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## **San Diego needs state to shake tired thinking on fishing licenses**

By Bryce Miller | Contract Reporter  
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Imagine registering your car in September, only to be told on Jan. 1 that you need to pay the same amount to register it again.

That's the dulled, change-averse thinking behind the way the state of California sells and regulates fishing licenses. The current calendar-year system — opposed to a 12-month clock that ticks to life when you buy a license — needs benched.

The “why” is simple. The current system isn't working.

According to a 2015 study by the California Sportfishing League, a recreational advocacy group, license sales nose-dived 55 percent since 1980 as the state's population increased 60 percent.

That's why the decision facing an appropriations committee chaired by San Diego Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher looms so large for an industry churning out an estimated annual impact of \$4.6 billion — with a saltwater anchor in America's Finest Fin-Obsessed City.

Gonzalez Fletcher's group will decide by May 26 whether a bill sponsored by Assemblyman James Gallagher (R-Yuba City) survives to see the floor. The legislation could spark economic ripples through lowered fees, incentives for veterans and, most notably, a 12-month license that makes actual sense for consumers.

An online analysis of the bill by the appropriations committee outlines “DFW funding challenges” by citing a \$20 million annual shortfall in its Fish and Game Preservation Fund.

“They're in a death spiral,” said Marko Mlikotin, the California Sportfishing League's executive director. “There's a need to change a costly, failing fishing license program. The sales underscore that this is a serious problem.

“It's common sense. If you had a business that dropped 55 percent in sales, you'd have an emergency board meeting. But (the state's) married to the status quo.”

Right now, a person considering a license during the heart of the offshore bite in June or July might be discouraged because the lifespan would be far less than a year. A license that lasts 12 months from the point of purchase, however, would ramp up the value — and incentive.

Will it work? No one truly will know, until it's tried. It worked in Texas, where the state saw revenue spike 14 percent. It's working in Maryland, where a late-2015 switch initiated a 4 percent jump. It didn't work in Alabama, which has shifted back to the calendar system. The thing that's clear: Doing nothing is the worst idea of all.

"California is ranked dead last in participation, per capita (on the last U.S. Census)," Mlikotin said. "That's astounding, given all the coastline, more than 3,000 lakes and thousands more rivers and streams."

How can that be?

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife shudders at the thought of a depressed revenue rivulet drying even more. There's no doubt, however, for those doing the actual fishing.

"It's going to be a good thing for fishermen, because a lot of people don't start fishing until June or July. If they do that, it's only good for like six months," said Doug Kern, co-owner of Fisherman's Landing.

"The 12-month license is likely to help everybody. It might get somebody to buy a yearly permit who might only buy a daily or a two-day. You might sell a (\$47) license rather than a (one day, \$15) license."

There would be subtle benefits in San Diego, as well. An example: A point-of-purchase time clock would bring the state license in line with the system for a Mexican license.

Those purchasing Mexican licenses might be inclined to buy a yearly state license at the same time. It offers convenience and a way to remember when licenses expire, once they're linked by a common date.

Again and always, action trumps inaction.

That's the reason Gonzalez Fletcher's influence on whether the Gallagher bill survives next Friday's thin-the-herd deadline in the appropriations committee matters. She steers the group that could invigorate fishing in the state and more smartly serve customers. Three calls to the Assemblywoman's office in recent weeks — including one that promised a response by the close of business Wednesday — failed to reveal a window into the feedback she's received from water-soaked San Diego.

"I am hopeful that Assembly member Gonzalez Fletcher supports this legislation, given that she represents a coastal district in San Diego and recognizes the economic value to her

community,” Mlikotin said.

Andrew Hughan, a CDFW information officer for the region that includes San Diego and Los Angeles, said “we have a long-standing policy not to comment on pending legislation.”

The Gallagher bill is supported by Service Employees Union International, which includes many CDFW workers. The legislation also owns the backing of San Diego’s tourism authority and regional chamber, along with a wide range of California travel and hospitality groups.

Companies behind the bill included Abu Garcia, Pure Fishing, Penn and Berkley. So think about it: Why would industry giants help shoulder something they thought would hurt their very livelihoods?

Plus, a true 12-month license makes sense for consumers.

What a novel thought.

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### **To Voice Your Thoughts**

To reach Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher, chair of the appropriations committee considering the fate of a bill that to create a true 12-month fishing license in California:

- **Capitol office:** (916) 319-2080
- **San Diego district office:** (619) 338-8090
- **On Twitter:** @LorenaAD80

The committee’s deadline to decide which bills remain alive is May 26.

**Also:** The Senate’s committee on appropriations also is weighing a bill that addresses a 12-month license. It’s SB 187, sponsored by Tom Berryhill (R-Twain Harte).

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