

## Appeal Democrat - Anglers hope lead weights bill sinks

Major concern over economic impact on outdoor recreation

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Lead fishing weights, some as small as pellets, are the focus of a big debate this legislative season in California, involving environmentalism, economics and the sport of fishing.

Assemblyman Bill Quirk, a Democrat from Hayward, introduced Assembly Bill 2787, which would outlaw the manufacture, sale and purchase of lead-based fishing weights under 50 grams (one and three-quarter ounces).

Assemblyman James Gallagher, a Republican from Yuba City, said that, much like his objection to a lead ammunition ban signed into law in 2013, he opposes AB 2787 because there is little scientific evidence to support the claim that the environment is being impacted by trace amounts of lead.

Quirk, who has a doctorate in astrophysics, said that in his scientific opinion, there is enough evidence to justify the legislation to protect people and the environment.

“There is no safe level of lead,” Quirk said. “According to a study done by the state, people who fish for four hours with lead weights will get four micrograms of lead exposure ... Beyond that, we have studies that were done in New England and New York that indicate a substantial number of deaths of various birds were from lead.”

Quirk points specifically to the loon, a migratory species in California, as well as other birds that swallow small pebbles to help digest their food.

Gallagher is not biting.

“All this is going to do is lead to higher costs,” Gallagher said. “This is a recreational activity we want to encourage and something that brings a lot of joy to people.”

James Stone, owner of Elite Sportsmen Guide Service in Sutter, said he does not understand the reasoning for outlawing lead fishing weights and also shares a concern over the cost of alternatives.

“As a fishing guide and owner of a business, this would be a major setback financially,” Stone said. “It’s not like we’re losing lots of lead. There is no proof that this is affecting wildlife... Not only can it hurt local sporting goods stores, the fishing guide industries, but hotels and restaurants. It will be a domino effect with no science.”

Marko Mlikotin, executive director of the California Sportfishing League, said there is neither enough substantial evidence, nor are there specific scientific studies done in California to justify the legislation.

With lead weight alternatives being roughly twice or three times the cost, Mlikotin argues the average fishermen will bear the brunt of the ban.

“The responsible first step is to do the analysis first before threatening a great form of outdoor recreation,” Mlikotin said. “(The Mid-Valley) region is heavily dependent on outdoor activities. I don’t think people appreciate the importance fishing plays in generating economic revenue.”

Stone, who offers his services from the Delta to north of Shasta Lake and several rivers in Northern California, said he estimates his services, which typically range from \$175-\$200, would increase by as much as \$25 or more. Though the increase is not dramatically higher, Stone argues it will be enough to turn away the average fisherman or first-timer.

Stone, who is also president of the NorCal guides and sportsmen’s association, said a majority of the 1,500 members are strongly opposed to the proposed legislation and that a substantial amount of their current gear would become illegal to use.

Every one of the opponents to the bill points to local economies based on recreational activities such as hunting or fishing that will be threatened by the legislation.

Gallagher said the upcoming striped bass season, which will attract fisherman from all over Northern California to the Feather, Sacramento and Yuba rivers, will not only bring a string of revenue for fishing supply stores, but is beneficial to other local businesses because those same fishermen usually dine out, visit shops or purchase lodging.

Pat Kittle, owner of Kittle's Outdoor & Sport in Colusa, said about 1,000 lead weights and sinkers will be bought for the upcoming striped bass season.

Kittle also said he is unsure of the economic impact the legislation might cause but said it could hurt businesses if a cheaper alternative was not available. Kittle and Quirk both pointed to tungsten weights as a possible replacement, which can cost about twice as much as lead weights, according to a national retailer's website.

AB 2787 has been referred to the Legislature's Environmental Safety & Toxic Materials Committee with a specific hearing date yet to be determined, according to Quirk's Chief of Staff, Tomasa Duenas.

[http://www.appeal-democrat.com/news/anglers-hope-lead-weights-bill-sinks/article\\_e085af3a-2348-11e8-9689-a31e29904b9c.html](http://www.appeal-democrat.com/news/anglers-hope-lead-weights-bill-sinks/article_e085af3a-2348-11e8-9689-a31e29904b9c.html)