



The Senate Commerce Committee on Wednesday approved a bill to help the families of the 11 victims of last year's Deepwater Horizon blowout by changing outdated federal maritime laws, one going back to the 1850s, to make it possible to recover damages from BP, rig operator Transocean and rig subcontractors.

The Deepwater Horizon Survivors' Fairness Act would amend the Jones Act and the Death on the High Seas Act to allow the victims' families to claim non-compensatory damages, such as pain and suffering and loss of companionship.

Both laws prohibit such claims. The bill also would change the Shipowners' Liability Act of 1851, which limits a vessel owner's liability to the value of the vessel and its freight.

The Death on the High Seas Act, which dates to the 1920s, effectively prevents the victims' families from suing BP, Transocean and the other companies involved by limiting compensation to funeral expenses and lost wages.

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