

Opening Statement
The Honorable Madeleine Z. Bordallo
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife
Thursday, June 24, 2010

***Oversight Hearing on State Planning for Offshore Energy Development:
Standards for Preparedness***

Today the Subcommittee holds its third hearing on the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. While the tragedy continues for both Gulf communities and the environment, we will look ahead and examine whether current planning efforts and requirements under the law are sufficient to ensure a coordinated and effective response to future spills.

Yesterday we were again reminded of the difficulties of operating a mile below the sea surface when a remotely operated vehicle accident suspended operations and the cap was temporarily removed allowing much more oil to gush into the Gulf as it has been for the last nine weeks. Nearly 2,000 birds, sea turtles, and mammals are known to have died as a result of the spill while hundreds or possibly thousands more may never be accounted for, and by now we are all familiar with the tragic degradation of wetlands and beaches in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida.

While the many hearings and investigations to date have shown that the oversight and regulation of the offshore oil industry is in clear need of reform, we must also look beyond regulatory mechanisms and recognize that informed and thorough preparedness is necessary for effective and coordinated disaster response, and to protect marine environments and coastal communities from the effects of a spill.

Various response plans were in place before the Deepwater Horizon incident, including offshore facility, local, and State plans. In addition to this localized planning, area, regional, and national Contingency Plans were mandated by the Oil Pollution Act. Other planning statutes include the Coastal Zone Management Act, which requires States to include in their Federally-approved Coastal Management Plans, a process for anticipating impacts resulting from offshore energy facilities, and the Stafford Act, which authorizes the President to issue major disaster declarations to enable Federal agencies to provide assistance to State and local governments overwhelmed by catastrophes.

Current response and recovery activities have adhered to existing plans, but as the National Incident Commander, Admiral Thad Allen, has noted, the unprecedented complexity and magnitude of this disaster shows us those plans may not have gone far enough. This spill is a wake-up call, its damages stretching from coral reefs to coastal communities, and we must do our best to prepare for a new worst case scenario.

I thank all the witnesses for being here today and look forward to hearing how to improve our preparedness for oil spills amongst all levels of government.