

Wednesday, March 26, 2025

Testimony before the Maine Legislature

Environment and Natural Resources Committee

Matt Dundas, Oceana Campaign Director

Madame Co-Chairs, esteemed members of the committee, it's a privilege to be here today.

My name is Matt Dundas. I live in Cumberland, I'm a campaign director with Oceana, and I'm here to testify in support of LD 1122 and in opposition to LD 56 and LD 69. Oceana is the world's largest international non-governmental organization that focuses exclusively on ocean conservation. We work all over the world on our mission to protect and restore the oceans. We have thousands of members across more than 300 towns and cities in Maine.

Plastic pollution represents a primary threat to ocean health. Plastic is now everywhere. It's in the water we drink, the air we breathe, and the blood pumping through our veins. Many plastics, such as grocery bags, are used only once and then discarded, yet are easily replaced by effective alternatives. We must reduce the production of unnecessary plastics.

Each year, an estimated 33 billion pounds of plastic enters the oceans. During my brief testimony right now, the amount of plastic entering our oceans would fill six garbage trucks.

This figure is expected to triple over the next 15 years. Without robust policies in place, Maine can expect to see more bags, more bottles, and more plastic overall in the Gulf of Maine as the years go by.

Maine attempted to eliminate single-use plastic bags at retail stores by passing a ban four years ago. Unfortunately, the language in this law allowed for thicker plastic bags. As a result, some stores are now prominently displaying and distributing these thick plastic bags. LD 1122 corrects this unintended consequence.

Plastic bag bans and bag fees work. Where bag bans and fees have been properly implemented, plastic bag pollution has been dramatically reduced. Following implementation of a plastic bag ban in New Jersey in May 2022, plastic bags littering New Jersey beaches declined 46% between fall and spring, and continue to decrease every

year.^{i,ii} When Austin, Texas banned single-use plastic bags their plastic bag litter decreased by 90% in just six months.ⁱⁱⁱ

In Oceana's plastics report from 2020 we found evidence of almost 1,800 animals from 40 different species swallowing plastic or becoming entangled in it in U.S. waters between 2009 and early 2020. Eighty-eight percent of these animals were from species listed as endangered or threatened with extinction under the Endangered Species Act.

We cannot rely on recycling to get out of this, as less than 6% of the plastic in the U.S. is recycled. The solution must involve reducing production and distribution, and the only way to do that effectively is by passing LD 1122 and voting down LD 56 and LD 69.

Thank you very much for your public service and for the opportunity to address this critically urgent issue.

i - <https://publicinterestnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Plastic-Bag-Bans-Work-revd.pdf>

ii

[https://cleanoceanaction.org/fileadmin/editor_group2/Beach Sweeps/COA s 2023 Beach Sweeps Annual Report.pdf](https://cleanoceanaction.org/fileadmin/editor_group2/Beach_Sweeps/COA_s_2023_Beach_Sweeps_Annual_Report.pdf)

iii

<https://nebula.wsimg.com/ae9ad3fb6e2a02e0b1da01c078920330?AccessKeyId=1C31A3B4B1A73412F089&alloworigin=1&disposition=0>