

Sad Anniversary

It's a sad anniversary. It's slightly more than a year after the disastrous blowout after the collapse of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico. It quickly became clear that it was catastrophic, threatening the wildlife on the Gulf Coast, fish and mammals in the seas around the Deepwater Horizon and the livelihood of many people living on the coast working as fishermen or in the tourism industry. A year after the blowout the consequences are still not clear, law suits have been prepared and regulations on deep water drilling will be adjusted.

A team led by Larry Mayer, director of the Center for Coastal & Ocean Mapping, will look into the effects of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill on the ecosystem services. Larry Mayer is the right man in the right place. He was responsible for mapping the oil spill in the water column last year with the help of the 3D-visualisation software developed by a consortium based at CCOM in New Hampshire. Through this first off application of software developed for hydrographic purposes, NOAA vessel *Thomas Jefferson* was able to monitor plumes of oil in the Gulf of Mexico. This resulted in enormous opportunities to identify the scale of the spill. Undoubtedly, this technique will be used by the team that is analysing the effects of the spill on the ecosystems, a year later, to be reported on in Autumn 2012. In the meantime, Mayer will be at sea for more than 50 days starting a new expedition to the Arctic in order to map the continental shelf North of Alaska. Data gathered on this expedition are meant for purposes of supporting claims for the Exclusive Economic Zone of both Canada and the United States with the United Nations. While the two States are still disputing over an area they both feel should belong to their respective EEZs, Mayer points out that the fact that Canada and the US are teaming up together to find scientific evidence shows that data and not politics will solve the case in the end. Enough reason to interview Mayer in this issue of *Hydro International* (see page 10).

It's clear now that we have been lucky to some extent; no hurricanes swept the spilled oil further and the loop current did not pick up the spill, thereby preventing it from travelling to the Atlantic and the North East Coast of the US. But luck is bound to run out. Mayer's experience in the Gulf made it clear to him that drilling in the Arctic is extremely dangerous. The effects of a blowout in the Arctic would be unimaginable. The biodegradation of oil under cold temperatures is uncertain, let alone the effect of oil under ice. On top of that, there is totally no infrastructure to respond to a spill. He advocates, in addition to a lot of research, also with hydrographic techniques, for a new international regulatory system around deep water drilling in general, and for the Arctic in particular, in which risk analysis by the drilling company is the most important component. The disaster in the Gulf will have a major impact, eventually for the better, on drilling for oil in deep water or vulnerable areas.