



**Committee of Advisors
to the
Great Lakes Fishery Commission**



MEDIA ADVISORY: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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GREAT LAKES FISHING INTERESTS URGE PLASTIC MICROBEAD BAN

(June 18, 2014)—The bi-national committee of advisors to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission recently passed a resolution that calls on state, provincial and federal governments in the United States and Canada to prohibit the sale by 2015 of cosmetic or personal care products containing plastic microbeads. Advisors expressed concern that fish and wildlife mistake microbeads for food, which harms health. The resolution supports legislative action pending in several Great Lakes states.

Advisors noted that the cosmetic and personal-care product industry produces many facial scrubs, body washes, toothpastes and other products that contain tiny plastic abrasives called “microbeads.” These multicolored, very small, buoyant pieces of plastic are rinsed down the drain, passed through wastewater treatment plants, and discharged into waters. The first open water survey of the Great Lakes for plastic, conducted in July 2012, found some of the highest concentrations of microplastic ever recorded on earth, and microbeads from personal care products made up the majority of microplastic under 1 millimeter in size¹.

Once microbeads are discharged into the water, they persist – that is, they do not break down or degrade over time – and collect toxic chemical pollutants on their surface. The committee—representing recreational and commercial fishing, Aboriginal communities, public-at-large, academia, and state agencies—were concerned about the impact microbeads have on the fisheries of the Great Lakes. These toxic-coated microbeads are mistaken for food by organisms throughout the aquatic food web, where they can cause physical blockages and internal damage and serve as a pathway for dangerous pollutants to enter the food web and contaminate the fish and wildlife.

Advisors pointed out that plastic microbeads are not an essential component of cosmetics and personal care products and a number of companies have never used them in their products. Other companies

The Committee of Advisors consists of both U.S. and Canadian representatives, from First Nation, commercial, recreational, academic, agency, and public fishery interests in the Great Lakes Basin. Advisors provide advice to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission; U.S. advisors are nominated by the State Governors, and appointed by the commission. Canadian advisors are nominated by the Ontario Minister of Natural Resources and appointed by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

have voluntarily committed to stop using microbeads in their products. Natural, safer materials such as ground almonds, oatmeal, and sea salt provide a comparable abrasive “scrubbing” quality and do not pose a threat to the marine environment.

“The concentrations of microplastics in the Great Lakes rival the highest concentrations of microplastics present in the massive ‘floating garbage dumps’ that are found in the middle of the world’s oceans,” said John Jackson, Chair of the Canadian Committee of Advisors. “Every time we wash our face or brush our teeth with a product that contains microbeads, we are contributing to this wasteland. This is a key example of where individual action *can* make a difference – Great Lakes citizens not only have an opportunity to do the right thing, we have a duty to stop buying and using these products.”

“We were unanimous,” said U.S. committee chair Denny Grinold from the Michigan Charter Boat Association. “Advisors agreed that microbeads present a real and serious problem for the Great Lakes fisheries. We do not know yet how best to remove them from the system, what the long-term impacts will be on the health of the fish populations, or if there are human-health implications, but we do know that we can prevent more microbeads from entering our Great Lakes – we can stop this problem at the source and that is just what this resolution aims to do.”

A copy of the resolution is available on the Advisors’ web page: www.glf.org/staff/resol2014_2.pdf.

ⁱ Eriksen, M. et.al. (2013). Microplastic pollution in the surface waters of the Laurentian Great Lakes. *Marine Pollution Bulletin*. 77, 177-182