



Photo by Highton Ridley,
<http://www.highton-ridley.co.uk>

Cross-posted at [CPR Blog](#).

Here's some of what's going on in the ocean policy world:

- BOEMRE is reviewing the first post-moratorium application to drill an exploratory deepwater well in the Gulf of Mexico. As required by a June [Notice to Lessees, Shell's application](#) to drill 130 miles from shore in 2000 to 2900 feet of water includes a blowout scenario. Shell anticipates that drilling a relief well would take 109 days, during which time 12.3 million barrels of oil could be discharged, more than twice what the Deepwater Horizon dumped into the Gulf. The application includes a brief environmental impact assessment which acknowledges that the Macondo blowout showed that the impacts of a large spill could be worse than previously thought, but offers very little in the way of analysis of potential impacts. Mostly it repeats over and over again that a large spill is unlikely. BOEMRE has 30 days from January 28, when the application was deemed submitted, to review it. NRDC and other environmental groups [have asked BOEMRE to prepare a full EIS](#) before approving the plan.
- Meanwhile, a group of marine scientists [argues in the journal Science](#) (subscription required) that the lack of baseline data on the Gulf ecosystem make it very difficult to plan or evaluate restoration efforts. They contend that "The United States needs strategic national research plans for key marine species and ecosystems based on evaluation of cause and effect and on integrated monitoring of abundance and demographic traits. . . . Agencies should focus resources and expertise on research that identifies why populations change and that enables modeling future impacts."
- Beyond the Gulf, a research team at the University of British Columbia led by Daniel Pauly finds that fisheries catch data in the Arctic is [wildly underreported](#). The actual catch, they believe, is 75 times as high as that officially reported to the U.N. (Hat tip: [Yale E360](#).)
- And speaking of fisheries, NOAA has floated a new [Draft Aquaculture Policy](#). Like most such documents, the draft policy is vague and general, but it seems to take a more balanced view of the environmental and economic picture than the Bush administration did. It calls for encouragement of sustainable aquaculture within the context of the agency's marine stewardship mission; the first of its articulated Principles for Aquaculture in Federal Waters is that

“Aquaculture development in federal waters should be compatible with the functioning of healthy, productive, and resilient marine ecosystems.” High priorities actions identified include more scientific research and establishment of a “coordinated, comprehensive, transparent, and efficient regulatory program.” Interestingly a separate but [“complementary” draft policy](#) was simultaneously issued by NOAA’s parent Department of Commerce. [Comments are being accepted](#) on both drafts through April 11. (Hat tip to Ben Somberg of the Center for Progressive Reform.)