

**Groundfish Oral History: Dana Rice<sup>1</sup>**

**Birch Harbor, Maine**

**Date: March 3, 2012**

**Interview Location: Rockport, Maine**

**Interviewer: Sara Randall**

*Dana Rice, born in 1948, groundfished out of Birch Harbor, starting in 1957, tub trawling with his family. He describes the fishing community as subsistence living, most families making enough to live comfortably but not able to accumulate much in savings. Rice went groundfishing only occasionally, estimating that it made up less than ten percent of his income before he left the fishery in 1982. [The beginning of the audio file was not available for transcription]*

**DR:** It was a subsistence living. People made money at it and paid their bills, but trust me, some of the things that my grandfather and his father told me about this--you went fishing because you had to. The only people that made any real money in the fishing business from the first half of the century were the people that ran rum. The rest of them may have made a good living, but nobody put a lot of money away, so that is a myth. What I'm describing doesn't necessarily make them poor people, but nobody had a lot of money back then.

Now, it seems to be that with the younger generation or in general that if you can't maintain a five hundred thousand dollar boat and you're not making three or four hundred thousand dollars a year, then you're not a viable entity on the coast of Maine. I think that's absolutely wrong. But collectively, there is nothing else to do for young people on the coast of Maine. The town that I live in, Gouldsboro, has one hundred and twenty six licensed lobster fishermen in it. If that industry went to pieces, Gouldsboro would fold.

It sort of relates to the question you asked me, and we keep getting interrupted. The coast of Maine and the access to the groundfisheries, the benchmark of something that regulators and people use to judge this is "is it financially viable to do that?" Well, when I was younger everybody did a lot of different things. You didn't necessarily make all of your living catching groundfish in the spring or scallops in the winter.

You were able to fish around and do a lot of things, and it made for very healthy communities. I think back to some of those stories, and having heard all those stories from the older generations. They made a good living, it was a good family atmosphere, and it was good for the coastal communities in Maine. As I pointed out, it was quite a lot different than Massachusetts or any other state.

Your fishing community in Massachusetts is in Gloucester and Boston and New Bedford and whatever, but in Maine it's about every five miles is a little cove where the fishing community in it. We are geographically different and our fishing habits are different. Anyway, I've rambled on enough about that. I'll try not to ramble so much.

**Interviewer:** That's okay. What year did you first start commercially fishing for groundfish?

**DR:** Well, actually, most of my fishing wasn't groundfish. It was various things because groundfishing wasn't that big a thing down east. My grandfather's brother, my Uncle Mike, was groundfishing in the summer months, and I went with him at ten or twelve years old until I got old enough myself and we went tub trawling. I've towed some nets, but most of my fishing is trawls or tub trawls or the other type of fishing.

**Interviewer:** You were doing that with your uncle? The tub trawling?

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<sup>1</sup> This interview was completed as part of a University of Maine study funded by the NOAA Saltonstall-Kennedy grant program (PI: Dr. Teresa R. Johnson).

**DR:** Yes, when I started. Well, he was a groundfisher. He was a dragger.

*Interviewer:* A dragger, OK.

**DR:** Yes, one of the few, at the time.

*Interviewer:* Was he out of Birch Harbor, as well?

**DR:** Yes.

*Interviewer:* Did you ever have your own boat for groundfish?

**DR:** I've had a couple of them, but they mostly were used for scallops or others.

*Interviewer:* In the spring would you use them for groundfish?

**DR:** Some, yes.

*Interviewer:* You said you worked with your uncle, and you worked with your father, too?

**DR:** Grandfather.

*Interviewer:* Oh, grandfather. Your father did something else.

**DR:** Yeah.

*Interviewer:* When you were first groundfishing, how hard was it to get into the industry?

**DR:** Well, not at all. All you had to do was have a boat and some method to catch fish. I've been around that business long enough to remember that I became aware of federal permits when the Coast Guard asked me if I had one while I was fishing. I had no idea that we were supposed to have a federal permit.

*Interviewer:* When was that?

**DR:** A long time ago. I've been around longer than most people. The only thing you had to do was buy a license and abide by a few rules in the beginning, but you can trace the hero of the federal fisheries to the Stratton Commission.

*Interviewer:* Was that in the '60s?

**DR:** Yes, right. This whole thing evolved. The Stratton Commission, the 200-mile limit, the Russians and the Poles and the shipments that were on George's Bank and all of that; it's 99% politics and nothing else. That's the reason we've got to where we've got to today. To answer your question, no, all you had to do was have a net or a hook and a boat and whatever method and go. You did have to buy a commercial fishing license in the state of Maine. I guess they cost five dollars or something.

*Interviewer:* How old were you when you got that first boat that you used for groundfishing, even though you might have scalloped with it?

**DR:** I was twenty or twenty-two.

*Interviewer:* That was in '67?

**DR:** Probably. I'm not good with time.

*Interviewer:* What type of boat was this?

**DR:** It was a forty-foot Novi.

*Interviewer:* Do you know the gross tons?

**DR:** Not really, but you had to measure all Novi boats under five net tons to get 'em in the United States. You still do.

*Interviewer:* They have to be under five net tons?

**DR:** Yes, there's an antiquated law on the books that says anything that measures over five net tons can't be used commercially in the United States. That was to keep ship building in the United States back in the '60s or '70s. Basically, any Canadian boat that you bring in you have to measure under five net tons, but they were bigger than that.

*Interviewer:* If people knew someone, could they help them verify the weight to get it into the country?

**DR:** You basically just got 'em measured under five net tons. There was kind of a wink and a nod with the customs there until they got up to a certain point, and then you couldn't get them in. Fifty-five feet was a boat as big as you could get in without an act of congress. We're still suffering from that. It was just a thing that you went through and blocked off compartments if you were bringing one across from Canada so that they didn't measure over five net tons. Then after you got them across, you kicked out all of the barricades you put in.

*Interviewer:* Do you remember how much horsepower it had?

**DR:** Yeah. It had about a hundred and seventy five horsepower.

*Interviewer:* With this boat, you just did tub trawling. You didn't do dragging?

**DR:** Oh, no, we did shrimping and a little groundfishing and scalloping.

*Interviewer:* When you say groundfishing, do you mean you trawled with a net?

**DR:** Yes, briefly.

*Interviewer:* Okay.

**DR:** One of the reasons is at that time in eastern Maine, that's when we started to lose our groundfish way ahead of anybody else. They started disappearing long before the cry came up. When I was a kid and fished with my grandfather's brother, you could go anywhere in the spring. We didn't even have any electronics. We just had a net and you could go right out here or down home or anywhere and throw a net overboard and you'd catch two or three thousand pounds of flounder per tow, and they disappeared in the '60s.

Interesting thing, not that it bears on this interview, but I'm sure you know Frank O'Hara who's down here.

*Interviewer:* I don't know him, but, yes, the O'Hara Corporation?

**DR:** Yeah, it's interesting people. They reason the O'Hara people are here is there was the forty-fathom fleet. There was a huge redfish fishery right there. There were twenty or thirty boats that fished for years right there in the spring for redfish.

*Interviewer:* In the '60s?

**DR:** No, that was in the '30s and '40s.

*Interviewer:* Oh, in the '30s and '40s.

**DR:** Yes. Talk to Ted Ames about that. He can tell you the details. Where we can see, there was a bountiful fishery that lasted and brought industry into this town in the same thing, and it's just dead and gone.

*Interviewer:* When you were fishing for groundfish, what species would you target?

**DR:** Flounders in the spring. Cod, hake and haddock were the premium species you went after if you could get any when I was young fellow, but you really couldn't catch haddock because the type of boats we fished in didn't have enough horsepower, and you couldn't tow fast enough to catch a haddock.

*Interviewer:* Because they're faster?

**DR:** Yes. Haddock is harder to wear out and get in the net. We caught some, but most of them got away.

*Interviewer:* How many boats that you used for groundfishing did you own over your career?

**DR:** That I used? Probably two.

*Interviewer:* Was the second boat that you had a similar size?

**DR:** Second one I had? The Novi boat?

*Interviewer:* The second boat that you had besides the Novi boat.

**DR:** I've owned 17 all the way from twenty to ninety feet. Not all of them were in the groundfish fishery. I only used two of them in what you would call a trawl fishery towing a net around.

*Interviewer:* How big was that second boat? Besides the Novi?

**DR:** Forty-eight feet.

*Interviewer:* How important was fishing to your overall income?

**DR:** It was my overall income, or if you did something else it was fishery-related. Even though it sure had something to do with fishery. Yeah, it was our overall income.

*Interviewer:* What percent of the groundfish was your overall income?

**DR:** Small. A very small part of mine.

*Interviewer:* Ten percent or smaller?

**DR:** No more than ten percent.

*Interviewer:* When you first started groundfishing, what months would you do it in?

**DR:** April or somewhere around April.

*Interviewer:* You said that you were trying to target the flatfish?

**DR:** In the spring is when the flatfish were around and the right time to catch them. So in early spring, you'd fish flatfish and then a little bit later on it was pollock and hake. The coastal fishery didn't travel that far. We'd only go probably eight or ten miles from home, fish some of that area, find the places that you could tow a net

When I was a young fellow fishing with my uncle there, we spent more time going to market than we did towing because we had to run across through the backside of Mount Desert Island to

sell the product. You'd fish for two days and ice it down, and then one day you'd run over there and sell the product.

*Interviewer:* What's the "backside of Mount Desert"? Bass Harbor?

**DR:** Bass Harbor, yes.

*Interviewer:* Did you change your gear over the time that you were fishing? Did you change your gear when you were doing the flats versus looking for the pollock and hake?

**DR:** No, everybody had just an old net that hung back there and a winch. It was driven mechanically. No hydraulics. It changed over a period of time, but I guess what I'm describing is way back when they started.

*Interviewer:* What mesh size on your net did you have?

**DR:** I think four and a half. There wasn't any mesh size. *[Laughs]*

*Interviewer:* Yeah, you just did whatever. You said your trips were two days?

**DR:** Actually, no. Now, when you got older, you might come up and get a job on one of O'Hara's boats as a rite of passage, but most of the fishing that happened in my area or in the coastal areas were daytrip boats. They'd leave the harbor like today and go fishing and ice down the product. They'd have a couple days of ice and probably two days of fishing, and then you'd go deliver the fish somewhere.

*Interviewer:* You would keep your fish all together, and then after two days you get enough to take it.

**DR:** Well, yeah, unless you had enough the first day, which was rare.

*Interviewer:* How many trips per year would you typically do for groundfish?

**DR:** Personally, not a lot because I didn't do that much. Probably the people that did it would do thirty to fifty. Thirty probably.

*Interviewer:* How many crewmembers would you take with you?

**DR:** Two.

*Interviewer:* Two besides yourself?

**DR:** No, one besides yourself; two at the most.

*Interviewer:* You said that you went fishing about eight to ten miles from Birch Harbor.

**DR:** Groundfishing, yes.

*Interviewer:* And also Petit Manan?

**DR:** Yes.

*Interviewer:* What other areas?

**DR:** Well, we're in Rockland now. Working your way east, there are very few places inside of the fifty-fathom age, where the bottom drops off, that you can tow in. The bottom gets rockier and very hard, and it's almost impossible to tow a net. It used to be very difficult to tow a net because you didn't have roller gears. You went down off Petit Manan or the money area. That's like eight or nine miles for me and five or six miles out.

You could basically throw a net over there and tow it around without tearing it up. The spots that you'd go were sort of dictated by the topography of the bottom. That's probably one of the reasons that there aren't as many fish around there because technology got better. We got roll gear and you got electronics and all of that kind of stuff. You could chase the fish places you never could before.

*Interviewer:* What condition do you think the stocks were in when you first started groundfishing?

**DR:** I think they were in good condition.

*Interviewer:* In the late '60s?

**DR:** Well, by the late '60s in Eastern Maine, they were in trouble.

*Interviewer:* They were?

**DR:** A lot of stuff had disappeared. In the '50s – from '55 to '60 – they had declined. When I was a young man and first started in mid '50s tagging along behind my grandfather, the stocks were in good shape. They declined pretty rapidly after that.

*Interviewer:* Do you remember the price per pound of your fish when you'd land them?

**DR:** Yeah, but way back when I was young again. As I say, as I got older and got my own boats, I didn't catch that much. But yes, a cent and a half to three cents a pound.

*Interviewer:* For all of them?

**DR:** Hake was three cents. It wasn't when they were valuable. A cent and a half or two cents for cod. Haddock, I think, got up as far up as ten cents.

*Interviewer:* Why were the haddock worth more?

**DR:** That's a damn good question. For some strange reason, everybody loves the haddock.

*Interviewer:* I thought everyone loves cod.

**DR:** Yes. If you're a real person and you know anything about fish, cod is way ahead of a haddock, but for some strange reason, haddock always seemed to be the thing for the market. Cod did have worms a little bit.

*Interviewer:* Oh, you had to candle them?

**DR:** Cod tastes better. Cod was currency at one time. That's the reason men came to this side of the world, chasing cod, and they taste better than the haddock. Then, of course, there's that little thing about God's thumbprint on the haddock.

*Interviewer:* What does that mean?

**DR:** You don't know? On a haddock's head, behind the little gill, it looks like a thumbprint. It actually looks like this. That's God's thumbprint. They'll call that God's thumbprint, so that maybe has something to do why haddock is so valuable. *[Laughs]*

*Interviewer:* What year was the last time you went groundfishing?

**DR:** I think the last year I fished, I put on a net and went down to Eastport in the *Bonny Bride*, and it's probably been 30 years or so.

*Interviewer:* So that would be 1982?

**DR:** Late '70s or '80s, yeah. That was just an attempt to get down there and get some flounder. We had some Chinese people show up here, and they were looking for some flounder. We threw down a net and made a great excursion down there.

*Interviewer:* You said to Eastport?

**DR:** Yeah. We worked down the Perry shore there and tried to catch some flatfish for them. Well, we did catch some, but it didn't work out.

*Interviewer:* How much did you catch when you did that?

**DR:** You can catch a couple thousand a day, but there was really no market for the flats. The Asian people came over here to a friend of ours from Steuben and they were trying to create a market, so we threw down a net and went down there and caught some fish, but it didn't materialize.

*Interviewer:* The market didn't?

**DR:** Yeah. They would have been happy to take all of our fish and pay us nothing for them.

*Interviewer:* When you first started, that would be in the '50s.

**DR:** Yeah, I was a very young kid. Most of my groundfish experience was chasing along behind my grandfather and his brother. In my boats, I did mostly other things. Actually, in my area, groundfish started to disappear ten to fifteen years before the cry came out that the groundfish were disappearing. We never relied totally on groundfish. The other species were only something we moved to. We just figured it was a cyclical thing, and it probably would have been, and they would have come back.

I don't know what it's got to do with this interview you're asking me, but then when the rest of this whole thing played out, federal fisheries came in in the two hundred-mile limit and all of this stuff. The emphasis I think needs to be made in what you're leading up to when you're asking me all these questions is we got locked out of the fishery due to circumstances that we had nothing to do with. I know how that all worked, because I was involved in some of the fishery management politics at the time, but the people that voluntarily stepped back from that traditional fishing and took their effort off on their own, are the ones that are now being penalized. The communities are being penalized as a result of the some of the fishing in the other fishery management practices.

I guess this is my place to say it's wrong. It really is wrong, because now we have no role in the management of the eastern Gulf of Maine. The Gulf of Maine is managed basically in all species by the "big tub theory." The amount of cod of whatever you're allowed to harvest or catch out here, if I had a chance to go out there, is based by trawl surveys and effort and everything that happens in the total Gulf of Maine. There hasn't been any research done in eastern Maine from Penobscot Bay in thirty or forty years other than what individuals have done and some of my folks have done on their own. Then, it isn't accepted very well at all in the regulatory process. Anyway, I'm rambling off again.

*Interviewer:* When these fishermen that you saw laid off the groundfish, were they doing that out of a conservation ethic or were they were doing it because they just couldn't make a living?

**DR:** It was a secondhand conservation effort. In the '80s there was a flurry or few years of a lot of gill netting up and down the coast of Maine. But it was economics.

*Interviewer:* They couldn't make any money.

**DR:** Right. When it got to you weren't catching any fish, you went and did something else; caught some other product or did something else. Coincidentally, that took the pressure off that particular species, and it balanced out. One of the things that have happened in the lifetime of fishing

regulation is the regulation that made people focus on fish when they normally would have gone somewhere else if they could have moved around in different fisheries.

I don't care how greedy you are; nobody wanted to catch the last cod or whatever you were taking. It's sad that it happened that way, because some of the problems we've got out here are due to fishery ethic. There's no question about that. However, there are also some ecological factors out here that's happened over the last forty or fifty years that we don't take into consideration. It's impossible to take into consideration, and the regulatory scheme over a period of time has not allowed that to happen. A few years back, the management process was told to enter into an ecosystem approach of fishery management, and we haven't.

Management's idea of an ecosystem approach is "is it pebbly bottom there? Is it sandy bottom there? Does the codfish eat that or whatever." It has absolutely nothing to do with the balance of if one predator species is too abundant and forcing the other one down. Anyway, I'm getting off track again. It's dangerous to get me started.

*Interviewer:* How many people were fishing out of Birch Harbor when you were fishing?

**DR:** Groundfishermen? Two or three. Birch Harbor is a very small example. It's just one little inlet, you know.

*Interviewer:* How many, would you say, were in eastern Maine? This is in the '50s when you were going with your grandfather.

**DR:** Thirty or forty or more dragners and fifty or sixty hook people. There weren't that many gill netters, but gill nets were a product of the '70s.

*Interviewer:* Were these boats all around forty-five feet?

**DR:** Most of them. Occasionally, you'd find one that was sixty.

*Interviewer:* Where were they coming from besides Birch Harbor?

**DR:** Jonesport had a big groundfish fleet. Lubec had some. Bar Harbor and Southwest Harbor had a big groundfish fleet. Then, as you came this way, Rockland, of course, was huge on groundfish. It was Groundfish Harbor.

*Interviewer:* In the '50s?

**DR:** Well, even beyond the '50s when the O'Hara fleet was there.

*Interviewer:* It was '67?

**DR:** The O'Hara fleet was four or five boats that fished through Grand Banks for years.

*Interviewer:* Did you ever see boats not from eastern Maine fishing where you were fishing?

**DR:** Oh, yeah.

*Interviewer:* Where were they from?

**DR:** Well, they were from up and down the Maine coast, but in the spring of the year '50, at certain times, you'd find some Rockland boats, but New Bedford boats would wander down there. Some of them that had connections down there or worked up and down the coast before would come. Of course, back then there were mostly all eastern rigs.

*Interviewer:* How big were those boats? Bigger than yours?



**DR:** Oh, yeah, they were sixty, seventy, or eighty-footers.

*Interviewer:* Did you ever see any foreign boats fishing?

**DR:** Not in eastern Maine. There were some here. There were some joint venture things here. There were Canadians, of course, but we never considered those foreigners.

*Interviewer:* Okay. Did they ever land their fish in Birch Harbor?

**DR:** No.

*Interviewer:* Did they ever land it anywhere close to you? Such as in Gouldsboro or anything?

**DR:** Not really, just the local fleet landed some in Southwest Harbor. Mount Desert Island was the biggest, and Jonesport.

*Interviewer:* When you were fishing for groundfish, did you ever use ice on your boat?

**DR:** Sure.

*Interviewer:* You did?

**DR:** Yeah.

*Interviewer:* Where did you get your ice?

**DR:** Wherever you sold your fish. Tremont or Bass Harbor or Jonesport or whatever. There were ice houses around, and you had to ice the fish down.

*Interviewer:* You said Tremont and Bass Harbor?

**DR:** Yeah.

*Interviewer:* Who had those ice machines, and are they still there?

**DR:** No, they were old, old ice machines. I think Joe Koloski had the last one. The Rich Brothers used to be fish in Southwest Harbor and Bass Harbor, and they had some old antiquated ice machines there. For my generation, a lot of our stuff went in the trucks, so they'd truck in ice, and we pick it up.

*Interviewer:* Okay.

**DR:** Because for fish, you want a thicker chunk of ice.

*Interviewer:* You would land in Bass Harbor and Tremont.

**DR:** Yeah.

*Interviewer:* And Birch Harbor?

**DR:** Well, no, actually we never landed many fish there.

*Interviewer:* In Birch Harbor?

**DR:** Yeah, that's just where we tied the boats up.

*Interviewer:* So your fish went to Bass Harbor and Tremont.

**DR:** Or Jonesport or on a truck and send it wherever.

*Interviewer:* When you landed in those places, whom would you sell your fish to, or would you pay a trucker at that point to truck your fish?

**DR:** Oh, there were guys depending on where you were. There was Rich, C.H. Rich, I think, on Mount Desert Island, and Thurston's used to buy fish in Bass Harbor. Some of the original wharfs like Kelly's Wharf and a couple of places in Jonesport, and then Pettigrew's too. A lot of people would be around with a truck.

*Interviewer:* Those were on Mount Desert Island?

**DR:** Rich and Thurston's, yes.

*Interviewer:* And the Pettigrew?

**DR:** Yes, and then in Bar Harbor, Vick Leveque had quite a fishery going for a while, and he'd truck stuff out for you. Yeah, Vick Leveque probably in the last twenty or thirty years. Of course, you've probably heard that name.

*Interviewer:* I interviewed him, too.

**DR:** He's an interesting guy, and he did as much to keep the groundfish fishery alive from an infrastructure point of view as anybody did in the last twenty or thirty years that it was viable just by sheer determination and being sort of a character.

*Interviewer:* Did you ever sell your fish locally?

**DR:** Sure. Somebody was always coming down and wanting a fish. We never tried to sell any locally, but--

*Interviewer:* So when you tied up in Birch Harbor, some people would come down and then also in Tremont and Bass Harbor?

**DR:** Well, not so much in Tremont, but locally, if you had fish you almost hated to come ashore in your own harbor because there'd be eight to ten people standing around wanting a fish.

*Interviewer:* Oh, really? Did you have a favorite person to sell to or a way to sell?

**DR:** No.

*Interviewer:* How did you choose?

**DR:** Wherever the nearest best market was.

*Interviewer:* How did you find out what the best market was?

**DR:** It was just one of those things you knew.

*Interviewer:* Did you hear word from other fishermen?

**DR:** Oh, sure.

*Interviewer:* Such as who was paying more?

**DR:** Yeah. That's the way it's been forever.

*Interviewer:* Also, did it depend on if someone was actually going? Such as if maybe somebody wasn't trucking

that day?

**DR:** These are difficult questions for me to answer because of my limited groundfishing and the answers I give you are relating to some of the other fisheries I did more than anything. I think one of the things you need to point out is I'm sixty five years old now and I've basically been in the fishing business since I was five or six years old. I'm in eastern Maine. I mean, I've done some stuff to the west on other people's boats, but because the fishing was so limited and a lot of things were happening, it's probably the reason that I had this limited access to groundfishing.

I don't quite know how to put this, but most guys my age are in the same boat. It was a small amount of people that went and utilized that access to those fish out there and the hundred and fifty miles of coastline. Again, I need to keep pointing out that the regulatory process, more than anything else, locked us out of that fishery. I may be reaching for more than you're asking here, but it is completely wrong for those hundred-and-some-odd miles of coastline to be locked out of a fishery by mistake or accident. We have a right to that, and it's important.

*Interviewer:* This is what I want. Thank you.

**DR:** The bottom line of this whole thing and asking these questions and the survey you're trying to do is that this fishery is a source of income and a source of protein that's very important to eastern Maine its economy, and we have no access to it. We're trying to permit banks or whatever mechanism there is to leave the door open there, and there's a good reason for us to do that because we need to manage that fishery as well as harvest it.

*Interviewer:* When your fish were being trucked, were they whole and gutted?

**DR:** Gutted, yeah.

*Interviewer:* Okay.

**DR:** Usually head-on and gutted.

*Interviewer:* Do you know if they ever went to Canada for salting?

**DR:** I don't think so. Not that I knew of.

*Interviewer:* Do you know where they were processed?

**DR:** Well, there was quite a few fish processed in Corea in my local area.

*Interviewer:* Oh, really? Okay.

**DR:** Yeah, there were certain times of the year that they were processed, filleted and boxed up and shipped away. The fellow named Don Anderson and Twin Crowley bought fish there from my grandfather and his brother's generation. In Prospect Harbor, there was a fish stand in the '40s. A lot of little boats would come in and offload the thing and there would be a crew that would fillet them and pack them in wooden boxes before the days of cardboard boxes and then shipped them to Boston and New York by truck and anywhere in between that somebody wanted to buy fish.

Now, you're talking about groundfish and I tend to ramble off into whatever because groundfish was never that important to eastern Maine in itself. It was part of the bigger picture. You get talking to a lot of people who say, "There's no infrastructure. You never could start a business up. You never could start a groundfishery." That's a crock of shit. If I got a fish, and somebody sure wants it, it'll take care of itself.

It'll either get used up in a very small way in my neighborhood when I come ashore, or if there's more than my neighborhood will consume, it will build on itself. That infrastructure will take

care of itself the same way it always did. I'm getting off on the wrong subject again.

*Interviewer:* When you put your fish on the truck, would you know the price that you would get?

**DR:** Sometimes.

*Interviewer:* Were they trucked to Portland, or were they trucked to Boston and New York?

**DR:** Both.

*Interviewer:* Okay.

**DR:** It depended on whose truck you put them on. In Corea, when we had Don Anderson and Twin Crowley and those guys buying fish over there, you went in and you knew what you were going to get. They paid you a certain amount.

*Interviewer:* Did they pay you when you brought the fish in or after?

**DR:** Usually when you brought it in or the next day because you were a local fleet, but they paid you whatever. Then, if they made more money on the other end, or they lost money. You could, at times, put that stuff on a truck and send it away, and supposedly you were going to get twenty-five cents to thirty cents a pound for it, and sometimes you didn't get it.

*Interviewer:* Did you think the prices that you got for your groundfish were fair?

**DR:** Yes and no. Price was always a factor, and some people are greedier than others, but watching the price didn't used to be as intense as it is now. You usually tried to deal with somebody you knew that was local. He paid the going price, whatever it was, pretty close to everybody else, but there wasn't as much mistrust as there is nowadays. It was usually a pretty common thing, and the groundfish weren't worth that much anyway.

*Interviewer:* You have your own fish-buying business?

**DR:** I buy and sell lobsters. There are no fish to buy, or I'd be in it.

*Interviewer:* It's only just lobsters and you never did any other species?

**DR:** Lobsters and crabs and an occasional scallop or something like that. The main reason that I don't is that there is nothing else to buy in eastern Maine. Maybe clams or urchins or something like that, but, no. I had a dragger I was using for scallops and shrimp at one time in a lobster boat about thirty-five years ago and I decided to try buying lobsters because the local lobster dealer had closed his doors. I sold the last dragger I had and raised a little capital and came ashore and started buying lobsters.

*Interviewer:* Was that in the late '70s that you did this?

**DR:** It was '80-something. I'm not good with time, I told you.

*Interviewer:* You did that in part because of...?

**DR:** Well, there was no groundfish. Scallops were something that I was still doing, and we were going to do some shrimping and there was herring fishing, but the dragger that I had at that time was a sixty seven-foot wooden Eastern rig dragger. All of the equipment was there and it had an active permit with days at sea.

*Interviewer:* For groundfish?

**DR:** Yes.

*Interviewer:* What happened to that? You sold it?

**DR:** I sold it because I needed to raise money to start the lobster business and rather than play the game that a lot of people did with the permit and the days at sea and make a lot of money on it, it retired that.

*Interviewer:* So you sold your boat and retired the permit?

**DR:** The permit, yes.

*Interviewer:* By retired did you mean you got a buyback?

**DR:** No.

*Interviewer:* No?

**DR:** No, I just let it go.

*Interviewer:* Oh, you just let it go.

**DR:** The guy that bought it didn't want it, and so I just let it go.

*Interviewer:* So you didn't transfer it to him?

**DR:** It fell through the cracks.

*Interviewer:* Okay.

**DR:** Smart guy, huh? *[Laughs]*

*Interviewer:* You win some, you lose some. *[Laughs]*

**DR:** Right.

*Interviewer:* Were your groundfish landings ever recorded?

**DR:** No, I don't think so.

*Interviewer:* You never kept track of it yourself?

**DR:** I filled out some log books for a short time. I have the original versions of them, but no.

*Interviewer:* They never got to like NMFS?

**DR:** No, I don't think so. They were about that big.

*Interviewer:* I just have one little section about the future, but then I wanted to check, what year was the last year you went groundfishing?

**DR:** Oh, my God. I don't know. Maybe thirty-five years ago or more.

*Interviewer:* Your last trip when you went to Eastport?

**DR:** Yeah, that was about thirty years ago.

*Interviewer:* So '82?

**DR:** Yeah, thirty to thirty-five years ago.

*Interviewer:* Did you ever have the open access permit for groundfish?

**DR:** Yes and no. I think some of the permits were just plain permits before they started getting quantified. You used to just get a permit to go for groundfish, and then it went to days at sea and A and B and all that. They started getting quantified, and although I did the fishing I never had an open access permit, because I never did the fishing to qualify for those amounts. That's basically what happened to Downeast Maine.

*Interviewer:* They didn't have the documented time, and then they didn't get enough days at sea or they didn't have enough landings?

**DR:** What basically happened to Downeast Maine, I can simplify it a little bit, is people went fishing – groundfishing or gill netting or whatever – and then the regs started coming why you had to cut down. Fishery stocks were going down and they had to do something, so everybody in Downeast Maine said, “Well, yeah, we haven't been going fishing because we haven't been catching any fish. What's going to happen to us?” So NMFS said, “Don't worry about it. It'll be okay when the numbers come back,” but it wasn't.

They just got locked out by the process. What happened the next time the stock assessment came around was people were in more trouble, so the people that were still active in the fishery said, “Well, wait a minute, you know, I need to survive,” and total communities of people that didn't have much effect on the groundfish got locked out of it. It's just a process of elimination.

*Interviewer:* Looking towards the future, assuming that groundfish stocks returned, what would need to happen in your opinion to revive the groundfish fleet?

**DR:** We need access to the fishery. The short answer is access to the fishery, and that's going to be very difficult. You've heard me ramble on about how we get that permit banks. We're at a point now where we're going to have to create some kind of a permit bank through the state and some mechanism to keeping it in an open chance for everybody. That's kind of what I was describing at a meeting that you were at.

We have a little bitty beginning of a permit bank in the state of Maine, and the only way that you're going to keep this an open fishery for however many people up and down the coast of Maine is when somebody retires, sells or turns over a permit or a license for the poundage, it'll soon be poundage instead of days at sea. My thought is there needs to be a tax or a levy on that poundage or days at sea.

Days at sea is a kind of common currency now. Let's say I've got a permit that has a hundred A days at sea, and that'll equate to so many pounds of fish. When I get ready to sell it or it gets transferred, I think ten days ought to go into a permit bank in the state of Maine or New Hampshire and through some public mechanism, which ought to get turned out to the downeast area. That keeps an open fishery alive, because we have resisted quotas and ITQs in the coast of Maine forever, and Senator Snowe has been helping us do that.

The end result of that is you have a manageable fishery, but it's corporations that own the fishery, and that may not work well in places like Alaska. The coast of Maine needs for this to happen more than anything else because we're so individual up and down the coast. We have all these little individual harbors versus another social structure or mechanical structure of how we do things. Anyway, that is about the only way that I know of that we will keep that resource open.

*Interviewer:* Yeah.

**DR:** It's important that we do because it isn't just groundfish. That's an important issue monetarily and from a protein point of view for human consumption and all of that. But if we do not remain

involved with what's happening out there, whether it's groundfish – it's been difficult for me to answer these questions because of my limited groundfish – but if I have no input in what's going on in the groundfish, and my grandchildren have no input in what's going on in groundfish, then I lose input in what's going on in the lobster industry or the herring industry and all of the other things. Then, it sort of takes me back to that point I was making about an ecosystem of post fishery management.

One of the biggest problems we've got in some of these fisheries in Gulf of Maine and beyond right now is the seals. It isn't a popular thing to say, but those buggers are eating a lot of stuff, and it is upsetting the balance, and man is paying the price for that and you're not allowed to even mention that in the regulatory process or you're a bad person.

*Interviewer:* Right, because you don't like the cute seals.

**DR:** Yeah, but it's a fact! They are one of God's creatures, and they're beautiful little animals, but a full-grown seal every three days eats 40% of its own weight in fish, and there are hundreds of thousands of them down here that never used to be.

*Interviewer:* Do you think they've increased since the Marine Mammal Act? Yeah?

**DR:** I don't necessarily think that the Marine Mammal Act had a lot to do with it. I think it's ecological a lot more than other things. The Grand Banks got fished out, and the seal hunt stopped in Newfoundland. Seal hunting stopped on the ice floes years ago, and they're chasing food down here. There was always seals around in the summertime around the shore, and if you shut off herring in around the shore here, there would be a few seals working it, but if you went offshore fifteen or twenty miles, there weren't any seals unless you got close to the rocks or something like that.

You go out in the spring now and set a net; there'll be a thousand seals around you in seventy-fathom water. It's just incredible the amount of seals there are up there. They need to eat. I guess you see where I'm going with that. My good friend who died down a few years back made himself very unpopular by going to places like this giving interviews with people probably sitting here saying the same thing and complaining about the shag or the cormorant. That's an endangered species that has done as much as anything from a predator point of view to kill the groundfishery in this area than any other thing.

They are an incredible eating machines and little flounders and all these other little fish that are in your estuaries and in the areas of spawning and growing, they eat tremendously. Robert Joyce – you've probably heard that name.

*Interviewer:* Robert George?

**DR:** He was a great old guy. He really was.

*Interviewer:* He was a fisherman?

**DR:** Yeah, he's got a grandson on Cranberry Island now, Jason Joyce.

*Interviewer:* Oh, Joyce! Yeah, I know.

**DR:** That was Robert's grandfather's big thing. "Goddamn shags!" He didn't swear. The man didn't swear.

*Interviewer:* But shags?

**DR:** Yeah, cormorant.

*Interviewer:* Oh, cormorant.

**DR:** We call them “shags.”

*Interviewer:* Oh, you do? Okay.

**DR:** Everybody on the coast of Maine calls them shags.

*Interviewer:* I grew up in Freeport.

**DR:** Well, there again, there never was that many of them around because they were controlled.

*Interviewer:* By the DDT?

**DR:** Lead. People shot them because they were predators. I can give you a quick example. In the herring fishery, in the summer, they used to stop seine. The fish would come into Rockland Harbor or in this cove here, and you’d close it off with a long piece of net, and then you’d put a square piece outside of it – what you called a pocket -- and you’d have hundred hogshead of fish in little square area that was a twenty-five fathoms square. A hundred hogshead of fish is about three hundred thousand pounds or three tanker trailers.

Shags would come land in that pocket and in two days would take you down to half. That’s how much they can consume. The Chinese used to use these cormorants to catch fish. You ever see that? They tie ropes around them. They get a whole bunch of these and tie ropes around their feet and tie a string around their throat and they dive down in the river and catch five to six fish, and then they’re not allowed to swallow them and they regurgitate them up. They are an incredible eating machine.

*Interviewer:* If you could, would you like to go groundfishing again?

**DR:** Yes, I’d love to for about three days, then I’d need to come home and rest at my age. *[Laughs]* Yes, I would, but more than that, it isn’t so much that I want to go groundfishing again – yes, I’d love to because it interested me -- but I would like to see groundfishing available to the fishing communities in Maine regardless of where they are, and in eastern Maine especially, because just that pocket of that little corner of the ocean up in there that the Canadian line is known from data and everything for forever and ever.

There never was that much effort up in there anyway, and it never was recorded, and by the time that things were in trouble, the focus was all somewhere else.

*Interviewer:* Is there anything else I haven’t asked you about that you think is important for us to know?

**DR:** Probably. You probably shouldn’t ask me anymore. *[Laughs]* I guess the only thing I’d emphasize is not blaming any one person or any one group, but where we are today is a poor reflection of fishery management. The thing that drives us is maintaining a healthy resource for whatever reasons. The political system that has driven us has done more damage to the resource. It’s basically been social engineering versus fishery management, and it needs to change. It really does need to change.

*Interviewer:* How is it social engineering?

**DR:** Groundfish is the thing you’re talking about, so you’re dealing with the NMFS and the council process. Cod are in trouble right now. NMFS knows that it’s going to have to cut down the number of cod that’s being landed, although I don’t agree with that science. That’s another whole story; there’s a real problem there. The issue up on the regulator’s table is now science says cod is in trouble, so we’ve got to cut down the number of people that are harvesting cod.

Maybe some little guy down here in Maine is trying to catch a few cod somehow or other versus one of my friends – I’m not picking on them – out of Gloucester and New Bedford that’s got a two and a half million dollar boat and got a fifteen-man crew, the argument is going to be,



“Who’s got the most to lose?” Social engineering is who survives. We use the numbers in that whole process. Well, here we are today. You started asking me about this groundfishery that used to exist down there by itself and people didn’t know you had to have a license to go fishing. You just went fishing.

Then in my lifetime, I’ve seen it disappear and the access to the people disappear. There has been no real effort on cod down there in all these years. Some indications are some of that stuff is coming back, but what’s happening today is locking out people and the people that live in that area from that fishery. You can call it fishery management if you want to, but it’s basically social engineering. Anyways, it’s pretty hard to describe.

*Interviewer:* I just wanted to try to get you to describe it a little bit.

**DR:** Well, I could be more vocal, but I know because I’ve been at the table of fishery management. If you’ve got to cut down on whatever species that there is that you’re catching, it’s “how do you cut down?” Do you take 10%? If you need to cut down 10%, do you take 10% away from everybody that’s catching that species? The little guy here and the big guy outside? No, that isn’t equitable.

We get into conversations of, “Okay, how can I save Jimmy Odlin from going bankrupt?” and “How do you balance that out?” It’s social engineering and it leads us to a whole host of problems that we’ve got down here. Anyways, I’ve gabbed too much.