





SUPPORT SB 1114 TO REDUCE THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF CALIFORNIA'S SWORDFISH FISHERY

April 7, 2016

Dear California Legislator,

On behalf of our hundreds of thousands of members and supporters statewide, we strongly urge you to support SB 1114, which reduces the environmental impacts of California's swordfish fishery. SB 1114 will end the most harmful fishing practice on the West Coast by reducing the number of damaging drift gillnets (DGN) used to catch swordfish off California's coast and phasing out the remaining few drift gillnet permits. The bill also transitions the industry to the more sustainable deep-set buoy gear.

California is the last state on the West Coast that still allows the use of harmful drift gillnets in its swordfish fishery. Large scale drift gillnets have been banned on the high seas, in other states, and in many countries worldwide because of the unavoidable impacts on marine wildlife, including whales, dolphins, sharks, pinnipeds, and sea turtles. Many of the species harmed are protected under state and federal law or covered under international agreements, such as the sperm whale, leatherback sea turtle, loggerhead sea turtle, common thresher shark, Bigeye thresher shark, smooth hammerhead shark, scalloped hammerhead shark, shortfin mako shark and longfin mako shark.

Drift gillnets are responsible for the death of an estimated 16 endangered sperm whales in the last decade. An estimated 22 Pacific leatherback turtles (an endangered species) and loggerhead sea turtles also have been caught. If more than one Pacific leatherback is killed in a six-year period from any human activity, the entire population recovery is at risk. At least one leatherback was killed in California in 2015, which means that the continued operation of the DGN fishery increases the risk that we will exceed the six-year cap on leatherback turtle mortalities and jeopardize the entire population. There are only an estimated 1438 nesting Pacific leatherback sea turtles left, and they are

on a course to go extinct by 2030. Drift gillnets have also caught at least five megamouth sharks, a species so rare that fewer than 102 have ever been seen worldwide. An estimated 885 marine mammals have been killed by drift gillnets in the last decade.

According to data collected by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's observation program, California's drift gillnet fishery kills or injures approximately seven times more whales and dolphins than all other observed fisheries in California, Oregon, Washington, and Alaska combined, and 13 times more than any other single observed fishery on the West Coast. In fact, more than two-thirds of what is caught in California's drift gillnets is bycatch – not the target species being fished – and is discarded overboard.

The high bycatch and environmental impacts of drift gillnets have led researchers and regulators to turn to deep-set buoy gear as an alternative gear for swordfish. This gear has been deployed on the east coast for years and has had four years of successful trials in California through grants from the Ocean Protection Council and other environmental and fishing groups. Deep-set buoy gear has proven to be among the most sustainable methods to catch swordfish. As opposed to the inefficiency of drift gillnets, about 94 percent of the catch from deep-set buoy gear can be kept and sold at market. SB 1114 will transition California's swordfish fishery away from harmful drift gillnets to more sustainable deep-set buoy gear by authorizing the new technology for use in California, in coordination with the Pacific Fisheries Management Council, while phasing out drift gillnets.

Because our oceans are critically important, with ocean health and diversity connected to other aspects of life on the planet, we urge you to support SB 1114 and take action to end the use of drift gillnets in California. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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