

WASHINGTON – Congressman Jo Bonner, R-AL, is calling on the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to halt its plans to “reformulate its policy” regarding the processing of Gulf of Mexico oysters.

After years of working with the Gulf Coast oyster community to manage the levels of the *Vibrio vulnificus* bacteria in Gulf oysters, the FDA is now seeking to force costly new requirements on the oyster industry which could block sales of Gulf raw oysters for half the year.

Bonner has signed a congressional delegation letter to the FDA commissioner asking that the agency adhere to its original management plan which does not require post-harvest processing of oysters. Additionally, he has cosponsored legislation that would prohibit FDA funds from being used to implement its new post-harvesting rule.

“In recent weeks, the FDA has stated its intent to mandate a new policy for Gulf raw oyster processing without sufficient cause and without regard to the severe impact such a policy reversal will have upon the livelihood of the oyster industry,” Rep. Bonner said.

“Over two thirds of America’s oysters come from the Gulf of Mexico and 40 percent are harvested during the warmer months. Yet, the FDA has now determined that these harvests must be subjected to costly additional processing in order to reduce the likelihood of bacteria which has only shown to have a limited health impact.

“At the request of the FDA, the Gulf Coast oyster industry has significantly invested in equipment to minimize the presence of the bacteria. However, the FDA has proposed that draconian measures be put into place that will result in a loss of jobs and dramatically higher costs for raw oysters.

“Statistically, more people die from lightning strikes and skydiving accidents annually than die from eating raw oysters. The FDA is imposing a dramatically higher standard on the oyster industry than for other food producers and its consequences on the local economy are being ignored.”

FDA officials met Tuesday with lawmakers from the Gulf Coast states, including Congressman Bonner's staff. During the meeting, the FDA officials pledged to continue discussions with lawmakers over the proposed new post-harvesting processing policy.

"I look forward to working with the FDA to ensure that common sense and fairness are retained and our Gulf Coast oyster community is not the victim of bureaucratic overreach," Congressman Bonner said.