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August 13, 2010

The Honorable Ray Mabus  
Secretary  
United States Navy  
1000 Navy Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20305

**RE: Gulf of Mexico Restoration Plan**

Dear Secretary Mabus:

Thank you for listening to the concerns of Florida Gulf coast residents during your recent town hall meeting in St. Petersburg. We are all heartened by President Obama's pledge to return the Gulf of Mexico to a healthier ecosystem than before the BP Deepwater Horizon blowout disaster. The feedback I have received regarding your visit has been positive and hopeful. As you rightly noted, the Restoration Plan must come from the people of the Gulf, so I appreciate your effort to gather input from those who have been impacted.

The fishermen, small business owners, conservationists, and scientists who attended the meeting did an excellent job of expressing the broad range of concerns and needs of our community. I have summarized their concerns and propose the following recommendations for inclusion in the Gulf Restoration Plan.

**Robust short term, long term, and independent research** – We are very fortunate to have excellent colleges, universities and research institutes in Florida to fulfill short term and long term research needs. Researchers at the University of South Florida, Eckerd College, Florida Aquarium, Mote Marine Laboratory and other colleges and universities throughout Florida are working together on a common plan of action which should be incorporated into the Restoration Plan. The best science should guide the Restoration Plan in relation to the impact of toxic petroleum, chemical dispersants, marine life, the water column and food chain, and public health. The Florida Aquarium Center for Conservation is currently researching and developing methods to transplant and restore corals in the event they are damaged or killed off. I have attached this proposal for your consideration. The research needs require multi-million dollar investment and probably over \$1 billion over the next ten years.

**Fisheries Marketing Plan** – Gulf seafood is the most tested, cleanest, safest seafood in the world. A comprehensive marketing plan should address any misperceptions to the contrary. Local businesses like Bama Sea Products of St. Petersburg tell me that Gulf seafood is losing market share to other seafood producers, both domestic and foreign. I have expressed the need for a national strategy to promote domestic seafood in line with other agricultural products which already benefit from USDA assistance. I have attached a proposal from the National Seafood Marketing Coalition that I recommend to you.

**Improved Commitment to Federal Estuaries, including the Tampa Bay Estuary Program** – The Tampa Bay Estuary Program is designated by Congress to protect and preserve our waters. Through its “Charting the Course” protection plan, they have been improving water quality, recovering seagrass, and restoring wildlife and fish populations. We need to tap into their expertise and vigorously support their continued efforts through a substantial boost in resources. I have attached a summary of the Tampa Bay Estuary Program’s Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan for restoring estuaries in the Gulf. This plan has already been vetted by the public, local officials and governments, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection as well as the EPA.

**Tourism Marketing** – Industries all across the state are reporting that they have seen a considerable decline in tourism-related revenues over the past three months. TradeWinds Resort, the largest hotel on Florida’s Gulf coast, reports that it has already lost \$1.7 million this summer and is expected to see further declines in conference bookings. This downward spiral is having a chilling effect on other businesses that rely on tourism-generated revenues. We need to help assure tourists that our beaches are clean and safe. Tourism boards across the Gulf such as Visit St. Pete Clearwater have suggested creating a fund with the sole purpose of letting the country and the world know our beaches are open for business. Youth Empowerment Association, a non-profit in St. Petersburg, came to me with a proposal for BP to establish an escrow fund for travel to the economically impacted beaches of Florida. I support this program, and I have called on BP to set aside \$500 million dedicated to promoting tourism along Florida’s Gulf coast. The Restoration Plan should devise tourism-promoting strategies to keep Florida's economy and related businesses from suffering further.

**Make Permanent the 235-mile Protection and Buffer area off of Florida** – The Gulf of Mexico Energy and Security Act ("GOMESA") of 2006 established a moratorium that expires in 2022 on offshore drilling 125 miles off Florida’s coast and areas east of the "military mission line." GOMESA took into consideration Florida’s unique environmental, economic, and military needs. The rationale for continuing the 2006 agreement is even more apparent now due to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster in the Gulf. As the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, Environment Florida, and many other advocates have maintained, expanding drilling closer to Florida’s coast is a serious threat to our tourist economy and jobs, our wetlands and fisheries, and our quality of life. Florida’s tourism-based economy depends on having clean beaches. Tourism officials support a robust buffer for Florida’s beaches so that we can avoid the devastating consequences of another disaster like the Deepwater Horizon blowout. The Restoration Plan should recommend a permanent buffer.

**Attack the Dead Zone and Nutrient Loading from the Mississippi River** – The dead zone at the base of the Mississippi River is one of the largest in the world. Nitrogen and phosphorous entering the river due to upstream runoff of fertilizers, animal waste, and sewage in this area cause hypoxia and harmful algal blooms which threaten public health and the Gulf's valuable fisheries. If this serious problem isn't addressed, the expanding dead zone could limit economic and environmental recovery in the Gulf. Well-researched and thoroughly vetted solutions to this long-standing problem already exist. They just need to be implemented. The Sierra Club of Florida has been working on this issue and specifically requested that hypoxia be addressed in the Restoration Plan. I support this recommendation and hope you will include it.

**Robust Renewable Energy Plan** – Tampa Bay area families and businesses continue to voice their support for a clean energy future. They recognize that the only long-term solution to oil disasters such as this one is a plan that puts us on a path to clean, renewable sources of energy. The Florida Conservation Alliance Institute, the League of Conservation Voters, the Alliance for Climate Protection, Florida Defenders of Wildlife and other advocates did an excellent job of directing your attention to the need for comprehensive energy solutions during the town hall. Wind, solar, biomass, and other innovations should power our economy and our way of life, not risky offshore oil drilling. As we have seen, there is too much to lose in this risky gamble and one community shouldn't have to shoulder the burden of these risks for the entire nation. I strongly recommend that we organize clean energy businesses and target investments to these industries to create jobs in a workable timeframe over the coming five years.

**Public Comment, Reporting and Transparency** - Our neighbors want to see government transparency and the flow of information stepped up. From disagreements over the oil flow rate to health and safety protocol for the cleanup, residents are vocal about the need to restore the public trust in the wake of this disaster. They want a seat at the table in the recovery effort. Creation of a Citizens' Advisory Council would give Gulf coast residents a permanent voice in the development and execution of the Restoration Plan (see below). I recommend strengthened partnerships between federal agencies and academics; better protocol for responding to requests from independent scientists; enhanced conservation and protection of wildlife habitats; stronger worker protections; collection of baseline data for chemical dispersants; and publicly vetted local and federal oil response plans. Restoring the public trust will take a concerted effort on the part of our local and national leaders. I look forward to working with you to get us back to where we need to be on this front.

**Citizens and stakeholders Advisory Council** – The Gulf Restoration Network has proposed the creation of a Citizen's Advisory Council for the Gulf. This idea was successfully implemented in Alaska following the Exxon-Valdez oil disaster and has helped the people of that region hold the oil industry accountable since then. Florida has been dramatically impacted by this spill even though it does not have oil rigs off its coast. Perhaps more than any other Gulf state, Florida needs an independent voice in oil drilling decisions and spill mitigation actions that will impact the health of its economy and environment. I helped author and pass an amendment to the CLEAR Act which would establish such a council because I believe citizen and

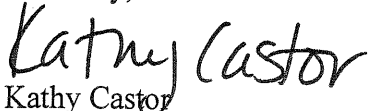
stakeholder input is vital to the restoration process. I have attached the proposal for your consideration.

**Studying the Effects of Chemical Dispersants** – Defenders of Wildlife, the Sierra Club of Florida, the Florida Wildlife Federation, the Suncoast Seabird Sanctuary, and countless other organizations have raised serious concerns over the use of chemical dispersants as part of the oil disaster response effort. We need to perform both short- and long-term research on what these chemicals are doing to our Gulf and act accordingly to ensure as little damage is done to our marine life, food supply, and ecosystem as possible. I urge you to put the best peer-reviewed science behind this initiative.

**Use Restoration as a Jobs Plan for Florida and other Gulf Coast States** – Residents, small business owners, scientists and fisherman in the Tampa Bay area have called on you and President Obama to implement a robust and far-ranging Gulf Restoration Plan. My hope is that the Restoration Plan will spur economic and environmental recovery. From fishing to tourism to renewable energy and beyond, there is a world of opportunity awaiting us if we marshal the required resources for the recovery effort. Consider a targeted jobs initiative for a remediation corps with a focus on local jobs and minority small business owners.

I am grateful for your contribution, and I look forward to working with you in the weeks and months ahead. We have a long way to go before BP's mess is cleaned up, but I am encouraged that with your leadership, the Gulf of Mexico, our ecosystem, and economy will be restored.

Sincerely,



Kathy Castor  
United States Representative  
Florida District 11

cc: The Honorable Charlie Crist, Governor, State of Florida  
Frank T. Brogan, Chancellor, State University System of Florida  
Dr. Judy Genshaft, President, University of South Florida System  
Dr. Donald R. Eastman III, President, Eckerd College  
Mimi A. Drew, Interim Secretary, Florida Department of Environmental Protection  
Thom Stork, Executive Director/CEO, The Florida Aquarium, Inc.  
Dr. Kumar Mahadevan, President, Mote Marine Laboratory and Aquarium  
Holly S. Greening, Executive Director, Tampa Bay Estuary Program  
Dr. Richard D. Garrity, Executive Director, Environmental Protection Commission of Hillsborough County