

[00:00:00]

Wang: Do you already have it—Okay. It's going. All right, so this in an interview with Kenny Reinertsen. The interview is taking place on August 8th, 2018, and the interviewers are Susan Wang—

[00:00:17]

Lesyna: And Kristine Lesyna.

[00:00:19]

Wang: Okay, and we'll have you introduce yourself, Kenny.

[00:00:22]

Reinertsen: Kenny Reinertsen, here at Fish and Game office in Belmont.

[00:00:29]

Lesyna: Great, thank you.

[00:00:32]

Wang: So thank you for coming down here and doing this interview with us. We just wanted to start off by learning more about your history in fishing. So would you just tell us how you got into fishing?

[00:00:47]

Reinertsen: Family business, I started when I was eight years old, you know, and then I fished every summer until I got out of high school and then went full-time fishing.

[00:01:09]

Lesyna: And who in your family was involved with fishing?

[00:01:15]

Reinertsen: Mostly just me and my dad.

[00:01:19]

Lesyna: And was that here in, in California?

[00:01:24]

Reinertsen: Newport, Oregon.

[00:01:26]

Lesyna: Oh, okay.

[00:01:27]

Wang: What did your dad fish?

[00:01:29]

Reinertsen: He fished mostly bottomfish.

[00:01:33]

Wang: So when you were eight what did you do for the business?

[00:01:40]

Reinertsen: Well, I started out—At that age I was, we were crabbing and I just stuffed bait jars when I was really young. And then went from crabbing to shrimping and then from shrimping to dragging midwater fish and then—what was it—in 2000 we came down and started doing the California Halibut.

[00:02:08]

Wang: How did you guys end up coming all the way down here from Oregon for California Halibut?

[00:02:16]

Reinertsen: It was an interesting story. We—Things were changing in the drag quotas and, and we were looking to get into a different fishery and we had a friend who was fishing for California Halibut but on his way home his boat sank. So we ended up hiring him to come down here and fish for the Halibut. Kind of he helped us learn what to do down here and, and he was able to make enough money to buy another boat and go his own way again, but. So that's how we started doing the Halibut.

[00:03:10]

Lesyna: And once you started doing Halibut did you stick with it or did you continue doing other fisheries as well?

[00:03:17]

Reinertsen: Yeah, we did it for 17 years, so.

[00:03:23]

Wang: So only California Halibut, or also—

[00:03:26]

Reinertsen: Well, we also do the bottomfish too.

[00:03:31]

Lesyna: And was that in California or was that up in Oregon?

[00:03:35]

Reinertsen: Back and forth, we did some in California and, and most of it up in Newport, Oregon.

[00:03:44]

Lesyna: Okay. Did you ever stop fishing and do something else and come, and then end up coming back to it?

[00:03:54]

Reinertsen: No. No, I've pretty much fished the whole time, still am. Back to crabbing, but...

[00:04:07]

Lesyna: And are you still participating in the California Halibut trawl fishery?

[00:04:13]

Reinertsen: Not right now.

[00:04:16]

Lesyna: And you said you were crabbing?

[00:04:18]

Reinertsen: Yeah, crabbing off of Newport, Oregon.

[00:04:21]

Lesyna: Okay.

[00:04:24]

Wang: So you've been doing—You've fished for California Halibut 17 years?

[00:04:29]

Reinertsen: Yeah.

[00:04:30]

Wang: And then how long total has been, have you been fishing?

[00:04:34]

Reinertsen: Have I been fishing?

[00:04:37]

Wang: Uh-huh [affirmative].

[00:04:38]

Reinertsen: Oh, over 35 years. I, I have to figure that one out.

[00:04:45]

Wang: Wow.

[00:04:47]

Lesyna: Do your family members still fish as well?

[00:04:52]

Reinertsen: No, I have a brother that kind of off and on, you know.

[00:05:00]

Wang: So what did you—What do you enjoy about fishing? What keeps you going in fishing?

[00:05:10]

Reinertsen: Oh, I don't know.

[00:05:25]

Lesyna: Is there anything that motivates you to go fishing every day?

[00:05:30]

Reinertsen: I don't know, just something I like to do.

[00:05:35]

Lesyna: Yeah. Is there anything you like specifically about the California Halibut fishery over other fisheries?

[00:05:49]

Reinertsen: It's a lot different. It's, it's easy work physically, but, you know, we went day and night for, you know, well, just in the wintertime, usually three or four months. It was every day that the weather would allow us, so.

[00:06:24]

Lesyna: Every day and long days?

[00:06:27]

Reinertsen: Yeah, day and night.

[00:06:28]

Lesyna: Oh wow

[00:06:31]

Reinertsen: Come in, unload your fish, turn around and go back out and do it again.

[00:06:34]

Wang: So like all-day operations? You just would—Can you describe what that, what a day would look like?

[00:06:47]

Reinertsen: Most days it was we'd tow from Half Moon Bay up to San Francisco buoy line there, or, yeah, and then see what we caught, then set the net and tow back down to Half Moon Bay and just, it took about five hours. And we just kept doing that and then we'd have a certain time that we'd come in and unload every other day. And so we just did that, day and night.

[00:07:29]

Lesyna: So that was a reliable fishing area for you or did you ever a try a new, new places?

[00:07:34]

Reinertsen: Well, there's several zones that we move around to but that was the most popular, I mean more consistent area.

[00:07:46]

Lesyna: So when you said zones, are they different depth zones or different like northern and southern zones?

[00:07:54]

Reinertsen: Well, they have the trawl zones that they set. I think they did that just before 2000. I'm not sure when they did it.

[00:08:12]

Wang: So you would go—Like would you leave early in the morning?

[00:08:16]

Reinertsen: That didn't matter. If the weather was good we went.

[00:08:22]

Wang: And then you just keep going until the weather is not good?

[00:08:25]

Reinertsen: Until we just couldn't take it no more and we'd come in. If the ocean got so rough that we, you know, couldn't keep the net on the bottom then it was time to come in.

[00:08:41]

Wang: So what's the longest stretch of the number of days?

[00:08:46]

Reinertsen: I mean consistently? I'd say we had a—Several years ago we had an observer that was on the boat for, I think there a two-month period. And the first month we had him out there 28 days in a row.

[00:09:13]

Lesyna: Wow.

[00:09:14]

Reinertsen: Soon as we hit the dock he was gone on the 28th day. Said somebody else could go, but yeah, we just, you know, the weather kind of restricts how many days you can go in a month. And like I said, we fish in the wintertime so you get a lot of storms and so. And that was another thing with the California Halibut, right after a storm is the best fishing, so kind of stirs up the ocean, so.

[00:09:55]

Wang: So why is that—Why is right after a storm the best time?

[00:10:02]

Reinertsen: It's, I think it's just all the, the sand and stuff gets stirred up and kicks the fish offshore. So we're fishing three miles out and that kind of pushes the fish out to us.

[00:10:20]

Wang: Oh, I see.

[00:10:24]

Reinertsen: Yeah, I mean the fish are always moving but you know, right after a storm it's just the fish are moving more.

[00:10:38]

Wang: And, and why winter? If that's the—

[00:10:41]

Reinertsen: More storms. I know a lot of the boats fish here in June and July but, you know, I, I'm not sure what gets the fish going then, but I don't know if it's the hot water on the beach or what it is, but yeah, it's just a lot of the times of the year that fish aren't moving, so.

[00:11:15]

Lesyna: So you fished the winter here because you thought that the fishing was actually better than during the summer?

[00:11:22]

Reinertsen: Yeah. Yeah, you get, well, more rain, bigger swells, you know, it all made for better fishing. If the ocean was too flat we didn't catch nothing, so.

[00:11:41]

Lesyna: So you needed that in-between weather. So what kind of weather restricted you from going?

[00:11:49]

Reinertsen: That was, yeah, start getting up to 20-foot swells it gets a little too, a little too rough, so there's a certain point that you can't really get in and out of Half Moon Bay there, so.

[00:12:13]

Wang: Oh, are you ever—Were you ever surprised by what you caught in your nets?



[00:12:21]

Reinertsen: I'd say yeah. Depends on what you, you know, what we catch. I mean anywhere from lots of fish to semi-trailers and airplane parts.

[00:12:43]

Lesyna: Semi-trailers? Whoa.

[00:12:46]

Wang: Oh, you were able to bring those up?

[00:12:48]

Reinertsen: Got it far enough up we could read the license plate.

[00:12:52]

Wang: Wow.

[00:12:56]

Reinertsen: Yeah. I've caught all sort of things that you're surprised to see.

[00:13:13]

Lesyna: So you said you've been trawling for Halibut for 20 years, is that—?

[00:13:22]

Reinertsen: 17.

[00:13:24]

Lesyna: 17 years? So we're going to kind of switch gears a little bit and ask you how you've seen that fishery change over time. Have your fishing tactics changed at all?

[00:13:39]

Reinertsen: Not too much. That fishery, it's more the weather patterns. Yeah, there's—In the

years I've done it there really hasn't been too many changes.

[00:14:09]

Lesyna: Did you ever modify your trawl net gear during your career?

[00:14:17]

Reinertsen: A little bit with, like, excluders. But most excluders are trying to get rid of the bigger fish where we're trying to keep the bigger fish and get rid of the smaller fish. So there's no net companies or anything that are experimenting with what we need, you know, Halibut fishing.

[00:14:47]

Wang: So what is it—What does an excluder look like or how does it work?

[00:14:54]

Reinertsen: Well, like the shrimpers, you know, they're keeping the little shrimp. Well, they want to get rid of all the fish, rockfish and stuff, so they have grating to where the, you know, allows all the bigger fish to get out of the net. And up north when they're catching Petrale, you know, Petrale hang out with Halibut, Pacific Halibut, and they got excluders to let those Halibut out but keep the Petrale. And that—We kind of have the opposite problem. We want to keep, you know, the big fish and get rid of the smaller ones and so we just have to come up with our own ideas, but, so.

[00:15:52]

Lesyna: Did you ever try using larger mesh sizes?

[00:15:57]

Reinertsen: Yes, and that works but the California seals really like Halibut. And the bigger mesh sizes allows them to eat the whole thing, so we're kind of stuck there.

[00:16:21]

Lesyna: So is that because they stick out of the net a little bit and the sea lions are able to grab them?

[00:16:29]

Reinertsen: Yeah. Yeah, if there's just Halibut in the net then, you know, that's all, the sea lion gets to, you know, pick and choose what he wants to eat. Now if there's a whole bunch of fish in there it's a little harder for him to find them. But they are picky. They like Halibut, so.

[00:17:05]

Lesyna: Is your, is your trawl gear unique from other fishermen's gear, and if so, how?

[00:17:14]

Reinertsen: Not really. Well, basically the same, same thing. I think nowadays it's a little smaller than what they use up north but it's still basically the same, same setup.

[00:17:44]

Wang: So over your 17 years, how has technology changed and how has that influenced your fishing and your fishing success? Or even over, since your 35 years of fishing?

[00:18:06]

Reinertsen: Well, it's made a, a bigger change in knowing exactly where you are and being able to come back later and say, "This is where I was, you know, two years ago at this time," you know? That's helped a bunch. But, you know, with the Halibut fishery, you know, the technology really doesn't help that much because, you know, you're towing in the same area, doing the same thing, so a boat with no electronics can catch just as many fish as one that does. I mean, it's a little different than, you know, what you see, you know, with the boats that go offshore catching, you know, Dover and black cod and stuff like that, where the electronics help them a lot more.

[00:19:18]

Wang: So you, have you, you pretty much go back to the same places over the years that those areas have not changed?

[00:19:25]

Reinertsen: No, those areas have not changed. Same place and it's one of those things you may not catch hardly anything, turn around, go over the exact same spot, and catch a whole bunch of them. And you just—You got to keep going.

[00:19:45]

Wang: Why do think that is?

[00:19:49]

Reinertsen: They're just moving all the time, you know, whether it's tides, currents, you know, it's hard to second-guess them.

[00:20:09]

Lesyna: Have you seen any changes in the marine environment that you think might have impacted the Halibut population or fishery?

[00:20:20]

Reinertsen: Not that I can really think of.

[00:20:38]

Wang: Have you seen any changes in the Halibut population over time?

[00:20:44]

Reinertsen: From year to year you'll see, you know, some years more bigger fish, some years smaller fish, and why that is I don't know. It's always good to see smaller fish. The last couple years we've been seeing a lot of really big ones, so.

[00:21:19]

Lesyna: Have you seen any shifts in market demand that affected your sales of Halibut?

[00:21:27]

Reinertsen: The sales of Halibut—There's been a few changes, you know, because it's mostly—I should say California Halibut because, you know, a lot of that's smaller markets, so I don't know, some of them come, some of them go, so there's a few changes here and there, but yeah.

[00:22:02]

Lesyna: So when you say smaller markets, they're local markets for California Halibut?

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Reinertsen: Yeah, fresh, fresh local markets.

[00:22:12]

Lesyna: Fresh local, okay.

[00:22:13]

Reinertsen: Where your, you know, Pacific Halibut, most of it comes from Alaska and it's all frozen and, you know, they sell a lot of it but, you know, people like fresh fish, so.

[00:22:36]

Lesyna: Have there been any changes in management policies that impacted you and the fishery specifically?

[00:22:52]

Reinertsen: Well, there's been a few small changes and most of it was what we could keep and what we couldn't keep. But didn't really affect the operations of the boat.

[00:23:09]

Lesyna: So it wasn't—It was groundfish that you, that there were changes to?

[00:23:17]

Reinertsen: Yeah, mostly it was just—The only real changes in the California Halibut is, you know, when I first started you were able to keep some personal fish and, you know, which was a short or, you know, started off you could have like four little short ones for personal use. And, you know, then it got down to, I don't remember if it was like so many a week or I don't remember how it changed but, you know, now you can't have any. You can still have personal use it just has to be, you know, over 22 inches.

[00:24:22]

Wang: So we're going to kind of shift to the future of the fishery and what do you think your, your future role will be with this fishery?

[00:24:41]

Reinertsen: Oh, that's a good question for me because that's—We sold our boat, permit and all that, so.

[00:24:49]

Lesyna: What was the name of your boat?

[00:24:51]

Reinertsen: Fishing Vessel Tabitha.

[00:24:53]

Wang: How big was it?

[00:24:55]

Reinertsen: 68 feet, which is, you know, fishing out here there's only two actively fishing that were that big.

[00:25:11]

Lesyna: And when, when was it sold?

[00:25:14]

Reinertsen: The first of, first of 2018.

[00:25:21]

Wang: Oh, so you're no longer fishing California Halibut?

[00:25:27]

Reinertsen: No, actually the permit went to a, a boat down here.

[00:25:34]

Lesyna: In Half Moon Bay?

[00:25:36]

Reinertsen: Yeah, yeah.

[00:25:39]

Lesyna: But it didn't stay with the Vessel Tabitha?

[00:25:43]

Reinertsen: No.

[00:25:44]

Wang: So what are you—

[00:25:48]

Reinertsen: And actually, that was a change. They didn't—California Fish and Game didn't allow permits to be sold like that. And this year they decided that we could sell a, a permit to another boat. You know, before the boat either would have to be scrapped or sunk or something before you'd be able to sell it. Or there was a few things, if you were 65 years old you'd be able to sell it, and they I guess took all that away so you can buy and sell those.

[00:26:36]

Wang: Oh, so before the permit had to go with the vessel?

[00:26:40]

Reinertsen: Right.

[00:26:41]

Wang: And they had to go together? Oh. Why, do you know why that was or why they changed it?

[00:26:48]

Reinertsen: I'm not positive. I think it was mostly to, kind of, so, you know, they weren't having big boats buy up all the permits or something like that. Because I think when they first issued them there was a few more boats that were fishing. But yeah, the last few years there hasn't been that many of them fishing. So I know the permits are still out there but why they're not using them, I don't know.

[00:27:31]

Wang: Oh, the California Halibut permits?

[00:27:34]

Reinertsen: Yeah.

[00:27:35]

Wang: Oh, okay.

[00:27:36]

Lesyna: So when you first starting fishing 17 years ago there were a lot more trawl vessels fishing the same area and now there's fewer?

[00:27:46]

Reinertsen: Yeah, yeah.

[00:27:48]

Lesyna: Do you know about how many there were when you first started?

[00:27:53]

Reinertsen: Oh, at one time there was like eight of us in one little tiny area. And, yeah, and then, oh there was, oh, at least six boats going all the time. But the last couple years there's, there was only like two of us going day and night, and two others, you know, just doing it, you know, from early in the morning until 4, 5 o'clock.

[00:28:42]

Wang: You don't know why that's changed?

[00:28:45]

Reinertsen: No, I know some of the bigger boats either sold or changed fisheries or something. But, you know, I'm not sure what they did with their permits.

[00:29:05]



Lesyna: Why the bigger boats over the smaller boats?

[00:29:10]

Reinertsen: What do you mean by that?

[00:29:14]

Lesyna: Why did the bigger boats stop fishing Halibut?

[00:29:18]

Reinertsen: A lot of them changed to areas probably—catching like black cod and stuff or, or crabbing—where you can keep going, you know, producing more money over a longer period of time, you know? You know, like Halibut, it's a little different, I mean it's, just because you go out there and set your net doesn't mean you're going to catch anything. It's hard to, you know—You bring up the net and there's nothing in it. Your whole instinct is to move on and it's hard to set that net back down and try it again. But if you keep doing it, you know, you come out, but it's really hard to do that over and over and over again.

[00:30:46]

Wang: Like how often would you set a net and it would come back empty?

[00:30:52]

Reinertsen: I mean it's not totally empty but, you know, you're counting your fish, I mean you're catching two fish an hour, three fish an hour. Bigger boats are, you know, they want to catch, you know, 10,000 an hour, 20,000 an hour, you know? It's one of those things that's, you know, at the end of the day you make just as much money because a lot of times that, the big tows of black cod and stuff, you know, you have a limit of how many you can catch. And, you know, you get a big tow and you're done, where the Halibut you just got to keep grinding and going and going and going and...Until the ocean's too flat and then you go home.

[00:31:56]

Wang: So what are you fishing now?

[00:32:00]

Reinertsen: Oh, crab.

[00:32:03]

Lesyna: And what's the name of your boat?

[00:32:07]

Reinertsen: Evie.

[00:32:08]

Lesyna: Evie.

[00:32:09]

Wang: Oh, that makes sense. Are you fishing up in Oregon or down here?

[00:32:15]

Reinertsen: Yeah, Newport, Oregon.

[00:32:23]

Lesyna: Do you have any concerns for the future of the Halibut fishery based on your 17 years of experience?

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Reinertsen: Yeah, I mean, it's a, it's a very small, state-controlled, to where, you know, if they wanted to they could close it down, you know, due to like the Green Sturgeon or, you know, there's a lot of things they could say that, you know, "We're just going to close it down," because there's only so many permits, and I've seen it in other fisheries. So one of those things you just never know what the future's going to be.

[00:33:22]

Lesyna: Are you concerned about Green Sturgeon?

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Reinertsen: Well, it's a concern but how much of one. I don't know. I mean, it's, we don't catch

that many of them. Sometimes you catch a few. I know when they first started your tagging and stuff we weren't sure if we were going to be able to tag very many of them because, you know, we'd go months without ever catching one and then you go for a week and you'll catch one, yeah, one or two every tow, you know? And it's just, you know, it probably helped having the tags on the boat and having the fishermen do it because a lot of times when you have the observer you never seen one, you know?

[00:34:45]

Wang: So what are your thoughts on how the fishery might change in the future, the Halibut fishery?

[00:34:56]

Reinertsen: How it might change? No idea.

[00:35:04]

Wang: Or what are, what are your hopes for the fishery?

[00:35:10]

Reinertsen: That it keeps going. It's kind of a different kind of fishery. It's fun to do because, you know, like I said, you go out there and you're only catching so much and you're sitting there with your calculator trying to figure out, "Am I making any money?" And then all of a sudden you got a big old bag full of them and, you know, it gets kind of exciting. You want to go turn around and do it again.

[00:35:46]

Lesyna: Are you planning to come back if you can?

[00:35:50]

Reinertsen: If I can, yeah. It's one of those things that, you know, there's quite a few people around here that are still fishing in their 70s and you don't see that up north, you know. It's just a little too hard on your body to, to do all that, you know, the amount of fish and, and the, you know, competition, I should say, that's up there. There's a lot more bigger boats that are getting bigger and bigger all the time and, you know, when it comes to California Halibut you see boats that are almost 100 year—Well,

ones over 100 years old and still going.

[00:36:52]

Wang: That's amazing, so.

[00:36:58]

Reinertsen: You don't see that up north.

[00:37:01]

Wang: Why is there that difference?

[00:37:04]

Reinertsen: Guess its life style? You know, more happy with what they got, where up north they, you know, it's got to keep growing bigger and bigger.

[00:37:31]

Wang: So is there, is there anything else you'd want to share about your experiences, the fishery, about your career as a fisherman?

[00:37:48]

Reinertsen: Not that I can think of.

[00:37:57]

Wang: Okay, well, we just want to thank you for—

[00:38:01]

Lesyna: Yeah, thank you very much.

[00:38:03]

Wang: ...coming down here and doing this interview with us, so thank you very much, Kenny.

[00:38:07]

Reinertsen: No problem.

[End recording at 00:38:08]