SB 69: (Wiener): Ocean Resiliency Act of 2019

Senate Bill (SB) 69 is a comprehensive ocean health bill focused on actionable strategies to increase the resilience of California’s coastal and ocean ecosystems to climate change. The bill centers on four key strategies to improve ocean health and resilience:

I. Ocean Acidification and Hypoxia (OAH)
Global carbon emissions are driving changes not only to the Earth’s climate, but also to the chemistry of the world’s oceans. The oceans are acidifying as they absorb a significant share of the carbon dioxide released from burning of fossil fuels and changing land uses. From corroding shells and skeletons of marine organisms to disrupting normal fish behaviors, ocean acidification (OA) has the potential to alter marine food webs and ecosystems, and diminish the benefits they deliver to society, including California’s $45 billion ocean-based economy.

SB 69 will address the threat of OA and improve water quality by reducing local sources of pollution that exacerbate local OAH hot spots, and by enhancing marine protected areas as climate ‘hope spots.’ Actions specified in SB 69 include improving water quality standards to prevent OAH hot spots, the removal of nitrogen and other OAH-contributing nutrients from wastewater discharges and strengthening the State Water Board’s Areas of Special Biological Significance program.

II. Blue Carbon Strategy
Ocean and coastal ecosystems have the potential to sequester carbon and to assist California in its efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change. These valuable resources – such as kelp, tidal marshes, and seagrass meadows – are historically threatened throughout California due to changing ocean conditions, competing coastal uses, and development. Blue carbon, the carbon dioxide captured by these natural resources, is among the most effective, yet overlooked methods of long-term sequestration and storage of carbon.

SB 69 will make permanent the Coastal Conservancy’s beneficial reuse pilot-program, determine a coastal wetlands baseline and an implementation plan to achieve annual net gain of ecologically functioning wetlands, and develop statewide goals for sustainable mariculture production to improve the overall presence and function of Blue Carbon.

III. Protection of Keystone Species
California is home to iconic, keystone species that provide both cultural and economic value to its communities. Whales along the California coast enhance the predictability and stability of marine ecosystems, while fueling the state’s vibrant coastal tourism economy and a multi-million-dollar whale watching industry. Meanwhile, salmon serve a critical role in California’s coastal and freshwater ecosystems, cultural heritage, and support an $1.4 billion commercial and recreational fishing industry that supplies tens of thousands of jobs. Yet, salmon remain threatened throughout the state with many populations not expected to survive the next century due to the lack and poor quality of freshwater flow.

SB 69 aims to protect California keystone species by improving the management of California’s salmon fisheries and targeting direct threats to water quality in vital waterways for salmon populations, such as improved timber sediment management to reduce turbidity and improve river conditions. SB 69 also aims to protect whales from being fatally struck by ships by establishing a permanent voluntary Vessel Speed Reduction incentive program for the Santa Barbara Channel and San Francisco Bay Area.

Contact: Miles Horton with Senator Wiener’s Office (Miles.Horton@sen.ca.gov)
Sean Bothwell, California Coastkeeper Alliance (sbothwell@ccacoastkeeper.org)
Noah Oppenheim, Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations (noah@ifrfish.org)