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Ms. Dorothy Lowman, Chair
Pacific Fishery Management Council
7700 NE Ambassador Place, #101
Portland, OR 97220
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Mr. William W. Stelle, Jr.
Administrator, Northwest Region
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Seattle, WA 98115-0070
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Dear Chair Lowman and Administrator Stelle:

We write to express our support for the authorization of deep-set buoy gear (DSBG) under the Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan. Importantly we view the authorization of DSBG as an important step in transitioning away from the other less sustainable gear.

We understand that authorization of DSBG will involve several key steps and decision points. By starting the process now in conjunction with ongoing exempted fishing permits currently using this gear, the Council can ensure the availability of a steady, increasing supply of buoy-caught swordfish coming into West Coast ports. We are encouraged that the Council tentatively scheduled action on DSBG at its March, June and September meetings and we recommend the Council prioritize resources to meet this aggressive schedule and authorize the gear during 2016.

The benefits and efficacy of using DSBG to catch swordfish include a significant reduction in incidental catch and a higher-quality product entering the market that earns higher prices. After five years of research on the West Coast – in particular through the Pflieger Institute of Environmental Research – indicating profitability and minimal bycatch, there is sufficient data to support the authorization of DSBG.

In authorizing DSBG, the Council has the opportunity to further develop a plan detailing a switch to more selective gears. Because the authorization process takes at least three meetings, we are confident the details of a “phase-in” plan for this gear can be developed without needing to delay the process.

By authorizing DSBG, the Council will take a significant step toward providing a sustainable gear alternative for the West Coast swordfish fishery. Thank you for your attention to this issue. We look forward to an update as things progress.

Sincerely,



Tom Raftican, President