to the Container Deposit Legislation included a broader range of beverages and containers, including flavoured milk and fruit juice in containers of less than one litre and all non-carbonated soft drinks in containers of three litres or less. Some existing exemptions were also repealed.

This extension of the CDL in 2003 came after a great deal of industry consultation to help deal with the litter generally caused by these type of beverages and to ensure that application of the legislation was more uniform.

A survey was carried out with the participation of respondents from both metropolitan and regional South Australia to determine:

- the level of public awareness of the changes to the Container Deposit Legislation, including knowledge of the items covered, what items are not covered, how much the refund value is, and which containers are covered by the scheme
- the general level of public acceptance of the CDL
- whether the current refund amount is sufficient to act as an incentive to consumers to return their empty containers, or whether it should be increased
- the public's opinion on whether the CDL should be extended or a similar scheme be introduced to cover other containers not currently covered by the CDL, such as food and dog food cans, shampoo containers, jam jars and other beverage containers.

## Methodology

From 9-17 June 2004, 803 interviews were conducted with respondents across South Australia. A total of 603 interviews were conducted with respondents from metropolitan Adelaide and 200 interviews were undertaken with respondents from regional South Australia.

The following summary covers the findings of the report on community awareness and acceptance of the Container Deposit Legislation (CDL) and any extension to the CDL.

## **Awareness and support for CDL**

Overall awareness of the CDL scheme was very high with 93% of all respondents being aware of the CDL.

The majority (92%) supported the CDL, with 78% strongly supporting and 13% slightly supporting the scheme. Only 5% did not support the scheme, where 3% did not support the scheme at all.

## **Effectiveness of CDL**

The majority of respondents believed that CDL had been effective in:

- encouraging and promoting the recycling and reuse of container materials (92%)
- reducing litter in South Australia (88%)
- reducing the number of beverage containers that go into landfill (86%).

## **Unprompted knowledge of items covered by CDL**

Whilst the vast majority (94%) of South Australian interviewees were able to recall at least one beverage container covered by the CDL, 42% nominated one or more beverage container(s) that were not covered by the scheme, indicating a level of confusion regarding the items that are covered.

Soft drinks (86%), beer/stout/ale (61%) and flavoured milk in containers of less than one litre (44%) were the three main items that respondents could spontaneously recall as being covered by the scheme.

One in five respondents, however, incorrectly thought that plain milk containers (20%) were covered, while a further 17% thought that flavoured milk containers of one litre or more (17%) were covered by the scheme.

## **Prompted knowledge of items covered by CDL**

When respondents were read a list of items and asked to indicate which of these attracted a refund under the CDL scheme, the most frequently nominated were as follows:

- **Soft drinks—non-alcoholic (97%)**
- **beer/stout/ale (90%)**
- **water—plain, still or carbonated (74%)**
- **spirit-based beverages (68%)**
- **cider and alcoholic lemonade-style drinks (68%)**
- **flavoured milk—less than 1 litre (66%)**
- **sports and energy drinks (65%).**

## **Awareness of January 2003 changes to CDL**

Less than half (44%) were aware that the CDL scheme had been extended.

Among those respondents who were aware, the most frequently mentioned media through which they became aware of the scheme's extension were as follows:

- newspaper (39%)
- signs in shops (34%)
- radio (22%)
- refund statements on bottles and cans (17%)
- website (13%).

## **Perceived refund amount and whether this is sufficient to encourage the return of containers**

The vast majority (92%) of respondents stated that 5 cents was the current refund amount.

Positively, almost two thirds (62%) stated that the current refund of 5 cents was sufficient to encourage return of containers to collection depots.

Among those respondents who felt the refund was insufficient, the majority (83%) said the refund amount should be increased, with three quarters (77%) indicating that this increase should be to 10 cents.

## **Implications of increasing the refund or leaving it the same**

Positively, 80% of respondents said that if an increase in the refund amount resulted in an increase in the price of beverages, it would have no effect on the number of beverages they would buy each week.

In addition, six in ten (60%) of those surveyed thought that increasing the refund would result in an increased number of beverage containers returned to collection/recycling depots.

Interestingly, however, a similar proportion (55%) of respondents felt that leaving the refund amount the same would have no effect on the number of beverage containers returned for refund.

## **Disposal habits, and frequency of visiting and awareness of recycling/collection depots**

The majority (60%) of respondents returned beverage containers to collection/recycling depots, while one third (32%) used their kerbside recycling bins/crates to dispose of the containers instead of collecting the refund. Only 4% of respondents claimed that they generally throw empty beverage containers covered by the scheme into garbage bins.

Four in ten (41%) respondents indicated they return containers four times a year or more to collection depots, while one quarter (25%) of respondents returned containers between one and three times a year.

The majority (80%) of respondents indicated that they knew the location of their local recycling/collection depot without having to refer to the telephone book.

## **Containers respondents would like covered by CDL or a similar scheme**

When respondents were read a list of items that are not currently covered by the scheme, and asked to indicate which ones should be included or covered by a similar scheme, the items most frequently supported were as follows:

- plain milk containers (81%)
- food glass jars (71%)
- other cans—metal and aluminium, including food, dog food and soup (68%)
- food plastic containers (66%)
- shampoo/conditioner, detergent, disinfectant plastic bottles (62%)
- yoghurt containers (59%)
- take-away, fast food containers (58%).

## **Effective ways to inform the public of changes to CDL**

Television (59%) was considered to be the most effective way of informing South Australian residents of changes to the CDL, with the next most preferred means of communication being:

- newspaper (47%)
- radio (33%)
- letter/brochure in the letter box (25%).

## **Level of agreement with statements about CDL**

- Nearly all (97%) respondents agreed that the CDL is good for our environment.
- The vast majority (92%) thought that extending the scheme to cover additional beverage/containers such as fruit drinks and flavoured milk containers was a good idea.
- Over three quarters (76%) of all respondents agreed that the CDL has been effective in reducing litter.
- Almost three quarters (74% agreed) were aware that South Australia is the only state in Australia with this type of container deposit scheme.
- More than half (57%) of respondents agreed that they would be more likely to return beverage containers if the deposit amount was 10 cents or more.
- More than half (55%) disagreed with the premise that they used to return more containers than they do now.
- A little more than half (54%) of all respondents agreed that they had enough information about which beverage containers have refundable deposits.
- Four in ten (40%) respondents agreed that it is often more convenient to throw containers away than collect them.