



**MEMORANDUM**

Item 4

**TO:** Ocean Protection Council  
**FROM:** Amanda Sackett, Sea Grant Fellow; Marisa Villarreal, Sea Grant Fellow  
**DATE:** November 21, 2013  
**RE:** Update on Marine Debris and recommended next steps for OPC staff  
**ATTACHMENTS:** Related Marine Debris Initiatives (see links in document)

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**REQUESTED ACTION:**

Given the continuing need for leadership and coordination on marine debris, staff requests that the Council:

1. Accept the report [Marine Debris: A Snapshot of Work in California](#) generated in response to the OPC Workshop of June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2013.
2. Discuss and provide guidance to staff on the draft priority steps for tackling marine debris.

**BACKGROUND:**

Marine debris is a global problem impacting the environment, commerce and human safety. Marine debris is generated through the production, manufacturing, transportation and distribution of products to sellers and buyers, careless littering and poor solid waste management, as well as loss of fishing gear. The main types of marine debris include plastics, glass, metal, polystyrene (Styrofoam), rubber, wood, derelict fishing gear, and derelict vessels. An estimated 60 to 80 percent of all marine debris and 90 percent of floating debris is plastic. The majority of marine debris comes from land sources including industrial outfalls, landfills, littering, dumping, and poor waste management. Debris from ocean-based sources arises from commercial fishing, shipping and oil sectors, and from recreational boating and military vessels.

Plastics in particular are the number one type of trash found in the ocean and along California's coast. Plastic trash never fully degrades; instead, it photodegrades into microscopic particles. Trash on the beach can be harmful to the health and safety of beach users. It is aesthetically displeasing and can lead to lost tourism revenue. Furthermore, marine animals can ingest or become entangled in marine debris, which can result in suffocation or starvation. For example, it has been well documented that both sea birds and sea turtles ingest plastic debris, mistaking small plastic pieces and plastic bags for food. It has also been demonstrated that plastics can absorb and concentrate toxins and transport organic contaminants in the oceans such as PCBs.

Marine debris is one of four priorities for the West Coast Governor's Alliance (WCGA) for Ocean Health. California is an active participant in the WCGA's Marine Debris Action Coordination Team (ACT), with the OPC's Sea Grant Fellow Amanda Sackett taking a leadership role. The ACT recently updated [their strategy](#) for responding to marine debris on the West Coast and created a new Coalition bringing together stakeholders and experts representing state, federal, regional, tribal, and NGOs within Washington, Oregon, and California to develop a framework to identify, assess, prevent and reduce marine debris.

The Ocean Protection Council (OPC) has long recognized the importance of reducing marine debris. In [2007 the Council adopted a resolution on reducing and preventing marine debris](#) and in 2009 a resolution endorsing extended producer responsibility. In 2011 marine debris was included in the OPC Strategic Plan as

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a focus area. OPC has articulated and supported twin strategies of reducing land based litter and source control.

In examining how to implement the OPC's Strategic Plan for marine debris staff undertook a review of efforts that are currently underway to reduce marine debris. The review identifies gaps and allows staff to make recommendations for future work. As part of that review OPC sponsored a workshop on June 28<sup>th</sup>. Based on the input received, a survey of stakeholders, and a review of the existing information including OPC resolutions, staff completed a report that summarizes the status of key work in California and identifies current gaps and needs entitled [\*Marine Debris: A Snapshot of Work in California.\*](#)

Below is a summary of the key findings:

- There is a need for increased collaboration on outreach and education efforts on marine debris, including a unified message.
- There is a need for statewide uniform policy on bans and regulations on common marine debris items.
- There is a need for statewide collaboration by a unifying body such as the California Marine Debris Steering Committee.
- There is a need to coordinate and concentrate work on preventing and reducing the sources of marine debris, such as by extended producer responsibility and bans and/or regulations on common marine debris items.
- There is a need for increased collaboration on marine debris legislation, particularly by state agencies in order to unify efforts.
- There is a need for state level legislative support by state and local agencies.
- There is a need for increased scientific research particularly on the subject matter of the impacts and toxicity of marine debris and socio-economic assessment.
- There is a need for coordination with industry members, particularly manufacturers and retailers of common marine debris items.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

Based on these findings staff recommends maintaining focus on reduction of land based sources of marine debris and pursuing options to reduce the creation of materials that end up as litter and marine debris. Additionally staff recommends the follow steps:

1. ***Coordinate and consolidate at the state and regional level:*** The OPC should increase its work to coordinate the currently dispersed efforts of the state and other parties through the rejuvenation of California's Marine Debris Steering Committee and the emerging West Coast Governor's Alliance Marine Debris Coalition. The OPC has dedicated significant effort towards addressing marine debris and generated substantial momentum at the state and regional level thus far. The OPC can play a pivotal role in leading and coordinating the various statewide and west coast efforts, making landmark progress in reducing trash. These committees are pursuing twin strategies of trash/debris removal and reduction of source material which mirror the philosophy already embraced by the OPC.
2. ***Invest in science:*** The OPC should strategically support scientific/socio-economic research, to assess the effectiveness and impacts of land based control schemes. An analysis of the roles and opportunities for source reduction should be made. Urgent needs identified in the Snapshot report include studies related to toxicity of plastics, hazardous materials and related water quality concerns, as well as socio-economic assessments. This information will enhance our current regional understanding of the effects of marine debris and enable a more comprehensive and consistent approach to curb the influx of pollution and toxins entering our waters.

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3. ***Identify legislative gaps and recommend solutions:*** The OPC should consider recommending or supporting legislation consistent with its current policies to reduce marine debris. As per section 35615.6 in the California Ocean Protection Act, the OPC should identify and recommend to the Legislature changes in law needed to achieve reductions in marine debris.
4. ***Support unified messaging to the public:*** The OPC should continue to support outreach and education efforts that contribute to a unified message on marine debris through the Thank You Ocean campaign, a partnership between NOAA and the State of California. Thank You Ocean has identified marine debris as a top priority issue and works to generate collaborative outreach efforts on marine debris through the Ocean Communicator's Alliance. The OPC's support for Thank You Ocean has enabled the campaign to continue its outreach to all Californians on marine debris and marine debris reduction through everyday actions. With this support, the campaign will continue to leverage resources in California to achieve efficient and unified outreach and messaging.

Staff recommends further refinement of these recommendations and the development of an action plan and possible updated resolutions for the council's future consideration.

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ATTACHMENT

**RELATED OPC MARINE DEBRIS INITIATIVES:**

**Marine Debris Steering Committee:** The OPC Resolution called for the OPC to chair a Marine Debris Steering Committee (hereafter, “Steering Committee”) to prepare a plan to implement the OPC Resolution. The Steering Committee is comprised of representatives from state agencies including the California Coastal Commission, California Integrated Waste Management Board, Department of Conservation, Department of Toxic Substances Control, State Water Resources Control Board, California State Parks, and Department of Transportation along with Keep California Beautiful. The Committee played an important role in coordinating and monitoring Japanese Tsunami Marine Debris (JTMD) and directed the creation of a JTMD webpage on the Thank You Ocean website, serving as a portal of information on all statewide efforts.

**West Coast Governors Alliance on Ocean Health (WCGA) Marine Debris Action Coordination**

**Team:** As part of the West Coast Governors Alliance (WCGA) on Ocean Health, the Marine Debris Action Coordination Team (ACT) brings together stakeholders and experts representing state, federal, regional, tribal, and not-for-profit organizations within Washington, Oregon, and California to create a framework to identify, assess, prevent and reduce marine debris. The Marine Debris ACT recently released a pivotal Marine Debris Strategy, with guidance from the Ocean Protection Council which establishes goals and objectives for a coordinated regional approach. The OPC is poised to support this important effort as a leader in carrying the Strategy’s momentum forward. The OPC Executive Director sits on the WCGA Executive Committee, and is in close contact with counterparts in Oregon and Washington on this issue.

**Marine Debris Database:** The [Marine Debris Database](#) was created by the Marine Debris Action Coordination Team (ACT) as part of the West Coast Governors Alliance (WCGA) on Ocean Health. The goal of the database is to consolidate and publish all of the beach cleanup events and derelict fishing gear data collected along the West Coast into one central location. The database will be beneficial for decision makers (policy and management), research, and education. for easy access to data and information in order to locate and compare beaches that are most impacted, specific sources, and the type and quantity of marine debris found throughout the three states. Notably, the WCGA’s Regional Data Framework Action Coordination Team and the Marine Debris ACT recently partnered in an effort to create useful policy tools capable of supporting management decisions. The OPC plays an integral role in creating and maintaining the Database.

**Marine Debris Coalition:** The Marine Debris Coalition is a diverse coordination body in beginning stages of development, is an evolution of the Marine Debris ACT. The Coalition aims to add value by providing a conduit to a higher level of government decision making. It provides a means to further efficient action in addressing marine debris by identifying gaps, finding funding, focusing attention on priorities, sharing information on effective actions, tracking work in standardized ways, coordinating education, and measuring progress towards goals and effectively breaking barriers between state agencies, federal government, NGOs to advance actions that implement the Marine Debris Strategy.