Subject: Container Deposit system and R.I.S.

I write to register our support for a National Container Deposit System.

I make these comments on behalf of AFROCAB (Australians for Refunds on Cans and Bottles) and our supporters.

Supporters of AFROCAB are mainly litter volunteers. These are people who do daily or weekly informal litter clean ups in their local area.

Like myself, they are people who from know from ongoing personal experience how big the problem of drink container litter really is.

We divide our comments into the 4 categories of the problem, costs, benefits and the alternatives.

The problem

Figures from the 2006 KAB National Litter Index show that drink containers are the number 1 litter item by volume and the number 3 litter item by quantity. However, in that study drink containers did not appear in the list of ‘top 10 litter items’. That is because KAB (who are sponsored by

Coke) broke them up into 38 different categories according to their contents.

We make this observation to point out that the beverage industry uses a number of strategies to understate the true extent of this problem.

Roadside litter surveys done as part of our ‘Community Litter Report’ (see

AFROCAB.org.au) show that drink containers are a major litter problem along our roadsides and other public places. That conclusion was also supported by our surveys of ‘Adopt a highway’ groups and other litter clean up groups. Our report also showed that drink containers were not a major problem on roads in south eastern, South Australia.

Costs

Past reports have consistently overstated the costs involved in container deposit systems. The R.I.S. should not make the same error. Reliable studies have shown that the cost will be about half a cent a container.

Benefits

Past reports have also understated or ignored the financial and environmental benefits of container deposit systems.

The financial benefits have been well documented by other groups. They include reduced operating costs of kerbside recycling systems and reduced litter clean up costs for local and state governments. The alternatives proposed by industry will in fact increase costs to local governments.

Financial benefits also include benefits to charities and community groups and income generation from jobs created, especially in rural and regional areas.Overseas experience also shows that tourism will get an indirect financial benefit from less litter in areas of scenic beauty. In total, financial benefits are a very important part of the equation and should not be overlooked.

Container deposit systems also have many environmental benefits. The carbon tax shows that a cost should be attached to things that damage the environment. Consistent with that, things that diminish and reduce environmental problems should have a financial benefit attached to them and that should be factored in to any evaluation of the merits of a proposed policy like a national CDS.

A container deposit system has many environmental benefits including saving non renewable resources, reducing water and CO2 emissions, saving finite landfill space, protecting our waterways and increasing recycling.

Alternatives

The alternatives proposed by industry sound good in theory but will not work in practice. Trials of public place recycling bins have not worked or increased recovery rates because of high contamination rates. Also, public place recycling bins would not be available in the majority of places where ‘away from home’ beverage consumption occurs. Thirdly, public place recycling systems will increase costs to local government who will have to fund and maintain an ineffective system. Industry is also fond of saying education campaigns are the answer to this problem. Past campaigns have not worked.

Conclusion

The key to any successful litter policy or program is community support.

The idea of container deposit systems has always enjoyed very high levels of public support because people know from childhood experience, from the South Australian experience and from overseas experience that these systems work.

If the objective of the R.I.S. is to recommend a policy that will achieve policy goals of reducing waste, reducing litter and increasing recycling it should recommend a national container deposit system. None of the alternatives have the public support needed to be effective and successful.

Peter Cook