

EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT & PACKAGING LAW

Little support for MEPs' call for EU-wide can deposit

European Environment & Packaging Law

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A call by four MEPS to make metal beverage can producers harmonize "their deposit and return systems" has failed to receive adequate support in the European Parliament.

Swedish Independent MEPs **Hélène Goudin** and **Nils Lundgren** together with Finnish Liberal **Henrik Lax** and UK Conservative **John Bowis**, tabled a written declaration at the end of last year, claiming that the lack of compatibility between national deposit and return schemes constituted an obstacle to internal trade and harmed consumers.

The four had hoped to get the backing of at least half of Parliament's 785 MEPs to ask the European Commission to "induce" producers into making their systems "mutually compatible." By the deadline date of 5 February, however, they had only gathered 123 signatures, thereby failing to get the declaration adopted.

"We are relieved that this call did not get more support although we never expected it to be a big issue," **Joris Nachtergaele**, EU Public Affairs Manager at the Association of European Producers of Steel for Packaging (APEAL) told EE&PL.

In their declaration, the MEPs noted that there is no "coordinated deposit and return system for metal beverage cans" and "increased cross-border mobility now results in metal cans ending up in countries where they cannot be processed by the national deposit and return system." According to them, "the lack of compatibility between systems constitutes an obstacle to trade for producers and is a contribution factor in restricting competitions on the internal market. They also asserted that consumers "suffered" when a can bought in one country could not be returned against a deposit in another.

"Most EU member states already have effective kerbside collection systems that are delivering good results so it is not surprising that this declaration received little support," **Nachtergaele** said. **Nachtergaele** told EE&PL MEPs had been convinced by Apeal's argument that introducing deposit schemes for metal beverage cans "does not guarantee higher recycling rates at all" and that countries with "holistic collection and recovery systems" have very high recycling rates for cans. "Deposit schemes are costly and endanger very well performing, existing holistic collection and recovery systems as established in member states, he said adding that deposit systems on top of collection systems were actually "counter-productive from an environmental point of view." He pointed out that deposit systems themselves lead to market barriers, the distortion of the internal market and increased prices for the consumer.

Deposits hamper free trade

This argument was recently re-iterated by the European Commission when answering a parliamentary question by one of the petitioners of the declaration.

In December **Goudin** asked the Commission whether it considered that "integrated coordination of the national systems of deposit on metal cans within the EU would contribute to greater energy efficiency and reduce raw material usage." "There is evidence that deposit systems may lead to a partitioned market and hamper the free movement of goods within the EU," said the Commission on 15 January, pointing out that in line with the subsidiarity principle, this was a matter for member states. "The Commission remains committed to working with member states to ensure that national deposit systems do not fragment the internal market and that potential synergies are maximised."

Contacted by EE&PL, **Bowis** refused to comment on the issue while Lax explained that his main concern was to tackle the problem, prevalent in Nordic countries, of cans with a deposit on them ending up in a different country from where they were purchased.