



July 17, 2020

Assemblymember Autumn Burke, Chair  
Assembly Committee on Revenue and Taxation  
1020 N Street, Room 167A  
Sacramento, CA 95818

**Re: Senate Bill 587 (Monning) – SUPPORT**

Dear Chairperson Burke:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we are writing to support Senate Bill (SB) 587 (Monning), which will extend the California Sea Otter Fund until 2026.

The southern sea otter is an iconic ambassador for California’s Central Coast. Tourists flock to the Central Coast to watch these charismatic creatures play, eat, nap, and float together in “rafts” just off our shoreline. These animals, that live in our nearshore waters, are also known as “keystone” species, which means that they are critical to the health of our kelp forests and thriving ocean ecosystem. Without sea otters, sea urchin populations can explode, decimating kelp forests. At one time, it seemed as if the sea otter had been erased from our shores due to excessive hunting for the fur trade. But, in 1938, an alcove of 50 otters were discovered in Big Sur and from there, the population has grown to more than 3,000 otters that live along our coast between Point Conception and San Mateo County. Though the population is rebounding, it is not recovered. Sea otters still face many threats including shark predation, oil spills, plastic and fishing line entanglement, toxic algal blooms, loss of kelp forests, and boat strikes.

The California Sea Otter Fund, which was established in 2006, allows taxpayers to donate to the protection and restoration of sea otter populations along our coast, by simply checking a box on their tax forms. Since its creation, the California Sea Otter Fund has provided critical funding for sea otter conservation, collecting nearly \$3.7 million, with an average annual donation of \$306,494. Grants awarded from the fund by the California Coastal Conservancy and the Department of Fish and Wildlife have gone toward research and projects that help us understand causes of sea otter deaths, identify factors that limit population growth, reduce water pollutants toxic to otters, develop wetland management and restoration guidance to aid in otter recovery, and educate the public how they can

prevent disturbance of wild otters. Further, the Department of Fish and Wildlife relies on funding from this program to conduct sea otter conservation science, yearly population counts, and investigations into the causes of sea otter deaths. In addition, the funds from this program are an important source of matching funds to leverage federal funding. This funding program is set to expire January 2021 unless the Legislature acts to extend its sunset date.

The extension of the sunset on the Sea Otter Fund is essential to continuing with current and ongoing sea otter conservation and recovery efforts at a time when this species is making progress towards recovery. Without this critical funding source, much of the sea otter conservation and research work will be curtailed at a time in which additional funding sources are difficult to replace due to the current economic downturn.

For these reasons, we strongly urge an "Aye" vote on SB 587 to ensure that California's sea otter conservation and recovery will continue.

Sincerely,

Pamela Flick  
California Program Director  
Defenders of Wildlife

Juan Altamirano  
Associate Director of Policy  
Audubon California

Howard Penn  
Executive Director  
Planning and Conservation League

Dan Jacobson  
State Director  
Environment California

Sean Bothwell  
Executive Director  
California Coastkeeper Alliance

Pablo Garza  
CA Political Director, Ecosystems  
Environmental Defense Fund

Brandon Dawson  
Policy Advocate  
Sierra Club California

Jennifer Savage  
California Policy Manager  
Surfrider Foundation

Victoria Rome  
California Government Affairs Director  
Natural Resources Defense Council

Jay Ziegler  
Executive Director of External Affairs & Policy  
The Nature Conservancy

Marcela Gutiérrez-Graudiņš  
Founder and Director  
Azul

Amy Wolfrum  
California Ocean Policy Manager  
Monterey Bay Aquarium

Andria Ventura  
Legislative and Policy Director  
Clean Water Action

Linda Krop  
Chief Counsel  
Environmental Defense Center

Diane Tomecek  
President & CEO  
Sea Otter Foundation & Trust