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## **REGIONAL: BAY AREA LEGISLATURES PASS RESOLUTION URGING PROTECTION OF ENDANGERED SEA TURTLES**

The California Legislature adopted a resolution today opposing federal proposals to permit longline swordfish fishing in endangered sea turtle habitat off the coastline.

Shallow water longline fishing, a method of fishing that uses lines equipped with thousands of hooks that stretch for hundreds of miles, is one of the most serious threats to endangered leatherback and threatened loggerhead sea turtles, according to the resolution's author, state Assemblyman Mark Leno, D-San Francisco.

In fact, shallow water longline fishing, which is where swordfish can be caught, brings a catch of only about 50 percent swordfish. The remaining 50 percent of creatures injured or killed by the hooks include sea turtles, dolphins, seals, albatrosses, sharks and other types of fish and marine mammals.

When a sea turtle gets caught in a fishing line, it isn't able to surface for air and often drowns, according to Teri Shore, program director for the Sea Turtle Restoration Project.

Shore said that shallow set longline fishing has never been permitted within 200 miles of the California coast, but in the past two years, the National Marine Fisheries Service has considered opening up coastal waters to commercial longline fishermen targeting swordfish.

Unfortunately, the same federal agency that is supposed to protect the turtles is also charged with regulating fishing, Shore said.

Shore said that the National Marine Fisheries Service could make a decision any day about whether or not to open California coastal waters to commercial longline swordfish fishing.

A spokesperson for the National Marine Fisheries Service did not immediately return phone calls today, but Shore said advocates of opening coastal waters have claimed that new fishing gear has greatly reduced the number of sea turtles killed in the lines.

Shore said that while the number of sea turtle killed may be reduced, the leatherback species in particular is so fragile that any increase in kills could lead to its extinction.

Leatherback turtles are the largest living reptile in the world and tend to migrate from warmer waters where they nest to colder waters, including waters off the California coast, where they feast on jellyfish from August through December.

Scientists have estimated that the Pacific leatherback and North Pacific loggerhead sea turtles could become extinct within 10 to 20 years if existing fishery by-catch rates aren't reduced, according to Leno.

"Legally and ethically we don't think they should do it," Shore said.

While the resolution passed today is not a law, "it's sending a clear message from the state legislature to the federal government that we really don't want this and we don't think they should even consider it until further studies have been completed," Shore said.

The resolution, Assembly Joint Resolution 62, was co-authored by Sen. Patricia Wiggins, D-Santa Rosa, and Assembly members Patty Berg, D-Eureka, Noreen Evans, D-Santa Rosa, Loni Hancock, D-Berkeley, Dave Jones, D-Sacramento, and Pedro Nava, D-Santa Barbara. It was sponsored by the Sea Turtle Restoration Project and supported by several environmental organizations, including the Center for Biological Diversity, Oceana, Defenders of Wildlife, Friends of the Earth and Seaflow.

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