



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Representative Michael G. Devin

In Support of L.D. 427

"An Act to Address and Mitigate the Effects of Marine Debris"

Before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

Wednesday, March 4, 2015

Senator Baker, Representative Kumiega and fellow members of the Joint Standing Committee on Marine Resources, I am Representative Mick Devin, serving House District 90, which includes Bremen, Bristol, Damariscotta, Newcastle, parts of Nobleboro and South Bristol, Monhegan Island and Louds Island. As the sponsor of L.D. 427, I am here today to speak in support of its passage.

Marine debris is becoming more prevalent and, with increased video technology, we are becoming more aware of its presence and impacts on the marine environment. Video of the Pacific and North Atlantic garbage gyres is now common. So are images of marine mammals and turtles with plastic debris that constrict their proper growth. Marine debris pays a heavy toll on our marine ecosystem. Maine's marine economy is vital to the state's health. This concept bill will develop policy to address plastic pollution entering our coastal environment.

Senator Saviello introduced LD 85 "An Act To Prohibit Synthetic Plastic Microbeads in Personal Care Products and Over-the-counter Drugs". This bill establishes dates after which the manufacture for sale or acceptance for sale of personal care products containing synthetic plastic microbeads is prohibited. It also establishes dates after which the manufacture for sale or acceptance for sale of an over-the-counter drug containing synthetic plastic microbeads is prohibited.

Senator Saviello's bill addresses one source of insidious pollution found not only in our terrestrial environment and freshwater, but the marine environment as well: microbeads used in personal care products and over-the-counter drugs. His bill is important and warrants a thorough review from this Legislature. However, in terms of marine debris, it represents only a tiny fraction of the problem.

The sources of marine debris and their impacts on the marine environment are varied and complex.

According to a recently published article in the journal *Science*, within a decade, there will be one pound of plastic in our oceans for every three pounds of fish. This landmark study finds huge quantities of plastic are entering the ocean. Since much of the plastic is not accounted for, we should be concerned about where it's ending up, which likely is the food chain. And who sits at the top of that food chain?

One aspect of marine pollution, which is less known and understood, is the impact of micro debris. Plastic often degrades by flaking off micro bits that are five to ten microns in length (roughly the size of a blood cell or many single-celled phytoplankton). Studies have shown filter-feeding organisms will ingest micro plastic debris. The debris itself is harmless, but the organism can fill its gut with micro debris it cannot digest, causing it to starve.

Plastic micro debris results from any plastic in the marine environment. Millions of single-use plastic grocery bags litter our entire environment. Eventually, nearly all of those bags enter the marine environment. Micro debris is more insidious than macro debris and must be addressed. As this concept bill is developed, micro-debris and its effects will be considered.

Because marine debris is a complex issue and one that is already effecting our marine environment and marine economy, it will require multiple work sessions to develop the bill. I respectfully request that LD 427 be carried over to the 2nd legislative session. I recommend the following approach: To have one work session in four or five weeks from today where I present to the committee a list of objectives to tackle marine debris and the names of people or organizations who will contribute to forming sound policy to address marine debris. Over the summer and early fall multiple work sessions would be held to fashion the bill. Finally, early in the second session a concluding work session will be held to complete LD 427, followed soon by voting it out of committee.

Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions.