



United States Senate

September 11, 2019

Mr. Phil Anderson, Chair
Pacific Fishery Management Council
7700 NE Ambassador Place, #101
Portland, OR 97220

Mr. Barry Thom
Administrator, Northwest Region
NOAA Fisheries
7600 Sand Point Way, NE, Bldg 1
Seattle, WA 98115-0070

Re: Agenda Item I.4 – Deep-Set Buoy Gear Authorization; Final Action

Dear Chair Anderson and Administrator Thom:

I understand the Pacific Fishery Management Council will meet later this month and consider full authorization of deep-set buoy gear as an allowable gear for swordfish. I write to applaud and support this action.

Deep-set buoy gear is a proven method of harvesting West Coast swordfish while minimizing bycatch of iconic Pacific Ocean marine wildlife such as dolphins, whales, and turtles, as well as recreationally important species like striped marlin. Authorization of this gear would facilitate continued progress toward a more sustainable and environmentally-friendly fishery. Importantly, final authorization of deep-set buoy gear would better facilitate multiple policy objectives that Congress established for U.S. fisheries management under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, including requirements to achieve optimum yield in each fishery and minimize the bycatch of non-target species.

More than 8,000 hours of on-the-water trials, under a variety of ocean conditions, have confirmed the excellent performance of deep-set buoy gear. It has been in development for almost a decade and utilized on an experimental basis for nearly five years. The resulting data demonstrates that 98 percent of overall deep-set buoy gear catch is marketable, and over 80 percent of that catch is swordfish - the target species. This is in stark contrast to large-scale mesh drift gillnets, which routinely result in more marine life thrown overboard than retained.

Moreover, due to its higher quality, swordfish caught with deep-set buoy gear has earned nearly double the price of drift gillnet-caught swordfish, allowing fishermen to make more profit per fish. As Council data indicates, in 2017, five vessels fishing with deep-set buoy gear caught swordfish valued at \$408,874

(\$81,774 per vessel) while seventeen drift gillnet vessels landed swordfish valued at \$890,443 (\$52,379 per vessel).

Additionally, I ask that the Council consider implementing a limited entry program for deep-set buoy gear permits south of California's Point Conception to ensure that this new fishery grows at a responsible and sustainable rate. As part of a limited entry program, I ask that you prioritize the issuance of permits to active drift gillnet permit holders who trade in their drift gillnet permits. Some fishermen have already given up using drift gillnet gear in favor of deep-set buoy gear; this tiered approach to permit issuance would further incentivize the transition away from drift gillnets.

Over the years, the Council has received testimony from numerous stakeholders invested in the management of the West Coast swordfish fishery, including recreational fishermen, food industry representatives, and conservation groups, regarding the ecological and economic importance of developing and fully authorizing deep-set buoy gear.

Full authorization of deep-set buoy gear will not only pave the way for a truly viable alternative to wasteful drift gillnet fishing, but also provide access to higher-quality swordfish, benefitting fishermen and consumers alike.

Once again, thank you for your continued consideration and attention to this issue critical to California and the entire west coast. Please do not hesitate to contact me or my staff with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dianne Feinstein". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping underline.

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

DF/as