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## COMMERCIAL FISHERMEN HIRE PROMINENT ENVIRONMENTAL LAWYERS TO PROTECT THEIR RIGHTS

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**AUSTIN, TX** – Stuart H. Smith of the law firm Smith Stag, LLC, New Orleans, Louisiana has assembled a working group of lawyers from Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida to prosecute claims for those who have been affected by BP's Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Commercial fishermen and shrimpers have filed a class-action lawsuit against BP and owners of the oil rig for economic losses stemming from the disaster. The lawsuit was filed late on Wednesday, April 28 in U.S. District Court in New Orleans.

The suit names as defendants BP, which holds the lease to the offshore well; Swiss-based Transocean Ltd, owner of the Deepwater Horizon drilling platform; and Halliburton Energy Services Inc., which the suit outlines was engaging in cementing operations of the well and well cap. The complaint says Halliburton "improperly and negligently performed these duties, increasing the pressure at the well and contributing to the fire, explosion and resulting oil spill." The suit also names Cameron International Corp, which supplied the rig's blow-out prevention equipment "that failed to operate upon the explosion and should have prevented the oil spill."

All the defendants are accused of negligence in the lawsuit, which seeks economic and compensatory damages of at least \$5 million. That sum is the minimum amount required by the federal Class Action Fairness Act, on which jurisdiction for the suit is partially based.

"While we're still in the embryonic stages of quantifying the environmental impact, we're watching in real time, and somewhat helplessly, a slow-motion disaster," stated Louisiana-based lawyer Richard Arsenault, a partner in one of 10 law firms joining the legal action.

This group of lawyers has extensive experience in their respective jurisdictions addressing the substantial losses landowners and fishermen have suffered as a result of toxic contamination. For example Mr. Smith was lead counsel in the *Grefer v. Exxon* litigation wherein a judgment of \$1.043 billion was taken against Exxon for oilfield radiation contamination.

Mr. Smith along with Mr. Val Exnicios and Mr. Gladstone Jones have extensive litigation experience against the oil and gas industry in Louisiana. Mr. Jones served as lead counsel for Connecticut and New York lobstermen who lost their industry due to pesticide contamination. The firm of Krupnick Campbell of Fort Lauderdale is renowned for representing the shrimping industry in chemical contamination cases. The group also contains French speaking Acadian lawyer Warren Perrin of the Perrin deLaunay firm since many of the fishermen expected to be affected will be Acadian.

Mr. George Barasich, individually and as the president of the United Commercial Fisherman's Association, and the Louisiana Environmental Action Network have requested that Mr. Smith and his team begin immediately investigating the cause of BP's Deepwater Horizon Spill and the environmental impact associated therewith. In light of current predictions of large-scale environmental damages, Mr. Smith and his team are preparing the legal paperwork necessary to file suit.

Any of these attorneys would be happy to provide comment on the issues of the case. With respect to the assembled team of lawyers, Mr. Smith provided, "Without any hesitation I can report that these lawyers who have joined together are ready to protect the interests of all those who have suffered and will continue to suffer as a result of this most unfortunate disaster and like all Americans, we hope BP stops the leak soon."