

John Fiotakis speaks about Fiobuoy at a California State hearing on whale entanglement

CEO of Fiomarine Industries, John Fiotakis, was invited to speak on a panel of experts and stakeholders in the field of sustainable fisheries before the California State Assembly Budget Subcommittee on Wednesday April 24. The panel's focus was to address the issue of whale and other entanglements in fishing gear by moving beyond funding responses and rescue to looking at preventative solutions.

The entanglement of marine life is a global issue that kills an estimated 300,000 whales annually. It is the leading cause of many whale species. In California, fishing gear poses a high entanglement risk to blue whales, humpbacks and sea turtles. Fisheries and state government have, and continue to, face legal issues because of this problem, as each entanglement is considered a violation of law (under the federal Endangered Species Act).

Whale entanglement can be solved through our proven subsurface marker buoy technology.

Mr. Fiotakis presented the Fiobuoy as a solution to the subcommittee, which was met with strong support from fellow panellists Leah Sturgis (Social Compassion in Legislation) and Dave Anderson (Captain Dave's Dolphin and Whale Safari), who remarked that funding needs to be spent on prevention and that the problem of whale entanglement is entirely solvable.

At Fiomarine we believe that there is a need for government incentives to encourage fisherman to move towards using gear that promotes sustainable fishing practices.

Mr. Anderson shares our view and suggested that government implement a plan to subsidise the purchase of subsurface buoys and phase out surface markers, thereby eliminating the problem of entanglements through prevention.

Presenting the Fiobuoy before Californian state government is a great step forward in our goal of developing an effective solution to end the global problem of whale entanglements.

Fiobuoy's subsurface design eliminates free-floating rope, preventing issues of entanglement, ghost fishing and lost gear. By securing gear, Fiobuoy can ensure it comes out of the water at the end of

the season and doesn't continue to represent a risk of entanglement, a concern expressed by Tom Dempsey (Nature Conservancy).

The Chairman of the Subcommittee and fellow panellists agreed on many aspects of the approach that we're focussing on with Fiobuoy. Here are some of their comments:

"Eliminating vertical lines in the water would end California entanglements...we want to take first steps to develop a long-term plan to implement proven technologies. There are solutions that exist right now that can stop entanglements and we'd like to urge all stakeholders in the state to take steps to see how we can use this technology to solve the problems."

Leah Sturgis

Social Compassion in Legislation, independent filmmaker currently making a documentary on whale entanglement

"[Whale entanglement] is a serious problem, and it's totally solvable. [Fiomarine] has a buoy that they've been using for years, it works, and there's no reason that all the fisherman in the whole state couldn't be using that buoy and we would basically end the problem, because most of the entanglements in California are from these buoys with ropes so if you have no rope and no buoy, you have no problem."

Dave Anderson

Captain Dave's Dolphin and Whale Safari, formed Orange County's first whale rescue group

"What we learned from a forensic review of prior entanglements and disentanglement responders is that a lot of those interactions are happening at the surface in the 'top gear' which is the buoys and ropes floating often at the surface."

Tom Dempsey

Nature Conservancy, California for their Sustainable Fisheries Initiative