5GYRES

Date: April 28, 2015

Dear Representative Pitts and Honorable Members of the Committee,

We submit our testimony is support of legislation to keep plastic microbeads out of our waterways, from the drain to the ocean. In 2012 we published our findings of microbeads in the Great Lakes[1], and most recently we published the first global estimate of microplastic pollution worldwide[2]. This science shows that plastic pollution, specifically microplastics in our global waters, is an issue of growing ecological concern, and underscores the importance of responsible oversight of the use of plastics in personal care products.

The scientific community understands the lifecycle of microbeads:

- Normal use of facial cleansers and toothpastes wash microbeads down the drain.
- Typical waste treatment facilities are not capable of keeping all microbeads out of US waterways.
- Microbeads, and other microplastics, do not degrade, absorb toxins, and have been ingested by marine life, including game fish harvested for food.

Although many companies, including Proctor & Gamble, Johnson & Johnson and Unilever have announced their own phase-outs, we all agree that this legislation will level the playing field. Our primary objective is to keep all plastics out of our lakes, rivers, and oceans – including biodegradable plastics. Efforts to allow exemptions for biodegradable plastics are problematic, unless these alternatives can be shown to break down completely before entering our waterways.

Our solution is simple.

- Microplastic and microbeads do not belong in personal care products.
- Any alternative to plastic microbeads must degrade fully before it enters any aquatic environment.

The scientific community would like to see our legislators utilize the best science available to protect our natural resources. The continued use of plastic microbeads in consumer products, or the use of PLA or other alternatives that are non-biodegradable in our waterways, will perpetuate this critical environmental issue, putting additional ecological stress upon our precious marine and aquatic resources.

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Director of Research

[1] Eriksen, M., S. Mason, S. Wilson, C. Box, A. Zellers, W. Edwards, H. Farley, and S. Amato. 2013. Microplastic pollution in the surface waters of the Laurentian Great Lakes. Marine Pollution Bulletin 77(1-2):177–182.

[2] Eriksen, M., L. C. M. Lebreton, H. S. Carson, M. Thiel, C. J. Moore, J. C. Borerro, F. Galgani, P G. Ryan, J. Reisser. 2014. Plastic pollution in the world's oceans: more than 5 trillion plastic pieces weighing over 250,000 tons afloat at sea. PLoS ONE 9(12): e111913