

Tsunami Debris Cleanup Reimbursement Act (Discussion Draft)

Purpose: To give the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration the authority to use the \$5 million provided to the U.S. government by the Government of Japan for the purpose of assisting state governments with funding marine debris cleanup activities they have already undertaken, in response to the tsunami that struck Japan in March 2011.

Background:

- Following the tragic Tohoku earthquake and resulting tsunami that devastated the nation of Japan in March 2011, communities in the Pacific Ocean and on the West Coast of the United States began to experience a significant increase in marine debris arriving on their beaches and coastline.
- The first high-profile piece of debris was an abandoned fishing vessel that the U.S. Coast Guard sank off the coast of Alaska. Later, a 66-foot dock covered in potentially invasive marine species landed on an Oregon beach. Similar items have continued to arrive in recent months, and some oceanographers predict that the volume will increase.
- The cost of removing the debris from our coasts—and to responsibly address the threat of marine invasive species—has put an unexpected strain on already stretched state budgets.
- In December 2012, the Japanese government generously provided the United States government with \$5 million to assist with the cleanup and removal of debris from the tsunami.
- Because of the statutory language describing their grant authority, *NOAA can only provide grants to states for future projects, not those that are already-completed.*

Proposed Legislation:

- This legislation would give the NOAA Administrator authority to reimburse states for the cost of cleanup efforts they have already undertaken to address marine debris from the tsunami. NOAA have indicated to states that they would like to be able to provide reimbursement with these funds, but that they are currently constrained by law.
- The bill gives NOAA this reimbursement authority *only for the \$5 million that the U.S. government received from the Japanese government.*
- The funds in question would only be available to assist with a “covered marine debris event,” which is defined in the bill as “the events, including marine debris, resulting from the March 2011 Tohoku earthquake and subsequent tsunami.”