

Interview with Steven Welch [SW]
Occupation: Fisherman
Port Community: Scituate and Plymouth, MA
Interviewer: Angela Wilson
Date: February 15, 2012
Catch Share Oral Histories Project – NOAA Fisheries
Logger/Transcriber: Elizabeth Wetterhahn
INDEX: [minutes:seconds]
Scituate Town Library, Scituate, Massachusetts

Interview

[00:00]

AW: Ok, for the record, this is Angela Wilson. It is February 15, 2012. I am at the Scituate Town Library. I am here with Steve Welch. And could you please state for the recording that you have read, agreed to, and signed the release form.

SW: Yes.

AW: To begin, can you start out by stating your name and address?

SW: Steven Welch. Towerhill Drive, Hanover, MA.

AW: Your homeport?

SW: Depends...Scituate and Plymouth.

AW: Your vessel name?

SW: I have two. The *Mystic* and the *Holly and Abby*.

AW: And you are in Sector 10?

SW: Yeah.

AW: And if you don't mind me asking, how old are you?

SW: 51.

AW: So to begin this interview, we just want to sort of get a little bit of background about you. Could you just tell me a little bit about yourself, your family? For instance, where you're from, your family structure, how long you've been wherever you live, and your educational background?

SW: [I] grew up in Scituate. [I] worked on boats as a little kid, all through high school and stuff. And then I started commercial fishing fulltime when I graduated high school. Then I had fished for a couple of years, went to college for two years, then started a fishing business on my own.

AW: And are you married?

SW: Yeah. I've got a wife and two kids.

AW: And how old are your children?

SW: 11 and 14.

AW: Oh, those are good ages.

SW: Yeah, yeah.

AW: And when did your... now you mentioned you started fishing out of high school?

SW: Yeah, fulltime.

AW: And do you have any other family members that are involved in the fishing industry?

SW: Not anymore, no.

AW: And what type of fishing have you done?

SW: I've done gillnet and dragging, scalloping, longlining, tuna fishing, lobstering inshore and offshore. Just about all of the fisheries, except for herring.

AW: What was your favorite?

SW: I like groundfish.

AW: Groundfish?

SW: Yeah, yeah.

AW: And where do you usually fish now?

SW: It depends on the season. You know, this time of year I fish out of New Bedford. Summertime I leave from Scituate, fish offshore for a week or so and offload in either Boston or Gloucester.

AW: And has this changed over the last couple of years?

SW: Yeah, yeah.

AW: And how has it changed?

SW: There's not much fishing left anymore, so... its... catch shares destroyed what we had, so....

[03:14]

AW: So the location that you fished out of was different two years ago, before sectors?

SW: Just the allocations... of how fish was allocated to the boats. For me, I took a 62% cut once we started on the catch shares. So now you have to buy fish to go fishing. And that's what I've done this year. Last year I didn't even fish. I leased out my quota and laid off five men. All family men. It was better for me, but it wasn't good for them. So I took a year off last year and I tried fishing this year and now I'm losing money under this brilliant catch share plan that's supposed to create economic efficiency.

AW: So, did you have more than two boats before or did you just...?

SW: No, I had two boats because of the Days at Sea program. If I had two boats, I was able to keep a large crew fishing year-round. With two boats, I would have captains take them. Once in a while [I'd] take time off and let crewmen, first mates, take the boats and... but I was always fishing, too. When things got slow, I would put somebody else on the boat and I'd stay home. Let them make the extra money. Now on the catch shares, there's really no money to be made.

AW: So you had to lay off one whole crew and then you sort of have one crew that goes on two different boats?

SW: I laid off two crews last year, yeah. This year I hired back... I had probably six men last year, plus myself. I laid off everybody. This year, I've got four fulltime guys, plus myself. We're going shorthanded. When we are fishing, we're working longer hours, doing more work, for less money.

AW: And so before sectors started, there would be sometimes when you would stay on land. And now you definitely do not do that anymore? You always go out fishing on your boats?

SW: It's February. I'm letting someone take the dragger right now and the gillnet... the offshore gillnet boat I'm not going out on anymore, so I let someone take that. I ran both, prior to catch shares, I ran both the boats, on and off. And kept guys, but we'd rotate trips and

everything. But I kept the boats fishing fulltime, with me running them. And we all made money. I always made a lot of money. You know, when I'm on the boats, I fish a little bit differently, a little harder. So everyone made money.

AW: So what happened to the people that you laid off? Are they collecting or have they....

SW: I don't know.

AW: ... found different jobs?

SW: A couple of them stayed fishing. Most of them... I don't talk to them anymore. I don't know what they're doing. They don't.... you know, they used to be friends of mine. There were some hard feelings last year, so....

AW: Well, that's understandable, right? Did you fish with these people for a long time?

SW: Yeah, we were friends, so....

[06:32]

AW: And so you socialized with these crew members also, outside of work?

SW: No, not really. I didn't have time. I didn't have time to socialize when we're all busy like that. I had a family to take care of. I do all my own home maintenance, gear work, accounting, so... I didn't do a lot of socializing. I just worked.

AW: Do you now do a lot of socializing?

SW: No. I do less now than I was doing before.

AW: Do you find that any of your friends are also fishermen?

SW: Yeah, a couple. And they're leaving; they're leaving the industry. I remember we talked this summer, or something, but they're done, so....

AW: And how about you, have your future plans changed?

SW: I'd tell you right now, I'd sell everything right now if I could. I hate it. They took something I loved; they ruined it under the guides of economic efficiency and sustainability and better for the resource. It's nothing but a bunch of lies. The resource is getting destroyed right now. The economic profitability is a joke. There's no money to be made now.

And on top of all that, because of the new mandatory observing requirements, they've made us welfare babies, where we depend on the government to give us money to pay for these

observers that go out on our boats. I used to be accountable to me. Now I'm accountable to about eight other people, plus the entire government, which just keeps expanding. And NMFS (National Marine Fisheries Service), this is nothing more than a giant bureaucratic mess, which is expanding government and taking away the rights of the individual American citizens.

AW: So in your opinion, what were the best years for you personally as a fisherman?

SW: All the years prior to catch shares.

AW: Yeah.

SW: I started fulltime in January of 1979 and all the way up until the catch shares. Then I saw it. You know, I went to British Columbia. I've got friends. I've been very active in the fisheries. I belong to a responsible fishing organization, North Atlantic Responsible Fishing Organization. We've had meetings with fishermen from all over the Atlantic. From Europe, Iceland, Newfoundland, Canada, United States, and we've developed responsible fishing programs and practices and we handled those. We didn't have a problem, you know. We followed the rules. And for some reason, this brilliant idea of catch shares, which is nothing more than a corporate takeover of the industry, has destroyed everything that I've worked for, so....

[09:39]

AW: And I assume that because your future plans have changed, and the way that you feel about fishing has changed, that it's affected your personal life?

SW: Yeah.

AW: And has it changed things at home in the household?

SW: Yeah. A lot of, you know... myself. You know, I've got a good wife, but she's about had it with my shit. I can't let it go. You know, something you work for for 33 years and you get a handful of greedy people that pushed to manipulate the Council. People from Environmental Defense that have manipulated the Council, they said they could work the Council from the inside. At a meeting I was at in Gloucester, they said they could work the Council from the inside, and they've done that. They're getting funded by Pew, which is nothing more than a think tank, a socialist think tank that wants to dictate U.S. policy across the country. They're funding EDF (Environmental Defense Fund), and that's what's happening. This is nothing but a corporate takeover of our resource. And part of that corporate takeover is to get... which is happening on the Obama Ocean Policy plan, which they're leasing out sections of the ocean right now to corporations. This is nothing more than getting the fishermen off the water so that the giant companies, oil companies and wind companies - which are oil companies - can exploit the last natural resource that we have. So that's what's going to happen. You're going to see all the wind farms for the inshore waters, you know, it's no coincidence that the people

being put out of business by catch shares are all inshore fishermen. So what does that tell you? This wind energy policy plan is nothing more than a farce. It's not a proven technology. They haven't done any environmental assessments of impacts of these windmills that will be going [in] off of Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket Sound. It's going to be a waste of the taxpayer's money, for no benefit, so, I think that's where it'll end up. It's all just a giant plan; consolidate the industry into a couple of corporate owners. Take the small fishermen off the inshore so they won't, you know, have any battles over the rights of putting in wind farms or running pipelines or drilling for gas or oil. So....

[12:09]

AW: And so, have you seen the ports change also...?

SW: I have.

AW: ... that you fish out of?

SW: Yeah.

AW: What kind of changes have you seen?

SW: Well in Scituate, we probably had 16-18 fulltime fishermen in 2009. Here in the beginning of 2012, there are two, if you want to call them fulltime fishermen. One of them is getting divorced. You know, big family, great family man. It's the stresses of everything going on. And the other guy that's fishing is... has got a lot of money behind him, which is good for him, but if you don't have a lot of money behind you, under catch shares, then you're done. So I'm just holding on as long as I can until, you know, until whatever happens, happens.

AW: And so your future plans for your family have changed dramatically since this...?

SW: I don't have any future plans.

AW: Did you before?

SW: Well, I would have liked to have sent my kids to school and things like that. I'm just trying to pay the mortgage on the house. If you want to call a monthly budget a future plan, then that's what I have now. Before, I was saving money. I've spent all of my money. I don't have any retirement money, I don't have any savings. I invested into Days at Sea and bought some permits. And once catch shares came in, the permits had no history, so I lost, you know, hundreds of thousands of dollars there, so... feeling that that was going to be the currency, Days at Sea. But they changed it to catch history, so... I was making money before. I'm not making money now.

AW: But you did invest quite a substantial amount of money in Days at Sea?

SW: Yeah, in Days at Sea permits.

AW: Wow, that must have been disappointing for you, to say the least. Now, does your wife work?

SW: Yeah, she started working. She was working part-time, she's working fulltime now. She has to.

AW: And she wasn't before?

SW: No.

AW: So I'm going to ask a question that's sort of obvious, but [it] has to be asked. Would you say your quality of life is better or worse since this management plan started?

SW: It's much worse.

AW: Much worse, okay. Would you... how would you advise somebody that wanted to get into fisheries today?

SW: I would tell them to stay as far away from it as possible.

AW: And how about two years ago, what would you have told them, before this plan was in place?

[15:07]

SW: They had a chance. They had a chance under the Days at Sea. All this crap, this bullshit, about catch shares, to protect the resource, is a lie. We, the inshore fishermen, figure out ways to catch 800 pounds of cod and not discard any fish. We fish less gear. Less gillnets, less hooks, we've modified our trawls on draggers. And we had a beautiful fishery. We had a good thing going. We used to be able to go out in 2009, we used to be able to go out and tow for 15 minutes, 10 minutes, 7 minutes. On a bad day, we'd have to tow for an hour to get 800 pounds of fish. Now, under catch shares... we were out last week, we towed 22 hours, or 20 hours for 1,100 pounds of fish, so.... What's happened with catch shares? It promotes economic efficiency. That's the buzzword with catch shares, the economic efficiency, is taking the entire fleet and moving them inshore to catch the fish as close to land as possible. So all the fish that we rebuilt, fifteen years under input controls, which I helped develop, which I agreed with, has been destroyed by the offshore fleet moving inshore. The last time the offshore fleet moved inshore, was back in the early '90s. And you hear people say, "Well, we fished inshore." Well, they did fish inshore. They fished inshore for like three years, '91, '92, '93, and it lasted for about two or three years, and then we had a fishing crisis on our hands. That's why we had a fishing crisis to begin with. The small boats were sustainable. They took what they needed.

They didn't work around the clock. They gave the resource a break. Day boat fishing, and once the big heavy hitters moved inside, the big powerful boats, you know, they're not doing anything wrong, but it's not good for the resource. And people call it economic efficiency, it's an ecological disaster. Catch shares, that's what it is, so....

AW: So I want to ask you some questions about your sector specifically. And about how you fish. Do you fish on a day boat or a multiday boat?

SW: Day boat.

AW: Okay. And do you know about how many members are in Sector 10?

SW: It's like 33, 32, 33.

AW: And do you hold any position within your sector?

SW: I'm the Treasurer.

AW: You're the Treasurer.

SW: By default. I don't want to be the Treasurer, but no one else would do it, so....

[18:09]

AW: And do you know about how many boats are in your sector?

SW: Like 32 or 33 that are signed up.

AW: How about your total sector allocation?

SW: I don't know what we've got.

AW: And how about your allocation?

SW: I don't even, I don't have a lot. I've got a lot of pollock. Offshore stuff. That's where I fished, so....

AW: And compared to what you used to catch, how does your allocation stand?

SW: My allocation took a 62% cut.

AW: Okay. And that's without....

SW: That's without buying fish. Now to keep up with my previous allocation numbers, at least so far this year, I've leased \$120,000 worth of fish and I've lost a lot of money doing it. If you don't have a lot of quota, you can't make a living by leasing fish and catching them. The numbers just aren't there.

AW: So interviewing another member of your sector, he told me that sometimes the prices for the fish that you get at market is actually less than what you lease it for?

SW: Yeah.

AW: And so, therefore you're fishing for free, basically.

SW: You're losing money.

AW: Yeah.

SW: If you're not making \$1.20 a pound or something on the fish you're catching, if you're leasing it, say for \$1.00, you've got to make at least \$2.20 back to the boat to break even. If you've got crewmen, a lot of insurance, mortgages, which I have, you know?

AW: And so....

SW: One hiccup and I'm done. I've never been in this position in my life. Well, when I first started fishing.

AW: So it's been 30 years since you've been in this position?

SW: Yeah.

AW: So can I ask you why you joined the sector?

SW: 'Cause I didn't have a choice?

AW: You couldn't have stayed common pool?

SW: The common pool was called the cesspool by the Council. It's bullshit. The common pool is the cesspool. They call it a cesspool for a reason. So you either join the cesspool or you join the sector. We were backed into this. We were forced to join the sector. And if they tell you otherwise, they're lying.

AW: And why did you join Sector 10?

SW: Because that's the one that was developed for our area.

AW: And do you have an option to change sectors?

SW: Not really. I mean, I'm sticking with my community. We'll probably all go down together, so... that's what I see happening. Other sectors aren't going to take us in. They don't want us. We've raised, you know, a lot of issues with the problems with catch shares. People don't like hearing from us. And they want us to go away. And I know people in other sectors, you know, I'm part of the Northeast Seafood Coalition, and I know people in other sectors in the Seafood Coalition have said at a meeting that they wish, that they should just get us out of Sector 10. That Sector 10 shouldn't be part of the Northeast Seafood Coalition so; I was told it's for people that were sitting at the meeting. They called me up the next day, so... that's only a handful of people though.

[21:43]

AW: Why do you think they feel that way?

SW: Because we're bringing these problems, trying to bring these problems to light. We want fair and equitable allocation. We took the brunt of the... we took, you know, the last remaining biomass of cod was in inshore Gulf of Maine, which is where we traditionally fished. And we were the first ones to get off and stayed off of them. We didn't continue fishing. Actually, I did. I went offshore. I was probably the only, you know, I have the most quota in our sector and I'm not even doing that good. But that's 'cause I went offshore and caught a lot of pollock, you know? Pollock isn't worth any money. We're getting the same price for pollock now that we were ten years ago, so, you know, price of fuel's about tripled. Ice... they've, you know, I don't know.

AW: So do you see a concentration of quota ownership?

SW: [It] hasn't happened yet, but it's going to happen. There is a concentration of quota for shrimping, yes, there actually is right now. By people that... look back as far as, you know, what was it, was it 2004? Yeah, 2004, there was a lot of activity, people going around and buying up permits with history on them. And these, ironically enough, or coincidentally enough, are the same people that are the winners of catch shares now, so.... There was insider information. You know, it can't be proven or anything, but I bought a permit through a winner of catch share who had sold me a permit. But what he didn't tell me is when he sold me the permit, he bought the permit, took the history off of it, put the permit on the skiff, took the permit off the skiff, put it on the boat, fished the boat for six months, took it back off the boat, put it on the skiff, so I was buying Days at Sea and the history that went along with it, cause I was told you get the history that goes with it, but it didn't have the good history. It only had the six months that he actually fished it. The guy has a lot of quota now, so, there was a lot of stuff like that going on. If you weren't part of the insiders, you're done. And that's what happened. That's what happened to me. I've got the paperwork at home to prove it, so....

[24:14]

AW: And so, instead of the quota being concentrated by state or region, it's really concentrated by people that have a lot of money, a lot of boats, and are sort of corporate boat owners?

SW: Yeah. A lot of money, a lot of boats. And they'll tell you they invested, they sacrificed... they did this, they did that. You know what? We all did. And I'll tell you right now that the people on the south shore sacrificed the most, because we were a traditional small boat fishery. We didn't have the ability to go offshore and continue fishing on the troubled stocks like they did. So, you know, ironically enough, the people that sacrificed the most, got the least.

AW: And do you find anybody being excluded from sectors?

SW: I don't know. No, not yet.

AW: And how about some of the people that, you know, that have had to sell their boats because of catch shares... do you know what happens to them? Do they just sort of get out of it and don't look back or...?

SW: What do you think that someone who's done this their entire life is going to do? All they do is talk about is suicide or killing somebody, so, that's the reality of it. We have a guy, you know.... Personally, last year when catch shares started, [I] couldn't handle it, so, I was up all night. I'd gone two weeks without really sleeping. I was working, I was skate fishing, and I was in the supermarket and I came close to having a heart attack. I mean I should have been rushed to the hospital, but I just drove home to my own doctor and they sent me to the hospital for the night. Observation and put me on pills to settle me down and, you know, I couldn't work with the pills, so I stopped taking them. There are a lot of people having health issues because of this. Financial issues, marital problems, and you know, I don't know, and this is pre-catch shares, we were all happy and profitable. Now we're not.

AW: And do you have continuing health problems because of the stress?

SW: Yeah, yeah.

AW: And how about relationship problems? How is... I mean, you said your wife is awesome, but I'm sure that the stress of your job puts stress on your family.

SW: Oh, yeah, without a doubt. Not sleeping, not being able to do things that we used to do. You know, we don't... money's always an issue, you know?

AW: She has to work fulltime now, where...

SW: Yeah.

AW: ... she didn't before?

[27:18]

SW: Yeah, yeah. Kids were on sports programs, they can't do it anymore. We're cutting back where we can, so....

AW: And you've seen other people have similar issues in their personal lives and their health?

SW: Yeah.

AW: Yeah.

SW: Yeah.

AW: Speaking of health, do you have health insurance?

SW: Yeah. I mean, that's the reason my wife started working is because, you know, under this new mandate we had to get health insurance, so, with the state, so... she went back to work and got a job; she works pretty much for free. She works with insurance, so....

AW: And so before catch shares, you had your own health insurance?

SW: Yeah, yeah. Well, she started towards... she started in 2008, started working for insurance, so....

AW: I know how expensive personal health insurance can be.

SW: Yeah.

AW: It's quite costly. And you said you had boat insurance?

SW: Yeah.

AW: And has the type of boat insurance that you have changed at all over the last couple of years?

SW: It keeps going up.

AW: It keeps going up.

SW: Yeah.

AW: And has joining a sector had any impact on your personal relationships with your social circle or your colleagues?

SW: Not really, no. The guys that were friends are friends. The guys that weren't, aren't, you know? But I would say that, I mean, I just, there's a lot of talk of saying there's a reason people without a lot of quota don't have a lot of quota. And the underlying tone of that is that we were lazy and that we didn't work hard. And none of that's true, so, that's, you know, so some of these people coincidentally are, you know, winners in catch shares, so, you know, people like that I really don't like to associate with anymore.

AW: Well, that's quite a bold statement for them to say.

SW: Well, actually it wasn't even the fishermen that said that. It was somebody who buys fish, so it shouldn't really... there's still members of catch shares that I still like. But a fish buyer said that, so... someone who's never been on a boat before should keep his mouth shut.

AW: I have to agree with you there.

SW: Yeah, yeah.

[30:12]

AW: And do you find that you interact with other sector members by doing projects or working together in other ways, sort of coming together to discuss issues within the sector or with catch shares?

SW: We don't have the time and we don't have the money. And we don't have the patience to do any of this stuff anymore. The people that should have been representing us aren't. The people that we paid money to... you know, the problem with sectors and catch shares is that the organizations that run these sectors get most of their money from people with a lot of quota, so they basically have to take care of the people with the most quota and somehow try to piece the people with the least. 'Cause the people with the most quota are paying the bills, and the people with the least aren't. So it's the winners and losers, you know?

But I'd say, what's the number... 20% of the people running catch shares? You know, talk about economic efficiency, you know. At the public hearings for Amendment 18, you know they talk about, you know, the break even analysis or something like that and the White paper that came out... who's to decide how much money a person needs to make? You know, I know guys who can make \$30-40,000 a year and live off of that. But if you have a big boat that comes in that only grosses \$30-40,000 and that's \$30-40,000 and that's considered a bad trip.

So there's big, there's a lot of, I don't even know what the word is, but you know, a lot of bullshit. People, you know, shouldn't be deciding how much money people should be making

from the ocean. It shouldn't be decided. What economic efficiency is... economic efficiency is what the individual makes it, you know? Somebody makes \$30,000 a year with a boat, then that's fine. You get someone with 15 boats that makes \$4 million a year, that's fine. If they're happy with it, then that's fine. But you shouldn't get rid of the guy making \$30,000 a year 'cause he isn't making \$4 million a year. So... and that's the problem, you know? People are deciding that if you don't make a lot of money then you're not a good fisherman and you're not economically efficient.

You know, this efficiency thing is nothing more than a farce. Economic efficiency is catch shares... is catching as much fish as you possibly can, as close to land as you possibly can. And that's what's been happening for the last year and a half, almost two years now. And we're seeing localized depletion of fish stocks on the inshore areas from Maine, all the way to the Cape. 'Cause the whole fishing fleet in New England has moved inshore. And they're not doing anything wrong, but it's the failure of catch shares to recognize these problems and to do something about it.

Fish stocks... you have inshore and offshore; you have different fish stocks and, you know, the inshore is going to get wiped out. Big boats are going to move back offshore and the small boats are going to be left inshore with nothing, like we were back in the early '90s, the mid '90s. And that will be the end of it for the inshore day boat fleet.

We're going to lose our communities.... Our communities are really devastated now already. You know, there used to be 34 boats in Plymouth in 1994. There's 1 [now]... and the one boat in Plymouth is the boat I moved from Scituate to Plymouth, to keep a presence down there. The other two guys that fished out of Plymouth are both selling their permits, so....

[34:33]

AW: So you had mentioned that these boats have moved to fish closer to shore, how has that influenced safety at sea? Do people take more risks or less? Or do you think that they're just trying to get out there, get the fish, and come home, or...?

SW: I don't know what they're doing. Safety, I don't know, fucking safety, you know, is that really an issue?

AW: Well, I know that the way that they manage the scallop fleet is, you know, they have the closed areas and everyone goes there and it's sort of like derby fishing. I don't know if any phenomenons like that have happened because of catch shares.

SW: Well the derby, yeah, [they] moved all the effort inside. So are those offshore boats safer inside? Probably. Are the inshore boats safer going offshore? No.

AW: Do you find that a lot of boats are fishing in the same area?

SW: Oh yeah.

AW: Yeah.

SW: Yeah. I've never seen anything like it before in my life. Never. Ever.

AW: And do you think that fishermen that are in sectors now are more or less involved in meetings and management and public comment periods and things like that?

SW: Less involved. Everyone's given up. If things continue the way they're going, there's no future in small boat fishing.

AW: Do you think young people coming up just can't make a living now?

[36:10]

SW: There's no place for them to go. Unless they can get on one of these big corporate owned boats and maybe someday they can be the captain, you know? The reality of it is they'll never own a business or start a business like I did. They had a chance under Days at Sea, but they don't now.

AW: And I know that you said that you're the only boat in Plymouth, but where do you keep your other boat again? I forgot.

SW: Right now it mostly fishes out of Gloucester. And right now it's in New Bedford.

AW: So you do fishing out of both Gloucester and New Bedford?

SW: Yeah.

AW: And have you seen the social dynamics of people change at the ports that you fish out of since sectors started?

SW: There's, you don't see, you don't see the guys around like you used to, you know? It's just, doom and gloom if you even see them around, you know? Down in New Bedford, most of the guys are working for companies. So, you know, the days of owners and operators is rapidly declining, so....

AW: And do you think that if there's any way that you could go back and change it, what would you change it to? The Days at Sea allocations?

SW: Yeah. I mean, I don't see... they worked. Days at Sea and trip limits worked. They were talking, you know, you keep hearing these environmental groups and other people saying, "Well, what about the discard?" The only discard...the only bad discarding I saw under trip

limits and Days at Sea were when big boats came inside. They've got... the gear is three times bigger than what we use. They were towing a lot longer. They didn't know to do short tows. They came in and they were getting into like huge piles of codfish and discarding and... we had one guy out of Scituate that was an offshore boat. He came in and he started day fishing. He was catching 20-30,000 pounds of codfish in a tow. And picking out the large cod. And keeping 800 pounds of large cod a day, and throwing the rest back dead. And his crew quit, and he got a lot of pressure from guys that were on the pier, and he was bragging about it, showing pictures and, you know....

AW: That's horrible.

SW: Yeah. And that's... the couple incidences like that and everyone says "Well, what about the discard?" Well, the small boats, the guys who traditionally fished here, the guys who, you know, care about the resource and care about sustainability, didn't do things like that. And on top of that, we had a program which was called the Running Clock. If you went out and caught... we had an 800 pound trip limit. If you caught 1,600 or 2,400 pounds, you could call in and declare that you've caught 3 days worth of codfish. So you'd land it, come to the dock, tie up for 3 days, and you would lose 3 Days at Sea. So there was no discarding at all. And it worked very well.

But the corrupt enforcement agency for NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) thought that we were gaming the system, and they got it stopped. I think that the only reason that it was stopped is that they saw that we were making money and we were a little more efficient at it. Not spending the money. But these are the very same people that have been cited. None of them have been convicted yet, of shaking down the fishing industry for a number of years, so, you know, hurray for them. They ruined a good thing. And it had a negative effect on the resource and the industry, but a handful of people with their 'holier than thou' attitudes were able to gain the system and just put the hammer to us once again. Either fine us out of business or just taking our ability to make money away.

[40:28]

AW: So there's really corrupt enforcement officials out there?

SW: Oh yeah. I don't know. A lot of them have been moved around. And I want to make it clear that it's not so much that the guys at the docks that were doing the enforcement for NOAA. But it was the people higher up that were actually prosecuting the cases. You know, the guys at the docks were decent. The enforcement agents, you know, the one's out on the beat, its' when it got into the hands of, you know, headquarters in Gloucester... that those people were the ones playing the system. I got caught... I got wrapped up in that.

AW: You did?

SW: Yeah. Boat drifted into closed area with no gear onboard. Guys were asleep. I was running a dragger and there was a guy running my gillnet boat in the Western Gulf of Maine closure, 6 days after VMS became mandatory. And all the boats in the fleet, they had all kinds of problems with the polling rates, you know, every half hour, every hour, but the system couldn't handle it. My boat drifted into the closed area. You know, there was no gear on the boat, they were asleep. It was a beautiful night. It drifted in. The captain woke up, steamed back outside. You know, got up in the morning, started hauling and 12:30 in the afternoon we got called to come in because the catch is being confiscated and he was charged with fishing in the closed area. He was pinged by a satellite. There was no gear... and it's not illegal to be in there. It's only illegal to be in there if you're fishing, which they weren't. Or if he had gear that wasn't properly stowed, but there was no gear on the boat, so....

AW: So what happened?

[42:07]

SW: He seized the catch and gave me like a \$4,000 fine. I got like \$11,000, almost \$12,000 from me.

AW: Never got the...?

SW: Just before Christmas. The crew quit because they wanted the money and I didn't have the money at the time to give them, so they all quit. I had to go out... get off the other boat, grab the other boat. Find someone to go with me, go out and grab the gear, some in... and that's that. That's, you know, an \$11,000 slap in the face. Those maggots.

AW: How long ago was that?

SW: That was in... was it 2005 when VMS became mandatory? 2004, 2005, I don't know. I don't really....

AW: So you mentioned earlier that you'd leased quota?

SW: Yeah.

[Interview cuts off mid-sentence at [42:54] – Interviewee walked out of interview due to frustration with the subject matter being discussed.]