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NOAA Reopens More Than 8,000 Square Miles in the Gulf of Mexico to Fishing
99.6 percent of federal waters now open

NOAA today reopened to commercial and recreational fishing 8,403 square miles of Gulf waters which extend from the Louisiana state water line to due south of the Alabama/Florida state line. This is the eleventh reopening in federal waters since July 22.

This reopening was announced after consultation with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and under a [reopening protocol](#) agreed to by NOAA, the FDA, and the Gulf states.

The total area reopened today is about 3.5 percent of federal waters in the Gulf of Mexico and 89 percent of the current closed area, as last modified on October 22. No oil or sheen has been documented in the area since July 25. At its closest point, the area to be reopened is about 10 miles from the wellhead.

NOAA sampled this area between August 31 and November 1 for finfish and shrimp, including tuna, swordfish, escolar, and royal red shrimp. Sensory analyses of 286 finfish samples and 55 shrimp samples and chemical analyses of 207 finfish samples in 33 composites and 50 shrimp samples in nine composites followed the methodology and procedures in the reopening protocol, with sensory analysis finding no detectable oil or dispersant odors or flavors, and results of chemical analysis for oil-related compounds and dispersants well below the levels of concern.

“This is the first reopening where we have added a supplemental test to detect dispersants in seafood, and all the samples passed,” said Jane Lubchenco, Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. “This is yet another indication that our Gulf seafood is safe for consumption.”

As announced on October 29, NOAA and FDA have developed and implemented a chemical test to detect the presence of dispersants in fish, oysters, crabs and shrimp. The level of concern for dispersants is 100 parts per million for finfish and 500 parts per million for shrimp. The test can reliably detect Dioctyl sodium sulfosuccinate (DOSS) at levels of 2000 times below the lowest level of concern.

NOAA continues to work closely with the FDA and the Gulf states to ensure seafood safety. NOAA and FDA are working together on broad-scale seafood sampling that includes sampling seafood from inside and outside the closure area, as well as dockside and market-based sampling.

An area covering 1,041 square miles immediately surrounding the wellhead, remains closed to fishing. The boundary of the fishery closure has changed 32 times after it was first instituted on May 2, at which time it covered about 3 percent (6,817 square miles) of Gulf waters around the wellhead. As oil continued to spill from the wellhead, the area grew in size, peaking at 37 percent (88,522 square miles) of Gulf waters on June 2. To date, NOAA has reopened more than 82,900 square miles of oil-impacted federal waters under this protocol and sampling regime.

NOAA has a number of methods for the public to obtain information or be notified when there is a change to the closed area:

- Sign up to receive Southeast Fishery Bulletins by email at SERO.Communications.Comments@noaa.gov
- Call 1-800-627-NOAA (1-800-627-6622) to hear a recording of the current coordinates in English, Vietnamese, and Spanish
- Listen to NOAA Weather Radio for messages about the closure
- Follow us on Twitter: @usnoaagov to get a tweet when the closed area changes

NOAA's mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources. Visit us at <http://www.noaa.gov> or on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/usnoaagov>.

On the Web:

History of federal reopenings in the Gulf: <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/BPOilSpillArchives.htm>

Schedule of sampling priority areas:

http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2010/20100927_reopening.html

