

Interview with Angela Sanfilippo [AS]

**Occupation: President, Gloucester Fishermen's Wives Association;
Executive Director, Massachusetts Fisherman's Partnership**

Port Community: Gloucester, MA

Interviewer: Azure Cygler [AC]

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Telephone Interview

Interview

[00:00]

AC: Okay, for the record my name is Azure Cygler and the date is the 16th of October, 2012, and I'm here speaking over the phone with Angela Sanfilippo, from Gloucester. So Angela if you could just quickly mention that you agree to do this interview over the phone today?

AS: Yes, I did agree to this interview over the phone today.

AC: Okay, and please give me your full name for the record, Angela.

AS: My name is Angela Sanfilippo.

AC: Okay, and where do you live?

AS: I live in Gloucester, Massachusetts.

AC: Okay, now are you, you're very active in fisheries, currently what is your..., what are your positions and roles?

AS: My main position is I'm the President of the Gloucester Fishermen's Wives, and I want to do this interview as that.

AC: Okay, got you, thank you for clarifying. And are you married with children as well?

AS: I am married to a fisherman; I have three children who are all grown up now, none of which are in the fishing industry.

AC: Okay, now is your husband currently in a sector?

AS: No, we lost our boat in 2005, and knowing what was coming we decided not to re-invest into the fishery, and my husband, for the last six years now he's been working on a charter boat.

AC: Out of Gloucester?

AS: I have a brother and family members who are in sectors.

AC: Okay, so you have familiarity with how sectors...

AS: I am, yes, I've been, you know, I've been involved through the process of sector. I am, actually I am a sector member in a way because I am an officer in the Gloucester Preservation Fund, which is a permit bank, and we have a sector for the permits that we own.

AC: Okay, and so you're, are you on the board of directors with...?

AS: Yes.

AC: And Angela just give me, let me know how old you are for the record?

AS: I'm sixty-two years old.

AC: Okay, sixty-two years young.

AS: Mm-hmm.

AC: And so tell me a little bit more about sectors from your perspective. How have they affected your community at all in Gloucester, just kind of speak to that personally from a family perspective, and if you'd like as well, from a community perspective.

AS: Well, sectors was that thing that we never wanted in our community and in the fishery. But when we saw that it was going to happen, no matter what we said, we just want to prepare our community, to be ready for when that system came into play. People like myself knew from the very beginning that it wasn't going to be nice, but maybe in the beginning would have been okay to make people feel that it was a good thing. And a few people did feel in the beginning, because they felt, "Well, now I know how much fish I have, I can go catch it, I can borrow it...", and then it happened what we thought was going to happen. The quotas have been cut, and they're going to be kept cut, but that's what eliminated a lot of people from the industry. Not so much as boat owners, but as crew members. Because those people had to deal with all that

they had to deal, and with the cuts, they either let some of the crew go, or people had to go fishing alone, even though some of them were already fishing alone under Days at Sea. So for myself I really did not have any illusion that things were going to be great. Um, and it just came to be played as many of us saw, and thought about how it was going to happen.

AC: Hmm. So, was this permit bank a way to sort of protect the fishery that existed still, amidst this change, of sectors?

AS: Gloucester was very lucky in a way because of the permit bank that we have that will have been able to help people by, you know, helping out the sectors because we've been giving them the fish for a very good price, and naturally we give the quota to the sector and then they would divide it among themselves. We really do not dictate how that should, you know, be divided. Because under the system basically, you know, the sector owns the quota and they get the permits from the National Marine Fisheries (Service; NMFS), and then they divide it. The fishermen have to bring their quota to the table of the sector and then the sector has to get the approval from NMFS and then it gets divided all over again.

AC: Okay, so how does the permit bank work, does it actively seek out to purchase permits from fishermen getting out of fisheries?

AS: Well, the way it worked was that we tried to keep as many permits in Gloucester as we could. Those that were selling out that were from Gloucester we tried to buy their permits, we also bought some from outside, but mostly the permits we bought they were from Gloucester.

AC: Now, folks who did get out, where did they go?

AS: Some people retired, some people changed. They, from groundfish they went lobstering, or they went tuna fishing and some people just gave up, they just left the industry. They were a certain age and they just didn't see a future into this anymore, and they left.

AC: Okay, and how did that trickle down to the community of Gloucester, is there less residents, is there sort of holes that you see or, how does that look?

AS: Well, the community has been affected. Gloucester is, you know, we are at the end of (State Route) 128, it isn't as much industry, the fishing industry, its a big economic machine. And for every boat that we lose or for every crew member that gets let go, it's less income for the community, and that has happened.

AC: And how many would you say have left?

AS: We really haven't lost boats that much, so it's really hard to tell, some people, like I said they sold the groundfish permits, but they kept using their boats for other things, other fisheries.

AC: Okay, and how about the infrastructure in Gloucester, has that changed?

AS: Oh, that is a whole new subject. The infrastructure is hanging on, the reason we still have some infrastructure is because Gloucester is a Designated Port Area, which is what we call a DPA, which is protected under the State law, for marine industrial use, but we already have the argument going on just a couple of months ago, the city of Gloucester approved the change of zoning for a marine zone, so that they can build a fancy hotel right on the waterfront. Not so much in the DPA but across the street, on the beach. All in the name that the fishing industry is ..., and there is not much hope for things to get better, so we have to diversify.

AC: Okay, and have you been involved in that as well?

AS: We've been involved in that, and other waterfront property, now we have another piece of waterfront property, of course it's been just sitting there for many years, it's in the DPA, and the city council is trying to make moves...excuse me-[interrupted by someone coming into her office]-...and now the city council wants that piece of land out of the DPA, so they can build something that's not marine-related. And if they were to remove the DPA tomorrow, the whole Gloucester waterfront would be gone; hotels, and condominiums and restaurants.

AC: Hmm, sure. Now, are there commonpool fishermen in Gloucester as well?

AS: Very few, I heard there is a few people in the commonpool, but they are mostly people who really have very little quota, as well, we were doing, you know, preparing for the sector stuff, you know, we tried to make it inclusive for everybody, who was willing to be part of the sector. Because everything was so new nobody really knew how things were going to play out, we just encourage people only to protect themselves.

AC: 'We', meaning the Gloucester Fishermen's Wives?

AS: The community at large, you know, we work with other organizations, we work with the Northeast Seafood Coalition, and basically, we just, not so much encourage people but put everything on the table where it was and let people make a decision.

AC: And are there several different sectors in Gloucester?

AS: There are two sectors in Gloucester, Sector 2 and Sector 3, and then there is the sector from the permit bank, which is, you know, we don't fish, we just have the fish, the permit that we give to the Gloucester sector.

AC: Okay, and Angela how have you seen social dynamics change amongst fishermen, is there a difference between how fishermen interact and view each other and relate to each since sectors started?

AS: Um, yeah, as always with fishing regulation. The social bond and activities of life changes, you know, and little by little I think people are really realizing that fighting with each other doesn't help, so it's better to become friends and try to navigate through the storm together. The fabric of our community, the social fabric of our community has changed. And it's also because people do not understand, I'm talking about the general public, they don't understand, you know, and then the Gloucester Times writes these articles they are more confusing than helping. And people really have no clue what the fisherman has to do in order to go fishing.

AC: Right, has that always been the case, there's been a public confusion, or is it more so recently?

AS: I think now it's more than ever. Because again, because of the publicity, some people think, "Oh, the fishermen have it made, they know how much fish they can catch, so they, and they can go and lease the fish so they can make as much money as they want to, but they don't understand what it takes to be in a sector, to be monitored in a sector, to do the reporting, to work with your Sector Manager, to do the Operation Plan, there is so much, so much paperwork.

AC: And is that part of the reason you and your husband decided not to reinvest with your vessel, into your vessel?

AS: Yes, I knew. And you know, typically Gloucester has been always an immigrant fishing community, and my husband was sixty when this happened and being bilingual I knew that he would not be able to navigate through the system.

AC: Hmm, and was it a..., may I ask what happened to the vessel exactly?

AS: Our boat caught on fire. In November 2005, while he was at sea. We're lucky that he got, he saved himself, he had some burns on his face and his hands, but he, we're grateful that he's alive.

AC: Certainly, and everyone else on the boat was okay as well?

AS: He was alone. He used to fish alone. Yeah, those were the days when we got the Days of Reduction under Framework 24..., 42, Framework 42.

AC: So from 2005...

AS: We had, I think around that time we only had like 45 days, and then they were going to go to two-to-one count, would have given them less than twenty days a year.

AC: I see, so from 2005 to 2010, when sectors started, charter fishing was his primary pursuit?

AS: Yeah, he started in 2006, he went into charter fishing.

AC: Okay, and how are you doing in amongst all this? How have your workload and your career choices been affected or changed at all by sectors?

AS: Well, we, you know, we're doing all kinds of other things within, throughout the fishermen's, their lives, we have, I'm working with the Massachusetts Fishermen's Partnership, I'm the Executive Director there, and we're working with the Fishing Partnership Health Plan program. We're trying to do more like social service through the industry, that we used to have the health plan, and then we had to close the health plan because we didn't have enough people in the industry to sustain a health plan, plus Massachusetts has its own health plan, but now we're doing all kinds of wellness programs for the industry. We still have sick people getting health insurance in this world of complicated health insurance.

AC: That's a great service.

AS: People have so many other needs, that in order to stay focused on what they're doing, they need help with.

AC: Right, and speaking of health, and this could be physical or mental health, are there changes you have seen with respect to those two things in Gloucester?

AS: Yeah, oh yeah. Like I said there is a change in the social fabric of our community. And in people too, stress, there's a lot of stress. There's stress in the unknown, you know? Now we're sitting here, and we're getting from everywhere that they're going to cut groundfishing by 70-75%, depends on the stock, and so we're here waiting to see what's going to happen on May 1st,

2013. The council is not going to make a full decision until I believe it's February, and then there's only like three months before May 1st, and we really don't know how much of a cut it's going to be for the industry, so without not sitting around, without trying to put our heads together and pool all the resources that we can in preparing for the worst.

AC: Right, so can you just sort of talk a little bit more about that change in the social fabric of the community? Could you give me some sort of concrete examples, you mentioned obviously stress in the sense of the unknown that looms, are there other sort of concrete things that you see?

AS: Um, yeah, people don't get together like they used to, fishermen work on their boats and they go home, they go to a lot of meetings that they didn't go to before, and many times just they don't even have time to breathe. It's one meeting after the other, it's a sector meeting, it's an operation meeting, it's always..., you just cannot look the other way, you have to be involved 100% outside of fishing. You have to be involved and make sure that you can do whatever you can to survive, for yourself and also your other people.

AC: Right, and do you think that this change really started with sectors, or just, was it before that?

AS: It started with the, you know, it's the Days at Sea got cut, and then the sector really was like the last nail in the coffin.

AC: I see. And how about quality of life, Angela, overall, if you were to look at where you're at and how you feel, from a, you know, sort of all things included, would you say that you're doing okay, or it's worse than before or better than before, or has it not changed since sectors? How have sectors influenced your quality of life?

AS: Well, you've got to understand one thing within Gloucester, a lot of our people in the industry are Italian-American, we have a strong culture, we're family, we are, you know, when there are problems you talk about it in the family, you have the family support. It's not that, even though we see yeah, that there could be more of other social changes, such as drug and alcohol abuse, but thank God we haven't seen that – could you hold on a minute? –[phone call interruption].

AC: Yes.

[Phone conversation]

AS: Yeah, my life is very complicated today.

AC: (Laughs) You are a very busy woman that is for sure. Now some of the effects you felt on your family, you said, you know, being a close-knit community, and family's home port, are there things that you've felt in your own life, personally, between your family, or between your husband and you in terms of these changes? Has it trickled to that level?

AS: Well, my husband keeps, you know, he goes down to the waterfront, he meets with the guys and the only thing he keeps saying is that "Thank God we did not get another boat, I couldn't have handled this." And that's, basically, you know, what we see, and fishermen just shake their heads, but they have no way out. Where do they go? What else can they do? Most of the people in the industry they're over fifty, but it's not the industry in Gloucester, so even when they've lost they're still going to fish, if they're allowed to.

AC: Right. Now have your husband's friendships changed...sorry...

AS: What I get from fishermen, a lot of, I cannot sleep at night. I keep waking up and think if they reduce 75% more of my cod, you know, allowed cod, I can only catch 4,000 pound of cod next year, how am I going to live with 4,000 pound of cod a year? I cannot survive that. And if they don't pay for the Observer Program, and we have to pay it, how are we going to pay it with only 4,000 pound of cod a year?

And in a way I think the people talk about it because they do, in my presence and other people's presence, but then they just let it go, to just say like, "We'll cross that bridge when we get there.", because it's just going to..., it drives you insane, because nobody can give you any answers right now. I mean last night I read on "Trade and Seafood", now they're going to announce a cut in the scallop industry, 30% of the scallop stock. People in New Bedford are going crazy, but the New Bedford fleet has been hit very hard on the groundfish and scallop is what's been carrying them all through these years, and now there's going to be another 30% cut on scallops.

AC: Is that next year for May?

AS: Yeah, whenever the scallop year starts. At least they've got some distractions, because if you don't distract yourself from that you go crazy.

AC: And what are the distractions?

AS: I find them myself, you know, sitting at my desk working and if it hits me, I keep saying, "How are these people going to survive? What are they going to do with the boats, if we go 50% cut on any species, forget about 75% for cod?" All we have is to hope for a miracle, otherwise before we get to May 1st we'll really, we'll all be nuts.

AC: Yeah, wow. Now, have your husband's friendships changed because of all this, has he lost friends, or has he gotten any new friends?

AS: No, I tell you one thing, maybe not even a year ago, within the last year I see the fishermen that I know, I see that they're more close. They're really starting to work together, but I mean working together doesn't either mean they go fishing together but it's more like they will work together on the issues, people do show up for meetings.

AC: Right, and have you found that you work closer together with your peer group too?

AS: I have always been close with the fishermen, you know, and they come to me when they have that feeling that they need to talk to somebody. And I listen to them and we talk about what it's been in the past, and we were in a bad situation but somehow we made it through, so we stop when we think at the end it's always a miracle, but it's just to let them feel better, because I'm worried just as much as they are.

AC: And what do you do to distract yourself when those thoughts...?

AS: I just stay busy with everything else. Obviously I stay busy with everything else, that is another one, just one issue with the fishery, you know?

AC: Right, and do you feel like that's what fishermen do too, is they just sort of put their heads down and stay busy?

AS: Yeah, there is the groundfish issue but then there is everything else, the fish farm, the windmills, the fish farm in the open ocean, the CO₂ carbon in the Atlantic with the acidification, there is, the fishermen could call from Alaska, Bristol Bay, they want to do a copper and gold mine in the Bristol Bay watershed and they want help from us. I just came back this afternoon, I went to do a presentation to a group of BU, Boston University, students, believe me there is plenty, plenty to stay busy.

We started a community-supported fishery three years ago, I, you know, we work with that, and we're trying with the Fishing Partnership Health Plan, we're trying to bring service to the fishing industry, we're planning a flu and tetanus shot clinic to bring them to the wharf, bring the van in the wharf and have fishermen have their flu shots and their tetanus shots. Right now we're doing also safety training, safety at sea training. We just had one in New Bedford, last Friday, we had seventy-two people, we are having one this Friday

in Chatham, and we have another group of people registered, so we just keep doing those other things to keep everything flowing.

AC: Keep the community together, it sounds like.

AS: Yes, yes.

AC: Now Angela, just, I had another thought about your husband and his quota, does he then lease, if he's charter fishing, does he then lease if he's charter fishing, does...

AS: No, when we lost the boat we did sell our permit. A year later before even sectors came, before the Permit Bank happened, there was a fisherman who really needed to get the extra Days, we were still on Days at Sea, and he convinced him to sell him the permit.

AC: I see, okay. And do you both have health insurance, through...?

AS: We both have health, and my husband's already over sixty-five, so he has Medicare, and then he has Tufts, and I get my health plan through my job. But I do, for pay, I do work for the Massachusetts Fisherman's Partnership, I'm the Executive Director of the Massachusetts Fisherman's Partnership.

AC: Right, now is David Bergeron still there?

AS: No, David has left, he left in 2008 and that's when I took over.

AC: Okay, gotcha. And any other thoughts as we begin to wrap up, about sectors specifically, Angela, that you would want to say, and sort of...

AS: No, what I really want to say that it's sad, that after thirty-two years of working so hard to protect the ocean and protect an industry, but to believe that the resources belong to everybody, we have come to individual ownership of the resource it's sad, it's really sad. And even though these people seem to own these resources right now, May 1st they might own nothing. It's this uncertainty that we always live with, and rightfully so. It's just that they've given inability to the industry and we don't see the young people getting into it, and it's sad, because the fish are going to be there. Who's going to catch them? I don't know if I will see it in my lifetime. So now we're thinking that we need to give some funding so we can start training younger people about fishing.

AC: Yup, is that something you're, is on the burner for you?

AS: Yeah, we have applied for grants for that kind of money, we don't know if we're going to get them yet, but if we do, we'll go start educating the next generation. And they need to be educated different than the present generation.

AC: That's right. And just one quick thought, and I want to respect your time here, before we wrap up; regarding the Permit Bank, Angela, is that something that will be in existence as long as, when you look down the pipe to the future, you see that existing as an option for people?

AS: Well, if the permits we have, they still have value, yeah. You know, the permits we have in the Permit Bank, if they cut cod 75%, our permits will be devalued just like the other people. The ball is still in the courts of NMFS, they can make us and they can break us.

AC: And currently how many permits would you say are in the bank, roughly? Is there dozens, or...?

AS: Um, to be honest with you, I just read it the other day, one of the documents, but I cannot remember.

AC: Are we talking dozens or is it more like hundreds.

AS: No, not hundreds, no, no, no. I don't know if it's twenty-nine?

AC: Okay.

AS: You know, Vito Giacalone will know right off his head, but I cannot remember right now.

AC: Okay, no that's fine, just to get an idea. And is there something Angela you would want to close with regarding your experiences and thoughts as we wrap up our interview?

AS: Well, my thought is this, I work with this for thirty-two years, God-willing I'm healthy right now, I'm hoping to stay within the industry, by the time I retire I really would like to see a healthy industry. This is a natural resource that we very much love and very much care, can be there forever and we can still have an industry, in New England, in Gloucester. This is the only last natural protein in the world and we need to guard it in such a special way. And I hope God we don't see the come-back of the factory trawls, just like we did in the (19)'50s and (19)'60s, only because there is no one left in this country, in New England, in Gloucester to go fishing. All our boats are old, nobody's building new boats. I hope our sacrifice is going to pay off.

AC: I certainly hope so too, well Angela thank you very, very much for your time. Just to close, this is the 16th of October, 2012, and I'm here with Angela Sanfilippo. Thank you again Angela for all your time.

AS: Thank you.

END INTERVIEW

[00:34:04]