CONTAINER RETURN

CRS and Refillable Beverages complementary systems to reduce waste and emissions

Prepared by the Zero Waste Network Aotearoa and the New Zealand Product Stewardship Council

SUMMARY

Reusable packaging helps to reduce both waste and emissions. A comprehensive, nationwide beverage Container Return Scheme (CRS) would give us a unique opportunity not only to increase recycling rates, but also to boost a return to reuse for beverage packaging in Aotearoa. If we design our CRS well, in the near future we could see more companies washing and reusing glass bottles for milk, beer and fizz - like in the old days - and more drinks sold 'on tap' with new technology. To make this a reality, we should factor reusables into CRS design and implementation from the get-go. For example:

- including glass in the CRS because glass is the material of choice for refillables
- adopting supporting policy and investment to leverage the CRS for reuse
- ensuring any new infrastructure or systems needed for a CRS can accommodate refillables as well as one-way/single-use containers.

WE NEED MORE REUSABLE PACKAGING

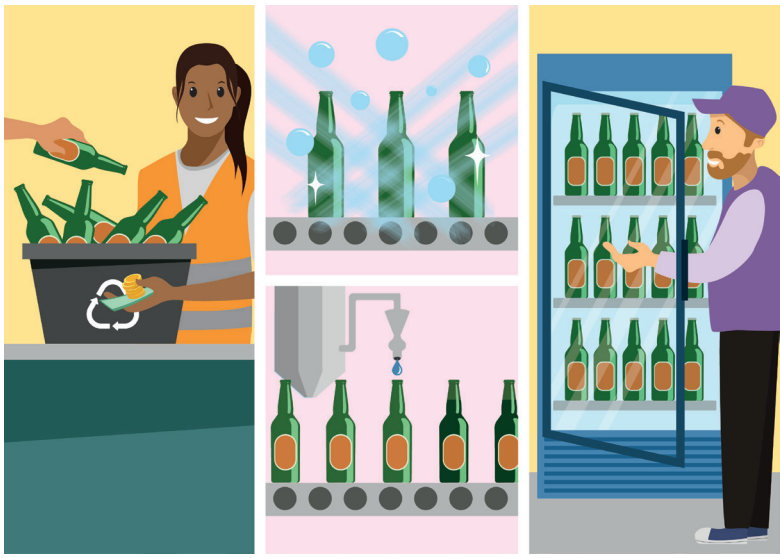
Reusable packaging is a key part of the transition to a circular economy and a classic example of a closed loop system in action. (Lendal & Wingstrand) Getting back to reusable beverage packaging in New Zealand is important for the following reasons:

Less waste: Reuse is higher up the zero waste hierarchy (or the 3Rs) than recycle because it achieves a greater reduction in waste than recycling. (Reloop (2021) p11 & Tangpuori et al, p121)

Fewer emissions: Reusing a bottle or refilling a bottle from a bulk dispenser is less energy intensive than recycling or downcycling a single-use container. (Reloop (2021), p8; Tangpuori et al, p121)

More jobs: Reusable packaging systems create more jobs than single-use packaging systems and these jobs are localised and spread across the country. (Blumhardt, p5)

Less plastic pollution: an increase in reuse/refill beverages is associated with a decrease in single-use plastic bottle pollution. (Schroeer et al, p1)



> "... a deposit system for single-use containers creates supporting system conditions for a refillable system, and vice versa, both in terms of the collection infrastructure and consumer engagement."
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> *—Reloop (2021) What We Waste (p.26).*

WHY ARE REFILLABLES RELEVANT TO A CRS?

A comprehensive CRS opens the door to more refillable beverages. Unlike a system that relies on kerbside recycling, a CRS (Reloop (2016); Tangpuori et al, p121; Reloop (2021) p26):

- Encourages high return rates of good quality, undamaged bottles that are in the best state to be either recycled or reused.
- Levels the playing field between single-use and reusable packaging by requiring all packaging to carry an upfront deposit and be returned by the customer
- Creates the supporting system, consumer engagement, and return system infrastructure for single-use packaging that is also needed for a well-functioning reusables system.

> While a deposit-return system (DRS) in and of itself may not compel a beverage manufacturer to switch to refillables, it establishes an infrastructure by which containers can be returned, and is one of the most effective ways to support high levels of capture and material quality. In short, it is a necessary component of any successful reuse system.
>
> *— Reloop (2016) "Policy Instruments to Promote Refillable Beverage Containers Factsheet"*

CRS DESIGNED TO REFILL

While CRS is a necessary precondition for a thriving refillables market, certain scheme design features, alongside supporting policy and investment are needed to leverage a CRS for reuse. For example (Blumhardt; Reloop (2021) p13; Tangpuori et al, pp109, 121):

- Include glass in the scheme.
- An 'eco levy' on single-use containers and virgin material.
- Make binding refillables quota or target.
- Investment in washing facilities for bottles.
- Scheme logistics and infrastructure that preempt a future increase in refillables and thus ensure interoperability for both single-use and reusable containers.
- Tax incentives or pilots for innovative reuse models.
- Supporting development of standardised reusable bottles to reduce costs and logistical complexity.
- Public engagement and communications around reuse.

CRS and refillables are complementary systems. Countries with both a beverage CRS and a >25% refillables market share are, on average, the best at reducing single-use beverage containers wastage. A CRS on its own is still great, but the overlap between a well-functioning CRS and a healthy reusables market means that establishing one of the systems opens the door to the other, as has occurred most recently in Lithuania and Oregon. (Reloop [2021]).

FOR MORE INFORMATION

References used in this document can be found in these sources:

Hannah Blumhardt (2020) Reusable Beverage Packaging and Refillable Beverage Delivery Systems in New Zealand: Discussion Document (Commissioned by Greenpeace New Zealand).

A Lendal and S Wingstrand (2019) Reuse: Rethinking Packaging (Ellen Macarthur Foundation and New Plastics Economy)

Reloop (2021) What We Waste: Tracking 20 years of growth in international drinks container wastage, and how refillables and deposit return systems can reverse this trend.

Reloop (2016) Policy Instruments to Promote Refillable Beverage Containers Fact Sheet

Anne Schroeer, Matt Littlejohn and Henning Wilts (2020) Just one word: refillables. How the soft drink industry can – right now – reduce marine plastic pollution by billions of bottles each year (Oceania).

Alice Delemare Tangpuori, George Harding-Rolls, Nusa Urbancic and Ximena Purita Banegas Zallio (2020) Talking Trash: the corporate playbook of false solutions to the plastic crisis (Changing Markets Foundation). See especially pp. 26-29, 109 and 121 of the report.