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Statement of the
Honorable Bill Cassidy (R-Louisiana)
at the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife Hearing
titled “Our Natural Resources at Risk:
The Short and Long Term Impacts of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill.”
June 10, 2010

Madam Chair, thank you for holding this hearing today. I am pleased that my Colleagues are committed to pursuing solutions to the ongoing oil spill. The people of the Gulf Coast, including my home state of Louisiana, have had their lives upended by this disaster. Yet the actions of this committee, the Congress and the Administration will also have a significant impact. Our government has the power to *mitigate* or *exacerbate* the damages caused by this spill.

Madam Chair, this disaster will affect the economy of the Gulf for years to come. While most of the Gulf remains open to fishing and seafood coming from the Gulf is safe, we are already seeing a reduction in demand for Gulf seafood. This loss of market share doesn't just affect fishermen, but also seafood processors, the truckers who take the seafood to market, and workers from every other aspect of the Gulf's commercial fishery industry.

But it is not just *commercial* fishermen who will suffer. Our *recreational* fishermen, charter boat owners, and businesses that depend on recreational fishing will also suffer.

The loss of habitat for fish and wildlife could also take years to restore. The Gulf is a resilient place, but if an entire year of spawning potential for fish is lost to the spill and the marshes are not able to support the juvenile fish and wildlife next year, it could take Gulf fisheries a long time to recover.

Having said that, many of the folks who make their living in the fisheries business live next door to folks who make their living in the offshore oil and gas industry. These two industries have successfully operated side by side for decades. We all use the products from the offshore oil and gas industry—to fuel our cars and airplanes, and for plastics, fertilizers, and a wide variety of products that come from petrochemicals. It is important to remember that the United States relies on all the natural resources in the Gulf – not just the fish.

Madam Chair, the spill is a disaster and a tragedy. First and foremost, the flow of oil needs to stop, coastline must be protected, and what has already spilled must be cleaned up. But

the economy needs to continue to operate. While we can recover from the oil, Gulf Coast communities cannot endure the loss of jobs and its citizens.

The Federal government must not make knee-jerk decisions that will further cripple the Gulf economy. Yes, we need to find out what went wrong with the Deepwater Horizon and we need to take steps to ensure that something similar does not ever happen again. But calls to stop all oil and gas production in the Gulf will only cause us to lose more jobs, more businesses, and more of our economy.

The Federal government should take steps to help the people affected by the spill *now*, even before the spill is stopped. For example, we need to make sure that Americans know that seafood from the Gulf is safe.

We need to work together to make sure that people affected by this disaster are financially compensated in a timely manner. Fishermen who have boat and insurance payments and who cannot work must be compensated quickly so they don't lose their boats and their houses. And those businesses that depend on fishermen must be fairly compensated as well. Otherwise, they won't be there when the fisheries reopen. Whole communities that rely on the fishing industry could disappear if those affected are not compensated fairly and quickly.

Madam Chair, our response to this disaster needs to be guided by facts—not emotion, not political opportunism, but facts. Let's stay focused on the evidence and figure out what measures will ensure that the people, the economies, and the ecosystems of the Gulf can thrive.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for convening this hearing. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.