



PEW ENVIRONMENT GROUP

May 26, 2010

The Honorable David R. Obey
Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
Room H-218 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jerry Lewis
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Obey and Ranking Member Lewis:

The ongoing Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico has resulted in tragic loss of life, damaged the livelihoods of many, and is creating an unknown but likely devastating environmental disaster. Though the full impact of the spill on the Gulf's coastal communities and its marine resources is still unknown, experience from past spills indicates that the damage will last for years. On behalf of the Pew Environment Group, I'm writing to urge you to respond forcefully to this crisis by providing increased funding to address ecological needs in the Gulf region. Though we support the Obama Administration's request to provide the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) with \$30 million for environmental studies and unemployment compensation for fishermen, we feel that more – specifically \$50 million - is needed to support oil spill trajectory modeling, natural resource damage assessments and cooperative research to fill critical information gaps and keep fishermen on the water.

Commercial and recreational fishing play a vital role in the Gulf economy. In 2008 alone, commercial fishing brought in \$659 million in total landings revenue, and over 3 million fishermen took fishing trips to the Gulf region.¹ The oil spill has already dealt a severe blow to these fisheries in the form of lost days at sea, canceled boat charters, and lost revenue.²

The commercial and recreational fishing industry relies on the tremendous coastal and marine resources of the Gulf region. The spill will take a toll on fish, other marine wildlife and habitats over the next weeks, months and years. Commercially and recreationally important fish species, such as bluefin tuna, groupers and red snapper, are spawning now in the spill area. Larvae that may manage to survive the oil contamination will confront toxic dispersants, which “make the oil easier to ingest as the oil is often formed into small, bite-sized particles.”³ The spill, which

has the potential to wipe out a significant portion of this year's reproduction, could lead to significant declines over the next years and potentially decades of key Gulf fisheries, negatively impacting commercial and recreational fishermen for the foreseeable future.

Our request will allow the government to continue modeling the path of the oil, begin assessing the extent of the damage wrought upon the marine environment to guide restoration efforts, and keep fishermen on the water conducting cooperative research. In the near-term, we feel that these three areas, described more fully below, will require significant increases in funding to address the negative impacts associated with the spill:

1. Oil Spill Trajectory Modeling (\$10 million)

Accurate models of the path and trajectory of the oil spill are critical in order to mount an effective response strategy in specific regions and Gulf-wide. Increased funding for trajectory modeling will help NOAA understand immediate impacts and more accurately predict medium and longer-term consequences and resource needs in specific locations.

2. Natural Resource Damage Assessments (\$35 million)

Assessing the nature and extent of the damage caused by the spill will be critical in guiding short-term clean-up and longer-term restoration. We support increased funding for natural resource damage assessments so that NOAA can fully understand the impact of the spill on fish, marine mammals, turtles, birds and other coastal/marine wildlife and their habitats, including wetlands, beaches and other areas. Additionally, natural resource damage assessments will help NOAA understand the socioeconomic impact of the spill on Gulf communities. These assessments will enable NOAA to develop targeted and effective response strategies, as well as monitor the impact of these activities over time on Gulf resources and communities.

3. Cooperative Fisheries Research (\$5 million)

Robust data collection programs will be critical for establishing a baseline to guide and assess restoration efforts. Cooperative fisheries research involving scientists and fishermen can provide urgently needed data on fish resources and habitats, and has the added benefit of keeping fishermen employed and on the water.

This environmental catastrophe has the potential to permanently alter the Gulf ecosystem and the industries and traditions that have existed for centuries. In addition, the damage to marine wildlife and ecosystems could have implications well beyond the boundaries of the Gulf. Supporting the three priorities outlined above will enable NOAA to quickly and effectively respond to the immediate impacts of the spill. However, to help ensure the long-term recovery of the Gulf's fishing industries and its marine resources, we will also need to increase support for: 1) disaster aid for fishermen and other Gulf industries reliant on fishing, such as charter vessels and marinas; and 2) expanded stock assessments for key fisheries so that managers can better understand and respond to long-term impacts of the spill on vital Gulf fisheries.

We urge you to fully support \$50 million in funding for NOAA to help mitigate the damage from the spill and eventually put the region on the path to recovery. Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,



Lee R. Crockett
Director
Federal Fisheries Policy
Pew Environment Group

cc: The Honorable Alan B. Mollohan
Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
Room H-310 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank R. Wolf
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nick J. Rahall II
Chairman
House Natural Resources Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Doc Hastings
Ranking Member
House Natural Resources Committee
1329 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

¹ *Fish Stocks in the Gulf of Mexico: Fact Sheet*. NOAA. April 2010

² Testimony, Steve Bortone, Executive Director, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

³ *Ibid.*