

# Los Angeles Daily News

## Change in state law could help fishing industry reel in jobs: Guest commentary



By Marko Mlikotin

Posted: 05/24/17, 4:01 PM PDT | Updated: 2 hrs ago

Will the state's failed fishing license program be reformed to protect jobs?

This is the question on the minds of California's 2.7 million anglers and an outdoor industry that is dependent on them for jobs and more than \$4.6 billion in annual economic activity.

Since 1980, California's annual fishing license sales have declined by more than 55 percent, while California's population increased by more than 60 percent. Given that California has one of the nation's longest coastlines and thousands of rivers and lakes, its fishing participation rate should not be ranked (per capita) dead last among all 50 states — but it is.

There are many reasons for declining participation rates. Among them is a costly and antiquated fishing license program. In 1980, annual licenses cost a mere \$5. Today, it costs \$47.01, not including the additional cost of permits and stamps that can double its price.

California's calendar-based license is even less appealing to anglers given that it expires on Dec. 31 every year, regardless of when it was purchased. Just imagine if you purchased a car in October, only to renew your registration for a second time two months later. No

other product or service is marketed this way.

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife's (DFW) "get less for more" marketing plan does not recognize anglers as consumers, and this is evident in its sales reports. No business would ignore a 55 percent decline in sales. An emergency board meeting would be held; the CEO would be fired. But no, not in California.

As if doubling down on a failed practice, DFW continues to bite the hand that feeds it, for the consequences of this failed marketing plan extends well beyond the future of recreational fishing.

Fishery and conservation programs are also at risk as fishing license sales fuel the Fish and Game Preservation Fund, which is facing an unprecedented \$20 million deficit. This deficit will only grow as federal funding, assessed by the number of licenses sold, is reduced as annual license sales continue to decline.

While DFW ignores this reality, an unprecedented coalition of statewide associations representing business, labor, travel, hospitality, marinas and boat manufacturers are calling for reforms. Like throwing chum in the water to attract fish, California's outdoor industry recognizes that anglers need incentives to continue fishing and the state Legislature appears poised to make change.

To increase fishing participation rates and sales, Sen. Tom Berryhill, R-Fresno, has introduced [Senate Bill 187](#). It will establish a fishing license valid a full 12 months from the date of purchase, very much the same as in 11 states and Mexico.

Such reform could be the solution to California's failing fishing license system. Texas implemented a 12-month fishing license in 2005, and from 2012 to 2016, it experienced a 11.8 percent increase in sales and a 12.5 percent increase in revenue (or \$1.9 million). Other states have had similar success.

Fishing's future is dependent on whether Sen. Ricardo Lara, D-Long Beach, who chairs the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee, allows SB187 to advance to the Senate floor this week.

If Lara and other Southern California representatives in Sacramento consider the interests of their constituents, it will, for these reforms take on added importance for Los Angeles County, which has more licensed anglers than any other California county and 17 states.

It is time for California to adopt a sensible approach to increasing fishing participation rates and economic activity by making fishing licenses valid a full 12 months from the date of purchase. Those who enjoy fishing, and appreciate the jobs it supports, should be compelled to contact Sen. Lara and urge him to help.

Marko Mlikotin is executive director of the [California Sportfishing League](#).