

Interview with Fred Mattera (FM), F/V *Travis and Natalie*

Occupation: Commercial Fisherman

Port Community: Point Judith, Rhode Island

Interviewer: Azure Dee Cygler

Date: 11/08/2011

Oral Histories Project - NOAA Social Sciences

Logger/Transcriber: Angela Wilson

INDEX: (minutes: seconds)

Northeast Safety Training Company, Narragansett, RI

Interview

[Recorder not turned on by accident for first couple minutes of introduction. Introduction made at the end of interview but summarized here]

[Interview with Fred Mattera at 55 State Street, Point Judith, Rhode Island at the NESTCo building. Date is November 8, 2011. Release form signed].

[00:00]

FM: ... I am today, I'm a liaison with the Sector Five. I am a member. My family, the name of my vessel is the *Travis and Natalie*. Travis is my son and Natalie is my daughter. They are now thirty-three and thirty-one so, my wife is getting old. My wife is Patricia, I met her in college. Just walked into a classroom and I said that's the girl, and that was it. We've been together ever since. Ironically, we were both born the same day, same year, everything. Good for me, I never forget her birthday. And she has been a staunch supporter. We raised our children with her being home. She was a social worker, graduated with a degree. But we decided it would be best to stay and raise the kids as my mother did and as her mother did. I think it had its merits, I know it has had its merits. Both of my children have been very, very successful. You know, but in the meantime, she didn't just sit home, my wife is "Dolly Domestic". The house is spotless, [she] cooks, and gardens, and then did all my bookkeeping for twenty-five to twenty-eight years. [She] did all the bookkeeping and all. And then she did some work in the hair salon every two or three days a week as well. So, she's been very supportive.

It's been very difficult. Those first years when I bought that boat in '84 and before that I was fishing all the time. I'd just go, go, go. I was rarely home, and it is not easy raising two young kids all by yourself. And her family is from Pennsylvania so it wasn't like she could call her mom and have her come over. And my parents were you know, I've got a family of five, so they were always busy doing something else it seemed like. I think at this point now, she's ready to move on from the fishing business. We haven't had too many lucrative years in the last four or five years, especially since we had the fire on the boat.

You know, I mean we realized that fishing on the *Travis and Natalie* has afforded us a good life. We have a beautiful home and put the kids through school and did all that. That's good. It's unfortunate it's not paying the dividends in the end. On the brink of selling the boat and it's not

where we hoped to be, retiring wise. But that's fine. It's a sign of the times and we will just keep going. Those are the things that impact. You want to get into the impact of fishing.

AC: Yeah a little background is good.

FM: That's more than a little.

AC: That's fine. Did any of your children get involved in fishing?

FM: No.

AC: They didn't.

[3:08]

FM: No. Travis is an aerospace engineer with Boeing and Natalie is the beauty director for *People Style Watch Magazine*.

AC: Wow, that a little different.

FM: She's in New York City. He's in Seattle.

AC: Gotcha. Now what type of fishing do you do, Fred?

FM: Bottom Trawling. I use nets on the bottom and my primary species is squid, *Loligo* and *Illex* squid.

AC: And is that inshore or offshore?

FM: Both.

AC: Both.

FM: We chase them inshore and offshore.

AC: Has that changed over the last couple of years going inshore more or offshore more?

FM: No. It's the same. Actually, in the summer months the price of *Illex* has gone up so we used to work and chase *Loligo* on the beach in the summer months now we don't at all. We just one hundred percent go offshore chasing *Illex* in the summer months. And it is because we have freezers. We freeze the product onboard. We take it and freeze it in blocks of twenty-seven to twenty-eight pound blocks. So the clocks that have been ticking as far as concern of shelf life.

AC: Very good. Are you the captain?

FM: No, not any longer. I make a few a cameo appearances, maybe three to five trips a year.

AC: And crew members on the boat? How many

FM: Five.

AC: Has that changed over time?

FM: No, when we are freezer fishing we generally like to have the five people. If you got four, you know, we fish for eight to eleven days. If you fish with four after five or six days guys are starting to get really beat and prone to injury and everything. So, we just have five guys.

AC: So, if you could just tell me a little bit about your neighborhood. Would you describe it as a fishing community, in touch with fishing issues or not so much?

FM: Were I presently live or have lived in the last thirty years?

AC: Yeah.

FM: No, not at all. I live in Richmond, Rhode Island. We bought a home there in 1980 and then built. We bought the new home in '80 and in 2001 built another home right around the corner, probably 1,000 yards away. We bought six acres and built a brand new home there. But it is a wooded area, suburbia. People know I'm a fisherman, but you'd never know it looking at my property. I have everything else stored elsewhere, away. And as far as being tuned into the industry. No, it's not like a live right around the coast here or in Narragansett community where they are more in tuned. No.

AC: Is that by choice?

FM: Yeah it was by choice. I just wanted to be.... Well, in the summer months it gets to be crazy down here. We did live down here years ago, and Narragansett just gets insane. You just lose your community. You give it over to tourism and everybody that comes racing down here. And we actually wanted to get away and raise our kids in more of a suburban area.

AC: [That] makes sense. In terms of your social networks, do you find that you have fishermen as friends or not so much? Does your family tend to gather with others in the industry?

[07:02]

FM: No, not too much. No. I have, personally, fishermen as friends, but no. I would say people that we are closest to and friends that we are closest to are not associated with the fishing community. My wife was at church and sang for many, many years. So we had a lot of good friends that we still have now from that. We met through the church. I like to play golf and I

have been a member of clubs. That's another group of guys that are friendly and I get along with. Because I fish and because I have been affiliated as a representative of fishermen I am just saturated with the negatives. The "Oh my god, it's so difficult", "What are we gonna do"... I need a break from that.

I just don't want to talk 24/7 about how bad everything is. Because very rarely do people come and just say all the good things. They are coming to you because they need issues, they have issues they need it corrected. How can we do this? Can you help? Can you speak to whoever? Can you get the delegation from Rhode Island? Can you get the scientists? Can you go to the council meetings? Can you get them to change? So after awhile... and even when you make decisions, and even as hard as you work through all of that there is still a contingency that is going to stick a finger in your chest and say "You screwed me. You didn't do it the way I wanted you to do it." Sometimes you're in handcuffs. Sometimes you only have one or two choices. You have to pick one of them. Hopefully, it's the one that least impacts or creates minimal economic hardship.

And it's very difficult being in that [position], so I have shied away over the years. It used to be where I'd come in and go have a few drinks with the boys for years and years and years. Around here we were all fishermen. The last fifteen years I rarely, rarely do that anymore, any longer. I just do my thing and people always walk through the door and everything but I don't rub elbows.

AC: And in terms of your family, these are all general, not sector specific questions, just to get a context. But in terms of your family's longer term life plans, would you say that those have changed in the last couple years? So for instance you thought to retire early but you are extending your retirement or vice versa? Has anything like that changed for you?

[10:02]

FM: Yeah. Definitely. The change in fishing, in management and everything else has caused a gap or a problem. First you can't sell your boat. Your boat is aging, because management that has restricted moratoriums and fisheries elsewhere are struggling just as much. So, the opportunity to move your vessel like you thought, oh hell, and by the time I'm 60 years old I'll sell this thing and the whole thing will be worth a million or a million and a half dollars and I'll just put away, pay Uncle Sam and I'll live on that and other investments I have and be fine. Well, hell, you are not 'gonna get a million, million and half dollars for any boats anymore.

Permits have gone up in value. I am on the brink of selling my vessel and will probably get a good amount of money because I have good access to fisheries. In my federal permit, I have access to everything except for clamming and scalloping. Unfortunately, no scalloping. I have over 600,000 pounds in the groundfish and I have a lot of yellowtail. Which would be valuable at some point to scallopers or others that have a concern with bycatch. So all of those things. *Illex* squid, is becoming more and more popular. Probably there are fewer and fewer squid and it doesn't look good in the Falklands and all. So the price of that has doubled. So that has made

that access to that permit, which I think there is only about fifty of us, much more valuable as well.

So fortunately, I'll be able to get out reasonably. Uncle Sam will be the biggest problem. Uncle Sam is gonna take so much money out of this that it doesn't leave you anything. That is the biggest problem. After the fire we incurred some tremendous debt. Through that period, the fire and the next few years, it was just awful. It's not like I am walking away clean. Or I'll walk away with a little bit of money. I'll have to continue to work for six or seven years. Which is fine, I enjoy work. I enjoy being down here. I enjoy it. So that's where we are.

[12:51]

AC: Okay. In your opinion, what were the best years for the fishing industry in Point Judith?

FM: I think the eighties through the mid-nineties were really good here. Even in the seventies. The seventies, it was so easy, I mean it was just no turmoil. It was open access. You had fish. You could just go out south of the island. Boats were small. There was tremendous pride. Crews and you had to know your stuff. You had to really pay attention. You were lucky. It was difficult to get on good boats.

The opportunity now, is that they are a dime a dozen and even if you get that, nobody cares about anything. There is no pride. That is one of the reasons that I want out. I'm tired of dealing with misfits. I'm really, really tired of it. I was blessed. I was blessed probably for almost twenty years of having superb crew members. But it just changed. When we went to freezing, a lot of the crew members don't want to fish that long. They are getting older and they didn't want to be away. So it's a young man's game. Young guys, they have issues.

AC: I'm going to ask just a few questions about sectors specifically. If you could just tell me about your sector. How many members? When you became involved? Or roughly?

FM: We started obviously in 2010.

AC: So you were involved from the beginning?

FM: Yes. I was sort of a liaison for the sector. I worked through the process through the Northeast Seafood Coalition, working together. [I was] helping to put together the Operation Plans and the working agreements and everything else that we had. Then being here local, I was able to link with all the members. Call, make contact with them. And then walk them through the Operation Plan and walk them through the signed agreements and getting all the data and information that they needed to gather. Email, fax and everything else. Got them to sign on, and go through that whole process.

It was enriching and in some ways disillusioning. I think what bothered me more than anything starting this, going through this, was the fact that people have opinions about sectors and there

is... I don't think anybody had a real good strong feeling about sectors. I think that the plan of getting there and how they came up with it qualifying, was flawed. Tremendously flawed. It took a lot of fish from people. Just take ten years of history and just do it for one fishery during a period when National Marine Fisheries Service was encouraging you to move away from groundfish and go to others.

AC: It was a period of ten years?

[16:29]

FM: '86-'96. So if you did take that initiative and went, like I went swordfishing, I did all these other things, you were penalized. The guy who stayed and beat up the stock and didn't help to rebuild it, wins. He wins 'cause he's got history. That is so flawed. You want to get qualified, fine, then take 50% of it and put it across the board or take everything. Take every fishery that you ran. That's the problem with this. They should have gone along. If this is what they wanted to do, they should have taken every fishery. Because what you didn't have in groundfish, you would have made up in scup or whiting or squid or something else so that you had that commodity. You had something as a trade. Maybe there are people and there are fishermen out there that just want to go groundfishing. And there are those of us that just want to go squid fishing or mixed species fishing. Then we would have been able to negotiate and trade and not cost you so much money. But no, they didn't do it. They stuck to the groundfish.

So many people hated that because they feel that it should be open. You shouldn't own and possess that. Everybody should have the right to go out to fish. All we need is better science and we can continue on the track we are on. Well I'm sorry. I listened to those guys for fifteen years bitch and moan about how they hated micromanagement, hated it. They would do anything to get away from it. Well, here you are getting away from it and now they hate this even more than they hated that. It divided this port. Incredibly. There is a divide. A strong divide. There are those that felt that sectors are sectors and we need to embrace it and move on. There were those that say I hate it but I have no choice, I'll have to join a sector and so that's why you have two sectors out of this port. So, personalities get entered into it and everything else so it got ugly. It gets messy and ugly.

AC: So in terms of the common pool...?

[18:49]

FM: I don't know who is in the common pool, just maybe a few little guys. I don't know who is. I couldn't even tell you anybody.

AC: So it's mostly sector. The port is mostly sector members from either sector 5 or...?

FM: 13.

AC: 13. So, that is very interesting. Are there any services the sector provides like representation at meetings or insurance or something?

FM: There is no insurance. There is nothing. All we did was that the Coalition started this. They put their money into it to, built it up to get everything done. And there are 12 sectors that worked through them. What we did in the end of 2010 and now presently in the 2011-12 year of sectors, we created an entity, NESSN... Northeast (Northeast Sector Service Network) I don't know. I can't remember what the hell it all means. Another acronym. But that is the entity. And we didn't cause of the economy. We have 12 sectors in here. If every one of them had to put an Operations Plan and agreement every year up, it would cost you hundreds of thousands of dollars to do this. Now we do it as one.

Everybody, those 12 sectors that are involved, we pay a penny and a half or two cents. You take two cents off of the price of the fish and that gets forwarded to the entity. That's how they survive. Libby is now the Chief Executive, the Executive Director of that and her staff. The Coalition is still associated with it but they get funding elsewhere. That is the service they provide. We have a Coalition with the likes of Jackie O'Dell and Vito that are our mouthpiece. There are supporters that take us through the process. They keep us aware of where we are. Our sector managers also keep us abreast of what's changing in management, what's coming so that we can attend public hearings and all that, council meetings.

They also give you constantly, every day, I have an update of fish that is available to purchase or lease or whatever. There is access to that all the time. And it all works well through this entity. You have the right of first refusal through the sector that you are in. Then any fish, three days it goes out to the rest of the entity. If somebody bids on a fish and they all bid a dollar across the board for everything, you have that. You can accept that or you can go out to the rest of the entity, the other twelve, and even the other five or six. There are seventeen or eighteen. They can bid as well. So, what we are trying to avoid is cronyism. I've got a good buddy down there and I want him to have my fish, so I'll give it to him for thirty cents even though it's going for sixty to a dollar. We want to avoid that and make it fair and competitive. Those are the nuances that developed for all of the sectors. We all do the same thing.

[22:26]

AC: Here you said there was a bit of a divide or is a divide. How does that affect the fabric of the place in terms of fishing in general?

FM: It's changed. Rodman Sykes, ask him when you talk to him. Here's a guy that there is no one that doesn't like Rodman. He is the easiest going, mildest, traditionalist that has been down here. And he'll come in and tell me; "I can't believe that there are guys that hate me, won't even talk to me because of the sector shit."

AC: How does them being in a sector...? How does someone else being in a sector affect their lives?

FM: Well first off, he went into a fluke sector which was before any sector, through the state. They looked at it as a select few. Everybody could have put in a permit for it. It just happened that Chris Brown around commercial fisherman put one in for eight boats and they got it accepted as a pilot program. All these other guys are bitching when they had the opportunity to do the same thing. If you don't like it, put your own in.

AC: So, it's not detracting from them.

FM: It's fishermen, fishermen. It's like Peyton Place. It's ridiculous, the soap opera down here. Now you understand why I said I don't hang around them all the time. The soap opera attitudes of fishermen. And everybody has distorted concepts. If you really sat them all down in here and said; "Okay, tell me what you really think is happening..." And you had ten fishermen, you would get eight at least different opinions and seven of them would be clueless because they just hear the peripheral, the sound bites. The little things and they don't really comprehend it. So now what it does, it is personalities. Those guys who will do it, screw them. Screw Fred Mattera... Chris... blah.... I'll go over here with these guys. And that's what you get. You've got to hand out nylons and high heels and skirts to these guys sometimes.

AC: Very interesting. I hadn't thought of it from that perspective.

[24:45]

FM: It's the worst I've ever seen. All my years down here fishing I have never seen anything more dividing than what has happened here with sectors.

AC: Now with that in mind, if you had a very close peer/friend that was fishing, and had a choice to join a sector or not, would you say yes definitely do it?

FM: Well now that sectors are here, you are out of your mind if you don't join a sector. That common pool is suicide. There is nothing there. There is nothing there. Go to the sectors. The key is that we have got to get more fish.

AC: So the more people that join, the more quota is put into that pool that everyone can fish from.

FM: What you are going to find is that most people don't fish. I didn't fish. I fished two trips. That's it. I left hundreds of thousands of pounds on the table, didn't even sell them.

AC: So where did it go?

FM: In limbo. It just stayed there. Add it on to next year.

AC: But you, as a member you still get... but because you have contributed your quota, a portion of the income?

FM: No. Oh no, no, no. It just sits there.

AC: Then what is the benefit of membership?

FM: No, now you have to figure out how many pounds of fish do you have. And I think this sector has three to five million, I'd have to go through the books. But of that, obviously the lion share is haddock. I had six hundred something thousand haddock last year, almost six hundred thousand. I don't think I caught forty thousand.

AC: Because you are targeting squid?

FM: Yeah, I just kept it until the end of the year to see if they shut down squid because that is a quota species. I'd used it. Well, at that time everybody had thought the same thing and then there is fish all over the place, so no one was interested in even buying haddock. So I couldn't sell that. I think last year I sold \$15,000 worth of fish. I did sell \$15,000. Yellowtails, flounders, some codfish, haddock to Patty McClade. And then made a few trips so there was still I think thirty to forty thousand yellowtails they never caught. There was a portion of flounder they never caught. There is a portion of cod they never caught. Haddock, grey sole, dabs, hake, whiting, catch it. So it just rolls over.

So what you have to do is you have to figure out, okay say I've got five million. What does it cost to run this thing? Okay, it costs \$125,000 to pay a manager, pay costs, pay a secretary, all that, get your accounting done. I mean all costs attributed with it. Well now you have to figure, okay, how much realistically, come on guys, are we going to harvest here? We know we're not gonna.... Two point two or two million of this let's say three and a half million of the five is haddock, we won't even do ten percent of that probably. I think we did do right around ten percent of it. You know. So the rest of it at that one and a half million, what are you gonna take to generate that one point two? You gonna take nine cents plus the two cents to them? So you are gonna charge eleven cents when other sectors that have tons of fish are charging four, five and six? So you are disadvantaged. That is what's happening.

[28:38]

AC: So who is making that kind of decision?

FM: The Board of Directors for the sectors.

AC: So they sit and meet every...?

FM: They have to. Well, at the beginning of the year and through the year and look at where we are and do we have to increase it or do we drop it back?

AC: They are constantly assessing where you need to be. Okay, so there is a Board of Directors that is part of this entity.

FM: There is a Board of Directors that is part of each sector.

AC: Then there is also one for the entity.

FM: And then we have the entity which has a Board of Directors which I was part of and then that was.... We realized that we had four or five hundred thousand dollars going into it and they only needed three hundred so we cut back. I think it used to be three and a half cents or three cents we cut back to one and a half, three to one and a half. And now I guess there is something else that is going on that is going to raise it a half a cent. So that is how you get your cost broke down.

AC: Okay that is very good information.

FM: In the sector, every sector has a fee, they have what we call a "sector fee" and then we have the "network fee". Ours is \$0.02 now for the network fee and I think its \$0.05 for the sector fee, for fish that are landed. And that's still taking into consideration the first year forty something thousand dollars went into the kitty. And now the dockside monitoring money will come into the kitty. So at some point, all that is going to dry out and then you're gonna have to support that sector on the fish that you have. Pay the director and everything else to meet the cost. That's not going to be easy.

AC: You have a little bit more time? There are just a few more things. So how have you changed how you fish since you have joined this sector? Can you talk a little bit more about that? Has that made you shift when you go, where you go, if you go?

[30:42]

FM: Well, it's your mind set. You shift to thinking, "Geez, I don't want to have an awful lot of this. When do I want to use this? When do I seize the opportunity?" Generally, for us we would like to continue to squid fish all the time and keep the freezers going. But, there are lulls. There are times in the summer where *Illex* were twenty cents, thirty cents; it wasn't worth it for us to go out. We couldn't catch enough, land enough, hold enough, to make it worthwhile. So you choose to then go out and do a little monkfishing and go off catching the yellowtail and few haddock and stuff like that to augment your year.

But now, you have to be a little more conservative. I mean, I had years where I landed three hundred, four hundred plus yellowtails. I think out of five or six years we were number one landing yellowtails for three of them. We caught a lot of yellowtails for a long time. Now, I don't catch ten thousand pounds of them anymore. You know we don't go. And right now, 2011, I haven't used a single pound. It is just sitting there. Sometimes in December, that week before

Christmas, something happens in December, I don't know if the squid realize it is Christmas and they go on vacation somewhere, but for years we never did anything right up from about the 10th of December right through Christmas. It's terrible.

Unless, you're maybe lucky, you might go way, way east and then you get your head kicked in by the Hague line. But other than that, it is very, very slow. So, we used to always go make a yellowtail Christmas trip. There are times you didn't catch much. One time we got \$3.40. I think we had twenty thousand pounds of everything. We had \$68,000 worth of stock. We just caught prices, so we used to do that. We don't do that anymore. And we used to go in the spring because squid used to be shut down or on the brink of being shut down come March or April. So then we then just switch over and go groundfishing. I always used to go groundfishing at the end of March and April. And now we just don't. We hang in there with squid as long as we can and then maybe go fluking and then go out to work on the boat and then go from there. It's not like we just had these days that we would just go hunt and find it. I have an allocation but we just don't seem to be targeting it that much. It has changed. The way we go about our thought process of fishing.

[33:39]

AC: Now how do you get paid? How do you get a check from the sector?

FM: Well we don't get a check from the sector. The way it works is, for instance I go and start out here, catch three or four thousand monkfish, and I steam to George's and I catch ten thousand yellowtails and five thousand cod and thirty thousand haddock. I come back and go to the auction in New Bedford. Burge's, I mean Whaling City, with the Canastra boys and I unload. I get decent prices. I get \$55,000 worth of stock. But, now I have a VTR (Vessel Trip Report) that I have to fill out prior to landing. When I come back to port, I have to hand in my VTR copy and my landing slip. The landing is true. It's the actual amount of fish that we caught.

So based on those, everything except for skate and monkfish, because there is no fee for that, I pay the five cents to the sector and the two cents to the network. So, if I had fifty thousand pounds of fish, I would pay, times seven, would be \$3,500 to the sector. All of a sudden, I have to come up with another \$3,500 off of my gross stock because of what they built in as a plan. Where Days at Sea, I never had to give anybody any money. Everything I made is mine. And I didn't even buy any fish. Now, think if you bought, you'd pay sixty cents for those yellowtails and they had ten thousand. Of those yellowtails, I gotta take six grand. Say I did buy it, now off the top I have to take \$6,000 off that stock to pay for that. So that's much less. That stock of fifty-five, when I pay the sector fee, becomes fifty-two-five. And if I had to pay sixty cents for ten thousand yellowtails, I gotta take another six off of that. So now I'm forty-six-five, and that's my stock.

[36:09]

AC: You cannot opt to step out? You're locked into that sector? You're obligated?

FM: Oh, once you commit, you sign on, you're in.

AC: Is that for one year?

FM: Right. It's for a year.

AC: So, if you had a bad trip or you need that money for something else, for that particular trip, or an emergency happened, you're still locked in. You have to pay that?

FM: Some guys may come and say, "Can I give you a thousand and pay another five hundred as we go along in the squid fishery or something else?"

AC: So there is some flexibility?

FM: We don't like to do that, but yes there is some flexibility and understanding that the nature of this guy. He has a mortgage payment and insurance payment and he's got nothing. So, yeah.

AC: Interesting. How are your earnings distributed in your family? Is it your contribution more, or less, or equal to your wife's?

FM: No, it's much more.

AC: And has that changed over the years?

FM: My wife works. So it used to be, ninety, ninety-five percent of it. But, now she works so she probably puts in twenty five percent, maybe twenty percent.

AC: Okay. In terms of leasing quota, have you needed to lease additional quota as time has gone on in this sector?

FM: Yes, I did. I had to lease some at the end of the year because I did make some trips at the end of the year and I exceeded my haddock, my codfish, and maybe my flounder. So I bought some from Jim Fox and paid him. It wasn't more than two or three thousand. I arranged it with him. It had to be approved by the sector and the manager. I wrote a check out to Jim Fox and paid him.

AC: Was the arrangement fair in your eyes?

FM: Oh yes it was very fair.

AC: So, it was a good option?

FM: Yeah it was much less. It was at the end of the year, prices were so depressed. So I said "I'm not giving you sixty cents for flounders, I'll give you thirty, take it or leave it. Or you can throw them away. Or go to somebody else." "I'll take it."

AC: Now Fred, does your family have health insurance?

FM: Yes.

AC: Through?

FM: Through her business, through her job.

AC: For many years that wasn't the case?

FM: No, it wasn't the case up until two years ago. We provided all our own insurance for years.

AC: Boat insurance?

FM: Boat insurance, but you said health.

AC: I did.

FM: Health insurance, no, up until two years ago we were paying eighteen [and] change for health insurance.

AC: Eighteen change... meaning?

FM: Eighteen thousand, five hundred dollars for us, for my wife and I for health insurance per year.

AC: Wow.

FM: Wow. In fact I think that when she got the job we were going up to almost \$1,800 a month, which was well over \$20,000

AC: Because you were paying out of pocket?

FM: Well, we're old, age. Once you turn fifty-four, fifty-five it changes. Sixty, it changes. And medical conditions, I'm diabetic, so you know I use mine. So, a lot of those things are contributing factors. So it was very, very high. Now boat insurance, I have always had boat insurance, and that is my highest cost other than fuel. My fixed cost, not my extraneous cost, is my insurance. I still have a mortgage, but it is nothing like my boat insurance.

[40:06]

AC: Have sectors influenced that? You just consider that a cost that you pay?

FM: Yes, I just consider that a cost. Sectors had no influence on it. Unless, that's all I had, so I was only fishing so much in a year. We are lucky that I have the ability to go fish twelve months out of the year. Guys in New Bedford that only have groundfish might only fish one hundred days a year. Their exposure would be less, so their insurance would be less. We go two hundred twenty, two hundred fifty days.

AC: Has the same captain been with you for a while?

FM: A couple of my brothers are there now. He's been with me since the summer. And he's just going on with the new boat, because they are going to put a scallop dredge on it. So it will be a good opportunity for him.

AC: In terms of your sort of physical and mental health and just overall well-being; would you say, and these are tough times in general, would you say that your overall outlook on life has improved, or has it decreased, or is it about the same?

FM: It has decreased.

AC: And have sectors influenced that in any way, or is it more other factors?

FM: For me, sectors have probably been more of a positive influence dollar wise. If there wasn't a sector, we would still be in the Days at Sea and the value would be even less for *Travis and Natalie* because they lock those ten years. I did have a lot of fish.

AC: So the cause is more?

FM: Well the permits are more valuable. The boats are worth shit. But the permits are really what people are buying.

AC: The 'cause of your sort of decrease look on life would be?

FM: The other part of that, most of that is because I [am] realizing now as I am walking away, the impact of taxes and everything else. For the property, doing things like that, businesses. There are so many ways, I wouldn't call them loopholes but, maybe you would call them loopholes. But there are ways of minimizing your tax exposure. Some of them are just a one-time deal. You know you can take all of your investment property, and you can pull it together and sell it, and only pay twenty-two percent or so tax-wise. And then the state, if you went and say you bought... oh say you wanted to go live in Naples, Florida or Fort Myers, Florida or something like that. And bought a place down there using the money, you know a half a million dollars. You go down there and buy a \$250,000 home down there and once during the year you rent it out to somebody. He gives you \$3,000 for it and you give him a check back. You don't

really need to do it. You need to show that it is an investment. You don't need to pay hardly any state tax. But when it comes to fishing, I'm looking at forty percent exposure. I'm looking at over \$400,000 to \$450,000 paying Uncle Sam. It's ridiculous. It's ludicrous. There's no way of getting around it.

[43:35]

AC: And there's no hefty write-offs that you can claim?

FM: No everything is depreciated. I have had the boat too many years. It's just the way it is. We have been begging them for a means of a buy-out. That's another thing that was flawed in this whole process. Having traveled around the world, and seen what is happening around the world, where they are constricting and consolidating fisheries everywhere. They did it through decommissioning or buy-outs. That is the first thing they did. And that is the other thing they should have done here. It [would have] made it much easier to just have come in here, put \$100,000,000 on the table, buy this industry out, give guys a gracious exit. Let them go out. And then incorporate in an incentive by saying, "Okay, here you go, you get a one-time shot, you pay a twenty percent tax and that's it. Go away." Guys would have seized that opportunity. But no, we didn't do that. It's not going to happen now, that's for sure.

AC: Money was spent anyways on management efforts?

FM: You're not going to get it. Not now, not in these economic times. Not when they have to reduce by Thanksgiving \$1.5 trillion dollars. You're not gonna see anything like that happening. So, again, sign of the times. So mine, it's a dimmer view because now I realize what you'd assumed you'd be with, and have and everything is not going to materialize like that. So it's a little step back, that's all.

AC: Has this influenced your physical health? Have you found your stresses increase?

FM: No. I deal with stress pretty well, or I'd never be able to make it through this business. I don't feel that. I don't feel stressed. I don't feel anything. Just the decisions that I have to make that I haven't made yet. And I am one that just, when time comes, will deal with it. I'm not going to get all worked up over it. I'm just not that way. It's too crazy.

AC: It could drive you insane. Your involvement in the fishing community is huge. Could you just give me a running list of all the things you do with the foundation and your roles in the bigger picture too?

[46:10]

FM: Well, President of the Point Club is probably my biggest position. It's not a timely position. Vice president of the [Commercial Fisheries Research] Foundation is definitely the most timely. I probably have given them twenty hours a week. Sunderland [Insurance], Director for

Sunderland. I dedicate at least four weeks out of the year going traveling and going to meetings. But, I am rewarded there. I am compensated for that. Point Club and CFRF, I'm not compensated for at all. Other associations that I am affiliated with I just, I do them because I like to stay involved and I try to give something back to the community. A lot of people gave something to me years ago and I think it is important that, it's just the way I'm cut, to give something back. I like the safety aspect of it. I like the safety business. I have seen people's family members die with me and going through the rescue and all, it did something, it changed you, it changed me to the point where I think we need to change the culture in this industry and make it safer. So I am obsessed in a sense with that.

[47:38]

AC: So that is your role at NESTCO (Northeast Safety Training Company) here?

FM: That's NESTCO, which I conduct drills and inspections on fishing vessels and all. I work through the insurance company. They're probably my bread and butter. And I have some independents as well.

AC: So you own NESTCO?

FM: Yeah.

AC: So it's your...?

FM: NESTCO is Fred Mattera, President and everything. And through that, I am a member of the commercial, US Coast Guard Commercial Fishing Safety Advisory Committee, which is a national committee made up of representatives from the industry; Naval Architects, one insurance person, safety people from Maine to Alaska. I think there are 17 of us. We sit down and go through the [Magnuson Steven's] Authorization Act, Coast Guard fishing regulations. We pass motions and make decisions that are then passed through Coast Guard to our delegation to legislation and bills.

The Authorization Act that was passed October 2010 has some new changes and will be the topic next week on our plate in Seattle for that meeting. I am involved in that. Again, it is pro-bono. They pay for my travel and everything else. But, it is a great way to network, great way to understand, [and] a great way to know what is going on around the country. [You] know where you stand as opposed to everybody else and I find that one pill doesn't solve everything for everybody. We can't just say we've got to do this. Because regions change, region's fisheries, region's mindsets are different. I think that you need time. Safety, my opinion everything should happen tomorrow. It should be as ridged as it could be. But, if you stand up and hold that stand... it just won't work. You can give them all the reasons in the world and everybody will be nodding their head.

But, the economic hardship of it will far exceed the rationalization of doing it. So you have to take little baby steps, I believe and continue to educate. You need to constantly educate them. And again there is a science. There are certain people that are really good. NIOSH (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health) is really good at it, looking at fatalities, occupational fatalities, and what are they. You know. What is it that kills us; being overboard? Loss of the vessel? Losing the whole crew because of capsizing, flood, fire? What is doing it? Getting caught in winches? Getting caught in net drums? What is killing people? What is killing people in the fisheries in the regions? Where are the worst places?

Right here in the northeast trawl fisheries are pretty bad. Scallop fishery, there are a lot of injuries. Not a lot of deaths, but a lot of injuries. Gulf of Mexico, wooden decks, slippery, rails real low, working in little white boots, at night... man over boards; "Where's Fred? He's back there somewhere I guess...." It's different. It's different everywhere. So it's a good opportunity to see that so that you could make valued decisions on where we need to go.

AC: And any working groups or councils?

FM: We split up into a couple of working groups but any councils or advisory committees? No. I haven't done much with the councils in the last 10 years. I used to be on advisory committees for pelagics, for groundfish and things like that. But, I sort of pulled myself away from that. There is only so much, I just can't cut myself up into pieces you know.

[52:04]

AC: Research Projects. You are doing a few of those?

FM: I am doing one. This is the first time in my thirty-nine years of fishing I'm engaged, and that is because Adam [from School for Marine Science and Technology at UMass Dartmouth in New Bedford, MA] begged me, "Please, please do this yellowtail with us. Please, you and Stevie (Steve Follett). The boats are comped. Please." And, I don't do them because I got enough of a big bulls-eye on my back. "The Foundation [CFRF], oh yeah, well Fred, it will be all the same guys and they are just going to take all the money and do all the research and they will benefit. That is what he does." You will always have that. You will always, always have that. So, I just never put any bullets in their gun. I just never got involved. I didn't need it. Others, they do too much of it. I tell them that it doesn't help you. It doesn't serve you. You know?

AC: A couple more questions and we will be free. Bigger picture, in terms of what the future holds for Point Judith. Do you have some thoughts on what you would like people to know November 2011? Looking out a few years down the road, what are you seeing?

[53:13]

FM: Well, I see a fishery going through a tremendous transition. But, I see in the ocean, on the ocean, a healthy fishery, a health ecosystem. I see more fish now, than I ever have in thirty-nine

years. I mean the ocean is really teeming with fish. Hopefully, see National Marine Fisheries, they know how to take fish away, but they don't know how to give it back. They are so conservative. Then we have the NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) that are our greatest nemesis. So, I think that you're gonna see a smaller fleet. I pray that we can maintain diversity, I really do, because that will continue to foster the community and the culture of it. Because there are those that don't want to be on big boats and go way off.

And there are those that just want to fish around Block Island, and there are those that want to fish right around the coast and the Bay. And, that to me is paramount, that is what it is all about, diversity. The uniqueness of Point Judith is that Point Judith will always be here and always be successful. I don't know if it will be as big as it is today. But, I still think that it will be, because of all the fishing ports I have ever been engaged in, and I have been through a lot of ports up and down this coast and the west coast, these are the most progressive, sharpest fishermen that I have ever met. Now, there are some keenly, real bright good business men in the scallop business now. They are boat owners, but they are really not individual boat owners or something like that. These are guys that are magnanimous built up, big companies and everything else. They just bought up a lot of boats. They're fleet owners. And as far as them looking at a new fishery and how to get into it, these guys are unbelievable here.

They are educated, they are smart, they're sharp. And what is happening, guys are saying, "Okay, I see opportunity here. That opportunity is how do we create markets? We aren't going to catch a lot of fish, so we need to get more money." And they have started an ACE (Annual Catch Entitlement) exchange which is an auction that, "I'm leaving to go fishing Wednesday, so I sign into them that I am leaving Wednesday, the *Travis and Natalie*. I am targeting probably a couple thousand monkfish, four or five thousand codfish, a few flounders and whatever else. Bid." So that way by Wednesday morning when I am steaming out, I've already got a bid. I already know what price my fish is. You have to bid ahead a time. That will take time to be cultivated. It will hinge on the fact that you need to... [Interruption from a person coming into the room].

AC: We are just wrapping up.

FM: That's again an incentive. That is the way to go. We need to create these markets. Local seafood, locally caught. That's one of the reasons why I think this will end up being fairly successful, because aquaculture isn't going to be the answer. The consumer really wants to know what they are eating. It's what's happening. It's a green movement. We just need to slowly tap into that. And it will happen. Business men put their heads together. That will happen. I think that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. I think that this will be a smaller port, but there will still be a diversity and some very successful individuals here. It is just going to take some time.

[57:16]

AC: Now for posterity's sake, is there something you would add to an archive about your experiences or your perceptions as a closing comment?

FM: Well, you know I am synonymous with doing an awful lot in this fishery. Giving something back and being involved, and I have been for a long, long time. I'll slowly, slowly start to pull myself away. But a lot of that was generated... probably part of it is my personality. But, I remember when I started here. I came down out of Cranston. Long hair, beard, hippie-ish looking and everything, into a swamp Yankee community. I was Italian. I was the only token Italian around here. But, my work ethic is proud. I could really put my head down and went to town. I bought a boat with a partner in '74. It was a boat that was here years prior to that. It was Papoose. It was built at Palmer Brother in Connecticut, and we called it the *Hobbit*.

When we came in here and started working on that, at that time, you just were a fisherman. You were part of that society here, but you didn't know what people really thought 'cause nobody really talked to you. Fishermen, they talk with their heads down and their thumbs twiddling, or they didn't talk at all. That is why I usually did all the talking. Slowly but surely, in those 6 weeks of putting that boat together. The most magnanimous fishermen down here, the guys we revered the most, started coming over and giving you stuff, telling you stuff, accepting you. That just hit me. It was just, who gave you tow posts, who gave you a collar, who gave you a boom? I mean these were great, great things that we didn't have that we would have spent money on.

Probably the most magnanimous thing, this story that I told when I was National Fishermen Fisherman of the Year or whatever thing that was. High liner of the year. John Dikestra, very quiet and incredible family, his brother was Jake, and very successful fisherman. He lived across the pond. His boat was there. He's got a place right up there. He's got fields and a warehouse. Synonymous with stuff strewn all over, whatever you need, go see John. He, one day took out fishing and stopped over and said, "When you boys get ready to go fishing, I think I got a net or something over in the yard, you come and see me, I have a net for you." And we were thinking, "Wow, the nets we have are all rags. That would be great." So, the last week we drive over in the truck, go knock on his door, and he said, "Talk to my wife, come on we'll go over and look in the barn, I think I got something over there." Takes us over in the barn and points up in the loft, and there up on a pallet is a brand new net, built by Wilcox. Brand spanking new net. Knew the horsepower, knew the size. Says, "Take that." We were just about in tears. We were like "Are you kidding me? What do you mean? We don't have much money right now." Says he didn't want any money. "Well what can we do?" "Over the years I'm certain you'll find some fish, just give me a call and let me know there are a little fish over here". And that's just the way that it went. And for years, I have gone over with thousands of dollars in my pocket. Trying to give John a penny, he wouldn't hear of it, wouldn't hear of it. And it's that, those things that hit you that make you realize, wow. This is unique. This is special. These people are special and we need to enforce that and continue that. As we move forward, that is the important thing.

AC: Excellent Fred. Thank you for your time. Just in closing I will state that this was a fabulous [talk] with Fred Mattera here in Point Judith, Rhode Island. The Vessel, *Travis and Natalie*. This is Azure Cygler as interviewer on November 8, 2011. Thank you again Fred.

FM: You're welcome.

END INTERVIEW

[1:01:35]