



HISTORIC NEW ENGLAND

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Interview with Erik Anderson by Elizabeth Farish for the Historic New England Oral History Project, November 20, 2009.

ELIZABETH FARISH: This is Elizabeth Farish and I'm at the Governor John Langdon House on Friday, November 20, 2009, with Erik Anderson, who is a commercial fisherman out of Portsmouth, New Hampshire. And this interview is in support of the oral history project documenting commercial fishing stories. Good morning, Eric. Thanks for being here.

ERIK ANDERSON: Thank you.

EF: Would you mind spelling your name for me before we begin?

EA: Erik, E-R-I-K. Anderson, A-N-D-E-R-S-O-N.

EF: Thank you. So, let's start at the beginning. Can you tell me a little bit about your early fishing days? Like when you began, how long you've been fishing?

EA: Yeah, I started probably—I started as a freshman in high school and what I—how I was introduced to the fishery was through the recreation fishery. I used to go on charter boats a lot and—or party boats, and just through the course of that time one of the—you know, the fellow that ran the boats that I went fishing on decided to hire me. So he was my mentor. His name was Mindy Ridder and—so that was where—that was the fishery I first began, you know, my interest in the industry and it was, you know, it is a legitimate segment of the industry, the recreation fishery, party charter boats, that type of thing.

And I stuck it out with him through high school and actually got my license, my operator's license to run those boats I think as a freshman in college, and stayed on with them and ran those—ran boats for him and also out of Seabrook, New Hampshire. There was an outfit called Eastman's Fishing Parties and worked for them for a period of time. Stayed with that—you know, stayed in that end of the business for, Jesus, I can't—I'm going to have a hard time putting,

you know, timelines on it, but from around '64-'65 and then got out of it. I just got tired of that aspect of it and then started commercial fishing and a gill netter out of Rye with a fellow named Bob, Bobby Anderson. No relation. Fished with him for a season and, you know, gill netting and, you know, just as another aspect of the story, he committed suicide.

EF: Oh, no.

EA: And, you know, that—I mean that was—that was kind of, you know, a low moment in—in—you know, that I recollect but it—it—it still didn't, you know, falter my, you know, interest and commitment to, you know, staying in the industry. So after that I purchased my first boat in I think—I've had a variety of boats, but I guess the first commercial boat that I had that I, you know, went gill netting with was in 1980 or '81. And it was a gill netter, and also it was, you know, it had the ability to go tuna fishing, particularly to harpoon tuna because I really liked that fishery. And, you know, it's a season, so on and so forth.

So I had that boat there. First boat was called *The Perceptive*.

EF: How long was it?

EA: Thirty-seven foot Repco and, you know, I converted the boat. It was a lobster boat that I converted into a gill netter and then, you know, when we didn't work gill netting, we went tuna fishing. And we went all over the place. We went, you know, down—down the Cape, stayed up here, so on and so forth. That's what the fish—that's what the—that's what the fishery was like then is you did a lot of traveling around.

EF: Long trips?

EA: No, not as much as—you know, they were all day trips when you're tuna fishing except if you went out and, you know, spent, you know, if you were on the fishing grounds and you didn't catch a fish, you know, you'd stay for a couple, three, four days until, you know, you just wanted to take a rest from it and, you know, come in and, you know, go back out. But, you know, that was the early end of things.

EF: In the '80s.

EA: And I liked it. In the '80s. I liked it.

- EF: What was tuna fishing like? Harpooning must be different than anything you'd ever done.
- EA: Yeah, it was. It was and that was just something that I, you know, just took a liking to. I mean it was just a different end of the—you know, we—we would, you know, we would we call it harpooning or sticking fish and then we'd, you know, we'd hand line. It was in the early days of the—I mean it was not in the early—I first learned how to, you know, did a lot of tuna fishing on the party boats. In the fall when things would get slow, then we would—we would go out, you know, there'd be a gang of us that would, you know, when the boat wasn't fishing during the week or something like that, we'd—we'd go tuna fishing. We did quite well. It just always was a fascinating fishery. It just—it's a real exciting fishery. I mean there's nothing more boring than going tuna fishing and not catching a tuna fish and there's nothing more exciting than going tuna fishing and catching a tuna fish. So, you know, it had—it had a real spectrum, you know.
- EF: Did you have to have a different license for tuna fishing than for gill netting, the way that you do now?
- EA: No, the license—well, a different license, yeah. It was kind of specific. I mean everybody's had to have—everybody through the course of time now has—I don't even think there was a license requirement back then in the '80s. We sold them for—there was no market then. When we first started doing it on the party boats, we'd sell them and a lot of them went for cat food. A lot of them we would cut up at the dock and just try and peddle, you know, because there wasn't really any market and then all of a sudden, you know, the Japanese came on the scene and things started to get, you know, a little bit more exciting as far as what the fish were worth and so on and so forth. But—
- EF: Because they're a very hot commodity now, aren't they, tuna fish?
- EA: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah. They probably backed off a little bit because, you know, that—the Japanese economy's probably toned down a little bit like ours and so on and so forth, but you know, there were times that, you know, there was a lot of—you'd make, you know, if you had the right fish and it was the right stuff and they liked it, then, you know, you could make, you know, the fish could be worth a lot

of money. But that wasn't how—I mean it was because of my first introduction to it through when they really weren't worth anything that, you know, you still—I still, you know, had a—had a liking for that fishery and it was different back then. Probably not as regulated.

EF: Hmm.

EA: And [unclear] fish and then things have changed since then. That's—that's just—I think that's another discussion but it just—it was a component of, you know, me being interested to, you know, pursue this as a profession. But you still had to have—you just—you couldn't be one-dimensional and I don't think you can be one-dimensional in the fishery. You have to—you have to be a little—you know, you have to be versatile.

EF: Diverse.

EA: Especially today, you know, today just with limited opportunity. Um—

EF: So gill netting was your primary—

EA: Right.

EF: Your boat's primary function.

EA: That was what it—yeah and then, you know, when things would slow down and, you know, you'd find other work. You know, I'd step on as crew for, you know, on a dragger for shrimp season. You know, ran—ran a fellow's boat. As a matter of fact, it was this fellow Bobby Anderson, his brother Ricky Anderson, I'd fish his boat a little bit during—during the shrimp season and just kind of get through until things started up again in the spring for, you know, what we were trying to do which was, you know, gill netting because that had a seasonal aspect. A lot of things around here just always have a seasonal aspect.

EF: Uh-hmm.

EA: You know, you start and it kind of tones down and you work into something else, you know.

EF: When you first had your own boat in the—in the '80s, what sort of ground fish did you fish for?

EA: Oh, back then it was, you know, traditional stuff. I mean, you know, when a—I mean this whole community is dependent on opportunity. You know, there's a

codfish season. There's a pollock season. That was the basic—those were the two basic fisheries that, you know--and then there was hake and there was—you know, there—I mean there was a variety of species you caught, but your target was—you know, your—your two bell weather stocks that, you know, really comprised the gill net fishery around here was pollock, hake, cod. Haddock hadn't really—haddock was really on the down—you know, on the down side then. So that was probably the biggest—the biggest part of—the early part of, you know, my, you know, fishing for, you know, gill netting. And then as things started to change and the dimension of things started changing, we kind of worked into monkfish.

EF: Which is not considered a ground fish? That's its own fishery?

EA: Well, it's a ground fish. There's no question it's a ground fish. It just has a different management structure.

EF: I see.

EA: So I mean that's where people kind of—as everybody was kind of regulatorily, you know, moved away from ground fish a lot of people saw monkfish as an opportunity and went there. It didn't have the same restrictions or requirements or regulations and so on and so forth, but I don't think there's anything that exists presently that doesn't have a, you know, pretty—pretty onerous management plan behind it. And it's—I'm not saying, you know, that management isn't needed. It's—it's needed. I mean there was—there was issues I think back when—when the cod fish resource started, the cod fishery started to, you know, fail. I think everybody came to some conclusion that, you know, that there had to be something done.

EF: When was that about, approximately? The late '80s?

EA: Yeah, late '80s. There was a management—you know, there was a management process that, you know, was trying to, you know, address the issue and it was—you know, there was—there was issues and whether it was from the fishery, whether it was biological, whether it was there was just—you know, there was the effect that, you know, the fishery wasn't as healthy as what it was before. But that's—that's, you know, a function of the fishery. It's a function of, you know,

the biology, of year classes, spawning, you know, so on and so forth, but—so everybody kind of recognized that that fishery was in tough—you know, was in a tough shape and needed some attention and I don't think people were really disappointed or resistant to, you know, the fact that it needed some, you know, regulatory attention.

But that's, you know, maybe later on we can just discuss that, you know, it—it—the pendulum has swung to such a, you know, extensive degree that it's—it just raises a lot of question amongst fisherman now that aren't experiencing—or experiencing better fishing conditions than what is being, you know, told to them from, you know, the regulatory people.

EF: So what were the regulations like when they were first instituted? Do you know when that was, again the same time period, like the '90s?

EA: I'm going to be—I'm going to be a little—I think around late '80s, early '90s. I mean, you know, a lot of—a lot of—a lot of guys just didn't—you know, a lot of guys didn't engage in the management process, but I guess I probably saw that, you know, this management process, you know—and a lot of people need—you know, like I said, a lot of people recognized that there had to be, you know, some concerns and the management process was going to be the vehicle that it was going to be instituted through and I became, you know, a little intrigued with that and started going to meetings and, you know, starting to find out how the management process worked.

I spent a considerable amount of time in the audience, you know, as—you know, to go to meetings which were scattered all around New England, but each meeting had a different, you know, had a different focus or a different attention on ground fish issues which was where, you know, my interest was. Enough to kind of understand the process or understand the system and say, "Well, I'd like to be part of it. I'd like to go from the audience to the table," and, you know, be involved in—in the decisions, you know, on behalf of what I knew, on behalf of the community that I—community that I did know in New Hampshire and this—you know, in New England. And, you know, affect something that was, you know, logical and, you know, kept—kept both parties in line. I mean—I guess parties,

no. Kept the fish in mind along with the industry in mind. There had to be a balance. There had to be something you could—you could see that, you know, the texture of the—of the council which is the New England Fishery Management Council. The texture of the council was starting to change and—and it wasn't going to be well-represented from the industry's point of view.

EF: Who sits on the council? Fishermen and politicians?

EA: Right, the texture of the council is it has, you know, fishing industry expertise. It has state people representing each state from a governmental point of view, whether it's New Hampshire Fish and Game or Department of Fisheries in Maine or Department of Fisheries in Massachusetts. You know, they had—you had state government people on it and you saw other peoples becoming interested in it and trying to get a position with the—you know, authority on the council and that was the environmental NGOs or non-government organizations that wanted to be—you know, they came across as a stakeholder in the process. I can't come I'm completely convinced that, you know, that they should be at the table, but that's just my opinion.

EF: Uh-hmm.

EA: But I—I—I don't—I don't, you know, disagree. I probably agree with a lot of their opinions, but the way that the influence has—has—has shifted with their being predominantly represented in the system is—is a little concerning. But I don't know if that's another subject through the course of this interview.

EF: Yeah, [unclear].

EA: But I—I—I spent nine years on the council. I actually had to my end my—you know, it had a three—you know, they were three-year term limits. Three-year limits, or three-year appointments and—

EF: So you're appointed. You're not elected or—who does—who does the—?

EA: No, you're appointed by the governor.

EF: Oh, I see.

EA: You're appointed by the—well, you're—you're—you're name is submitted by the governor and then it has to go through a federal process of, you know, reviewing it and making sure that you're—you know, you have the qualifications to

participate in or be in the council. But each term is three years and you have a term limit of three terms, so after nine years I—I—I had to step off and, you know, we had other people from New Hampshire come in and represent, you know, the fishing interest or the concerns of New Hampshire.

EF: So when—when restrictions were being implemented, how did they start? Was it less days at sea? Was it pounds that could be cut? What were the first restrictions?

EA: First restrictions came around with the—the first restrictions were the days at sea.

EF: Days at sea.

EA: That was the core. That was one of the core management or effort controls that they tried to implement saying, you know, “We want you to fish less,” and you could have done that through two things. You could have had an output control. They call it—they call it either output control or input control. An input control—an output control is you can only catch this amount of fish, quotas.

EF: Quotas.

EA: You know, and an input control is using other methods, using other methods like days at seas or other—other—

EF: Like the mesh size? Does that enter—?

EA: And mesh sizes and days at sea and net limits and, you know, fishing gear limits and closed areas and, you know, there’s a whole repertoire of things that they can use in that—in that regime of—of—of management, but it still didn’t set, you know. And then after that it was—and then it evolved, you know. Those—days at sea was probably the major shift into—into management and then that, you know, and then through the course of that time all these other features were added to it. Trip limits, enclosed areas and, you know, again and the second—you know, the second biggest feature after days at sea were the trip limits and they were basically for certain species, certain bellwether or core species like cod and haddock that they thought represented the multi-species—you know, represented the biggest concerns of the multi-species stock that’s available.

EF: And how did those limits or how did those restrictions, all—all of the things you mentioned, how did they effect you, or even like other fisherman that you—in your community?

EA: Oh, they—they—I mean everybody had to acclimate to them. I mean—and they evolved in, you know, first being introduced and then there was people acclimated to the—you know, there was a period of time that they acclimated to that and then—then they—then they started reducing the days at sea. Then they started reducing the trip limits because they said that the stock was not responding to, you know, what their—what their expectation of rebuilding was and that’s always been—that’s always been a tenuous or a tough, touch discussion because we’re not—we’re not controlling the fish, we’re controlling, you know, the—you know, we’re controlling the fishery.

EF: Uh-hmm.

EA: And the—you know, the people that are involved in the fishery. We can’t influence what—what—exactly how the fish are going to respond to that and that’s just—there is a biological, you know, factors that—you know, it got to a point that—that, you know, through the whole course of the time that—that I remember on the council that people just got up and said, “Close the fishery. Shut it down, let’s get this thing over with. We’re tired of it. We’re just”—you know, it’s one—one restriction after another and they’re just compiling themselves and—and it just being layered and layered and layered in—in—it just, you know, people had a—people had a time with the acclimation of it. [Coughs]

It became more sophisticated. I mean now it’s—now it’s to the degree that, you know, some restrictions are still there that just don’t make any sense. They’ve added you know—and then the, you know, the—the paperwork burden. I mean the administrative part of the fishing was, you know, filling out, you know, catch reports and vessel trips reports and then the requirement of vessel monitoring systems and everything just escalated. You know, it just keep—you know, it was additive. Everything was additive. It was just, you know, one thing on top of another after and it discouraged people.

EF: Hmm.

EA: I mean, it—I mean its grand intent was I guess—because it always avoided—it always avoided allocation of the fishery. Allocation, I mean by quotas, all right, which is now—which is—we’ve kind of evolved into now with the fact that we

had to slice the pie. You're going to get, you know—some guys are going to get this amount of fish; some guys are going to get some and some guys aren't going to get any, and that was just something--I think New England was very resistant to go to what was called a quota based management system, ITQs, which are Individual Transferable Quotas, or IFQs, which are Individual Fishing Quotas. But it actually set—you know, you only could catch this. We saw—it wasn't anything new. It had been instated in, you know, other countries but there was always the background that, you know, what did it actually accomplish?

And what it did is, I mean the texture of New England and the texture of a lot of communities around the world was small boats and—and, you know, small fishing operations and, you know, community. You know, very—very connected to the community and the social structure of the community and everywhere that you had visited where they had instituted these type of programs and policies, those components of the fishery disappeared. Just through attrition. They could not compete. They weren't even—they were either not given enough allocation to support themselves, you know, economically and viability issues and—and—and then since the value of each permit or each allocation had a—had a value—I mean a monetary value connected to it, you saw that the fishery was—you know, got bought up and it just got—you know, it just constricted or consolidated itself according to the amount of money that people wanted to invest in it beyond ability of some individuals to—to play the game.

EF: Uh-hmm.

EA: To be part of the game. To have the—have the—you know, have the amount of—of financial ability to participate. So those are the people who disappeared.

EF: Because permits are not connected to boats, so you could sell your permit to another fisherman?

EA: Right.

EF: Or another fisherman could buy your permit and you couldn't fish, you couldn't work on your boat if you—unless you had the right permit to do so.

EA: Right, I mean everything—you know, that was another thing is that, you know, everything like currently now is—you know, every aspect of—of the fishery now

is—is—requires permitting. I don't think there's anything that's still, you know, open access that anybody can get into it. It's all limited access. The doors have been closed for people to enter the fishery without a handful of money to get into the fishery. And that's—that's definitely a concern for, you know, this community, that you see enough—you see enough new blood coming in. I mean there's some actuarial, you know, issues with—with this—this community now. We're aging and—and all said and done, you don't want the fishery just to kind of evaporate because people, you know, want to get out and those permits that—you know, those permits that are available here can be, you know, part of a commodity. They can be bought and sold in different regions, you know.

EF: They can go out of New England.

EA: Oh, they can go—well, they can go out of New Hampshire. They can go out of New England, sure. They can—nobody—anybody can—I mean, it depends. If you've got deep enough pockets, you can buy the whole fishery. If you—if you make it attractive enough to the people that, you know, you're trying to—trying to purchase it from. And that's—I think that's—that's relatively—that's a product of what it's done in Canada. That's a product of what it's done in New Zealand. That's a product of what it's done in the European Union. That, you know, every time these type of—every time this type of policy is instituted, you finally get to a point of cutting the pie, of how much fish they say is available to catch and who's going to get what an slicing the pie is a very difficult—it's the—once it's done, it's over. You have the haves and you have-nots and you probably always hear from the haves that it's a good system because they have, but from the have-nots and the people that have been forced out of the fishery because they couldn't financially compete, I don't think there's really been a good—been a good product out of—out of them doing this type of thing. You know, this type of policy.

EF: So you've seen that? With—with these restrictions you've seen people leave the fishery?

EA: Oh, absolutely. I mean, you know, I dare say that—I mean, I wouldn't want to list all the people that I—you know, in the course of my time that, you know, that I've

been around that, you know, have just left and—and they just—they just—everybody has—I guess everybody has a breaking point where they just say “I’ve just had enough. It’s time for me to go. I can’t compete financially.”

EF: Is that why the Portsmouth Fisherman’s Co-op doesn’t—isn’t operating as a [unclear]?

EA: Absolutely. I mean, the co-op was, you know, around for the better part of thirty plus years but it finally came to the juncture to recognize that, you know, members had—its membership was diminishing. It was made up of fisherman. That’s who drove—you know, that’s who operated the—you know, that’s how the—that’s how the organization ran itself. It wasn’t owned—it wasn’t solely owned by anybody. It was—it was a conglomeration of fisherman that—that saw the need for it, organized and, you know, let it function for thirty years, thirty plus years. But it finally came to the structure—you know, it finally came to a point with, you know, escalating regulations that it just didn’t have enough product. They couldn’t—it didn’t have enough product coming over the dock to support all the overheads that were needed to, you know, turn the lights on, you know, to employ people, employ managers, so on and so forth. It—it finally just became economically, you know, not viable and so it was a decision of the group to say “We’ve just got to—we’re going to close up,” and I thought that was a real sad—I—I was not an advocate of it. I said, “Let’s—you know, let’s try and keep it going for as long as we can,” but all said and done, it was—you know, it went through a process that people decided it was the better thing to do.

EF: Is there hope that it could open in the future?

EA: I’d like to think that there’s a prospect of it, but you know, right now I’m not sure. I think—I think individuals—it upset—it upset everybody. I mean, it upset the—what—how people operated because, I mean you have—you have the fish—you have fisherman. You have their boats, you know, which are—you know, and then you need infrastructure. I mean, these boats can’t just operate on their own. It—that’s why co-op was created, to give a level of infrastructure that supported the industry. I mean, there’s only so many hours in a day. You can’t—you can’t, you know, go out, keep your boat running, catch fish, come home, put them in the

truck, go sell them. There's just not enough time and so that's what the function—that's what the—how that's—that's how the co-op functioned. It was the first line of infrastructure, of support for the industry.

EF: There's fuel and ice.

EA: By selling the fish, the ice, the fuel, and other aspects of it, you know, that—that just made—you know, just was needed and it's needed anywhere the fishery exists. This just happened to be how it was set up in New Hampshire as that co-ops were felt to be, you know, there wasn't anybody that, you know, emerged as, you know—you know, taking care of those infrastructure needs as well as the co-op, you know, came out to do it for so many years.

And so closing it really created a lot of—I mean, there's been a variety of co-ops throughout New England, but the ones that really kind of stood in there and hung out the longest were the ones in New Hampshire because there's two. I mean, there's only—you know, that's how the structure in New Hampshire, this community is. They did it through co-ops. You had the Portsmouth Fish Co-op. You had the Yankee. You know, Yankee was—I'm not sure, they've probably been around for twenty years now, but you know, they—that's what worked best.

EF: Is the Yankee Co-op still operating?

EA: Yankee's still operating. Once Portsmouth closed, they—they—they—you know, they took on other boats that—that, you know, needed to have their fish unloaded out of Rye because the three loading—the three places in New Hampshire that probably represent the fishery are Seabrook, Hampton/Rye and Portsmouth. And Kittery. I mean, you know—you know, there were—this community wasn't, you know, aligned itself from state to state. It kind of—

EF: The [unclear] is a blurry line, isn't it?

EA: Yeah, it came—it came together differently, you know. There was the people in Maine, you know that needed the same stuff that, you know, people in New Hampshire needed and that was how it was conceptually put together. And—and how it functioned. It was good, and it worked well for a lot of years, but it just finally came to a financial juncture that, you know, it just couldn't support itself anymore and I think that was kind of a sad moment, when—when, you know, the

reality was that it was—it was going to need, you know, more money than could be generated from the industry to support itself. So—at least, you know, from Portsmouth. I mean the Portsmouth Fish Co-op, and we just hope that a similar situation doesn't happen with Yankee, you know, because that would—that would—that would really—I mean everybody talks about the industry, like I said, in regards to, you know, individuals and boats, but it's all connected. One can't take place without the other. You need the boats, you need the infrastructure, and it all—and—and without it—without it—you know, without both, neither one of them work.

EF: Uh-hmm. Well, how has it changed for you? I know you—your first boat was a gill netter. Are you still gill netting?

EA: No. I—I—I got rid—I mean, after that I—I made a commitment. I was doing things that—that I was trying to do things with the boat that wasn't—that pushed the boat beyond its limit and so I decided to, you know, upgrade the boat. I went to Canada and built another boat, bigger, more comfortable, you know, more suitable for what we were doing. We were starting to, you know, do a little bit of offshore fishing. The first boat was too small. We were stretching—like I said, we were stretching what it was supposed to do because it was originally a lobster boat that had been converted to a gill netter. So anyway, after I built this—and I really enjoyed—you know, I really enjoyed putting—you know, this was like the ultimate dream is to build your own boat and—and you know, I decided to do it in Canada because that was the type of boat I wanted, and then, you know, it was a very, very good experience and I got what I wanted out of it all, but you know, it took about—it took about a year to put it together, all said and done. And that was it. That was my heart and soul.

And—but everything was just—you know, all this—all this other regulatory stuff was just accelerating faster than you could keep, and you could just see that it was—it was heading in a direction that just wasn't going to, you know, was just going to be that much more of a struggle. And you just had a big—

EF: Well—

EA: You had a big—you had a—you had this big five hundred-pound gorilla on your back, which was the federal government and they were always pushing on you. It just--always pushing on you. Just, you know, you felt really uncomfortable and threatened by their presence. You know, not to say that you weren't—you know, you tried to follow every regulation that you could, you know, physically understand or mentally understand, but there were just so many that—and the fines were so big and they—they were so aggressive about that—the fishing part of it, I miss it every day because I did sell that boat, you know, to somebody younger that wanted to get into the industry. So I—you know, and—you know, it was—it was a real sad time for me to let that boat go, but it was—it was the right thing to do, and I just, you know, went back to—back to lobstering, in between me running, you know, working on a party boat. Thinking back to the origin, I went lobstering, too, to supplement, you know, some income but I just felt it was time to return to that fishery.

EF: So you're lobstering now?

EA: So I'm lobstering now. I got out of—I got out of ground fishing. I still have a permit. I would like to think that I could get back into ground fishing sometime, and I still hope that I can, but I just wanted to step away from it.

EF: You sold your boat that you built for yourself and that you loved so much?

EA: Yup. Sold the boat that I built. Yup, named it after my kids, the *Chris and Kev*, and, you know, just really enjoyed the boat. It was, like I said, I think it's something that everybody wants. You know, everybody that's—that fishes wants to do is, you know, build their own boat, just exactly the way they want it and not take something else and, you know, turn—turn another boat into something that it wasn't originally intended. That really—really kind of, you know, it was—it became an obsession to kind of—to do that and—and do it the way that it, you know, that it played. And I liked the boat. I mean, just—whatever. So that was just part of it.

EF: Well, I know you are actually doing a lot of proactive things to—to represent your industry. Are you the president of the New Hampshire Commercial Fisherman's Association?

EA: Yeah. I've drawn the short straw for that for a lot of years because I think it's important. You know, fundamentally I think it's important to have, you know, some type of vehicle for the industry to have representation and it's through an association. I mean, the—I think the beauty out of this association is it—it didn't—it wasn't the gill netters association or the dragger man's association or the lobsterman's association. New Hampshire just was a community that wasn't big enough to support individual associations—you know, individuals, you know, fishers. So I mean, it just kind of put everything one umbrella and tried to bring people together to take on any issue that, you know, affected New Hampshire.

And that's what the association is and I think, you know—I think it has—I definitely think it has value. We've had—we've done a lot of good things. It—it—it and it's needed because if you have—you just can't approach things—it's difficult to approach things singly as individuals now, and, you know, if you—if you think that strength is in numbers and that's what the association does. If it wants to, you know, bring people together, discuss an issue, think what's best for everybody and then—you know, then move in a direction to advocate for the—for the fisheries, if it needs it.

EF: So that's the function of the association?

EA: Right. Right, right, and I think it's—and I think it works well. I mean, you know, it's all—it's all—I mean anything of this nature is you get what—you get out of it what you put into it and, you know, periodically, you know, people come and go out of it, according to, you know, what the issue might be at the time, but it still represents I think a voice of the industry for New Hampshire and I think we've got a little bit of—you know, we've got—we have a respectful name and, you know, we try and do things, you know, on behalf of—it's motivated to keep the industry, you know, viable and healthy and make sure that its well-being is in place for what it's represented out of the past and what it represents for the future. And the present.

I mean those—those are the three issues. To make sure that the fishery is healthy and that there's—you know, you don't want to lose it. I think that's—it goes with a lot of other communities but I mean, you know, this industry has a

long history in Portsmouth and New Hampshire—you know, New Hampshire itself and Portsmouth and—and, you know, to let it go or just have it just evaporate or disappear because of a variety of other issues I think would be tragic and—and don't want to see that happen.

EF: Hmm. Are—are fisherman members of the—?

EA: Yup.

EF: Association?

EA: Yup, they subscribe to a membership, like anything else. Very modest. Nobody gets paid out of it. It's all volunteer. Nobody—never taken a penny. So I mean it's—you know, that's—that's how it functions now. I mean, it's different. Maybe it ought to grow, maybe it ought to, you know, elevate itself to another plane of—of—of, you know. We're in the process of that. I think it's been around for a long time. It's been effective in a lot of issues.

EF: So it's an advocacy group.

EA: It is an advocacy group. It is an advocacy group for the—for the industry. Like I said, its health and its well-being, to take on, you know, whether it's state issues, federal issues. Those are the two issues that the fishery has to deal with, you know. Educational issues. I mean, we've participated in a lot of—a lot of—what's the right word? We've just participated in a lot of—

EF: Venues?

EA: A lot of activities. Like I said, whether it's policy advocating, education to the industry in dealing with, you know—I mean there's—through the evolution of all this stuff, everybody's trying to find a better way to make sure that the industry is around. You know, there's been—we've participated in a lot of academic associations with the university and a lot of other initiatives. I can't ever—you know, if I was to sit and write them down, it would take me a while, but you know—you know, through the course of when I've been involved with the association, we've done a lot of things. I think it's good. I think it's needed.

EF: Hmm.

EA: It's needed in any community. You have to—you have to collectively, you know, gather and not just—I mean, that's the thing about fisherman, you know. We

put—if you put ten fishermen in a room, you’re going to get fifteen different opinions, but you know, eventually you have to come—come together and, you know, try and bring a single—

EF: Have a voice together.

EA: A single opinion, you know, of what you’re hoping to—of whatever the issue is or what you’re hoping to get out of it.

EF: What about the New Hampshire Seafood Fresh and Local campaign? I know that you have been—

EA: It’s new. It’s something I mean relatively new in regards to the amount of time that we’re talking about it. You know, it’s—it just came to be that I particularly felt that Portsmouth as a city did not recognize the fishing industry that had been one of the original reasons for people to come here. I—I just like to—you know, I—I—I like—I’m not saying I like politics, but I mean politics is a component of any community or anything. You know, politics, well, it’s a big word. It has lot of meanings. But I just thought that Portsmouth in the way it has transitioned and evolved, it has a different texture now. It’s not bad. It’s just—but it’s a matter that—that I didn’t think the fishing industry was getting enough recognition. It—it—it—I think the city used the industry or used—you know, had a convenience for the industry to use it in promoting the industry—promoting the city, but it didn’t have a lot to say with regards to what—you know, what it felt about the industry and, you know—anyhow, I mean the purpose was to approach the city and say, “Listen, at least—at least let somebody come together as a committee or some—some—some action from the city in the City Council to put a—put some people together and, you know, report back to the city of what—you know, some facts related to the industry, what it does economically, what it—you know, social connection, whether it be from the past or the present, and hopefully the future.”

And so that’s what the committee originally decided to do, but unbeknownst to myself, you know, we did work and we accomplished that and we reported back to the city, but unbeknownst this—this committee took on an interest from a variety of other people. I think I—and it’s only been around for a year. I think—I think we’re probably—you know, it’s November. It was

November last year that, you know, the committee first met and then it just kept growing with involvement and—and participation and people that had an interest, and from a variety of other dimensions. And—and so as these people joined, the conversation got more—I won't say more complex, but more—gathered a different spectrum and in the essence they said, “Well, let's find ways to visibility the industry and the products that it produces,” and it evolved into a brand new name and a brand new logo for New Hampshire, Seafood Fresh and Local. I came to understand that this—you know, that this local movement of supporting local businesses and supporting local products and food was a much bigger—you know, had a—had a—we well grounded and it had a lot of participation in just adding this particular—adding seafood to the—to the—to the menu, per se, of what they—what they advocated for. It was more—it was more agriculturally structured until we started bringing seafood into the discussion. It just evolved. It just evolved so that we, you know—and we had a lot of—you know, a lot of good people in the discussion.

I think that has been—you know, and the group recognized that. I mean, we assembled and in a relatively short order of time accomplished a lot of things, you know, with the—trying to get recognition for the industry. I think that was one of the first things. Trying to create something that was better, that had a better prospect for the industry, create niche markets to—to get the product, which has always been a good product, to the consumer a little faster, you know, with—you know, and the value of the product to the community and to people.

EF: So they—

EA: It's been—it's been rewarding, you know, and we want to keep it growing. You know, I mean granted we accomplished a lot very fast. It's like blowing up a balloon, you don't want to blow it up so fast that it pops, but you want to, you know, once you get it, you want to keep filling it so it—it—it keeps getting bigger but doesn't pop and—and—and that you—that you maintain this thing because it has a—we definitely recognize its benefit and—but—but it takes effort to keep it, you know, up and running.

EF: Uh-hmm. Do you think—do you think that the industry has a good chance of survival if the community—in ways like this, if this campaign--

EA: It helps.

EF: Can get behind it?

EA: It helps. It's not—it's not the solution. It doesn't—it doesn't represent any solution for that regard. Those—the industry isn't just a—it's in a—it—it's in another dimension of—of regulatory difficulty in—in, you know, this next step that the industry's going to—I'm talking about the ground fish fishery.

EF: Uh-hmm.

EA: And it will probably go into other fisheries. The lobster fishery. So I mean those are the two—those are the two major—those are the two fisheries for New Hampshire, but right now they—you know, for ground fisherman it's—you know, the policy change is in an order of magnitude that they haven't ever seen before, and without doubt I think one of the most discouraging aspects of it is that, you know, it's been promoted—you know, it—it has—it—it—it's—how it's related to the government because they're the one—they're the one driving the program, but I mean when they come out and say, "We want," I mean a product of this is there's going to be fewer boats. I mean and—and that—that right out of the gate just is repulsive to me. I—I—I don't—I don't understand it. I don't—I—I—we've already taken a big hit. This—you know, this—this—this fishery fleet's probably down fifty percent of what I recollect it to be and to take anymore out of it is—it's going to stretch how—how it's going to have the ability to maintain itself in the community. Other than that, you're going to see boats disappear. They're going to have to go to places that have the ability to support, you know, like we talked earlier about the infrastructure issue. Boats go fishing, but they eventually come home and they got to get rid of what they—you know, they got to get rid of what they caught. If there's not any—if there's not any system there to support it, they'll go to other places.

We've seen a lot of our boats go to Gloucester, you know. Some of them went to Portland, you know, places where there is a little bit more attention to those issues and—so I don't think—you know, getting back to the question of

whether this Fresh and Local is going to—is going to be the answer some of the dilemmas, no. It—it—it's—it hopefully is just going to create a niche, another niche that, you know—another niche of opportunity if the fishery is allowed to—you know, if the fishery can hang and get through these, you know, these regulatory issues that—it—it—it—it presents maybe a little bit better prospect. It's not going to—it has no ability to cure every—every one of the—you know, all the woes that—that have taken place.

EF: But it can educate.

EA: Yeah.

EF: A community that might not know. Even though they live in this—this very traditional New England fishing town, people might not have any idea about the industry. So maybe that can help educate them.

EA: Absolutely. That was one thing—that's the one thing that we came to—

EF: That's what the point is.

EA: We came to recognize at least in discussion with the city government is that, you know, you look across the—they didn't know. They just didn't—they had no idea. They just didn't know what this—what the industry does for the city.

EF: Uh-hmm.

EA: And it's—you know, it's a part of it. I mean Portsmouth has evolved to its present day, you know, what it is presently. It's a—it's a different type of town as what it was before, or city. However you want to call it. It's not a big city. What's Portsmouth, twenty-three thousand?

EF: Something like that.

EA: Maybe? It's not—it's not huge. But I mean it has a good name. It has—it—it—it—you know, the city—I don't want to, you know, stray, but I mean it's done what it's done I think in a good way, but it—it should be attentive to all the components that make up the city of Portsmouth. Or the seacoast and one of those components is the fishing industry. That shouldn't be ignored and—and—and I think they came to the recognition that it needed some—you know, it—it--it needed some attention or it needs some—it needs attention because once it's gone, it's gone. You're not going—this is—once the industry gets to a point that

it's a fraction of what it is, it just—it wouldn't be a good component of the city or the region. I just don't want to focus on Portsmouth because New Hampshire doesn't have a big seacoast, so it's a community and that's the way we—that's the way we think. At least I think that this should be represented. It's the community. It's Portsmouth, it's Rye, it's Hampton, it's Seabrook, it's—you know, that's what it is.

EF: Will you stay fishing and lobstering?

EA: Yeah, I mean I've kind of toned back now. I mean, like I said, I've gone full circle, gone back to lobstering. I enjoy it. I don't feel the pressure of all the regulations. I miss ground fishing every day because I liked it. I mean, that was what I really—you know, that's—and—and—but, you know.

EF: Why did you like it so much? Just the fresh and the sea and—

EA: It was—no, it was a challenge. It was—it was—it was the challenge. It was, you know, dealing with all the factors that the industry has to deal with that any—that any individual's got to deal with, you know. Keeping your boat together. I mean going out, I mean, you know, and fishing. I mean—and that's what—I mean, if you're going to take—if you're going to discuss, you know, whether it's—whether you're a hunter or hunting in the woods or you're a fisherman fishing in the ocean, I mean there's a challenge. What—what—how do I catch them? You know, what are they doing? You know, what's the—what—what's going on? I mean, there's a lot of guys that have, you know, more talent than me, but you know—and—and—and, you know, but you just try and hold your own and it's the challenge of trying to do something in an environment that doesn't necessarily have to co-operate, you know. Or fishing through weather that you shouldn't be in, or going out when you shouldn't go out because, you know, you have an obligation to, you know, to tend the gear and, you know, bring in a good quality product and so on and so forth.

I mean it's just so many dimensions of it that—that, you know, increment, you know, some—some parts of it are bigger than others, but there are just a lot of—there's a—just there's a lot of dimensions of it that, you know, kept you going, you know, but—and that's—you know, once you—once you understood

what was going on as far as them trying to reduce the amount of individuals in the industry, there had to be reductions. There was too many—you know, there was I think a point there was—that—I mean it's been described as a lot of things, you know, whether it's the last frontier or, you know, a bunch of cowboys or whatever you want to call it, you know. Yeah. I mean, that—that's going to come and go. I mean, people got in the fishery when it wasn't regulated and they got out of it because they couldn't compete. They didn't—you know, they—they—I mean they just didn't have that type of talent. They didn't have the type of drive and so on and so forth, and they fell out of it economically because they just couldn't—couldn't produce enough. You know, they—they—they couldn't compete and that's just the natural pecking order of things.

It's the same way it is with any other business, I guess. Because each one of these guys, you know, call them fisherman, call them boats, each one of them were a business that got to, you know, especially—it might have been different in a different time before, you know, but it's always been a business. You know, for the first time it ever—the first time they came here to start fishing, it was—it had to be—you know, there had to be something—you know, it had to be somewhat profitable.

EF: Uh-hmm.

EA: You know, and that's just—but each one of these businesses, you know. I mean just the fish pier itself, even though the co-op is the most—I tell you, look around. It is the most concentrated business district in the city of Portsmouth. You got forty boats there. You got forty businesses in a hundred and fifty feet, you know.

EF: Is that true today or was that sort of in the heyday?

EA: Oh, in the heyday there was seventy-five boats.

EF: Wow.

EA: I mean, coming and going or—yeah, I'd say—no, that was—that would probably be a stretch, but you know, I think there's thirty something boats there now. In its heyday it might have been, just—just for that—just for Portsmouth facility—just for Portsmouth fish pier there might have been forty-five-ish coming and going. I'm pulling that out of the air, but I can—I can think of guys that have gone by.

- EF: And that represents gill netters, lobsterman—
- EA: Right, it was the ground fishery.
- EF: All that.
- EA: But I mean that's the beauty. I mean that's—that's what the facility is, it's ground fishing and it's gill—I mean it's gill netters. It's draggers. It's lobstermen, you know. It's not—it just wasn't left with one, you know, one type of place, where you see other places that might be just lobster. You know, that ninety or a hundred percent of the people there are lobstermen. I saw that in Canada a lot. You know, these little—these little ports or these little harbors, you know. You know, ninety percent of them are lobstermen because—
- EF: Because that's not regulated and ground fishing is?
- EA: They had thrown—because of—of the management processes that went on in Canada that threw everybody out of the ground fish fishery.
- EF: Uh-hmm.
- EA: Ground fish fishery in Canada is probably owned by four or five big companies now. And a little bit—and a little bit of small boat, you know, fisherman that still have—you know, that try—you know, that—that haven't—that haven't been bought out or something like that. But, you know, basically the Canadian ground, you know, ground fishing's controlled by a couple, three, four companies. You know, so you—you know, that wasn't—and that was different, you know. That—that—that's what that country wanted to do and they thought it was the cure, but I don't think—you know, you still—you still can go up there and find people that are really upset that they —they—they're the have-nots. They became the have-nots of the industry.
- EF: Uh-hmm.
- EA: After—you know, when they were—you know, these are—these are people that had generations in the industries, but were kind of—they were thrown out.
- EF: And now maybe they work for the company.
- EA: They work for the company. They work for them, yeah. If they—if they still are in the fishery, yeah.
- EF: And that's the danger here?

EA: I think so. I mean, you know, everybody says no, no, no, it won't happen, but I can't see it going any other way. I mean, it, you know—if this was the first time we were going into this type of program or process or, you know—you know, what's going on here and you could say, "Well, we don't know," but we've just seen it happen in other places.

EF: Right.

EA: And—and you say, "Well, what's going to make us different?" and I don't see anything. I don't see anything the way it's going on that's going to make it any different for this place or this, you know, this area, this community, you know, or any place else in the country that it's going on. There's nothing that's going to prevent it being, you know, just bought up. Bought up by the one, you know, by somebody who's got the deepest pockets. I just—I can't see it. I can't see it going any other way. It's going to take some time. Might take—might take a short amount of time than what I think, but I think it's eventually going to happen. You know, whether it's two years, five years, ten years, I mean in the course of the four hundred plus years that, you know, it's been here, I think what you're going to see in the—in the next, you know, two, five, or ten years, you know, is this type of thing coming. You know, this same type of thing coming out, these communities aren't going to exist.

Especially when the government—the thing that bugs me, the thing that bugs me the most is that the government—well, people that are in, you know, high positions within the government that oversee the fishery said, "This is what I want to do. I want less boats," and that shouldn't be—that shouldn't be the position of an individual that is in charge of an agency. That's—that's like saying, "If I want less boats, I'm going to—I'm going to put you out of business. If I don't do it this way, I'm going to do it that way." I—I—I've got a real hard time, you know, chewing on that piece of information because it's been publicly said. I just don't think it's correct that they, you know—I don't think it's correct that they can say, "When I'm done with you, I'm going to put you out of business, and I'm going to use different reasons for doing it. I'm going to use"—there's always been a clash. You know, since the—since the whole—since the whole regulatory

process has started, there's always been a clash between the—what the industry's views are versus what—what the administrative people want to accomplish or science or so on.

I mean, you know, there was a big effort to try and, you know, put—put science together with the industry because it's like, I mean, you want to know about farming? Then go to a farmer, all right, but then you still have to have some—I mean, things have evolved so that there's got to be some science behind it and—but they've always clashed. And even more so now. There was an effort to try and put them together and work together, come up with better fishing gears, come up with, you know, better strategies and, you know, things that, you know, were going to be, you know, positive for the resource because that's, you know, in the final end if you don't—if you don't have a good—if you don't have a healthy resource, you don't have a fishery, anyway.

So—and I think that worked for a while. Things were accomplished and then I just think that there's been—I think the industry has been overwhelmed by environmental organizations that have different thoughts or, you know, different perspectives of how things should be and they—they—they'd get into the system and start and become so ingrained in the system that—that it's not producing the best result.

You know—I—I—I think from a total, it's not all the way across every individual, but I—I—I think all in all, fisherman is just more of a, you know, an environmentalist or a conservationist than—than—than the organizations that represent the movement, the environmental movement. You know, they just never are going to get that type of credit.

EF: Why is that, do you think?

EA: Perception. I mean, you know, it's always—I mean, you know, the thing that's probably put the industry in a little bit of, you know, public view is that, you know, well, overfishing. You know, things are overfished. There's too many fishermen. There's too many, you know. I don't think that's right, but that's the strategy that people in other, you know, environmental groups have used to move their way into the system. It's—it's a—it's a—I guess there's more to be said

about that. It's a longer story, I guess, but for me that's just the way I view it. I'm trying to—trying to participate in all—you know, in any discussion that, you know, advocates for the industry, but some of them are just a little bit more difficult with people who have got a predetermined, you know, idea of what they—how they want to see things in the final end and how they portray them.

And—and—and it's been, you know, it's becoming more adversarial. It's becoming more difficult for, you know, these people to—you know, to try and say, “Well, why not work with them?” Well, I've tried working with them or, you know, I've had experiences working with them and it, you know, it's always the same. They don't seem to want to come to your—you know, they don't want to come to the middle. That's all you would expect out of working with somebody is okay, I'll compromise and you compromise and we're going to have a solution out of this, but they don't. It's—it's—it's been my—it's been my experience more often than not that, you know, in the final end, they—they don't really have a lot of desire to compromise, for some reason or another.

EF: Well, you said that some of the restrictions have worked and that the relationships between fishermen and scientists at some point were—were accomplishing things.

EA: Yeah, they were. They were.

EF: Are there—

EA: I mean, you know, we were coming up with better, you know—

EF: Are there stocks that have been recovered that you represent as [unclear]

EA: Oh! I think that's—I think that's—that's the issue that—that—that—that we're at a juncture with. Yeah, stocks are recovered. I mean—I mean, the—is every stock going to recover at the same rate and to a level that is, you know, they're all healthy at the same time? I don't think so. That's just not—that's just not a biological reality. It just—you know, you got—you try and manage everything and you're saying, “Well, everything has got to be at its biological high. They got to be healthy and not overfished and overfishing is not occurring,” and this and that and all these standards that have been set—that have been set up, and you go, “I don't think it will happen.” It hasn't happened since time and creation that, you know—some things are healthy, some things—and then, you know, next thing

you know, one that wasn't healthy has come up the ladder, something else is moving down.

It's—there's not enough—I—I use the word energy. There's not enough energy in the—in the system to keep everything up, up and running simultaneously at the same time. It just doesn't work like that, but we—but we've got these manmade, you know, rules and regulations that says "This is what we want. This is the way it should be on paper." It just don't—it has a hard time translating to that, and—and I mean a lot of what I said here was just structured under the difficulty that the industry's had, you know, regulatorily. I mean, that's not my whole focus into my—

EF: Perhaps.

EA: That's not my—that's not my whole focus into why I'm in the industry. Because I liked it. I like—I like what I do. I like what my profession, what I call my profession, but—and I still do! I don't—but I don't want to get mired in the fact that, you know, or just be discouraged with the fact that they, you know—I don't want them to drive me out of the business for something I like to do. That's really, you know—they've redirected me. I mean, I'm doing something that I still enjoy when I go lobstering, but it's not what I really, really, you know, got into it for is to go ground fishing. So.

EF: Well, this has been really great. Is there anything else you want to share before we wrap this up?

EA: Equally part of why I got in—you know, why I—I—you know, like what I do is the people. I mean, I don't know how many adages fishermen have associated with them. We're all liars. We all—we all go—you know, but you know, so on and so forth, and it's kind of humorous. But, you know, we compete against each other and in the same way we're best friends, you know. Or we have commonality. Or we, you know—I think there's just—there's been just as much satisfaction and enjoyment, you know, socially with the people that you meet and—and camaraderie or that you can kind of—you know, that you can gather amongst yourselves. Some really, really good, interesting people, some people, you know, I've advised. Some people that, you know, I respect and then there's

others I don't. So I mean, you know, it's not like everybody's, you know, on—
on—but that's—that—that frames the—that frames some of the—you know,
being part of that community, being part of other, you know, people in—in the
social—the social part of it, too. I don't know. Okay.

EF: Well, that's great. Thank you so much for your time.

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