

Testimony of Congressman Les AuCoin
Before the House Committee on Public Works
and Transportation
September 19, 1977

AMENDMENTS TO THE FEDERAL WATER POLLUTION CONTROL ACT

Mr. Chairman, I am extremely pleased to present this testimony in support of efforts to resolve questions surrounding the disposal of seafood wastes into the marine environment.

As you know, Congressman Don Young and I have been concerned about this problem for several months. I'm delighted that the Committee has agreed to consider it today and am eager to work with you to achieve a solution which is fair and equitable to everyone involved.

The Senate has included in its report on S. 1952 language which directs the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency to conduct a study of the effects of seafood processing wastes on the marine environment. My own view is that this mandate should be included in the bill itself. Moreover, I urge that the bill not just authorize the study but prohibit the Administrator of EPA or any other state from changing the requirements of existing permits issued under Section 402 of the Act until EPA reports its findings to Congress and Congress has had an opportunity to act on them.

If, however, the Committee decides that language in the conference report is adequate, I urge you to redraft the Senate version to make the study directive more precise. In this regard the economic and social costs of requiring treatment should be examined as well as the "geographical, hydrological and biological characteristics" of the waters receiving such wastes. The duration of the study should be extended from the five months proposed by the Senate to 18 months, and the Administrator and the states should be prevented from plunging ahead with their seafood waste discharge enforcement programs until the study is completed.

Mr. Chairman, it has been my experience that few groups are more concerned about the quality of our marine environment and our waterways than the fishing industry. It is, after all, their life. A continuing harvest of fish literally depends on good, clean water.

Fishermen and seafood processors alike believe that the study we are proposing here will prove beyond any doubt that seafood processing wastes, when adequately dispersed, will not damage the marine environment and may, in fact, enhance it. In this regard they expect the study to affirm the finds of earlier studies conducted by the University of Washington and the National Cannery Association.

My own observations during a recent visit to Newport, a seafood processing community in my district, confirmed the

problems caused by EPA regulations that too-sharply restrict dumping of biodegradable wastes. Processors have been required to make unnecessary heavy capital investment for equipment to keep fish wastes out of nearby Yaquina Bay -- with sad results. Fishing for perch, sea trout and other edible species off the docks and wharves now is virtually fruitless because there's no longer seafood particles which the fish can feed on. The same goes for crabbing, and oyster growth in the bay has slowed as well. In fact, the entire food chain in Yaquina Bay appears to have been disrupted as a result of regulations which were intended to do just the opposite.

It's my sincere hope that you will not deny seafood processors their day in court. I believe their case is a sound one and will result in a national policy that benefits not only them but everyone committed to clean water in this country.

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