

Stop the Nets:

Enact The Driftnet Modernization and Bycatch Reduction Act (S.273/H.R.404)

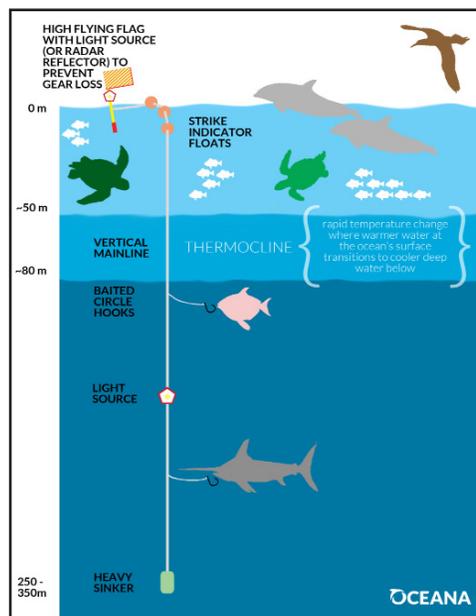
Large-mesh drift gillnets—mile long, nearly invisible nets set at night near the ocean’s surface to capture swordfish—entangle, injure and kill incredible numbers of whales, dolphins, sea lions, sea turtles, sharks and other animals. This single fishery kills more dolphins each year than all other observed U.S. West Coast and Alaska fisheries combined. In 2021, federal observers documented two humpback whales caught in the fishery despite only seven vessels fishing and only 23% observer coverage.

Federal waters off California and Oregon are the only place in the nation where drift gillnets are still allowed to catch swordfish. California state legislation (S.B. 1017) established a transition program to assist fishermen to move to more selective gear and sunset all the state drift gillnet permits in 2024. The California Ocean Protection Council and Oceana contributed a combined \$2 million to implement the program, and the California legislature allocated funding sufficient to cover all willing participants. Participating fishermen become first in line for new federal deep-set buoy gear permits, an innovative technique that targets swordfish selectively without causing harm to marine mammals and sea turtles.

Federal legislation to permanently end large-mesh (14 inch and greater) drift gillnet fishing gear in the United States passed Congress in the previous session but was vetoed by President Trump. In this session of Congress, the bill has again passed both the Senate (S. 273) and House (in the America COMPETES Act, H.R. 4521), but still needs to be passed in a common legislative vehicle and signed by President Biden. This legislation is crucial to transitioning California’s dirtiest fishery once and for all. Every day that goes by with these nets in the water is another day of deadly risk for ocean wildlife.

Transitioning to Cleaner Fishing Gear

Ending the use of large mesh drift gillnets will not mean the end of fishing for swordfish in California. It will simply require a transition to deep-set buoy gear, which has proven to be a profitable fishing method. This gear is actively tended, so swordfish are landed faster, meaning the fish is higher quality and can sell for nearly double the price of the fish caught in drift gillnets. The Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch Program now recommends deep-set buoy gear swordfish as a “Best Choice.”



Transitioning to deep-set buoy gear to catch swordfish

WILL SAVE

an estimated



27 WHALES



548 DOLPHINS



333 SEALS & SEA LIONS

24 SEA TURTLES



and

70 SEABIRDS



over 10 years¹

Transitioning to deep-set buoy gear will save countless whales, sea turtles, seals, sea lions, seabirds and other animals, while continuing a sustainable West Coast swordfish fishery.

With the state of California's transition program now complete, there's just one more step to make sure deadly drift gillnets are off the water for good. Federal legislation to eliminate the remaining federal permits will ensure this fishery never again threatens whales, sea turtles, dolphins and other animals in our nation's waters.

Where We Are Now

- Fishermen have already participated in the State of California program to transition away from swordfish drift gillnets. The program compensated fishermen who forfeited permits and turned in their nets for recycling, and also aided their transition to fish with deep-set buoy gear. In total, 38 drift gillnet permit holders participated in the program, including 23 fishermen who were recently active in the fishery; however, at least 24 federal drift gillnet permits remain, allowing continued swordfish drift gillnet fishing unless Congress acts.
- Oceana, the California Ocean Protection Council, and the California state legislature contributed a total of \$3.2 million to fully fund the transition for all willing fishing participants.
- Enacting the Driftnet Modernization and Bycatch Reduction Act will bring a permanent end to this destructive fishing gear nationally.
- The Pacific Fishery Management Council approved a new deep-set buoy gear fishery, and the National Marine Fisheries Service will soon begin issuing federal permits for buoy gear to former drift gillnet fishermen participating in the state transition program.



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Left: Pacific leatherback sea turtle; Right: Elephant seal pup at Big Sur

Congress should send the Driftnet Modernization and Bycatch Reduction Act to the President's desk to be signed in to law this year—phasing out federal permits for large mesh drift gillnet fishing. This is an important opportunity to make a tangible difference by getting large-mesh drift gillnets off the water permanently, while supporting local fishermen and protecting ocean wildlife.

For more information, visit

www.oceana.org/StopTheNets



Pacific white-sided dolphin; NOAA photo



Humpback whales in Monterey Bay; Shutterstock/Chase Dekker

Swordfish caught with deep-set buoy gear can be worth nearly

TWICE AS MUCH

as swordfish caught with drift gillnets



Short-finned pilot whale trapped in drift gillnet; NOAA photo

1. Based on estimates from Carretta, J.V, J.E Moore, and K.A Forney, 2018. Estimates of marine mammal, sea turtle, and seabird bycatch from the California large-mesh drift gillnet fishery: 1990-2016. NOAA Document PSRG-2018-07 (February 12, 2018).