

Interview  
With  
MELVIN SHEPARD  
In  
Sneads Ferry,  
North Carolina

Interviewed by Barbara Garrity-Blake

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Transcribed by Mary Williford

For Carolina Coastal Voices

<u>Track Time</u>	<u>Topic</u>
0:00:25	Shepard's interests in both commercial fishing and environmental issues
0:01:38	Shepard's family background
0:3:26	Describing Shepard's business and professional background
0:06:13	How Shepard and his wife got started commercial fishing
0:06:36	Changes over time in the number and type of commercial fishers in the ocean; Coca-Cola's party yacht in the 1970s
0:08:18	Shepard's ongoing relationship with fisheries and water management
0:09:16	When Shepard first noticed water quality issues; Pulling clams from polluted New Hanover County waters; The role of coastal building and development in water quality issues
0:11:30	Tensions between commercial and recreational fishers during the Fisheries Reform Act process; Shepard's thoughts on the impetus behind the legislation
0:12:56	Shepard as a member of the Moratorium Steering Committee and Chairman of the habitat committee; Balance on the Moratorium Steering Committee
0:15:54	Working toward the Coastal Habitat Protection Plan system; Excellent feedback from meetings
0:18:40	Compromises and errors during the Fisheries Reform Act process
0:20:22	The efficacy of the Coastal Habitat Protection Plan; The role of the Coastal Resources Commission; Increased public awareness of water quality issues

- 0:22:17 Water quality and the shrimping industry
- 0:22:42 Whether Shepard was pleased with the outcome of the Fisheries Reform Act;  
Examples of more contemporary fisheries regulation issues
- 0:27:32 Personal agendas conflicting with a balanced Marine Fisheries Commission  
process
- 0:30:23 Organized protests to the Fisheries Reform Act;  
Red drum as a nuisance
- 0:33:02 Shepard's views on successful components of the Fisheries Reform Act;  
The issue of ongoing enforcement;  
Oysters in crisis
- 0:38:45 The necessity of compromise;  
Tweaking the Fisheries Reform Act to respond to emerging issues
- 0:41:35 Changes to ensure a healthy fisheries environment;  
Issues with charter boat fishing and licensure
- 0:45:42 Which stakeholder group(s) Shepard aligns himself with
- 0:50:14 The current state of state government and fisheries;  
Putting environmental concerns first

BARBARA GARRITY-BLAKE: My name is Barbara Garrity-Blake--

MELVIN SHEPARD: Okay.

BGB: --it is May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016 and I am in Sneads Ferry at New River Nets, speaking to the owner, Mel Shepard, Mister Melvin Shepard, and this is the Fisheries Reform Act project. So, thank you, Mel. You are the very first person to be interviewed for this project!

MS: Okay! Now. This doesn't go on that, because I've got it written out. From time to time, somebody says to me, 'Who are you?' That's what I give them every time.

BGB: Okay, great. That's very nice background information. But for the, for posterity, I will say that Melvin is a unique individual because he has one foot firmly in the commercial fishing industry, with his business, and the other foot firmly into conservation and environmental issues, and has been a board member for many, many years with the North Carolina Coastal Federation. So, we are very excited to have this opportunity to talk to you, and you have been involved with management and politics your whole career, haven't you?

MS: Yeah. Now, the one thing I wanna say is that, never have I ever not been an advocate for anybody fishing, recreationally or otherwise, because I think that's a privilege we all ought to have. Okay?

BGB: M hm, yeah. So, Mel, can you just tell us, are you from Sneads Ferry?

MS: Yeah. I was born in James Walker Memorial [Hospital] in Wilmington [North Carolina]. My parents were in Holly Ridge, because Holly Ridge used to be almost nothing more than the Shepard farm. My granddaddy was the Atlantic Coastline [Railroad] Station Master; my grandmother, Hannah Missouri Edens, was the Post Mistress and ran a store there, many, many years. And the farm was on the side of the road that [pause] the Fire Department is, and plus went all the way out toward the Wildlife Preserve. Marine Corps just took the last of the farm

behind the swamp in this last time they took it, everything. Before that, the Army had taken it, the farm and--when Kemp Davis owned up there. Tilly [pause] I'm not sure exactly where she was born, but her parents and she lived two doors from here when she was a child, and I lived about a half a mile through the woods that way, and we grew up together! Okay? Been married since 1955. So--yeah, and this has been very, very special to me. Okay?

BGB: M hm. So can you tell me how, when did you get into this business and how did you come to--first of all, for the listeners, tell us what your business is.

MS: Okay. We have the biggest marine supply business in North Carolina now. We import foul-weather gear and shoes from Portugal, and we have dealers from Kodiak to Key West and almost every state. Tilly, Bryan, and I started this--my son, Bryan--in [19]80. This is our thirty-seventh year here.

BGB: Wow!

MS: Yeah. So we've been involved. Now, trying to make everything short, when I got out of the Navy, I was in Korea, October the 11<sup>th</sup>, [19]55, in the 17<sup>th</sup> of October, I was in Atlanta working for a finance company, 'cause I had that job was waiting. I went up through the ranks there, even went up to as far as, with C.I.T. Financial owned up their personal loan operation in Puerto Rico, and then we left them, I was supervising Kentucky and Tennessee loan operations and they were talking to me about going to New York. Tilly had four children, and I saw them late, late Friday or early Saturday, back gone again Monday. Not a really good life, and the job I might be a bit headed for was a Regional Supervisor, which meant I'd probably get home once a month or something. Those marriages didn't last real well. Came home from the road one day and Tilly said, 'Melvin, let's go back to North Carolina.' I says, 'You got it, baby!' And so we came back to North Carolina, no job, no nothing, and four kids. So we hit the river, something

that we had grown up with, and started fishing and oystering and that kind of thing until she got a job with the--I got a job first with the Camp Lejeune Fire Department and she got a job with the Post Office. I retired as a Fire Captain at Camp Lejeune while we had this beginning, ten years, because everything begins really slow. So I was taking nothing out of here and just living off-- Bryan was running, living here every day, and then Tilly retired. I retired in [19]90 from the Fire Department and she retired shortly thereafter from the--so we both had those retirements.

BGB: When you say 'hit the river', are you talking about--what are you talking about?

MS: I'm talking about we bought a boat and she and I fished 1,600 yards of flounder net every single solitary day.

BGB: Which river?

MS: New River. Okay? And then, during the winter, during the fall, we would fish the ocean for mullets. And what, I think has something to do with what has happened, is the change when she and I were fishing in the early [19]70s in the ocean for mullets, Coca-Cola had a Bertram down here that was their fun boat, and their Captain would say to us in the morning as we were gassing up, 'Melvin, if you'll keep an eye out for me, I'll keep an eye out for you.' We were about the only two people you'd see all day long in the ocean, from Swansboro to Cape Fear. Change now? You betcha.

BGB: What do you mean, Coca-Cola had a fun boat?

MS: They owned that boat!

BGB: For pleasure?

MS: For pleasure only! And they had a guy locally-hired that ran it for them. But what I use that to say is that, the competition for fishing, particularly in the ocean, was really, really low. Almost didn't exist. Fiberglass boats in this area that were capable of going in the ocean were

very, very low.

BGB: So where were the fishermen fishing, then?

MS: Mostly in the sound. Some of them had boats that would set nets off the beach and come back in, then they'd go back and harvest those. But not so many, because you had to be able to take a sea. Even the commercial fishermen began to grow outside as they began to get something that could travel safely. Okay?

BGB: Okay. So, Melvin, can you describe your relationship with the fisheries environment?

MS: Uh [pause] I was President of North Carolina Coastal Federation for twenty years. I worked all that time in trying to head off things that did bad to either the water or the fishery, 'cause it doesn't exist when there's not proper environment. And then that note there'll tell you that I was Tar-Pam--that group, I worked with them, I was on the North Carolina Ocean Resources Task Force. So this is something that's been near and dear to me forever.

BGB: What were some of the indicators that were harming, that you felt were harming the fisheries environment or the water quality?

MS: Well, when I began to see the buildings that were coming on the shorelines. You began to suspect that storm water runoff, particularly--. And so, when we would go under fisheries guidance, to New Hanover County, which had the greatest growth first, to get clams and--clams particularly--out of their polluted waters, at that time, because of growth on the shoreline, there was not one single creek in New Hanover County that wasn't polluted. And we would go down and collect clams by the hundreds of thousands and bring 'em back to Onslow County, put 'em overboard, give 'em thirty days, and you could go get 'em. But that was proof positive that this is not good. Since that time, they've been working hard and it's been really hard

for the people that live on the shores, to stomach the fact that they, building there, expecting to have everything at their fingertips, and they can't eat it. They can't touch it. It was easy to see what was happening. So then, when we started making objections to developments and asking for setbacks and that kind of thing. And then I spent twelve years with the North Carolina Coastal Resources Commission doing exactly that, trying to write the rules for development and for use of waters. And all this has been just, like, my life! You know? [Laughs]

BGB: Oh yeah! And we're all fortunate for that! Um, so, getting to the Fisheries Reform Act, can you tell us what your involvement was early on in that process?

MS: Okay. I don't remember even the people that were there, except I remember that the Chairman was an attorney from Smithfield.

BGB: Bob Lucas.

MS: Bob Lucas. I'd never seen Bob before, and I suspect even to this day that, politically, the people that were trying to get rid of the fishermen in the river had gotten this guy a Chairman, 'cause I believe, even today, that the Fisheries Reform Act was brought about by objection to 'all these guys catching all our fish that we want to catch recreationally.'

BGB: So, you think that's why this whole movement started?

MS: Well, at the very outset, there was an effort to remove all inside fishing with nets and trawling. Voted down. Because we were pretty evenly divided; somebody did a real good job of saying 'I want these people, I want these people, I want these people.'

BGB: Wait, when you say 'voted down' by who?

MS: By the members of the Fisheries Reform Act.

BGB: Okay, so now we're talking about the Moratorium Steering Committee?

MS: Yes.



BGB: So, you were a member of the Moratorium Steering Committee.

MS: Yes.

BGB: Yes.

MS: Yes, yes. [Pause] Right away, there've always been commercial fishermen that resented the recreational guys! It's been, you know. So somebody said, 'What about all these recreational fishing nets?' And so we came up with a compromise that created what you see now: a recreational commercial license. They gotta have one net. That's all they wanted 'cause if that's what he wanted, he could turn in his old license and buy it. And we thought that would be something that the public would like; we wouldn't have any repercussions and it'd answer some of these things that people wanted to happen. It turned out to be accepted just right off-hand, by the public, you know? There was about twenty, seemed like twenty-five commercial licenses, and they had to buy a full-fledged commercial license to fish one net. And that particular group, I think of 'em as farmers from Pender County and Warsaw and Beulaville who came down with a net and all they needed was spot fish. And they didn't care about anything else, just some spots. And that went over really well.

BGB: Did you have a positive experience in that process and being a member of the Moratorium Steering Committee?

MS: I did have a positive experience because the balance on the committee was so well that things that were--like getting rid of inside fishing--something that was really not good, could be voted right down. I don't know why, but I was put on the habitat committee, as Chairman of the habitat committee, and I made sure that our members, we met separately from the Moratorium Steering Committee and I made sure that I kept track of these dates and never let these guys be excluded from this Moratorium Steering Committee meeting. We weren't gonna

lose any votes on the big picture, right?

BGB: Uh huh.

MS: And everybody signed in for all the things that needed to be done for the environment, and that's what you saw passed. Even North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission gave us an award for that process.

BGB: So what was your specific contribution from that committee to the outcome?

MS: I think I had a great deal to do with not getting rid of all the fishermen. I think I had a great deal to do, 'cause my mouth was working constantly for the recreational license that we now have. And I think, had a guy from--and I can't remember his name now--that ran a fish house in Ocracoke as Vice Chairman of the habitat committee.

BGB: Was it Murray Fulcher?

MS: It sure was. And I think Murray's dead now. And we all had great agreements, there was almost no fussing about any particular thing unless it was completely out in left field, and it was voted through and we had great attendance from anybody that was interested in environmental issues. They were there chiming in, giving us their feedback. And frankly, there was some things said and put into the minutes that I didn't even think of! We had really good feedback! I guess that's the reason why they gave us that award: 'cause we had a good piece of paper there.

BGB: So refresh my memory, Mel, 'cause I'm a little fuzzy here, but was the Coastal Habitat Protection Plan directly the result, a direct result from--?

MS: That's the thing we wrote!

BGB: Yeah, that's what I'm asking!

MS: Yes.

BGB: And didn't the Coastal Federation have a hand in helping organize meetings for that?

MS: Sure.

BGB: Yeah.

MS: Sure. But they weren't out front. They were in there pushing, because Todd and I were really great friends, right? And, like I say, I was the President for twenty years. Yeah. They had a good input; the Tar-Pamlico people had good input. The people that were working with it, hog farms, had good input.

BGB: The Riverkeepers.

MS: The Riverkeepers. And so we had really, really good people pushing. What surprised us so much is that Jean Preston, who's a buddy that was representing--

BGB: Was it Redwine?

MS: David Redwine grabbed 'em and put 'em in the bill for 'em and here they went. I mean, it was a done deal. And I think that the rest of it went through because there was a compromise made in the licensing. And we made some glaring errors that [pause] went through. This is something that you--the people that did the party boats and so forth, right?

BGB: M hm.

MS: I did my best to keep them from having a commercial license. Didn't work. They were part of this group that wanted to get rid of all inside fishing, but they also wanted to be party boats outside and inside. And as long as there were commercial fishermen, they wanted a commercial license so they could sell. And so what happened as a result of that, all the efforts for recreational catch size, which has something to do with the ability of the resource to stay level, when they go fishing outside or inside, if they catch more than the recreational catch, the dealer

takes it and sells it as commercial catch. It's the damndest loophole you've ever seen.

BGB: Interesting. Well, how about the Coastal Habitat Protection Plan today? Do you feel like that plan has made a difference in the water quality?

MS: I think it has, and what I'm seeing right now is that we have--Onslow County is where I live--they are really concerned about the water quality around Sneads Ferry, and I'm seeing what I think is a good, statewide appreciation of the water most places. Now, I'm afraid of what happens going ahead when this present General Assembly abolished a tremendous number of the rules that C.R.C. [Coastal Resources Commission] wrote. So I don't know what's behind those. And it still exists, the rules review commission, that if you were at the C.R.C. now writes a rule and three people object, it doesn't go through.

BGB: Oh. I didn't know that.

MS: The C.R.--it goes through the rules review commission, which means then it doesn't become any rule unless the General Assembly passes it as a law. I mean, it's a real brick.

BGB: Right.

MS: But so far, things are doing pretty well. I think the common, everyday, ordinary person that lives around the river now is more aware than they have ever been. I give Coastal Federation credit for going to these people and trying to help them make rain gardens and all this stuff, and having school children go with them to plant marsh grass and all this stuff, and teaching them about the environment.

BGB: How important is water?

MS: Greatly. I right away say, okay, look at Flint, Michigan. It's the lifeblood of the people that drink it and the things that live in it. It's the life. The federal Fishery Management Plan for shrimp says 'shrimp cannot be overfished.' However, the environment can do away with

them, right? Or they won't come to where the environment is going downhill. They come in as a post-larval thing and go high and dry in the marshland right up next to where these houses are, homes are. They're the lowest thing on the food chain: everything is trying to eat 'em! And then, if what's coming off the lawns does its thing, then you have no shrimp. Last year was the biggest shrimp year in North Carolina history, I think. And this one is starting off the same way. So that tells me something about what's happening on the edge of the shore. That, to me, is a yardstick.

BGB: Yeah. Yeah. So, thinking back again about when the Fisheries Reform Act was passed: the Act wasn't exactly the same as the Moratorium [Steering Committee] recommendations. Were you happy with the Fisheries Reform Act?

MS: I was, because what I thought the purpose of it was, was to do bad, worse. And I don't think you can get any group together unless there's some kind of compromise. Nothing gets passed without some sort of compromise.

BGB: But you're saying that you thought there was an agenda in putting the process in motion that was not friendly to the--

MS: To begin with.

BGB: --but then you were surprised that it was balanced and worked out?

MS: That, I think, is the key to almost anything in our state, legislative or anything else. For example, the [pause] the group that is wanting to get away, get people out of their fishing and their waters, has really had red drum, wanted to make it the state flower and all that stuff, right? Well, they really were hard on the flounder nets last year. Well, the truth of the matter is, flounder net is exactly the size to catch a big red drum, precisely the size. So you had to be careful and you couldn't keep but one or two--according to what time of year it was. Well, the guys that were on the [Marine Fisheries] Commission at that time, the Chairman tells me, voted down any

presentation from the geo--ah, not Geologist--the research people.

BGB: The Biologists?

MS: The Biologists. Voted down any of the meetings, hearing from any of the meetings of the people involved. That doesn't work! That's not balanced! I'll give you the best example I can tell you: the recreational flounder fishery was fifteen inches; commercial was fourteen. I never agreed with that, but that's what it was. The flounder net you could use was five and three-quarter inches, recreationally, with that fifteen-inch fish. Okay, they talk, the [Marine Fisheries] Commission and got it voted through, and although commercial was going to fifteen inches, no, we're gonna raise the net by a quarter of an inch so that they can't have the nets they're using now! Across this state, there was probably \$200,000 worth of net expense to recreational and commercial fishermen, just that one item. I can show you on my tax return, I charged off just barely under \$50,000 because I had that net here to sell and couldn't sell it in North Carolina! Now, who loses? I'm big enough now that I absorb that like it's nothing. But guess who don't get paid the taxes on it? North Carolina and the federal government. I get both of 'em!

BGB: M hm. Yeah.

MS: Right? So, that's dumb! That's dumb as hell!

BGB: Yeah.

MS: I mean, the state loses in that case!

BGB: So talking about this flounder, you know. It's a little complicated, I think, to get across to the public, but the [Marine Fisheries] Commission came up with this idea to supplement and they, I guess, in the end didn't have to go through the complete process that was set out. So, you know, as a member of the Moratorium Steering Committee and a developer of the Fisheries Reform Act, what's going on?

MS: It's people on the [Marine Fisheries] Commission that have an agenda, and when that was voted on, it was not balanced! Now, you're not balanced when you're not willing to hear with the Biologists have got to say, and you're not willing to hear what the--there are committees established in each region, of the people that are involved in the fisheries. Didn't want to hear them. This is a recognized problem, because the Supreme Court just warned the Attorney General in North Carolina and all other states that these commissions that have members that have an agenda to put other people out of business, like them, that can't be! And so what you had, you had some people on this commission that wanted to put other people out of business or make it really difficult and make them want to go!

BGB: Yeah.

MS: Right?

BGB: Right.

MS: So how do you balance the [Marine Fisheries] Commission and keep it balanced?

BGB: Yes.

MS: See, that requires people who care about other people. That requires people who, if they see a fishery resource and they're advised that this fishery resource is going downhill by the Biologists, in order to do this, they do it! If they say things are pretty good right now, you can go another year just like you are and we'll look at it, then they don't have an agenda. And that's hard, that is hard. It seems like the [Marine Fisheries] Commission is like this, like this, and the Chairman that's on there right now, Sammy Corbett--

BGB: Corbett, yeah.

MS: --is probably as good as there has ever been there. But he can only do so much; he's not a dictator! And he tries his best and when you call for a vote and you lose the vote? You want

to throw up your hands, but he stays there and he tries to do the best he can.

BGB: Right. Right. Um, if you remember when the Fisheries Reform Act--or the Moratorium Steering Committee--recommendations went before our Legislators in Raleigh, there was a protest launched. Do you remember that?

MS: [Laughs] M hm!

BGB: What--can you tell us about that? What was that about?

MS: Well, I think [sighs] I think part of it came out of Jerry Schill.

BGB: Ah.

MS: Some of 'em don't want those kinda rules at all, and then I think there was, the C.C.A. [Coastal Conservation Association] had a great protest because this doesn't solve anything! You know? This doesn't solve the--you're still letting the same people fish that fished before!

BGB: M hm.

MS: But they didn't listen. I know they're making an attempt now at making people listen again, but I, in my estimation, the fish are as in good a shape as they have ever been. I told you we have fished 1,600 yards of flounder net every single solitary day; we probably never had more than thirty flounder in those 1,600 yards. You don't do more than that now, that's a lot many fish! You know? We worked at it. I mean--and of course, then, we wouldn't fish when they dropped below fifty cents. Now you get about three bucks for 'em when there're not many around. But I had those yardsticks I can look back on and, right now, the red drum are a pain for people fishing flounder nets! Almost as bad as turtles!

BGB: Ah! Oh, you mean like they're a nuisance?

MS: They're a nuisance! Because you can't, if you got a dead one and you've already got



one in the boat dead and it's the time of year where you're gonna have to keep one, the other one'll float off. And somebody sees it. Or the man comes to check you and you got three in your net! What do you do? You get criticized, severely.

BGB: So, thinking about the Fisheries Reform Act, Mel, what do you think has--what part of the Act, what changes that were made, have been most successful for the state?

MS: Well, I think the one where the guy that had to buy a full-fledged commercial license and by doing that he went ahead and bought some other nets and tried to fish more, I think when it fell back to him he only had one net, he was tickled to death. I think that's the one thing we did well. Even then, fisheries--even then, fisheries wanted to get rid of everybody with a license that didn't make at least forty percent of their income from fishing. And one thing I argued then and argue still now is, why in the hell would you worry about the people that affect the resource the least?! Because, Barbara, here's what's wrong now: enforcement is the biggest problem right now. It's terrible. Those guys work like hell. They are restricted, often, on how much gas they can put in their truck or how much gas they can put in. Some guys tell me they have put their nets out for a year and never see an Enforcement Officer. He can't be in every creek and at every dock. He just can't be. And the other thing is oysters: that's the fishery that's in a crisis. Those things are worth about seventy-five dollars a bushel and when the guys come in here and buy oystering equipment and gloves, well over half of them have no license. He can't catch 'em! He can't be everywhere! And the one thing we've said is, okay, we wanna let people live in this state be able to at least have a bushel of oysters to eat. See, that's a great goal. But the people that use it to go, bring it to dock, go get another one, bring it to the dock.

BGB: Oh, I see! [Laughs]

MS: I mean, it's abused like crazy, so why don't you support the fisheries by everybody

having to have a license if you've got it in your boat?

BGB: M hm.

MS: You gotta--the only people that are required to put anything back are the people that own a lease, and they keep track of them. You gotta put X number of bushels or shells or this kinda stuff back. Otherwise, the people that want to have a bushel of oysters never, ever put anything back. Right? They take, take, take, take, take, take more of 'em and more of 'em and more of 'em and more of 'em.

BGB: M hm. So--.

MS: We've gotta--I'll leave it alone after I say this--we have got to, we have got to support fisheries enforcement. That's got to happen! Otherwise, no rule is worth two cents. They accidentally catch somebody now and then violating something, but they work hard. I would hate for one of them to hear me say this and misunderstand me. They work like crazy. But lemme give you some example: we sell to the Division [of Marine Fisheries]. Do you know who they send by here to pick up the packages of boots and gloves and stuff for fisheries? The Enforcement Officer. They put him in his truck and drive him here to pick it up, and he takes it to the--that's not much enforcement for that boy that day!

BGB: Yeah!

MS: I mean, they use him for something else!

BGB: Yeah, I see.

MS: To me, it's a tragedy that we'll never, ever keep the resource protected like it ought to be.

BGB: Yeah. Do you think that's a budget question?

MS: Hell yes!

BGB: M hm.

MS: Uh [pause] the money coming to support them has to come from someplace. There are license that we'll be writing and the General Assembly--because what happens right now is, we keep writing rules like that flounder rule to solve the problem of the, that we see with the resource, because we haven't been able to do what the last rules we wrote said! So we keep writing a rule to make it tougher and tougher and tougher and tougher and tougher and none of them get enforced! We just keep writing rules; we look really, really good on the books! And it's not worth a tinker's damn!

BGB: Well that brings up my next question, because there are emerging issues that we face today--climate change, the onslaught of imported products that has really transformed our industry, the emphasis on ecosystem-based management--so, do you think the Fisheries Reform Act, as written, can in any way accommodate those issues so we can continue to manage our fisheries well, or do you think it needs to be changed or tweaked?

MS: The answer is, we need to say, 'We're taking this Fisheries Reform Act that we love and we're gonna take it to the table and we're gonna rework this boy!' Because then, we didn't know all we know now. Right? And these problems that we have seen crop up, we're gonna try to solve them--well, we're doing that. And if we'll put a balanced group together, it may not come up perfect, but it will come out pretty good. You know? Early in life, I didn't compromise on a damn thing because I was a supervisor in a finance company. If I caught you stealing, you were gone; there was no second chance. Right? And I'd catch people, for example, a loan that the insurance company had paid and it's thirty days over and I go look at it and the guy was dead before the Office Manager wrote the loan. And he wrote it on this guy that he'd read the obituary in the paper, and it was on the books, everything was okay, and then thirty days later, file the

insurance to pay off the loan. I mean, there's always somebody, somewhere cheating. And in fisheries, there are a tremendous number, Barbara, of cheaters.

BGB: But you started off to say that compromise, you were talking about compromise?

MS: There may be something that, let's say there's fifteen of us. And each fifteen of us have, 'By golly, I'mma get this in there!' and the other fourteen won't buy it. So this little agenda I've got maybe crumble, but if I can agree with what everything else comes out, I'm gonna vote for the final thing. Right? That's compromising sometimes. And I don't know how you get away from that.

BGB: So, um, what, if anything, should be changed to ensure a healthy fisheries environment?

MS: Just the enforcement. Some of the things I've brought up to you about [sigh] for example, I mentioned the thing I think we--and I brought it up and they wouldn't buy it--where we've got a guy with a commercial license that's taking people out recreational fishing. That's an error. Now, it's real easy to write it so he's got to register this trip in advance; he's gotta notify fisheries that he's got a charter at such-and-such a date. When he comes back to the dock, they meet him there and he better not have over a recreational limit for each of these people. I saw some of the stuff being unloaded one day in Morehead City, and they had to had one hell of a day in the grouper! And the guy was taking them in carts, from the fish house right over there and put 'em in the carts. And they weren't taking 'this is mine, this is mine, this is mine,' these were all from the boat, right? Things like that could be solved pretty easily. A lot of the people that sell clams now buy from anybody, okay? Suppose those books had to balance. Suppose what I sell has to balance with what I took in, plus, we have a system where all this is supposed to go through the catch registration, right, fish and everything else? That ought to balance some way.

BGB: Right.

MS: You know?

BGB: M hm. Yeah.

MS: I think things can be handled easier; there are probably some different ways to write rules, and we oughta take it and look at the ones we've got and say, 'Look, we are crazy as the devil, this is simply done this way.' And because there are some things these guys have to do that even they don't agree with. You know?

BGB: Oh yeah.

MS: But I think that anything that's that old, [19]94, we didn't have the whole picture in our mind that we've got now, and I think somebody needs to pick that up, and they oughta ignore the people with an agenda to get rid of a group of people and say, 'Okay, let's get together for the common good with a well-balanced group, have some of those people in it.' Right? Then let's come up with the very best product we can come up with. And there might even be a habitat committee come out of that. See some things that we've seen that we've missed. You know? The oyster thing I've been living with now for about six years because, every year, we go to Ocean City, Maryland and across from us is a University of Maryland oyster recovery program. And all of the things that they're doing to recover oysters in the Chesapeake Bay, where they have been so depleted, it's interesting.

BGB: Yeah. Yeah. Well, Mel, these are pretty much all my questions. Is there anything you would like to add?

MS: Ah, I probably wrote a couple things in here [SHUFFLES PAPER] can you read it if I just tear it out and let you--you can throw it away or read it?

BGB: [Laughs] Sure!

MS: And I may have recovered these. But, for example [SHUFFLES PAPER], I think you knew me already, Barbara, but I think that something like the [Marine Fisheries] Commission, we have got to get people on that. Maybe they don't know so much!

BGB: Who do you consider your stakeholder group?

MS: [Exhales] I would consider the stakeholder group to be the ones right around me right here, Sneads Ferry. Because I see 'em, I work with 'em, I get a chance to talk with 'em.

BGB: And so who are they? I mean, what do they do?

MS: They net fish, they fish in the ocean, they crab, they clam, they run trawlers.

BGB: Okay, so you're considering yourself as part of the commercial fishing stakeholder group?

MS: No. In this business, I've got the biggest group of people, particularly Wilmington, that comes up here to buy lead, that comes up here to buy rings, anchor ball rings so they can recover their anchor in the ocean, those are people that are--that caliber of fishing, right--that's recreational fishing. I sell, I buy about a ton of lead a month and people in Wilmington, they fish offshore, buy most of it. So, the people, almost with very few exceptions, the people that come in here, I feel a great kinship to after thirty-seven years. And in that group, let's say, Barbara, there's fifteen percent of 'em that I consider thieves and crooks, because they--God didn't write anything that they can abide by! You know? Only thing they're doing is just, if you write a rule they're looking for a way to get around it. Hence my push for enforcement. Because I believe that, if a guy didn't give me a ticket for going eighty [miles per hour], I might drive eighty a lot of times, I'm in a hurry.

BGB: I guess what I was getting at, Mel, was like, in your career of participating, you've been quite a participator in management processes; do you consider yourself more an

environmentalist, an environmental advocate, or a fisherman and fishing advocate, or do you see a combination of all these things?

MS: If I had to give it a percentage, I'd say I'm eighty percent an environmentalist because all of this other hinges around it. I mean, it's such a deadly connection to it. You know? It just is. But I'm concerned, I'm concerned when the guys like that last thing that came out of the [Marine Fisheries] Commission cost them every net that they had. It cost them \$285 to replace it, and it was--how many people do they have licensed in this state? 2,000? I'll guarantee you every one of them had a flounder net that he had to throw away or replace the webbing in. See, those things are wrong. Unless that's the right thing to do. And I can show them on paper it's not. The fifteen-inch flounder was okay in a five and three-quarter inch net until you decided you wanted to go to six inch, on the same flounder. Come on, guys.

BGB: Yeah. Do you think that our leaders in Raleigh understand the importance of clean water quality to the coastal folks?

MS: Barbara, I really don't. I have very little confidence in the group that's in Raleigh right now, because I feel like our Governor right now, that Duke Power and the coal ash ponds still have him in their pocket. I mean, when he made an effort to get the Division of--I guess, Coastal Management, whatever it was, Environmental Management--back off on their rules, and the court says no! The court says they gotta do it now! Don't let's put it off for years, you know? I think that I would like for everybody to have a job, but just like when we were working against that cement plant in the Cape Fear River--

BGB: Oh, Titan.

MS: --they were holding up, 'think of all these people we're gonna hire.' Hiring somebody does not replace destruction of the environment. I mean, that's a poor excuse and

unacceptable as far as I'm concerned. 'Cause I think, I really do believe, that we can do things the right way. I think we're capable of doing that. Now, maybe a guy that's developing, he can only put eight houses where he wanted to put ten. Come on. Join us. Be part of the caring world here, you know? So yeah, I consider myself more of an environmentalist.

BGB: Alright, well thank you so much, Mel!

MS: Listen--

BGB: You know, unless you have something else you wanna add, that's all--.

MS: --the reason I told you, you're the only person that I'm letting come down and sit down and interview with me because of what you and I just talked about. Right? You're dealing with something that's really, really, really important, not something that you want to gain a newspaper article one day about, right? Maybe you can't take it very far, but hopefully you can. Hopefully you can. And then, I'll tell you right now, I'm with you all the way. You've got me. Always have and you know that.

BGB: Well thank you so much, Mel. I appreciate it. I'll turn this off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]