



Fishing license reform fails again

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September 5, 2018

SACRAMENTO — California’s anglers will have to wait yet another year to realize fishing license reform, as state legislators failed to advance the 12-month fishing license proposal to Gov. Jerry Brown’s desk for a second time in as many years.

Senate Bill 518, or SB 518, was amended to increase the cost of a 12-month fishing license bill, causing one of the proposal’s leading supporters – California Sportfishing League – to withdraw its support.

State Sen. Tom Berryhill, the Republican legislator from Twain Harte who authored SB 518, ultimately withdrew the bill. The proposal, accordingly, never made it to the legislative floor for a full vote.

Anglers can only buy a calendar-based fishing license in California; the license expires on Dec. 31 of each year, regardless of when purchased. The license’s fee does not proportionally change according to purchase date, either.

California Sportfishing League had been a vocal and active supporter of a 12-month fishing license regime for anglers in the nation’s most populous state, so its withdrawal as a sponsor of SB 518 is significant.

“The [California Sportfishing League] has sponsored several 12-month license bills, including Senate Bill 518 (formerly SB 187), but opposed charging more for a 12-month license,” a press release issued by the pro-sportfishing organization stated. “As if intended to be a poison pill, the legislature amended the bill to charge a premium for the 12-month license that was 30 percent more than the cost of the current calendar-based fishing license.”

Marko Mlikotin, executive director of the California Sportfishing League, said a 12-month fishing license regime was “common sense” and would go a long way in bolstering the state’s angling participation.

“When the high cost of fishing is a leading contributor to declining sales, making fishing even more expensive is contrary to the advice of marketing experts and common sense,” Mlikotin said. “It is for this reason recreational anglers could no longer support Senate Bill 518.

“In order to address declining sales and fishing participation rates, the solution was simple – abandon a costly and antiquated calendar-year based license for a 12-month fishing license that is valid 365-days from the date of purchase,” Mlikotin continued. “Most states that made this transition experienced greater sales and revenue than calendar-based states.”

Berryhill, who spearheaded legislative efforts to reform California’s fishing license system, is retiring from Sacramento at the end of this session. Time will tell whether another legislator picks up the mantle and advocates for a 12-month fishing license regime in future legislative sessions.

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