

Interview with Jim Keding
Occupation: Fisherman
Port Community: Plymouth, Massachusetts
Interviewer: Samantha Sperry
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INDEX (minutes: seconds)

Interview

SS: For the record, my name is Samantha Sperry. It is February 16th and we are on the vessel *Mystic* right now, in Plymouth, [Massachusetts]. And to begin can you please start out by stating your name, residential address, home port, vessel name and if you are in a sector or the common pool and how old you are?

JK: My name is Jim Keding. The boat is the *Mystic* in Plymouth, Mass. My home address is 2 Colt Lane in Plymouth Mass, and I am in Sector 10.

SS: And how old are you?

JK: I am 42.

SS: Can you just give me a general context, a little bit about yourself, your family, where you are from, how long you have been here in Plymouth, if you have kids, brothers, sisters and a little bit about your educational background?

JK: I originally come from Marshfield, and I have been fishing out of Plymouth since 1987, I have been commercial fishing for 28 years. I have two boys, 10 and 8, and what else was it?

SS: Did you go to school? Did you go to high school, college?

JK: I have a high school education and I have been fishing right since out of high school.

SS: Can you tell me a little bit more about your family's involvement in the fisheries. Did you have any cousins, brothers, sisters that fished? And how did you get into the industry?

JK: Well, I lived right down from the dock in Brant Rock in Marshfield and my cousin was a fisherman. He's the only one out of the family that was a fisherman. But we lived right down from the dock so I just happened to take a liking to it and started when I was 14.

SS: Has your role or position in the fishery changed since sectors began?

JK: Absolutely.

SS: In what ways has it changed?

JK: I used to have my own vessel. Now I am a captain on a vessel. I had to sell my vessel because of the sectors that came in.

SS: How many crewmembers are on the boat and where do they come from?

JK: There are two crewmembers on the boat. One comes from Plymouth, and one comes from Hanover.

SS: And has this changed over the past few years since sectors began? The amount of crew?

JK: Yeah.

SS: Can you tell me a little bit about your neighborhood? Would you describe it as a fishing community and why did you decide to live here?

JK: My neighborhood is not really a fishing community, its kind of set off from here, from the docks in Plymouth. I actually kind of wanted to get away from the docks where I live you know, kind of get away from your job.

SS: Yeah.

JK: But, Plymouth used to be a huge fishing community.

SS: How would you say that fishing is viewed by the community?

JK: Now, probably not very good because there are not enough of us left here in Plymouth anymore. There used to be probably 30 boats here and now we have basically two active boats

[3:15]

SS: Do you hang out with or socialize with other fishermen and their families?

JK: Yes.

SS: Are they mostly other groundfishermen or are they in a variety of fisheries?

JK: Variety.

SS: Have you or your family changed your long term life plans over the past two years as a result of the changes in the fishing industry?

JK: Yes.

SS: In your opinion, what years were the best for the fishing industry?

JK: Were the best? I would have to say prior to 2010, back to '99 maybe. The best ones were probably 2009, 2008, and 2007 down that line.

SS: Has the industry changed since sectors began two years ago?

JK: Yes.

SS: Would you say that your quality of life is better or worse since sector management began?

JK: Worse.

SS: What advice would you give someone starting out today?

JK: "Good luck." I wouldn't recommend somebody starting out today. There's not going to be anybody starting out today. There's no possible way, unless they have family money behind them, there's just no possible way.

SS: So do you fish on a day boat, or a multi-day boat?

JK: We do both, we do multi-days and we also do days. Mainly days, but we do stay out for a day or two at a time.

SS: Can you tell me a little bit about your sector, what your position is, how many boats there are, your sector allocation and your allocation?

JK: I believe there are 30 fishermen in the sector. Our allocation is decent, but the owner of the boat has purchased three permits on top of the permit that we had. So we have not enough quota; we leased a lot of quota this year in order to keep fishing.

SS: Can you tell me a little bit about your involvement in the sector, when why and how you joined, and was it easy or pretty difficult to join?

JK: Well, I am a Board member, I am actually the Vice President of the sector and it was easy to join. Obviously, we had no choices. I mean, they say that it was optional but the only other option was to join the common pool, which was a joke so.... The common pool is run by Pat Kurkul so she could shut that down any time she wanted to, which she did. So they cut all of the trip limits back so drastically it wasn't worth going. So guys did try but they kind of failed at it.

[6:05]

SS: Can you describe what your typical day looks like? What time you start your day and how this might have changed since sectors began?

JK: Well, on a day that I'm going to go fishing, I start at three in the morning and we usually get off the dock here at quarter to four and we probably don't get back on the dock until 8:00 or 9:00 at night.

SS: So is this different since sectors began or is this how it has always been?

JK: No, it's different because we used to just go out and with Days at Sea. We used to just go out and catch our limit in one or two tows and come in because we had an 800 pound trip limit and 250 and stuff like that. But we used to be able to fish quite a bit.

SS: So now in the last two years would you say that you don't go on as many overnight trips?

JK: Yes.

SS: So it's mostly day trips now?

JK: Yeah, pretty much.

SS: What services does the sector provide or assist you with like insurance, support groups, representation?

JK: The sector, our sector manager probably does more than most sector managers in representing us, but as far as services and stuff, nothing. We don't have health insurance anymore through the Fisherman's Partnership, and everyone that was in the Partnership was older and using the insurance so they basically bankrupt it, because there were no new participants; young kids paying the money but not getting sick and having to have medicine and stuff like most of us now. So we don't really have anything from the sector other than leasing fish and stuff like that.

SS: What are the pros and the cons of the sectors? Or of being in the common pool?

JK: I guess one pro would be that you aren't discarding large amounts of fish, you know, you keep what you catch but you hope you have enough quota when you catch it. And the cons, no quota, bad allocations, basically taking the industry off fleet and doing away with it, you know. And we had rolling closures 3 months, 5 months, 7 months, you know. Its low trip limits; 30 pounds of cod fish one year. They went from a yellowtail flounder unlimited to 750 pounds to 500 pounds to 250 pounds so it's....

Back then, I had two boats, a big one and a smaller one, and we used to run two crews, and I had to sell them. And then my wife got really sick and I bought a smaller boat and that didn't work out, and then I bought this last boat that I had to sell because they screwed the allocation

up on it. And then sectors came in and the way they worked it they had really low allocation so I couldn't make it.

[9:14]

SS: What do you mean by they screwed the allocation up on the boat?

JK: When I went and researched the permit history for the boat before I bought it, me and the previous owner... NMFS (National Marine Fisheries Service) sends you a pamphlet, it was like four or five pages long, telling you how much fish the boat caught through the years from '96 to 2006. And the system they used was flawed. So when they gave me my history, I was looking at hopefully 40,000 or 50,000 pounds of fish for the year and I ended up with 18,000 pounds.

SS: Wow.

JK: And, it's still being fought right now by Senator Kerry, but it doesn't seem to be getting too far.

SS: Do you think that other fisherman share your opinion, the same opinion that you have about sectors?

JK: A lot do, yes, a lot of the day boat inshore fleet, we are pretty much all on the same page.

SS: How do you view other sectors? Successfully operating? Better or worse than yours?

JK: In my eyes and a lot of other eyes, sector 10 is the worst sector. We have taken the biggest brunt, the biggest hit. We are losing the most members. But there are a lot of other sectors, day boat sectors that are hurting too.

SS: What motivates you to stay in the sector?

JK: There's no other choice; the common pool is a joke so you have to. You are locked into a sector; no matter what they say. "It's optional", the only other option... you know they call it the 'cesspool', so it's very... there's nowhere else to go basically.

SS: Have you changed how you fish since joining sectors, like where you fish, what you target?

JK: Yes, the way I catch them too. I fish a bigger cod-end so I don't catch as many small ones because we get charged [for] discards too, that come off our quota. So if we catch 500 pounds of good fish and 200 or 100 pounds of small fish and you throw them over, they call it 'dead' so then that comes off your ACE (Annual Catch Entitlement), a percentage of that.

SS: Do you have health insurance, boat insurance, and has this changed for you and your family since sectors began?

JK: I have health insurance through the state now, Mass Health, and I don't have boat insurance anymore. I had to sell my boat, so now I'm just the captain of this one.

SS: So is this vessel insured?

JK: Yup.

SS: Do you think that being in a sector has influenced your friendships or interactions with other fisherman?

JK: Yup, absolutely, lost friends over it.

SS: So mostly in a negative way?

JK: Yes.

SS: How often do you interact with other sector members?

JK: Other sector members? At meetings, not too often.

SS: So do you guys work together at all or is that the only time that you guys really...?

JK: We try to. I wouldn't say that its 100 percent but we do try to.

SS: Would you consider other sector members as friends?

JK: Yup.

SS: Would you say that they were friends with you before sectors, or do you spend personal time with them outside of fishing?

[12: 26]

JK: In other sectors or other sectors?

SS: Your sector.

JK: Pretty much everyone that I'm friends with, we were friend before sectors came in. There might be two or three that we never interacted with before but now we have to.

SS: Have your relationships been enhanced or detracted from since you joined the sector?

JK: I would say a little bit, yeah.

SS: Is there more or less communication between you and other fisherman since sectors began?

JK: There's probably more; more people know your business now than they used to.

SS: Have sectors changed dynamics in your port? And do sector members and common pool members view each other differently due to their involvement or lack of involvement in sectors?

JK: Yeah, I would say so.

SS: It what kinds of ways?

JK: Well, we are losing a lot of boats here and like myself, I'm pretty bitter. When you hear somebody crying the blues about something that they never had, it irks me and a couple of my friends are like that, I wouldn't say my friends more my acquaintances are like that. And I have worked for 28 years for everything that I have and I have sold everything that I worked for, so it gets irritating listening to people that don't have it as bad as they want you to believe, but I guess that's my own pet peeve so....

SS: Has shore-side infrastructure changed over the past few years. If so how?

JK: Yes, and we lost the fish company that used to be on the dock here, which used to be the Shanty Rose at the end of the dock there, it used to be a fish house. There's no ice here, there's not many suppliers her anymore, we have lost one gear supplier and there's just nothing here anymore.

SS: Do you think that is a direct result of sectors?

JK: Sectors didn't help it, sectors was probably the nail in the coffin. Through all the regulation changes, through the last five or six years it's been changing but sectors stopped all of the other boats from coming into this port, nothing has been good. Framework 42, all of these regulations that have come down the past five years, then sectors just kind of put the icing on it.

SS: Based on your experience in your sector, would you recommend another fisherman to join a sector?

[15:08]

JK: If he was in the common pool, yes. We took somebody last year who was in the common pool into our sector. That's the only way I would say. Like I told you, there's no where else to go, so if you want to stay fishing, you're going to have to join a sector.

SS: Are you involved in the fishing community? How are you involved? Do you attend fundraisers, meetings?

JK: In the community?

SS: In the fishing community, and in your community in general.

JK: Like I said, I am Vice President of the permit bank and the sector, so I go to pretty much all of the meetings.

SS: So are you involved in the wider community, school board, town council, any thing like that?

JK: No.

SS: So how do you get paid, being the captain?

JK: I get a percentage of the catch, after expenses.

SS: Has your income increased or decreased since sectors?

JK: Decreased.

SS: What do you think caused that change in income?

JK: Not having my own business.

SS: And how have you compensated for these changes?

JK: Good question, this is the first, well it hasn't been a full year yet, but I have another source of income which is snowplowing. That got me through last winter. Having the extra quota that he has helped me out, but my income has gone down a lot. And a couple of the ways was I sold my house, I sold my big truck, sold my boat.

SS: How are earnings distributed in your family, like what percentage do you contribute and what percentage does your spouse contribute?

JK: Well I contribute 100 percent of the money. My wife does make a little bit, I mean she pays for groceries once in a while, but I'm basically the breadwinner.

SS: Have sectors changed this distribution? Do you think she works or contributes more as a result?

JK: She might make a little more than she did previously, but not much.

SS: Can you describe a little bit about leasing, and if you have needed to lease additional quota how much and how often?

JK: Leasing, it all depends on the price of the fish, but just us, we lease probably 50,000 pounds this year so far and it's anywhere between \$0.70 and \$1.10 a pound. So let's do codfish, codfish is pretty stable so codfish we lease at \$1.00 a pound, so then you come in and you get \$2.00 per pound. You have to take that dollar a pound off the top of the catch, the stock, so we basically make a dollar a pound. So my percentage comes from a dollar a pound not the two dollars a pound that the market is paying us. So that's another thing where my income has differed because of that. In 2009, I had my own boat and you get two dollars a pound you get two dollars a pound. You take fuel and ice and you pay the crew and the rest is the boats. Now, unless you get three dollars a pound for codfish and take a dollar off, then you make the two dollars, so, leasing keeps you going but you just turn money over basically.

[19:03]

SS: So when you have leased in the past, has it pretty much been from the same person or has it been from a lot of different people?

JK: A range of people.

SS: Do you think that there are any benefits to leasing; do you think that you guy's benefit or the leaser benefits?

JK: I don't know how much the leaser benefits because if you lease your quota out then you have no write-offs for the whole year, so basically if you lease all of your quota, say you have 100,000 pounds and they write you a check for \$100,000, there are no write-offs. There's no fuel, there's no ice, there's no crew, so you are paying taxes on that full amount. Where if you went fishing, you have all of your expenses. If you lease a lot of fish after a while, you'll probably start making some money. If you're an owner/operator, I think you're going to start making some money but if you're a captain, you're always kind of like behind the eight-ball. You're going to make a living, but it's not like before. You're not going to get ahead.

SS: Do you think that the price that you guys paid when you leased was a fair price?

JK: Well, what's fair really? But I guess now I would say yes, but with certain stocks... like with codfish, [it] is so up and down sometimes depending on the prices. Yellowtail is leased for \$0.50, and you're only making \$1.00 a pound so you're making \$0.50 on it so it's, you know, I wouldn't say any of it is fair but it's what you have to do.

SS: Has your general outlook on life and well being changed since sectors started?

JK: Worse, I can actually say that I don't even enjoy going fishing anymore. I don't look forward to it, I don't even want to do it, but it's all I have ever done, so I don't really even have a good outlook. It's put a lot of stress on me; I have had panic attacks, I have had sweats and worries, and it's worse.

SS: With sectors in place, do you think the future of fisheries is bright or less bright?

JK: I would say for the inshore fleet, it is less bright.

SS: What do you think the future for fishing holds?

JK: I really don't know. I would be curious to see what happens at the end of this year, 2012, how many guys are in and how many guys have sold the permits and their boats and just moved on.

SS: So what happens to the guys that have left the fishery?

JK: They try to start different businesses up. I know one guy right now, he's trying to sell his federal permit and he's going to try and start a new business up with his wife. Some guys go to work for bigger boats, some guys drive trucks; you know fish trucks delivering fish. You hate to get out of the business completely but sometimes you're forced to.

[22:22]

SS: Has there been a concentration of quota ownership by state, region or community?

JK: It's starting, yes. It's starting. The main permit bank is buying up permits for a ridiculous amount of money and they are setting a bad precedent especially for small guys like us, that are trying to buy or if you want to buy permits, and it's hard to go to the bank to say I want to buy a permit because there hasn't been a real value of a permit yet, what a fish is actually worth. So it's hard for us small guys to say, "I want to go buy a permit and its \$150,000." And they are going to say, "Okay, well where is the collateral?" Getting a line of credit is a joke. I had to do that in order to lease fish last year, and it was a joke.

SS: Who is included or excluded under sectors. Do you think it's certain communities, geographic regions, or certain size vessels?

JK: It's geographic and it's the vessel size; the bigger boats are basically winning, and the smaller boats are losing. That's the bottom line and you can see it happening.

SS: How have sectors influenced safety at sea? Do you think people take more or less risks under sectors?

JK: I wouldn't say that they take more risks because you keep what you catch and you don't have a lot of quota so you try and play the nice weather and the market at the same time. I personally can't say that it is more risky.

SS: Can you tell us a little bit about how sectors may have influenced how you view your relationship to the resource? In other words, have sectors influenced how much you have to discard, bycatch, or the fishery resource in general?

JK: The worst thing about it is that you are getting charged for fish that you don't get to keep. So if you have 50,000 pounds, you can almost bet that 5,000 to 10,000 of those pounds are going to be called discards, so you're getting charged for something that you don't get to keep and make money with. There is a figure out there for how many millions of dollars they charge us to throw illegal fish away.

SS: Is participation in decision-making or management changed in your community?

JK: There's not a lot of decision-making in this community. Like I said there are not enough of us around.

SS: Would you say that people are more involved in the meetings and the council that relate to fisheries?

[25:09]

JK: No, I would say less. Guys are discouraged; they don't go to a whole lot of meetings. It's the same faces every meeting.

SS: Do you think the efforts that you have made and the concerns that you have voiced have had any affect, or given you guys a voice?

JK: I think in the past, they never listened and if they do listen then it's changed at the end of the meeting. Recently, I believe that our voices are being heard a little bit more than normal, because now everyone is so fed up and the guys that are left are really voicing their opinions like they really should have been doing a long time ago instead of us guys in the same old group. So yeah, I would say that maybe our voice is being heard a little bit more now. We have more congressional [representatives] on our side.

SS: Are regulations becoming easier or harder to understand?

JK: Harder.

SS: Have you or anyone you know experienced any health issues that can be attributed to sector based management? Anxiety, worry, stress, relationship problems, substance abuse?

JK: Yeah, I know plenty of guys. Like I said, I have had panic attacks, and you don't sleep, I really don't sleep anymore. I know the guy that owns this boat; he's had a panic attack. He has been rushed to the hospital twice in the past year. So yeah, there are health issues. I'm sure there's substance abuse; the kid that worked for me, he's been in and out of rehab twice now.

SS: Have you experienced any life changes that you have attributed in whole or in part to sectors or the general downturn in the economy or a combination of these?

JK: Everything that I am facing or feeling is from sectors, is from the way that fishing is nowadays. I don't, you know, you wonder what I am going to be doing next year. Who is to say this isn't all going to be gone next year. Everybody just gets fed up and leaves, so then I'm stuck so then I have to do something. I never know but I'll look. I don't know what's going to happen.

SS: If you could go back in time and remove sectors as a management tool would you do it?

JK: Absolutely.

SS: What would you replace it with?

JK: I'd go back to Days at Sea and start changing the landing limits. They never tried it, All they did is just say, "Oh, it's dirty, let's just get rid of it." So if we had gone back to Days at Sea, and I hate to say it but even when we only had 48 Days at Sea, if we had upped the codfish limit and upped the flounder and different things, up so that we weren't discarding as much, we would have kept everybody in the business. Over the next few years, we would have been able to adjust it the way we needed to adjust it.

SS: So what do you think the state of the resource is right now?

JK: It's terrible.

SS: You think that there is not a lot of...?

JK: Fish? It's being wiped out by the bigger boats. Our whole area out here that we have preserved for 15 years is being wiped out. They just come in and they clean it right out.

[28:22]

SS: Have you considered returning to the common pool?

JK: No, I have never been in the common pool.

SS: Is there something else about sectors that I have not asked you that you would like to add to the record?

JK: I don't think so.

SS: To conclude, is there something that you would like people to know about your career in fisheries, your views or even a story to share for those in future generations that might read this?

JK: Yeah, I started commercial fishing when I was 14 years old. My 11th year of high school I wanted to quit to just go full time fishing, but I obviously smartened up and finished high school. But the only thing that I have ever done is made a paycheck from the water and it has always been from commercial fishing, and it's a great business. You used to be independent and you were free. I always say, you used to throw your lines on the dock and you head out and you figured out all of your problems and you're just going for a day of fishing. It's too bad that it has come to this because I wanted to pass this on to my kids. So it's in my heart, it's in my blood; I love it but I feel like I probably won't retire from it.

SS: You feel like you won't stop fishing?

JK: I can't stop fishing. I have [a] 12th grade education that I didn't even feel like [I was] paying attention to the last three years of my education because I knew that all I wanted to do was be a fishermen. I tell my kids that and I tell them to always pay attention and go to college and everything now. But I knew what I wanted to do, and I was sure about it and I was doing it. But I never thought it would come to this.

SS: Anything else you would like to say?

JK: I don't know. NMFS (National Marine Fisheries Service) sure doesn't seem to care about the commercial fishermen. I think they have done a poor management job and I think there's a lot of other things they could have done to save the fish than do what they did. And they were pushed by environmentalists and you get tired of hearing that they were pushed because NMFS is supposed to be one of the highest up in the government and they tell us how they get pushed around and sued and they are afraid of them so who do they go after, the weakest link which is us.

END INTERVIEW

[30:58]