



FISHERMEN AND FRIENDS OF THE SEA

Summary Report: Dec 17th 2013 Oil Spill, La Brea, Trinidad

On 17th December 2013, 7,554 barrels of Bunker C fuel oil spilled into the Gulf of Paria. It was speculated that the oil spill was a direct result of poorly maintained sea lines owned by the state owned company Petrotrin. These sea lines, which had not been inspected for over 17 years ruptured and directly affected the coastal areas from Mosquito Creek to Point Fortin. This area became known as the Petrotrin Red Zone Area (PRZA).

The “reported” 7,554 barrels were neither contained nor recovered. As the spilled oil washed ashore a dispersant, COREXIT 9500 was admittedly applied to the oil spill inshore, contrary to the country’s National Oil Spill Contingency Plan (NOSCP), which states that “the area of application is not less than... closer than three nautical miles up current from important marine fisheries”. The COREXIT 9500 was applied one nautical mile from the shore in the inshore fishery of the Gulf of Paria, which supplies the country with 70% of its sea food.

The tidal “gyre” movement of the Gulf of Paria pushed the oil and COREXIT 9500 mixture—into the Aripero Lagoon and Mangroves and up the Aripero River. The COREXIT 9500 and oil mixture was naturally and intentionally buried in the sand on the banks of the Aripero River, which washed into the Aripero Lagoon and still can be found on Point Sable Beach today.

Within a month of applying COREXIT 9500 to the oil spill, the entire village of La Brea had fallen ill. The residents were complaining of dizziness, headaches, belly pain,



chest pain, and itching. The then Member of Parliament for La Brea (MP) Fitzgerald Jeffrey called for long-term monitoring to be implemented in the area, to ensure the residents' health was cared for.

Since this Petrotrin 2013 oil spill, there have been an on-going daily fish kill and dead marine species in the PRZA, even up to today. In December 2013 and January 2014, the Institute of Marine Affairs (IMA) collected samples of sick, dying and dead marine species and concluded that the prevalent fish kill [was not due to the presence of COREXIT 9500 or polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon \(PAH\).](#)

[Petrotrin conducted a nearshore water quality assessment, and also concluded that PAHs were “not detected in the nearshore water” and there were “no COREXIT in the samples” of dead fish analysed by ALS Environmental Lab in Washington, United States.](#)

In 2014, a [National Environmental Assessment Task Force \(NEATF\)](#) was appointed by the Government to oversee all activities that were necessary to address the environmental impacts of this oil spill. The NEAFT commissioned a [report](#) which stated that oil contaminated fisheries were not closed due to fear of public confusion, “seafood market disruption” and “unforeseen “economic impacts”. In contrary, [Point Sable Beach, Carat Shed Beach and Station Beach](#) were in fact closed and restricted from fishing for over 6 months. The NEATF recommended that the relevant authorities needed to “review issues pertinent to seafood safety risks during an oil spill...and advise on seafood contamination risks and action to be taken”.

Despite calls for monitoring and on-going daily fish kill and dying marine species washing ashore in the PZRA, no environmental and public health monitoring programme was ever implemented.



In 2016, the [Environmental Management Authority \(EMA\)](#) commissioned the [Caribbean Industrial Research Institute \(CARIRI\)](#) to analyse solid and liquid samples and fish for COREXIT 9500. [The results were negative but the contents of the solid and liquid samples were never stated.](#) The EMA also commissioned CARIRI to analyse samples of [marine species for COREXIT and TPH](#), which were also negative. [Fishermen and Friends of the Sea \(FFOS\)](#), concerned about these fish kills and the health of the fishing communities, commissioned the CARIRI to analyse the Total Petroleum Hydrocarbon (TPH) levels in the [sediment, water and fish](#). The test concluded that the water on Point Sable had levels of 0.41 mg/L of TPH, whereas the sediment contained 139.11 mg/kg and the fish contained 2680.73 mg/kg.

FFOS discovered and petitioned that the EMA's commissioned [CARIRI's laboratory report was fraudulent and threatened exposure if the EMA did not retract the report.](#)

The EMA retracted the [report](#) and agreed to test the samples in collaboration with FFOS, with both parties paying half the required fees. [This second laboratory report confirmed FFOS initial report of high levels of TPH, \(26, 757.92 mg/kg in catfish caught in Point Sable Beach\) and contradicted the EMA's report.](#)

The EMA and the IMA then concluded to us that the [test method for TPH is not a specific method for the analysis of petroleum hydrocarbons, but one that extracts other substances such as lipids \(fatty acids\), oils, humic acids and any substance soluble in the organic solvent, used in the tested method.](#) The IMA and EMA concluded that in order to determine if the hydrocarbon levels affect human health, PAHs must be tested.

At the time of this IMA/EMA/FFOS meeting to discuss the CARIRI TPH report, FFOS had already commissioned the [University of Trinidad and Tobago \(UTT\)](#) to determine the levels of the PAHs in the sediment and the fish from this area. The UTT's report



concluded that *“the Gulf is significantly contaminated with a variety of Persistent Organic Pollutants (PAHs and PCBs)”* and that *“their presence in the marine ecosystem will eventually lead to higher and higher levels in fish and, when consumed by people, to high levels in humans, thereby posing a significant threat to human health.”*

On the same day in 2016 that FFOS released the UTT findings, the Ministry of Planning and Development (MPD), the line Ministry for the environment, announced that seafood samples will be collected and sent abroad to the United States Food and Drug Administration (USFDA). Strategically, seafood samples were not obtained from the Petrotrin Red Zone area, where the local fishing community daily catch their staple food but rather bought from other landing sites. As such the location of the seafood caught is unknown. US based Northwest Fisheries Science Centre (NWFSC) a branch of the National Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and [Eurofins Frontier Global Sciences](#) conducted the seafood analysis for the MPD. The MPD concluded from these [laboratory reports](#) that the fish were *“deemed safe for human consumption”* despite the NWFSC stating in the report that *“caution should be used when comparing Trinidad and Tobago seafood POPs levels to the U.S. FDA action levels for these compounds as they were developed using U.S. consumer rates of seafood that may be different than the rates for consumers from Trinidad and Tobago”*. The average seafood consumption rate in the local fishing communities is over 1400g per week.

Since this oil spill 5 years ago, every day dead and dying marine species (over 22 species of fish, crab, shrimp, sting ray, eel, brown pelican, magnificent frigate bird, common dolphin and bottlenose dolphin) and corbeaux wash ashore in the PRZA.

FFOS has appealed and continues to call on the Government to:



1. Close the PRZA from any crab catching, shrimp trawling or any type of fishing from Mosquito Creek to Point Fortin;
2. To remove residual contaminated sand from this area;
3. To continuously test specimens from this area to determine the safety of fish or shrimp for consumption by testing for cancer causing hydrocarbons;
4. To consider fair compensation for our Southern fishers who have been abandoned for 4 years.

Both the IMA and the EMA have publicly and repeatedly stated that the dead and dying fish were "[dumped bycatch](#)". The IMA in one of its articles stated that "*All the fish were dead. There were no dying fish, i.e., fish gulping for air at the surface, which would indicate a contaminant was present in the water and the kill was an ongoing event.*" Despite numerous video footage of living fish gulping for air at the surface, the IMA/EMA have not conducted any scientific analyses to rule out the possibility of a contaminant in the PRZA.

FFOS visits Point Sable Beach every month obtaining [pictures and footage](#) of the dead and dying fish which are submitted to the IMA, EMA and the [public](#).

No one is listening.

