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## **AGENCIES CONTINUE TO MONITOR WATER QUALITY TO PREVENT UNNECESSARY FISHING CLOSURES**

**TALLAHASSEE-** -State agencies in Florida as well as several federal agencies involved in the response to the Deepwater Horizon Incident in the Gulf of Mexico continue to conduct tests, including sampling of water, fish, shellfish and habitats along the Florida coastline and into the Gulf of Mexico.

Officials with the Florida Department of Agriculture, Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission have indicated they have no intention of halting commercial and recreational fishing in Florida until there is evidence that the action is necessary.

“Florida seafood has not been impacted by this oil spill at all and is completely safe,” said Agriculture and Consumer Services Commissioner Charles Bronson. “There is no reason to take any action at this point and numerous agencies continue to monitor the situation and take test samples and will ensure the integrity of any seafood product being sold.”

While the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has temporarily closed off portions of federal waters from Louisiana to Pensacola to offshore fishing, inshore waters have not been impacted by the action. The closure in the Florida Panhandle impacts waters at least twenty miles from shore.

Currently, numerous species of seafood including grouper, shrimp, flounder and swordfish as well as shellfish are safely being harvested in Florida waters and federal waters not included in the temporary closure. At this time, there are no indications of any health risks to Floridians due to the Deepwater Horizon incident. The Department of Health (DOH) and DEP are closely monitoring health and environmental impacts to Florida’s beaches and will notice an advisory if conditions become unsafe.

The movement of the oil spill is heavily dependent on weather conditions so it is difficult to predict what will happen beyond about 72 hours. However, response agencies have indicated that weather conditions have improved enough to facilitate resuming applying dispersants and skimming operations.

The federal and state governments have strong systems in place to test and monitor seafood safety and to prohibit harvesting from affected areas and keeping oiled products out of the marketplace. NOAA Fisheries is working closely with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the States to ensure seafood safety, by assessing whether seafood is tainted or contaminated to levels that pose a risk to human health.

Agency leaders are concerned that misconceptions about the status of seafood harvesting in Florida could have a devastating impact on the state's vital seafood and tourism industries. They want to ensure residents and visitors are getting the facts and say if there is any change in the status of fishing in Florida, the information will be immediately released.

For the most up-to-date information on Florida's Deepwater Horizon response, as well as health and safety tips, visit [www.dep.state.fl.us/deepwaterhorizon](http://www.dep.state.fl.us/deepwaterhorizon), follow us on Twitter at [www.Twitter.com/FLDEPAlert](http://www.Twitter.com/FLDEPAlert) or contact the Florida Emergency Information Line at 800-342-3557.

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