

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 28, 2012

The Honorable Dr. Jane Lubchenco  
Administrator  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Administrator Lubchenco:

As you are aware, the domestic shrimp fishery in the Gulf of Mexico traditionally has been the nation's most valuable, accounting for almost three-fourths of national shrimp landings. The shrimp industry creates thousands of jobs and provides a national economic impact that exceeds one billion dollars.

Since the devastating oil spill in 2010, Gulf States have witnessed a significant increase in the number of sea turtle strandings, which may or may not be related to the spill. Certain environmental groups have charged that commercial shrimping efforts are to blame for the mortality events. These groups filed their intent to sue the federal government under the Endangered Species Act unless NOAA closed the Gulf shrimp fishery. We offer the following facts in opposition to any such action:

1. Available data of shrimp fishing effort in the Gulf during 2010 and 2011 clearly show that the majority of turtle strandings occurred while the commercial shrimping fleet was docked or when fishing efforts were minimal.
2. While compliance with proper turtle excluder devices (TEDs) decreased in the past, in many cases due to improper TED construction or installation, it has increased significantly over the past two years. With guidance provided by NOAA gear experts, TED compliance reached 87 percent as of July 2011.
3. Shrimping effort in the Gulf of Mexico has decreased dramatically since the 1990s. Additionally, the implementation of TEDs and restocking and protection efforts on turtle nesting beaches in Mexico and the United States has contributed significantly to sea turtle survival.

It is for these reasons that we believe the increase in Gulf sea turtle strandings in 2010 and 2011 was due to the fact that the population of sea turtles, such as the Kemp's ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*), has increased greatly in recent decades. In fact, the number of Kemp's ridley turtles nesting on Mexican beaches has increased by 93 percent since the joint effort of the United States and Mexico began documenting nesting activity in 1978. As stated in the 2011 update of the Bi-National Recovery Plan for the Kemp's ridley Sea Turtle, *"The Kemp's ridley nesting population is exponentially increasing, which may indicate a similar increase in the population as a whole."* The Plan also confirms the population is now approaching the threshold for down-listing this species under the Endangered Species Act.

In light of this, we urge NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to contribute to a quantitative population assessment for sea turtles in the Gulf of Mexico, specifically the Kemp's ridley sea turtle. This proposed stock assessment should utilize only existing resources and data held by NMFS, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas in order to save taxpayer dollars. The Gulf States already have contributed \$200,000 to this effort.

Fallout from a decade of disasters, including Hurricane Katrina, a severe economic recession, illegal shrimp imports, and the 2010 oil spill has negatively impacted the Gulf shrimp industry, which not long ago was America's most valuable commercial fishery.

Shrimpers currently suffer from low prices at the dock for their catch and high prices at the pump for fuel. Further unnecessary restrictions or closures imposed on the Gulf shrimp fishery due to unrelated turtle stranding events would devastate communities on the coast that depend on this vital resource.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



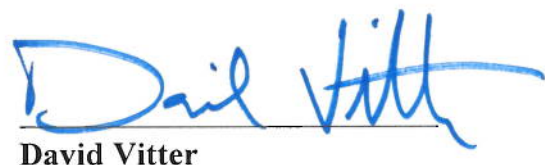
Roger F. Wicker



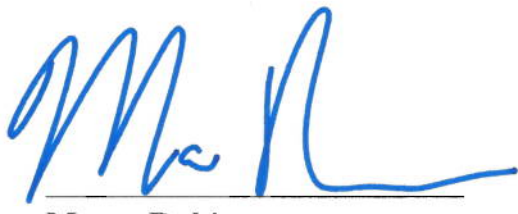
Mary L. Landrieu



Thad Cochran



David Vitter



**Marco Rubio**



**Jeff Sessions**