

Lawmakers reauthorize NOAA Marine Debris Program

October 11, 2018

President Donald Trump signed the Save Our Seas Act of 2018 (S. 3508) into law on October 11. The Save Our Seas Act reauthorizes the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Marine Debris Program through fiscal year 2022. It also strengthens certain Coast Guard requirements to promote safety in the maritime industry and establishes a Coast Guard Blue Technology center of expertise to promote awareness and implementation of marine technology within the Coast Guard.

The act has three titles: Marine Debris, Maritime Safety, and Center of Expertise. Title I reauthorizes the NOAA Marine Debris Program and appropriates \$10 million per year to the program. The NOAA Marine Debris Program investigates and prevents the adverse impacts of ocean pollution. It was originally authorized in 2006 as the Marine Debris Research, Prevention, and Reduction Act and amended in 2012 to provide a new funding mechanism to respond to clean-up efforts from severe marine debris events such as floods, storms, and tsunamis. The act directs the President to work with foreign countries to reduce marine debris, including forming new international agreements that create infrastructure to reduce waste discharges.

Senator Dan Sullivan (R-AK) introduced the bill on September 26 with bipartisan cosponsors Senators Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), James Inhofe (R-OK), and Bill Nelson (D-FL). The bill had strong bipartisan support, passing the Senate by unanimous consent on the same day and passing without objection in the House on the following day.

President Trump signed the bill alongside Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross and Acting NOAA Administrator Admiral Tim Gallaudet.

In a speech before signing the bill, President Trump said the 8 million tons of garbage dumped into our oceans globally are harmful to not only marine life, but also fishermen and communities that rely on the ocean's resources along America's coastline. "The United States has some of the most beautiful beaches and oceans in the world, and the coastlines are incredible," President Trump said. "As President, I will continue to do everything I can to stop other nations from making our oceans into their landfills. That's why I'm pleased — very pleased, I must say — to put my signature on this important legislation."

Sources: Library of Congress; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; White House.
