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LNG Plan Under Fire For Impact On Marine Life

March 5, 2005

**Release from: John Surratt
The Mississippi Press**

PASCAGOULA - ConocoPhillips came under fire Friday night for its proposed method of heating liquefied natural gas (LNG) and an environmental impact statement that some environmentalists said failed to look at all the marine species that could be affected by the company's proposed Compass Port LNG facility.

ConocoPhillips wants to build the offshore LNG terminal 11 miles south of Dauphin Island in the Gulf of Mexico to receive LNG from carriers, convert it from a liquid to gas and send it along an underwater pipeline to an on-shore station at Coden Alabama.

To reconvert the frozen liquid gas back to a gas, the ConocoPhillips officials said they plan to use an open loop system that pulls in an estimated 136 million gallons of water per day from the Gulf of Mexico to warm the gas and then discharge the cold water back into the sea. The water would be treated with chlorine to prevent algae build-up in the lines.

It's a system that has triggered a firestorm of criticism from environmentalists and fisheries and conservation officials.

"This system would have a negative impact on many Gulf fisheries by destroying fish eggs, larva and zooplankton," said Aaron Viles, fisheries campaign director for the Gulf Restoration Network in New Orleans.

He added that there were no statistics to show the effect on shrimp, a major Gulf commodity and money crop for the Coast that may be living in the area around Compass Port.

Compass Port, he said, would be in an area called the "fertile fisheries crescent" in the Gulf, adding that while no one can say for certain what the effects of sterilizing 130 million gallons of water may have on the marine life, "we fear the fisheries impacts would be significant."

According to charts displayed by Entrix, an environmental consulting firm working with the Coast Guard in evaluating the project's environmental impact statement, Compass Port would have a minimal effect of less than two percent on red drum and even less on red snapper and menhaden, another commercially harvested fish.

Entrix representative John Harvat said the figures were based on information from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Viles said challenged those figures, saying the process could destroy as much as the equivalent of 14.9 percent of Mississippi's and Alabama's redfish catch.

"Due to these significant fisheries impacts, open loop terminals are opposed by a variety of organizations, including the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, NOAA Fisheries, as well as non-governmental fishing and conservation organizations," he said.

Edwin W. Cake of Ocean Springs, a biologist with Gulf Environmental Associates, urged federal officials to perform an impact assessment on oyster beds on Portersville Bay, where the pipeline crosses on its way to Coden.

"An open system is not going to just take in water, it's going to take everything in the water," Paula Vassey of Gautier said. "And 95 percent of the marine life in that area lives on the bottom."

Vassey also said the environmental impact statement did not take in endangered species like the gulf sturgeon.

"(Protected and endangered species in the area) should be checked," she said.

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