alupro

THE ALUMINIUM PACKAGING RECYCLING ORGANISATION

POLICY BRIEFING

A DEPOSIT RETURN SCHEME (DRS) FOR THE UK

POLICY BRIEFING

SECURING TRUE CIRCULARITY

Aluminium packaging is a British manufacturing success story. Drink cans are the most popular beverage container in the UK. Because aluminium is 100% recyclable and capable of being remelted endlessly without loss of quality - it is uniquely placed to drive a true circular economy. In addition, using recycled aluminium delivers 95% energy savings compared to using new primary aluminium making regional circularity central to the UK's net-zero ambitions.

The upcoming UK Deposit Return Scheme (DRS), presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to supercharge recycling rates and cut carbon emissions. It must be designed to maximise the environmental and economic value of collected material. Representing the UK aluminium packaging value chain from remelters and brands to reprocessors, Alupro (the Aluminium Packaging Recycling Organisation) is advocating for regional can-to-can recycling to be prioritised, a variable rate of deposit and a UK-wide scheme implemented without delay.

> **"DRS is not just about increasing recycling rates; it's about tangible climate outcomes, security of supply, energy savings, and carbon reductions. Most importantly, it's about enabling progress towards a more circular economy."**
>
> *Tom Giddings, Executive Director, Alupro*

Where we are today

Planned for rollout in October 2027 by the Deposit Management Organisation (DMO) Exchange for Change, the UK DRS sees Wales operating a separate scheme, matching the UK-wide timeline and DMO structure, but diverging by including glass in scope alongside beverage cans and PET bottles. Exchange for Change is planning a flat 20p deposit across in-scope containers, in contrast to the Republic of Ireland's successful variable rate.

				MATERIALS			
NATION	LAUNCH DATE	DEPOSIT LEVEL	CONTAINER VOLUME	PET (PLASTIC)	GLASS	ALUMINIUM	STEEL
SCOTLAND	October 2027	£0.20	150ml - 3L	✓	✗	✓	✓
IRELAND	Launched 01/02/24	€0.15 (≤500ml) €0.25 (>500ml)	150ml - 3L	✓	✗	✓	✓
WALES	October 2027	£0.20 for cans /PET bottles £0.00 for glass	150ml - 3L	✓	✓	✓	✓
ENGLAND + NORTHERN IRELAND	October 2027	£0.20	150ml - 3L	✓	✗	✓	✓

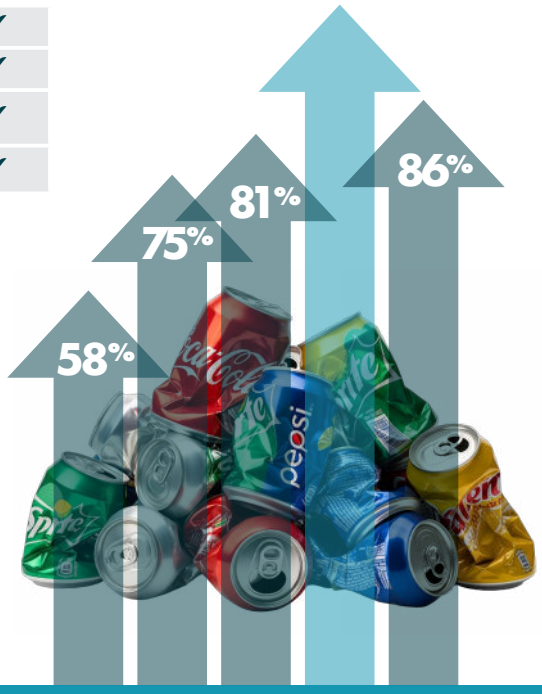
What the public want

A UK-wide representative poll of 2,000 adults conducted by Yonder (April, 2026) for Alupro revealed strong public demand for government action to protect domestic secondary (recycled) aluminium:

58% are concerned the UK is losing too much aluminium as a critical resource essential for growing the economy.

Strong public backing for government action to encourage more secondary aluminium to be available for companies supplying the UK market. Including **86%** in Northern Ireland, **81%** in Wales, and **75%** in Scotland.

The public want the DRS to boost recycling while ensuring high-value materials remain within local economies.



POLICY BRIEFING

HOW TO DELIVER RECYCLING SUCCESS (DRS)

To unlock the full environmental and economic potential of a UK DRS, policy and scheme design must address the following:

Variable Deposit Rates Over Flat Fees

A flat 20p deposit penalises multipacks of cans, adding £2.40 upfront to a 12-pack of cans versus 40p on two 2L plastic bottles. This risks distorting consumer behaviour away from endlessly recyclable aluminium towards larger plastic formats. Independent modelling shows a potential 73% slump in demand for large multipacks due to a flat deposit. Alupro has long called for a variable rate mirroring the Republic of Ireland and the Nordics. We also call on Exchange for Change to commit to reviewing deposit pricing post-rollout, ensuring the DMO actively assesses market shifts and adjusts policy to mitigate negative impacts on sustainable beverage packaging.

Mandating Regional 'Can-to-Can' Closed Loops

Given aluminium's status as a critical mineral, government and Exchange for Change must ensure DRS-collected cans are where feasible channelled back into new beverage cans through regional 'can-to-can' closed loops. This guarantees that collected material is utilised to its maximum environmental and economic potential, supporting the businesses funding the scheme and safeguarding domestic jobs.

No further Delays & Need For Interoperability

Delivering the DRS on schedule in October 2027 is critical to maximise the scheme's environmental outcomes and boost UK recycling performance. With around a year to launch, there must be seamless operational interoperability between the Welsh scheme and the rest of the UK to ensure the schemes function smoothly and deliver on their recycling potential.

Comprehensive 'On-the-Go' Infrastructure & Public Engagement

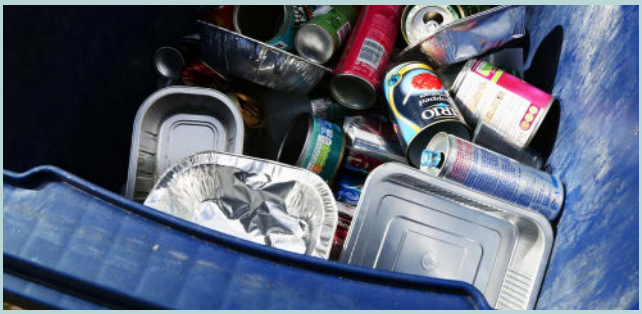
The DRS must work as part of a mosaic of recycling solutions to tackle the UK's 'on-the-go' consumption. This means investing in dedicated recycling points for public spaces remote from DRS return points (such as parks, beaches, and festivals), backed by behaviour-change communications. Exchange for Change should partner with proven, industry-led programmes like Alupro's Every Can Counts (which engaged 16m consumers in 2024) and MetalMatters to build proactive public participation from day one.

Kerbside Alignment & Local Authority Offsets

As the most valuable material in the household bin and accounting for roughly three-quarters of aluminium packaging by tonnage, moving beverage cans into the DRS represents a major structural shift for kerbside collections. Other aluminium formats such as foil and aerosols cannot be left behind. A strategic approach across the packaging reforms is needed, leveraging Simpler Recycling and Extended Producer Responsibility to boost household capture and drive investment into sorting infrastructure.

ALUPRO'S INDUSTRY MANIFESTO

Our manifesto sets out the policy asks needed to allow industry and government to collaborate on a circular and sustainable future and deliver the low-carbon, highly recyclable packaging we all need.



1. Effective Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging (pEPR) and packaging collections must drive greater circularity and sustainability.
2. UK-wide Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) must drive aluminium drink can circularity.
3. UK recycling and economic policy should prioritise retention of aluminium in highest value applications.
4. UK circular economy strategies must recognise the value of permanent materials, whose inherent properties do not change after being recycled, allowing them to survive multiple recycling journeys and reducing the reliance on critical raw materials.
5. UK economic and environmental policy must support the aluminium value chain to decarbonise and improve competitiveness.

ABOUT ALUPRO

Alupro is the voice of the aluminium packaging value chain in the UK.

Our mission: maximise aluminium circularity.

We work with organisations across the supply chain to help the industry meet - and exceed - its recycling obligations. Together with manufacturers, reprocessors, local authorities and leading brands, we strengthen collection systems and spark lasting behaviour change through national campaigns. From can-makers to recyclers, our members span the full aluminium loop, bringing the whole industry to the table. As the sector's voice on policy and legislation, we guide our members, amplify their influence, and build a community with a shared purpose.

Alupro membership is more than meeting recycling obligations - it's about unlocking aluminium's unique sustainability. From influencing government policy to running bold campaigns, our work delivers measurable results that members are proud to share.

Together, we're shaping the future of aluminium packaging recycling.

alupro

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