

Interview with David (Dave) Beutel [DB]

Occupation: Fisheries Management (Coastal Resources Management Council)

Port Community: North Kingston, RI

Interviewer: Lisa Colburn [LC] and Azure Cygler [AC]

Date: October 24, 2012

Catch Share Oral Histories Project – NOAA Fisheries

Logger/Transcriber: Caitlyn Lawrence

INDEX: [minutes:seconds]

Interview

[00:00]

LC: Great. And could you please give us your name and address.

DB: David Beutel, 60 Mark Drive, North Kingstown, Rhode Island.

LC: Thank you. And could you, before we get into the questions on issues with sectors, could you give me a sense of your history in fishing? Where you began and how you got to where you are today?

DB: I've worked in fisheries since the mid-1970s, basically all of my adult life, starting out as a commercial fisherman, then owning a fishing gear manufacturing company, then working at the University of Rhode Island in the fisheries department and now at the Coastal Resources Management Council as their only fisheries and aquaculture person.

LC: Do you fish under any capacity now? Since you left?

DB: I fish recreationally and I fish doing research work for a multitude of projects.

LC: And do you have any family members that are involved in fishing in any way or have been?

DB: All of my children fished when they were in high school and through college and some after college, but at this moment none of them are making a living fishing.

LC: Okay. Good. So just a little bit more about the context of the project, which is beyond what I emailed about, I mentioned that, you know, we're trying to keep this from a social scientific standpoint. You know, really sound methodology. We have chosen people based on trying to get a range of perspectives as much as we can given the limitations of, you know, that we're

talking to 40 people. We've talked to fishermen and their wives and we've talked to sector members, non-sector members, common pool, people that switched and so and some people have left the industry altogether. Some have moved into retirement but held onto their, their shares and are leasing them. So we've, we've really tried to get the broadest perspective on what some of these impacts have been.

DB: Can I ask you a question? What is the geographic range of the people that you've spoken with?

LC: Southern New England primarily but we're also looking at trying to talk to some people in Gloucester.

DB: Nothing north of Gloucester? No one north of Gloucester?

LC: No one north of Gloucester. So that is a....

AC: Some Cape Cod and some South Shore: Plymouth, Scituate as well.

LC: And Rhode Island.

AC: And then certainly Rhode Island.

DB: Cause I could recommend people, so....

LC: Well that we will definitely, definitely take you up on that absolutely.

DB: Okay.

LC: So, part of this as well is, in terms of the range of perspective is we want people to tell us about either positive, they've been effected positively, negatively, a combination or you know, some people it's been neutral. And with that I, we'd like your perspective on what you've seen if you could... want to talk about a specific place Rhode Island or outside of Rhode Island, but what have you seen in terms of transitions, impacts on the fishing industry in general or on individuals?

[3:46]

DB: Very broad. So, so first off sector management has not affected me whatsoever. So I don't have an economic stake in this. So for me, it's easy to, to look at the broader picture. And there's no, I don't have a particular order I'll go in but the, but one of the first things that comes to mind about the sector program's effect on fishermen is here in, in Rhode Island, is the

divisiveness that it's caused between fishermen. So when I look at certain groups of fishermen are very, some are very pro-sector, some are moderately for sectors and then there's a large group that's very anti-sectors. And, you know, I actually don't know the, how the numbers play out, but there is that division and it is divisive. They really don't get along philosophically and consequently, they don't get along personally and you see it in the port. You see... mostly it's in Point Judith, but it's very clear.

LC: Can you describe a bit what the, these relationships were like before sector management? Sort of give us a picture of what it was like before...?

DB: That's a, that's a really good question because most of these people didn't get along before that either but they were much more amicable. I've witnessed in some meetings in Rhode Island for the fluke sector, which has nothing to do with this, but people red in the face, screaming at one another, pounding on the table, threatening to take them outside, so really threatening violence, really some very ugly behavior, which I didn't witness that before sectors. Certainly [I had] witnessed ugly behavior but not as bad as that. So, so....

LC: Yeah. And how would you say that, the fluke, your observations in the fluke sector compared to the groundfish.

[06:29]

DB: It, it's very similar. The fluke was actually before the groundfish so that got people thinking about the, both the positives and negatives, and certainly the negative group was fighting with the positive group so.... And it carried over philosophically to the, the groundfish sectors. So, you don't see a philosophical change.

LC: Okay. And in terms of the, the, the level of, sort of change in terms of social relationships, the way in which people interact, would you, would you say that... I guess is it more intense now, you know, moving into Amendment 16 and groundfish? Has it stayed about the same in terms of the tension?

DB: It's probably actually lessened a little bit but I think that's mostly because the Department of Environmental Management pulled the fluke sector. The philosophical differences remain equal, the, the acrimony is less but the civility is not increased.

LC: Okay. And can you, do you feel you can comment on that particular issue, the, the relationships that people had before and after outside of Rhode Island? Do you have any sense about that elsewhere?

DB: I do. I've worked with a bunch of fishermen in New Hampshire right before sector management came in, but I am still in contact with them and, and we're on different committees together, so, so I do hear a little bit about their views on sectors, which, which are a little different than here.

LC: Could you expand on that?

DB: So in New Hampshire, I knew people that reluctantly have gone into sectors and they're, really they're fishing partners in that they work together but they each own different boats who have not gone into sectors. [They] each have their own reasons and they, and when they articulate them, they make sense.

[09:25]

LC: Has it had as much effect on social, sort of, the social interactions like you... you know, the tension or anything like that anywhere?

DB: Not that I have seen up there compared to here. They, the people in New Hampshire are very, that I've worked with, are very articulate in their complaints about sectors or what they've noticed about sectors and, and how it affects their community. But in New Hampshire, the fishing community is really small and so it's not really how it affects their interactions but how it affects their, their ability to live in the community, community economically.

LC: Can you describe that?

DB: Yes, so it is involved with purchasing extra quota and how the success of sectors has been portrayed as, "Gee" you know "the revenue from fish is way up." You know, fishermen are getting more for their fish. Which is, which is clear. What that doesn't reflect is how much they have to pay to get those fish. So it seems as if the statistics or the data is skewed just be revenue rather than by cost. That being said, the same fishermen will say that, "I will buy every pound of codfish I can for a dollar a pound because I will make more money." So, so, so long as there's quota to buy, they're making more money on their codfish.

[11:30]

LC: Now is there any difference, you know, either there or even here, in terms of who's buying and who's selling? I mean, is, you know, is there a pattern to that?

- DB: What I've noticed is that the older people that are ready to get out of fishing are holding onto their quota and selling it to sectors and that's their retirement plan.
- LC: So that's been something that has really benefited some people it appears.
- DB: It does. The consequence is though, you have a useless boat. So what do you do with that? So, you know, it's your quota that's valuable, not your fishing operation.
- LC: True.
- DB: So I think with time, you know, just the cost of owning those boats or maintaining them are going to start to come out of that so that'll be a challenge that needs to be resolved.
- LC: And, but you say that's also true with folks down in, in, you know, down here, that it's also been people that are getting ready to, to leave are leasing their quotas. Is the pattern the same down here as it is in New Hampshire?
- DB: It's more so up there than down here and I'm not sure that has so much to do with sectors as for the different opportunities that are here so.... But I see southern New England really unique in that much of the activity is on mid-Atlantic species, which are not included in the sectors. And I don't know if it's occurred or not, but I would suspect that the manipulation in the groundfish sectors could actually cause increased activity on the mid-Atlantic species.
- LC: And why is that?
- DB: You could sell your quota and concentrate on mid-Atlantic species and make money on mid-Atlantic species while getting paid for not catching something else. Or you can use up your groundfish quota and then chase mid-Atlantic species that are not as highly regulated. So, there's, there's just more opportunity here. Which is good. It's good for southern New England. That's, that's always been one of the strong points here.

[14:21]

- LC: What's your thinking on those that went into this that were more, had, had more flexibility like, you know, it used to be when.... You know, historically fishermen fished a number of different fisheries, they had the flexibility, they had a seasonal rounds. That's not so true anymore, but the people that went into, to this and that are, that are part of sectors, what's your sense about

those that perhaps went in with more flexibility and, and how they've been coping?

DB: [I] think that people that are in sectors that were flexible in the first place are making more money than they made before, without the extra expenses. So in southern New England, I don't see quite so much, or hear quite so much about people buying groundfish quota. So I think they manage their fisheries really different to, to maximize their groundfish quota, while they're catching mid-Atlantic species. So, which didn't really happen before with Days at Sea so down here there, there's certainly more profit because of, because of the sectors.

LC: And what's your thinking on, sort of, the differential effect between the big boat guys and the, you know, the smaller inshore?

DB: Big boat guys from down here or from all over? And I think it's really different.

LC: Well, can you talk to us about both?

DB: Okay, so the big boats here that, that concentrated on groundfish from Georges Bank and... really on Georges Bank, I think they're hurting more than before because they have to buy more quota if they, they want to make a bigger profit. The people that concentrated on the mid-Atlantic species and only made a few trips a year on groundfish have been able to, to maximize that, so they're doing better. So you have... it really depends on the, the individual fisherman and what they liked to do before and how they prosecuted their fisheries. So... in northern New England... or in boats that just fish in New England, I think the big boats, some of them are doing really well, but there's been, from what I can see, a pretty large transfer of quota that has consolidated the industry where fewer boats are catching, catching the fish than before. That's great for the boat owners if it's one or two, but it's not so great for the crew people because there's not so many boats going.

[17:41]

LC: That, that's a, an interesting point that it, it's really had an effect, you know, potentially a great effect on employment for, for crew.

DB: Yes. Yes, I don't think it makes a whole lot of difference for shore-side facilities. The same amount of fish coming in whether it's 10 boats or 5 still requires the same processing, unloading, lumping, all of that, but, but for the actual catching of it, I think it's different.

- LC: And would you say you've seen any, any difference in shore-side infrastructure, shore support? You're saying that it's not as affected as, you know, but have you seen any effects?
- DB: Well there are affects in that with Total Allowable Catch. When the catch goes down there are definite effects on shore-, shore-side infrastructure. When a, a certain volume of fish comes across the board or increases, there's a positive effect. When there's less Total Allowable Catch then it's negative so.... So, really it depends on which year we're talking about.
- LC: In, in general would you say, I mean, could you speak sort of in general since Amendment 16, have you seen any loss of that kind of that shore infrastructure that you might attribute or in part....?
- DB: You know, I was only talking about actually fish handling so if I look at say fishing gear companies, I would think there's a consolidation there. Because if there's a consolidation of boats, there's less gear that's needed, so I would think it's a negative effect on them. But, by the opposite token with sectors there is an incentive to be more selective in your fishing and for the people that manufacture nets that are known to be selective, there's an increase, there's an opportunity for increased business so.... It has to do with choke species and missing the choke species and that sort of thing.
- [20:27]
- LC: Sure. And could you speak to what you've seen or what you think are any positive effects of, of sectors, from Amendment 16 in particular?
- DB: I think a positive part is, depending upon how you conduct your fishery, you might make more money. You are more flexible so, you know, you're not operating under daily quotas so if you catch a large amount of fish you can bring them in. So there, I... the biomass benefits are really relatively clear in that there's less discards, less bycatch. You can also manage the fishery to some extent to minimize your... your working in bad weather, although you still have to work when the fish are there which might include bad weather so.... So those two I would think are the, the biggest positives. But I don't think it's, you know, it's not even across New England as to whether you have that positive flexibility as you said earlier to, to work. You still have to work when they're there.
- LC: Yeah. And what about negatives?
- DB: Well certainly it can, any consolidation is, has a negative impact on the community. That being said, the consolidation might, might have a positive

impact on the stocks so, you know, it's not clear to me which is, which is more significant. But community-wise, consolidation is bad. Environmentally, it's probably good.

LC: Can you describe, and this may seem a little bit like you're answering the same question, but it's... really it's....

DB: Yeah.

LC: Yeah. Can you speak to, you know, concretely within the fishing community maybe beyond just changes in behaviors and, and sacrifices that fishermen have made, impacts, the, the effects, the negatives that, that might be happening within the fishing community?

[23:07]

DB: Well, some of the negatives I think that might get overlooked a little bit are the competition between sectors for quota and then some of the sectors, the sector members are much better at working with one another than others so there's intra- and inter-competition within sectors. So that I think is a negative. The... the whole Total Allowable Catch, which, you know, didn't come in until sectors is a concept that can be negative and can be positive. Right now it's negative because we're, we're having a shrink in catch. Does that the kind of stuff you meant. I don't know if I'm getting to it or not.

LC: Oh. There's sort of multiple levels of this.

DB: (laughs) There are.

LC: If we drill down, you know, a little bit more, get a little bit more personal in terms of what you've seen beyond the actual, actual fishing, you get into the effects on, I would say the effects on individuals. What have you seen in terms of how some people in individual level have to go through?

DB: Oh. Okay. Yeah, no, some people have really embraced this and they love it. Other people, and we talked about this a little earlier, philosophically are against it and one of the negatives with that is because they're philosophically against it, they don't use the opportunity to their best advantage. So it's a self-regulating negative of sort so.... And then, consequently the people that are less successful are interacting on an even basis or even on a civil basis with people that are more successful. And I do think part of that has to do with their philosophy on sectors in general, not their, not their business skills.

LC: What about drilling down, sort of, one more level to, sort of, very personal impacts: mental health, physical, any physical challenges? I mean, I'm not sure how, how close you are at this point to, you know, but what have you seen in terms of the personal effects?

[26:13]

DB: The... I'm not close enough to see physical changes. Nor fully addressed the, any mental health pieces other than in the beginning when I was talking about the fluke sector and the volatility that was around that, to me, that would be an indicator of a negative effect on mental health. So [I] think that was pretty clear.

LC: And what about any life changes that you're aware of for people that have been, you know, affected by Amendment 16?

DB: I don't think I can really answer that. So, it's... at the point of my life where I am now I, I don't really work with crew people where I think the, the changes are most significant. So I, I can't really clearly answer that.

LC: Okay. And what about what you've seen in, in common pool? Folks that chose to stay in the common pool have you... what's your sense about that?

DB: The, I only know one that's happy. And he likes it because he [can] just go out and catch his, catch the fish as fast as he can and then he's done so.... But he likes living like that so.... I'm sure there are others like him. I'm sure that there are others that, you know, want to spread out their catch over the whole year, but, you know when you have people that are trying to catch it quickly, really in essence the common pool is undefined sector, they'll run... they lose out.

LC: What about, I mean, any observations on any negatives in terms of common pool any...?

DB: Just what I just said, people that want, want to fish on a schedule, they get hurt.

LC: Okay.

AC: Is this gentleman from Point Judith, this common pool fisherman that likes to be in the common pool?

DB: No.

AC: Are there common pool fishermen in Point Judith?

DB: I have no idea. I would suspect there are but I... nobody jumps, jumps out at me.

LC: What do you see, in terms of the, sort of the effects right now in the overall groundfish fishery of sectors? Where do you see, see it going?

[29:11]

DB: To see major negative effects in both, mostly through consolidation and loss of crew I just have to look to New Bedford. Where sectors that sell their fish on the New Bedford market, so Newport is like that. If, if I look at the Point Judith people, it's nowhere near as negative so....

LC: Yeah.

DB: So I see the consolidation as a substantial negative piece for fishermen that are not boat owners or quota owners.

LC: Yeah. And for those that are losing their jobs, what have you seen in terms of, you know, where they go? Do you have any sense... they can't fish....

DB: In this economy, where do you go if you don't have a job? To the Department of Human Services that's downstairs from here. And, yeah, I, it's very negative.

LC: And so you've, you've actually seen this, I mean people have really gone, had to go on to the unemployment.

DB: Yeah, yeah.

LC: Yeah. Have any, have you seen anybody been able to leave and actually get...?

DB: Most fishermen don't go on unemployment, they, they have to get welfare, because, you know, unless you're on a scalloper that has a lot of crew, there's no unemployment insurance so it's....

LC: Okay. And what about... have you seen anybody [that's] been able to leave and transition out more successfully? Get a job? Move into something else?

[31:21]

- DB: Certainly some people have found some shore-side jobs that are, you know, some of the few shore-side jobs that are available. I know some people that have totally changed careers and, you know, they're not making as much money but they're not as stressed as they used to be so....
- LC: What kinds of things are they doing?
- DB: Just blue-collar jobs so it, it's not... some people drive trucks. You know, there's a, there happens to be a lot of opportunity there. But some people go into construction work. There's not a lot of opportunity there, but... so their... really I think people are trying, struggling to find what they can do. Some people are successful and some aren't so....
- LC: Yeah. There was one person that you talked to that did move into [the] seafood business, so they, they were able to stay, stay engaged but they left, left the sector and sold their boats, yeah.
- DB: I mean, I see fishermen going into aquaculture but they're not sector people. You know they're people leaving from other fisheries.
- LC: You've really hit on a lot of the, the key things that I wanted to know about, is there anything like...?
- AC: Maybe just a question about whether you see common pool fishermen and sector fishermen interacting in any way or not or whether that, those are divisions that actually don't exist in terms of how fishermen view each other? Do you see evidence in Point Judith or elsewhere, do you see...?
- DB: I think people that interacted positively before still interact. [It] might not be as positive, but they still interact.
- AC: Okay.
- LC: Now in terms of, I guess from a, sort of a personal safety standpoint, you said some of the guys have really gotten, you know, it's caused a lot of huge rift and a lot of people have been red in the face, has this caused any, any issues with personal safety? I mean, are people threatening each other, anything like that?
- DB: It's kind of come and gone, but the answer, if you asked me that two years ago I would have given you an emphatic yes, now I don't hear that. I mean, I can't think of the last time I, I heard it so....
- LC: Okay.

DB: But two years ago, certainly, yeah I heard a lot of that.

AC: Have you seen changes in how people participate in things like the scholarship fund and, you know the fundraisers and has it, have people changed their involvement because they're in a sector or not in sector to those sorts of bigger community events? Is that not a factor...?

DB: I think people have changed their involvement based on their philosophies of where the fishing industry should go. Part of that has to do with sectors, not all of that does, but yes, there is a, certainly a difference in community involvement.

[35:12]

LC: You really have hit on the things that I, I wanted to know about, is there any, anything else that... thoughts that you might have that...?

DB: In talking about all this, I still have no clues whether sectors are successful or not.

AC: We often ask if the, after speaking with people if they have a personal experience they'd like to share for the record or something about your involvement that you might want to end on that is highlighted in your memory or for whatever reason? Do you have something like that to, to end on?

DB: No. I'll end on the piece where I don't have a clue.

LC: (laughs) That's actually a great place to end. Yeah.

AC: Well thank you Dave for your time today. And today is the, October 24th 2012. My name is Azure Cygler and I'm here with Lisa Colburn and we're interviewing Dave Beutel. Thank you Dave.

DB: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

[36:35]