



Department of Justice

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COAST FISHERMAN PLEADS TO DISASTER FISHERIES PROGRAM FRAUD

Gulfport, Miss. –**Timothy Rice**, of Gautier, Mississippi, appeared today before U.S. District Judge Sul Ozerden in U.S. District Court in Gulfport and entered a plea of guilty to one count of wire fraud in fraudulently obtaining disaster crabbing benefits from the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources following Hurricane Katrina, U.S. Attorney Dunn Lampton announced.

As part of the Hurricane Katrina recovery program, the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources administered fishing programs funded by the Department of Commerce through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Commercial fishermen who held licenses before Katrina were eligible to be accepted into the contract program in which participants would be paid \$160.00 per day for each day of fishing and reporting bycatch and harvest data.

Rice faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000.00 fine. This case was investigated by Special Agent Kevin George of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Senior Master Sergeant Charles Vyles of the Department of Marine Resources, and prosecuted by Annette Williams, Assistant United States Attorney.

In September, 2005, then Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales, created the national Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, designed to deter, investigate and prosecute disaster-related federal crimes such as charity fraud, identity theft, procurement fraud and insurance fraud. The Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force - chaired by Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Criminal Division, Matthew Friedrich, includes members from the Department of Homeland Security, FBI, the Federal Trade Commission, the Department of Labor Office of Inspector General, the Postal Inspector's Office and the Executive Office of United States Attorneys, among others.

Pursuant to the Justice Department initiative, a local Katrina Fraud Task Force, consisting of over 20 Federal and State law enforcement agencies, was formed in the Southern District of Mississippi to pursue and prosecute individuals who engage in fraud associated with the hurricanes.

If anyone has information concerning possible fraud being committed during the post-Katrina recovery effort, please call either the DHS-OIG Fraud Hotline at 1-866-720-5721 or the FBI Fraud Hotline at 1-800-225-5324.

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