

**STATEMENT OF GULF COAST FISHERMEN, SEAFOOD WORKERS, and
MARITIME COMMUNITIES on the
GULF OF MEXICO OIL DRILLING DISASTER**

THE FACTS:

We Are a Unified Community. Gulf Coast fishermen, seafood workers, and maritime communities from Florida to Texas will not be divided by nefarious, unscrupulous corporate tactics.

This Disaster Has Been Devastating. As residents of the Gulf Coast, many of us have not fully recovered from Hurricane Katrina and subsequent storms. There are still unmet needs in housing, healthcare, economic development and community restoration, almost five years since Katrina's landfall in this same area. Many of the fishing cooperatives that formed since Katrina have not received adequate support and funding; many families still have not received housing assistance to rebuild (in south Mobile County, Alabama for instance, more than 450 families that qualified for Federal housing rebuilding support, will not receive it because funds are insufficient); and many communities, community services and eroded shorelines across the Gulf Coast region have not been fully rebuilt or restored. See, www.ushrnetwork.org/sites/default/files/Katrina_Aftermath_Joint_Report_USA.pdf. Notwithstanding, we returned to rebuild. Now, our prime fishing areas are closed, at the very beginning of the commercial fishing season. Many fishermen and seafood industry workers are small business owners or seasonal workers who are not covered by unemployment compensation and other worker benefits. We have made significant investments in preparing our boats and equipment for the 2010 season, with the expectation of a good year – finally. That expectation has been shattered.

We Are Entitled to Accurate Information. Since the BP oil drilling disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, people in the fishing and maritime communities across the Gulf Coast from Florida to Texas have received misleading, factually inaccurate, and sometime deceptive information about the extent and impact of the disaster. We do not know when this disaster will end nor how its impacts on the ocean, estuaries, marshes, bays, bayous, beaches and communities that are our home and source of livelihood. We also do not know how the wide scale use of chemical dispersants will impact the long term health of our seafood resources and communities. At the very least, those responsible for this man-made disaster must be held accountable by the federal government, and fully transparent in their disclosure of information and documentation.

We Are the Gulf Coast Experts. Our lifelong experience and environmental knowledge have not been utilized to mitigate and solve the impacts of this catastrophic ecological, economic and social disaster. Still, most of us have not yet been employed as “first responders” to protect our fishing grounds, shore lines, wildlife, and our communities. This is nonsense.

OUR DEMANDS:

We as commercial fishermen, seafood workers and residents of maritime communities in the Gulf Coast are demanding:

1. **Responsibility and Accountability:** The President of the United States and the U.S. Congress must ensure British Petroleum (BP) and its subcontractors are held financially responsible for the full immediate, short-term, and long-term impact of this disaster. Further, BP, its subcontractors, and any other corporate entities deemed responsible parties for this disaster, must provide all appropriate assistance to fishermen, seafood workers and maritime communities dealing with the long term impacts of this disaster and its yet unforeseen impacts on the fishing, seafood, recreation, and culture in Gulf Coast communities;

2. **Oversight:** The President and the U.S. Congress must provide public oversight, information, and administration of support to assist fishermen, seafood workers and Gulf Coast communities in this disaster. The federal government must have complete oversight over the BP oil drilling claims process, and BP must relinquish this control immediately;

3. **Compensation:** The President and the U.S. Congress must ensure that immediate compensation is paid to fishermen, fishing crews, seafood processing workers, seafood industry related workers and others, to provide for income replacement and family living expenses. The lack of federal or state income returns must not preclude any fisherman, fishing crew member, seafood processing worker, and seafood industry related workers and others from receiving compensation. This claims compensation protocol must include:

- a. A system for classification of claimants;
- b. Immediate compensation for six (6) months of lost income that is equivalent to at least an annual income of \$24,000. Fishermen, fishing crews, seafood processing workers, seafood industry related workers and others who can substantiate higher annual income from fishing will receive higher payments;
- c. In 6 months (October 2010) a sum equal to one half of one year's lost earnings (and no less than \$12,000 per worker) shall be paid to every fisherman, seafood

processing workers, seafood industry related workers and others remaining out of work as a result of this disaster;

- d. Within 12 months of the initial payment, the President of the United States must make a final assessment of full damages for lost earnings to be made to fishermen fishing crews, seafood processing workers, seafood industry related workers and others and seafood workers. This determination should include evaluation of other long term losses beyond loss of earnings such as damage to boats and equipment, damage to oyster beds and fishing grounds, and other longer term losses.
- e. All other workers along the Gulf Coast, directly or indirectly connected to the seafood industry, must receive emergency unemployment compensation, retroactive to the beginning of this disaster, from the appropriate state agencies, reimbursed by BP and other responsible parties.

4. **Forbearance of Loan Re-Payments.** A consequence of the BP oil disaster is the indefinite interruption of income for people whose livelihood is based on the fishing and seafood industries. Therefore, the President must provide a mechanism whereby payment obligations for home and business related loans are placed in forbearance.

5. **Prioritizing Local Communities:** Priority in contracting and hiring must be given to local fishermen and firms along the Gulf Coast; and that firms that use workers receiving substandard pay be excluded from contracting.

6. **Language Access:** All information and documents related to providing information and instruction to fishermen and seafood workers must be translated, into Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Spanish, and other languages so that the residents of the multicultural maritime communities across the Gulf Coast will be able to read and understand the information provided.

7. **Access to Funds:** That there are significant unspent Federal funds for Katrina Hurricane relief and rebuilding that are unspent which must be re-programmed and utilized to meet these un-met needs so vulnerable Gulf Coast people and communities can better deal and respond to the current oil drilling catastrophe.