

Senate Bill 290

Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Rescue Grants

Senator Jackson

SUMMARY

SB290 creates a statewide marine mammal and sea turtle disentanglement and stranding emergency response grant program under the Wildlife Health Center at the University of California, Davis.

BACKGROUND

In 2016 there were reports of approximately 70 whales entangled in fishing gear and other marine debris, making it the third consecutive record-breaking year for such entanglements. Threatened and endangered humpback whales are most commonly entangled, but blue, fin, gray, minke, orca, and sperm whales have also been entangled. Reports of entangled leatherback sea turtles -- California's critically endangered state marine reptile -- were also made in 2015 and 2016.

Large whales and sea turtles migrate long distances between foraging and reproductive areas, and when these animals are entangled they can experience life-threatening dehydration, starvation, and drowning.

Often, fishermen and whale-watching boats are the first to spot and report such entanglements.

Additionally, a record 6,000 stranded or abandoned sea lions, harbor seals, elephant seals and other marine mammals were rescued off the California coast in 2015 and 2016. Searching for prey often takes nursing marine mammals away from their young, and the lack of available prey in recent years is one factor that may have contributed to increases in strandings.

California has an existing network of volunteer emergency response teams authorized by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration that assist entangled and stranded marine mammals and reptiles. These volunteer teams contribute significant personal funds and time to aid marine animals in distress. Disentanglement efforts, for example, typically range between \$4,000 and \$12,000, and can include a multi-day effort on the water depending upon the severity of the entanglement.

SOLUTION

SB 290 creates a statewide marine mammal and sea turtle entanglement and stranding emergency response grant program to help support California's volunteer emergency response teams. Coordinated by the Wildlife Health Center at the University of California, Davis, this grant program will help fund emergency response efforts and allow the volunteer response teams to keep up with the increased frequency of strandings and entanglements off California's coasts.

SUPPORT

California Coastkeeper Alliance
California Whale Rescue
Condor Express Whale Watching
Defenders of Wildlife
Five Gyres Foundation
Heal the Bay
The Humane Society
Humane Society of the United States
Mission Blue/Sylvia Earle Alliance
Oceana
Patagonia, Inc.
Santa Barbara Channelkeeper
Seventh Generation Advisors
Surfrider Foundation
Tesla Foundation
Wildcoast

STATUS

Enrolled, and before consideration by the Governor.

CONTACT

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