

Save Our Seas 2.0 Act

Summary

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Background:

Every minute, the equivalent of a garbage truck full of plastic is dumped into our ocean. According to the United Nations, that's more than eight million metric tons a year. Plastic bottles, straws, grocery bags, cigarette butts, fishing gear, and abandoned vessels litter the ocean. Currents and winds trap items in debris accumulation zones, also known as garbage patches.

Marine debris harms our coastal economies, endangers marine life, destroys important marine habitat, propagates invasive species, and creates hazardous conditions for the maritime industry. Tiny pieces of plastic, fiber, fragments, and microbeads also make their way into marine life, blocking digestive tracts, altering growth, and, in some cases, killing animals and marine organisms. We still don't know how long it takes for plastic to completely biodegrade; estimates range from 450 years to never.

The health of our ocean reflects the health of our planet, and we must do more to keep garbage out of the ocean and off our shores. Last year, Congress unanimously passed the bipartisan Save Our Seas Act to reauthorize the NOAA Marine Debris Program. Save Our Seas 2.0 Act builds on this bipartisan success.

The bill will improve the domestic response to marine debris by:

- Establishing a Marine Debris Response Trust Fund for NOAA to use in responding to marine debris events.
- Creating a Marine Debris Foundation to encourage, accept, and administer private gifts in connection with the activities and services of the NOAA Marine Debris Program.
- Authorizing a prize competition to advance innovation in the removal and prevention of plastic waste.
- Directing federal agencies to prioritize marine debris removal, expand derelict vessel recycling, and establish a pilot program to assess the feasibility of providing incentives for fishermen who capture marine debris at sea to properly dispose of the waste.
- Requiring the Interagency Marine Debris Coordinating Committee to report to Congress on innovative uses for plastic waste, causes of microfiber pollution, and opportunities minimize the creation of new plastic waste.

The bill will incentivize international engagement to address marine debris by:

- Expressing Congressional support for international cooperation to raise awareness about sources of plastic waste, the effects of mismanaged waste, and expanding systems to recover, reuse, and recycle waste.
- Directing federal agencies to prioritize encouraging, advising, and facilitating foreign countries to improve capacity and operation of waste management systems.
- Requiring the Secretary of State to submit a report to Congress assessing the potential for negotiating a new international agreement or creating a new forum to address marine debris.
- Mandating that the Executive Branch consider marine debris in negotiations of international agreements.

The bill will strengthen domestic infrastructure to prevent the creation of new marine debris by:

- Directing the EPA to develop a strategy within one year to improve waste management and recycling infrastructure, harmonize waste collection and recycling protocols, strengthen markets for recycled plastic, and identify barriers to increasing the collection of recyclable materials.
- Creating a Waste Management Revolving Fund, Waste Management Infrastructure Grant program, Drinking Water Infrastructure Grant program, Wastewater Infrastructure Grant program, and Trash-Free Water Grant program to assist local waste management authorities in making improvements and deploying waste interceptor technologies in waterways.
- Reviewing the use of plastic waste in roadways, bridges, and other infrastructure projects, technology to convert plastic waste into other products like chemicals, fuel, and energy, and the effects of microplastics on food supplies and drinking water sources.

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