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Parliament Q&A

Oral Reply to Parliamentary Question on Beverage Container Return Scheme

3 February 2026

Oral Reply to Parliamentary Question on Beverage Container Return Scheme by Dr Janil Puthuchery, Senior Minister of State for Sustainability and the Environment.

Questions:

Ms Poh Li San: To ask the Minister for Sustainability and the Environment for the Implementation of the Beverage Container Return Scheme (BCRS), how will NEA ensure that (i) the locations of all BCRS vending machines are known to consumers and (ii) retailers and shops do not sell beverages in non-returnable containers at the same price as returnable containers to consumers.

Ms Joan Pereira: To ask the Minister for Sustainability and the Environment in respect of the Beverage Container Return Scheme (a) what measures will be put in place to mitigate the impact of potential price increases on consumers, particularly for products from smaller producers; and (b) what assistance will be provided to vulnerable residents not living near return points to claim their container deposits.

Mr Foo Cexiang: To ask the Minister for Sustainability and the Environment (a) whether NEA took reference from other countries in designing the Beverage Container Return Scheme; (b) whether NEA has considered alternatives which could have a lower cost impact on producers and consumers; and (c) how will NEA ensure that producers and consumers are not adversely and severely impacted.

Ms Valerie Lee: To ask the Minister for Sustainability and the Environment (a) how many operational reverse vending machines and return points will be available at the onset of the Beverage Container Return Scheme on 1 April 2026; (b) how will adequate capacity for redemption of deposits be assured during the roll-out of the scheme; and (c) how will unredeemed deposits be managed with full transparency.

Mr Kenneth Tiong Boon Kiat: To ask the Minister for Sustainability and the Environment given that the Beverage Container Return Scheme is projected to add 25 to 60 cents to prices of bottled and canned drinks of which only 10 cents is refundable, what assessment was made of the affordability impact on lower-income households before confirming the April 2026 launch.

Mr David Hoe: To ask the Minister for Sustainability and the Environment (a) whether the approximately 1000 Beverage Container Return Scheme return points have been identified; and (b) whether the Ministry will consider (i) prioritising locating the return points at high-footfall HDB blocks and precincts and (ii) exploring tie-ups with existing commercial parcel locker or collection-point machines to leverage on existing infrastructure.

Combined Answer:

I thank Members for their interest in the upcoming Beverage Container Return Scheme, or BCRS, which will commence on 1 April this year. This scheme was debated three years ago, during the Second Reading of the Resource Sustainability (Amendment) Bill, and Members had expressed support for the scheme. Engagements and discussions with industry and the public had started even earlier.

The scheme was first proposed by a Recycle Right Citizens' Workgroup in 2019 to increase household recycling rates and reduce contamination in the recycling bins. These intentions remain relevant today. The amount of packaging waste generated in Singapore forms one third of our domestic waste generated and our overall recycling rate remains low.

The BCRS aims to increase the recycling of beverage containers using an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) concept, the second such scheme to be introduced in Singapore, building on our experience with the e-waste recycling programme. The scheme features a deposit paid at the point of purchase to incentivise consumers to return their containers. By nudging consumers to make a small change in their lifestyle, we hope to increase recycling of beverage containers, and spark a change in our recycling habits.

In designing the scheme, we studied the experiences of other jurisdictions. Schemes in Norway, Denmark, and Lithuania have achieved high collection rates, and one common factor was having an industry-led, not-for-profit entity run the scheme. We have adopted a similar approach in Singapore, because the industry stakeholders are best placed to determine the most effective way to recover used beverage containers. They are also incentivised to operate the scheme efficiently and effectively, to ensure that the cost impact on producers is manageable.

The scheme operator, BCRS Ltd., was formed by the industry and is governed by a Board that has both large and small producer representatives comprising Coca-Cola Singapore Beverages, F&N Foods, Pokka, Wanin Industries and Chia Khim Lee Food Industries. Licensed by NEA, they are required to report the amount of 10-cent deposits collected from the producers and refunded to the consumers, in their annual report for public accountability.

Several Members asked questions about the cost of the scheme, and the effect on beverage prices.

All regulated beverage containers supplied in Singapore will attract a 10-cent deposit, which is fully refundable. Such containers will bear a deposit mark for easy identification. Consumers will pay this 10 cents at the point of purchase and obtain their refund when they return the containers for recycling.

All producers will also need to pay a producer fee of 3-4 cents per container to the scheme operator, BCRS Ltd.. This fee covers the logistics to collect and recycle the containers and is comparable to fees in other jurisdictions.

From our engagements with stakeholders, producers of about 80% of beverage containers can incorporate the deposit mark and barcode requirements directly on their containers. Beyond the once-off implementation cost, these producers should see costs per container close to the producer fee of 3-4 cents, which should keep compliance costs low for most drinks sold.

Some producers may need to, or choose to, place a sticker on their containers, instead of changing the design of the container, in order to comply with the scheme. The cost of stickering will vary depending on the quantity of containers put to market and how their supply chains are organised. Some can do so for about 3 cents per container, if done at source overseas and at scale. For small quantities done locally, the cost to the producer would be higher.

We appreciate that some producers may find the transition more challenging. NEA and the scheme operator BCRS Ltd. have been engaging both large and small producers regularly and providing practical support to help them come on board. Responding to feedback

from producers that they needed more time to comply with the scheme requirements, we have extended the transition period from 3 months to 6 months. We also introduced a transition grant of \$2,500 to help smaller businesses.

We will continue to be flexible and supportive to producers who reach out to BCRS Ltd. to help address their concerns. Over time, we expect producers to work with BCRS Ltd. to optimise their processes and find cost effective ways to meet their responsibility to the environment.

The consumer pricing of beverages is a complex and commercial decision. Consumer demand patterns and marketing strategies will also affect the price.

We have designed the scheme to be run as efficiently as possible, with low cost to producers. Any cost pass-through to consumers will likely be further moderated by price competition among industry players, as consumers have a wide variety of choices.

This has been the experience in some jurisdictions that have implemented this, where studies found that the introduction of deposit return schemes did not have a significant direct impact on beverage prices or beverage sales.

Members also asked about the accessibility of our return point network. At launch in April, the public can return their empty plastic and metal beverage containers bearing the deposit mark at over 1,000 Reverse Vending Machines (RVMs) located across Singapore to obtain a 10-cent refund. These RVMs will be located at larger supermarkets and other publicly accessible locations with high footfall, such as void decks of HDB blocks and some hawker centres.

90% of residents in HDB housing estates will live within a 5-minute walk to one of these return points. BCRS Ltd. will provide more details on the RVM locations in the coming weeks.

We aim to double the number of return points to 2,000 RVMs within the first year of implementation. While the scheme officially starts in April, containers bearing the deposit mark will gradually enter the market during the transition period, with widespread availability expected by August and September. During this initial period, we will closely monitor return patterns and gather community feedback to determine the optimal location for these additional return points.

We want to create a scheme that works for all of us. At launch, we will deploy ambassadors on the ground to guide the public on how to use the RVMs. We recognise that some seniors and vulnerable members of the community may require additional assistance to adapt to the scheme. NEA and BCRS Ltd., together with our community partners, are committed to providing additional support to better address their needs.

A key focus for us in the coming weeks is to work closely with all stakeholders to build understanding and support for the scheme. We will be reaching out to grassroots organisations, schools, youth groups, NGOs, and corporate partners to share how the scheme works and why it matters. Many are already champions of our sustainability initiatives, and I hope will continue to advocate for how BCRS is a very important step in our journey to look after our land, our resources, and our environment.

We are also in discussions with other key stakeholders, including coffeeshops and smaller retailers, to help them understand the scheme and explain it to consumers. This includes posters and collaterals to assist in distinguishing new beverage containers bearing the deposit mark, from older or non-regulated beverages that are not subject to the deposit.

The beverage container return scheme is a significant step forward in Singapore's recycling journey. It will take time for people to adjust. We will not get everything right from the start, and we ask for feedback, suggestions and understanding as we transit to this new way of recycling. As we gather more data, we will refine and improve the scheme.

We need everyone's support to make this scheme a success. We want to thank the producers who have helped to bring the scheme to where it is today, and we call upon those who have yet to register for the scheme to come forward and do their part for the environment. The scheme cannot succeed without the support of our residents. I encourage Members of the House to rally their communities to participate actively, and extend a helping hand to those who may need assistance in returning their containers, as we all do our part for Singapore's sustainability journey.

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