

The Honorable Tom Udall  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Udall:

Thank you for your letter and interest in addressing the problem of mismanaged plastic waste within U.S. waters.

As you stated, the durability of plastic has made it the most abundant marine debris in our oceans, waterways, and Great Lakes, resulting in entanglement and ingestion by wildlife. Harmful chemicals can also accumulate on plastics in the environment, posing a threat to biodiversity, the economy, and potentially even human health. This is an issue that the Administration and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) take very seriously, and prevention efforts in our waters is one of our primary concerns.

The NOAA Marine Debris Program (MDP) is addressing plastic marine debris through several initiatives. It offers a nationwide, competitive funding opportunity for research projects that focus on the ecological risk assessment, exposure studies, and fate and transport of marine debris. Several currently funded projects address microplastic ingestion by marine organisms. MDP also offers prevention grants for projects that raise awareness, reduce barriers to marine debris prevention (e.g., lack of access to waste receptacles or alternatives to single-use items), and encourages and supports long-term behavior changes. Many funded projects focus specifically on reducing single-use plastic through targeted education and outreach campaigns. MDP also gathers data on plastic and other debris through the Marine Debris Monitoring and Assessment Project. Through this citizen science initiative, the public collects and records data on the amount and types of debris along the shoreline in order to evaluate the status and trends of marine debris in the environment.

As you mentioned, robust interagency coordination on this issue is critical. Through the Interagency Marine Debris Coordinating Committee (IMDCC), NOAA and other member agencies coordinate efforts to address plastic pollution, which includes research. Recently, IMDCC assisted the National Science and Technology Council in drafting a plastic pollution section for its *2018 Decadal Vision for America's Oceans*. This document identified five priority research areas for agencies to consider in future planning efforts. With these priorities in mind, IMDCC plans to identify new opportunities for improved interagency coordination in the coming year.

We appreciate your interest in marine debris, specifically plastic pollution. If you have any further questions, please contact Wendy Lewis, Director of NOAA's Office of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, at (202) 482-4981.

Sincerely,

Neil A. Jacobs, Ph.D.  
Assistant Secretary of Commerce for  
Environmental Observation and Prediction  
Performing the duties of  
Under Secretary of Commerce  
for Oceans and Atmosphere

The Honorable Alan Lowenthal  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington DC, 20515

Dear Representative Lowenthal:

Thank you for your letter and interest in addressing the problem of mismanaged plastic waste. As you noted, plastic trash can enter the ocean and waterways and result in entanglement and ingestion by wildlife. Chemicals can also leach from and accumulate on plastics in the environment. These effects pose a threat to biodiversity, the economy, and potentially even human health. This is an issue that the administration and NOAA take very seriously.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Marine Debris Program serves as the U.S. Federal government lead for addressing marine debris. The Program's mission is to investigate and prevent the adverse impacts of marine debris. It accomplishes this mission through five program pillars: Removal, Prevention, Research, Regional Coordination, and Emergency Response. The Director of the NOAA Marine Debris Program also chairs the Interagency Marine Debris Coordinating Committee (IMDCC), which is dedicated to harmonizing federal efforts to combat marine debris.

As you noted in your letter, plastics have many uses in society because they are durable, lightweight, and versatile. This durability has made them the most abundant type of marine debris in our ocean, waterways, and Great Lakes. Once in the environment, plastics remain there indefinitely, which is why preventing these items from entering our waters in the first place is especially important.

The NOAA Marine Debris Program is addressing plastic marine debris through several initiatives. The Program offers a nationwide, competitive funding opportunity for research projects that focus on the ecological risk assessment, exposure studies, and fate and transport of marine debris. Several currently funded projects address microplastic ingestion by marine organisms. The Program also offers prevention grants for projects that raise awareness, reduce barriers to marine debris prevention (e.g., lack of access to waste receptacles or alternatives to single-use items), and encourage and support long-term behavior changes. Many funded projects focus specifically on reducing single-use plastic through targeted education and outreach campaigns. The Program also gathers data on plastic and other debris through the Marine Debris Monitoring and Assessment Project. Through this citizen science initiative, the public collects and records data on the amount and types of debris along the shoreline in order to evaluate the status and trends of marine debris in the environment.

As you observed, robust interagency coordination on this issue is critical. Through the IMDCC, NOAA and other member agencies coordinate efforts to address plastic pollution, including research. Recently, the IMDCC assisted the National Science and Technology Council in drafting a plastic pollution section for its 2018 Decadal Vision for America's Oceans. This document identified five priority research areas for agencies to consider in future planning efforts. With these priorities in mind, the IMDCC plans to identify new opportunities for improved interagency coordination in the coming year.

We are grateful for your interest in marine debris and the problem of plastic pollution. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Wendy Lewis, Director of NOAA's Office of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs at (202) 482-4981.

Sincerely,

Neil A. Jacobs, Ph.D.  
Assistant Secretary of Commerce for  
Environmental Observation and Prediction  
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Under Secretary of Commerce  
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