



NORTHERN CALIFORNIA'S SECOND SENATE DISTRICT

SENATOR MIKE MCGUIRE

MEDIA



RELEASE

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Governor Brown signs McGuire's Whale Protection Bill

SB 1287 will protect whales from lost or abandoned crab gear

Sacramento, CA – A record number of whales are suffering from entanglements in California waters – 2015 saw 57 whales entangled off our coast, which is the highest total since the National Marine Fisheries Service started keeping records in 1982. Just in the first half of this year alone, there were another 40 reports of entangled whales off California's coast. Many of these whales are becoming entangled in lost or abandoned crab fishing gear.

North Coast Senator Mike McGuire's legislation that will help permanently protect whales by removing lost and abandoned crab fishing gear from the ocean was signed Friday afternoon by Governor Jerry Brown. SB 1287 also received widespread and overwhelming support in the Senate and Assembly.

"With whale entanglement numbers skyrocketing off the California coast, we were able to bring together crabbers and environmentalists to get this common sense bill signed into law. This bill will save the lives of countless threatened and endangered whales and it will keep California's crab fleet fishing," Senator Mike McGuire said.

The Whale Protection & Crab Gear Retrieval Act, which was proactively initiated by the thousands of hard working men and women who make up California's mighty crab fleet, 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 light of the record number of whale entanglements over the last several months, this legislation will provide us with the retrieval programs to ensure California's beloved humpbacks and blue whales will have the protection they need to thrive," Senator McGuire said.

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 builds 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 were 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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