

**Interview with Karl Cygler [KC]**  
**Occupation: Operations Manager, East-West Technical Services**  
**Port Community: Narragansett, Rhode Island**  
**Interviewer: Azure Cygler [AC]**  
**Date: November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2012**  
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**Telephone interview**

**Interview**

[00:00]

AC: Okay, for the record, my name is Azure Cygler, and I'm here with Karl Cygler in Narragansett, Rhode Island, and Karl, if you could just state that you agree to do this interview and you read a signed the release form?

KC : I agree to do the interview and I have read and I have signed the release form.

AC : Excellent, and may I ask how old you are for the record?

KC : I am thirty-six years old.

AC : Excellent, and if you could give me a little bit of context about how you're involved in fisheries? You're a business owner I know, so tell me a bit about that business and how it started and how you got into fisheries in general, just a little background for the record.

KC : Okay, I am currently the Operations Manager here at East-West Technical Services. We are an Observer and At-Sea Monitor provider for National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) here in the northeast. I originally got involved, I guess in the groundfish program back in 2002 as a fisheries Observer for National Marine Fisheries Service. I started off working all over New England and the mid-Atlantic region in all different fisheries including herring, groundfish, pot fisheries and I also observed scallop dredge, a clam dredge, so I've seen a lot of the fisheries and a lot of different vessels and crews involved.

In 2005 I started my own business providing Observers and At-Sea Monitors to NMFS after doing it for oh, I'd say about four years as an Observer, I took the leap and started my own business with the help of my father who was also a commercial fisherman back in the day and who was also an Observer back in the 1980s. So we come from, I guess a vast knowledge of what it entails to run and

be a robust Observer, and so in 2005 we decided to start our own company together, and we got to provide Observers for industry-funded scallop program. And we did that for five years, till 2010, when a new NEFOP contract came up, which is the Northeast Fisheries Observer Program, and we bid for that contract to provide At-Sea Monitoring service to sectors and the commonpool. And lo and behold we got the contract for two years, to provide At-Sea Monitors and so we expanded our business from providing Observers just for the industry-funded program and we expanded to provide Observers and At-Sea Monitors is what they call them, to the groundfish fishery for sectors and commonpool. And so here we are in 2012, we just bid on another contract for another two-year extension which we did receive, and we'll be providing At-Sea Monitors through East-West till 2014.

AC : And how does that work on a daily basis? Do fishermen find you, or do you seek them out to provide Observers? How does that work, for people who are unfamiliar with Observer providing?

KC : How the operation works is the fishermen, whether you're in a commonpool or a sector, you have to declare into the fishery. And you have to give NMFS forty-eight hours notification before you're going into the fishery. So we're given adequate time to prepare our staff if your vessel is selected for coverage so we can provide our staff and get all our ducks in a row to deploy somebody out to your vessel. So NMFS handles the declaration part of it, and NMFS also handles the selection part of it, who gets selected to carry an Observer. So on our end, all we see is a list of vessels that have been selected for coverage, given different strata whether it be gear type, where the fishing is going to happen, which statistical area, and vessel size, I think is another parameter for that. So once those things are all, all those variables are inputted in some kind of system out pops a vessel for coverage. We're notified forty-eight hours in advance so we can get our staff prepared to go out on that vessel and this is all done via computer. So there's a site we log onto and it lists the vessels that are selected for coverage and then we collaborate with our staff, who's available, which region, and then we can deploy that person for that vessel.

AC : Okay, great. And how does that, what do your interactions look like with fishermen? Do you on a daily basis speak with them, or is it more random than that?

KC : It's a bit more random, not on a daily basis, but we do have issues that always pop up. So for example it sounds like, you know, it's easier said than done to have a vessel list a time that they're expected to leave and a date and of course, you know, given this industry and weather and mechanical factors, there's a lot involved in that in terms of deploying somebody out there in the field. There's different variables where the Captain and the crew might change times, change

dates, so we do have some interaction with the Captains, more or less letting us know that they're cancelling the trip, the reasons why, sometimes, if they're delaying the trip they'll call the office so we do have interaction with them in those events. And also for example if they need to have a life-raft on the vessel, if their life-raft doesn't have the capacity to carry an Observer, so you know, we kind of co-ordinate with the Captain on how, what's the best ways we can kind of remedy that situation and see if we can provide them. So we do have some interaction with the fishermen in the industry.

AC : And you do Captain interviews as well, which consist of what?

KC : Correct, so also, it's a very independent position and the one way that we can sort of gauge our staff performance is to talk directly to the Captain. So what we do is under the contract that we're working at to provide At-Sea Monitors, NMFS had requested that we do these Captain interviews for 10% of the trips for each staff we have. So we get a list of pre-determined questions from NMFS that they want us to ask these Captains. So we would in turn call these Captains asking these questions, and you know, get feedback on how our staff is performing out as sea, just because, you know, the nature of the work is very independent, and it's very difficult for us to keep tabs on our staff. And that's one way that we find it, as a plus for us to talk to the Captains, and kind of gauge our staff and see if they're doing all the right protocols and things.

AC : Okay, and are you hearing anything from either your Observer staff or Captains about their assessment of sectors, how sectors are working out for them, whether they're positive or negative, do you get any feedback in that regard from Observers or fishermen?

KC : Well, when we initially started the program in 2010 I think there was a lot of negative feedback in terms of just having the Observers onboard. You know, their coverage was increased drastically, it was increased to about 35% and so before 2010 the coverage hovered around 5% for groundfish or something along those lines. So the industry was accustomed to having people on board, but the drastic increase, they weren't accustomed to having them so regularly. So it's, some vessels were having Observers come on almost every trip, you know, is what the big complaint was. You're going from a small coverage of 5% to a coverage of 35%, I just don't think the guys were ready for that coverage, and they just weren't accustomed to having that extra person on there all the time. So that's where kind of a negative aspect came about, and some guys were, "Okay, why do I have this guy five or six times in a row on my vessel? And my other vessel in my sector hasn't had an Observer?" You know, and there was some kind of heated moments going on there, in terms of, just the coverage being what it was.

- AC : Have your Observer staff mentioned any changes in how fishermen treat them, or either that or have they seen any sort of behavior changes in the fishermen themselves since these, since sectors started? Is that something they comment on to you?
- KC : Yeah, we have seen some changes, um, a couple of the bigger changes are of course the one I mentioned, where there seems to be more coverage, so you know, the Captains are just adjusting to having to take the Observer as much, and the other changes are given the sector program, the Observers information is much more heavily weighed in terms of choke species, you know, and caps on certain TACs [total allowable catch] and things like that. So, for example, before sectors, the fishermen were less likely to look at the data themselves. You know, they just, "Okay, here's somebody from NMFS coming on to do, you know, an Observer doing a stock assessment, it's really not affecting me that much." Now it seems the guys are really affected by what that At-Sea Monitor Observer is writing down. Because every pound counts, when you extrapolate that data that they're taking, you know for example if you have 100 pounds of discarded cod on one tow, they're going to extrapolate that data for the trip for the whole sector fleet if they're fishing in that area. So not only does every pound count for everybody, so everybody has more of a say of making sure that data's accurate, whereas before that didn't count as much, you know, against them. So there's more of an investment for the Captains and the crews to make sure that data is collected correctly.
- AC : And what does that look like on the boat? Does that mean the Captain is more sitting and standing side-by-side to the Observer, helping them collect the data or making sure it's collected right? Are they sort of looking over their shoulder, or is it just..., what does that look like on the vessel?
- KC : Well we've heard both things, things of you know, anything from the scales the Captains are always testing the At-Sea Monitor scales and making sure they're accurate and questioning the integrity of the scale and saying that it's off by this or off by that, we've heard stories like that. We've heard stories of Captains trying to, you know, trying to not make sure that the Observer doesn't document certain discards. And we've also heard stories of Captains and crews helping as well, so it's kind of..., every Captain and crew is different I guess, in terms of that. But there has been definitely more vested interest in terms of that data.
- AC : Now does an Observer for a particular trip have to show that collected data to the Captain before the trip is over, or is it a choice, or how does that work?
- KC : Yeah the Captain can request a copy of the data and they would just fill out a form and they would get the exact copy of that data.

- AC : Okay, and have you heard any accounts of just, sort of changes in behavior on boats in the way that the crew, the Observer is treated, in any way? Are they treated worse, or is that not something that's changed or been affected due to sectors?
- KC : I think..., I don't, I'm not sure about that, but I think that it seems like the Captains and crews are more bitter towards NMFS and they always seem like we're an extension of the Service, just because we do operate with them and that's kind of the only open hand they see. I mean your average industry participant doesn't go to the council meetings or anything like that, so when they see somebody supposedly from NMFS, you know, they're always going to voice an opinion to our staff about that. And there's been more negativity towards that, you know, towards sectors and the whole management scheme of switching over.
- AC : Okay, in terms of social behaviors and maybe friendships, does it, have you heard any accounts of fishermen changing or having relationships between other fishermen be eroded due to sectors, or enhanced or changed in any way? So in terms of their fishermen-to-fishermen friendships, is that something that's been affected by sectors that your Observers have noticed, or that you have noticed?
- KC : Hmm, no, we haven't noticed any of that. We don't participate at such a personal level so we wouldn't notice those changes.
- AC : And how about crew, is there a change in the number of crew, have you noticed anything to that effect since sectors started? Are fishermen taking more or less crew, or is it the crew are more transient, or is that not something that you would have been aware of?
- KC : I think the crew is the same, it hasn't changed much from that.
- AC : And how about your Observers job satisfaction and sort of in a climate of uncertainty for the fishing industry, has that affected your crew, your crew and your staff I should say?
- KC : Yes, we have a high turnover rate, just because of all the cancellations for the vessels is the first thing, and treatment of the At-Sea Monitor once they're out at sea. You know, it's kind of like I mentioned, they're kind of looked at negatively and not treated with the respect that they should have. Just because they're seen as, you know, a branch of the government, Big Brother looking in and you know, our staff are not the ones that are writing the regulations, but they get the heat for all the regulations. So there is a high turnover rate, plus it's a very physically demanding job and a lot difficult factors in scheduling as well, so you

know, all of those things into one, we do see a high turnover rate with our staff, and we are lucky if we have people stay on over a year.

AC : Okay and do your Observers collect any social data when they're on the boats, the sector or commonpool boats?

KC : They do not.

AC : Okay, so it's purely biological data.

KC : Correct.

AC : So catch information, discard information only?

KC : Yeah, discard and kept catch.

AC : Okay, um, and is this something that, have you seen any changes in the number of commonpool or the number of sector vessels over..., since 2010? Have there been more sector vessels each year or less? Is that something you've seen as a trend one way or the other?

KC : Yes, in terms of coverage I think we've been covering fewer and fewer commonpool vessels just because I think they've all been swallowed up by one sector or the other.

AC : Okay, what's the geographic range of the boats you guys cover?

KC : We cover from Maine to New Jersey. There are a couple of monk vessels that we cover down in New Jersey that I guess fish for the monkfish when they go down there.

AC : And are the..., in terms of sector and commonpool, what does the distribution look like for you? Is there, are there more commonpool vessels in one area than in another, or is that something you've been able to tease out?

KC : I think they're just sprinkled around, I don't think there's one area that's more proficient in either/or for the commonpool.

AC : Okay, and if someone were to ask you, say a young man or woman out of college were to ask you your advice in whether they should or should not go into fishing, what would you say to them?

KC : Out of college?

- AC : Sure, or looking for a new profession, someone young, trying to start anew.
- KC : Yes, I would, I would tell them, I would recommend the fishing industry. I think it's a great way to start and hopefully they're graduating out of college in some marine biology degree, but you know, it's a great way to make a living. I mean my father made a living as a commercial fisherman. Granted the scheduling is difficult and things but if you're just getting out of college I'm sure you don't have a family and scheduling would not affect you as much, and it really is an adventure out there and it really is a great way to make a living when you're young and getting out of school.
- AC : And how would they start, would they, what would they do to jump into it, what would be the first step that they would need to do.
- KC : Well, if you don't have any contacts in the industry you would just go down to the dock with a sea bag.
- AC : Which docks, which would be the best, what town, what port, what would you say looks like the best shot for someone trying to get a start on a boat?
- KC : Well, it matters if they're experienced, you know, if they had worked, and what fisheries previously. A lot of guys right now are trying to get on the scallop vessels just because that's where the money is, so that would, of course I would recommend them to go that route, but you know, there's money to be made in groundfish as well, and pretty much whatever local port you're from you can go in there and just do the dock talk and walk around and see who needs a spot filled, and get out on the boat. That's still the way they've been doing it for years and it's still run like that.
- AC : Okay, now are you familiar with leasing, do you hear much about fishermen leasing their Days or, is that something you work with at all?
- KC : No, we really don't work on that end.
- AC : And any other comments you've heard from your Observers?
- KC : Sure, so when we first started the contract it was a two-year period where the government would fund this program. So after the first year of course the gripe they had was with the increased coverage, and just having somebody on the vessels for so many times after the first year they kind of got used to it. And then all of the sudden they found out that they funding would be out the next year. So the new gripe was, "Well how are we going to pay for this?" With all of the new cuts that the sector program was having they told the industry that if you wanted to form a sector after these first two years of funding that you were

going to have to pay. The sector was going to have to find a way to pay for this coverage, and it's expensive. We, you know, usually an At-Sea Monitor Observer costs around about \$600 a day to provide; all the equipment and the personnel needed behind it. So when the groundfish fishermen found out about that they were stunned at the price and they had no avenue or means of paying that price. It would put all of the sectors out of business is what they were saying. So it went from a gripe about increased coverage to hitting that wall, that brick wall, they're saying, "We have one year before this funding runs out and we have no ways of paying this," so everybody would be dead in the water.

AC : And when would this go into effect, next year, next fishing year?

KC : Well the first contract we got was May 1<sup>st</sup>, the new groundfish fishing year and it was funded from May, well May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010 and it would elapse in May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012. But, given, I don't know the industry's way of doing it, but somehow they talked to their industry leaders and those industry leaders talked to certain politicians and somehow there was funding for another two years. And that's what we're working under now is the next two year contract for that. So now we're good till 2014.

AC : So okay, so if any industry-funded Observer program were to occur, it would be after 2014?

KC : Correct.

AC : And you're planning to continue in this business for long-term...

KC : Yes.

AC : ..., or what are your, when you look down the pipe to the future for the industry and your business what do you see?

KC : Sure, I think it's a healthy industry to be in, in terms of us providing Observers and At-Sea Monitors, I think there's a future in it. We also collaborate with a group from British Columbia in Canada and we also provide electronic monitoring for vessels, which is a way to maybe subsidize some of the cost and provide certain fisheries with electronic monitoring which means just putting on components, a camera and sensors on some of the gear just instead of putting a human on the vessel. So we're working with that right now and hoping that's going to be the future of the fishery too, the sectors can cut their costs in terms of providing somebody for \$600 a day, we can maybe give them a new avenue of providing this EM technology that we're collaborating with, with this other company and being able to cut costs for the sectors that way. So there is a



future and I think that's going to be going that way. Partial coverage, coverage for electronic monitoring and partial Observer coverage.

AC : And do you have a particular story or experience that you would want to share for posterity's sake for the record, a personal story or a memory about maybe your past Observer days?

KC : Sure, I have only everything to thank for the groundfish fishery, and I was involved in going out as an Observer for a tagging project on a groundfish fishing vessel called the *Trident...*,

AC : I've heard of that vessel (laughs).

KC : Yes, and that's where we met, and I have everything in my life to thank for this program, so I am willing to do everything to make sure that the program is successful and my family is successful and everything because I had met my beautiful wife through the program, and through being a fisheries Observer, and also have a beautiful son to thank for it as well. And it's all because of this program and the groundfish fishery, so...

AC : That's a great story, now if your son were to come to you as a teenage, young teenage boy, man, and wanted to go fishing, what would you say to that?

KC : Well, I would probably say that the saltwater is in his blood since my father was a fisherman and an Observer as well, and if he decided to do that I would encourage him, and of course try to teach him all the things of what I learned not to do in the commercial fishing world. So, and of course I would tell him our story of how we met and let him know that it can take you to places like that.

AC : Mm-hmm, excellent, is there anything that I did not ask that you would want to add, before we close?

KC : Um, you know I think that's it, I think the worst is over, in terms of how we deal with the sectors, I think a lot of the industry is getting used to it, they're learning how to play with the rules in terms of working to their advantage, I think the industry has learned a lot with it, and they're kind of being able to educate themselves and using the sector management program to their advantage, and we see that with a sort of better respect for the Observers as time goes on. And so hopefully, you know, for the next two years of funding it would be an easy transition for everybody in the future if it does ever go industry-funded where they have to provide for their own Observers. I think it would be an easier transition now since they know how to work those quotas to their advantage and find areas where they can afford that coverage.

AC : Okay, excellent, well it's been a pleasure, Karl, thank you for your time.

KC : Well, thank you for your time too, and giving me this opportunity to give this Observer provider, I guess view of things, because a lot of times we don't have the opportunity to let everyone know what a difficult job this is, and the data that w provide is critical for the management of the fisheries.

AC : Excellent, well thank you again, just to close this is Karl Cygler on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November, 2012, and I appreciate your time Karl.

KC : Well thank you.

AC : Good luck.

[ 0:30:57 ]

END INTERVIEW