



ASSEMBLYMEMBER
STEVE BENNETT
38TH DISTRICT



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 15, 2025

Contacts: Ashley Blacow-Draeger, Oceana, 831.224.7484, ablacow@oceana.org
Scott Webb, Resource Renewal Institute, 707.921.8211, swebb@rri.org
Michelle Sevilla, Office of Assemblymember Steve Bennett, 805.394.8842,
michelle.sevilla@asm.ca.gov

Governor Newsom Signs Bill to Protect California Ocean Biodiversity

SACRAMENTO, CALIF.— Governor Newsom signed into law [AB 1056](#) by Assemblymember Steve Bennett (D-Ventura). The bill—sponsored by Oceana and Resource Renewal Institute (RRI)—protects ocean biodiversity off California’s shores by phasing out the use of set gillnets—mile-long nets anchored to the seafloor to catch California halibut and white sea bass. By removing this gear, the law will protect more than 100 different ocean animals that become entangled in these nearly invisible nets.

“California’s biodiverse underwater ecosystems are world-renowned and we must do our part to keep it that way,” said Assemblymember Steve Bennett (D-Ventura). “In my district, the Channel Islands Biosphere Reserve is recognized by UNESCO as one of the last examples of natural Southern California coastal ecosystems. A healthy ocean is critical to community well-being and is the foundation of multi-million dollar fishing and tourism industries. AB 1056 provides a fair and just transition to both fishermen and the fisheries affected.”

In response, Caitlynn Birch, Campaign Manager and Marine Scientist with Oceana said, “Southern California’s ocean waters support an incredible diversity of marine life, which in turn sustains ecosystems, tourism, fisheries, and coastal communities. AB 1056 is a balanced, forward-looking approach that protects ocean biodiversity while ensuring a fair transition for fishermen who depend on this fishery today. We thank Assemblymember Bennett for championing this effort, the legislature for advancing it, and Governor Newsom for signing it into law. Together, we are securing a sustainable future for California’s ocean ecosystems and the people and wildlife who rely on them.”

Scott Webb, Director of Advocacy with the Resource Renewal Institute, added “Today, California is showing why it is a global leader when it comes to protecting the ocean. Set gillnets have been deemed a threat to our state’s biodiversity for over one hundred years, and with the encroaching effects of climate disruption, our seas are more vulnerable than ever. We thank Assemblymember Bennett, the California legislature, and Governor Newsom for walking the talk by sunseting the last of California offshore gillnets.”

State waters around the Channel Islands and federal waters off Southern California are the last remaining places set gillnets are allowed. More than half of what set gillnets catch are thrown overboard as waste, including sea lions, sharks, rays, and other fish species. AB 1056 allows

existing fishermen to continue fishing through their retirement and gradually phases out the fishery. While all gillnet permits will become non-transferable starting January 1, 2027, the law allows for a one-time transfer after 2027 to a single family member, after which the permit becomes permanently non-transferable.

Background

Set gillnets were originally banned in Northern California waters in 1915. California voters passed Proposition 132 in 1990, which prohibited the use of set gillnets within state waters off the Southern California mainland (0-3 nautical miles) and within one nautical mile of offshore islands. In the late 1990s, scientists discovered set gillnets were killing an alarming number of federally protected marine mammals and seabirds. In response, the California Fish and Game Commission banned the use of set gillnets off the Central California Coast in 2002.

Due to the complexities of these various actions, most Californians are unaware that set gillnets are still used in federal waters, around offshore banks, and in state waters around California's Channel Islands, with continued high rates of bycatch. Waters off California's Channel Islands are a globally significant region of ocean biodiversity, raising concerns about the impacts of set gillnet fishing gear to ocean life in the area.

More selective hook and line fishing methods are well-established for catching California halibut and white seabass that have significantly less bycatch and typically yields higher prices for fish considered better quality seafood.

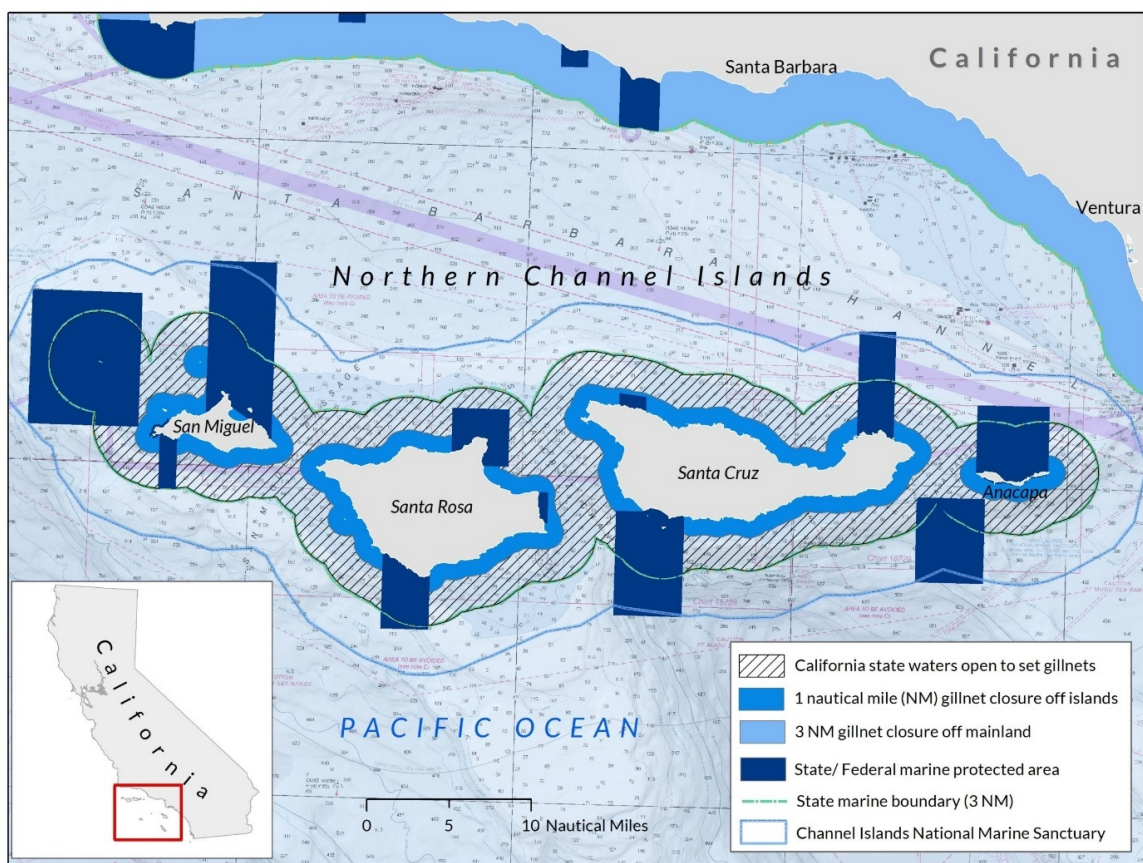
Next Steps

In partnership with luxury Swiss watch manufacturer, [Blancpain](#), Oceana is conducting a series of ocean research expeditions around the Channel Islands exploring and documenting biodiversity in the region. The expedition team is conducting scuba diving surveys to document ocean biodiversity and collecting water samples for analysis in a lab to identify environmental DNA (eDNA) left behind in the water by marine plants, fish, and animals. Environmental DNA collected during the first two expeditions in fall 2024 and spring 2025 [found that more than 11,000 species](#) frequent waters around the Channel Islands. A third expedition is planned for November 2025 to expand the eDNA library and explore further offshore islands and seamounts.

- *A catalogue of photographs taken during the scuba diving surveys from the spring and fall expeditions can be accessed [here](#).*
- *To learn more about ocean biodiversity at risk from set gillnets visit www.oceana.org/KeepCAOceansThriving*



Photographs showcasing the biodiversity around the Channel Islands, © Oceana. From left: 1) Gorgonian coral and garibaldi, 2) horn shark, 3) Spanish shawl, 4) kelp.



Map: Set gillnets were banned within state waters off the Southern California mainland (0-3 nautical miles) and within one nautical mile of offshore islands by California voters in 1990 due to bycatch concerns. Set gillnets were banned in Central Coast waters in 2002, in the San Francisco Bay Area since the 1980s, and off Northern California since 1915. Set gillnets are still used in federal waters, on offshore banks, and in state waters from 1-3 nautical miles around California's Channel Islands, with continued high rates of bycatch. Map by Oceana.

Oceana is the largest international advocacy organization dedicated solely to ocean conservation. Oceana is rebuilding abundant and biodiverse oceans by winning science-based policies in countries that control one-quarter of the world's wild fish catch. With more than 325 victories that stop overfishing, habitat destruction, oil

and plastic pollution, and the killing of threatened species like turtles, whales, and sharks, Oceana's campaigns are delivering results. A restored ocean means that 1 billion people can enjoy a healthy seafood meal every day, forever. Together, we can save the oceans and help feed the world. Visit [Oceana.org](https://oceana.org) to learn more.

The Resource Renewal Institute (RRI) is a 40-year California-based environmental non-profit that combines education, advocacy, organizational development, and sustainability analysis to leverage the global adoption of long-term environmental management strategies to benefit natural resources, wildlife, and society.

[Steve Bennett](#) represents the 38th Assembly District, which includes Camarillo, Fillmore, Ojai, Oxnard, Port Hueneme, Santa Paula, and Ventura. He is chair of the Budget Subcommittee No. 4 on Climate Change, Natural Resources, Energy and Transportation.