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Sent via email

May 18, 2017

Charlton H. Bonham, Director
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
1416 9th Street, 12th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814
Director@wildlife.ca.gov

Chris Yates, Asst. Reg. Administrator
Protected Resources Division, NMFS
501 W. Ocean Blvd., Suite 4200
Long Beach, CA 90802
Chris.Yates@noaa.gov

Re: Protect Whales and Sea Turtles From California's Pot and Trap Fisheries

Dear Mr. Bonham and Mr. Yates,

The undersigned organizations write to urge you to do everything in your power to reform California's pot and trap fisheries to reverse the alarming rise in whale entanglements and prevent sea turtle entanglements.

Thousands of vertical fishing lines off the West Coast create a dangerous labyrinth whales and sea turtles must navigate to complete their migration. These lines can get caught on whale tails and flukes, leading to laceration, infection, and slow death by starvation and drowning. According to the National Marine Fisheries Service, there were 71 unique reports of whale entanglements off the West Coast in 2016 – including 22 whales caught in lines connected to crab traps. That's up from 61 reported whale entanglements in 2015, 30 in 2014, and an annual average of eight entanglements during the previous decade.

The primary cause of the leatherback sea turtle decline and the greatest threat to its continued existence is entanglement and drowning in fishing gear. The western Pacific population is so small that killing even one leatherback could significantly impair the species' ability to survive and recover. To avoid delaying the species' recovery, scientists estimate that total interactions involving all U.S. West Coast fisheries need to be limited to no more than 1.2 turtles every five

years. Yet California has already exceeded that five year maximum entanglement rate in just 2015-2016.

As you well know, California's coastal and ocean wildlife are a huge source of pride for our country and an economic boon to the state. People come from all over the world to see whales feeding, migrating and playing off our coast. The steep, steady rise in whale entanglements over the last three years is alarming and must be addressed immediately.

Please show leadership in protecting ocean wildlife and making pot and trap fisheries sustainable by taking meaningful steps this summer to monitor where traps are and close the areas where whales and sea turtles are meeting harm.

Sincerely,

Catherine Kilduff
Senior Attorney
Center for Biological Diversity
ckilduff@biologicaldiversity.org

Diane Glim
Secretary
American Cetacean Society
diane@mcweekly.com

Kate O'Connell
Marine Wildlife Consultant
Animal Welfare Institute
kate.oconnell@balaena.org

Marce Graudiņš
Founder / Director
Azul
mar@azulproject.org

Birgit Winning
President
Bluecology
winning@bluecology.org

Constance Hanson
Director
Christians Caring for Creation
cccpnch@aol.com

Andria Ventura
Toxics Program Manager
Clean Water Action
aventura@cleanwater.org

Marjorie Ziegler
Executive Director
Conservation Council for Hawai'i
info@conservehi.org

Jane Davenport
Senior Staff Attorney
Defenders of Wildlife
jdavenport@defenders.org

Dan Silver
Executive Director
Endangered Habitats League
dsilverla@me.com

Genevieve Abedon
California Field Organizer
Endangered Species Coalition
gabedon@endangered.org

Kimberly Baker
Public Land Advocate
EPIC- Environmental Protection
Information Center
klam_watch@yahoo.com

Marcie Keever
Oceans & Vessels Program Director
Friends of the Earth
mkeever@foe.org

John Hocevar
Oceans Campaign Director
Greenpeace USA
jhocevar@greenpeace.org

Hannah Bernard
Executive Director
Hawai'i Wildlife Fund
wild@aloha.net

Mark J. Palmer
Associate Director
International Marine Mammal Project of
Earth Island Institute
markjpalmer@earthisland.org

Michael Gravitz
Director of Legislation and Policy
Marine Conservation Institute
michael.gravitz@marine-conservation.org

Brett Garling
Director of Communications
Mission Blue
bgarling@mission-blue.org

Kurt Lieber
President
Ocean Defenders Alliance
kurt@oceandefenders.org

Ximena Escovar-Fadul
Associate Director, Cuba Conservancy
Program
Ocean Doctor
ximena.escovar@oceandoctor.org

Rob Moir, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Ocean River Institute
rob@oceanriver.org

Sejal Choksi-Chugh
Executive Director
San Francisco Baykeeper
sejal@baykeeper.org

Dr. Thomas Armbruster
Founding President
SandyHook SeaLife Foundation SSF
shslfoundation@aol.com

Katherine O'Dea
Executive Director
Save Our Shores
katherine@saveourshores.org

David Lewis
Executive Director
Save The Bay
dlewis@savesfbay.org

Sharon B. Young
Marine Issues Field Director
The Humane Society of the United States
syoung@humanesociety.org

Carl Safina
President
The Safina Center
admin@safinacenter.org

Todd Steiner
Executive Director
Turtle Island Restoration Network
tsteiner@tirn.net

Regina Asmutis-Silvia
Executive director
WDC North America
regina.asmutis-silvia@whales.org

Elizabeth Hogan
Campaign Manager, Oceans & Wildlife
World Animal Protection
ehogan@worldanimalprotection.org

Zach Plopper
Conservation Director
WILDCOAST
zach@wildcoast.net

Bethany Cotton
Wildlife Program Director
WildEarth Guardians
bcotton@wildearthguardians.org