Sperm whales are truly magnificent creatures, making some of the deepest dives of all whale species. Of the estimated 971 sperm whales in the Pacific West Coast stock, the National Marine Fisheries Service estimated that 16 whales were taken by the drift gillnet fishery in 2010 alone, far exceeding the allowable take of these endangered species under the federal Endangered Species and Marine Mammal Protection Acts.

**ICONIC WHALES IN TROUBLE**

Sperm whales diving in unison

Examples of bycatch documented from the drift gillnet fishery include:

- Six whales
- Leatherback sea turtles
- White-sided dolphins
- Northern right whale dolphins
- Pacific electric rays
- Short-finned pilot whales
- Humpback whales
- Enormous whales
- Spiny whales
- California sea lions
- Northern elephant seals
- Blue sharks
- Salmon sharks
- Bigeye thresher sharks
- Mola molas
- White sharks
- Megamouth sharks
- Short-and-long-beaked common dolphins

Oceana is the largest international advocacy group working solely to protect the world's oceans. Oceana uses policy, science, and public education to win policy victories for the oceans. Since 2001, we have protected over 1.2 million square miles of ocean and innumerable sea turtles, sharks, dolphins and other sea creatures. More than 550,000 supporters have already joined Oceana.

To learn more, please visit www.oceana.org.

End the Walls of Death

Replace devastating drift gillnets off California with cleaner fishing gear

About Sperm Whales:
- Sperm whales can dive for a duration of over an hour and reach depths of up to 3,280 feet.
- They are the largest toothed whales, with males weighing up to 45 tons and measuring 52 feet in length.
- Sperm whales have the largest brain of any animal, it can take up about 1/3 of the whale’s total body length.
- Female sperm whales only produce a call approximately once every five years.

Examples of bycatch documented from the drift gillnet fishery include:

- Leathertback sea turtles
- White-sided dolphins
- Northern right whale dolphins
- Pacific electric rays
- Short-finned pilot whales
- Humpback whales
- Enormous whales
- Spiny whales
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- Northern elephant seals
- Blue sharks
- Salmon sharks
- Bigeye thresher sharks
- Mola molas
- White sharks
- Megamouth sharks
- Short-and-long-beaked common dolphins
WHAT WE SHOULD DO NOW:

1. Phase out drift gillnets altogether.
2. Replace with cleaner gears such as harpoons which have zero bycatch and discards for every swordfish caught.
3. Until drift gillnets are phased out, consider other cleaner alternatives.
4. Until drift gillnets are phased out, institute hard bycatch caps on all marine life taken.

FISHING INDUSTRY AT A CROSSROAD

In the Pacific Ocean off California, mile-long driftnets are used to capture swordfish and thresher sharks. But that’s not all they catch. When the nets are deployed in the evenings to soak overnight to ensnare their targeted catch, they also entangle large open ocean travelers, including whales, dolphins, seals, sea turtles, numerous shark species and many other ecologically and economically important fish. The nets inflict such devastation on marine life that they earned the name “Walls of Death.”

The drift gillnet fishery tosses 20–30% of its fish catch back into the ocean dead or damaged. In the 2010–2011 season, over 27 common molas, fondly called ocean sunfish, were discarded for every swordfish caught.

In 2012, based on new scientific research and as a direct result of Oceana’s petition to the federal government, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) designated 41,914 square miles of ocean waters off the shores of Washington, Oregon, and California as critical habitat for Pacific leatherback sea turtles under the Endangered Species Act. This adds additional habitat protections on top of the previously established Pacific Leatherback Conservation Area (PLCA), where drift gillnet fishing is prohibited annually from August 15 through November 15 to protect leatherback sea turtles that feed off the West Coast. The PLCA extends from the high seas and from Point Sur, California to mid-Oregon.

Since then, the price of a pound of swordfish caught with harpoons is feasible, has virtually no bycatch, and results in a higher price per pound for catch at the dock. It is time to remove the “Walls of Death” from our California shoreline and move our ocean-based economy into the future.

Next steps:

1. Replace with cleaner gears such as harpoons which have zero bycatch and consider other cleaner alternatives.
2. Until drift gillnets are phased out, require 100% observer coverage to adequately monitor and account for all bycatch and discards.
3. Until drift gillnets are phased out, institute hard bycatch caps on all marine life taken.

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