Interview

With

MAC CURRIN

In

Raleigh,

North Carolina

Interviewed by Sara Mirabilio

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Track Time	Topic
0:00:09	When and where Currin was born
0:00:44	Currin's professional background
0:02:29	How Currin's relationship with fisheries has changed over the years
0:04:00	How Currin initially became involved with fisheries management and policy
	Currin's professional and personal interest in healthy fisheries
0:05:53	Different organizations that attempted to represent stakeholders during and after the Fisheries Reform Act process;
	How and why Currin became involved with the Coastal Conservation Association
0:08:40	Currin's thoughts on why the General Assembly moved on fisheries legislation during this period;
	Commercial fishing's "heyday" of the early 1980s and the industry's regulatory response
0:11:30	The Coastal Conservation Association as bringing the voice of anglers into the fisheries management conversation for the first time
0:12:37	Currin's involvement with the Moratorium Steering Committee meetings
0:13:35	A consensus among stakeholders that something had to be done;
	Individuals from the commercial sector that were deeply involved
0:16:44	The role Florida's gill net ban played in North Carolina fisheries
0:17:40	Key players in the Fisheries Reform Act process;
	Recreational, commercial, and political players
0:19:42	Currin's involvement on the Seafood and Aquaculture Committee

0:21:00 Political reasons for not implementing a recreational license in the initial passage of the Fisheries Reform Act

0:22:37 Friendships Currin formed during this process

0:24:33 Weaknesses of the original Fisheries Reform Act legislation;
The recreational-commercial gear license;
Too many unsold commercial fishing licenses

0:30:36 The consequence of not passing the coastal recreational fishing license system with the original Fisheries Reform Act legislation;
Implementation of the Coastal Habitat Protection Plan (C.H.P.P.) system;
Increased communication between interrelated state-level environment and fisheries management bodies

0:33:43 Currin's three major successes of the Fisheries Reform Act (C.H.P.P.s, Fisheries Management Plans, and reducing the size of the Marine Fisheries Commission)

0:34:53 What Currin wishes he had known back when the legislation was originally under development in the 1990s

0:37:15 Future issues in fisheries management in the state;
North Carolina as the last state to allow in-shore trawling;
Balancing environmentally-damaging gear with habitat protection

0:40:30 Basing decisions on science and obtaining the best information

0:42:02 The future of North Carolina's commercial fishing industry as being housed in museums

0:44:44 The economic role recreational angling has in coastal communities

0:46:11 How North Carolina's current management plans are geared toward a commercial fishing economy

SARA MIRABILIO: Good morning.

MAC CURRIN: Good morning.

SM: I will begin with just having you state, for the audio archival purposes, some basic information about yourself. So the first question is: please tell me where and when you were born.

MC: I was born in 1950 in Henderson, North Carolina. A little north of Raleigh.

SM: So you're a Tar Heel?

MC: Yep. Born and bred.

SM: Okay. And you grew up there your whole life?

MC: Ah, yeah. I went off to school for a couple of years in high school and then off to college, so, I Guess I left there in [19]66, except for summers and I was working there and other places. But I pretty much, until '66, '68, I lived there.

SM: You currently are enjoying retirement?

MC: I am. Very much so.

SM: But what did you do for a living?

MC: Oh, lots of different things. Started out teaching school for a year when I got out of undergraduate school, then went back to school part-time at N.C. State [University] and was hired, worked with Doctor John Miller over there for sixteen or seventeen years, as a Research Technician, doing research on, primarily, little marine fish. Got a Master's degree from State while I was over there doing that, too. After that, I went downtown for a year and a half with the Outer Continental Shelf Office, was the Biologist on the staff that was coordinating the state's opinion on the proposed Mobil oil well, exploratory well, off of Salvo. And then, that job ended when gas prices tumbled, and Mobil went away and my job went away. So I came home and

started doing fishing schools; I had been doing the N.C. State sport fishing school since 1986, when I was on the staff at N.C. State. And so I continued doing that on a contract basis with them, and developed six to eight other programs, which I did off and on from [19]93 until 2012 or ’13, I guess. Maybe. Yeah, probably ’13, ’12. I forget. So. I think it was 2012, was the last year I did some surf fishing schools.

SM: Okay. What’s your current relationship with the fisheries environment?

MC: Ah, I’m a recreational angler, and that’s about all I do with ‘em, and I don’t do a whole lot of saltwater fishing much anymore, but I go some, every year. You know, I probably used to spend thirty to forty days a year fishing in salt water and about that many in fresh water, and now I spent probably forty days a year in fresh water fishing and more like [pause] twenty in salt water now. But it varies year to year.

SM: This is sort of a redundant question based on your answer, but has this relationship changed over the years?

MC: Yes! It’s changed some because a lot of, early on, some of my interaction with the fish and salt water was business-related. And so, since I’m not working in that field anymore, those opportunities are--have gone away. And as I sit here and think about it, Sara, I forget that I do travel some and fish when I’m out of the country or in Alaska or somewhere else, and so I haven’t counted those. I may be close back to where I was originally, I don’t know! I don’t keep track of it; I don’t keep a log. It would be interesting to do that, but I don’t.

SM: Okay. So now we turn to more of the specifics of your involvement in fisheries management and policy, generally. Why did you become interested in fisheries management and policy, or, perhaps restated, how did you get involved in fisheries management and policy? What was that first sort of toehold into it?

MC: Well the management, involvement in management, came through research, primarily, as my job at N.C. State [University] led me there. We interacted quite a bit with the Division of Marine Fisheries and tried to focus our research on issues that were--and questions that were--important to the Division of Marine Fisheries, and trying to help them out some. I mean, my Master's work was involved with nursery area utilization by spot and croaker and flounders and all those winter-spawn species, and so we were trying, personally and as well as a research that Miller and others were doing, other graduate students, were trying to get some information that might help direct or inform the Division's management policies. So that was my, I guess, my introduction and direct connection, early on. But from a personal perspective, I've always just been enamored with fish and the water and marine resources in general; always saw it as important that they continue on and exist for the pleasure of myself and my kids and everyone else. So I had a personal interest in the results of management and how things were being managed and, hopefully, successfully. I guess, one thing that struck me early on was that, in my mind, I was not aware of the North Carolina Fisheries Association [N.C.F.A.] early on--and I'm talking early on back in the mid- to late-[19]80s. I felt like that the, both the commercial industry as well as the recreational industry needed some sort of representation at the table. I didn't see N.C.F.A. being very active at that time; I saw them get very, very active after that, as I became more involved in management. But there was little-to-no involvement, organized involvement, by recreational anglers. Coastal Conservation Association [C.C.A.] started in the late [19]80s; I became involved in that because of what I just said: I think everybody needs to have a voice at the table and some sort of representation and organizational structure. You know, people--I think a lot of people have a wrong opinion or [pause] are wrong-headed about what they think C.C.A. represents or did represent, anyway. But anyway, I got involved with them

because that was the only organization in town that was doing anything! There were a bunch of fishing clubs in the state, but they purposefully chose not to be political; they wanted their meetings to be about fishing and catching fish and they absolutely refused, for many, many, many years, to ever get involved in the policy side of things. They bitched and moaned about it a lot! But they didn't want to get involved and do anything, so when C.C.A. came along, it was a vehicle to kind of fill that hole or provide some input from the angling community, and I saw that as important, so I got involved with them and that led to participation in meetings and then when the F.R.A. [Fisheries Reform Act] came through, when the [Marine Fisheries] Commission or the new law, I guess, put a lot more emphasis on public involvement, then I became very involved in that, as well.

SM: I think you pretty much said this, but just to restate for the recorder, why does fisheries management matter?

MC: It's a personal thing, really. I mean, it matters to me because I have a great appreciation for those little critters and I want to see 'em survive and flourish and be available for folks to enjoy, whatever way they choose to.

SM: So now we're gonna reflect back specifically at the Fisheries Reform Act of 1997. [PAPERS SHUFFLING] As we've just discussed, the North Carolina General Assembly was compelled to take action in 1994, and you were sort of in the circle at the time, C.C.A.--why do you think the General Assembly, in your opinion, took action in 1994?

MC: I think it reflects directly upon the birth of C.C.A. in North Carolina; I mean, everybody--well, a lot of people--know the history of that organization and was developed along the Gulf of Mexico, coast of the Gulf of Mexico, because of the same reasons that they became established here and this exact same reason that the Fisheries Reform act was implemented,

passed and implemented, developed, passed, and implemented. And that is because things had changed very drastically on our coast. It's well-reflected in the landings history, in the commercial landings history, if you look. Things peaked in about 1980, '81, '82, and they were out of control. There were few regulations on the industry, and it was a heyday for the industry; they loved it, but they'll never see it like that again. And I think, up until that point, Sara, in my mind, there were no need for activist recreational anglers 'cause everybody that went to the beach or went to the coast, there were plenty of fish to be caught! Nobody moaned and groaned about it, you know? You went around the gill nets in your boat and you went and you fished and you had a good day and caught some fish, and I think with that huge increase in landings from the commercial industry, anglers started seeing trips where they went, 'Woah, what's going on?!' you know, 'I used to be able to come down here and catch x and y and take what I wanted home or whatever!' It was changing, quite a bit then. Anglers said, 'Something's gotta be done about this.' I think what inspired the industry was after those years of very, very high landings, management was struggling to try to keep up with activity in the industry and started ratcheting down the industry both on a federal level and, not so much on the state level, but some. So the industry started getting involved--was forced to get involved in that. Anyway, I think that's the impetus for the F.R.A., that there were some major changes in landing and it affects people's activities and livelihoods and realized that, you know, we couldn't keep going the way we had been, forever.

SM: Do you think there was a particular circumstance that led to the creation of the Moratorium Steering Committee, or just general circumstances? Was there like one key moment where it was like, now we're gonna do the Moratorium Steering Committee?

MC: No, I don't think there was one key moment; I think it was a kind of a snowball

rolling down hill, you know. C.C.A. started out very, very small, anglers' voices had never been at the table before because they didn't need to be at the table, and there you've got some new people that are saying, 'Hey! There's something going on, and we need to do something about it.' People that the management, the Division of Marine Fisheries and the Marine Fisheries Commission had never heard from before, or heard very little from in the past. That's, to my knowledge. So I think this new upstart organization and the conflict that they had directly with the commercial industry made some noise that was noticed by the politicians and the Legislature and all of that, and the management agencies. That's my opinion.

SM: Okay. How were you involved, specifically, with the Moratorium Steering Committee process?

MC: You know, I've tried--.

SM: And then if you weren't--didn't say you were--'cause I don't really know the answer to that!

MC: I don't know the answer to that, either!

SM: I mean, you were on the Moratorium Steering Committee?

MC: I was not on the Moratorium Steering Committee.

SM: But you did attend part of those public meetings?

MC: I attended meetings, I sure did. And provided input and opinion. I wanted to be on the Moratorium Steering Committee and was not selected; I offered to serve and was not selected to be on the Committee, so I provided input at every public meeting that I could get to. Best I remember, I traveled some to do some of those, but not a lot. I didn't go all over the state or anything. But I knew a lot of the people that were on the Committee, and so I had direct input through representatives on the Moratorium Steering Committee. They didn't always listen to me,

but, you know--! That's still the case [laughs]!

SM: Do you think the various stakeholder groups were united in wanting passage of the Fisheries Reform Act; why or why not? So, basically, was there unanimous that something needed to be passed--maybe not the specifics, but was there sort of consensus among stakeholder groups that something needed to happen, or not at all?

MC: Yes. I think there was consensus among most of the stakeholders that something needed to be done--most, I'll say 'many' of the stakeholders--that something needed to be done. I think there was pretty unanimous opinion from the recreational side of things that something needed to be done, and I think there were some enlightened members of the commercial industry that realized that something needed to be done as well, so. Some of the rest of them got dragged screaming and kicking, I think, down that road, but you know, N.C.F.A. [North Carolina Fisheries Association] was at the table and participated, but they, there was a bunch of dragging and kicking and screaming, I think, from that group! At least, for a while, until they saw it was inevitable. Then they became a little more actively involved in trying to get things done that weren't gonna impact them as much as they might have.

SM: And I find this question, just from a personal--going off script--I find this question interesting, because when I first took my job, part of the reason I always heard that the commercial sector wanted some kind of passage of the Fisheries Reform Act was because they were afraid of people entering our fishery. There'd just been gill net bans in Florida and everything and everybody was worried that they were gonna come fish in our waters and take our share of the pie, and so that there was some kind of commercial support for--

MC: There was some.

SM: --and so, you know, I don't know how much truth there is to that; that's why I was

really interested to hear.

MC: Yeah, no, no. There's definitely some truth to that, and there were some enlightened--I call 'em 'enlightened'--members of the commercial industry who saw some issues with sustainability, with the way things were going. I mean, I remember Willy Phillips, who served on the first new [Marine Fisheries] Commission, felt--he participated in the blue crab fishery and still does, and he felt very strongly that there needed to be some reforms in the blue crab fishery! The first F.M.P. [Fisheries Management Plan] that the Commission messed with! They didn't do a whole lot with it, in my opinion; they didn't go down the road as far as I think I would've liked to've seen 'em and as far as Willy would've liked to've seen 'em. So, to answer your question, though: yes, there were Melvin Shepard, who was in the industry, and Murray Fulcher, I remember being very active at that time as a fish house owner and fisherman. And a number of others who participated in the fishery as dealers and as fishermen, felt strongly that something needed to be done. And I think you're right, with the net ban in the early [19]70s in Florida and--may've been in the '90s, I don't know, I can't remember the dates on that--but yes, there were, and there were fishermen from Florida. I remember mullet fishermen in new boats and people seeing 'em and some of the folks, fishermen in the industry, felt threatened by this new participation because anybody could get a license. The dealers didn't care! From my perspective, the dealers loved it! More fishermen, more fish. So that's where the buckin' and the kickin' and screamin' came from, as it generally does, to this day, from the dealers. The big dealers. But the fishermen themselves, lots of them felt like, yeah, they didn't need this enhanced competition, so they were willing to sit at the table and participate, yeah.

SM: Who were the significant leaders of the Fisheries Reform Act that you know about, and if you can, describe their specific roles.

MC: Well, I hit on a couple of them, I think, already with Melvin [Shepard]--I remember him being very active, then I remember Murray Fulcher, I think, being very active. And I may be getting confused because I worked with both of those guys afterward on committees of the newly-established [Marine Fisheries] Commission and all of that. So, I remember B.J. Copeland being very involved in it; of course, he was asked to participate, I think he did it gladly so. Bob Lucas--I don't remember whether he was involved so much in the early stages, but was the first Chairman on the Commission that [Governor James B. "Jim"] Hunt appointed, and I knew Bob some before and I knew he was gonna be involved, and he took his role very, very seriously, even before the new Commission and the F.R.A. was implemented, you know, Bob was active trying to develop a good sense of what people thought. So he was involved much earlier than his appointment as Chairman. Dick Brame was involved from the recreational side. I don't recall, maybe Bill Brown from Greenville, was a C.C.A. type? I can't remember who was actually on the committee other than a handful of those folks, and some of them may not have been active on the committee.

SM: Were there--I mean, who were the political champions, I Guess, of the Fisheries Reform Act? I mean obviously, there had to be somebody on the inside that sort of shook it up.

MC: Yeah, [Senator Marc] Basnight was involved in it, I think, pretty heavily. [Senator] Jean Preston. Most of the coastal Legislators were involved--Charlie Albertson, I remember as being a participant in that. I guess--I served on the Seafood and Aquaculture Committee and I was trying to remember when that was [SHUFFLING PAPERS] I thought of making notes but I must've left it on another sheet. And I can't remember exactly when I got appointed to that, but I think it was in the late--mid-to-late-[19]90s--and I served--Jerry Schill was on the Seafood and Aquaculture at the same time I was. So I think it predated the F.R.A. or was right about the same

time, and Charlie was one of the co-chairs of that, Charlie Albertson. So, you know, that was about the only fisheries-related committee there was in the Legislature at that time [laughs] was Seafood and Aquaculture. It no longer exists anymore, I don't think; I think they did away with it and who knows what they've got now. So yeah, those people were active, Jean Preston sat on that committee. Boy, I'm stretching now to try to remember who else was. There was a guy from Jacksonville, kind of a round guy, was a lawyer. Can't remember his name. He was very vocal about things.

SM: But the coastal--so the state Senators and representatives from coastal counties, were they generally wanting to pass the Fisheries Reform Act or blocking it? I guess they were helping it to go forward?

MC: I think--well, in order for it to go forward, they almost had to buy in. But they were very active and very important in how it was structured and, in my opinion, refused to allow implementation of certain things that I think were important, like the recreation license that was not implemented originally; finally got implemented down the road, but Senator [Marc] Basnight and many of the other coastal Legislators because of the, I don't know what was going on in their district or whether it was commercial industry that saw that as a huge threat, I think, because they didn't want all anglers to know each other from who was involved and all that! I mean, they were real worried about it and when it ultimately was passed, it was such that nobody could go in and get the list of anglers, people that bought licenses. That was a strict prohibition, and that was at the behest of the commercial industry because they didn't want recreational groups to be able to contact folks who they knew fished. Get 'em yourself, if you can, but you're not gonna get 'em from the state. There was things like that.

SM: Okay. Do you have any personal stories about some of the people that were in the

trenches with you? [LAUGHTER]

MC: I do, but I'm not gonna go into it!

SM: No clean ones?

MC: No, I developed a lot of really good relationships, or I think, relationships with a lot of really good people, I should probably say. Melvin Shepard being one of them, Murray Fulcher being another one, Ray Graham who--do you know Ray? He's an oyster, ran an oyster house up Mill Creek off of the Newport River. Bob Bryant. There were just a bunch of great--David Beresoff, I believe, that I served on the red drum F.M.P. [Fisheries Management Plan] committee with and co-chaired with David. I mean, I don't see David much anymore and I miss not seeing him; he's a great guy and had a great perspective on fisheries and fisheries management, I think. He was outside the mainstream and outside of N.C.F.A. [North Carolina Fisheries Association] often, and it put him at odds with that crowd. But he was a big enough man to stand on his own two feet and, when he had a different opinion, he was not afraid to state it. Jodie Gay, I guess, it somebody else that was involved at that time. He was a snapper-grouper fisherman out of the southern part of the state, served on the [Marine Fisheries] Commission for a while, was on the--I think he was on South Atlantic [Fishery Management] Council, at least on the snapper-grouper committee of the South Atlantic Council. I can't remember whether Jodie served or not.

SM: Okay.

MC: Those are the people I remember and being influen--I've known B.J. Copeland forever and still see him. Always loved B.J. and respected him.

SM: So we'll transition to a little bit more of the specifics of the law, and you already hit on one: coastal recreational fishing license. But just to review, the new law, at the time, had five focus areas: licensing, the Marine Fisheries Commission, Fishery Management Plans, Coastal

Habitat Protection Plans, and law enforcement. And some of the major provisions were, you know, the whole license structure, the eligibility requirements for the commercial license, a cap on the number of commercial licenses, the new recreational-commercial fishing gear license, the new coastal recreational fishing license which, as you said, wasn't implemented until January of 2007, so almost a decade later. Finally required Fishery Management Plans for all the significant species and another big change was it reduced the size of the Marine Fisheries Commission from seventeen to nine, and created, as you said, the public involvement. You had four standing advisory committees that were subject matter, and then the regional advisory committees, and then the Coastal Habitat Protection Plans which were for wetlands, spawning areas, primary/secondary nursery areas, shellfish beds, that stuff. Of these, which provisions of the Fisheries Reform Act were most significant in your view and why?

MC: I think they're all significant, and I also believe that they got it pretty much right with the provisions that were passed. I mentioned the exception with the recreational license, I was disappointed to see that was not passed originally. I was not a big fan of the recreational-commercial gear license and that's still contentious to this day. I don't believe it should've ever been established; I know there was a history of small-time folks who just loved to go set gill nets and pull little trawls--my younger brother did that for a number of years and I would help him, back in the early [19]70s and mid-'70s. And it was fun! But if they had told him or told me that I couldn't do that after the Fisheries Reform Act, I would've gladly accepted it. And I've always argued, personally, that it should never have been established. That's one thing I think they got wrong. The licensing aspect--.

SM: Just to follow up on that just for a second, do you think it was wrong just because it allowed for gear that took more fish that probably didn't need to--to--?

MC: Well the guys--primarily, folks were--especially the gill net aspects of it or the gill net, the gear that was in the hands of the recreational anglers. There were limits, starting to be limits and further, more restrictive limits on finfish species that recreational anglers could take, and they still continue to be ratcheted down or changed, probably, I should say, as the fisheries and the populations change and management becomes necessary. You can't control how many red drum you catch in a gill net, so if you go as a recreational angler or commercial fisherman, for that matter, set a gill net somewhere, and a school of red drum goes into it and you're allowed to keep one of 'em--they don't fare very well, especially in the summertime. So you're killing a bunch of fish that you can't keep, or shouldn't keep, by law. So that's a problem. When you have size limits a well as kill limits on finfish species and you're fishing 'em with a gill net, it's difficult to near-impossible and/or very wasteful to take those fish with the gill net.

SM: Okay, thank you for that follow-up. Sorry, continue on. So, areas you thought were--?

MC: Yes, yes. The other thing, I think, that was a little bit goofy was the restriction, quote-unquote, of the number of commercial licenses in the state. Very early on, as someone who was active in the process, I looked at participation--and others did, too--looked at participation by commercial fishermen, numbers of people, landings, average landings, the value of the landings, 'cause those were all reported once the trip ticket program was set up and the Division [of Marine Fisheries] had the data. So, there were, and to this day remain, a large number of very, very small-time, part-time, retired, whatever they are, people that hold commercial licenses. So I think, in establishing the number of, the cap, that was supposed to--sold--as a restrictive or a restriction on the commercial industry was not a restriction on the commercial industry at all. In fact, there's still licenses that have not been sold, and the Commission still will not get rid of

those licenses! They're still around for somebody to pick up, if they quality! And the qualifications are not that stringent; you just have to fish some, I think. So I think, you know, it probably should've been capped not at 8,300--I believe that's what it was, was it not? 8,300, 8,500, something, it was way too many. Probably should've been kept at 3,500 or somewhere down that way and we're still--I think the article that I saw in the *News & Observer* this week said there were 2,000, I believe, active folks that participated last year in the fishery or in commercial fishery. So, you know, and that's down from 3,500 or something a couple years ago, few years ago, 2000, I believe, was the date.

SM: So you talked about disappointment with the coastal recreational fishing license not being passed originally; what do you think that would've helped with, if it had originally been passed with the rest of the package?

MC: Well, I think it would've given it a large number more years to build up the endowment funds to generate interest more quickly, generate interest that could be used by the Division of Marine Fisheries for their operations and research and things that were important, items that were important to the state and to the recreational community, in particular. That's probably the biggest overall effect was not getting the money stream started early enough.

SM: Any other areas that were significant in your mind?

MC: Well again, I think all of it was significant. The Coastal Habitat Protection Plan, establishing that and when it finally got developed and passed I think was very, very significant. It' difficult because of the economic impact that appropriate management and habitat preservation and enhancement and the like has on other industries like agriculture and sylviculture, which are important in this state, as well. So just like the argument over stream buffers that the Legislature's currently talking about taking off, you know, that was a hard-fought

battle to get those buffers put on to begin with! And they're important; water quality and habitat are extremely important to fish! And anybody who cares about the fish and the marine resources, then you've got to care about the habitat and the water quality. The C.H.P.P. [Coastal Habitat Protection Plan] was a very important aspect of it and I was on the [Marine Fisheries] Commission when that was finally passed and implemented. It's important from a number of perspectives, I think, Sara, and one was just the habitat, putting in place measures to recognize the important habitats and some measures to protect those habitats. We haven't gone as far as we should, I don't think, in that direction. One of the more important aspects, I think, was just getting those three departments within the state that are, that have to approve and accept that C.H.P.P. to sit down and talk to each other and have an opportunity to know what, let the Environmental Management Commission know what's important to the Marine Fisheries Commission, and then to Coastal Management as well, because they all impact each other. So just throw all those people in the same room together so they can understand what's important to the other agencies is, to me, one of the more important aspects of it.

SM: So, thinking overall, what are the great--or what is the greatest success or greatest successes of the Fisheries Reform Act?

CM: Well, probably [sigh] I think Coastal Habitat Protection Plan was an important one. Fisheries Management Plans were a very important aspect of it. And then downsizing the [Marine Fisheries] Commission; getting those seventeen people away from the table and the structure of the Commission as it was set up under the F.R.A. was a great idea. So it's a whole lot easier for nine people to sit around the table and discuss things in an efficient manner than it is for seventeen people who sit around the table throwing shoes at each other. I think those three, the F.M.P. [Fisheries Management Plans] because of making people take a hard look at the

science and what needs to be done and the current condition or state of the fish populations, and then acting and having to act to make sure that those populations are sustained.

SM: Alright, sort of now we're transitioning into maybe like the future, like 'If I'd known when…'--is there anything you know today about, sort of, how this all played out, that you wish you had known in 1997?

CM: [Sigh] Well, I think if we had known that there would still be available commercial licenses in [19]97, then maybe we got a little more realistic about setting the cap on the fishery! That's kind of a moot point because, as we just talked about earlier, it hasn't grown that much; in fact, it's declining right now, so it's not a huge issue, but it's a philosophical [pause] issue, that could've been addressed way back then. Maybe a few more teeth into the Coastal Habitat Protection Plan and getting that off the ground earlier; you know, it took a long time, long, long time for that plan to ever be developed and that work should've probably started a little earlier in that whole process. Mentioned the recreational licenses and certainly that should've been implemented right off that bat. But I don't know, it's hard to think of--really, I'm not disappointed with what was passed and how it's played out. I guess the only thing that I see as a--and this--as an issue or a problem is--it's probably not so much related to the F.R.A. as it is to the individuals that are appointed on the Marine Fisheries Commission that failed to take their responsibility as seriously or as literally as they should, and tend to be a little softer on the management measures than they need to be, in my opinion.

SM: So thinking about, sort of, the challenges in the future--climate change and variability, imported seafood and changing domestic and global markets, and then the biggest thing, transition from single-species management to sort of this eco, ecosystem-based management approach--I wanted to know from you, what are your thoughts about these

emerging issues related to fisheries management in North Carolina? Do you see a couple of particular issues that you think are emerging that, if we don't get ahead of--? I don't know what I'm trying to say, basically like, like you said, Coastal Habitat Protection Plan, in hindsight, maybe should've started out a little bit sooner because of the ramifications, connectivity with habitat to fisheries. So is there something that we're, that's coming down the pipe that we really should get on, because it may take a while to--?

MC: I'm not so sure anything's become more important now or over the last twenty years than it was back then, to be honest. You know, we're still allowing the use of some gears in our state that have a terrible impact on habitats: trawls, I'm thinking of in particular, inside. I just don't think they should be there; we're the last state that has allowed this. And that's getting away from the F.R.A. to some degree, but it is related to the habitat and the Habitat Protection Plan and, of course, those are hard issues. And when the Division [of Marine Fisheries] and the folks involved in the committee said that, 'Look at these issues within the context of a Coastal Habitat Protection Plan, look at trawling as it impacts habitat', it's pretty easy to get 'em out of grass bed 'cause they don't wanna go into grass beds anyway, it clogs their nets and they can't catch and it's a pain in the butt to cull all the stuff out of all the grass. Oyster's the same way: it tears their nets up. But they still run over a few of them and they beat 'em up and--dredging, oyster dredging, for example, is still allowed in places and it's a very, very destructive process and we can harvest, as other states do, oysters within our state, the small number that are here compared to what used to be, using other gears that don't knock a whole reef down, you know, tongs, I'm thinking of, hand harvesting, that kind of thing. So we still allow some of these practices that I think, if we took a very rational look within the context of the Coastal Habitat Protection Plan and what we're doing to the habitat, that we really should come to a different

conclusion. But again, it's a rambling statement that I've made, but because of those economic impacts on a small number of small-time commercial operators, it just never seems to get done.

SM: Um, I kind of just, we're going into this, but what, if anything, should be changed to ensure sustainable fisheries and healthy coastal ecosystems? You pretty much just said the destructive gears--.

MC: Yeah, I think destructive gears is one thing; greater adherence to the science and the best information that we have with regards to establishing the proper regulations. And again, that's not because we don't know, it's because the individuals that sit on the [Marine Fisheries] Commission, at times, choose not to be guided as strongly or as directly by the science as I think they should. But, you know, people--I was called "heartless" around the Marine Fisheries Commission table one time by a fellow Commission member because of a stance that I took, which was very clear to me because the science, I think, indicated that that's what we needed to do. But there were others around the table who felt so sorry for those fishermen who were impacted by the potential regulation that they just couldn't do it. They just couldn't do it. So it took old Heartless Mac to ever get it done, or help get it done.

SM: Thinking about, sort of, the economy and sort of, maybe a little of the historic fabric of our coastal communities, is there anything that could, should be changed to sort of insure that there is some kind of sustainable economy out there? That they still have some kind of a maritime tradition? I guess, one thing I'm thinking of, I've heard a lot about stock enhancement from both sides, both sectors have been sort of proponents of stock enhancement saying that could provide some jobs, too. So that's where my head is going. Is there anything, is there opportunity, is there avenues for change that could allow these coastal communities to still be sort of vibrant and--maritime heritage?

MC: Well, those are two different things, I think. I think the maritime heritage is always gonna be there; I mean, we see museums popping up here and there, I mean, the Mariner's Museum in Beaufort, or--

SM: Maritime Museum.

MC: --Maritime Museum. The Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum at Hatteras, you know, I always encourage that crowd and I spend a lot of time up there, to not miss the history of the charter industry that they had at Hatteras. I hadn't been in that place, but I think they've tried to capture some of that in that exhibit. I think there is a place for that and there'll always be a place for that, but I think it's gonna shift from--down the road, and I've said this for a number of years to a number of different people, and this is just my opinion--but I think that's where it's going. Rather than people coming to the coast to see shrimp boats on the waterfront, they may always see those, I don't know, hopefully there'll be big boats that fish out in the ocean at some point down the road, instead of little boats that are fishing inside. In addition to that, assuming they're still there and still fishing offshore, they're gonna see the commercial industry depicted in more Maritime Museum-type environments and aquariums and homage to the industry, because I don't think it's going to exist the way it has existed as we move in to the future. I think you'll probably see more of that in museums as opposed to on the waterfront. The other thing that I think--the information's, to a large degree there, that I don't think gets appreciated as much by the general public nor the coastal communities, is the impact that recreational angling has on those communities--economic impact that recreational angling has on those communities. I don't feel like it's ever been given the recognition and importance that it deserves. It's a huge industry in the state and on the east coast. It always gets second place, plays second fiddle, to the value of the commercial and the importance of the commercial industry in the coastal communities when,

in fact, from an economic perspective, is much higher. So I would hope that, at some point, we can look--and recreational anglers have heritage, as well. It may not go quite as far back as the commercial industry, but there's certainly in Hatteras and on the Outer Banks, a heritage of recreational angling up there. So I'd like to see that recognized a little more by the communities on the coast and the coastal Legislators.

SM: Is there anywhere to sort of cultivate or grow the economy in that sector more?

MC: I think there is room for growth. I think if we chose to manage our stocks more for the recreational industry as opposed to the commercial industry, then we'd see a lot of growth in the recreational industry. There's a big difference--and you're probably aware--there's a big difference in what the recreational community sees as an ideal fish population and what the commercial industry sees as an ideal fish population. I mean, even from fisheries management perspective, from the scientific perspective, we look at production curves, surplus production curves, and we see, we target the point on that curve that produces the most biomass. Why do we do that? We do that because that's what' most important to the commercial industry. And so that's what we look at, yields, that's how we develop our yields. Those fish are not the big fish; those fish are the smallest fish, the most rapidly-growing fish, and they get to that point the quickest, so that's the most efficient place to harvest the most biomass that you can out of the fish population. I mean, I don't care, but I'm an oddball recreational angler, I like to catch lots of little fish or medium-sized fish and maybe occasionally a big one, it's nice to hook one now and then, but a lot of recreational anglers would like to target and have the opportunity to catch larger fish. Well, that's not what we're managing for. So the point is, Sara, I guess, if we were managing for recreational harvest, we'd be managing differently than we are currently. So that kind of feeds into the economic argument, in my mind: do we want to maximize the value of our

natural resources to the country and to our communities? Well if we do want to do that, then we probably should take a closer look at managing more directly for the recreational side of things as opposed to the commercial sector. That's a fundamentally different way than North Carolina has been managing for a long, long time. There are other states that have gone that direction, and I think ultimately North Carolina will be forced to go that way, too. But it hasn't happened yet and it may not happen in my lifetime. But if we're serious about things and economies and growing economies and the coastal communities, then that's certainly one way we can look at enhancing those economies.

SM: And last question: is there anything else you'd like to share or add?

MC: No! [Laughs]

SM: Any closing thing? I think we hit--we were all over the place!

MC: I said everything I wanted to say, I think, and probably more and said it more than once!

[END OF INTERVIEW]