April 30, 2015

Committee on Energy & Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
VIA FACSIMILE (202) 225-2927

Re: Support for Microbead-Free Waters Act H.R. 1321

Dear Chairman Upton and Committee Members:

Surfrider Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that is dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of oceans, waves and beaches through a powerful activists network. We represent over 250,000 supporters, activists and members nationwide who care about the conservation of our coasts and oceans. We are submitting this letter to indicate our support for H.R. 1321 Microbead-Free Waters Act of 2015 by Rep. Pallone (D-NJ) and Rep. Fred Upton (R-MI), which prohibits sale of personal care products with synthetic plastic microbeads, which can enter our wastewater system and directly impact waterways and coastal waters.

Microplastic particles are found in all oceanic gyres, bays, gulfs and seas worldwide. Plastic does not biodegrade into elements or compounds commonly found in nature like other organic materials, but instead, photodegrades into smaller pieces of plastic causing land and water pollution that is virtually impossible to remediate. Plastic consumption by marine life can lead to intestinal clogging and starvation, and fish can become contaminated by the plastic’s absorbed toxins, which bioaccumulate up the food chain negatively impacting animals who feed on fish, including humans. These toxins pose serious threats to humans and wildlife that consume them.

Surfrider Foundation is supportive of the bill as written; however, we do want to caution against any amendment that would allow for a “biodegradability” exception. There must not be an exemption for “biodegradable” plastics, as such products do not actually exist. Plastics claimed to be biodegradable do not actually biodegrade into benign substances, but to break down into smaller pieces that exacerbate the plastic pollution problem. Further, as with traditional plastics, “biodegradable” plastics contain chemical additives that may be unknown and additionally dangerous. Any such exemption creates a loophole for the microplastics-using industry, which will render any attempts to mitigate the foregoing problems utterly futile.

Surfrider Foundation thanks the Committee for its consideration of federal actions to address marine plastic pollution. We support this bill as an effort to protect our waters from microbead pollution and keep our nation’s valuable natural resources safe for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Angela T. Howe, Esq.
Legal Director
Surfrider Foundation