Interviewer-1: So if you agree, we would like to record this interview. And at the end if you're still comfortable with the interview, what we do with all of these interviews, we put them online for people researchers to listen to them. So I'm going to start the recording. Can you state your name for us?

Mark Ratfield: Mark Ratfield.

Interviewer-1: Mark Ratfield. We're in Panama City on his boat, Sunrise. Its [indiscernible] [00:00:30] boat you said?

Mark Ratfield: Marine Atlantic.

Interviewer-1: Marine Atlantic, okay.

Mark Ratfield: Yeah.

Interviewer-2: Yeah. So I mean you could just tell us a little bit about maybe how you started fishing when you got into it?

Mark Ratfield: I was – my dad started me fishing. I'm the fifth generation in my family.

Interviewer-2: Fifth generation?

Mark Ratfield: To do this. I've started when – I want to say '75, got my captain's license in '87. I had to go back in '88 to get my 100 ton license, because they won't let me have a 100 ton license in 18 and we hate [indiscernible] [00:01:04]. And we're in the chartering street for a while and then I just decided to go into the commercial side of it and that's what I've been doing since I'd say 1991. [Indiscernible] [00:01:21] has got three boats together. We're partner – business partners, so businesses boat, I just run it.

Interviewer-2: Yeah, that's what he said. He said he is getting it.

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. And we've been working on this boat going over six years.

Interviewer-2: Wow.

Mark Ratfield: It's a 1965.

Interviewer-2: And so this is like a – this is a charter boat, correct?

Mark Ratfield: This is a commercial boat.

Interviewer-2: Commercial boat, really?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah.

Interviewer-1: It was a beautiful commercial boat. You rarely see them like that.

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. This is *Gray's [phonetic]* [00:01:51] commercial boat.

Interviewer-2: Wow. I had no idea this was a commercial boat.

Mark Ratfield: It's got permits, VMS, all [00:02:00] manual.

Interviewer-2: Wow. So do you – when you were growing up, you remember going out fishing with family before all the regulations and things went in?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. We governed ourselves back then.

Interviewer-2: Yeah.

Interviewer-1: You said you started in what year?

Mark Ratfield: I started working on deck. I will say like '75, '76.

Interviewer-1: '75, '76?

Mark Ratfield: I got my last captain's license '87. So I stayed on deck for 10 to 12 years before I started running the *[inaudible]* [00:02:34]. I got a six passing license and I have to make seven in 1988, I went back and I did got *[inaudible]* [00:02:45].

Interviewer-2: And now what you primarily fish for?

Mark Ratfield: Everything.

Interviewer-2: Everything?

Mark Ratfield: Maybe for snapper mangrove, but all our boats were baited except for this boat and that boat, that's a commercial boat too right here, that's Gray exported also. We're all [indiscernible] [00:03:08] real on these boats.

Interviewer-1: Okay. So when you start, what were you fishing and what?

Mark Ratfield: We were fishing mostly charter fishing.

Interviewer-1: Charter?

Mark Ratfield: We started charter fishing.

Interviewer-1: What were your targets?

Mark Ratfield: Mainly grouper or snapper back then too. It was different than what it is now. Now it's mostly [indiscernible] [00:03:33] snapper and white snapper and what we call white snapper, now it's – more or less back then we had a bunch of people that wanted to carry home something like 100 pounds of fish. And so that's what we couch about every day.

Interviewer-1: On the charter boat?

Mark Ratfield: Mm-hm. The boys who didn't have that didn't run [00:04:00]. They were the ones sitting at the dock. I remember this boat pulling in down there, in fact there it was – everybody was amazed that it was as fast as it was. In fact they were just [indiscernible] [00:04:17] our boats. They didn't have a lot of boats, that did 20 knots like this back then in 1975, 1977. This catalog back then for sure.

Interviewer-1: So it sounds like a bit of catalog.

Mark Ratfield: It is. It really is.

Interviewer-1: How will – most of the boats are now like the most of the boats are doing 20 knots?

Mark Ratfield: No.

Interviewer-1: No?

Mark Ratfield: All the commercial boats are doing eight to nine knots.

Interviewer-1: Still?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah.

Interviewer-1: So it's still a fast one?

Mark Ratfield: We got to keep it down, because it save us fuel, it saves us money. That's how you would make money. So we try to just pedal on it and save fuel, because we're not on time [inaudible] [00:05:02]. You got to do that in a certain time. For fishing tournaments and stuff like that, we're going to do a lot of that on this boat, the fish tournament this year.

Interviewer-1: So when you started fishing, what was the front back then in the fishing industry?

Mark Ratfield: We caught a lot more groupers back then. Really the fish did not change that much, it's just what we're catching changed. We never caught snappers like we do now, because snappers – when we're going to catch snappers, we have to get registered.

You catch some, but not like you do now. If you go there, you catch 1,000 of pounds a day if you have [inaudible] [00:05:55].

Interviewer-2: Now, why do you think they're [00:06:00]...

Mark Ratfield: Just for regulations, yeah and IFT program all that help as far as that aspect and it's been as far as like what we can pay for the fish, it's going down. We're getting paid less in 2019 than we did back in 1990 for snappers, because of the lease price. If you had to lease them, they're like \$4.50 [inaudible] [00:06:25] lease the rights to catch them and you're getting paid six bucks. So yeah, the boat and the cruise, you get paid above 50 for snappers now. But that's the only thing that's changed and all that. The fishing is great. And what they've done is great. It need to be done back then it was - everybody just go out there and there is some great queue which we always try to - we caught small fish back then, we always threw it back. They can't get the yield out of them. So the market really didn't want them. So we always threw the little petty fish back before there was regulations. But there was a lot of [inaudible] [00:07:15] that you go out there and killing anything that it remains on. We try to look at it different. We're not that always [inaudible] [00:07:24]. We try to build racks and take care of it, because we don't have to do that the rest of our lives and we won't kill everything offshore. We want to make sure we had 50 to catch next year and year after that and year after that and that's the way we always try to do it.

We're officially starting to build the long haul racks again. They made it where we had to take somebody from – I don't know if it's from Nova or from whoever, we had to take with us and then everything we [00:08:00] put offshore was public knowledge. And then we spend a lot of money and a lot of labor to get all that stuff offshore to just have them published in the new *spectrum* [phonetic] [00:08:12]. So we quit doing it for a while. But now it's back like it was before. They give us designated areas, but we don't have to get a co-ordinance. So that's what they said.

Interviewer-1: So if you can tell us a little bit about you being a lot on the water in the last 20 years, more than 20 years?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah.

Interviewer-1: And when did you notice red tide or fish kills, like massive fish kills first?

Mark Ratfield: The first time I'd say by 2002.

Interviewer-1: 2002? Can you show us on the map there?

Mark Ratfield: It was out right here on the northwest side and...

Interviewer-2: You can draw on the map.

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. Middle ground is where we see in the waters there. We see groupers flooding every time down there. And now we're still clear of...

Interviewer-2: Draws [inaudible] [00:09:07] or like around the area where you [inaudible] [00:09:10] in the middle grounds?

Interviewer-1: And that was 2002 you said?

Mark Ratfield: This was – yeah, in the same area three years ago the same thing.

Interviewer-1: And that was three years ago, 2016?

Mark Ratfield: 2016, the same thing. Red tide came through there and there were fish everywhere. And it seem like it was just coming back real good from the last one when that happened.

Interviewer-1: That's the only area have you seen it in these few years?

Mark Ratfield: No, I've seen it right here in our bay too the last three years.

Interviewer-1: Last three years, same period?

Mark Ratfield: About the same time, about 2016 it got into bay – in our bays.

Interviewer-1: 2016 and 2002?

Mark Ratfield: 2002 [00:10:00] I don't remember being in our bay, but it was down south.

Interviewer-1: Okay.

Interviewer-2: And so now in the - the one you said there were lots of dead fish, red group or - and just anything that was out there, any snappers out there?

Mark Ratfield: Not every many snappers, no.

Interviewer-2: So it's just the...

Mark Ratfield: It really did affected the red grouper. We see more red grouper than anything else.

Interviewer-1: Well, what species did it affect?

Mark Ratfield: Red grouper the most is what we're seeing down here.

Interviewer-1: You've seen dead...

Mark Ratfield: Yeah, floating on top of water, yeah.

Interviewer-2: How long did it last?

Mark Ratfield: It lasted probably a couple of months until it got – the water temperature came back down, it killed it.

Interviewer-2: So kind of like October it's [indiscernible] [00:10:46] off and then the fish came back how fast?

Mark Ratfield: They started to come back, yeah.

Interviewer-2: Like how fast?

Mark Ratfield: I would say – and they're just now starting to come back now. Yeah and a lot of – yeah, a lot of that area we just stayed away from them for a while, because it was desert in there for a while for a good year.

Interviewer-2: Interesting. And so now you're seeing more kind of what size...

Mark Ratfield: [Indiscernible] [00:11:13] and red groupers.

Interviewer-2: Red grouper?

Mark Ratfield: Ever sized fishing instead of [inaudible] [00:11:18] out there.

Interviewer-2: But before 2002 you don't remember any fish kills?

Mark Ratfield: Not down there, no.

Interviewer-2: No? Or anywhere you could fish?

Mark Ratfield: Not that I remember.

Interviewer-2: No?

Mark Ratfield: No. Not like it is nowadays. We're down in Anna Maria Island down there of [indiscernible] [00:11:33] and it was down there last year and that was...

Interviewer-2: 2018? Can you draw there too or just another color so we can distinguish?

Mark Ratfield: It was when we're out here, because I will drive there Anna Maria Island.

Interviewer-2: That's 2018, all right. And how long did that last?

Mark Ratfield: I hadn't been back down there, so I don't know.

Interviewer-2: You don't know? You just [00:12:00] heard of it?

Mark Ratfield: No, I was there when it's going on last year with this, but I hadn't been back down there since.

Interviewer-2: Got it. And when you – so in 2002 for example, where were you fishing? Was that one – is that your spot?

Mark Ratfield: We're fishing [overlapping conversation] [00:12:14]...

Interviewer-2: That was your spot?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah.

Interviewer-2: And what did you do?

Mark Ratfield: We just had to go back to the west. Get out of it and get away from them. [Indiscernible] [00:12:24] to go home. I think a lot of it comes from Lake Okeechobee down there. A lot of that stuff comes from down there. You just run off from all the agriculture that you're down there. So I will – everything they're spraying down there is making that stuff grow away faster than what it used to be. And another thing we're seeing is that the flesh eating bacteria.

Interviewer-2: Where do you see that?

Mark Ratfield: I had [inaudible] [00:12:56] a couple of weeks ago saying it was pretty [indiscernible] [00:13:00].

Interviewer-2: Just from touching the fish or was in the water?

Mark Ratfield: Just from the water. I mean that was really bad. He had a hole in his hand started out like that and then it did like that.

Interviewer-2: Oh my god.

Interviewer-1: Oh my god.

Mark Ratfield: This was like in a two-day period. And I've had it before too and it was just bad.

Interviewer-2: Wow.

Mark Ratfield: We've never seen anything like that either.

Interviewer-2: So he got it where in the water? Where was it?

Mark Ratfield: It was right off Pensacola.

Interviewer-1: He got that off?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah, he was – they were writing here...

Interviewer-2: Let me get another color and we'll write that down.

Mark Ratfield: Write it here when he got it.

Interviewer-1: Wow.

Mark Ratfield: This was here.

Interviewer-2: It's right...

Mark Ratfield: But I know a lot of people around [00:14:00] Pensacola and Destin have got into it. There was a little girl not too long ago was on the national news that she got it on her leg while they're just hanging out on the bench, nowhere around fishing. She was just hanging out on the beach and got it.

Interviewer-2: It's Pensacola?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. But we've never seen that before either.

Interviewer-2: What about - so when you see the red tides, do you see changes in color of the water...

Mark Ratfield: Yeah.

Interviewer-2: What color – what?

Mark Ratfield: It's brownish red looking. You had lot of [indiscernible] [00:14:35] whatever, the water comes in there and kills that.

Interviewer-1: What about – how it affects for the – for you for example?

Mark Ratfield: How it affects us?

Interviewer-1: Yeah.

Mark Ratfield: We just can't fish in that area for two or three years before it comes back or where we can make money in that area. It's not even [overlapping conversation] [00:14:58]...

Interviewer-2: So if you move in other areas, is that – how it affects your cost?

Mark Ratfield: It's putting pressure on all the other areas a lot more. See we can fish, we're fishing, we leave Panama City, we're fishing anywhere from the river all the way down here so that we're covering a lot of area. So you can fish an area and then not have to come back in that same area for three months. It gives the time to catch back up. So you're able to sit there and it kills the same little area all the time.

Interviewer-2: So it doesn't – financially it doesn't affect [overlapping conversation] [00:15:39]...

Mark Ratfield: It hasn't, yeah.

Interviewer-2: Because – not yet, because you can move around?

Mark Ratfield: We can move around, yeah. We will go in Pensacola or wherever we got – what places too and unload and then we'll fish our way back home same way down south, we're going down there, we're going to fish our way back home [00:16:00], so make two trips on one basically.

Interviewer-2: So you do – your job is commercial fishing 100%, that's all you do?

Mark Ratfield: 100%, yeah.

Interviewer-2: Okay.

Mark Ratfield: Yes ma'am.

Interviewer-2: So can you tell me a little bit about the community of fishermen here, how do you get along? Has it changed through the years?

Mark Ratfield: It has. Just the way I'll get along pretty good and in this [indiscernible] [00:16:25] like in this any industry is drugs.

Interviewer-1: Drugs?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. We have to get rid out of that one.

Interviewer-2: Like fishermen are using that or...

Mark Ratfield: It's not just fishermen, it's just everybody, it seems a lot. We're having a lot of problems with that and just after the hurricane, a lot of the guys moved away,

they're gone. And we're having – I got a boat tied at right now that don't have crew owner. A lot of them went south and got on boats down there, there is a lot of boats [overlapping conversation] [00:16:58]...

Interviewer-2: So like what they lost their house, does that why they have...

Mark Ratfield: They'd lost their homes, but for a while they can't give fuel, couldn't get [inaudible] [00:17:05].

Interviewer-2: So how long did they...

Mark Ratfield: Even now the marines are still closed, can't even find a place to tie your boat up really unless you know people. It might be two or three years before they get both the marines back on again.

Interviewer-2: Interesting. So the hurricane really hurt the mariners and that way the fishermen...

Mark Ratfield: Absolutely.

Interviewer-2: So how did you survive?

Mark Ratfield: We went to Pensacola.

Interviewer-2: You went to Pensacola?

Mark Ratfield: I believe [inaudible] [00:17:37] Pensacola, we ran out of there for three months until Gray got power back on and got gas machines back on again and fuel. We stayed over there with sea foods until we got everything back on in Panama City.

Interviewer-2: Was your house affected?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. They got [inaudible] [00:17:59] [00:18:00]. But I was renting, so it was not bad.

Interviewer-2: I see, so you're not responsible. You got easier a lot of it.

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. But it's been certainly to find a place to live around here. Rents doubled on everything, real estate has doubled.

Interviewer-2: Because there is none.

Mark Ratfield: There is not of places.

Interviewer-2: Do you make more money from fishing since you don't have a lot of – much competition down...

Mark Ratfield: Not really. I'm making about the same money.

Interviewer-2: About the same, but everything is more expensive?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. Well – yeah, everything is more expensive. I'm still earning about the same money mission. [Indiscernible] [00:18:44] more now to make it.

Interviewer-2: Was – is there another example of a similar event in the past that...

Mark Ratfield: We've never had to go through anything like that ever.

Interviewer-2: What about – any other event with the national or not that kind of created opposition or difficulties in your...

Mark Ratfield: Not that I can think of right off.

Interviewer-2: No?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah.

Interviewer-2: Okay. So you said – you started to tell me a little bit about the fishing community they're gone, like what about before the hurricane? How was it?

Mark Ratfield: Before the hurricane it wasn't as bad. So I think that had a lot to do with just people being depressed and stuff.

Interviewer-2: Right now people are depressed now?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. The ones that are left, a lot of people are gone.

Interviewer-2: So tell me a little bit about before the hurricane, how was the community?

Mark Ratfield: Before the hurricane everything was running good, all the radars were up and running. Now we have no-brainers except for bay point here and [00:20:00] that's pretty much it. The main two marines are done for a while. They mad everybody believe about it so they can work and they're still saying three years.

Interviewer-2: Three years? What do you think is going to happen in three years?

Mark Ratfield: In three years I hope they have to put back together, but everybody is going to be settled somewhere else I'm sure. But hopefully it will come back slowly where we start getting some fish around and stuff here back.

Interviewer-2: What did you do during the hurricane?

Mark Ratfield: I take [indiscernible] [00:20:40].

Interviewer-2: And they [indiscernible] [00:20:43] and they were fine?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. A little damage, but nothing compared to what other guys.

Interviewer-2: And what did you do? Did you stayed in your house?

Mark Ratfield: No, I stayed on the boat.

Interviewer-2: You stayed on the boat? Do you have family?

Mark Ratfield: I had four boats. Yeah, I do, but both of my girls, I sent down to San Antonio.

Interviewer-2: You sent them away and you stayed here?

Mark Ratfield: I stayed on the four boats by myself through the hurricane.

Interviewer-2: How is it?

Mark Ratfield: It wasn't bad at all really. It was not [inaudible] [00:21:14]. But I was in there...

Interviewer-1: You picked a good spot.

Mark Ratfield: Because it all blew over the top of us. Everything was blowing over the top of the boats where I was at.

Interviewer-2: Yeah. Show us where are you, because I'm curious you got...

Mark Ratfield: I was right at the inner costal, right about there.

Interviewer-2: Okay. Where is the eye of the hurricane?

Mark Ratfield: Eye of the hurricane, its right here, right at [inaudible] [00:21:38] 40 miles...

Interviewer-2: So lots of boats. That's a [overlapping conversation] [00:21:42].

Interviewer-1: Wow. So it was a tight storm there.

Mark Ratfield: I was about 20 miles from it.

Interviewer-2: Yeah. Well, that's very courageous.

Mark Ratfield: I would spend every hurricane that's came through on boats. That's where I feel safe at [00:22:00].

Interviewer-2: So what other hurricane do you remember?

Mark Ratfield: Opal. And then we had several in the 90s we had to take boats off the inner coast. I don't remember all the names. The worst one was Opal.

Interviewer-1: Opal?

Mark Ratfield: Mm-hm. It hit Navarre back in '98 I'll say. You see, it's getting close now. Let me have it turn it sideways again to see the [inaudible] [00:22:40] manner.

Interviewer-2: Yeah.

Mark Ratfield: [Inaudible] [00:22:43] is not amazing, my intern at all.

Interviewer-2: Yeah, I don't know.

Mark Ratfield: Let me see it. I'll fix it.

Interviewer-2: Yeah. So you just [indiscernible] [00:22:51] so sure?

Mark Ratfield: We had anchorage ran it and...

Interviewer-2: On the ground?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. And [indiscernible] [00:22:56] and then we had anchors out in the inner coast also. There is the phase down there inner costal, we just had right it up next to [indiscernible] [00:23:09], starting to stern tied up to the wall, then we had anchors ran up to the landing, there is a big landing out there. That was the first picture that I had anchorage all out into the inner coast.

Interviewer-2: So how did you learn to anchor your boat like that?

Mark Ratfield: My dad.

Interviewer-2: Your dad? Tell us about your dad, because you said you're a fifth generation?

Interviewer-1: Fifth generation?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. My dad was...

Interviewer-2: Well, you need to tell us a little bit about the...

Mark Ratfield: My dad was in it for 50 years probably too. He is 84 now. He still thinks he is going to get back on the boat, but I don't think he will.

Interviewer-2: Is he living here in Panama City?

Mark Ratfield: Yes ma'am. [Inaudible] [00:23:54] can see in there. That's all – I had all four boats tied up like [00:24:00] they were chained off to the walls. There was that little photograph there, this one with the tower.

Interviewer-2: Do you think you can send us these pictures? That's cute.

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. That's my dream [inaudible] [00:24:15]. I can send you some pictures, absolutely yeah.

Interviewer-2: That will be lovely.

Interviewer-1: That's amazing.

Interviewer-2: Because...

Interviewer-1: Just so how you knew how to tie the stuff up. I mean I imagine like once a lot of fishermen know how to handle these sorts of situations.

Mark Ratfield: And that's staying in the top that we have out there, we had anchors – steer anchors, I had anchor all the way up to the ground, but let's say there is a bay highlighting on the other side and there is a bay highlighting on this side, so basically everything was blowing right over the top of the boats.

Interviewer-1: Interesting. That's fascinating.

Mark Ratfield: No, that's after the storm, that's where all the boats.

Interviewer-2: Look at that, that's all leveled.

Mark Ratfield: Yeah, docks gone, boats sunk everywhere and it's pretty bad and it's still pretty bad. It seems like maybe to the [indiscernible] [00:25:11] boat yard. You see all those boats, it's just [overlapping conversation] [00:25:15]...

Interviewer-2: Oh my god. It's like a cemetery of boats.

Mark Ratfield: Boats everywhere in people's backyards. I mean it was bad. And that boat made it through, I mean [indiscernible] [00:25:26] that boat and that's...

Interviewer-1: So did the owner, did they get [inaudible] [00:25:33] after the storm?

Mark Ratfield: They had two boats and had damage on the other one. And so they sold that one that had the [overlapping conversation] [00:25:41]...

Interviewer-2: Okay, so they're down to one?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah.

Interviewer-1: Yeah. It will be great if you can send us these pictures.

Mark Ratfield: Absolutely. Just text them to you, just the big ship that's turned upside out there.

Interviewer-1: Wow.

Interviewer-2: Wow.

Mark Ratfield: Because we were running water and stuff around fuel on the little boat, because we hadn't had [00:26:00] the damage on the – on that boat. So we're using it for trying to help everybody and I had to take pictures when we finally got [indiscernible] [00:26:11] turned over at the shop.

Interviewer-2: How long did it take? Is that two weeks?

Mark Ratfield: Two weeks, mm-hm.

Interviewer-2: Two weeks?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. So that's some of the damage to someone's boat. You see that it's all ripped in half, everything gone off the top of them. It was terrible. I'll send you the next.

Interviewer-2: Yeah. We'll get – you have my number. You can just kind of – all the hurricane and...

Mark Ratfield: I might have to send them like four pictures at a time, because if I try to send too many, it won't send...

Interviewer-2: It won't let, okay. Yeah, the signal is – my phone is not working good. But anyway, so tell us a little bit about your family? Now, they got like in the...

Mark Ratfield: They started – my granddaddy and my mom stayed right there at Tyndall and when Tyndall moved in, they made them leave.

Interviewer-2: Tyndall?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. Tyndall Air Force Base.

Interviewer-1: Air Force Base?

Interviewer-2: The Air Force Base, okay.

Mark Ratfield: That's where my family was originally from right there. And after that we all moved to St. Andrews, we lived in St. Andrews for 20, 30 years probably and then I moved into the [indiscernible] [00:27:23].

Interviewer-2: So they came here, they were kind of like pioneers in the region, right and they just started fishing, is that they learned how to fish and they started fishing. Where were they coming from do you know?

Mark Ratfield: Georgia is where my great, great granddaddy came from Georgia.

Interviewer-2: What was his name do you remember?

Mark Ratfield: I'll have to take...

Interviewer-2: That's fine.

Mark Ratfield: I can't remember. I'm so terrible at names.

Interviewer-2: That's okay. It's a long...

Mark Ratfield: Jackson. I want to say Jackson Ratfield [00:28:00].

Interviewer-2: Okay.

Mark Ratfield: But don't put me on that in.

Interviewer-2: Okay. So he came here with his family, settles, started fishing, do you remember – do you know what they were fishing for or...

Mark Ratfield: They were mostly *parsing* [phonetic] [00:28:11] and a lot of my family in St. Joe, I still have family over there, that's what they do.

Interviewer-2: Okay.

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. I just never like that kind of fishing.

Interviewer-2: Why not?

Mark Ratfield: I don't like net fishing and – because you just kill everything. What we do if we started killing something that we don't want to target when we won't, when you run a net through there, there is nothing. After you do that, it's another deal.

Interviewer-2: Yeah.

Mark Ratfield: The same way with long runner, so I don't long runner. I won't ever [indiscernible] [00:28:44].

Interviewer-2: Why not?

Mark Ratfield: It kills everything.

Interviewer-2: It just kills everything?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. Everything you – it bites the hook is going to die.

Interviewer-2: Can you describe to us a little bit of type of fishing you do now?

Mark Ratfield: We're banded fishing and pen rod and reel fishing. So we're just basically pulling up to a reef or artificial red and we just hold our boat at [indiscernible] [00:29:11], we draw lines down and it's just real [indiscernible] [00:29:13] over catching.

Interviewer-2: Okay. Is it a tough job?

Mark Ratfield: It is, long day.

Interviewer-2: What makes it tough?

Mark Ratfield: 16, 18 hours a day on your feet and then at the end of the day we have to draw the fish, put them all away. We get five hours sleep at night, five to six hours. So it's just long hours.

Interviewer-2: So how long is the season?

Mark Ratfield: Year end.

Interviewer-2: Constantly you have one species or another?

Mark Ratfield: We're in and out, in and out, in and out.

Interviewer-2: So most of the time it's the five hours...

Mark Ratfield: Take a couple of days off and then we're out like again another five to six days.

Interviewer-2: What do you love about this job?

Mark Ratfield: I love it. I love being offshore.

Interviewer-2: Why do you like it [00:30:00]? Why do you love it?

Mark Ratfield: I just like being out there. I love fishing. No stress, no phone ringing, nobody is peaking on your door. You're just [inaudible] [00:30:10].

Interviewer-2: So when you go do you have a crew?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah.

Interviewer-2: How many people you have?

Mark Ratfield: Usually two to three guys.

Interviewer-2: Okay.

Mark Ratfield: And what boats you're on.

Interviewer-2: Can you describe to me one of these trips or a day in one of these trips?

Mark Ratfield: Our trips will be from – anywhere from three days to seven days and we'll start the trip off usually like [indiscernible] [00:30:36] fishing or something like that and then at the end of the trip, we'll try to catch king mackerels or some – because kings don't last as long. [Inaudible] [00:30:45] on king mackerels, so we'll try to do that at the end of the trip. We'll catch snapper or catch [indiscernible] [00:30:53] rapper, we'll catch a few red snapper and then we'll try to catch some king, we'll just try to mix it up.

Interviewer-2: But tell me a little bit about – so you wake up, what hour you wake up?

Mark Ratfield: We'll wake up about 4:30, have some coffee, we get started about 5:30 and then we'll fish from 5:30 to 7 o'clock, 8 o'clock at night and we got a couple of hours of drawing fish, eat and shower or take shower, lay down about midnight, back up about 4:30, 5 o'clock in the next morning, same thing every day.

Interviewer-2: Do you eat lunch?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. They come in and make sandwiches, we don't stop and eat.

Interviewer-2: You don't stop. You just have something already made?

Mark Ratfield: They stop between places.

Interviewer-2: Okay.

Mark Ratfield: Because we'll stop and fish and when it starts slowing down or we'll catch something that we don't want to catch, we'll move to another spot and while we're changing spots is usually when they come in, cool off and get you – saying whatever they want.

Interviewer-2: So you said that you usually start from Panama City and then you have few spots that you already know you go [00:32:00] and then on the next trip you hit other spots. But usually you have a pretty good map and kind of hit the same places around that you're...

Mark Ratfield: And [inaudible] [00:32:09] got to try to playing it out. Hit on the weather like you got a strong west land and you try to plant it out, you start on the west side and work down with down sea. So you're not picking your crew up and picking your boat up.

Interviewer-2: Got it.

Mark Ratfield: So the weather has a lot to do with where we're fishing too.

Interviewer-2: So you guys are weatherman too, that you have to know your...

Mark Ratfield: We're electricians, plumbers, firefighters, weatherman, you had to be a little bit of all of it in this business.

Interviewer-2: A little bit of everything?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. The only thing we can't fix is the relationship.

Interviewer-2: Tell me about that. When you...

Mark Ratfield: We haven't figured that one around yet, but everything else we can fix.

Interviewer-2: So there is a lot of camaraderie I assume.

Mark Ratfield: Yeah.

Interviewer-2: The dead hands you use are sort of like the same or you have to buy them out from...

Mark Ratfield: [Overlapping conversation] [00:33:07] yeah.

Interviewer-2: So you've been working with the dead hands for a lot of years here?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah.

Interviewer-2: Okay. It's like a family?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah.

Interviewer-2: I see.

Mark Ratfield: And then the two captains on the other boats, I trained myself. So they're my kids to me pretty much.

Interviewer-2: What does it take to be a good captain?

Mark Ratfield: It takes a lot. It takes years of just being on the boat knowing – learning everything.

Interviewer-2: Experience, what about the – in terms of character?

Mark Ratfield: It takes a special person to do stuff sort of like that. A lot of people can't take it literally.

Interviewer-2: Why not?

Mark Ratfield: Just being offshore, I don't know if you – have you ever spent anytime offshore?

Interviewer-2: No.

Mark Ratfield: If you ever do, you'll know what I'm talking about, just making super home [inaudible] [00:33:50]. I'm out here sometimes, but not as much more, because now that I got my kids [00:34:00] growing and going, the only thing I miss is my grandkids sometimes, but that's it. [Indiscernible] [00:34:06] stay offshore for every [inaudible] [00:34:08]. A lot of them has have kids.

Interviewer-2: So you have to be accustom and like loneliness in a sense?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. It is stressful.

Interviewer-2: Why?

Mark Ratfield: Being the captain you got to worry about – you're responsible for everybody on the boat, you're responsible for catching fish and if you don't then you got three guys and three families depending on you to make them [indiscernible] [00:34:34].

Interviewer-1: It's a lot of responsibility for a captain?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah, very responsible [inaudible] [00:34:37].

Interviewer-2: How do you handle the times when you can't catch as much fish as you...

Mark Ratfield: I'll try to stick mine back at wave we have a bad month or I can [indiscernible] [00:34:50] guys a little mind to get by until we start catching fish again.

Interviewer-2: Okay. But you can't increase the number of trips even more, because even now...

Mark Ratfield: Not really.

Interviewer-2: Got it.

Mark Ratfield: Not really, because they're going quite a bit. They'll come in and unload and they might be home a day, two days max and then right back again. So they're — they stay and going through regular.

Interviewer-2: What about – so how does your relationship with dealers like would you sell to...

Mark Ratfield: *Gray Abrams [phonetic]* [00:35:25], I've sold him. He is 91.

Interviewer-2: So he is 91?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah.

Interviewer-2: And what – why you sell to him?

Mark Ratfield: Well, he is from St. Joe and he was just somebody we knew. He is pretty much out there with everybody's process. He has us making fuel right there, we'll make one stop, get everything you need and go on. Anybody else, you're just pretty much selling fish to him.

Interviewer-2: Can you sell to other people if you want?

Mark Ratfield: If I want.

Interviewer-2: Yeah. So you don't have a...

Mark Ratfield: But I would lose [00:36:00] access to ice. I have to get all that stuff.

Interviewer-2: So all of that – is it only access or you pay for it too?

Mark Ratfield: No, we pay for it.

Interviewer-2: Oh, you pay for it?

Mark Ratfield: Once you get pulled right out of the same dock, all *[overlapping conversation]* [00:36:10] get your ice, get your fuel, get your bait and you're done.

Interviewer-2: Very convenient?

Mark Ratfield: Very convenient. And me and Gray has been friends for a long time.

Interviewer-2: And this is - do you pay for the docking?

Mark Ratfield: Here?

Interviewer-2: Yeah.

Mark Ratfield: I don't – I'm not sure about that, because this is Gray's boat.

Interviewer-2: Right, so for your own...

Mark Ratfield: So I don't go over there...

Interviewer-2: Do you own boats?

Mark Ratfield: No.

Interviewer-2: No?

Mark Ratfield: No. We're just tying up the great [indiscernible] [00:36:34] and he

charges.

Interviewer-2: Okay.

Mark Ratfield: And we're selling fish to him.

Interviewer-2: I see. So that's the only time?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah.

Interviewer-2: How does it work? I mean some fishermen tell us that well, dealers often

time lend us money and off season or since that's the same, so it's really a...

Mark Ratfield: I had – I haven't loan in a long time.

Interviewer-2: That's good.

Mark Ratfield: But if I needed one, he will do that, yeah.

Interviewer-2: Okay.

Mark Ratfield: And lot other dealers won't do that either.

Interviewer-2: They won't?

Mark Ratfield: Like [indiscernible] [00:37:12], I know he never given out money before. We sell fish to him before too and not everybody – not every dealer is like that. They don't loan out money. They're not a bank, but he does.

Interviewer-2: Why do you think they won't? They're afraid?

Mark Ratfield: Maybe they're afraid they're not going to get paid back, yeah. Fishermen were all around, I don't know [inaudible] [00:37:37]. I've loaned them money and have [indiscernible] [00:37:40].

Interviewer-2: I see.

Mark Ratfield: But it's part of the occupation.

Interviewer-2: It's part of the business?

Mark Ratfield: Part of business.

Interviewer-2: What do you see the future of the industry is placed?

Mark Ratfield: With [00:38:00] the way I have kids and all this going, I don't see how a young man can afford to even get into business, because the formats are so high to own a – the rise to catch a fish is vigorously high. Red snappers are \$80 a pound. To be able to buy and then have – and you're not guaranteed to have it in the next year. If they cut the tag, you can lose poundage, the poundage that you could spend millions of dollars on. So I mean for a new guy to start in this business which is ridiculous.

Interviewer-2: So you said you have kids, you have boys?

Mark Ratfield: I have two girls and I have three grand boys and two granddaughters.

Interviewer-2: Do you hope for any of them to go in the business?

Mark Ratfield: I don't think they would.

Interviewer-2: Would you like them to?

Mark Ratfield: No, my grandson – one of my grandson is really interested in it and yeah, I'd love them to be, absolutely.

Interviewer-2: Do you think it's a good lifestyle?

Mark Ratfield: It's not the greatest lifestyle, but it just [indiscernible] [00:39:09].

Interviewer-2: Yeah.

Mark Ratfield: If you don't like it, you will not stay in this business very long. I watch people come in and spend a bunch of money buying boats, buying [indiscernible] [00:39:24] and then find out what that really involves and end up selling everything and losing a bunch of money. But then you have other people that come in and love it, do good, but they're getting fewer far between as far as finding captains and crew. Not many people want to...

Interviewer-2: Is it hard to find a crew?

Mark Ratfield: It has been since the hurricane, yeah.

Interviewer-2: Since the hurricane, but not before?

Mark Ratfield: Before hurricane it was a lot easier [00:40:00]. You could drive out [indiscernible] [00:40:02], now there is no more raining. So it's just hard to find one.

Interviewer-2: So you said that most of the people kind of went – went east or west?

Mark Ratfield: They went everywhere.

Interviewer-2: Everywhere?

Mark Ratfield: Some of my friends went to Louisiana and some of them went down south and got own boats down there. But they went every – all over the place.

Interviewer-2: So if you look back at your career, what – is there anything you would like to have done differently?

Mark Ratfield: There is a few things I would like to have done different, but most – everything, I'm satisfied with how it came here, yeah.

Interviewer-2: What do you think you're going to do in the next few years?

Mark Ratfield: Same thing.

Interviewer-2: Same thing?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. I'll do it or I'll die.

Interviewer-2: Okay. Are you going to settle here like this is where you're going to...

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. I'm – in the work spot and house [indiscernible] [00:41:02] so healthy and I'm going to go through without any complications.

Interviewer-2: Is there anything else...

Mark Ratfield: I'll be out be here forever. I'll fish all over the place. We'll go in and then go in Louisiana down here, Mouseville, Pensacola, but we're always – this will always be home to me and I'll always come back here.

Interviewer-2: Why do you feel so attached to this place?

Mark Ratfield: I don't know why I feel so attached to this. This is where I've been my whole life, but everywhere else is my home to me.

Interviewer-2: So now you said if your family has been here for five generations and so you have a lot of your [indiscernible] [00:41:54] family around?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. A lot of my family moved too [00:42:00].

Interviewer-2: A lot of your family moved?

Mark Ratfield: Both my daughters have moved. Well, my oldest one, her husband was in the air force, [indiscernible] [00:42:07] and they moved into Anchorage, Alaska.

Interviewer-1: Anchorage?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah, come back from there.

Interviewer-2: That's quite a shift.

Mark Ratfield: It's beautiful in there.

Interviewer-1: It is.

Mark Ratfield: And then my youngest daughter, her husband got a job offer in Oregon and so she went to Oregon.

Interviewer-1: No, yeah.

Mark Ratfield: But my mom and dad still live here and I got a brother and a sister who live here, cousins come on from here to St. Joe, a lot of family.

Interviewer-2: What would you like to see change in...

Mark Ratfield: I like to see the IFTs go to where like Whole Foods and the big companies can come in and drive the least price way of – if they were just making work,

I have kids, I would actually go to the fishermen or somebody who actually fished. Right now like the grocery store, Whole Foods could come in and they are optioned with all those fish off to the highest bidder and we can't compete with those guys.

Interviewer-2: Who are those guys?

Mark Ratfield: Whole Foods.

Interviewer-2: Oh, the Whole – so I...

Mark Ratfield: That's just an example.

Interviewer-2: Yeah.

Mark Ratfield: There're other companies too that do it. So that's crushing us right now.

Interviewer-2: Really?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. We lost crew over that, because now they're getting paid less and less for snapper every year and it should be going the other way.

Interviewer-2: The price in the water, I wonder how...

Mark Ratfield: The price in the store has been going up, yeah. And snapper prices has been going up to, but lease price goes under ever year. When we first started leasing fish, it was \$1.50 a pound. So we're still getting [00:44:00] \$4 if we leased from somebody else. Now, \$4.50, \$4.75 to lease one pound of snapper, they're selling for like I said six bucks, that's lean movement.

Interviewer-2: Yeah. That's [inaudible] [00:44:19]. So when you go on the water now, do you ever think the water is so different compared to when I started fishing, like the quality, the fish...

Mark Ratfield: It's just there is a lot more fishermen.

Interviewer-2: Now?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah.

Interviewer-2: There is more fishermen?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah.

Interviewer-2: So what does that do to the environment?

Mark Ratfield: Just a lot more trash and people, they just don't care about.

Interviewer-2: Trash? What kind of trash do you observe?

Mark Ratfield: They [overlapping conversation] [00:44:44] they threw – plastic, we found plastic bottles inside a fish, cutting the fish, beer can, you name it. They just trash everything. We never trash [inaudible] [00:44:55]. We're bringing all our trash home, every percent of it, put it in the garbage, we're always trying to do that. But yeah, they were trashing the place.

Interviewer-2: When did you start seeing this kind of increase in...

Mark Ratfield: The last 15 years.

Interviewer-2: 15 years?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. They just don't care.

Interviewer-2: Are they locals in the waters or...

Mark Ratfield: Lot of locals and lot of outer too.

Interviewer-2: And these are like – but they're not commercial fishers?

Mark Ratfield: Commercial fisher too.

Interviewer-2: Yeah?

Mark Ratfield: They do it too.

Interviewer-2: So is it from your generation of commercial fishermen?

Mark Ratfield: Younger.

Interviewer-2: They're not – okay.

Mark Ratfield: They just don't care as much about the environment as we always do. We were taught to take care of everything. But these young guys nowadays, they don't. You can ask the rest of the older – more of the older fishermen...

[Off the Record Conversation] [00:45:52 - 00:46:00]

Mark Ratfield: A lot of the younger guys now they don't have the respect that we always had for the resource, everything. They don't...

Interviewee-1: They got to farm in a way that you can't kill it. They don't care.

Mark Ratfield: They don't.

Interviewee-2: We try to teach the other fishermen up, they don't want to work together, they don't want us.

Mark Ratfield: So how is - so you're a fisherman too? Do you have your own boat? Are you...

Interviewee-1: Yeah. I've been working remote for last three years.

Interviewer-2: Okay. So you've been in the business for a longer time?

Interviewee-1: Whole life.

Interviewer-2: Whole life?

Interviewee-1: I'm 43. So I was running since 18, got my captain's license.

Interviewer-2: Okay. In the same area?

Interviewee-1: On [inaudible] [00:46:42].

Interviewer-2: Nice. And so you do commercial fishing now too? You've been in the commercial fishing business in the...

Interviewee-1: I started in the charter industry with seasons. You can't make a living for 60 days snapper season and you can't stay full down. I wish we already run Memorial Day and Labor Day, every day. We're beginning for [inaudible] [00:47:06] 250 days a year actually you can make a living doing something else a couple of months. You can't take out full time and go and find something else to do.

Mark Ratfield: Yeah.

Interviewer-2: I see. So we were asking Mark about red tides, when he observed them and he showed us on the map, that's what we're doing here.

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. That's what me and [indiscernible] [00:47:33] last year.

Interviewee-1: Yeah, down south.

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. Real bad and then around the middle grounds in 2016.

Interviewer-2: Okay. So what the – so since you came, we're going to ask you some questions too if you're willing?

Interviewee-1: I guess if I would ask.

Interviewer-2: Yeah. Tell us a little bit about what did you [00:48:00] observe since you started fishing? How has the industry changed? How has your fishing changed?

Interviewee-1: Like recreational or commercial or...

Interviewer-2: Both. I mean you've started in recreational you said and moved into commercial.

Interviewee-1: Well, we always charter fishing in the summer time and we commercial fishing in the winter state time, stay fishing, we're doing [inaudible] [00:48:20], so we just — when we had a chance we stay busy, we stayed fishing. We just kind of [inaudible] [00:48:28] commercial fishing, recreational fishing, we just...

Mark Ratfield: Back in the 90s that's where all the charter boats come in. Now, I was the same way, I did the same thing.

Interviewee-1: Yeah. We stayed fishing. We didn't take any – when the weather was bad then we went hunting or did our other stuff. That was our free time, it was too rough offshore. We took care of everything on the hill and took our little vacations or do what we had to do and went back fishing when the weather was pretty. We're offshore fishing.

Interviewer-2: What about the red tides? Did it affect your fishing?

Interviewee-1: Not necessarily the bottom fishing that I've seen.

Interviewer-2: No?

Interviewee-1: We see...

Mark Ratfield: So it's a big area, you can change areas.

Interviewer-2: Yeah. So you didn't really have...

Interviewee-1: I mean we see the fish floating and stuff like that offshore, but a lot of times we think that's from the beach and it's just the dead fish floating around the currents, here like the [indiscernible] [00:49:21] we see that come and stuff. But I remember back in the 90s if we come in here, we're coming out [indiscernible] [00:49:29] red fish literally float outside the boat and die like you're going through a [indiscernible] [00:49:35] and everything, kill everything, a lot of those and everything. You see it, but we can go past it and get out and fish.

Interviewer-1: Just don't keep your baits in the [inaudible] [00:49:47].

Interviewee-1: Yeah. Kill all your basic stuff [inaudible] [00:49:49] seeing, you run by and shut the pumps out and just keep your fingers crossed as you get some clean water

and turn it back on and then [00:50:00] you just have to stop offshore and catch more bait.

Interviewer-2: So how did you get in the business? Is your family in the business?

Interviewee-1: Dad grew up fishing. When he was young, he just always loved it, always died and friends, all the other guys I grew up with, they fish and everything. We got older enough, we always ride with them fishing. We just kind of kept going in all we kind of knew.

Interviewer-2: What about the hurricane now it affects you...

Interviewee-1: We're still repelling from the hurricane.

Interviewer-2: How has fishing been after the hurricane? Some fishermen say it's great, fish is there.

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. It's been pretty good.

Interviewer-2: Yeah, so...

Mark Ratfield: But it wasn't from the hurricane.

Interviewer-2: No?

Mark Ratfield: No. Usually we will get groupers and stuff pushed in from the hurricane and this one really didn't push it.

Interviewee-1: Yeah. This one come off...

Mark Ratfield: It came from well offshore straight in [overlapping conversation] [00:50:58]...

Interviewee-1: A lot of them would come from the south and push a lot of fish from down south. This one really didn't do that. But it didn't hurt it, but I don't think it helped it either.

Interviewer-2: I see. So what other hurricanes do you guys remember that had a positive or a negative impact in fishing?

Mark Ratfield: When the Opel came through, there was about four storms I think that in a couple of years that came through and we got fish from every storm. But it drove the prices way down.

Interviewee-1: Everybody catches fish.

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. Everybody go over the boat and then they come back in and then as soon as that happens the market – the price falls out.

Interviewer-2: It doesn't really help you financially? I see.

Interviewee-1: Floods the market.

Mark Ratfield: Yeah.

Interviewer-2: What other things that like had any negative or positive impacts from the years that [00:52:00] kind of stood with you, market changes?

Interviewee-1: Water system.

Mark Ratfield: Yeah.

Interviewer-2: The water system?

Interviewee-1: [Inaudible] [00:52:08].

Mark Ratfield: Water system helped as far as bringing the fish back, but as far as what we make, it really hurt us bad.

Interviewer-2: It hurts you bad?

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. It still is. It's still going down. It's terrible.

Interviewee-1: Yeah. The ones they quoted on fish then they won't charge [indiscernible] [00:52:25] fish, you can't make any money. We get paid the same price.

Mark Ratfield: I guarantee you have the quota that's out there are people that had been never fishing before. They just own the quota. And then a lot of people that are leasing on too, they don't fish. They just want to make sure they get the fish.

Interviewer-2: How – what would you change about the water system to make it work...

Mark Ratfield: Maybe where they will just – fishermen only or you have to own a boat or you have to actually...

Interviewee-1: [Overlapping conversation] [00:52:58] gear environments, if we got to go you got to have all that.

Mark Ratfield: To be able to have them.

Interviewee-1: Yeah. Right now you just got to be in the IFQ system in their computer they have fish. And if you go catch the fish and land and then you got to have...

Mark Ratfield: Everything else.

Interviewee-1: All the safety gear, VMS, trackers and everything that we're required to have so much more stuff just to go and go harvest that fish. They're just sitting there and having the money...

Mark Ratfield: They come and collect their money [overlapping conversation] [00:53:28], yeah. And it's got ridiculous now. They're just leasing them out to the highest bidder. So it's guys that we were leasing fish from last two and a year before, now they're leasing them to this other guy, because he offered them more money. So we don't get – catch fish anymore.

Interviewee-1: It's ridiculous process.

Mark Ratfield: Yeah. It's got way ridiculous.

Interviewee-1: If we were offered that project [00:54:00] we wouldn't lease them. You can't make any money on leasing them like that.

Interviewer-2: Well, thank you for giving us all this information.

Mark Ratfield: No problem.

Interviewer-2: Is there anything that you guys want to tell us?

Mark Ratfield: Nothing I can think of.

Interviewer-2: About the history of fishing, about red tides, about obstacles, about things that helped you in your business, things you would like to see happen?

Mark Ratfield: I'd like to see the changes on IFQ for sure.

Interviewer-2: That's the most.

Mark Ratfield: That's the most important thing right now.

Interviewer-2: What would you like the future generations to know about you?

Mark Ratfield: About me?

Interviewer-2: About – yeah, about...

Mark Ratfield: About this?

Interviewer-2: Yeah. Your industry, about you...

Mark Ratfield: It takes a special person to do this and if you don't love it, don't even try it. Get in your truck, drive away as fast as you can.

Interviewer-2: Do you have kids? No?

Interviewee-1: No. No problem at all. No black lab that counts.

Interviewer-2: Yeah. I'm always curious to know if you have kids and you would like them to go in the business and continue doing what you need to...

Interviewee-1: They need to go and stay in college if I had a son.

Mark Ratfield: That's what I did to my kids.

Interviewer-2: Well, thank you so much. Do you have other questions?

Interviewer-1: No.

Interviewer-2: No? We got it all.

Mark Ratfield: If you did, you got my number. You can call [overlapping conversation] [00:55:27]...

Interviewer-1: Please send us the...

Mark Ratfield: Yeah, definitely.

Interviewer-1: When you have a chance, there is no...