

Opening Statement
The Honorable Madeleine Z. Bordallo
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife
Thursday, June 10, 2010
Oversight Hearing on *Our Natural Resources at Risk: The Short and Long-Term*
Impacts of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill

Today is the first of three hearings that the Subcommittee will hold on the *Deepwater Horizon* oil rig explosion. This is in addition to two Full Committee oversight hearings already held by Chairman Rahall and two oversight hearings Subcommittee Chairman Costa will hold later this month. As the Committee with primary jurisdiction over offshore oil and gas drilling, we will exercise our oversight responsibilities to the fullest extent, and we take these responsibilities very, very seriously.

Before we begin, I would like to express sincere condolences to the families of the eleven individuals who lost their lives the night of this tragic explosion on behalf of myself, Mr. Brown, and the entire Subcommittee. We know that the healing process will be long and difficult, and our prayers are with them.

Today is Day 52 of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. I suspect that for many of the people in this room, those 52 days feel more like 52 years. Yet, in many ways they also must feel like it is a tragedy that has only just begun. Despite the fact that BP collected 15,000 barrels in the 24-hour period ending midnight Tuesday, an unknown amount of oil continues to flow, and we have no idea how much oil has actually spilled into the Gulf overall.

Also, while federal scientists confirmed yesterday that there is oil floating beneath the ocean's surface, they still do not know the full scope of the plumes or what their existence means for Gulf ecosystems. The only certainty is that with the still-spewing well head over 5,000 feet deep, and the release of record amounts of oil and dispersant, the effects of this disaster on the ocean, estuaries, fisheries, wildlife, beaches and the people of the Gulf Coast are going to be felt long after the well has been completely capped.

At this moment, dead birds, turtles, dolphins and fish are washing up on shore and brown goo is lapping up on our beaches and wetlands. Below the surface, the release of oil and dispersant at depth is creating the plumes I mentioned. Previous oil spills have shown that oil stays in these ecosystems for decades, damaging highly productive and sensitive areas that serve as habitats and nurseries for a large variety of species.

Today we will begin to explore some of these short- and long-term impacts of the oil spill on trust resources, including fisheries, birds and other wildlife, marine mammals, tribal resources, protected fish and wildlife habitat and other natural areas. We also will focus on the implications for local communities who depend on many of those resources for their livelihoods. I thank all the witnesses for being here today during what is a very challenging and extremely busy time, and look forward to hearing your testimony.