



The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk

Before the Environment Committee

In Support

**RB 426 AN ACT CONCERNING ABANDONED FISHING GEAR IN LONG ISLAND SOUND
Submitted by: Captain Travis Mingo, The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk**

March 14, 2018

The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk is a non-profit organization dedicated to “Inspire people of all ages to appreciate and protect the Long Island Sound ecosystem and the global environment through living exhibits, marine science and environmental education.”

Dear Sens. Kennedy and Miner, Reps. Demicco and Reyes and Members of the Committee:

The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk writes to ask that you support the changes outlined in this bill that would allow organizations like ours to help remove abandoned and derelict fishing gear from Connecticut State waters of Long Island Sound. We are grateful that the committee has recognized the importance of this issue, and is taking action to try to change the language of the bill to help reduce the number of abandoned and derelict fishing gear that litters the sound. The Maritime Aquarium looks forward to working with you and other stakeholders to address this problem.

Lobster fishing in Long Island Sound was a staple fishery for many years, however *Lobster landings in Long Island Sound have declined from 3.7 million pounds in 1998 to just 142,000 pounds in 2011. Between 1984 and 1998 state lobster landings averaged 2.3 million pounds. Lobster abundance and landings in the Sound have declined steadily, to present record low levels, since that time. (CT DEEP, 2012)* This led to an overall decline in lobster fishermen within the state and subsequently an abundance of unused lobster gear that is difficult and costly to store within the coastal zone. A study by Cornell University Cooperative Extension states that *The prohibitive cost of land storage near the Long Island coast coupled with the increased cost of transporting these traps to temporary or permanent storage elsewhere has encouraged universal trap abandonment and compounded the improper storage of surplus traps at-sea (Cornell University Cooperative Extension, 2016).*

Cornell University estimates that there is an abandoned trap population range of 763,450 to 1,357,290 in Long Island Sound between 1984-2006. *From 2006 forward, trap deployment has dropped significantly and mass trap abandonment began to occur after 2006 from resulting attrition of commercial lobstermen. (Cornell University Cooperative Extension, 2016)* With so many potential lobster traps abandoned in the sound the potential for “ghost fishing” is staggering especially considering that nearly 10% of traps recovered in Cornell’s Marine Debris Recover Grant were found to be “ghost fishing.” The following examples and species that were found as reported on by Cornell for “ghost fishing” in their retrieval of 3784 lobster traps in New York State waters include:



- American Lobster: 24% or 908 traps were found to have one or more lobster in them, 1018 alive/45 dead
- Black Sea Bass: 2.4% or 90 traps were found to have one or more Black Sea Bass in them
- Tautaug: 17.5% or 662 traps were found to have one or more Tautaug in them

During Cornell's Marine Debris Removal efforts they recovered 3784 traps equaling a staggering 94 tons of marine debris from only 15,298 acres through 56 research trips out of only three NY Villages in western Long Island Sound.

As a conservationist, hunter and fishermen I want to ensure that the Sound has a robust fisheries population for recreational and commercial fishermen alike. I spent 21 years in the US Coast Guard conducting numerous fisheries law enforcement boarding's of which most were boarding lobster and crabbing vessels in New England, the Pacific Northwest and Alaska. I have seen firsthand how effective a lobster/crab trap can be at retaining large numbers of many species, not just lobsters or crabs. In my post-US Coast Guard career, I have spent the last three years as a Captain on Long Island Sound operating a Hybrid research and education vessel for The Maritime Aquarium where I see firsthand the sheer number of abandon pots in the western Sound.

Changing the verbiage of the existing law will allow for a more streamlined and cost-effective way for Connecticut to clean up their waters of abandoned/derelect fishing gear. The change would help restore fish habitats, reduce waste in our waters and potentially increase fisheries numbers which in turn could increase state revenues.

I commend the committee for taking the time to raise this issue.

Sincerely,
Travis Mingo, Captain

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References

- Cornell University Cooperative Extension. (2016). *Long Island Sound Deep Water Derelect Lobster Gear Assessment, Removal and Prevention*. Retrieved from https://s3.amazonaws.com/assets.cce.cornell.edu/attachments/18284/NOAA_Marine_Debris_Final_Report_2016.pdf?1477418931
- CT DEEP. (2012, July 12). *DEEP to Study Decline of Lobsters in Long Island Sound*. Retrieved from <http://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?Q=507752&A=4173>