

Tackling Derelict Fishing Gear: SB 899 (Simitian)

The Problem

Derelict fishing gear includes nets, lines, crab and shrimp traps/pots, and other recreational and/or commercial harvest equipment that has been lost or abandoned in the marine environment.¹

Most fishing nets are made from synthetic fibers that take a long time to degrade and may never degrade. Commercial netting can take **30-40** years to decompose, and monofilament fishing line can take up to **600** years to decompose.⁶

Derelict fishing gear can entangle divers and swimmers. Lost or abandoned gear can wrap around rudders, propellers, anchors, or drive shafts and significantly damage marine vessels.

Marine Impacts

Lost or abandoned nets have been found to drift thousands of miles trapping and killing fish, turtles, seabirds, and other marine life.⁸

Virtually all of the entanglement records compiled for 34 species of fish and 8 species of crab in a recent study show death caused by derelict fishing gear.⁹

“Ghost fishing,” where marine animals are trapped in lost or abandoned nets and traps, is a lead cause of marine mammal deaths each year.¹⁰

Sensitive marine habitats and ecosystems are threatened by lost or abandoned gear.

On average, almost 10% of all brown pelicans and gulls admitted to wildlife rehabilitation centers in California are injured by entanglement in, or ingestion of fishing gear. California sea lions, pacific harbor seals and Northern elephant seals are also consistently injured.¹¹

“...derelict fishing gear poses serious threats around the world, entrapping marine life, destroying coral reefs and other habitat, and even posing danger to humans.”

– U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy



Green turtle that swam months with a lost net. Cerro Verde, Uruguay. (c) Karumbe Fotos.

Sea turtle caught in derelict net. Photo courtesy of Proyecto Karumbe.

A Need for Legislation

Nine in 10 Californians say the quality of the beach and ocean is just as important to them personally as well as for the overall quality of life and economy in the state.¹³

California’s ocean economy is valued at \$43 billion.¹⁴

On February 8, 2007 the Ocean Protection Council adopted a comprehensive resolution on marine debris that outlines specific actions for California to prevent and reduce marine debris. Specifically, the Resolution calls for target reductions of derelict fishing gear.⁷

Washington State, Oregon, Hawaii, Louisiana, Florida, Mississippi, Alabama, and Texas all have derelict fishing gear removal programs.¹²

SB 899:

- Establishes a database of known derelict fishing gear, including the location and type of gear.
- Requires a person who loses commercial fishing gear within the waters of the state and offshore to report this loss within 48 hours.
- Requires that all fishing licenses and brochures contain a toll-free telephone number and website to report derelict fishing gear.
- Establishes target reductions for the removal and disposal of derelict fishing gear by January 1, 2010.
- Requires traps and trawl nets to be tagged or coded with the owner’s identification number to assist in the identification and recovery of derelict fishing gear.



Removal of derelict fishing gear. Photo courtesy of the WA Department of Fish and Wildlife/NOAA.

References: ¹Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/derelect/>. Retrieved on March 13, 2007. ; ²SeaDoc Society, Gilardi, Kirsten. *California Derelict Fishing Gear Pilot Project: Final Report to the State Coastal Conservancy*. March 1, 2007.; ³*Id.* ⁴National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. http://marinedebris.noaa.gov/about/main_hawaiian.html. Retrieved on March 13, 2007.; ⁵Alaska: MCA Foundation; Washington: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. http://marinedebris.noaa.gov/about/nws_dfg.html. Retrieved on March 15, 2007. ⁶Sea Grant Mississippi-Alabama. *Protecting Your Fishing Waters: Ways to Reduce Derelict Fishing Gear and Other Marine Debris*. 2005.; ⁷Ocean Protection Council Resolution on Reducing and Preventing Marine Debris, adopted February 8, 2007; ⁸Sea Grant Mississippi-Alabama. *Protecting Your Fishing Waters: Ways to Reduce Derelict Fishing Gear and Other Marine Debris*. 2005.; ⁹Laist, David. (1994). *Impacts of Marine Debris: Entanglement of Marine Life in Marine Debris Including a Comprehensive List of Species with Entanglement Records*. In Coe, J. and Rogers, (Ed.), *Marine Debris* (pp. 105-106). Ann Arbor: Springer-Verlag New York, Inc.; ¹⁰Sea Grant Mississippi-Alabama, *Id.*; ¹¹California Lost Fishing Gear Recovery Project, communication 2/14/08; ¹²Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Derelict Fishing Gear Removal Project <http://wdfw.wa.gov/fish/derelect/>; Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Line Recovery and Recycling Program: <http://www.dfw.state.or.us/news/2006/march/021.asp>, University of Hawaii SeaGrant; Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission: <http://www.derelectcrabtrap.net/background5.html>;