

Responses by Gary Burke to QFRs from the 5-8-19 Hearing on H. R. 1979 before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Oceans and Wildlife

Questions from Rep. T J Cox to Gary Burke

- 1. In 2017, swordfish harvested with drift gillnets commanded a price of \$3.37 per pound while swordfish caught with deep-set buoy gear brought a landed price of \$6.65 per pound. I understand the higher value of the swordfish caught via deep-set buoy gear comes from the ability to bring a fresher fish to shore. According to the Pacific Fishery Management Council, due to the higher value of deep-set buoy gear swordfish, the California economy would see an 18-19% increase in jobs, output, income, value-added and taxes from the swordfish fishery. I understand change can also bring challenges, but if the new gear can help you sell a higher-value product, is that not a win-win for the long term?*

Response: 2017 is just a snapshot of a price for fish caught in an experimental fishery that is still currently under evaluation by Pacific Council and NMFS. The question takes out of context the real-world economic dynamics related to commercially harvested swordfish off the coast of California. To date, vessels using DSBG have not demonstrated the ability to harvest swordfish in quantities close to the amount harvested by DGN boats.

While there have been instances when a small number of DSBG boats have been able to secure a relatively high price for their swordfish, market forces lead to much lower prices when this volume of DSBG is higher coupled with swordfish imports flooding the market. This was demonstrated in late-2018 when the price of DSBG swordfish dropped to just \$4.00 per pound. What we saw when this happens is that DSBG boats stay at the docks and do not fish until they believe they have an opportunity for a higher price.

The DGN fleet is able to harvest a greater number of swordfish which allows their fishermen, even when they obtain an ex-vessel prices \$3.37 a pound, to compete effectively with imported swordfish. While DSBG boats stayed at the docks and cut their season short late-2018 due to the \$4 per pound ex-vessel price, DGN boats enjoyed \$7 per pound ex-vessel in January 2019 as they were the only boats that were delivering fresh swordfish at that time. This is why it is important not to draw conclusions from snapshots of a price for fish caught with any particular gear at any particular time.

When DSBG was proposed under an EFP, the Pacific Council considered it as a supplement to the harpoon fishery. It has never been considered as having the potential to replace the volume of swordfish harvested by the DGN fleet. In a letter to the sponsor of H.R. 1979, Representative Lieu, a significant number of fishermen using DSBG under the EFP stated that the transition to DSBG mandated by the bill is premature.

“Our concern is based on the fact that while there is potential for alternative gear to be used in this fishery, currently there is no existing gear that can be substituted for the DGN gear and still allow fishermen to earn a living.”

2. *According to NOAA, data collected from observer financial data, Pacific Fisheries Management Council estimates, and scientific costs estimates from the National Marine Fisheries Service indicate that the cost of managing the fishery is more than double the value of the fish. Taxpayers pay for observers and regulators for fisheries to protect public marine resources. Why does it make sense to continue allowing the use of drift gillnets, while burdening the taxpayer, when there are more sustainable and profitable alternatives?*

Response:

NOAA's Observer Program is an important federal fisheries management tool that facilitates the collection of catch and other statistical information for specific fisheries, pursuant to the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries and Conservation and Management Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. 47 fisheries around the U.S. participate annually in the Observer Program, and with the exception of Alaska, all receive financial support from NOAA.

The Southwest Region Fisheries Observer Program has placed observers aboard vessels in the California drift gillnet fishery fleet since 1994. As the size of the fleet has decreased, the overall cost to the Observer Program has also become lower. If DSBG is approved as a valid fishery, the DSBG fleet will be required to participate in the Observer Program to collect catch and marine mammal and turtle interaction data. If 50 or more permits are approved and utilized for a DSBG fishery, the overall cost to the Observer Program will be much higher than that of the current and projected DGN fleet.

Questions from Rep. Tom McClintock to Gary Burke

1. Please provide the Committee with the statistical information for finfish bycatch in your fishery from 2015 to 2018.

Response: Please also see attached graphs and spreadsheet.

Species	Total Caught	Number Kept	Number Returned		
			Alive	Dead*	Unknown
Swordfish	1107	1106	0	1	0
Striped Marlin	8	0	0	8	0
Blue Marlin	1	0	0	1	0
Bluefin Tuna	311	261	0	50	0
Tuna, Skipjack	74	56	0	18	0
Yellowfin Tuna	25	25	0	0	0
Albacore	15	15	0	0	0
Pacific Bonito	175	155	0	20	0
Common Thresher Shark	166	164	1	1	0
Bigeye Thresher Shark	17	1	0	16	0
Shortfin Mako Shark	166	151	8	7	0
Salmon Shark	11	0	0	11	0
Blue Shark	335	10	214	90	21
Smooth Hammerhead Shark	4	1	0	3	0
Unidentified Shark	2	0	2	0	0
Bat Ray	8	0	7	1	0
Unidentified Ray	2	0	2	0	0
Pelagic Stingray	34	0	32	2	0
Louvar	12	12	0	0	0
Escolar	1	1	0	0	0
Pacific Hake	1	1	0	0	0
Jack Mackerel	1	0	0	1	0
Pacific Mackerel	55	14	0	41	0
Unidentified Mackerel	2	1	0	1	0
Common Mola	1186	0	1149	35	2
Oilfish	1	1	0	0	0
Opah	226	226	0	0	0
Pacific Pomfret	2	2	0	0	0
Yellowtail	6	6	0	0	0
Total Finfish Bycatch					
			1415	307	23
81% of finfish bycatch is returned alive					

* Finfish not retained due to regulations including species or size limitations

2. *Please provide the Committee with the statistical information on marine mammal and sea turtle interactions in your fishery from 2015 to 2018.*

Response: Please also see attached spreadsheet.

Species	Total	PBR
California Sea Lion	2	9,200
Northern Right Whale Dolphin	7	179
Short Beaked Common Dolphin	21	8,393
Long Beaked Common Dolphin	1	657
Unidentified Common Dolphin	1	N/A
Northern Elephant Seal	3	4,882
Gray Whale	1	624
Sea Turtle	0	N/A

Source: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/webdam/download/82314961>