

Date of Hearing: August 20, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

SB 609 (Laird) – As Amended May 23, 2025

Policy Committee:	Water, Parks and Wildlife	Vote:	12 - 0
	Judiciary		12 - 0

Urgency: No State Mandated Local Program: No Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill updates commercial fishing record confidentiality laws to improve record accuracy.

Specifically, this bill, among other things:

- 1) Deems fish business identification numbers, fish business names, commercial fishing license numbers, commercial fisher names, vessel registration identification numbers, and vessel names contained in landing receipts, reports, or other records filed with CDFW public information and makes this information available upon request.
- 2) Provides that the information and data relating to catch contained in the landing receipts and records of fishing activities filed with CDFW are to remain confidential and are not public records.
- 3) Deletes the requirement that marine aquaria receivers submit an electronic fish ticket for bringing ashore their own live fish.

FISCAL EFFECT:

CDFW reports minor and absorbable costs to implement this bill. Following implementation, CDFW contends this bill would save the department over 300 hours of staff time per year currently spent on correcting data errors.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

The Department of Fish and Wildlife is responsible for ensuring that commercial fishing activity is accurately recorded and reported. However, California's stringent confidentiality laws prevent information about commercial fishers and vessels from being shared with those who do the reporting. This results in frequent data entry errors as proper identifications cannot be referenced, requiring the Department to allocate staff time to correcting basic errors. Senate Bill 609 updates California's confidentiality laws to align with those in other West Coast states by designating specific information already

considered non confidential by the National Marine Fisheries Service, such as identification numbers and names, to be nonconfidential.

- 2) **Background. Confidentiality of Commercial Fishing Records.** Current law requires commercial fishers to obtain certain applicable licenses and report their catch to participate in federal and state fisheries. Similarly, current law requires fish businesses to obtain certain applicable licenses and report their possession and handling of fish. In California, the names and identification numbers of fish businesses, the names and fishing license numbers of commercial fishers, and fishing vessel names and identification numbers are confidential information and cannot be released to the public.

According to prior committee analyses, this practice is somewhat unusual for West Coast fisheries. For example, both Oregon and Washington do not hold the names of commercial fishers confidential, and Oregon releases license numbers publicly. Both California and Oregon require vessel identification numbers to be publicly displayed on the exterior of the vessel. In general, fishing activity and landing receipt data are treated as proprietary business information and are kept confidential across the West Coast, with limited exceptions. To increase efficiency, over the last several years, both the federal government and the state have implemented electronic reporting of landing receipts and other fishing records which were previously reported on paper. CDFW staff collect and report the data and work to ensure the accuracy of the records.

Unfortunately, the accuracy of the electronic ticket reporting by commercial fishers and fish businesses is compromised by the misidentification of commercial fishers, fish businesses, and vessels, likely due to inflexible confidentiality requirements. CDFW processes between 45,000 and 50,000 landing receipts annually and indicates that 50% of the errors identified in these receipts are due to misidentification. CDFW estimates that identifying and correcting these errors takes hundreds of hours of staff time. Because of confidentiality laws, CDFW is unable to share identifying information with other fishers or businesses for verification purposes, which undermines the overall accuracy of the state's commercial fishing records. This bill enables CDFW to use these identifying details to correct erroneous landing receipts.

Marine Aquaria Landing Receipts. Current law requires any person engaged in the business of receiving live marine species native to California waters for the purpose of wholesaling or retailing these species for the pet industry or hobby purposes to obtain a Marine Aquaria Receiver's License. When these species are transferred from the collector to the receiver, the transaction must be documented with a landing receipt, which is still done on paper. Recent updates to statute, however, inadvertently required these landing receipts to also be reported electronically. This bill corrects that reference.

Analysis Prepared by: Nikita Koraddi / APPR. / (916) 319-2081