

FTS DOC CONFERENCING

**Moderator: Laurel Bryant
May 28, 2010
2:30 pm CT**

Man: I'll be right in.

Laurel Bryant: She's going to turn it over to me and I'll introduce you guys and then we'll go.

Man: Okay.

Laurel Bryant: And I'll be the bad guy.

Coordinator: Thank you all for standing by. All lines have been placed on a listen only mode throughout the duration of today's conference. Today's conference is being recorded. If you do have any objections you may disconnect at this time. I would now like to turn the call over to Laurel Bryant. Thank you, you may begin.

Laurel Bryant: Hi everybody. Welcome and thanks for joining us before your holiday weekend. My name is Laurel Bryant. I'm with NOAA external affairs, I'm the Fisheries Program Coordinator. And with me today I have Eric Schwaab,

Assistant Administrator for Fisheries and Dr. Steve Murawski, Chief Scientist here at NOAA fisheries.

And on the phone so far it looks like we've got over 60 representatives from our stakeholders around the country but certainly primarily in the Gulf. So welcome, thanks for joining us. This our second teleconference on the oil spill and we wanted to provide an opportunity for us to update, there's been a lot going on.

And so Eric is going to cover and give a brief overview on some of the changes and occurrences going on and Dr. Murawski will kind of give an overview of the science of the house. And then we'll turn it and open it up for Q&A. So, without further adieu, Eric.

Eric Schwaab: Thank you Laurel. And thank you everyone for joining us for some of you again for, as Laurel said the second call of this nature where frankly we want to just open lines of communication to provide a status update on particularly the NOAA fisheries activities in the Gulf.

And we have a few comments that we want to make in relation to some current events and current status reports. And I will make some of those and then I - as Laurel said I will hand the phone over to Dr. Steve Murawski to make some additional science specific and seafood safety specific comments.

But what we really want to do for the most part is provide an opportunity for a question and answer and we'll try to dedicate the bulk of our time - or reserve the bulk of our time to allow that to happen.

So I'm going to touch briefly on fishery closures as it relates to both purpose and process, say a few words as well about some plans in the work for

reopening as conditions permit. I will talk a little bit about as well the disaster declaration and where we are in that process before I turn things over to Steve.

With respect to fishery closures today NOAA issued the ninth modification to the fishery closure area since the first closure was designated on May 2nd. The decision to establish closure areas was a difficult one but for us critical for not only public safety but to protect the regions seafood reputation and to protect the integrity of the significant remaining recreational opportunities that exist throughout the Gulf region.

So even with today's closure the vast majority of the federal waters of the Gulf remain open to commercial seafood harvesting as well as recreational opportunity.

We are continuing to work closely with the FDA and other federal and state partners and are committed to continuing efforts to reassure consumers about the safety to seafood harvested in the Gulf. And this closure process is a primary mechanism to do that by ensuring that potentially contaminated product never makes it to the market.

As far as process goes the closure area is evaluated daily primarily based on the 48 hour projections of oil that we get that is derived from weather and ocean current analysis and provided by our NOAA scientists.

We make modifications as necessary, we hope to establish a process that allows us to update on a two to three day basis but we'll make daily updates if necessary and have done so.

If a decision is made to modify a closure area we strive to post any changes to our southeast regions Web site each day by noon and those modifications then take effect at 6:00 pm Eastern Daylight Time for that same day.

As I mentioned plans are underway to provide for reopening as conditions permit. A big portion of that is dependent upon seafood safety and sampling protocols that Steve will speak to but those protocols are being developed by FDA and NOAA to determine when harvest waters can be reopened.

Under the protocol harvest waters will not reopen until oil from the spill is no longer present and in addition to that seafood samples from the areas successfully pass both chemical and sensory analysis to ensure there is no harmful oil residue.

We anticipate release of this process next week and believe that this will help further to counter the misperceptions regarding the safety of seafood and recreational fishing opportunity in the region.

Let me shift just for a moment to the disaster declaration. We all recognize the financial hardship this spill has caused for commercial and recreational fishermen and businesses dependent on those fisheries.

On May 24 the administration announced a fishery disaster determination in the Gulf under the Magnuson Act for the effected states of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. This determination enables NOAA to make financial assistance available to those affected by the spill providing Congress support for the administrations request for supplemental appropriations.

The administration has requested \$15 million in supplemental funding as a backstop to address this disaster as well as \$5 million of economic development assistance through the Economic Development Administration.

In addition the administration is requesting unemployment coverage for this disaster and the Small Business Administration is offering economic injury disaster loans which can help fishermen and other affected businesses.

Further the Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration in close coordination with NOAA has been in the Gulf Coast region leading with the economic development practitioner community to assess the potential economic implications and effects from the spill.

Once these impacts are known EDA stands ready to respond with whatever resources are available within its traditional suite of economic development programs and tools.

I must say however that the administration expects that BP and any other responsible parties will ultimately cover the full cost of the economic damages and appropriated restoration of these fisheries and other important resources in the area.

Let me just say another word about recreational fisheries. Obviously we have under Magnuson rebuilding schedules been pursuing come fairly restrictive catch limits with respect to a number of species mostly prominently red snapper. We have understandably an expectation that some of these activities will suppress fishing behavior.

So to help measure not only the economic impact to the industry but also to position us to make longer term decisions with respect to appropriate

adjustments to management measure for some of these important fisheries we are helping to - working with other partners in the region notably the Gulf States Marine Fishery Commission and the State Fishery Agencies of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida to substantially increase the number of capping interviews conducted by the weekly for hire survey in each state.

This will allow us to produce fishing activity statistics at weekly rather than bimonthly intervals, measure changes in fishing patterns and levels so that we will be able to make adjustments to seasons as appropriate later on in this year if opportunity presents. So this additional enhanced effort is initiated in time to provide better tracking from June 1 on.

And we certainly - while we focus this portion of this enhanced survey on the for hire sector have essentially developed a process whereby we can use that as a proxy for broader recreational activity within the region to supplement traditional recreational catch and effort data. And we certainly want to thank the industry in advance for their participation in this enhanced data collection.

So with that I'm going to turn the phone over to Dr. Steve Murawski for a few important science comments and updates and then we will open the phones to questions. Steve.

Dr. Steve Murawski: Thanks Eric. I wanted to make a comment about the science response ongoing. Because as Eric said the closing and potential openings are going to be science based. First of all I'd like to use the words of Admiral Allen and say that this spill is unprecedented because it's omnidirectional and multidimensional.

Omnidirectional means basically it's everything from up in the estuaries to out to the deep pelagic realm. And so we have an enormous scope of mission here that we're trying to cover.

And multidimensional in the sense that it's trying to understand not only the short-term impacts but trying to set the stage for understanding what this means in the long-term for fishery resources in the region. And so we've deployed our assets to cover a number of important aspects.

I just wanted to run the numbers a little bit. We literally have hundreds of people in NOAA fisheries involved in this situation right now. Not only the people that are in the southeast region - the science centers and our laboratories at Miami, Panama City, Pascagoula, Lafayette and Galveston but we also have our seafood testing laboratory in Pascagoula and also our chemists in Seattle running most of the analytic chemistry samples that Eric talked about in terms of seafood sampling.

We've sent down one of our science directors from the northeast to run the seafood testing program down there. And we've got one of our first line science directors from the northeast also involved in some ship work down there.

So I just wanted to kind of run over what our science priorities are right now. First of all we're interested in the source, fate and movement of oil and dispersants. And so I think you all have seen some of the press about is there sub - I think we got a good handle on what's at the surface. There are aircraft - a special aircraft from NASA as well as our own aircraft that are tracking what's on the surface and that involves satellites as well.

Subsurface is a more difficult problem, you know, it's underwater, it's difficult to detect and the water is where this well site are extremely deep, they're 5000 feet deep. And so the questions come over that mile of water, you know, where are potential subsurface dispersants and oil going?

I can tell you from the sampling data that I've seen that there is no river of oil in crude form anywhere formed here . Even at the well site we're talking about oil in the parts per million and we've had a number of reports and you've seen some reporting on this in no case are we talking about what we would call crude oil being in the subsurface.

That being said there currently are a fleet of seven ships that are out there sampling looking for subsurface oil including fishery ships that are being repurposed. We have the Gordon Gunter which does fishery surveys in the region. Gordon Gunter is now outfitted using its sonar which is a technology that the Norwegians used to track subsurface and they actually had an experiment with it. We actually have the gear on board.

And the Gunter is also equipped with a state of the art underwater vehicle that takes water samples independently. That's out on scene right now. We've also got the NOAA ship Thomas Jefferson which is doing a similar mission. There are other ships that we have contracted with to do this kind of work. So we are very much omnidirectional in looking for these subsurface plumes.

I can tell you that all of the positive samples are within the - that we've seen and again there's a time delay because we've got to get the chemistry analyzed in a laboratory, are within the outline of the fishery closed area currently. And most of them - most of the positive signs that we've seen are actually within a 20 mile radius of that site. This is a very fluid situation if I

could say and so we're going to keep at this. So that's the tracking of subsurface.

The next is - as Eric said, we're trying to make sure that we track sample for potential contamination with oil products. Now it's interesting because oil is metabolized very quickly by fish. And so even if an animal is oiled within a matter of days it goes down to very, very low levels in the flesh but nevertheless publics concerned and so we're on it.

We were able to get some pre-impact samples, in fact quite a few because fisheries people in the region were able to use their small boats quickly to gather samples of snappers, groupers and then shrimp and oysters. And so we've got what we think is a good background to detect to and those samples have been run. We'll probably see those out in public pretty quick.

And then the other - the next part of seafood sampling is as we identify areas that may have been oil but aren't currently oiled, how do we turn them back on? And as Eric said we have two plans there, chemical analysis as well as the analysis of sensory which is smell and taste.

And it's interesting because the general feeling is that an adept sensory technician can actually detect oil levels down to one part per million with smell and that's a very sensitive detector. And so using the sensory as well as the chemical analysis is going to basically assure that we have safe and whole product on the market.

And then the third line of this sampling procedure is to get sort of Gulf-wide view. And one of - the two ways we're going to do this is number one, to gather seafood samples from the marketplace that are currently out there in conjunction with FDA and to run the sensory and chemical analysis.

And then secondly to start doing broad based surveys including not only the areas that have been oiled but outside the areas using our ships. And we're likely put another ship in the Gulf.

So I don't want to dwell on the science issues too much but the last thing we're doing is we're trying to gauge the impact on wildlife including fish but also including protected resources.

And so we know for example that we have 238 turtles that have beached. Most of them are deceased. They're undergoing analysis, basically the wildlife equivalent of an autopsy to under their, you know, their cause of death and about 24 bottlenose dolphins similar kinds of necropsy going on. And those - we're also doing counts, you know, with our aircraft about how many are actually in the water relative to the spill.

So I would say it's a multidimensional science plan that we've got going. It's very aggressive. A lot of resources involved in this. And we're going to do our best that number one, we're going to make sure no tainted seafood reaches the market. And number two that we understand the full impact on the wildlife in the region.

Laurel Bryant: Excellent. Thanks a lot Steve. And with that operator can you please prompt our participants with the information on how they can get into the queue to ask a question?

Coordinator: Thank you. At this time if you'd like to ask a question please press star 1 on your touchtone phone. Again to ask a question please press star 1. Okay, Our first question comes from (Steve Thomas). Please state your affiliation and you may ask your question.

(Steve Thomas): I own the Cajun Canyons Billfish Classic Fishing Tournament in Venice, Louisiana. My question is what are the effects of the dispersants and what do we need to do to convince the EPA to stop using them?

Dr. Steve Murawski: So the dispersants that are being used by EPA is - the primary one is a dispersant called Corexit. It's been studied fairly significantly. Certainly not with offshore pelagics that you might be interested in but a number of fish species.

I would characterize Corexit as mildly toxic to fish and wildlife based on the testing that we've seen. It also breaks down relatively quickly. Couple of the major constituents are isopropyl alcohol and ethanol. There are other elements in it and again it is mildly toxic.

We're a little bit in uncharted waters here in a sense that we don't know what the combined effect of this particular oil are along with the dispersants. And I can tell you that these dispersant conversations are going on with the EPA everyday even as we speak about what's the proper use of these relative to, you know, free run oil.

And, you know, it's a trade off and it's a hard tradeoff. There's no good answer here in terms of what's the proper thing to do. So...

Laurel Bryant: Okay. Thanks Steve. Operator the next question.

Coordinator: Thank you. (Les Hodgson) please state your affiliation. You may ask your question.

(Les Hodgson): Yes. Dr. Steve my name is (Les Hodgson) with Marco Sales and Seafood Company out of Texas. And we just wanted to be assured that the dispersants that are being used pose no health hazard to people consuming seafood products harvested from the Gulf of Mexico.

Dr. Steve Murawski: Well if we look at the dispersant's control sheets they are not toxic to humans. Right? Now one of the issues of course is trying to actually determine if they're present in the seafood that we've got.

So far the dispersants should be within the fishery closure area and what we're doing is we're going to monitor for dispersants as well. And so this is uncharted territory as well. Nobody's ever looked for Corexit in seafood fish flesh.

We have corrected the laboratory trying to determine what it looks like and our seafood sampling program will actually include looking for chemicals and sensory signatures of Corexit. So to the extent that we have our arms around the seafood supply within the closed area we will assure that we inspect the seafood and make sure that if areas are open that they're clean of this.

Laurel Bryant: Great. Thanks Steve. Operator our next question please.

Coordinator: Dennis O'Hern please state your affiliation. You may ask your question.

Dennis O'Hern: Hi. Dennis O'Hern, Fishing Rights Alliance. Thanks for the opportunity to ask the question and Eric thanks for addressing us.

My question goes to the statement you made about estimating effort based on ramped up of for hire surveys. And there's been a lot of concern expressed about actually comparing for hire surveys and professional pay charter

captains with fishing habits of the other 97% of the saltwater trips which are private boats.

And I'm concerned that you guys are going to ramp it up and see some activity and maybe get a signal that may not be correct whether it be high or low. And I wondered if there's any talk about that?

Eric Schwaab: So that certainly is something that is a part of the evaluation of that. And I would just emphasize that we're not going to be dependent entirely on that we will still have the (AMREP) data that will be coming out of the region.

And the only - the focus on the for hire is that it was a quick and cost effective way to get more real time data. So that for example as conditions permit later on into, you know, later June or even into July we didn't want to have to wait for the completion of a two month wave to be able to at least make some initial proxy assumptions about fishing trends.

So we'll have some opportunity to compare in a more - on a more real time basis with an understanding exactly of the point that you make which is it's not going to be perfect in that regard. And that's something that the team down there continues to look at very specifically. So thank you.

Laurel Bryant: Great. Thanks. Our next questioner.

Coordinator: Mark Robson please state your affiliation and you may ask your question.

Mark Robson: Thank you. This is Mark Robson and I'm the Director for the Division of Marine Fisheries of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. And thank you Eric and Steve for having this call today.

Eric Schwaab: Yes. Sure thing Mark good to hear from you.

Mark Robson: Yes. Nick Wiley our Executive Director sends his regards.

Eric Schwaab: Okay.

Mark Robson: My question for you is we're talking to a lot of the fishermen here in Florida of course and as you probably know Florida did not request designation under the Section 312 Federal Fishery Failure Declaration.

My question for you - and I think the fishermen will want to know because they are concerned about very sudden changes in their ability to fish. What is the likely scenario for actually implementing the disaster relief program and the minimum amount of time that funds would actually be available for those fishermen in the three states?

In other words how quickly even if Florida were to be designated - request designation how quickly would those funds actually be available to fishermen regardless of what state they're in.

Eric Schwaab: So, you know, I think the first question there relates to the appropriations process. The second element relates to our ability to work with the states where disasters have been declared to essentially identify plans for use of whatever money might be available.

And, you know, generally that is probably, you know, has been a lengthier process than anything we might be, you know, talking about under this scenario.

I think there are a couple of things that complicate this particular scenario one of which is as Steve indicated the sort of ever evolving nature of this event and therefore the economic impacts associated with it.

And the other sort of more confounding aspect of this is that the administration still believes that ultimately it will be BP and any other responsible parties that will be wholly responsible for, you know, bottom line, you know, restitution or, you know, impact mitigation.

And so we envision I think very much Mark this - the federal component of this to be a stop gap measure to the extent that we can identify plans and put some actions into place sooner rather than later.

But also one that will continue to be, you know, I think, you know, a process that will involve not only in conversation or in interactions with the states where disasters have been - where a disaster has been declared but, you know, in the event the circumstances change in Florida, you know, further inclusion of Florida in that process. And Steve has a comment he wants to add.

Dr. Steve Murawski: Hi Mark. I just wanted to emphasize what Eric just said. And that is, you know, thankfully with the loop current kind of enclosing and pinching off we haven't seen that scenario where, you know, the oil is up in Florida. But, you know, the loop current's very dynamic and we very well could see. I'm not saying that we're predicting this at all Florida actually, you know, becoming involved in this and so we need to be nimble about this.

Eric Schwaab: And so I guess, you know, just to get to your question of timing Mark which I didn't answer directly because there's not really a clear answer at this point, it's very much sort of a dynamic process.

Laurel Bryant: And don't forget (unintelligible).

Eric Schwaab: And - right, Laurel just reminded me to remind you again that there is obviously also in addition to that the direct opportunity for claims to be directed at BP. They have an 800 number. There is a backup number to the Coast Guard if the initial call to BP does not yield a satisfactory response. And - although BP as a responsible party has already paid out over \$27 million on 23,000 claims.

Laurel Bryant: Okay. Thanks. Operator we'll take our next questioner.

Coordinator: Thank you. Holly Binns please state your affiliation. You may ask your question,

Holly Binns: Thanks. This is Holly Binns and I run the Pugh Environment Group's fisheries campaigns in the southeast. And I am curious about the redeployment of the NOAA fisheries team in the southeast to deal with the oil spill response which is obviously sort of the front and center priority.

But they already had a pretty full workload with the MSA implementation and other issues before the Fisheries Councils. I'm just wondering if there's been any thought about additional staff resources or other ways to sort of help fill the gaps?

Dr. Steve Murawski: Oh thanks for the question. I can tell you that the other staff resources are already there. They're - we're fully engaged. This is a all hands on deck operation. I, you know, we are trying to make sure that we conduct our statutory responsibilities elsewhere but we also have to respond to this and, you know, I can tell you that it's maxing out of system.

We have lots of senior people, lot's of analysts, lots of chemists, lots of crews people that are there. We are responding to this but we're cognizant that the day before the oil spill we had a full plate of management responsibilities and we're going to do our very best to make sure that we satisfy the councils needs and others. Just remember that the eyes of the entire country are focused on this right now.

Laurel Bryant: Great. Thank you Steve. And this next questioner is my favorite. Operator.

Coordinator: Thank you. Eric Schwaab please state your affiliation and you may ask your question.

Laurel Bryant: Hello?

Coordinator: Mr. Schwaab please check your mute button.

Laurel Bryant: Oh he is a phantom after all.

Eric Schwaab: We were - we feared there was another Eric Schwaab out there. Perhaps I'll find him at some point.

Laurel Bryant: Why don't we go to the next questioner operator?

Coordinator: Thank you. Chris Dorsett please state your affiliation. You may ask your question.

Chris Dorsett: Hi. This is Chris Dorsett with Ocean Conservancy and thanks Eric, Steve and Laurel for taking time to address the group today.

Eric Schwaab: Hi Chris.

Chris Dorsett: Hi. I have a - Steve you mentioned the scope of the impacts of the spill here. We're looking at a variety of habitats covering a wide swath of area affecting probably a vast assemblage of species. And I appreciate the resources that NOAA's brought to bear to monitor the impacts of the spill.

I'm wondering how you all are working with states and academic institutions to essentially link the monitoring programs best as you can given that states and other institutions are also engaged in monitoring work so we can, you know, best assess the impacts moving forward in order to hold responsible parties accountable for damages in the short-term as well as over the long-term.

Dr. Steve Murawski: That's a great question Chris and thanks. You're absolutely right, there are lots of federal, academic and private organization resources available for this. And we really do need to make very best use of the partnerships that we've got in place.

I can tell you that Eric has a daily call with all the state directors to try to coordinate much of what we're doing particularly on the seafood safety side. States have testing labs they're using those things, we're using our testing labs, we're trying to coordinate the use of ships to do monitoring work, to do pickups of animals to be rehabilitated - variety of things.

On the academic side we have a number of joint missions for example with the NOAA ship the Gordon Gunter. That's actually an interesting partnership because we've got the University of South Florida's vessel called the Weather Bird which came in today that was actually part of that mission where Gunter was coming down from the north, Weather Bird was coming up from the south.

We also on that mission had the Monterey Bay Research Institute - MBRI which is a private organization also had their technology on board as well. We're trying to reach out through the Sea Grant Program to make sure that academics are involved. And also the National Science Foundation has made rapid grants available to a number of the academic institutions. In fact I think they have over \$1 million in rapid grants that are already being let and those people are on the water.

I can tell you that next week there is going to be a very large science conference that's going to look at the intersection between the federal and the academic side and try to get our hands around it.

And one thing I can tell you is that BP has announced that they're going to make \$500 million available for science related to this spill and that, you know, it's not just the short-term but also the long-term.

And of course, you know, we need some independent steering group to make sure that the science that's funded is the best and is credible and I guess those discussions are ongoing in terms of how that would work.

I would say that in any event like this getting organized and getting everybody on board and getting everybody channeled towards what we think the big issues are is always problematic. And I can tell you Eric has got his pager and cell phone going off as I do as well and a lot of it is coordination. And once we get out of the fog of battle a little bit I think we're going to see that we've got a lot of people on deck.

Eric Schwaab: So let me just add one thing to that, which is, Chris, as you know looking down the road the natural resources damage assessment process is going to

play an important role in ensuring that the responsible party is, you know, held accountable for appropriate restoration efforts.

And I think it's fair to say - and so the NRDA process brings together the state and the federal trustees who have, you know, public trust responsibilities for various resources that are in play here to begin very early on the documentation process.

And this is probably going to be one of the most complex and one of the most extensive documentation processes ever - if not the most ever encountered under this process. That process has already stood up, additional resources are being brought on board to ensure that that happens appropriately throughout the region.

And, you know, so when you look long-term that NRDA process which is managed jointly by the state and the appropriate federal resource agencies will be, you know, an absolutely critical source of, you know, assessment data to secure the funds from the responsible party to ensure restoration and replacement of lost not only resources but, you know, socioeconomic opportunity.

Laurel Bryant: Absolutely. Thank you guys. Operator our next questioner.

Coordinator: Thank you. Tommy Leggett please state your affiliation. You may ask your question.

Tommy Leggett: Tommy Leggett, Chesapeake Bay Foundation. Greetings Eric from your old stomping grounds.

Eric Schwaab: Sure Tommy. Always good to hear from you.

Tommy Leggett: Yes. I've got two questions. One, I deal mostly with oyster restoration up in the Bay and I'm also a commercial oyster grower on the side. And we're hearing a lot of horror stories about the guys down in the Gulf being closed and out of work. I'm just wondering is there any indication as to how long some of these oyster grounds might be closed. I know it's all preliminary but there's got to be some kind of idea as to how long this could persist and how long these beds will be closed.

And the second question is ya'll mentioned something about the loop current a little while ago. And I was wondering is there any indication the status of that and how close the loop current is to coming around the bottom of Florida and coming up the east coast?

Eric Schwaab: Thanks Tommy. So let me just say on the oyster issues I mean that's an entirely state water activity, Louisiana has closed some of its state waters. And so is not something that we are directly involved in from a management perspective.

And I actually see the next individual in the key is a representative from the Gulf Oyster Industry Council so perhaps he might actually jump in in a moment and offer some additional perspective on what's happening with respect to the timing and the implications of the inshore closures as it relates to the oyster fishery in particular and some of the related aquaculture efforts.

I'm going to - so let me hold on that and maybe Mike who's up next can add a few thoughts on that. But on your loop current question punt to Steve.

Tommy Leggett: Okay.

Dr. Steve Murawski: So I think we have all got educated on the loop current a little bit. But - so in the classic for the loop current comes up through the Yucatan, goes up towards New Orleans, drops back down and then shoots out to the Florida Straits and up to the Gulfstream. Well what happens is every once in awhile the loop current closes off as an internal eddy and that's exactly what has happened.

And so now all that oil that was entrained at the edge of it is actually in its own little loop, you know, and it's spinning clockwise but it's moving slightly to the west.

So until that loop current actually resumes very little is actually going to get into the classic loop where it goes down towards South Florida and out the Florida Straits and so we've got a little bit of a reprieve here.

Laurel Bryant: Excellent.

Man: Okay.

Laurel Bryant: Thank you Steve. Operator, can you go to Mike Voisin?

Coordinator: Mike Voisin your line is open. Please state your affiliation and you may ask your question.

Mike Voisin: Thank you. This is Mike Voisin and I'm with Gulf Oyster Industry Council. And appreciate the previous questioners question and the opportunity to ask a question. But let me answer the other question first.

Man: Okay.

Man: Thanks Mike.

Mike Voisin: The state of Louisiana has 30 different hydrologic harvest areas for oysters. At this point there are seven of those - well actually nine of those that are open. There will be in terms of - open and not closed as a result of this spill. There will be another five opened this evening, tomorrow morning so that will be 14.

In terms of reopening - they do precautionary closures and in terms of reopening what they do is organoleptic and hydrocarbon testing similar to what was discussed earlier in terms of what they're looking at with the fisheries stocks as well.

So about probably over half of the resource will be open again tomorrow morning. And there have been many openings and closings, it creates a tremendous amount of confusion.

The State Health Agency and Wildlife Agency in Louisiana are working with NOAA using their trajectory maps, also getting on the ground and going up in airplanes as well and helicopters and trying to spot any potential oil breaks or sheens and closing areas well in advance of the challenge.

State of Florida has opened its oyster producing areas in advance of its normal time period to help satisfy some market demand. The State of Alabama is looking as I appreciate at considering opening some of their areas here soon.

Mississippi is predominately a public fisheries and is closed always at this time of the year. And Texas has opened its private leasing system and is producing a few oysters.

Oyster production is down probably 50% in the Gulf because at this time of the year Louisiana is the major producer because it has over 400,000 acres of farmed water bottom and another 1.6 million acres that closed April 1st which is the public water bottoms and managed by the State Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. I think that answers your question.

Eric Schwaab: Thanks Mike.

Mike Voisin: It has been pretty aggressive and challenging down here. But my question to Eric and Steve is how long do you expect your efforts to last in the Gulf? And then do you have appropriate funding?

And before you answer that I want to say thank you for your emphasis you guys have been using on the safety of seafood in the marketplace. There's still a lot of areas open. A lot of the Gulf is open and the seafood in the market is safe and thanks for emphasizing that.

Laurel Bryant: Great. Thanks Mike. Eric?

Eric Schwaab: So, yes, thanks Mike. And I think the bottom line is obviously how long is, you know, remains an open question. But from the perspective of seafood sampling and the processes that we have put in place we expect they'll last as long as they need to in relation to, you know, presence of oil on the water down there.

Now obviously there's going to come a point when, you know, some of the (ensure) implications are going to get a little more complicated long-term but, you know, we're still way early in that process.

We've gotten sufficient funding for the first 30 days with a full expectation that the first 90 days will ultimately be funded. And I don't think that there is, you know, there are some issues related to caps on some of these funds and obviously they're going to be longer-term issues related to, you know, going back to the responsible party.

But at this point that there is nothing that we've seen that's going to suggest that resources are going to be a constraint on doing the job that we need to do down there as it relates to either seafood safety or continued assessment of the impact on other resources in the region. And I don't know Steve if there's anything you want to add to that.

Dr. Steve Murawski: Well I'll just say that we're not waiting around for a budget person to okay this stuff.

Eric Schwaab: Yes.

Laurel Bryant: Touché.

Eric Schwaab: Thanks Mike.

Laurel Bryant: Before we go to the next questioner I just want to let people know we've got ten people in the queue so I really - I'm going to close off questioning. No more questions coming in the queue. We're going to try to take the ten that we have. And with that operator can you turn it to our good friend, I believe, (Corky)?

Coordinator: (William Parrot) your line is open. Please state your affiliation...

(William Parrot): Thank you. Thank ya'll for the call. My question is this, is the disaster declaration - I think the Senate appropriation worked on something last night, going to require a state match?

Eric Schwaab: So I think (Corky) that we've moved under the section that does not let me try to clarify that for you.

(William Parrot): Well I...

Man: You know, that's always an issue and generally - let me double check on that.

(William Parrot): Okay. Thank you.

Eric Schwaab: We'll move on and try to if we can get a quick...

Laurel Bryant: Get a quick answer for you.

Eric Schwaab: ...answer back.

(William Parrot): Great. Thank you.

Eric Schwaab: Thanks.

Laurel Bryant: Thanks (Corky). Operator next questioner.

Coordinator: (Logan Respass) please state your affiliation. You may ask your question.

(Logan Respass): Yes. I'm with Texas Sea Grant. And the question I've got for ya'll today are what are the procedures for dealing with tainted seafood products which reach the docks? Is it seizures, is it destruction? What are ya 'll planning?

Dr. Steve Murawski: Well in terms, you know, if we identify - first of all if there are product - if people are fishing in a, you know, in the closure then, you know, the product would be confiscated. Right?

Now in terms of whether we can determine if it's tainted at the dock, whether the enforcement people would actually confiscate it and destroy it or require it, I don't think we've actually worked that out yet.

Eric Schwaab: So I would just make one additional comment on that (Logan). And that is that while we are pretty confident that the closure area has captured the - not only the places where oil is present on the surface, but, you know, all of the suspected subsurface plumes. That in addition to that closure area we've put out a very clear notice and continue to put out a notice to fishermen suggesting that if they encounter oil outside the closure area that they stay away from it.

And frankly I think, you know, the vast majority if not all of the fishermen out there are going to do their best to, you know, avoid any, you know, any suspicion because of the broader implications for the marketplace down there.

And let me just say one other thing which is in addition to on the water and dockside monitoring the FDA has a seafood market - as well as at least some of the states have marketplace presence as well to provide an additional backup.

Laurel Bryant: Great. Excellent Eric. Operator our next questioner please.

Coordinator: Russell Underwood please state your affiliation. You may ask your question.

Russell Underwood: Yes. This is Russell Underwood. I'm a board member of the Reef Fish Shareholders Alliance, a group of fishermen that's concerned about the resource.

And one of my questions is, our board members and members of our association are very, you know, watching this thing real closely -- the oil spill. We're very concerned about the Red Snapper and all the reef fish in the Gulf.

And one of my major personal question is I was involved last year with Dr. (Eric Hoffmayer) of the Pascagoula lab. I donated my vessel for about a week and we done a whale shark survey. And this newest love of my life now is whale sharks. And, you know, this is the peak of whale sharks coming up into the northern Gulf around the mouth the river, back toward the west toward the (UN) banks and further back toward Texas.

And we done a lot of great studies last year and I've been speaking to (Eric Hoffmayer) and his associate (Jennifer Kelly) - (Jennifer McKinney), excuse me. Anyway, my concern is will this whale sharks fixing to come into the northern Gulf and has no idea what's happening up here is there going to be resources available?

Have you had talk or concerns or conversations with anybody like Dr. (Hoffmayer) about maybe getting some kind of funding or fixing - do some kind of survey work?

Because I'm really concerned about what's fixing to happen with all these whale sharks that we have found in the northern Gulf this time of the year, they only come for just three, four months out of the year.

And we've been doing a lot of studies that was - we tagged and satellite tagged about four or five of them last trip and - last year and got some great results. But is there going to be funding and some concern for these whale sharks which I have?

Dr. Steve Murawski: This is Steve Murawski. I'd like to comment on that. We're all very concerned about the potential long-term damage assessment issues related to the offshore pelagic ecosystem there.

If you look at that wellhead very close to it we see a lot of sperm whales, they come up that head, we see beaked whales, we see, you know, loggerhead turtles, birds whales and then as you said more recently we found that this is a very productive area for whale shark migration and feeding. And so the question is number one, how can we put the potential damage that this spill is going to create into that long-term context, right?

So one of the things that Dr. (Lochinco) has put together is a science team to actually understand not only the science that we need today, you know, to monitor plumes but what are the medium and long-term science implications that we as a enterprise which means not only NOAA but the academic partners have to study. And this is a great idea.

And these are the kinds of proposals and these are the kinds of studies that we need to know to actually understand the full impact of this event. And this event is going to be with us for I would say a decade, you know, in terms of trying to understand these things.

And so I would say that this is definitely the kinds of things that we need to transition to, you know, once we can get a plug on the well in terms of our science program. So that's a very good comment.

Laurel Bryant: Thank you very much. Operator our next questioner.

Coordinator: (Catherine Kilda) please state your affiliation and you may ask your question.

(Catherine Kilda): Hi. This is (Catherine Kilda) from the Center for Biological Diversity. My question's a little bit related in terms of the long-term impact. You talked about how the oil is quickly metabolized from the flesh of the fish but there's going to be likely impacts on the reproduction and the larval development not to mention the habitat impacts where fish need to raise their young.

So I was wondering if you (unintelligible) thought at all about population effects on the fish and whether you can estimate them and whether or not you've considered producing fishing at spawning stock biomass?

Because it seems like now is the time when BP can be held accountable for any reduction in fishing whereas if the fish stock crashes in three years because of this year then it might be a harder time to protect the fish stocks and still have BP be responsible for those costs.

Dr. Steve Murawski: So this is Steve again. So, you know, timing is everything in this world. And as it turned out the Gordon Gunter research ship was actually on a egg and larval distribution study to look at blue fin tuna egg and larval issues - of course we capture a lot of other things as well coincident with this event. And so we've got those kinds of data that goes back decades actually.

And -so one of the things we were able to do on that survey was collect not only blue funned tuna eggs and larvae prior to the spill but we actually completed this leg as some of this material was getting out, you know, across this distribution.

So for example the current area that's closed to fishing actually encloses a substantial amount of the reproduction of blue fun. And so that being the case we will be able to see in the samples that we've got if the abundance and actually the mortality of eggs and larvae is increased because of this particular event.

Now we don't have continuous monitoring but we do have monitoring data. And so that should give us at least some indication of whether or not the initial parts of this spill were impacting reproduction.

And so we're all very concerned about that not only for blue fin tuna but for all the species and dolphin. We're going to try our best to put those kinds of studies in place to understand that.

Laurel Bryant: Great question. Operator we'll take our next caller please.

Coordinator: Thank you. (Dan Luke) please state your affiliation and you may ask your question.

(Dan Luke): Hi. Hi. I'm (Dan Luke). Thank you Eric and Steve. I'm a private citizen and interested fisherman. And I want to thank all the participants for this interesting conversation.

My question is this, with the total cessation of offshore fishing in the southeast Louisiana area and recognizing that this testing is going to be ongoing is there any process to involve the private charter fleet and their ability to locate and find these fish in the collection process?

Dr. Steve Murawski: That's...

(Dan Luke): And that would perhaps speed up the ability to consider opening certain areas for fishing again. Thank you.

Dr. Steve Murawski: That's a very good question and that's precisely what we're doing on the Mississippi-Alabama coast right now. There are a couple of candidate areas there for being reopened because they don't show the oiling sheen that they showed before. But that's actually our strategy is to, you know, use the rec fleet to actually help us gather those samples.

Now there's one issue there that we need to be cognizant of and that is there are requirements about handling potentially hazardous materials. And so the idea here would be that we would actually send a technician along to bag and tag the sample along with the fishers that would be involved in it. And so - just to make sure that we handled these procedures correctly.

Laurel Bryant: Great. Thank you Steve. Was a great question. And operator we'll take our next caller - or actually first before we go to our next caller I think Eric has an answer now to the earlier question regarding appropriations and the state match.

Eric Schwaab: So we have the initial (Corky) \$13million which is not tied directly to MSA that does not require a match and an additional \$15 million that was amended in last night under the leadership of Mr. (Shelby) that does require a match. So (Corky) just to get back to you on that and we can talk offline if you have more detailed questions. Thanks.

Laurel Bryant: Absolutely. Thanks a lot Eric. And operator we'll go to our next questioner please.

Coordinator: Thank you. Martin Fisher please state your affiliation and you may ask your question.

Martin Fisher: Good afternoon everybody. Thanks for hosting this NOAA leadership.

Eric Schwaab: Thanks Martin.

Martin Fisher: Hey Eric. This is Martin Fisher. I'm a (MAFC) member and vertically integrated fisherman - commercial fisherman, wholesaler, retailer in the state of Florida.

I have a specific question about the closure that came out that extended the eastern side of the closed zone in the eastern Gulf of Mexico. Is this due to subsea plume detection or is it surface oil that NOAA has detected that's encroached onto the (Hunter Traven) curve.

And the reason I bring it up is because we have now - Florida has now probably lost 85% of its fishable area for three very - two very important deepwater species Yellow Edge, Snowy Grouper and Golden Tile fish.

Eric Schwaab: Yes. Thanks Martin. So that's based on a surface projection. So we operate - we get 48 - 24, 48 and 72 hour trajectories that are essentially based on projected movements. Most of our closure determinations have been based on the 48 hour projection which has over the, you know, period of weeks proven much more reliable than the 72 hour projection.

So it's not based on the presence of actual oil, it's based on the modeled trajectory that places oil likely in that area on the surface during that time period.

And just to sort of complete the picture for the sub surface component we have continued to monitor everything we know about state of knowledge of subsurface movement of oil and so far have seen that fall entirely within the surface trajectory thus there has not been a need to establish closure areas based on unique subsurface detection or movement.

Laurel Bryant: Thanks Eric. Operator we'll take our next caller please.

Coordinator: (Rick Marks) please state your affiliation. You may ask your question.

(Rick Marks): (Rick Marks), Florida Commercial and Charter Fishing Interests. Thanks to NOAA for having this call and for all of your efforts to keep us in the loop and assist us with this process. Eric we really appreciate it.

Eric Schwaab: Sure thing.

(Rick Marks): Similar line of thinking that Mark Robson from Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission was working on. But I wanted to ask you Eric obviously the disaster declaration that's come down from Secretary Locke is for states other than Florida.

And we're just now starting to see economic impacts in our Florida commercial and charter fishing. Not necessarily ecological right now but we are starting to see the impacts.

Has there been any discussion in the context of the original disaster declaration whether you might have considered a broader maybe Section 315 approach for regional coastal fisheries disaster relief effort? Or are you going to plan to sort of add one state at a time as they come online for help?

Eric Schwaab: So, you know, I think that so far we've acted under 312 and on the, you know, state by state basis. You know, I think (Rick) that as I said earlier this is not only a unique event as natural resources disaster but it's a unique event as an economic - set of economic impacts.

And so the way in which the fishery disaster funding are deployed to provide some, you know, some relief to all of the affected, you know, fishery related businesses is still very much a work in progress. So I wouldn't say that, you know, at this point anything is precluded at this point.

But I would just sort of back up and say that I think that one of the concerns is because the economic impacts are still sort of - assessment of the economic impacts are still a work in progress that it was easier to meet the threshold for the 312 determination than it was for the 315 determination because of the specific sort of economic criteria that might - that are found in that section.

So I know that's not a real clear, you know, answer but I think that the prospect of trying to devise on a more regional basis a response from an economic perspective is still very much on the table.

Laurel Bryant: Great. Thanks Eric. And Operator our next caller.

Coordinator: (Tom Hilton) please state your affiliation. You may ask your question.

(Tom Hilton): Hi. I'm (Tom Hilton). I'm a private recreational fisherman here in Texas.

Eric Schwaab: Hi (Tom).

(Tom Hilton): Howdy. I appreciate ya'll providing this discourse between the fishermen our the fisheries regulators. I'm asking a question that I know that ya'll probably

will not have the answer to due to the unknowns of when they're going to cap the spill and so forth. And I know that this question is going to be coming up so.

We've got the snapper season is starting Tuesday and it's a very truncated season, 60 - somewhere around 60 days. I'm wondering have ya'll given any thought to what ya'll are going to do regarding any kind of flexibility or extension of the season? Because it's going to be basically come and gone before any response I think is going to be able to come from the government on opening up these closed areas.

Eric Schwaab: Yes. Thanks (Tom). That was - when I spoke earlier about enhanced recreational catch and effort data collection which, you know, at this point is - we're relying at least for, you know, shorter term assessments primarily on the for hire sector that was exactly what I was alluding to and I probably didn't say it clearly.

And that is that we expect to be able to use that data and work with the council or independently if, you know, if emergency action is required to adjust those seasons if, you know, if the catch data suggests that the opportunity is there to adjust.

So we are talking about that. We're very much open to that and we expect that to be, you know, very much part of the conversation going forward as this, you know, situation unfolds over time.

Laurel Bryant: Great. Thank you Eric. And operator we're going to turn to our last caller and then Steve and Eric for some wrap up comments.

Coordinator: Thank you. Our last question comes from (Gordon Robertson). Please state your affiliation. You may ask your question.

(Gordon Robertson): Hi. (Gordon Robertson), American Sports Fishing Association. Hey Steve and Eric, how are you guys doing?

Eric Schwaab: Good (Gordon) thanks.

(Gordon Robertson): Hey it's sort of a question and a comment. We've talked to a lot of our members in the Gulf. And of course our members are all recreational fishing businesses. And, you know, what we're discovering is - and we provided them all the claims information that's available and there's a huge bureaucracy out there with BP. And I know they've paid some claims and there's lots of questions about that.

But the bottom-line for a lot of these folks who are suffering a 40 to 65% - which is the pretty common range, depression in sales for the month of May compared to last May is that, you know, they're probably not going to be able to stay in business much beyond the end of June. And that's a lot of businesses that are saying that.

And so what we're seeing is a process that's very slow and cumbersome and will probably deliver some funds to some folks after they've already been out of business for some time. So my question is are you guys aware of a way to speed this up?

And that's probably not the best question. But the best question is what can we do to help you - and we're working with Congress on this too, what can we do to help you to make this a more efficient system so folks aren't relying on BP but they're relying on a more efficient system that the federal government constructs?

And then, you know, the onus is on the federal government to get that money back from BP. Because what's going to happen is we're going to have a lot of people out of work and a lot of businesses closed.

Eric Schwaab: Yes. Thanks (Gordon). So when I spoke earlier one of the things that I mentioned was, you know, engagement of Commerce's Economic Development Administration and I think in large part to provide some additional flexibility for exactly this kind of thing.

And so what I would suggest maybe we could do is, you know, facilitate a meeting not only with our people as it relates to how we might, you know, how we might look at, you know, perhaps creatively some of this fishery disaster money and the opportunity it provides. But also engage, you know, the Economic Development Administration which has gotten additional funding as I understand, you know, particularly to help in some of these kind of bridge types of circumstances.

So why don't I give you a call and we follow up and see if we can't put together a pretty quick game plan to put some heads together on this?

Laurel Bryant: Great. Okay. Before I turn this over to Steve and then Eric I want to number one thank everybody. Number two, this is being recorded and I will have transcripts and a recording up on our Web page. I cannot tell you which one yet. I'm targeting the NOAA page but I need to work with the Web people. And we will get that done so this will be available.

And the next thing I just wanted to say is really honestly a personal thanks from me to both Eric and to Dr. Murawski. I cannot tell you how busy they are. It is really hard as they are multi tasking like I have never seen and I just

very much appreciate their commitment to helping fisheries really improve it's communications and reaching out. This is an event that is pulling us all together. So with that I'd like to turn it over to Dr. Murawski.

Dr. Steve Murawski: I'd just like to say that, you know, we all appreciate everybody on this call and the immediacy of this issue and the importance that everybody ascribes to it.

What I'd offer is this. And that is we've got a lot of people down there doing a lot of things but, you know, this community has so many eyes on the water that if people are finding things that - they're observing things that we need to know about that I know Eric and I would be very pleased to have whatever information people can deliver - photographs, you know, what's going on on the water.

We need more eyes and ears on the water right now to try to figure out - the military uses this term situational awareness and we need some situational awareness from the fishing industry here.

Laurel Bryant: Great.

Eric Schwaab: Yes. Thanks Steve. And I will certainly echo Steve's comment in appreciation of your participation. We know these events that are unfolding are incredibly important to all of you. They're incredibly important to all of us.

I can say that, you know, from my perspective I mean in addition to being just sort of an unprecedented, you know, event that the turnout that I see across this agency and, you know, across the federal government and reaching out into the states and the local governments and the, you know, the industry associations and individuals down there in communities has just been unprecedented.

And I know that when you turn on the TV you see a lot of suggestion that maybe that's not happening and we're always trying to improve. But from an agency out perspective the mobilization, the coordination and the, you know, the sheer magnitude of this response has just been, you know, incredibly impressive to me just to be a part of it.

Steve, I just want to give sort of a particular nod to him. You know, we heard some discussions about dispersants in this call, we hear a lot of discussions about seafood safety, we hear a lot of discussions about the movement of oil. And there's been nobody in - certainly in NOAA and probably in the federal government that's been more engaged and more influential in science, discussions and transfer of science into policy than Dr. Steve Murawski.

And so, you know, we're looking forward to continuing to work with you and continuing to do the very best we can to respond to this just unprecedented event. So thank you all and to the extent that you're in a position where you can enjoy a little bit of the Memorial Day weekend I hope you get that chance.

Laurel Bryant: Safe travels. Happy fishing. Goodbye everybody. Thank you.

Coordinator: Thank you. That does conclude today's conference. Thank you for your participation. You may now disconnect from the audio portion and thank you for your participation.

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