



March 29, 2018

Assembly Member Bill Quirk, Chair  
Assembly Committee on Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials  
1020 N Street, Room 171  
Sacramento, California 95814

**SUB: AB 2787 (Quirk): Lead fishing weights and sinkers**  
**POSITION: OPPOSE**

Dear Assemblymember Quirk:

The California Sportfishing League (CSL) is a statewide organization devoted to representing the voice of over 2.6 million California anglers by ensuring that recreational fishing remains an affordable and accessible form of outdoor recreation.

California has one of the longest coastlines in the United States, over 3,000 lakes and reservoirs, and thousands of rivers and streams. Given its abundant natural resources, one would be surprised to learn that according to the U.S. Census, California is ranked dead-last in fishing participation rates (per capita) among all fifty-states.

Since 1980, annual fishing license sales have declined over 55%, during a time where our state's population grew over 60%. In 1980, annual fishing licenses cost \$5. Over the past 8 years, annual license sales declined 16%. Today, annual licenses cost \$48.34 and when including permits, it is the costliest annual license in the country. The cost of California's annual license is 110% over the national average of \$23.04.



California Fishing License Sales (1980-2017)

This disturbing trend is a strong indication that recreational fishing faces numerous barriers, many of which are imposed by state policies that fail to recognize that costs and restrictions on recreational fishing have consequences.

As an organization that champions recreational fishing, we are a partner with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) on their R3 Stakeholder Group as recreational fishing industry leaders tasked with identifying barriers to fishing, and solutions to increasing participation rates. The formation of this stakeholder group came about due to the Administration's recognition that declining fishing participation rates were having a measurable impact on DFW's funding and the economy.

We understand that the bill is well intended. Anglers are by nature conservationists. However, given current trends and the risks associated with increasing the cost of fishing further, we are certain that AB 2787 will only exasperate the efforts of the state and angling community to grow our fishing participation rates and our economy and the jobs anglers support.

Therefore, we have joined with a coalition of organizations and industries associated with small business, tourism, recreational fishing, boating, marina operators and aquaculture in opposition to AB 2787.

### **Impact on Anglers**

Every member of this committee represents tens of thousands of anglers in the California State Legislature. This is evident due to the abundant number of fishing lakes and rivers, sportfishing boats, marinas and fishing piers. This is most evident in Los Angeles County which has more licensed anglers than any county in California, and more anglers than several states combined.

If this bill passes, be prepared to tell your constituents that fishing is about to get a lot more expensive. Lead alternatives can cost 2-3 times more, in some cases, 10-20 times more depending on the metals, and in many cases can be less effective. With recent federal tariffs imposed on foreign steel and aluminum, the cost of alternative products could increase even more in the future.

Assembly Bill 2787 states; ***"A person shall not manufacture, sell, or purchase a fishing weight or sinker in California that has no cross section greater than or equal to two centimeters (less than ¾ of an inch) in length, is under 50 grams (less than 1 ¾ ounces) in mass, and contains more than 0.1 percent lead weight."***

As introduced, fishing weights found in every anglers' tackle box will be illegal and will impact every body of water in California, both fresh-and salt water. Given the size and dimension of the weights identified, this ban may be one of the most far reaching fishing weight ban in the country. What's more, adding to the confusion created by AB 2787, this legislation bans weights measured in metrics, when weights are measured by ounces in the United States.

With the cost of fishing weights increasing, the number of times an angler will fish will decrease and even fewer will take up the sport of fishing if they deem it cost prohibitive, removing even more anglers from the sport and decreasing fishing license sales into a death spiral.

### **Impact on State Tourism, Economy and Jobs**

Today, recreational fishing in California contributes \$4.6 billion annually in economic activity. Anglers from all over the world spend their dollars at tourism destinations, retailers, hotels, restaurants, campgrounds, marinas and sport fishing charter excursions. As a consequence, these dollars generate significant levels of economic activity and tax revenue for the state and local government, and support quality jobs.

With over 2.6 million anglers, California is also one of the largest consumer markets for fishing tackle and outdoor equipment in the country. Losing the ability to manufacture or sell certain fishing weights within California, or to export them could drive many mom-pop and larger companies throughout the country out of business or force them to leave the California market altogether.

It is important to note that California was once home to many manufacturers of recreational boats and fishing tackle. Over the years, they have relocated or expanded to states more business-friendly, and where there is greater growth in fishing and boating activity – aka more consumers. This bill could certainly accelerate this exodus.

### **Threatens State Funding**

As the cost of fishing increases, fewer anglers will fish and fewer fishing licenses will be purchased. Today, hunting and fishing licenses sales account for nearly 25% of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's operating budget. These anglers are the primary source of funding for fishery and conservation programs that protect state wildlife and keep our waterways clean. In 2017, the Fish and Game Preservation Fund experienced a \$20 million deficit and unless there is a permanent influx of new revenue, such deficits will continue for years to come. Such deficits over the past five years have led DFW to cut the number of fish stocked statewide by 39%, and the size of fish by 50%. As a consequence, the quality of fresh water angling has declined significantly and so have participation rates among fresh water anglers.

Moreover, as participation rates continue to decline, outdoor retailers will sell fewer fishing products or go out of business, local and state agencies will experience a decline in sales, property taxes, and transient occupancy taxes generated by tourists. Less recreational activity and tourism could have a considerable financial impact on the state's general fund, and local government.

## **Undermines Angler Retention and Youth Recruitment Programs**

Making fishing more expensive will harm fishing participation rates. As previously stated, annual fishing license sales have declined 55% since 1980 and 16% since Governor Jerry Brown assumed office. Recognizing that declining fishing participation rates have harmed the Department of Fish and Wildlife's (DFW) funding and fishing license sales, the DFW launched a program in 2018 that aims to Recruit, Retain and Reactivate anglers (commonly referred to nationally as R3). The high cost of fishing has been identified by this stakeholder group as a major contributor to declining fishing participation rates.

In addition, increasing the cost of fishing will undermine the success of underserved and inner-city youth fishing programs, such as Fishing-in-the-City type programs administered by Department of Fish and Wildlife and/or nonprofit organizations.

## **Not Sufficient Science to Justify Risks**

There is the perception among those not familiar with fishing practices that lead fishing weights are scattered along California shores, as if fired by a shotgun or discarded like golf balls. Not so. The goal of an angler is not only to retrieve a fish, but their tackle in whole. Tackle is not considered disposable. In some cases, anglers boast of fishing weights being handed down from one generation to another.

It is important to note that no study has been conducted to determine how "California wildlife populations" are specifically impacted by lead fishing weights, to what extent, how frequently and where. It is true that national studies exist, but again, no California study.

We'll acknowledge that small fishing weights have been problematic in some Northeastern states and Canada where large populations of Loons breed. Loons have a unique digestive system, very different than seals, pelicans or other wildlife in California. Loons purposely ingest small pebbles to help them digest food and can inadvertently ingest small fishing weights. In contrast to other regions of North America, Loons do not breed or nest in California, and according to Department of Fish and Wildlife sources, their population is small and seasonally scattered along the California coast.

Unlike loons, most wildlife are not in the habit of ingesting lead weights, or other hard objects or metals. It is important to note that most wildlife have very aggressive digestive systems whereby most weights will pass directly through quickly with little to no long-term impacts to their health. There are isolated incidents when wildlife can steal an angler's catch. In such cases, the weight/sinker may block the digestive tract because the weight is still attached to a hook and fishing line. Even when this occurs, it is infrequent and death by collision, electrocution and urban runoff are more common causes of bird and wildlife deaths.

This contention is not refuted by necropsies conducted in California approximately 14 years ago that some have referenced as justification for a "statewide" ban. The necropsies concluded that

one California (1) harbor seal and two (2) California Brown Pelicans died due to ingesting lead weights. The research did not conclude that ingesting lead weights is common or whether it is having a significant impact on harbor seal and pelican populations, or any threatened or endangered species.

### **Conclusion**

California is bigger than many states combined, and its wildlife is very diverse, whether they are located to the north or south, or near fresh or saltwater. The wildlife and fishing practices here can be different than other states or countries. It is for these reasons, greater analysis is required to determine the merits of a statewide ban, one more geographically limited or none at all.

Voting in favor of this legislation without the benefit of the best science would be reckless given its potential to have a lasting impact on fishing participation, wildlife conservation and a state dependent on outdoor tourism for jobs.

Thank for recognizing that California's 2.6 million anglers as conservationists and stakeholders in California's future.

The California Sportfishing League respectfully opposes AB 2787 and urges a "NO" vote.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marko Mlikotin", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Marko Mlikotin  
Executive Director

CC: Members of the Assembly Committee on Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials