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Fish and Game Commission



Wildlife Heritage and Conservation
Since 1870

Melissa Miller-Henson
Acting Executive Director
P.O. Box 944209
Sacramento, CA 94244-2090
(916) 653-4899
fgc@fgc.ca.gov
www.fgc.ca.gov

November 8, 2018

The Honorable John Thune
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce,
Science, and Transportation
512 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bill Nelson
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce,
Science, and Transportation
512 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Thune and Ranking Member Nelson:

On behalf of the California Fish and Game Commission (Commission), I write to express our support for S. 2773, the Driftnet Modernization and Bycatch Reduction Act; this legislation is complementary and consistent with recent legislation signed into law by Governor Jerry Brown that will transition away from the use of large-mesh drift gillnets offshore California. As you may be aware, the drift gillnet fishery is managed at the federal level by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC); however, a state-issued drift gillnet permit is also required to participate in the fishery in California, which will soon be phased out.

S. 2773 highlights two key areas for the California drift gillnet fishery: (1) a transition away from large-scale, drift gillnet fishing and (2) making federal grant funds available to affected fishermen. We request the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation continue to support this bipartisan and thoughtful legislation by reporting it to the floor and supporting approval by the Senate.

In September 2015, PFMC expressed its intent to change management of the California drift gillnet swordfish fishery using tools available under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act; PFMC's intent was to create a new framework to address bycatch concerns in the fishery, including hard caps on protected species. However, in June 2017, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) withdrew a proposed rule implementing hard caps, the primary purpose of which would have been to create transparency, accountability measures, and incentives for best practices within the fishery. The Commission unanimously supported implementation of hard caps and increased monitoring in the drift gillnet fishery, and strongly disagreed with NMFS' withdrawal of the proposed rule.

Honorable John Thune and Honorable Bill Nelson

November 8, 2018

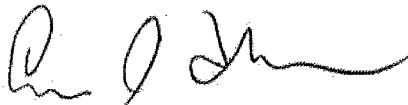
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In recent years, PFMC has been actively engaged in evaluating alternative gear, including deep-set buoy gear; PFMC is in the process of authorizing deep-set buoy gear, which would help open additional access for California fishermen to fish for swordfish with minimal bycatch.

Sustainable coastal fishing communities are a priority to the Commission and to Californians. In support of our coastal fishing communities, the Commission supports authorization of deep-set buoy gear as an alternate method of catching swordfish with minimal bycatch. Further, S. 2773 will make drift gillnet fishermen eligible to receive federal grant money and provide fishery participants with additional resources to transition to more sustainable and selective gear, such as deep-set buoy gear.

Thank you for your work on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Eric Sklar
President

cc: Members, U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Honorable Dianne Feinstein, Member, U.S. Senate
Honorable Kamala D. Harris, Member, U.S. Senate
Dr. Fern Gibbons, Policy Director for Surface Transportation, U.S. Senate
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Jeffrey H. Lewis, Counsel, U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and
Transportation
Lauren Linsmayer, Knauss Sea Grant Fellow, U.S. Senate Committee on
Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Brendan Dailey, Legislative Aide for Honorable Shelley Moore Capito, U.S. Senate
Neal McMillin, Legislative Assistant for Honorable Roger Wicker, U.S. Senate
Ann Robertson, Legislative Assistant for Honorable Lisa Murkowski, U.S. Senate
Lora D. Snyder, Professional Staff, U.S. House of Representatives Committee on
Natural Resources
John Laird, Secretary, California Natural Resources Agency
Charlton Bonham, Director, California Department of Fish and Wildlife
Craig Shuman, Marine Region Manager, California Department of Fish and Wildlife