

Submission to the inquiry into ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION (BEVERAGE CONTAINER DEPOSIT & RECOVERY SCHEME) BILL 2009

from Friends of Woodlands Historic Park Inc.

FOWHP is a group of volunteers who work in an 800 ha conservation park on the fringe of Melbourne. Collecting litter is not our major focus and we only collect litter in a small fraction of the park and it's surrounds - for example along the side of a 1km stretch of gravel road bordering the park (one side of the road only), which we clean up every few weeks. Last week one and a half "clean up Australia" type bags of recyclable drink containers were collected, consisting of about 80 cans, a similar number of glass bottles and a couple of plastic bottles.

We dispose of the bottles in our municipal kerbside recycling collection. Of concern to us is that we don't know how many of them are actually recycled, since they can easily get broken during collection. Beer "stubbies" are particularly breakable, and these are the most common type of bottle collected. We are not aware of any statistic showing the proportion of bottles that are broken. Not only are broken bottles not recycled, but the broken glass contaminates other recyclables, reducing its value or causing it to be diverted to landfill. With a container deposit scheme materials would be sorted by the person claiming the deposit, which would be more efficient.

Almost all the bottle and cans collected last week are from alcoholic drinks. A 10c or even 20c container deposit would have no impact on sales of these beverages as the price change would be insignificant. However 10c per container would provide a very significant incentive to pick up these containers. Knowing that all the containers we collect would be recycled rather than sent to landfill would also improve motivation. It is likely that our volunteers would be motivated to collect litter from a larger area, if other people do not beat us to it.

Most drink containers dropped on country and urban fringe roadsides or in parks outside the city never get collected, let alone recycled. Many of them wash into our waterways; the rest become concealed by vegetation and eventually get buried or, in the case of glass bottles, broken. The total amount of litter in the environment increases every year, but is never seen except perhaps after a wildfire, which is when we first noticed how much rubbish there was on the Woodside Historic Park roadsides. The longer the litter is there the harder it is to collect and the harder it is to recycle. The previous inhabitants of this country left behind middens containing nothing worse than shells or bones: we are creating "linear middens" of glass, metal and plastic along all our roads.

CONCLUSION

We support The Environment Protection (Beverage Container Deposit and Recovery Scheme) Bill 2009 for the following reasons:

Australia's recycling rates (outside of South Australia) are currently very low. A container deposit scheme is the only proven method of achieving a high recycling rate for drink containers disposed of outside the home.

A container deposit scheme is the only practical method for removing a large proportion of litter from the environment.

A container deposit scheme will reduce the cost to ratepayers of cleaning up city streets and parks. It will also reduce the cost to ratepayers of kerbside recycling because the operator will be able to collect the refund on drink containers which consumers choose to dispose of in this way.