



For Immediate Release

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California Fishermen Applaud Veto of Feinstein Bill S 906

California swordfish fishermen are applauding the veto of California US Senator Diane Feinstein's Bill, S 906, the Driftnet Modernization and Bycatch Reduction Act. This bill would have unnecessarily shut down the federal drift gillnet (DGN) fishery and force the substitution of fishing gears which are unproven, putting about thirty small vessel fishing families out of business. DGN gear targets swordfish, and also lands thresher shark and Opah, all of which are abundant, fished within legal harvest limits and delivered to local California markets and restaurants. The DGN fishery is sustainably managed by the Pacific Fisheries Management Council under the world-renowned Magnuson-Stevens Act, as well as the Endangered Species Act and Marine Mammal Protection Act.

S 906 was pushed hard by national environmental groups who have consistently mischaracterized the DGN fishery. These groups have peddled a false narrative of at-sea carnage, when in fact the record and statistics prove that the DGN fishery has developed responsibly into a sustainable federal fishery. Since 2010, there have only been three interactions with endangered species, and in two of those incidents, the

turtle and a whale were released alive. This remarkable record has come through years of work with stakeholders, including federal and state fisheries managers, scientists, fishermen and environmental groups. As for bycatch, the vast majority of non-target species landed are brought ashore and sold to markets; they are not wasted. In fact, since 2015 over 90% of DGN catch is either marketed or returned alive to the ocean.

Senator Feinstein claims that this veto endangers whales, dolphins and sea turtles, but in reality the proposed Feinstein law was likely to have increased harm to the very marine mammals and sea turtles it sought to protect. Without US caught swordfish, these animals would be impacted by foreign fisheries that have far less effective environmental standards. U.S. swordfish fishermen would be out of work, and American consumers would be stuck with lower quality and more environmentally damaging swordfish: a lose-lose outcome.

One of the core flaws of the bill was its reliance on an alternative fishing method, Deep Set Buoy Gear (DSBG), to replicate the harvests of the DGN fishery. This new gear is still experimental, and the Pacific Council has yet to determine its viability as a new gear type. When DSBG was first proposed, it was intended to supplement – not replace – DGN gear. It is a complete myth that DSBG will allow DGN fishermen to make a living. It is also worth noting that DSBG has caught at least one loggerhead sea turtle in 2018 and one baby sperm whale in 2020, and witnesses say the baby sperm whale likely perished from this interaction. In other words, DSBG has likely killed the same number of endangered species over the last 2 years as DGN has in the last 10 years resulting in another net conservation loss should the fleet transition to DSBG.

DGN fisheries contribute to the economic success of coastal communities, providing jobs throughout the supply chain, from deck hands to restaurant workers.

“This bill would have done nothing but put hard working fishing men and women out of business for political reasons only. It would mean less fresh swordfish for the west coast, more imports from unregulated countries, and because this fishery in reality has such few interactions with protected species and marine mammals, it would have little benefit, if any, to their populations.”, said Gary Burke, longtime DGN fisherman from Santa Barbara.

“People love getting fresh swordfish at our fishermen’s market. And Opah is a tasty, abundant, more affordable fish which can only be caught in volume with DGN gear” said Pete Halmay, President of the San Diego Fishermen’s Working Group, a regional non-profit which is currently supplying Opah and other seafood to local food banks.”We invite Senator Feinstein and her staff to come meet with us.”

DGN fishermen are willing to work with federal and state fisheries managers to develop alternative gear that is economically viable, but they urge Senator Feinstein and her staff to recognize that their fishing is not causing a current crisis in the Pacific Ocean.

“We are grateful that this flawed bill was rejected, and I hope Senator Feinstein will consider the points raised in the veto message if she proposes similar legislation in the new Congress. I am sure that fishermen would be happy to work with her and her staff to create a bill that would help fishermen,” said Kathy Fosmark, a longtime fishing industry leader from Moss Landing in Central California.

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