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## **Buoys provide safer alternative for catching swordfish in Pacific Ocean**

March 9, 2016

By Gavin Newsom and Ben Allen  
Special to The Bee

Bottlenose dolphins swimming in the ocean, sea turtles feeding along our shore, majestic whales traversing the coast – all of these are signs of a healthy and vibrant Pacific Ocean that makes California's coastline unique.

Fishing is also part of our state's heritage. That's why we have joined with thousands of other California residents writing to encourage West Coast fishery leaders to authorize a promising new fishing gear that minimizes harm to the iconic species that define our coast while also sustaining a productive swordfish industry.

We believe that the Pacific Fishery Management Council should authorize deep-set buoy gear as an alternative for commercial fishermen targeting West Coast swordfish. It is scheduled to hold a public hearing on the issue Thursday and vote on Friday.

Now, the predominant method of catching swordfish on the West Coast involves submerging mile-long drift gillnets overnight. Not surprisingly, these nets entangle many species of marine life other than swordfish. In fact, 65 percent of the catch is thrown overboard, including dolphins, striped marlin and even the occasional whale.

Even though California's swordfish fleet is relatively small – only about 20 active vessels – the indiscriminate nature of this fishing method means that it kills more dolphins, whales and porpoises than all other fisheries on the West Coast and Alaska combined. California is the only state on the West Coast that still allows the use of harmful drift gillnets in its swordfish fishery.

We believe there is a better way. Through collaborative grants, the California Ocean Protection Council has supported the research and development of alternatives for catching swordfish, most notably deep-set buoy gear. The gear works by dropping weighted hooks as deep as 1,200 feet below the surface, where swordfish tend to stay during the daytime. When an indicator float drops below the surface, fishermen immediately pull in the line.

After five years of research and experimental fishing, buoy gear has earned the support of fishermen, seafood buyers and chefs for two big reasons: It minimizes the catch of species the fishermen don't want, while earning a premium for sustainably caught swordfish.

About 94 percent of the catch can be kept and sold. In addition, because buoy-caught swordfish is put on ice within minutes of being caught, it produces a higher-quality product and a higher price for fishermen.

That's why we are encouraging the Pacific Fishery Management Council to authorize deep-set buoy gear in 2016. It's crucial that we provide swordfish fishermen the ability to earn a living while safeguarding ocean wildlife valued by all of us.

*Gavin Newsom is lieutenant governor of California and can be contacted at [gavin.newsom@ltg.ca.gov](mailto:gavin.newsom@ltg.ca.gov). Ben Allen, a Santa Monica Democrat, represents the 26th Senate District and can be contacted at [senator.allen@senate.ca.gov](mailto:senator.allen@senate.ca.gov).*

Dorothy Lowman, Chair  
Pacific Fishery Management Council  
1100 NE Ambassador Place, #101  
Portland, Oregon 97220

Re: Agenda Item F.3 – Deep-Set Buoy Gear Amendment Scoping

Dear Chair Lowman and Council Members:

As members of the sport angling community, we write in support of the Council's recent actions to clean up the drift gillnet fishery for swordfish in California and provide the following recommendations. Specifically, we believe the Council should hold the drift gillnet fleet accountable through use of hard caps and 100 percent monitoring while transitioning the fishery to actively tended and more selective gear types and deny any application to open a longline fishery.

The drift gillnet fishery catches several species marine life that are ultimately thrown overboard including recreationally important species like striped marlin. Drift gillnets are inherently nonselective and will have unintended interactions even with increased monitoring and management. Therefore, we encourage the Council to move away from drift gillnets and transition the fishery to more selective and actively tended gear types like harpoon and buoy gear.

We also write to express our concern with the Council considering the authorization of a longline fishery both outside and inside our Exclusive Economic Zone. Longlines are simply another indiscriminate form of fishing and are not the solution to the drift gillnet problem. Resources should not be focused on developing a new swordfish fishery that uses outdated and wasteful methods. Instead, the Council and NMFS should focus their resources on transitioning to more selective and actively tended fishing gears.

As long as the drift gillnet fishery exists, we ask the Council to hold the fleet accountable. We support the Council's implementation of hard caps on protected and vulnerable species and 100 percent monitoring to ensure those hard caps are adequately enforced. Because the catch of some species is a rare event, the Council will not have a clear picture of how many animals are caught in the drift gillnet fishery and cannot enforce hard caps on protected species until every fishing trip is observed. We support the use of electronic monitoring, but only if it is proven to be as effective as onboard observers. Until electronic monitoring is available, the Council should impose 100 percent observer coverage.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. As resource users, we look forward to working together toward sustainable management of our fisheries.

Sincerely,

We the 2100+ undersigned

To view full list of signers, visit:  
<https://goo.gl/59uv8v>

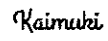
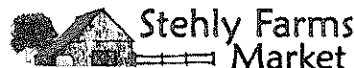
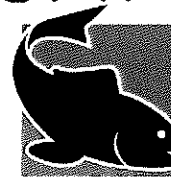
# Seafood Industry Leaders Support Buoy

Agenda Item F.3.b  
Supplemental Public Comment 3  
March 2016

More than 100 businesses across the seafood supply chain call for authorization of deep-set buoy gear



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March 10, 2016

Dorothy Lowman, Chair  
Pacific Fishery Management Council  
1100 NE Ambassador Place, #101  
Portland, Oregon 97220

### **RE Agenda Item F.3 Deep-Set Buoy Gear Amendment Scoping**

Dear Chair Lowman and Council Members:

More and more Americans are asking for sustainable, locally sourced seafood when they dine out. As commercial fishermen, seafood processors, distributors, chefs, restaurateurs and others along the supply chain, we take pride in our ability to provide local seafood to our customers. We are always looking for innovative ways to sell the freshest product possible, and that often means telling a story a story that separates the good fish from the bad.

That's why we are excited about an emerging innovation in the domestic swordfish fishery: deep-set buoy gear. This gear type is actively tended and minimizes interactions with non-targeted species such as sea turtles and dolphins.

Deep-set buoy gear has benefits in addition to less bycatch. Fishermen are able to land, bleed and put the fish on ice quickly, so swordfish caught with buoy gear is of the highest quality. This means a higher price to innovative West Coast fishermen and a tastier product for consumers.

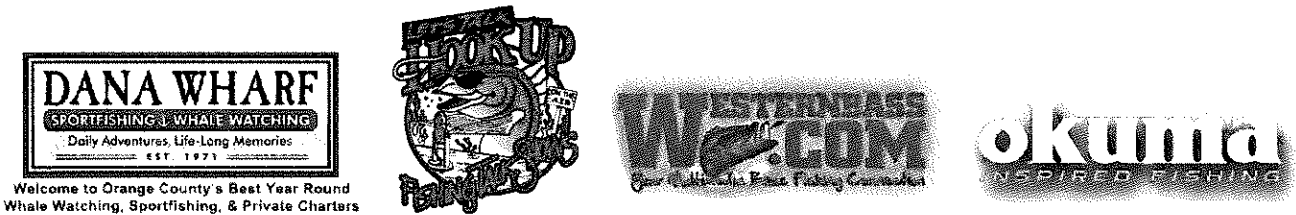
The Council is now considering transitioning buoy gear from an experimental gear to a federally authorized gear under the Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan. Collectively we recommend that the Council make authorization of buoy gear a priority and initiate this process early in 2016 to expedite the authorization of buoy gear as soon as possible.

We all share in the responsibility of making our fisheries more sustainable. Deep-set buoy gear is a step in that direction. The commercial market and many in the fishing fleet are ready to make this gear type a viable alternative on the water. Working together, we can deliver a sustainably caught and higher quality product to our customers.

Sincerely,

To view all signers, please visit: <https://goo.gl/LRZw03>

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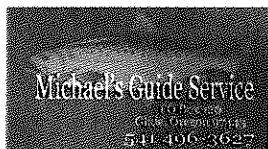


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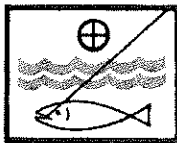


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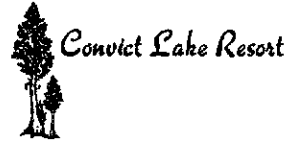
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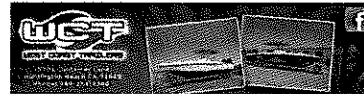
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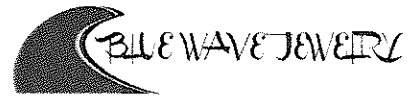
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Dorothy Lowman, Chair  
Pacific Fishery Management Council  
1100 NE Ambassador Place, #101  
Portland, Oregon 97220

RE: Agenda Item F.3 – Deep Set Buoy Gear Amendment Scoping

Dear Chair Lowman and Council members,

Sportfishing is the backbone of our industry and sportfishermen are the lifeblood keeping our businesses running. We write to stand with the thousands of sportfishermen calling for change in the West Coast swordfish fishery, and encourage you to begin the authorization process for deep-set buoy gear in March.

The West Coast commercial fishery for swordfish needs alternative gear types to drift gillnets. These mile-long nets, set for hours at a time overnight, ensnare finfish such as striped marlin and many other species of marine life resulting in 64% of the catch being discarded overboard, often injured or dead.

Last year, the Pacific Fishery Management Council took several positive steps in developing a comprehensive Swordfish Management & Monitoring Plan with the goal of reducing bycatch in the West Coast swordfish fishery. We commend the Council for its approval of hard caps on protected and vulnerable species, as well as 100 percent monitoring in the drift gillnet fishery, as interim measures until a transition to cleaner gear occurs.

Additionally, we applaud the Council's decision to leave authorization of shallow-set longline gear outside the Exclusive Economic Zone off of the Council's 2016 agenda. We hope this deletion is permanent, as any West Coast-based longline fishery would not achieve the Council's goal of reducing bycatch and are not a sustainable alternative to drift gillnets.

Deep-set buoy gear provides such an alternative, and we strongly encourage the Pacific Fishery Management Council to authorize this gear in a timely manner. Buoy gear is actively tended, using a hook-and-buoy system that enables fishermen to drop their hooks as deep as 1,200 feet to reach swordfish and respond to a bite within minutes. Scientists and cooperating fishermen have tested the gear extensively for nearly five years and it maintains a 94 percent marketable catch rate.

We believe the work to implement hard caps and 100 percent monitoring can coincide with authorization of deep-set buoy gear. Please ensure that authorization of this important innovation is a priority in 2016.

Thank you for your consideration,

**For full list of 143 signers, visit: <https://goo.gl/mgj7hn>**

American Fishing Tackle Company (AFTCO)  
Bill Shedd- President  
Santa Ana, CA

Mike Leonard- Ocean Resource Policy Director  
American Sportfishing Association  
Alexandria, VA

Shimano American Corporation  
Phil Morlock- Director, Environmental Affairs  
Irvine, CA

West Marine  
Randy Repass- Founder  
Watsonville, CA



111 SW Columbia Street, Suite 200  
Portland, Oregon 97201  
pewtrusts.org

March 11, 2016

Chuck Bonham, Director  
California Department of Fish and Wildlife  
1416 9th Street, 12th Floor  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: F.3 - Deep-set Buoy Gear Amendment Scoping**

Dear Chair Lowman and Council Members:

From February 29 through March 7, The Pew Charitable Trusts has collected an additional 5,016 public comments to CDFW from California residents in support of deep-set buoy gear authorization in 2016. As of February 29, the Pacific Fishery Management Council received 10,015 comments from outside California with a message of support for this action, following on similar messages in 2015 from thousands of citizens across all 50 states.

The California petition itself is included here, along with a compilation of the names and locations of the 5,016 individual signers that were gathered as of March 10, 2016. The Department may continue to receive additional comments in the days ahead.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Tara Brock'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'T'.

Tara Brock  
Senior Associate, U.S. Oceans, Pacific  
The Pew Charitable Trusts  
tbrock@pewtrusts.org

Chuck Bonham, Director  
California Department of Fish & Wildlife  
1416 9th Street, 12th Floor  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Deep-set Buoy Gear Authorization in California**

Dear Director Bonham:

I am writing to encourage you, along with your designees to the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC), to keep the authorization of deep-set buoy gear on track this year. By taking this action, the PFMC can help to meet its stated commitment to reducing bycatch, as outlined in its draft Swordfish Fishery Management and Monitoring Plan from September 2015.

Californians take pride in managing natural resources sustainably. However, many are surprised to learn that off the West Coast, hundreds of animals are unnecessarily entangled and killed by drift gillnets—an indiscriminate form of fishing gear targeting swordfish and thresher sharks.

Fortunately, better alternatives are available. Deep-set buoy gear uses a hook-and-buoy system that enables fishermen to drop their hooks as deep as 1,200 feet to reach swordfish during the day. The gear boasts a 94 percent marketable catch rate, meaning that almost all of what is caught can be kept and sold. Buoy gear has been tested by scientists and cooperating fishermen with minimal bycatch of non-target species and a consistent catch of swordfish. In fact, if buoy gear authorization stays on track, it will have received six years of extensive testing on the West Coast by the time it is allowed on the water.

Deep-set buoy gear has other benefits as well. Fishermen are able to catch and put the fish on ice quickly, so swordfish caught with buoy gear is of the highest quality. This means a higher price for innovative West Coast fishermen and a tastier, more sustainable choice for consumers.

By working to authorize deep-set buoy gear, California can uphold its reputation as a champion of conservation while supporting sustainable fisheries for our coastal communities. Please work with the California members of the PFMC to ensure the authorization of this gear type in the California swordfish fishery.

Sincerely,

*We the undersigned*

To view all 5,016 signers, please visit <https://goo.gl/hfCnV2>