

# Fishing ban imposed in oil-affected Gulf of Mexico

May 2 2010, by Allen Johnson

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Oil containment booms are seen staged at the edge of Lake Pontchartrain near the Rigolets in New Orleans, Louisiana. Louisiana's 2.4-billion-dollar a year commercial and recreational fishing industry is dealt its first major blow from the oil spill as the US government bans activities for 10 days due to health concerns.

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"NOAA is restricting fishing for a minimum of ten days in federal waters most affected by the BP oil spill, largely between Louisiana state waters at the mouth of the [Mississippi River](#) to waters off Florida's Pensacola Bay. The closure is effective immediately," said the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Louisiana accounts for an estimated one-third of the country's total oyster output, and the Gulf of Mexico are prime spawning waters for fish, shrimp and crabs, as well as a major stop for [migratory birds](#).

"NOAA scientists are on the ground in the area of the oil spill taking water and seafood samples in an effort to ensure the safety of the seafood and fishing activities," said NOAA administrator, Doctor Jane Lubchenco, quoted in the statement.

"I heard the concerns of the Plaquemines Parish fishermen as well other fishermen and state fishery managers about potential economic impacts of a closure," said Lubchenko, who met with more than 100 fishermen on Friday night.

"Balancing economic and health concerns, this order closes just those areas that are affected by oil. There should be no health risk in seafood currently in the marketplace."

George Barasich, president of the United Commercial Fishermen's Association, meanwhile Sunday filed an emergency request for a temporary restraining order (TRO) against BP's contract for oil clean-up workers, which his lawyers said would allegedly preclude them from suing the oil giant

BP is hiring fishermen to help clean up from the spill and deploy boom in the Gulf of Mexico.

The legal documents BP is asking the volunteers to sign would "seriously compromise" any spill-related legal claims against the oil giant, said Barasich's attorney Stuart Smith.

"That BP would attempt to force this one-sided and egregious agreement on volunteers in the midst of this environmental disaster shocks the conscience," Smith said in a press release.

Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke said in the statement: "We stand with America's fisherman, their families and businesses in impacted coastal communities during this very challenging time.

"Fishing is vital to our economy and our quality of life and we will work tirelessly protect to it."

According to NOAA, 3.2 million recreational fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico took 24 million fishing trips in 2008 and commercial fishermen there harvested more than one billion pounds of finfish and shellfish in 2008.

"There are finfish, crabs, oysters and shrimp in the Gulf of Mexico near the area of the oil spill," said NOAA regional administrator Roy Crabtree. "The Gulf is such an important biologic and economic area in terms of seafood production and [recreational fishing](#)."

NOAA said it was working with the state governors to evaluate the need to declare a fisheries disaster in order to unlock millions of dollars in federal aid to fishermen in these areas.

Louisiana and Mississippi have already requested that NOAA declare a federal fisheries disaster.

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