

Name of person interviewed: John Reardon [JR] with voice from Kirsten Bendikson [KB]

Facts about this person:

Age Unknown

Sex Male

Occupation General Manager for IMP Fishing Gear Limited in New Bedford; former fisherman

If a fisherman,

Home port, New Bedford, MA
and Hail Port

Residence (Town where lives) Unknown

Ethnic background (if known) Unknown

Interviewer: Millie Rahn [MR]

Transcriber: Azure Dee Westwood [ADW]

Place interview took place: IMP Fishing Gear Limited, New Bedford, MA

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INDEX/KEYWORDS**KEYWORDS**

Marine supplies; IMP Fishing Gear Limited; industrial marine products; Newfoundland; marine safety; draggers; scallopers; NMFS; regulations; new technology in fishing; SMAST; fisheries science; credibility; Radar's (business); Bendikson's [?]; diversify; dying industry; generations of fishermen/families; poor science; bycatch problems; mismanagement; hard work; gentrification of ports; seal over-population; women in fisheries.

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- [00:00] JR background briefly given; Description of IMP Fishing Gear Limited; products offered; travel and selling involved.
- [02:48] Scallop industry doing good but dragger fleet doing bad; IMP business has suffered but diversified; improvements in technology over the years.
- [06:04] Discussion of SMAST science as positive and advanced, supported by IMP; advantage of former fisherman doing business with fishermen; Bendikson family.
- [08:58] Future of fisheries; scalloping doing good where dragger and gillnet fleet will have trouble; misconceptions of world-wide fisheries problems; some problems are universally applied to all fishermen and fisheries.
- [12:01] Will lose long history of families involved in fishing; other problems with water pollution etc. but blame placed on fishing industry; misconception about fishing gear destruction of ocean bottom.
- [15:14] Influence of nature on restructuring ocean bottom; bycatch and discard problems due to mismanagement; poor, uncourageous political representation/leadership.
- [18:03] Future of fishing may be like a guest worker program; lack of younger recruitment of fishermen into the industry; modern fisherman has to be hard-working and responsible to survive; poor/uninformed management leadership.
- [21:01] Gentrification of Portland, ME and New Bedford ports; discussion of past meeting JR attended to inform Canadian Ministers of fisheries about U.S. system.
- [23:56] Natural fish stock patterns verses what science says; seal populations are high due to Canada regulations largely.
- [27:08] Women involved in fisheries; Settlement House owned by two women; advice JR gives to his son regarding hard work.
- [29:48] [End interview, however it keeps recording]
- [33:01] [End of Audio]

TRANSCRIPT

[Start of Audio]

[00:00]

[MR]: Today is Tuesday, November 28, 2006. My name is Millie Rahn and I'm here doing an interview with John Reardon at IMP Fishing Gear Limited in New Bedford. John, tell me a little bit about yourself: your full name, where and when you were born, how you got into this business, what IMP stands for and we'll go from there.

[JR]: My name is John Reardon, I was born in Boston, MA. I got into the fishing industry in the early '80's. I started out on a dragger and ended up retiring from fishing in '99 and started working for IMP Fishing Gear in November of '99. IMP is Industrial Marine Products. We started out selling fishing gear in Newfoundland and then now have 15 branches in Canada and the United States.

[MR]: That warms my heart. I went to graduate school in Newfoundland and actually just met with some people from the Province last night about getting more involved in the festival. What kind of things do you do here – I noticed your title is General Manager. What does the company do?

[JR]: Under this roof, it's primarily fishing gear, commercial safety, marine safety. My duties are covering the United States. We have customers from Alaska to Bermuda. We have had some business internationally but primarily it's the eastern seaboard of the United States is our coverage area.

[MR]: And do you sell, do you go out on the road selling?

[JR]: I do. With the use of the internet now, it kind of relinquishes our time. I was in Seattle for 10 days and Vancouver, British Columbia – we're looking to buy a company on the west coast – time consuming event. And then there was the Pacific Marine Expo which was 10 days. We have a booth there.

[MR]: And exactly what kind of gear do you sell?

[JR]: Everything fishing related that you could imagine, from hooks to life rafts.

[MR]: And how has the industry changed just in the last seven years that you have been involved from this end? And where do you see it going?

[02:48]

[JR]: Well, the good and the bad of it is that the scallop industry is doing very well and to their own... the boat owners and the people involved in the scallop industry did some self-conservation on their own and they kind of dictate what they are going to do. The dragger fleet which is under more of a... the curtain from NMFS, they monitor everything – maximum sustainable yield from fisheries – it's just not going to happen, it's impossible for nature to do that. In between all that, they keep tweaking the dials, not allowing nature to catch up with anything they attempt to do.

[MR]: And how are you affected by the regulations and how have things changed from year to year?

[JR]: Well, the dragger fleet, the trawling end of it, we take hits every year on it and it's probably decreased our business by about 40 percent. But obviously we diversify into different things; we're doing more into safety now. We just hired another guys to work our safety department here. There are some security issues we're dealing with, we're selling more to municipalities, more clothing, things like that for the police departments,

the fire departments, rescue suits and so forth. Safety seems to be the way that the industry, this part at least here, is going to be growing whereas the others may be shrinking a little bit.

[MR]: I know when I talk to the old timers and I ask how things have changed, what are some of the most outstanding changes and they always talk about the technology, both on the boats and things like safety and that kind of amazed them. They survived in the old days obviously but it was really a lot harder. And also the technology of linking the boats and the land and shore support and things like that.

[JR]: For good and bad. The technology has been great. The safety has been huge. When I first started fishing, survival suits were kind of the new thing on the block. Life rafts were pretty much unheard of; we used to have a dory up on the roof. And usually when you went to check on it, you could put your foot through the floor of it. But mostly were wooden boats but they didn't have the issues that the steel boats have today. Wooden boat will flounder around for awhile. Technology, you go from using a sideband to using satellite telephones in 20 years we've... it's amazing. Onboard computer systems, cameras on nets, cameras on dredges.

[06:04]

[MR]: Do you get involved in the R&D end of developing these products?

[JR]: Very peripherally. It's probably time consuming, but most of it is just your opinion on something. We're involved with SMAST as are most of the suppliers are. We support them. They do a lot of mapping and it's very expensive and we try to support them as best we can. But they're probably as high tech as anybody and they are doing a lot of things: they are working with the big underwater companies and they're...speaking of technology, they've just taken it to the Nth degree right now.

[MR]: And do you work with a lot of your Canadian counterparts?

[JR]: Not really, no I'm kind of the red-headed step child here I suppose. That's what they call me. I'm pretty much left alone. The first year or so they were very careful because they had some turn over here, they needed someone to come over and kind of shake things up a little bit I suppose. To get someone that knew a little bit about the industry I guess that's the best way to put it. Came in to kick the Country Club out.

[MR]: So do you find being a fisherman and dealing with fishermen an advantage? Or is it kind of like doctors only talk to other doctors?

[JR]: Yeah. If you can talk the talk and walk the walk, it's a step up on somebody that's trying to sell something that he's only looked at in a picture, whereas you know exactly what the application is; it's a huge benefit if you've stood next to this guy when its blowing 60 miles an hour out in the middle of nowhere – there's great advantage there, yeah.

[MR]: And how does what your company does contrast with what Radar's does?

[JR]: We don't. We actually interact a lot; we're customers of each other. One day I'm the vendor, the next day I'm the customer. We go back and forth. We have a very amicable relationship. We like dealing with people, like the Bendikson [?] family for instance, because they are the last of the last. There's no real family like them left, at least in New Bedford. There may be a couple small shops around, but the Bendikson family is unique. Unique in the fact that they've been able to diversify and survive through all of this government nonsense.

[08:58]

[MR]: Where do you see the industry going?

[JR]: Well initially probably two years ago I thought that 2007 would be a break out year for the commercial dragger fleet, but it appears that NMFS has other ideas. I think that 2007 could probably be – at least for the dragger fleet. Scalloping, they self-govern themselves, so they'll survive and they'll do fairly well. The only thing is they have these Closed Area accesses and maybe a big price fluctuation when they do these things. But overall, I think the scallop fleet will survive. The other small one is the gillnet fleet; they are going to go through some tough times until we get better science. The dragger fleet is a huge concern right now.

[MR]: What's your feeling about the future of fish? There have been predictions that we're going to be out of fish in a certain period of time?

[JR]: Well, that's what you love about the press is that they kind of throw everything in the world right in our lap because we're the most regulated industry in the United States. Hands down. We're the most watched; we have everything from VMS to NMFS building an 85,000 square foot building right in our backyard. The big problem is that they talk about the world-wide trawl fleet, fishing fleet and it all gets thrown into the same basket. It's just... it just doesn't work. There's areas where – yes there's water temperature differences that are of a concern – but I think, when they start talking about 50 years down the road and they can't even dictate what the weather is going to be like tomorrow, I have an issue with that. It's supposed to be nice today, look at it.

[MR]: Well, this is a question that I always ask fishermen because I'm a folklorist by training and many fishermen have been fishing for generations in their family or through their occupational contacts and know that these things go in cycles and they are out there – day in day out, year in year out, and that's the kind of thing that is really interesting to get the different opinions on. As opposed to somebody sitting at their computer and doing projections and things like that.

[JR]: When you just mentioned that, I was talking to a guy because I had gone to a lobster meeting about 6 weeks ago and there was a guy there and he's a customer of ours and he was talking about his family. They are actually listed as being part of the Pilgrims that came over here from Europe and they have always been fishermen.

[12:01]

[JR]: He was complaining about how the changes have gone on and how dramatic it's been and he's probably going to be in the final of his family that will be a fisherman – that's 300 years. It's kind of sad; there was a guy at the Festival I guess and he was from Bourne. He was at the Festival talking about being a fishing family for 250-260 years and you look at it and say, "It's not right." It's the cleanest food in the world. That's what baffles me. They talk about farming and everything else, aqua-farming, and if you look at the pollution content and what it does to land and never mind the ocean; antibiotics that they put in the feed, and dyes and everything else, you really wonder. We're going from something that you can just take right out of the water, put a knife to and throw on a pan, to something that you look at and it just doesn't look right, it looks like a boot. I think that's going to be a huge problem. I think we're going to see more serious viruses. We have antibiotics that don't even work now and it's because of what's going into the food.

[MR]: It seems like there is such a dichotomy between, yes, we're being told to eat more fish, it's healthier, in general as opposed to meat. And then the same people are saying, you know, there's not going to be more fish. There's all these food related things – there's this

dichotomy going on and it's being argued kind of out there and they never go to the source.

[JR]: It's all amongst them. All the experts as we call them, where they never come to the person that actually supplies. It just baffles me. It always has. You look at... they talk about bulldozing the ocean which is absolute garbage. There can't be anything more false. You got these guys that do their 30 second commercial and they raise millions of dollars to fight an industry that's struggling along, barely can afford a lobbyist. Now they are dealing with these sea squirts that have covered something like 1,100 square miles of Georges Bank and growing at a 20 percent rate and I firmly believe this – because they haven't allowed that floor to be turned over and now it's too the point where the bottom is dead, absolutely dead. There's no vegetation, there's no oxygenation and it's a huge problem. They don't know what to do now. They have no idea what to do. It's a very aggressive animal, I guess it is – I'm not sure what it is, honestly. But you look at other areas, they turn it over; they turn the Channel over since Radar was 16 years old. With scallop dredges. Yeah, they weigh 18,000 lbs but the fact of the matter is if you look at that ocean floor, it's as pristine as it was then. Yes, there are changes, but we've seen storms change sand lumps – 10 fathom sand lumps, that's 60 feet tall – change them and completely move it. And then move it back. People don't understand this stuff.

[15:14]

[JR]: You look at these bathymetric charts and they move all over the place. Yeah, they are generalized but then you go back and you're looking at it through a sounder and it's a completely different bottom and it has nothing to do with the fishing industry – its nature, that's all it is. It's kind of a sad fact that we're blamed for all the pollution, we're blamed for the shortage of species here; they make you fish in a box so you have bycatch. In essence, the government has created the bycatch problem. It's tragic. We're not allowed to bring everything home we catch, which is another thing that should be done. And assess some sort of time days at sea monetary factor in there. Fifteen years ago we were only allowed 1,000 pounds of haddock per trip. And every year, we couldn't get away from the haddock. We kept begging; let us bring it in, assess with the days at sea. They wouldn't do it. We killed... we couldn't get away from them; hundreds of thousands of pounds of fish; we couldn't get away from them. And it's going on right now. I won't say any more on that, but I'll let it go at that. Because it happened this year.

[KB]: They were throwing 25,000 pounds of codfish over the side.

[MR]: We were interviewing somebody...

[JR]: Easy. Try three or four times that. Because they can't bring it in. And they are talking about there being no cod. They have more concern over an underutilized species – dogfish, skates, now they are after these slime eels – its insanity. They target you, they get you to go chase them, and then they regulate them.

[MR]: Why do you think – again it's this dichotomy – Massachusetts has the sacred cod hanging in the State House. Our fortunes, historically and now, are built on maritime industries, particularly the fishery, and we're constantly undercutting... fishermen do not get to have a say. Is it because you don't have a strong lobby?

[JR]: I think part of it is we have locally a fairly strong representation – Montigne [?], Barney Frank, Studds was good, I think Kerry, he is a joke. Maybe that's not the right thing to say – Kerry is out for Kerry. If there's a camera around, it's fine. Kennedy is OK but it seems like they all talk the talk and we don't get a hell of a lot done. And in the mean

time, in ten years, we've lost half the fishing fleet here. It's through mostly... it all comes back to how the science is actually accomplished. We're fortunate to have SMAST involved in it more and more now. Even if it's bad news, at least we know that it's honest news.

[18:03]

[MR]: You talked about families who are no longer going to be fishing in the next generation. Do you see a new generation coming through?

[JR]: No. No, I see them being all, what do they call them, guest workers. That's what I see. We're going to see more and more of the hourly wage type people. You see it in the paper right now: they are trying to hire hourly wage people instead of going out and working for a share of the stock.

[MR]: That's pretty grim.

[JR]: The average age in the fleet, they did that two years ago, and it was in the 40's and that's not a good sign. The only time they only print anything in the paper about the fishing industry, its bad news. It's either bad news or violation; it's always bad news. Look at Deval Patrick, the first words out of his mouth were: "We have socio-affects of the industry that should be taken care of." Don't worry about the economic ones, for the other 99.9 percent. We've always been an easy target, I suppose that's what it comes down to. Every, someone that has issues, they run down to the mental health clinic and they say they were a fisherman, they get thrown right in that pot like they are a present day fisherman. Whereas today, if you're a fisherman, a vast majority of them are guys that go to work, they have families, many of them college degrees. We have guys that are pilots. There's no messing around anymore. You can't. It's too physically demanding and too mentally demanding.

[MR]: That's my answer always. Anybody who is messing up, they are not going to survive.

[JR]: It's a multi-million dollar operation now. It's no longer a \$200,000 boat with a sounder and a sideband. You're looking at \$2-4 million investment. Never mind 6-10 employees. We go back to the government; they've never ever taken into affect these socio-economic affects what they've done. Pat Kurkul – I call it the dysfunctional family in Gloucester – because of the way they operate. They have no clue as to what they are doing. I know what they are trying to do. If they are trying to salvage some sort of fishing industry [laughs] I can't say what I'd really like to say.

[MR]: So for your company you were saying you're diversifying and moving into more safety and security, so that's a way of surviving. But when I look at the waterfront, what are we going to see like in 5-10 years even?

[21:01]

[JR]: Interesting question. Look at Portland today. It's a shame what's happened up there... it's good and bad; some people call it progress but when you see million dollar condominiums going up. The issue was people going and staying and walking up and down the docks and seeing all the nice boats and seeing the motif of Rockport, Motif #1 and saying how nice it is, as soon as they buy a condominium, they don't want to smell diesel fuel, they don't want to smell bait, and they don't want to hear that damn diesel start at 5 o'clock in the morning. Well that's what we got. And that's what you got in Portland. And it's a...

[MR]: So it becomes more of a museum than a working waterfront?

- [JR]: Yeah, it very well could be. In five years, it's going to be very difficult for the infrastructure to survive at the rate of... they are pulling back boats as a potential buy-back for the dragger fleet which is really going to be a painful one. And there's guys that just want to get out; they are retirement age, they are closing in on retirement age and they figure it might be best to get out, salvage their permit for some kind of monies.
- [MR]: So do you have any advice for anybody who'd want to come into the industry?
- [JR]: It was interesting. Several months ago we were invited to go up to a meeting in Boston, it was at MIT with Madeline Hall-Arbor. And they brought in all the fisheries scientists and ministers as they call them, which would be the equivalent – I guess Kurkul would be an Assistant Minister. But they are voted in and voted out. The problem in the United States with National Marine Fisheries Service is they are appointed; they are politically... about as politically hacked as you can get and most of them don't have background or know anything about the industry – they are number crunchers and hatchet men. The Ministers were just baffled by the fact that we can't just vote these people out of office.
- [MR]: And who is Kurkul again?
- [JR]: She's the Regional Manager for NMFS.
- [MR]: I know the current Trade Minister in Newfoundland is a former fisherman and most of the Trade Ministers, the Fishery Ministers... again, they talk the talk and know what they are dealing with.
- [JR]: And they go through tough times. There's no question that Newfoundland is in very, very difficult times.
- [MR]: So in this MIT meeting, what came out of that?
- [23:56]
- [JR]: Well they were just more looking for input; how we operated, how was the days at sea program working. Because they see all these regulations and they... any scientist who has an open mind and not someone that is being paid by an environmental group, looks at it and says you can't keep tweaking the dials every year. You have to let science catch up to nature. The old timers used to say it was a seven year cycle. In 20 years it used to go 7-7-6 and it was almost guaranteed that you could turn around the fishery back. I think our big issue right now is we're being blamed for a lot more. The towns we live in, we're putting chloramines and chlorine and everyone has the perfect green yard. We have to get rid of the nitrates in the water. There's nuclear power, something we should look at, but then again you get into warming water issues. Seal population is a nightmare. We've seen seals gone from 2,000 to almost 20,000 on the Cape and they are multiplying at 20 percent. They eat 30 percent of their body weight in soft tissue everyday. Which means what they do is they will come up on a codfish, bite it, split it open and eat the liver out of it and that's it.
- [MR]: And that's a nightmare because of...?
- [JR]: There are no regulations on it. You can't touch them, they are a protected mammal. That goes back to about ten years when the Canadian Ministers cut back on the hunting of the seals up there in Newfoundland, actually. They cut back for a couple years and all the seals moved this way because there's nothing to eat. Now we have seals down, they've seen seals down as far as North Carolina, and this is a cold water mammal. Everybody wants to protect all these things but... last time I checked, the guy standing on two legs was more important.
- [MR]: Is there anything that you want to add that I haven't asked?

[JR]: No. Just don't call me an old timer I guess.

[MR]: No, we're nice. Part of this whole project is, as I see it, is really documenting the industry as its changing. And because there are a lot of old timers down here, we get a lot of the old compare and contrast, talking about how things were done in the old days and their advice and their observations on the good things that have changed, the not so good things that have changed, but certainly in this case, and this past year at the Festival we were dealing with a lot of younger people in the industry, both different ethnic groups and younger people. This coming year we're going to be looking at women in the industry. Again that's a story that isn't much told. So when we get all of this together, then we will have a bit of the story... at least we'll have representation from each aspect.

[27:08]

[JR]: There are a lot of women involved. From Kirsten, there were a lot of women that went fishing – I can think of one girl's name, Sue, she worked on the *Mischief* years ago and she worked on the *Curlew II* with Allen Sherman, Sue something and she quit fishing probably 15 years ago.

[KB]: She's still around though?

[JR]: Yeah, she lives in Woods Hole I think. Because Krueger [?] knew her.

[KB]: I saw McCarthy at the Seamen's Bethel, the service, her daughter is Peggy – what's her name? Barbara. Remember her husband was blind and she used to do the nets and everything? So she's going to be part of the Festival this year. So there are a lot of women.

[MR]: And also, both women in shore support and women who are keeping families going when the guys are going out to sea.

[JR]: The Settlement Houses are mostly owned... this one down here, Eddie Marie, there's both women that own it. Two characters, I mean they are very interesting people; hard working – it all comes down to hard work.

[MR]: I think that's true.

[JR]: I think that's somewhere lost in the translation too. People are... a lot of people don't want to work anymore. Again, you go back to looking at someone like Radar's show, his two sons being there, his daughter is there part time even though she's working in the school system. When my son was 12 I had him in here and I said, "Remember how this is." Because it was hot, nasty; we were doing a really tough job out back. I said, "This is what it's like if you don't have a college education. You don't want to work as hard as your father." It's OK to be involved in the industry, but you want to have an education first because if not, it's going to be a very difficult life style. You try to remind them that hard work is critically important. Plenty of time to have fun, just put it off for a little while.

[MR]: Work hard, play hard. Kirsten, is there anything you wanted to add or ask?

[KB]: No, I think that John did a great job.

[MR]: I just want to say for the record, this is Kirsten Bendikson [?] who is the other voice on the tape. Our tech support and Festival co-Director. Well if there's nothing else you want to add, I will say thank you very much for your time and perspective and we'll see you at the Festival.

[29:48]

[End interview, however it keeps recording]

[33:01]

[End of Audio]