

# The Nature Conservancy

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## Testimony of David Sutherland – Director of Government Relations

### In Support of Bill 426

#### ***AAC ABANDONED FISHING GEAR IN LONG ISLAND SOUND***

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy's Connecticut Chapter, I would like to express our strong support for Bill 426, which would address the very serious threat to fish, marine mammals, and other marine life from various fishing equipment which is abandoned or derelict. The bill grants the Department of Aquaculture the same authority that DEEP currently has, and adds shellfish to those animals, the equipment for which to capture, would be subject to collection by the agencies.

Abandoned traps and gear can wreak havoc and cause tremendous damage to benthic habitats – including shellfish beds – when they get moved around in surge and waves during storms. They also result in the unnecessary and cruel death of fish and invertebrates that find their way into traps and then slowly perish by starvation when the lost or abandoned trap is never retrieved. Similarly, entanglement in, and ingestion of, abandoned and lost fishing nets, lines and other gear is a leading cause of marine mammal and sea turtle injuries and death, second only to vessel strikes.

A 2015 report by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration - *Impact of "Ghost Fishing" via Derelict Fishing Gear* – notes in its Executive Summary:

“Ghost fishing” is a part of the global marine debris issue that impacts marine organisms and the environment. Lost or discarded fishing gear that is no longer under a fisherman's control becomes known as derelict fishing gear (DFG), and it can continue to trap and kill fish, crustaceans, marine mammals, sea turtles, and seabirds. The most common types of DFG to ghost fish are gillnets and crab pots/traps, with longlines and trawls less likely to do so. Ghost fishing can impose a variety of harmful impacts, including: the ability to kill target and non-target organisms, including endangered and protected species; causing damage to underwater habitats such as coral reefs and benthic fauna; and contributing to marine pollution. Factors that cause gear to become DFG include poor weather conditions, gear conflicts with other vessels or bottom topography, gear overuse, and too much gear being used.”

[https://marinedebris.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/publications-files/Ghostfishing\\_DFG.pdf](https://marinedebris.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/publications-files/Ghostfishing_DFG.pdf)

This bill is clear that the state's authority would be limited to the removal of abandoned, derelict or discarded gear, and it would not change the existing requirement for a one-year period upon which to re-claim that gear. Therefore, even if gear were to be accidentally “lost” rather than intentionally abandoned or discarded, this bill would both allow for it to be removed and for it to be recovered by the owner. Limited staff capacity at DEEP and DoAG will probably preclude the recovery of as much abandoned gear as would be warranted, but this bill at least gives the agencies to act when possible or most urgently needed.