

Testimony for the Subcommittee on Energy and Environment

August 16, 2010

My name is Acy J. Cooper, Jr. I am a commercial fisherman from Venice, Louisiana-Plaquemines Parish-Ground Zero. I am also the Vice President of Louisiana Shrimpers Association, a state wide organization that represents shrimpers throughout our state.

I would like to speak about the extent and effects of oil contamination due to the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill.

The extent of the damage is wide spread. Oil is on the bottom of our water ways and our seafood estuaries. We have reports of numerous fish kills which include different species of marine life. Some include Menhaden redfish, shark, turtles and many more. We have also seen a large number of birds being contaminated by the oil in our waters. Some are rescued and rehabilitated but some are not so lucky. We have reports of dead birds in our community and in our waterways that do not have evidence of oil contamination; the cause of death is unknown to me.

This oil spill has had a catastrophic effect to our community's environment. Our way of life and our industry has been greatly crippled. The total impact of this may not be known for many years. On Monday August 16, 2010 our commercial shrimping season in Louisiana began. Normally on opening day the average fisherman would bring in catches of a couple of thousand pounds. Today my catch was 500 pounds. This was a bad turnout. The exact reason is unknown to me. In my opinion this decrease is due to the waters being contaminated by oil and dispersants. The Shrimp Industry in the state of Louisiana employs 14,000 people and was a \$1.4 billion dollar industry. I do not think it will be so successful in the years to come.

I worked on the cleanup job through BP for the past 3 months. I was laid off so that other fishermen could have an opportunity to work and be compensated. In my last week of working with BP, I found oil on the water bottoms in bays. (The same water ways that were opened today for commercial shrimping.) I reported this find to the Coast Guard on the day that it was found and was told by them that it was not oil. It took me 3 days to have someone listen to my plea about this oil in this area. To this day I do not believe that this bay was skimmed or that the oil was cleaned up. We need our coast guard, our government officials and BP to take a more extensive approach to cleaning oil that is lying on the water bottoms. The dispersants that were used on this oil has caused it to sink and is making its way into our inland shores undetected.

The "VOO" (Vessel of Opportunity) program is a great program. It gives our fishermen a way to work and not depend on government handouts. It also gives us a way to help in the oil recovery efforts. There are many flaws in this program. But most are caused by contractors that do not know anything about our water ways or our coast or how to clean up or prevent oil from entering. Fishermen have to accept jobs with the VOO program when called. The future of the industry is so unknown that we cannot rely on the fishing industry alone. The openings and closures may mean that we fish today but are unemployed again tomorrow. The fishermen that

did not get an opportunity with the VOO program may not survive through our winter months. If they cannot survive this year, how will they get through future years? Stress, depression, abuse, suicides will be greater than ever. Our community is already seeing friends fighting against friends and families being divided because of this disaster.

I am worried about the affects of dispersants on our seafood and our marine life. Presently there is not testing being done for the dispersant corexit contamination to our seafood. I would like you to force the issues that a test to be developed and used for this. We do not want one bit of contaminated seafood to enter our markets. This would finish off our market for our seafood that has already been tarnished if not destroyed.

I agree with the opening and closing of the Louisiana waters to commercial fishermen when these waters have positive oil sightings. Again we do not want contaminated seafood to get into our market. But I also believe that testing in inshore waters have not been extensive enough.

I would like to ask that our Federal Government and Federal Agencies stay close and on top of all issues and affects on safety and recovery to our coast and waterways. It seems like BP Oil is trying to down size the present and future affects of this catastrophe.

Another issue that I have is that oil spill workers in our fishing areas must wear hazmat protective clothing and gloves to be in these areas. These are the same areas that we are being allowed to harvest and sell seafood from. Does this make sense to you? It does not to me.

We have had meetings to plan recovery from this disaster. How can we plan to recover when we do not and will not know the extent of the damage for years to come? This is the largest oil spill in America's history and everyone wants to paint a picture that it's all fine today. In reality the battle has just begun for our Fishing Industry and our wetlands. We as an Industry have a long way to go and may never come out of it.

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