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Wildlife Heritage and Conservation
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June 26, 2018

The Honorable Ben Allen
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 5072
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Support of concepts within Senate Bill 1017

Dear Senator Allen:

The California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) writes in support of the concepts within SB 1017 regarding the California drift gillnet (DGN) fishery. As you know, the DGN fishery that operates off of California is complicated. Finding comprehensive, long-term solutions to address the environmental impacts associated with the DGN fishery is needed, while also considering economic impacts within the solutions.

One of the Commission's current priorities is to support California's sustainable coastal fishing communities. To maintain a robust coastal fishing economy, fishing communities need both adaptive management and flexibility to fish a variety of fish stocks. This priority aligns with one of the objectives articulated by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), which governs management of federal fisheries, including the DGN swordfish fishery. The MSA highlights the importance of providing opportunity, and ensuring the environmental and economic viability of fisheries and fishing communities, while at the same time avoiding and minimizing bycatch.

As you may be aware, the DGN fishery is managed federally by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC); however, a California state-issued DGN permit is required to participate. The fishery primarily consists of swordfish, but can also involve the take of other commercially valuable species such as bonito, thresher shark, mako shark and opah. The DGN fishery operates under a limited entry permit system, which has included increasingly more restrictive gear requirements and time-area closures intended to limit bycatch of protected species. In recent years, PFMC has been actively engaged in reviewing DGN management measures and evaluating alternative gear,

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including deep set buoy gear (DSBG). PFMC is in the process of authorizing DSBG, which would help to open additional access for California fishermen to fish this healthy and sustainable fish stock with lower bycatch.

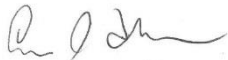
Senate Bill 1017 highlights two key areas for the DGN fishery: (1) transition of DGN to DSBG and (2) financial compensation to DGN permit holders. Over the past twenty years, the number of U.S. West Coast DGN swordfish fishery participants and landings have significantly declined, attributed in large part to regulations and time/area closures implemented to mitigate bycatch in the fishery. From a peak of 251 permits in 1986, the number of participants has dwindled to below 70; in 2017, all DGN swordfish landings were made by just seventeen of these permittees. However, concerns remain regarding management measures implemented to address bycatch and the subsequent economic impacts to California fishermen and coastal communities, despite a healthy swordfish stock, a high demand for swordfish, and concerns over imported swordfish.

Collaborative research and experimental fishing permit trials of DSBG conducted thus far indicate that the gear can minimize interactions with protected species and minimize finfish bycatch, and may prove to be economically viable for some fishermen. DSBG, if implemented, should also be aligned with economic incentives to allow for fishermen to easily convert from DGN to DSBG.

As mentioned, sustainable coastal fishing communities are a priority to the Commission and to Californians. Continuing to work with fishermen on this challenging issue to ensure their economic livelihoods is critical to the successful transition to a different gear type and to the resiliency of these communities.

Thank you for your work on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Eric Sklar
President

cc: Eduardo Garcia, Chair, Committee on Water, Parks and Wildlife, California State Assembly
James Gallagher, Vice Chair, Committee on Water, Parks and Wildlife, California State Assembly
Charlton H. Bonham, Director, California Department of Fish and Wildlife