

BP OIL SPILL AND THE GULF ECOSYSTEM: “Deformed Seafood”. Officials Close Gulf Waters to Shrimping

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Alarmed by widespread reports of visibly sick, deformed seafood coming out of the Gulf of Mexico, state officials have closed area waters to shrimping this morning (April 23). The waters will be closed indefinitely as scientists run tests in an effort to get a handle on a situation that is fast becoming a full-blown crisis on the Gulf Coast.

The closures – including all waters in the Mississippi Sound, Mobile Bay, areas of Bon Secour, Wolf Bay and Little Lagoon – mark the first official step in responding to increasingly urgent reports from fishermen and scientists of grotesquely disfigured seafood from Louisiana to the Florida panhandle.

The move is yet another major setback for the once-legendary Gulf seafood industry as it continues to struggle under the devastating impact of the BP oil spill, which began in April 2010.

Two years later, reports of severely deformed shrimp with bulging tumors – and no eyes – have become common.

And it's not just the shrimp. Commercial fishermen are reporting red snapper and grouper riddled with deep lesions and covered with strange black streaks. Highly underdeveloped blue crabs are being pulled up in traps without eyes and claws (see link at bottom to my previous post on seafood deformities).

For those who thought 205 million gallons of oil and 2 million gallons of toxic dispersant weren't going to have an impact on Gulf seafood, you need to check back in with reality.

As for the impetus for the shrimping closures, consider this from an April 18 Al Jazeera report by Dahr Jamail, who has doggedly covered the BP spill since the early days of the disaster:

Tracy Kuhns and her husband Mike Roberts, commercial fishers from Barataria, Louisiana, are finding eyeless shrimp.

“At the height of the last white shrimp season, in September, one of our friends caught 400 pounds of these,” Kuhns told Al Jazeera while showing a sample of the eyeless shrimp.

According to Kuhns, at least 50 per cent of the shrimp caught in that period in Barataria Bay, a popular shrimping area that was heavily impacted by BP's oil and dispersants, were

eyeless. Kuhns added: "Disturbingly, not only do the shrimp lack eyes, they even lack eye sockets."

Disturbing indeed. I am deeply saddened but not surprised by the shrimping closures. I applaud the courageous move by state officials to put consumer safety first. There's no doubt in my mind - as I've said for months on end - that seafood coming out of the Gulf of Mexico is unfit for human consumption.

We will bring you updates on water testing and any word on when these areas of the Gulf will be re-opened to shrimping.

Read my April 20 post on seafood deformities here: <http://www.stuarthsmith.com/a-taste-of-the-grotesque-in-the-gulf-eyeless-shrimp-clawless-crabs-and-lesion-covered-fish>

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