



For Immediate Release

Tuesday, July 28, 2010

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Citizen's Councils Followed Valdez Spill. Why Not BP's Gulf of Mexico Disaster?

New Orleans – A coalition of over one hundred Gulf Coast faith, community and conservation groups is calling on lawmakers to include a citizen's oversight council as part of an offshore drilling reform package the House is currently considering.

Citizen councils proved an effective reform for energy industry oversight in Alaska following the Exxon Valdez spill, so Gulf Coast communities are demanding a similar tool as a low cost, high value way to ensure responsible oil and gas development for their region into the future.

“There is no panacea for dealing with the many adverse effects of the Deepwater Horizon incident. But the closest thing there is to a ‘fail safe’ mechanism for the Gulf, we believe, is to get engaged in a meaningful and effective way the energy, wisdom, vigilance and ingenuity of the people of the Gulf Coast states in making sure something like this incident never happens again in the Gulf,” the letter says.

A 238-page package of offshore drilling reforms that the House is expected to vote on this Friday currently does not include a citizen's council provision.

The Gulf of Mexico Regional Citizens' Advisory Council would include members from the five Gulf Coast states representing commercial and charter fishers, tourism officials, indigenous peoples and others. The council's recommendations would be advisory only, and industry officials, as well as federal and state officials, would participate on the council as non-voting members.

“Such a council would give those most effected by oil and gas development in the Gulf of Mexico a necessary voice to help guide the future drilling and plan for its impacts,” said Cynthia Sarthou, executive director of the Gulf Restoration Network in New Orleans.

GRN is among the 101 groups, which range from the Biloxi Branch of the NAACP in Mississippi to Oxfam American, that have signed on to the letter, organized with leadership from Oxfam.

Similar councils in Alaska have been a necessary voice to minimize the danger from oil transport through Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet while improving communication and trust between local communities, federal agencies and the oil industry.

“The authorization of such a regional oversight council is, we believe, the quickest way to restore the confidence of the American people in Gulf oil and gas operations,” the letter says.

The [Gulf Restoration Network](#) is a diverse network of local, regional, and national groups and individuals dedicated to protecting and restoring the valuable resources of the Gulf of Mexico. The GRN has members in the five Gulf States of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida

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