

**Testimony of Mayor David Camardelle  
Town of Grand Isle, Louisiana  
Before the Subcommittee on State, Local, and Private Sector Preparedness and  
Integration  
June 10, 2010**

My name is Mayor David Camardelle and I am mayor of Grand Isle, Louisiana, located approximately 60 miles southeast of New Orleans. The only inhabited Barrier Island in Louisiana, Grand Isle is home to approximately 1200 permanent residents and about 3000 summer homeowners. The island is also host to approximately 250,000 vacationers, sport fishermen, bird-watchers and visitors annually.

Most of the residents of Grand Isle and this coastal region are either small independent fishermen or they are employed in an oil and gas related industry. And in many case they do both, working a seven day shift for an oil company, and then being off for seven days when they fish. We understand what it takes to get a job done and because our livelihood depends on it, a real sense of urgency. If a boat breaks or net tears during fishing season, you get fixed, and quickly or you lose a years income. Town of Grand Isle also has many other businesses that are affected. Marinas, grocery stores, hotels, souvenir shops, charter boats and the largest shrimp producer in the state of Louisiana is threatened by this disaster.

The committee wants to know the impact of the oil spill on our community, well one of the greatest impacts was frustration as we had to watch this tragedy slowly destroy our beaches, marshes, fishing grounds and way of life—while we were told we had to wait for someone else to do something. We had fishermen with boats, trained and ready to go, but they just waited at the docks for the call. We had plans for barges and sand berms waiting for approvals and environmental impact studies while the oil flowed through the passes into the fragile marshes and estuaries. An environmental impact study shouldn't take longer than dipping your hand in the thick sludge floating toward our passes.

My "Cajun heritage" has taught me that hard work and persistence will always prevail. We are resilient, since 2005 and the passage of 4 major hurricanes, Katrina, Rita, Gustav and Ike we, with your help, have rebuilt our houses and our community stronger

than before. We are used to challenges and hard work. Prior to the Oil Spill we were planning for our best Summer Season.

But now we have an Oil Spill the size of which nobody could have imagined, lapping at our coastline and threatening everything that sustains this community and its residents.

(1) Our Commercial fishermen and the seafood processors are virtually shut down until the fishing areas are reopened. Hopefully the shrimp, crabs and fish will still be there and we will have a retail market willing to buy them.

(2) Our Recreational Fisheries, marinas, bait business and charter trips are nonexistent.

(3) Restaurants and motels are losing their prime season and nobody is visiting our island except for BP's subcontractors in hazardous Material suits and the news media taking pictures of oil soaked wildlife.

The International Grand Isle Tarpon Rodeo, one of the largest fishing rodeos in the world and over 20 other fishing rodeos that are held on Grand Isle will have to cancel if the waters remain closed.

The moratorium on drilling now threatens the only other viable employers and jobs in the region.

For seven weeks now we have been flying over the affected areas monitoring the passes, beaches, and marshes. I am meeting at least 3 to 4 times a day with our parish, state and federal partners that are coordinating this response but every time we bring up a problem and a potential solution, the same thing was said to us, "We hear what you are saying Mr. Mayor but BP or EPA or the Coast Guard is going to have to approve this before we can do anything".

How can we accept that when it is our lives depend on their action?

We are not trying to blame any person or agency. There are many very sincere people working in this effort and we are appreciative, but we need resources and action

now. If we try something and it fails, then we can try something else, but the cost of waiting is not acceptable.

The President's visits have made a difference. Things like blocking the passes with barges and rocks that I suggested weeks ago are now being implemented. But it is seven weeks and we are in hurricane season. It is not just our home and way of life that is at risk, but an important part of our national assets.

Louisiana's coast provides benefits to our nation that are unrivaled by any other coastal area in the United States – benefits that include the hosting of 80 percent of the nation's offshore oil and gas supply, a third of the nation's fisheries' landings, wildlife habitat for the second largest flyway in the U.S., and the nursery ground for marine life for the entire Gulf of Mexico. These working wetlands also provide protection from storm surge for the world's largest port system and for the two million citizens who live and work in Louisiana's coastal zone.

In closing I would like to ask the members of congress and everyone else that see the pictures of oil soaked pelicans straining and suffocating in that brown muck, to imagine the fear, frustrating and futility they must feel. Well that is the same fear, frustration and feeling of futility that our fishermen, oil field workers, and business people are experiencing as they are forced to wait for others to do something.

There are great minds in this country that can put men in space and find oil miles under the sea. There are also creative fishermen and residents who understand the tides, marshes, and practical solutions. We need to use all the resources we have now to solve this problem.

Thank you for this opportunity and for concern.

David Camardelle, Mayor

Grand Isle, Louisiana