

WASHINGTON, DC – The House and Senate both unanimously passed Congressman Sam Farr's (D-Carmel) Marine Debris Act to combat the growing problem of ocean trash. The Marine Debris Act allows for permanent funding of the Marine Debris Program in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which seeks to address the adverse impacts of trash in the ocean. The legislation was included as part of H.R. 2838, the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Act. The bill is now at President Obama's desk and is expected to be signed into law.

“From the tsunami that impacted Japan last year to Hurricane Sandy that struck the east coast, we have seen a noticeable increase in the amount of debris in our oceans,” said Congressman Farr. “These disasters only highlight the problem, every year 14 billion pounds of trash are added to our oceans, endangering aquatic wildlife and threatening coastal communities whose economies rely upon the ocean. This act allows for the continued funding of a program that protects this vital resource and ensures its long-term health.”

The growing threat of marine debris has a detrimental effect on aquatic ecosystems. It damages habitats, provides a vehicle for invasive species and kills wildlife through ingestion or entanglement. Over 267 marine species are impacted by marine debris. Estimates suggest that up to 100,000 marine mammals are killed each year by marine debris. Marine debris also poses an ongoing threat to endangered species and recovery efforts.

Additionally, there is an economic cost associated with marine debris. It damages local economies dependent upon healthy beaches for tourism, damages marine vessels and creates numerous obstacles for the fishing industry.

The Marine Debris Program conducts research and develops solutions to these growing problems caused by ocean trash – both man caused debris and natural occurring, debris that results from storms like the Japanese tsunami or Hurricane Sandy.

In addition to providing a mechanism for continued funding, the act also alters the definition of marine debris to include all trash that ends up in the oceans, even if it originated on land. This is in contrast to the previous definition that only included debris that originated from a boat or other marine vessel.

“If we are going to provide sound stewardship of the world’s largest trust, then we must fully understand the nature of the problem,” said Congressman Farr. “As our society has grown more dependent on disposable items, the oceans have become a dumping ground for our waste. Trash that endangers the health of our oceans does not differentiate whether it arrived in the ocean from a boat or not. We must begin to understand that choices we make here on land have impact our oceans as well.”

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