

Packaging EPR – what it is, why we need it now and how to make it better

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This briefing is on behalf of nature and animal welfare coalition Wildlife and Countryside Link.

What is pEPR?

pEPR stands for packaging extended producer responsibility. EPR schemes, based on the “[polluter pays](#)” environmental legal principle, mean that the full costs of managing pollution are borne by those who cause it. In the case of pEPR it means producers who place packaging on the UK market will be responsible for paying for the total cost of managing household packaging when it becomes waste.

Why do we need pEPR?

For polluters to finally be accountable for the true cost of what they place on the market - pEPR will transfer the full costs of collecting, sorting, recycling and disposing of household packaging waste from local authorities (and consequently taxpayers) to producers of packaging. This makes those who place packaging onto the market responsible for the full waste management costs to society and the environment.

To reduce environmental impacts from packaging – placing this full cost on producers also creates an incentive to reduce the amount of packaging producers use overall, in order to minimise fees they have to pay. The aim is that a more accountable, circular and sustainable packaging system is created. Several countries already have full-cost EPR schemes in place for packaging, including France, Germany, Norway, Iceland, Japan, Spain and South Korea. Reducing packaging use is essential to reduce use of virgin raw materials, whose production drives greenhouse gas emissions and the destruction of nature.¹ It is also essential to minimise plastic pollution and its effects on humans and wildlife.

pEPR should be implemented in full and on existing timelines, with fees beginning to be paid in October 2025 and lowers fees on genuinely recyclable packaging starting in 2026.

Debunking pEPR myths

Myth 1: pEPR unfairly disadvantages glass compared to other materials.

¹ [Wildlife and Countryside Link: Transitioning to a circular economy to restore nature](#)

pEPR fees are paid by material weight, rather than per item, meaning total fees on glass packaging items will sometimes be greater. However, this reflects the higher environmental cost of transporting and recycling glass. For example, both aluminium and glass require approximately 1.5MWh/tonne for recycling.² But while a 500ml aluminium can weighs around 16 grams, a 500ml glass bottle will likely weigh between 250-350g. It is sometimes claimed pEPR fees do not sufficiently take into account the potential infinite recyclability of glass. A 2022 study showed that Britain's closed loop recycling rate for glass stands at just 43 percent, compared to 61 percent in France and 77 percent in Germany.³ Therefore, whilst it is theoretically possible to recycle glass infinitely, this is far from the case in the UK.

A per item option for managing waste from glass drinks containers was available in the form of the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS). This a separate system, due to be implemented in 2027, in which consumers pay a deposit for drinks containers which is returned to them when they bring the container back for recycling.⁴ However, British Glass successfully lobbied the previous Government to have glass removed from DRS, which would have exempted glass drinks containers from pEPR.⁵

Myth 2: pEPR will significantly increase costs for consumers

Although pEPR will increase the cost of packaging, the degree to which this cost is passed onto consumers is dependent on decisions by producers and retailers. The Government's impact assessment estimates costs per household will be 91p a week.⁶ In addition, pEPR does not introduce a new cost but shifts waste management costs from taxpayers to producers.

Myth 3: pEPR is another tax on business and will be used to subsidise non-waste services

pEPR is not a tax as fees are paid to a scheme administrator (PackUK) and sent to local authorities, who will only receive funds relative to their annual waste management costs.⁷ Where local authorities are underperforming relative to efficient disposal costs and to other local authorities, the scheme administrator can reduce the amount of money they receive. This means payments cover only the costs of packaging waste management and cannot be used to subsidise other local authority services.

How can pEPR be improved for the environment?

Vary fees based on the sustainability of packaging throughout its entire lifecycle

The Government is already planning to reduce fees based on how recyclable packaging is. However, this is only predicted to marginally increase recycling rates.⁸ The regulations allow

² [Eunomia: Decarbonisation of Single Use Beverage Packaging](#)

³ [New report – UK glass recycling lagging behind other major EU countries - Eunomia](#)

⁴ [Defra: Introducing the deposit return scheme for drinks containers](#)

⁵ [British Glass: Why glass should be excluded from a DRS](#)

⁶ [Defra: The Producer Responsibility Obligations \(Packaging and Packaging Waste\) Regulations 2024: Impact Assessment](#)

⁷ [Defra: Methodology and procedure for calculating 2025 to 2026 payments](#)

⁸ [Defra: The Producer Responsibility Obligations \(Packaging and Packaging Waste\) Regulations 2024: Impact Assessment](#)

them to further vary fees based on reusability, how many times packaging is reused, and the broader environmental impacts of the packaging. The Government is not planning to use these powers until 2029, despite the current Environmental Improvement Plan target to reduce residual (not recycled or reused) waste by 24% by 2028. New rules should be brought forward urgently to reduce fees for reusable and sustainable packaging. The introduction of per unit fees should also be considered, to provide incentives to remove unnecessary packaging altogether – as has been implemented by France’s EPR scheme.⁹ Fee variation to reward sustainability is of particular importance given the stagnation of UK packaging recycling rates at less than 65%.¹⁰ This compares to packaging recycling rates upwards of 70% in many EU countries.¹¹

Ensure adequate investment in reuse infrastructure

Once higher fees are applied to the least sustainable packaging types, the extra money generated should be used to fund much-needed shared reuse infrastructure. In Germany, over 40% of drinks are in reusable containers and 98% of reusable containers are returned.¹²

Introduce litter payments

Under the original proposal for pEPR, producers would have paid for the cost of managing packaging that is littered or placed in public bins. Despite the huge impacts of litter on nature, this portion of pEPR payments was dropped in England. Litter is a major cause of marine wildlife deaths, and the amount of plastic found on beaches increased by 10% between 2023 and 2024.¹³ On land, surveys found dead animals in litter on 8% of all nature trails.¹⁴ Producers should cover the costs of cleaning up litter.

Expanding EPR to other sectors

The polluter pays principle requires that producers cover the costs of the environmental impacts of their products. EPR should be expanded to other sectors to cover waste management costs and incentivise sustainability. For example, the textiles industry produces 4% of all municipal waste in England and 4-8% of all global greenhouse gas emissions and yet only 1% of the material used to produce clothing is recycled back into clothing.¹⁵ More on expanding EPR can be found in our paper: [Financial Incentives to Grow the Circular Economy](#).

Conclusion

pEPR is essential to improving the sustainability of packaging in the UK. It should be implemented without delay and ambition increased to reduce impacts on the environment.

⁹ [European Commission: Green Best Practice Community: Eco-Emballages \(France\)](#)

¹⁰ [Defra: UK statistics on waste](#)

¹¹ [Eurostat: Packaging waste statistics](#)

¹² [Deutsche Welle: A look at Germany's bottle deposit scheme](#)

¹³ [Marine Conservation Society: Beachwatch 2024](#)

¹⁴ [Trash Free Trails: State Of Our Trails Report](#)

¹⁵ [Defra: The waste prevention programme for England: Maximising Resources, Minimising Waste](#)

Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) is the largest nature coalition in England, bringing together 90 organisations to use their joint voice for the protection of the natural world and animals.

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The following organisations have inputted into this briefing and support the implementation of, and increased ambition for, pEPR:

Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA)

Fidra

Keep Britain Tidy

Marine Conservation Society

The British Mountaineering Council (BMC)

WWF – UK