



CHARLIE CRIST
Governor

SECRETARY MICHAEL W. SOLE
Florida Department of Environmental Protection

DAVID HALSTEAD
State Coordinating Officer

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CONTACT: PUBLIC INFORMATION (ESF 14): (850) 921-0217

BRONSON EMPHASIZES SAFETY OF FLORIDA SEAFOOD

TALLAHASSEE— Florida Agriculture and Consumer Services Commissioner Charles H. Bronson said today that seafood currently being harvested in Florida is safe and has not been impacted by the oil spill in the Gulf. He is concerned that misinformation about the conditions in the Gulf waters may unnecessarily impact the state's seafood industry.

While the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is restricting commercial and recreational fishing in federal waters from Louisiana to waters off Pensacola Bay, the ban does not yet impact waters extended out 25 miles from Escambia County. Currently, all species harvested from the closure line to shore, including grouper, snapper, golden tilefish, mullet, blue crab, oysters, flounder, sea trout and shrimp, are safe to eat. Stone crab season is in effect until May 15 and is also unaffected by the ban. Federal agencies and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection are conducting ongoing tests of water samples and have not found any hydrocarbons in samples taken from Florida.

In addition, Bronson's Division of Aquaculture is monitoring oysters to assure their safety, and NOAA is working closely with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and food safety officials in the Gulf states to assure that no unsafe seafood products are sent to markets.

"Our shrimp, shellfish and other seafood being harvested right now are fine, and I don't want people watching reports of the oil spill to think differently," Bronson said. "If and when Florida waters are impacted by the spill, we will take immediate action to close the waters to commercial and recreational harvesting."

In 2008, the latest figures available, the quantity of seafood sold at the dock just on the west coast surpassed 66 million pounds with a value of about \$125 million. This is the price paid to the fishermen for their catch, not the retail or wholesale value.

In response to the Deepwater Horizon Incident in the Gulf of Mexico, Bronson's Division of Aquaculture is actively evaluating the latest reports from the official clearinghouse of information, www.deepwaterhorizonresponse.com and evaluating predictions of spill movement, weather patterns and projected landfall points.

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.

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