

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 21, 2008

The Honorable James Connaughton
Chairman
Council on Environmental Quality
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Chairman Connaughton:

We are writing to express our strong objections regarding a proposal to create a network of marine monuments within the Gulf of Mexico. This proposal, currently being circulated within the Administration, could have grave impacts for the Gulf Coast's recreational fisheries, commercial fisheries, marine cargo shipping, and domestic offshore energy industry. Each of these industries is of fundamental importance to our regional and state economies, and the nation's economy as well.

It is our understanding that you and representatives from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration have discussed a plan for the President to declare a network of marine monuments throughout the Gulf of Mexico under the Antiquities Act of 1906. We are concerned that an attempt to use this authority could restrict vitally important marine areas without the benefit of public participation and stakeholder input.

The Gulf of Mexico is home to productive commercial and recreational fisheries that have an annual economic impact of over \$4.5 billion. A number of the nation's top ports are also located in the Gulf region. Maritime infrastructure and fisheries are still recovering after the devastating 2005 hurricanes, while facing increased competition from subsidized foreign aquaculture and unsustainable fishing practices of other nations.

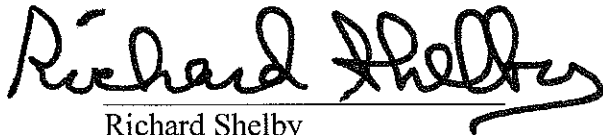
In addition to nationally significant fisheries, the Gulf Coast has the greatest concentration of energy infrastructure in the world, with an estimated 4000 of the world's 7000 offshore platforms located here. The Gulf of Mexico supplies up to 30 percent of the nation's energy needs, and provides a source of secure domestic energy in a time of increasing volatility in the world energy market.

We support the protection of environmentally sensitive marine areas, and feel that the best way to continue to protect natural resources is to fully engage the public interest. Recommendations to expand protected areas should be based on recognized need, with sound scientific justification.

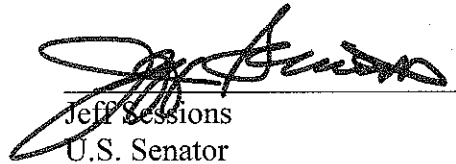
The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, which represents a spectrum of stakeholder interests from all five Gulf states, is specifically tasked to manage fisheries and identify areas of particular concern. The Flower Garden Banks and Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuaries Advisory Councils have already established public forums which involve all interested parties in decisions to protect marine areas. Any proposal under the Antiquities Act would short-circuit these councils, disrupting a trusted, transparent public process.

We strongly urge you to refrain from moving forward on a Gulf of Mexico Marine Monument. This Administration does not have enough remaining time to fully consider the variety of public interests that must be represented, and such a significant project should not move forward without the participation and support of the many stakeholders involved.

Sincerely,



Richard Shelby
U.S. Senator



Jeff Sessions
U.S. Senator



David Vitter
U.S. Senator