

SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES AND OCEANS  
Committee on Resources  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Gretna , Louisiana

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Re: Natural disasters in the Gulf of Mexico, Katrina and Rita's effects on natural resources

Submitted by:  
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Good morning my name is Jeff Angers and I am the Executive Director and CEO of the Coastal Conservation Association of Louisiana (CCA). I would like to thank the Chairman for this opportunity to address the Committee on issues near and dear to the hearts of our members and the citizens of Louisiana. Our members' passion is enjoyment of the outdoors and conservation of this state's valuable marine resources. First, I would like to tell you a little about CCA, who we are and how we operate. Second, I will address some of the damage that others at this table have addressed, and lastly I'd like to make some suggestions of measures that could be undertaken by the committee to improve the state of the resources here, as well as that of commercial and recreational fishermen who depend on them.

The Coastal Conservation Association is the leading marine recreational fishing group in the United States. Formed by a small group of sportfishermen in Houston in 1977, CCA has grown to a fifteen-state operation representing almost 100,000 members. Each of our states operates somewhat independently focusing on issues in the state that are important to marine recreational fishermen. However, like so much in fisheries management, conservation issues encompass a regional and national perspective; therefore, CCA learned long ago that federal and international fisheries management were just as important to local marine recreational fishermen as the conservation of the local fish population.

CCA pursues conservation policies set by our state and national boards of directors. These boards are made up of active volunteers concerned about the health of the nation's fisheries. CCA has been active in a number of conservation issues in the last 25 years, including: all of the East and Gulf Coast net bans; game fish status for redfish; speckled trout; tarpon; striped bass; river shad; marlins; spearfish; sailfish; and the reduction of bycatch through the use of closed areas and technology. Our Maryland chapter is actively involved in the health of the Chesapeake Bay and management of its valuable recreational species. Sherman Baynard has testified before this subcommittee on oyster bed protection in the Bay.

CCA Louisiana was founded in 1983 by Jack Lawton, Jr. and several other concerned conservationists. Over the last two decades, our organization has been focused on responsible stewardship of our state's marine resources. CCA Louisiana has won gamefish protection for redfish and enactment of restrictions limiting the use of gill nets in Louisiana waters. CCA Louisiana members have built artificial reefs; they've donated equipment to the enforcement division of the La. Department of Wildlife and Fisheries; they've led the Derelict Crabtrap Removal Project, and they've funded college scholarships in marine sciences.

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated our coast from the Sabine River to the Pearl. The storms destroyed public infrastructure and private property. They leveled fishing villages and brought a mighty city to its knees. Neither commercial docks nor recreational launches were spared. Likewise for small camps and big coastal homes. We will be finding derelict boats for years to come.

But our people are coming back. They are cleaning up and helping neighbors do likewise. They are rebuilding or are planning to do so wherever possible.

All of the damage done will in time be fixed. The question for Louisianians is how and when. There are three distinct roles in the recovery of the commercial and recreational fishing industries in the Gulf. The first is the industries themselves. As I said, many of our members are already fixing their camps, building new boats, reopening tackle shops and moving forward. Some in the commercial fishing industry are in the same mode although it would appear as if the vast majority are not. Many in the commercial industry are either not insured or are underinsured. Many can not reenter the fishery because the houses they lived in are now gone and there is no insurance to rebuild them.

The second level is the state and local governments. Much of the responsibilities of local and state government will be in the planning for and initiation of rebuilding projects. Some of this will entail financial assistance but most of it will be in the form of adjusting and modifying regulations to meet the needs of the recovery. Here in Louisiana, some leaders in the commercial industry called for a roll back of state conservation laws: Repeal of game fish laws and the elimination of bycatch and turtle excluder devices. Where those adjustments made sense they have been implemented, but CCA has steadfastly opposed the reduction of conservation measures by the state. We can not place the recovery of the industry ahead of the health of our fisheries. Not only is such action short sighted for the industry, but it would place the recreational fishery in jeopardy as well.

The third level of assistance is the federal government. Some in the Gulf want the federal government to restore the commercial and recreational industries to exactly the level they were in August before Katrina. That would mean restoring a commercial shrimp industry that was overcapitalized and only sustainable in circumstances where it has enormous negative impacts on other fisheries. Restoring a shrimp processing and harvesting sector that is being protected by dumping margins and direct subsidies of its own, including federal payments. Restoring a directed red snapper fishery that is overcapitalized and not sustainable at the present level of harvest, much less at the reduced rates being discussed by the Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council. This is not a picture that the federal or state governments should be remaking.

It would be irresponsible of all of us to ignore the needs of the commercial and recreational fishing industries, but it is equally irresponsible of us to assist in creating the same mess we had before the storms. There ought to be a clear plan to reduce the size of the shrimp and red snapper fleets in the Gulf. All are now under limited entry schemes, but capping them where they were is simply not enough. They clearly need to be reduced in order to make these fleets financially solvent and conserve the resources they impact. Some have asked why not impose limited entry on all recreational fishermen as well? The answer is in how these sectors contribute to the economy. The commercial fleets have to extract a public resource in order to produce an economic benefit for themselves. Recreational fishermen can produce the same economic benefit with or without being able to extract fish. Recreational fishermen can and often are limited to no take with little or no decline in activity.

So how do we fix the problem of reducing these fleets? Recreational fishermen across the Gulf are willing to help. CCA has agreed to impose a surcharge of \$5 on every saltwater reef fish angler to accumulate funds to pay the costs of buying out that portion of the directed red snapper commercial and charterboat fishery that is willing to sell. The quota used by the commercial fishery will be transferred to the recreational fishery, which will increase the sustainability of the charter boat sector. Having recreational fishermen pay to reduce the impact of commercial fishermen is not new to CCA. We are reducing the Texas inshore shrimp fleet through a \$3 surcharge. We placed a \$3 surcharge on saltwater recreational licenses here in Louisiana to compensate net fishermen for the loss of their nets and for retraining. We agreed to participate in the reduction of the longline fleet, but Congress failed to pass the bill. In each of these instances we saw a benefit and unlike so many, we were willing to stand up and pay for it.

Today the Magnuson Stevens Act includes disaster relief for commercial fisheries all over the country. That relief is restricted to commercial enterprises only. The Act ought to be amended to make clear that the recreational charterboat and guide industries be included as well. Private recreational fishermen, tackle dealers and the boating industry – although dependant on a healthy resource – will be assisted through other means.

The shrimp fleet is simply too large for the recreational sector to help on its own. For that, we need the assistance of the federal government. A fleet reduction program must be put in place that has two impacts. The first assists those vessel owners who do not want to reenter the fishery by offering them a way out: Retraining, relocation assistance if necessary and compensation for the loss of their livelihood. The second is a control on the remainder of the fleet that enhances its sustainability. It must include a rebuilding of the shore-side infrastructure and the fleet within a context of the health of the resource in the Gulf and the market for the processors which will make the industry sustainable. If federal funds are going to be used to recover the industry, then there ought to be controls on how it happens.

Although I've highlighted the shrimp, red snapper and charter boat fleets here today, I would be remiss in pointing out that they are not the only ones that need your help. The menhaden industry in the Gulf took a direct hit. To the extent that it receives federal assistance it ought to be subject to the same right-sizing considerations as other industries. The same is true for other fisheries as well.

There is little doubt that Katrina and Rita produced a huge impact on the users of our marine resources here in the Gulf. The aftermath of that impact will be felt for many years to come. Congress has a chance to guide it in a direction that alleviates much of the stress on the resource and results in sustainable fisheries. It is CCA's hope Congress has the courage to do the right thing rather than the expedient one.