



NORTHERN CALIFORNIA'S SECOND SENATE DISTRICT

SENATOR MIKE MCGUIRE

MEDIA



RELEASE

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Contact: Kerrie Lindecker, Kerrie.Lindecker@sen.ca.gov or (707) 319-3654

Senator McGuire's whale protection bill one step closer with approval in Assembly committee this week

With increasing entanglement count, SB 1287 will protect whales from crab gear

Sacramento, CA – Last year's crab season delay had a disastrous impact on our state's fishing industry, and it wasn't great news for humpback whales either – California saw a record number of entanglements off the Coast. Several proactive/short-term measures have been taken by the fishing industry, emergency entanglement teams and the state legislature to address this increasingly common occurrence.

Senator Mike McGuire's legislation that will help permanently protect whales by removing lost and abandoned gear from the ocean received widespread and overwhelming support in the Senate, passing with a vote of 38-0 earlier this month. This week, as the bill continues to progress, it was approved in the Assembly Water, Parks & Wildlife Committee.

"This program is a true example of teamwork. California crabbers, environmentalists and the state have come together to protect whales and keep our ocean clean of old fishing debris," Senator Mike McGuire said. **"And it couldn't come at a more important time. There were a record number of whales entangled off the California Coast last year and the numbers are alarming in the first half of 2016. There's a simple solution, and we're working closely with crab fishermen and ocean and marine mammal protection groups to get this bill signed into law."**

The Whale Protection & Crab Gear Retrieval Act, which was proactively initiated by California's Dungeness crab fishermen, would create a regulatory program with incentives for fishermen to retrieve Dungeness crab fishing gear that would otherwise be lost in the ocean. It's estimated that thousands of pots are lost every season and these pieces of gear could have hundreds of feet of rope attached to a locator buoy.

The lost gear has created marine debris and entanglement hazards for whales and other marine life, along with others in the crab and salmon fleets.

"In 2015, 61 whales were reported entangled off the West Coast, 57 in California alone. Humpbacks were the main species impacted. This is the highest total since the National Marine Fisheries Service started keeping records in 1982," Senator McGuire said. **"Just in the first half of this year, there have already been 27 reports of entangled whales off California's coast. In light of these concerning developments, we are working with the**

thousands of hard working men and women of California’s Dungeness Crab Fleet and environmental organizations from across the state to bring forward a lost fishing gear recovery program.”

Senator McGuire also supported a one-time funding allocation of \$100,000 from the State’s General Fund to assist with emergency disentanglement efforts, supporting a highly specialized volunteer-based whale disentanglement emergency response team. The team is on-call 24/7 and works diligently to disentangle whales; and the group continues to volunteer their time and personal funds to ensure whales are able to swim freely in California waters. Successful grant funding in the past years provided sufficient monetary support for emergency responses in the single-digits. As emergency responses increased, the funding remained the same. This year’s additional allocation will help achieve the dual-goals of safely disentangling more of the whales and allow for the collection of additional data that can ultimately inform long-term solutions.

Crab fishermen continue to take the lead on the whale entanglement issue and many are already taking part in a voluntary pilot project that was initiated two years ago. Approximately 1,500 lost crab pots have been collected in that program. SB 1287 will build upon the successful pilot project by advancing a statewide solution to the growing problem.

Based on recommendations from the Dungeness Crab Task Force, SB 1287 will call on the Department of Fish and Wildlife to establish a retrieval program. One hundred percent of the program will be paid for by industry related fees, not the taxpayers. Dungeness crab fishermen, who obtain a retrieval permit through this program, will collect old crab traps after the crab season has closed each year. Those fishermen will be paid a recovery bounty for each trap retrieved from the ocean. The bill also establishes a fee to be paid by the owner that lost or abandoned the crab trap. A crab fisherman who doesn’t buy back their lost or abandoned crab traps will not be able to get their vessel permit the next season. The creation of a self-perpetuating program to recover fishing gear is a necessary action of the commercial Dungeness crab fishing industry to continue operating as a responsible, sustainable fishery.

“The Dungeness crab fishery is in the top tier of California’s commercial seafood catch and the entire industry has weathered a challenging few years, including the historic delay of this year’s Dungeness crab season,” Senator McGuire said. “This gear retrieval program will be a great step forward in cleaning up our oceans and making a safer environment for the people who work the Pacific for their living and the whales and marine life that call the ocean home.”

A broad coalition of fishing and environmental groups are unified in supporting SB 1287 which will increase mariner safety while reducing marine debris and the potential for whale entanglement, including: Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations, Sierra Club, Californian’s Against Waste, California Coastkeeper Alliance, Earthjustice, Golden Gate Salmon Association, Golden Gate Fishermen’s Association, Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom, The Marine Mammal Center, Monterey Bay Aquarium, Trinidad Bay Fishermen’s Marketing Assn, Crescent City Fishermen’s Assn, Half Moon Bay Seafood Marketing Assn, the Morro Bay Commercial Fishermen’s Assn, Natural Resources Defense Council, Ocean Conservancy, Oceana, Surfrider and many more.

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