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Testimony on H.R. 1171, Marine Debris Act Reauthorization Amendments of 2011
To the House Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans, and Insular Affairs
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Good morning Chairman Fleming, Ranking Member Sablan, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify. My name is Paul Gilman, and I am the Senior Vice President and Chief Sustainability Officer of Covanta Energy, the world's largest producer of electrical energy using waste as a fuel. Covanta Energy operates and/or has ownership positions in 44 energy-from-waste facilities, primarily located in North America. We also have additional energy generation facilities in North America, including other renewable energy production facilities. Covanta's energy-from-waste facilities convert 20 million tons of trash annually into 9 million megawatt-hours of clean, renewable energy. I am here today to express our support for H.R.1171 and the important efforts carried out by the NOAA Marine Debris Program.

This process of recovering energy from wastes that would otherwise be disposed of in landfills is recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the European Union as a more sustainable use of waste than landfilling. In 2008, Covanta was the recipient of the Energy Innovator Award from the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy for providing communities with an environmentally sound solution to their solid waste disposal needs.

In 2008, Covanta Energy expanded its waste to energy efforts to address the growing problem of marine debris, and in particular, derelict fishing gear. Derelict fishing gear (gear that is lost in the marine environment) has been identified by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) as a major source of debris impacting the marine environment. It can damage ecosystems as nets and heavy equipment settle upon the ocean floor or through 'ghost fishing,' when a net continues to catch fish after it is lost. Gear can also impact navigational safety, damage fishing equipment and boats that are in use, and have economic repercussions on fishing enterprises and coastal communities. Estimates suggest that derelict fishing gear results in over \$250 million in lost lobster catches and over 1 million lost crabs in the Chesapeake Bay region. Additionally, In the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary it was estimated that up to 25% of the reef damage at certain times was due to abandoned trap movement, resulting in decreased productivity of fishing grounds.

To help reduce the impact of derelict fishing gear in U.S. coastal waters, the Fishing for Energy Partnership was launched in 2008. This is a public-private partnership between Covanta Energy, the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Marine Debris Program, the

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and Schnitzer Steel. This partnership works closely with state and local agencies, community and fishermen groups, and local ports to install bins at convenient and strategic locations where fishermen can easily dispose of gear at no cost. When these bins fill up, Covanta Energy and Schnitzer Steel collect the gear and cover the costs of transporting it to a facility where the gear is converted into clean, renewable energy.

The “Fishing for Energy” partnership first originated in the Northwest Hawaiian Islands, where over 1.4 million pounds of derelict gear have been recovered and recycled, producing enough electricity to power 260 homes for an entire year. Since then, the Fishing for Energy partnership has expanded to 25 ports across the country, in states including New Jersey, Massachusetts, New York, Oregon, California, Rhode Island, Virginia, Maine, and Florida. From these 25 sites, we have recovered an additional 1.1 million pounds of old or derelict gear, and we hope to expand these bins into new regions in the future.

The public-private Fishing for Energy partnership has considerable tangible benefits. First, it reduces the financial burden imposed on commercial fishermen when disposing of old gear in landfills. It also encourages commercial and recreational fishermen to reel in any derelict fishing equipment they might find and deposit it for free at designated drop-off sites near fishing ports. Next, the Fishing for Energy Partnership has the added benefit of reducing the impact of derelict gear on fishing habitat and target species, helping to reduce the economic impact of derelict gear. Lastly, grants from the program which we co-fund with our partners, have provided paychecks for fishermen who have been actively recovering debris from fishing grounds like Long Island Sound.

In 2010, the Fishing for Energy Partnership was awarded the prestigious Coastal America Partnership Award, which is the highest level award for partnership efforts from the President of the United States. The award recognizes outstanding collaborative, multi-agency and multi-stakeholder efforts that leverage and combine resources to accomplish coastal restoration, preservation, protection and education projects. This award demonstrates how successful our partnership has become.

The Marine Debris Research, Prevention, and Reduction Act of 2006 provided a framework for the Fishing for Energy Partnership. Through this partnership and the research the Act has driven, we have established a foundation of knowledge and practice that will, if continued, make a real difference for these communities. Because of our successes, my private and public sector colleagues in Europe now wish and plan to emulate our efforts. H.R.1171 will call for the continuation of these public-private partnerships to address marine debris, and Covanta Energy is fully supportive of the ideas and language put forth in the Reauthorization.

The non-regulatory NOAA Marine Debris Program has and will continue to make significant progress to reduce the impacts of marine debris on coastal economies, navigation safety, and the environment. Another important aspect of the work they carry out includes documenting the significant costs of marine debris. This is important as the private sector weighs the costs and benefits of engaging in efforts such as ours. We have funded our own activities and subsidized those of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and as a publicly traded company, our obligation to our shareholders makes us think carefully about programs like this. However,

because this Partnership is well organized, well run, and tangibly benefits many coastal communities where we operate, we can easily justify the expense.

Covanta Energy is prepared to continue our work to address marine debris and derelict fishing gear through the Fishing for Energy Partnership. We hope to expand our efforts to new ports, so fishing communities all over the country can participate. We hope that you will add your voices of support for H.R.1171 and the worthwhile efforts carried out by the NOAA Marine Debris Program by moving this important legislation forward.