

Congress Reintroduces Bill to Protect Marine Life, End Drift

Bill Will Save Whales, Sea Turtles, Dolphins, Sharks and Other Animals from Drowning in Large-mesh Drift Gillnets and Encourages Shift to More Sustainable Fishing

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Washington, DC

The bi-partisan **Driftnet Modernization and Bycatch Reduction Act** was **introduced** in the Senate, led by Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Senator Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.V.) to end the destructive use of large-mesh **drift gillnets** in U.S. ocean waters and save countless whales, dolphins, sea turtles, and sharks as well as sportfish. These mile-long, nearly invisible nets drift overnight to catch swordfish off California, but entangle, injure and kill more than 70 other species of marine life. According to federal data, more dolphins are killed in the California drift gillnet fishery than all other observed U.S. West Coast and Alaska fisheries combined.

The federal legislation will prohibit the use of large mesh drift gillnets in United States federal waters (out to 200 miles from shore) in five years and promote the adoption of cleaner fishing gear that reduces the incidental catch of marine wildlife. California recently established a transition program where fishermen can receive funding for turning in their nets and permits. The federal legislation authorizes the federal government to provide additional funding to fishermen to facilitate this transition to cleaner methods, namely deep-set buoy gear. Deep-set buoy gear uses hooks set during the daytime that selectively catch swordfish and are actively checked by fishermen, as opposed to a large net left unattended for hours like a drift gillnet. The actively tended gear not only greatly reduces harm to wildlife but also leads to higher quality swordfish. The gear type has **been successfully proven to be profitable and sustainable**, resulting in its authorization in 2019 by the Pacific

Fishery Management Council. Drift gillnet fishermen who participate in the transition program will be first in line for new federal deep-set buoy gear permits.

In 2020, deep-set buoy gear caught four times more swordfish than drift gillnets and garnered a 62% higher price per pound due to the quality of the fish and sustainability of the gear. According to landing data from the Pacific Fisheries Information Network, drift gillnets caught 19.8 metric tons of swordfish in 2020 at an average ex vessel price of \$3.62/lb worth a total of \$157,728. Deep-set buoy gear caught 79.4 metric tons of swordfish at an average of \$5.88/lb worth a total of \$1,028,932. All deep-set buoy catch was caught with Exempted Fishing Permits.

Conversely, large mesh drift gillnets throw overboard more wildlife than what is kept and due to their wasteful nature, these nets are banned in many places around the world. Ocean waters off California and Oregon are the last places in the U.S. where large mesh drift gillnets are still allowed.

Congress passed similar legislation last year by unanimous consent of the Senate and a bi-partisan majority of the House of Representatives; however, President Trump vetoed the bill in the final hours of the Congressional session.

{note: Mr Trump said publicly he vetoed because he doesn't like CA}