

California bill seeks to ban small lead fishing weights

Feb 19, 2018

By David Smith

The state of California could join six other states in banning small lead fishing weights if a new bill introduced on Friday is passed.

The state of California could join six other states in banning small lead fishing weights if a new bill introduced on Friday is passed.

Assembly Bill 2787, introduced by Assemblymember Bill Quirk (D – Hayward), would use existing hazardous waste control laws to prohibit the manufacture, sale, and purchase of any fishing weight or sinker in California if the object is under a certain size.

The ban would apply to any sinker or weight that does not have a cross section greater than or equal to 2 centimeters in length – about three quarters of an inch – is under 50 grams in mass, and contains more than 0.1 percent lead by weight. Fifty grams is approximately 1.76 ounces.

If the bill is passed, California would join Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Vermont, and Washington states, all of which have some form of ban on lead sinkers.

Quirk stated in a press release issued Friday, “Small lead fishing weights, like splitshot, are killing California wildlife. Many birds consume river gravel to aid in mashing and digesting food. Often they accidentally ingest discarded lead fishing weights. The lead poisons their liver, leading to a slow death. Water fowl, in particular, are common victims.”

The California Sportfishing League was quick to issue its own press release arguing that AB 2787 should not pass, with CSL Executive Director Marko Mlikotin stating, “There is no science that justifies banning fishing weights found in nearly every California angler’s tackle box. Making fishing too costly and less accessible will have a devastating impact on the state’s tourism industry and communities dependent on outdoor recreation for tax revenue and jobs.”

While current and proposed bans are for fishing gear, most laws appear to aim for protection of wild birds, especially loons. In 2006, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife issued a paper on the potential impacts of lead-based fishing tackle.

The paper notes that animals typically absorb lead through the gastrointestinal and respiratory tracts, and that lead poisoning can cause permanent damage to the brain and nervous system, digestive organs, kidneys, heart, and reproductive organs.

The paper notes that lead poisoning deaths have been documented in a number of bird species and

poisoning has also been documented in some small mammals, and that approximately 4,000 metric tons of lead fishing sinkers were being sold annually in 2003.

Washington's ban affects the use of lead weights and jigs that are 1.5 inches or smaller along the longest axis, but only at 12 lakes in the state where loons breed and rear their young.

Other states' bans are based on the overall weight of the sinker used, and not the length. In Maine, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire, weights under 1 ounce are prohibited, while in New York and Vermont, those under 0.5 ounces are banned. Of those states, some ban both the sale and use, while others ban one or the other.

The proposed law for California does not mention a ban on using lead weights within the size restriction – just the manufacture, sale and purchase.

Other metals used in sinkers and weights include tin, bismuth, tungsten, and steel. As Mlikoten notes in the CSL press release, currently, those alternatives have a higher cost to manufacture and purchase.

CSL is already circulating a petition to stop AB 2787 from passing, and is calling for a California-specific study of the potential impacts of lead based tackle before moving forward with a ban.

Lead is already banned in ammunition used for certain game in California, and lead ammunition will be banned for any hunting starting July 1, 2019 in the state.

<http://www.siskiyoudaily.com/news/20180219/california-bill-seeks-to-ban-small-lead-fishing-weights>