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Oral Reply to Parliamentary Question on the Beverage Container Return Scheme by Dr Amy Khor,...

Parliament Q&A

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

Mr Ang Wei Neng: To ask the Minister for Sustainability and the Environment (a) what is the projected cost per annum for the new proposed beverage container return scheme; (b) whether NEA will consider setting up return points at hawker centres, food courts and canteens of significant size; and (c) how will NEA ensure that the non-profit administrator of the proposed scheme will operate the container return scheme efficiently and effectively.

Mr Zhulkarnain Abdul Rahim: To ask the Minister for Sustainability and the Environment under the proposed beverage container return scheme (a) what are the types of pre-packaged beverage or container envisaged to be included; (b) what are the annual projected costs and expenditure to run the scheme; and (c) what are the Ministry's plans to utilise any excess deposit or fees which remain un-refunded because of beverage containers not returned.

Mr Liang Eng Hwa: To ask the Minister for Sustainability and the Environment with regard to the model in which the beverage container return scheme will be implemented (a) what is (i) the envisaged scale in its implementation and (ii) its projected initial and recurring costs under this model; and (b) whether the Ministry has considered other non-monetary related schemes to achieve the same outcome that is expected under this model.

Answer:

1 The proposed beverage container return scheme aims to encourage good recycling practices, conserve resources, and reduce waste and carbon emissions. This is in line with our Zero Waste Masterplan and contributes towards our climate ambition to achieve net zero emissions by or around mid-century. The scheme, which was first proposed by the Citizens' Workgroup on #RecycleRight in 2019, will be the first phase of an Extended Producer Responsibility approach to manage packaging waste.

2 This Extended Producer Responsibility, or EPR, approach means that the scheme will be funded by producers of pre-packaged beverages. Under the EPR approach, beverage

producers, such as manufacturers and importers, will be responsible for the collection and recycling of the products they put on the market as well as funding the scheme. This is similar to the EPR scheme that was implemented for e-waste in 2021.

3 Under the beverage container return scheme, a small refundable deposit will be applied when a consumer buys a pre-packaged beverage. I must emphasise that this is a refundable deposit. Consumers will get a full refund of their deposits when they return their empty beverage containers at designated return points. Compared to non-deposit based recycling schemes, the refundable deposit will encourage a higher recycling rate and aggregate a stream of cleaner and higher quality recyclables that can be used to produce new products, thus enhancing the resource loop. Similar schemes in countries such as Norway, Sweden and Lithuania have achieved return rates of 80% or higher.

4 Producers typically appoint an operator to carry out their responsibilities under the scheme. Based on the experience of other countries, a not-for-profit, industry-led scheme operator is preferred. It will be able to tap on the industry's capabilities and resources, such as existing logistics channels to make use of backhaul trips, to improve operational synergies. As the scheme is owned and run by the industry, it will have a strong incentive to operate the scheme efficiently and cost-effectively, to keep scheme costs low for all parties. In addition, the revenue from the sale of clean, high quality and high value recyclables, and any unclaimed deposits, will be utilised by the scheme operator to reduce the scheme costs. In Singapore, the eventual cost pass-through to consumers in beverage prices, if any, will likely be moderated by price competition among industry players. This is also the experience in other countries that have implemented similar schemes.

5 To ensure that the scheme operator operates efficiently, effectively, and fairly across multiple producers, the Government will exercise regulatory oversight over the scheme operator. The scheme operator will be licensed by the National Environment Agency (NEA), and be required to meet conditions set by NEA, including a collection target.

6 To develop the scheme framework for Singapore, my Ministry and NEA have conducted over two years of extensive engagements and consultations with stakeholders, including members of the public and over 250 beverage producers, retailers and waste management companies. We have taken into account their feedback and views in developing a proposed scheme framework, and we are currently conducting further public consultation via REACH. As public consultations are still ongoing, not all the details of the scheme have been finalised.

7 We are proposing for the scheme to cover plastic bottles and metal cans as a start, as these have high material value, high consumption rates, and are easy to collect and compact. We also propose to include all beverage types, to reduce consumer confusion and maximise the number of containers that can be collected for recycling. The scheme would include containers from 150 millilitres to 3 litres, which can be accepted by typical Reverse Vending Machines. With these proposed parameters, the scheme is estimated to cover more than 1 billion beverage containers in Singapore each year.

8 In designing the scheme, we will make it easy for consumers to understand, to enable each of us to play our part in building a circular economy. We will need to have an extensive network of conveniently located return points to enable consumers to easily claim their deposit refunds. Based on a survey conducted with 1,000 households, supermarkets were among the most preferred return location across all the age segments and are a major sales channel for pre-packaged beverages. We have thus proposed that large supermarkets with a total floor area of more than 200m² be mandated to set up return points. This will cover about 400 large supermarkets. We also welcome operators of other premises, such as mall operators and smaller retailers, to voluntarily set up return points. Based on experiences overseas, this can increase footfall to stores. The scheme operator pays handling fees to return point operators, to reimburse costs incurred. To build the return point network, NEA will work closely with the future scheme operator to identify and set up return points in suitable community and public spaces, such as Community Clubs, sports facilities and large, well patronised hawker centres to increase accessibility. Return point operators can choose manual over-the-counter return points or opt for automated Reverse Vending Machines.

9 At food and beverage (F&B) premises, such as hawker centres, food courts and canteens, operators and stallholders have the flexibility to decide whether to collect the deposit and pass the beverage containers to their patrons. There are a wide range of such premises, from casual settings to more formal settings, and each would have its own preference. For example, stallholders could serve the customer the beverage with its container and charge the deposit, in which case the customers can take away the empty beverage containers and return them at designated return points to claim the refund on their deposit. Alternatively, stallholders could pour the beverage into a cup before serving, in which case they do not need to charge the deposit as the customer does not receive the beverage container. In this case, the stallholder can collect the empty beverage containers and claim the refund of the deposits on the containers. We expect the former to apply in more casual settings such as coffeeshops and hawker centres as the shop owners would typically have their customers pay the deposit and take the beverage container.

10 Operators of F&B premises, including hawker centres, food courts and canteens could also consider setting up return points at their premises, where appropriate. NEA will work with the scheme operator to engage F&B premises operators, advise them on the scheme, and prepare them for implementation.

11 We will continue to engage stakeholders as we develop the scheme. The ongoing REACH consultation will be open until 14 October 2022, and we encourage and welcome all stakeholders and members of the public to give their feedback.

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