

# ***Unify Nations in Trash Elimination (UNITE) for our Oceans Act***

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## **Background**

Each year, billions of pounds of trash and other pollutants enter our oceans – and the amount is only expected to increase. In particular, plastics are estimated to comprise up to 80% of this marine debris and have pervaded almost every part of our marine environments, including the deep ocean. There is currently about 150 million tons of plastic in our oceans, which is forecasted to increase to 250 million tons by 2025. The scale of the issue is staggering, and it is having devastating effects on marine ecosystems, human health, and economies across the world. Although there are existing efforts to reduce marine debris, even more effort is needed. To address this critical issue and preserve our oceans, the world must take additional steps to produce, consume, recycle, and dispose of plastics and other materials more sustainably.

## **Proposed Solution**

The *UNITE for our Oceans Act of 2020* directs the U.S. government to work with the international community to establish a global trust fund to finance projects across the world to prevent and reduce marine debris and plastic pollution. The trust fund would solicit money from the international community and award grants to local governments, non-profits, and other entities for projects that would meaningfully address the issue. For example, grants could be used to improve waste management and recycling systems, create more sustainable products, or reduce the amount of trash currently in our oceans. These efforts would complement and expand on existing U.S. government and international marine debris efforts.

## **Legislative Summary**

The *UNITE for our Oceans Act of 2020* contains the following key components:

- **Trust Fund** – Directs the Secretary of State to work with U.S. federal agencies, individual countries, and international organizations to establish a “Trust Fund for Marine Debris and Plastic Pollution” (Trust Fund). The goal of the Trust Fund is to prevent and reduce marine debris and plastic pollution and facilitate the sustainable production and consumption of resources. The Trust Fund would be managed by a Board of Trustees, comprised of representatives of the countries that contribute.
- **Grants** – Specifies that the Trust Fund will award grants to national and local governments, non-governmental organizations, and other entities for projects to reduce marine debris and plastic pollution. These projects include efforts to reduce the amount of trash and plastics entering marine environments, encourage the use of sustainable materials, reduce the use and improper disposal of single-use plastics, and promote the reduction, reuse, and recycling of materials that pollute marine environments.
- **Administration** – Directs the Secretary of State and the Board of Trustees to appoint an Administrator to manage the Trust Fund and to implement standards and procedures to monitor the use of funds and establish criteria to determine how grants will be awarded.
- **Environmental and Health Assessments** – Directs the Board of Advisors to assess the environmental and health impacts of projects on local communities.
- **Advisory Board** – Establishes an Advisory Board to the Trust Fund to provide guidance in the development and implementation of grant projects and in leveraging contributions to the fund.
- **Reports** – Requires the Secretary of State to submit annual reports to Congress outlining the goals of the Trust Fund and the criteria that has been established to determine the programs and activities that it supports.
- **Appropriations** – Authorizes \$150 million to be appropriated for U.S. contributions to the Trust Fund each year for two years.