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Wang: Okay. So, this is an interview with Kyle Pemberton. And this interview is taking place on August 6, 2018. The interviewers are Susan Wang and...

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Lesyna: Kristine Lesyna.

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Wang: And we'll have you introduce yourself.

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Pemberton: Hi. My name is Kyle Pemberton. We are in the cabin of the Moriah Lee in Pillar Point Harbor, Half Moon Bay, California.

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Lesyna: Great, thanks.

Wang: Thanks.

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Wang: So, we just wanted to start off with some background about you. So, how did— can you tell us how you got into fishing?

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Pemberton: I started fishing with my father at a young age, Salmon trolling and a little bit of crabbing. And I was going to school for a little while. And I ended up getting a job on a crab boat. And then just kind of working my way up through, you know, deckhand to alternate skipper to now owning my own vessel.

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Wang: Wow. How old were you when you started?

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Pemberton: My first few fishing trips were probably around 10 to 12 years old with my father. Just getting days off of school here and there and getting to hang out with him. And then I became, basically, a full-time fisherman eight years ago in 2011.

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Lesyna: And how old are you now?

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Pemberton: 30 years old.

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Lesyna: That's young.

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Pemberton: So, about 19 I got, I became a full-time fisherman.

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Wang: And all here, in Half Moon Bay?

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Pemberton: Yeah. All my fishing experience has been out of Half Moon Bay. Mostly crab and Salmon. And then ended up buying a vessel and... Well, I did start working on the Mr. Morgan. And that's where I learned the groundfish industry. And that's what peaked my interest in the groundfish industry and ended up pursuing that.

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Wang: So, you said your dad taught you? So, has—was he a fisherman as well?

00:02:19

Pemberton: Yeah.

Wang: Is he a fisherman?

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Pemberton: My dad's a current fisherman right now. He's a part-time fisherman. Yeah. He has a Harbor Master job here in Pillar Point. And he's still a Salmon fisherman and a crabber.

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Wang: How did—

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Pemberton: Dungeness Crab. Yeah.

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Wang: Oh. So, he's—is—are a lot of other members of your family also in fishing?

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Pemberton: My brother's fishing on the Merva W here in Half Moon Bay in the squid industry, crab. And he has his own Salmon boat also.

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Wang: Wow. So, your whole family almost.

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Pemberton: Yeah.

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Wang: Does it, like, what's the history? Does it go back a few generations?

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Pemberton: My uncle is also a fisherman in Half Moon Bay here. He's a crabber and a Salmon fisherman and a bla- he does black cod or sablefish, long line. And he has a long history of fishing in all, all types of fisheries. And my grandfather didn't do much fishing. So, my uncle is the first in our family to start fishing.

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Wang: That's really cool.

Lesyna: And you were born in Half Moon Bay?

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Pemberton: Yep. Half Moon Bay.

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Lesyna: How about your dad?

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Pemberton: My father was born in Redwood City.

00:03:41

Lesyna: Okay. And your grandfather?

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Pemberton: I don't know.

00:03:47

Lesyna: Okay.

00:03:49

Pemberton: Probably Redwood City.

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Wang: Why—do you know why or how your uncle and your dad got into fishing?

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Pemberton: They started off... My uncle started off in the commercial abalone industry when it was around. And my dad basically saw him making some good money abalone diving. And so, then they started diving abalone together. And then, I think that was the first experience my dad had with fishing. And then he ended up working on some squid boats around here. And then ended up buying his own crab and Salmon operation. And then he's still currently fishing. My uncle is still currently fishing also. But, I couldn't tell you when they started.

00:04:43

Lesyna: Did you learn about, a lot about how to fish from your father and your uncle?

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Pemberton: I think I got a good start with them. But my father was, was also a Harbor Master so he never was like, a really full-time. Not all—he used to be full-time when I was younger. But then he got a more, I guess, stable job as a Harbor Master around here. And so, I ended up learning most of my profession- or, I ended up learning a lot from the boats I worked on full-time. So, that would be the Pale Horse around town here. And then it was, then it was running my own- running a boat for

somebody else, the Misty Dawn. And then it started—then I started working on the Mr. Morgan in the groundfish industry. And I worked for him for about seven years. And then we—I ended up finding this opportunity with the Moriah Lee.

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Lesyna: And so how long have you been trawling for California Halibut from the Moriah Lee?

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Pemberton: I've currently been trawling Halibut for one year. I've basically learned trawling through asking questions and trial and error. I didn't work on a trawl boat. I worked on a Scottish seine boat before this. And so, it's just been, kind of, a really tough learning curve. There's not many trawlers left these days to ask questions to. And... Yeah.

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Lesyna: So, you've been asking or working with other local Halibut trawl fishermen to help you out?

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Pemberton: Yeah.

00:06:33

Lesyna: Okay.

00:06:34

Pemberton: Tom Genochio on the Helen Ruth was a, a big help in my life getting me started in trawling. And then, the Bettencourt's on the, on the Miss Moriah over here, they, they were also a big help in my, in my fishing, trawling, in my trawling side of it.

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Lesyna: Why did you choose this fishery? What attracted you to it? Did it, kind of, fall into your lap? Or...is it something you pursued?

00:07:23

Pemberton: Yeah. I, I basically saw an opportunity to get involved with the, the California, or with the West Coast groundfish industry by being able to get accepted in the California ground or... I got accepted in the... I saw the opportunity of getting involved with the California Groundfish Collective. And I thought it was a good thing because having multiple fisheries to go fishing for, I think, is very important these days with the, the volatility of markets, the volatility of Salmon. Some, some years you can go. Some years you can't. California Halibut industry, I saw the opportunity to buy a permit. And, you know, the, the rarity of a California Halibut permit just, kind of, peaked my interest because there's not many guys doing it. So, just trying to, whatever. Just trying to build a business off multiple fisheries. And so, not many people entering into the California groundfish. Or, not California. The West Coast groundfish. That's, kind of, peaked my interest, too.

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Wang: What, what are the other fisheries you're involved in currently?

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Pemberton: Currently involved with Dungeness, California Dungeness Crab fishing, California Salmon fishing, California Halibut, and the West Coast groundfish trawling.

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Lesyna: And you do all of that from this boat?

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Pemberton: Yes. On the Moriah Lee. Yeah.

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Wang: So, how do you choose? Is it based on just, what's open at the time? Or, how do you decide like, what's, which fishery you're going to be—

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Pemberton: Right now, my best fishery that I'm in right now is the California- or the Dungeness Crab Fishery. So, that is number one on my list. Whenever I can do that, I'll do that. And then, basically, if Salmon's open, I love Salmon fishing. So, I'll try to do Salmon. But if that's not paying the bills I'll switch over to California Halibut. And if that's not making it, if that's not really paying the bills, I'll go over to the West Coast, West Coast groundfish. So, whatever. Just try to keep the boat working year-round. And, you know, obviously the overhead on a boat's very high. And so, you've got to stay busy.

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Lesyna: So, you have no time off because you're either out fishing one of those fisheries or you're at the dock working on the boat.

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Pemberton: Yeah. This is, this is—I've been fishing this boat, this operation for a year and a half now. So, I haven't really taken any time off yet. I hope to in the future.

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Lesyna: Have you trawled for Halibut anywhere else in the state? Or has it all been out of Half Moon Bay?

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Pemberton: It's all been between Pigeon Point and, I guess, San Francisco Bay.

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Wang: How do you know, or like, determine where you're going to fish?

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Pemberton: I, this year I just started in front of Half Moon Bay and I've been slowly, kind of, branching out, learning new trawl grounds. You know, the big thing about trawling is that you find the bottom and you find the spots where the boat hangs up. And you can tear up your nets. And you can, you know, break, break things when you hang up.

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Wang: So, you've experienced that?

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Pemberton: Yeah.

00:11:42

Wang: Oh.

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Pemberton: I lost my net down in Morro Bay last year on a sunken vessel that I found. I ended up retrieving it. But that was a... You know, nets are not cheap. They're around, they're around 15,000 dollars for a net in the... It's a big oh, it's a big, big thing to lose.

00:12:06

Wang: How'd you retrieve it?

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Pemberton: A big grapple. I had a big grapple made and I ended up dragging that around and snagging a wing of the net. And then slowly working it off the vessel on the bottom. And now I have a piece of it in my front yard, too.

00:12:20

Wang: Oh. Man. Okay. So, I guess, in your ex-, in your year of Halibut trawling with, have you had a typical day? Or, what is... Could you just describe what a day would be like?

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Pemberton: The three months I've done Halibut trawling this year was basically looking at the weather. If the weather permitted, if it seemed safe enough to go out and go Halibut trawling I would wake up at five a.m. and head out, head out straight out of Half Moon Bay. And... Well, depending on where I fish, kind of, was what time I left. But if I was fishing out in front I'd leave at five a.m. Put the net in the water at sun up, or sunrise. Make my first couple of tows. Make breakfast. And then, just kind of keep working at it. If it wasn't a good area, then the next day I'd probably end up, moving to a different area. And then try out there. And I would basically fished seven days a week if the weather allowed it. And then would be in, be in around, you know, 9:00 or 10:00 at night, or... And then start over at like four or five in the morning.

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Wang: It sounds like—no sleep.

Lesyna: Long days. Were you ever surprised by your catch?

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Pemberton: When I first started I was surprised because I was catching fish. And then it slowly started... It slowly started dwindling after that until I didn't, until I wasn't making money. And so, I had to switch over to the West Coast Ground Fishery. And I went down to Morro Bay to fish down there.

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Lesyna: So, the overall amount of Halibut that you were catching started to drop off?

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Pemberton: Yeah.

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Lesyna: Do you think that was seasonal?

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Pemberton: Yes. The, the fish went into San Francisco Bay.

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Lesyna: Okay.

00:14:16

Pemberton: They're not in the Halibut trawl zone anymore.

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Lesyna: Did you ever find reliable fishing areas? Or, did you just keep experimenting? Did you ever go back to one spot a few times?

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Pemberton: Oh, yeah. I went to the same spot over and over. And some days they were there and some days they weren't. And through talking to other fishermen, I, I see that there's Halibut in the ocean. And comparing catches with them, like, I realized I was doing just fine. I was keeping up with, with what everybody else's done. And... Yeah.

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Wang: Do you work with others on this boat?

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Pemberton: I have one other crew member when I'm Halibut fishing. And then... That's it. Just one other guy.

00:15:08

Wang: Okay. That's a lot of work.

Lesyna: Did you have a really memorable fishing day that you want to tell us about from this last year? Good or bad.

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Pemberton: Yeah. Halibut trawling has been, kind of, a much easier, easier fishery than fishing on the edge of the shelf or fishing a lot... Fishing Halibut is a lot easier than fishing the West Coast ground fishery. So, I felt like it was actually much better, much easier on the boat. The gear is smaller for Halibut fishing. It's lighter. There's a lot less catch to, to deal with when you're Halibut fishing. So, it, it was just a nice... It's a nice fishery to be involved in with me. I... Yeah. There's, there's nice sunny days where my, the nice calm sunny days where just, were just those nice days. That's what I remember.

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Wang: So, do you see yourself pursue, like, focusing on this fishery, or still, kind of, choosing all, like, all the four different fisheries you are involved in?

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Pemberton: I'll stay doing all, all the fisheries I'm involved in. Just to keep the boat rounded out and not focus on one fish. Because I, I ... Through talking to fishermen and just, kind of, the way fishing is, is that there's good years and there's bad years. There's simple cycles of the ocean where some years there's a lot of Halibut and some years there's not a lot of Halibut. So... And that's the same to be true with, crabbing, and also salmon and rockfish and flat fish, other flat fish.

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Lesyna: Did you change your, or modify your trawl gear over the last year as you learned a little bit more about what worked and what didn't?

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Pemberton: Oh, yeah. I've done countless numbers of modifications to the net, switching how the net's towed through the water to trying out different door set ups on the boat, to stitching in pieces of net in my, my cod end of my net so I, I wouldn't be retaining any smaller crab or anything else, or smaller fish. So, that, that... One of my biggest things that I've done was I put in a big old panel of seven and a half inch mesh in my net. And it drastically reduced my bycatch of smaller crab by 90 percent, at least.

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Lesyna: So, is the, the whole net seven and a half mesh, or...

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Pemberton: No.

Lesyna: Just portions of it?

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Pemberton: No. I—me not, me being new to the industry and stretching my basic funds very thin, I've, I've been having to modify existing nets, older nets that people I could buy off other people so I can go fishing. I've never, I've only had one net made for me for, for a specific type of fishing. If fishing goes well these next couple of years, obviously, I'll buy a net specifically designed for Halibut.

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Lesyna: So, the one you have now you acquired from others. And then you started

modifying for—

00:19:01

Pemberton: Yes.

Lesyna: ...need-be.

00:19:02

Pemberton: Yeah. Basically. I modified a net to, to become a Halibut net.

00:19:07

Lesyna: Hm. And were there things that worked better for your vessel, you think? Or was it more just about like, keeping up with that species specifically?

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Pemberton: Just trying to, you know, get a cleaner tow.

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Lesyna: Hm-hmm. [affirmative]

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Pemberton: Become more fuel efficient. Yeah. Just the, just to, you know, get rid of some non-target species. Yeah.

00:19:44

Wang: You grew up around fishing and around this area. Have you seen changes in the, just the, the fishing community here or the local community here?

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Pemberton: I've seen a lot of changes. I've seen... I grew up seeing lots and lots of Salmon

being offloaded in Half Moon Bay. And now it's a lot less. But it seems to be coming back. Yeah. There just seems to be fewer fishermen out of Half Moon Bay. And I don't really see too many younger guys getting into it.

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Wang: Why do you think that is?

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Pemberton: It's a hard way. It's a hard way of life. It's not a guaranteed paycheck. It takes a lot of hard work. And I would say a majority of the times it, you are, you're not making enough to, to survive. But, those, those days where you have good days, that's what gets you through all the rest of the year, is when you have a few good fishing trips can add up pretty quick. But then you've got to save the money for the rainy days.

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Wang: Why, why did you choose this path, given knowing how hard it is?

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Pemberton: I chose fishing because I just enjoy the, the variety of work it involves. It's just, you, you put on a different hat every day. Some days you're a plumber. Some days you're a carpenter. Some days you're a fisherman. *Some* days you're a fisherman. Some days you're a mechanic. It's, it's just exciting to... The excitement of fishing and the problems that, that arise ahead of, you always got to expect problems. And it's just... It's exciting to, to have a different challenge every day.

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Lesyna: It's never boring.

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Pemberton: No. Never boring.

00:22:03

Wang: So, how do you think your—what do you think your future role in this, in the California Halibut fishery will be?

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Pemberton: The future of me being in the California Halibut fishery will be just helping to, you know, make it a sustainable fishery for the future generations. And to make it so we all can have Halibut for forever. So, I just want to make sure that having, having a Halibut permit, just to ensure that, that has, that piece of my fishery will always be there for me and for the future. So just working with oversight, working with management. Yeah.

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Wang: How, how do you, how would you want to work with management to, to make sure this fishery is sustainable into the future?

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Pemberton: Right now, we take observers out fishing with us. We accommodate them on our boat. We pay for their food. We get vessel, we get... We get the boat certified by the Coast Guard doc, or Coast Guard stickers so it's safe for the scientists that come on the boat. In the West Coast ground fishery, I have cameras on the boat to help make it a, to help make me 100 percent accountable for everything I touch. I'm working with the California Groundfish Collective. I work with the Half Moon Bay Groundfish Association. And then I work with the Morro Bay Community Quota Fund. So, I'm—yeah.

00:24:14

Wang: Yeah. You're really active.

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Lesyna: Involved.

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Wang: So, that's great to see. Do—okay.

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Lesyna: I think we're going to ask the same question. Do you have any concerns for the future of the fishery? Halibut specifically.

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Pemberton: Not at this point. It seems like there's a lot of younger class fish in the ocean right now. I'm sure it's just a cycle. So, I see a few good years coming. But, you know, I... Like I said, I think fishing's all ups and downs. You know, there's good years and bad years. And there's, it's simple cycle of the ocean. So, I... Yeah. That's—I don't know.

00:25:07

Lesyna: Do you have any environmental concerns?

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Pemberton: None that I'm aware of right now.

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Wang: Have you seen changes in the environment that you've noticed since you've started fishing when you were young?

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Pemberton: I think... I haven't... I, I haven't... I haven't been around long enough to, to see many cycles. So, I'm still pretty new to that area, but...

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Lesyna: Do you ever worry about competition with other fisheries from other areas?

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Pemberton: You know, that's, that's always a hard thing when two fishers are overlapping. But, you know, we're all, we're all out there. We all deserve a chance to go fishing, no matter what fishery you're in. So, it's just, it's just the matter of us working together and sharing the ocean. And having gear management. If you're, if you're fishing gear that's not attached to your boat. That's, kind of, what it is. I catch a lot of crab pots. But I'm also a crab fisherman.

00:26:44

Lesyna: Oh. What do you do when that happens?

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Pemberton: I bring them in. Return them back to the fishermen.

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Lesyna: Oh. So, do you actually know them, some of them?

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Pemberton: Some of them I do.

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Wang: Oh. Oh. How can you tell whose pots they are?

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Pemberton: There's pot tags inside of them.

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Wang: Oh, okay. Oh, that's good. So, as one of the younger fishermen out here, I would, do—how do you see yourself, kind of, encouraging others in this field, or sharing with other young people?

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Pemberton: I think it just takes—I, I'm willing to help out anybody that wants to become a fisherman. But it does take a certain type of person to just take the leap of faith and to be, to put skin in the game. Just you've got to work your way up through the ranks and earn the respect of all the fishermen around you. Because you do need, you need, you need the support of the community to be a fisherman.

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Lesyna: So, you'll pass on that fishing knowledge that you've learned from these older guys that are about to retire, and...

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Pemberton: Oh, yeah.

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Lesyna: To the newer generations.

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Pemberton: Yeah.

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Lesyna: You're kind of like a bridge.

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Pemberton: Yeah. Because, I mean, fishing is, you know, it's one of the greatest protein sources for, for us. And so, I mean, trying to manage it in a sustainable way is very

important to me.

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Wang: What are your, your hopes for California Fish- California Halibut Fishery but also just fishing fisheries in this community in general for the future?

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Pemberton: I hope that the... I hope in working with the management side and the, the scientific side of fishing will pass on the knowledge or pass on the thought that the fish just... The fish can be sustainably harvested in the ocean. And the, that we won't have a bad name for Halibut trawling. So, hoping to work with management to create a sustainable fishery. I hope that that will, can be passed on to the public.

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Wang: I like that. I agree. Okay. I guess, is there anything else you'd want to share about your career, in closing?

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Pemberton: No.

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Lesyna: Covered everything.

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Pemberton: Yeah.

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Wang: Okay. Well, thank you for your time. I know you're busy and doing a lot of things. So, thank you so much for your time and just sharing with us and... Yeah. I hope that you will have a great year—

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Pemberton: Yeah, thank you.

Wang: ...in all the fisheries and—

Pemberton: Yeah.

00:30:23

Wang: ...continue to enjoy Halibut fishing.

00:30:26

Pemberton: Hm-hmm. [affirmative] Thank you.

Lesyna: Thank you, Kyle.

[End recording at 00:30:31]