



June 12, 2018

California State Senate  
 California Assembly  
 Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Please Support SB 1017 – Sustainable Swordfish & Marine Life Protection Act of 2018

Dear Members of the California State Senate and Assembly,

We write to urge your support for SB 1017 to phase out the use of drift gillnet gear in California’s offshore waters while promoting sustainable, local fisheries.

Mile-long drift gillnets, meant for swordfish and thresher sharks, form underwater walls that entangle iconic ocean marine life, preventing them from surfacing for air where many eventually drown or become critically injured. After soaking in the ocean overnight, the nets are pulled from the water often containing unacceptably high numbers of dead and dying animals—including whales, dolphins, sea lions, sea turtles, numerous shark species and many other ecologically and economically important finfish such as striped marlin.

Both historically and in recent years, the swordfish drift gillnet fishery on average throws back to sea more marine life than it keeps, with among the highest bycatch rates in U.S. fisheries. Representing over 70 different species, at least 20 percent of this bycatch is already dead prior to being discarded and it is

not known how many more animals die after being released. With cleaner gear types available and historic lows in fishery participation, it is time to phase out the remaining swordfish drift gillnets and incentivize the use of cleaner fishing methods. A new method of swordfish fishing called deep-set buoy gear has been shown, through California Ocean Protection Council-funded research and three years of commercial trials, to effectively catch swordfish with minimal bycatch, earning higher prices than drift gillnet-caught swordfish due to the better quality of the product. The Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) is currently in the process of authorizing this method for commercial use.

Recent state and federal efforts to reduce swordfish drift gillnet bycatch through additional management measures have failed. After an extensive, multi-year stakeholder process, the PFMC unanimously recommended in September 2015 to impose hard caps on the bycatch of endangered marine mammals and sea turtles, and require 100% observer coverage or electronic monitoring of drift gillnet vessels by 2018.

However, in June 2017, after proposing regulations to implement the PFMC's recommendations, the National Marine Fisheries Service withdrew the proposed rule, and has yet to move forward with increased monitoring requirements. The California Fish and Game Commission and Department of Fish and Wildlife supported the hard caps and 100 percent monitoring requirements, strongly opposed the federal government's decision to withdraw the proposed rule, and opposed the recent creation of federal DGN permits.

Due to concerns about bycatch, the states of Washington and Oregon no longer permit their fishermen to use large mesh drift gillnets, leaving California as the last remaining state in the nation to allow its fishermen to use this indiscriminate fishing method. For the benefit of healthy oceans and coastal economies that rely on robust marine life populations and California's reputation as a producer of sustainable seafood, we thank you and offer our support for your efforts.

Sincerely,

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cc: Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr.  
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Pacific Fishery Management Council