

Christina Package-Ward: Your name and the city you live in?

David Cupka: Okay. My name is David Cupka. I live in Charleston, South Carolina.

CPW: What year were you born? Then where were you born?

DC: I was born in 1945 in Charleston, South Carolina.

CPW: [laughter] What are your father's and mother's names? What were their occupations?

DC: My father's name was Frank. My mother's name was Susan. He worked at the Naval Shipyard. My mother was a housewife.

CPW: Were you always interested in the marine environment as a child?

DC: No, I wasn't actually. [laughter] It came on later in life when I was in college.

CPW: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

DC: I have one brother, one sister. Neither of them are in the marine field.

CPW: [laughter] Do you have any children?

DC: I have one daughter. She's a buyer for a series of clothing stores.

CPW: Tell me about your educational background. Where did you go to high school and college?

DC: I went to high school at Bishop England in Charleston. I attended the College of Charleston. I got a bachelor's degree and graduated from there in [19]63. [laughter]. I stayed out a year. Then I went to the College of Charleston and graduated from College of Charleston with a Bachelor of Science in 1968. In 1970, I graduated from Florida State University with a master's degree in Biological Oceanography.

CPW: When did you become interested in the marine environment?

DC: Actually, it was when I was in college. I started out pre-med...

CPW: Oh, wow.

DC: – in the College of Charleston. But I had a professor there who took an interest in me and opened my eyes to the field of marine science and convinced me I needed to go into marine science. So, I did, and I'm glad I did.

CPW: What was your first job in marine science?

DC: In my first job, I went to work for the State of South Carolina in 1970. I was the principal investigator on the 88-309 project, Commercial Fisheries Research and Development Act. It was looking at the life history of black sea bass of South Carolina and the commercial fisheries for black sea bass or description in fishery.

CPW: Did you work with any notable people early in your career?

DC: I have worked with Philippe Cousteau. When I first went to work for the state, he came by. He was interested in going out and diving on some of our artificial reefs, and also on some mariculture work that we were doing. I think he was working on a film at the time, so he spent about a week with us. But he's the only one. [laughter]

CPW: How did you first get involved in fisheries management?

DC: Actually, like I said, when I went to work for the State of South Carolina, I started out on the research side. I worked in research for about three or four years. Then the individual who was director of the Marine Resources Division, Dr. Edwin Joseph, offered me a chance to either stay with research or to go into management. I decided to go into management. So, [laughter] that's the way my career made.

CPW: [laughter] What are some of the significant changes in the way that fisheries are managed today compared to when you first began in fisheries management?

DC: I'd say one of the main things that's different now, for one thing, when I first started working in fisheries, there was very little attention paid to recreational fisheries. It was almost all commercial fisheries. There were very few, if any, recreational fisheries programs. So, back then after Marine Fishery Service, it was the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries. So, there's been a lot of changes, [laughter] and a lot more emphasis now on recreational fishing, which is important because they certainly have a significant impact on our marine resources. So, one of my first jobs when I switched over to management was to develop the recreational fisheries program for the State of South Carolina. So, I developed a number of programs, the Marine Game Fish Tagging Program, the State Artificial Reef Program. Later, I was very heavily involved in getting the saltwater fishing stamp or saltwater license. We called it stamp in those days passed in South Carolina, which has provided millions of dollars over the years for recreational fisheries research and development. So, that was a significant step forward.

CPW: I am just interested. You were saying that nobody really paid attention to recreational fishing at that time. Was there the same level that there is today in recreational fishing compared to commercial?

DC: There was a fair number of people fishing more inshore than offshore. Back then, they referred to it as the sleeping giant [laughter], I think. That was growing, and people were asking that more attention be paid to managing our recreational fisheries and development now. It's a lot more now than it was. The other significant thing, I think, that's different now compared to when I first started out is there weren't any federal fisheries laws both in state and in federal waters. I was involved in Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission for a number of years

where I was a commissioner. But back when I first started with the Commission, the states worked together cooperatively to develop fishery management plans. But it was a voluntary thing as to whether or not they got implemented. Then in the early [19]90s, we got the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act passed, which puts some teeth into it. After that, if states didn't implement the provisions of these plans that were developed jointly, then they could be penalized and could actually lose the ability to harvest the portion of the stock that we're trying to manage and whatnot. Assigned by on the federal side, they have the Magnuson-Stevens Act that come along in the 1976. So, it was very little going on particularly in terms of recreational fisheries. But both the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act and the Magnuson-Stevens Act not only provided a legislative base for fisheries management, but they also provided resources in terms of funding to carry out research in recreational activities for our fisheries. So, that was a big change [laughter] back in the [19]70s.

CPW: What would you say has been the biggest improvement in fisheries management that you have seen?

DC: I think certain data collection. Again, when I first started out, mostly fisheries management involved biological information. Very little attention was paid to economic and social sciences. I think that's improved over the years, although we still have a way to go, I think. So, that's been a big improvement over the years.

CPW: What do you think we can do to improve the economic and social data collection?

DC: That's one of the things I'm a little concerned about. I know in terms of the future of fisheries management, in this current atmosphere, I'm afraid that we aren't going to have the resources we need to get a lot of the data that we need to manage our fisheries and manage them properly. I see that as a problem, particularly in the near term, for getting the resources that are needed.

CPW: But I guess that kind of leads into the next question. What do you think is lacking and needs improvement?

DC: Again, I think a lot of it is data. One of the things that we've done a couple of years ago, you heard a lot of talk, a buzz phrase, was ecosystem management. I think people realized that we need to go in that direction. But it's not as easy as it sounds because we don't have a lot of the data that we need to manage on an ecosystem basis. So, unfortunately, we've tended to manage things in a vacuum. We know those aren't really isolated, that everything is connected. If you manage one fish, it's going to impact other fish and fishermen's activities and everything. So, we need to take a more holistic approach to how we manage our fisheries. So, I think there's a real need to improve our database to do that. Some of the things we were talking about today are some of the activities in the South Atlantic, where we started pulling a lot of these databases together and showing them in terms of mapping and things like that. It's all going to come together and enable us to move in that direction more in the future, which I think is the route we need to go.

CPW: If you could change anything about the current way that we manage our fisheries, how

could that be? What would that look like?

DC: It would be to take politics out. [laughter] Too many times, I've seen legislators substitute their judgment about fisheries issues for the judgment of the managers and the experts in there. That's all for political reasons. Unfortunately, sometimes it stuck us, and the fishermen pay the price for that. So, if there's any way it could be politicized less, I think [laughter] that would be an improvement.

CPW: Do you think there is any way to do that? [laughter]

DC: I don't know of any way [laughter] to do that. We just have to keep trying to forge ahead. But over the years, I've seen how disruptive it can be and how unfair it is in certain situations. People end up paying the price. They shouldn't have to pay the price for those political decisions.

CPW: Are there any memorable moments or periods that you remember most during your time as a fisheries manager?

DC: On a personal basis, I guess [laughter] one that really stands out was when I won the Captain David H. Hart Award at 1997 from the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. It's the highest award that the Commission gives. It's voted on by the commissioners from all fifteen states, Maine through Florida. They recognized me that year for making significant contributions to fisheries management on some of the work I did on establishing artificial reef program and getting the law enforcement more involved in our management activities, as well as some of the recreational fisheries programs I started in South Carolina and continued to go ahead. So, that meant a lot to me because it was something my peers awarded to me. So, that was probably one of the highlights of my forty-four-year career in fisheries management.

CPW: What have you enjoyed the most about being involved in fisheries management?

DC: I think it's intellectually stimulating. It's good to be able to put together a plan to bring a stock back. It benefits not only the resource, but the users of that resource. It's a good feeling. Very fulfilling personally to be involved in an activity that results in that.

CPW: What have you enjoyed the least? [laughter]

DC: The least, well, [laughter] again, I think, is the bureaucracy and politicalization sometimes of the fishery management process. Unfortunately, I got to say, I've seen the results of some of that. In my own experience, on a state level, you may see two or three years' worth of work go down the drain because somebody thinks they've got a better idea, so they completely disregard all the work of the experts done in trying to improve things and yet, again, substitute their judgment for the people they ought to be [laughter] letting manage the resource.

CPW: What do you think is the biggest concern for the future of fisheries management?

DC: I think the biggest concern I have right now is, like I said, just the resources not being

available to provide the data we need for things like stock assessment. It's getting harder and harder, I think, to get funding for research. So, that, I think, is the biggest challenge. Immediate challenge in the future is just getting the resources we need to do the job.

CPW: Do you think that is a short-term thing? Have you seen it progressively get worse?

DC: It's gotten worse [laughter] for the last six or seven years, but then the whole economy has gotten worse. I'm hoping it's the thing that's going to turn around eventually because there's a lot of needs out there for fisheries management and for life in general. So, hopefully, we're going to climb out of this.

CPW: [laughter] Is there anything that you are particularly proud of about your accomplishments in fisheries management? You talked about your great acknowledgement by your colleagues.

DC: Well, just being involved in a number of things over the years. I've been able to start some programs and some projects that I started at the state level, having served as chairman on the South Atlantic Council. Now, it is, I think, my twenty-third year. I think I'm the longest-serving member of the South Atlantic Council. I've gotten to serve as vice chair in five years and chairman, six years. So, it's been very fulfilling. It hasn't always worked out the way [laughter] I would like it to, but I think we've done some good things over the years. I'm glad I've been a small part of that.

CPW: How did you first become involved in with the council in particular?

DC: The council was started in [19]76. At 1978, Dr. Joseph, the director of the Marine Center, who was a personal mentor to me, who got me appointed to the Scientific and Statistical Committee. I served on that for fifteen years, including three years as chairman to the SSC. Then when he passed away, unfortunately, I was tapped to continue serving on the council in his place because I had attended virtually every council meeting since the council was created in 1976. So, I had a lot of knowledge of the process and the people involved and the issues, and also, I just kind of moved into it.

CPW: Do you have any advice for a young person who might want to get involved in fisheries management?

DC: [laughter] I'm not going to say don't do it, because it has been very rewarding and fulfilling. I would recommend that they get a good and solid foundation as they can in math and science, that they try and get into the best school they can, and importantly, to try and find somebody who's willing to be a mentor who can open up opportunities to them they might not have heard otherwise, as well as share their experiences with the person who is wanting to pursue that line of work. Right now, in my case, I had a couple of mentors who were very important in my career.

CPW: Who are they?

DC: One was Dr. Norman Chamberlain, who got me to switch to [laughter] marine science.

Another one was Dr. Ed Joseph, who was the director of the Marine Resources Division in South Carolina and our first council representative when the councils were formed. He gave me a lot of opportunities.

CPW: I was just interested in all that work that you did with the recreational fisheries and developing the stamps and everything. Could you talk a little bit more about that?

DC: Well, back in those days, there wouldn't but a couple of states that had what we call a saltwater fishing license. We started calling it stamp because it was objectionable [laughter] to people. But we developed a process. We had to work with our legislature for about six years before we ever got it through. So, I spent a lot of time meeting with fishing clubs and individual fishermen, as well as tourism organizations in the state. There was a lot of concern that if we implemented a saltwater fishing license that people will going to go to another state instead of coming to South Carolina. It's going to have a negative impact on tourism. Spent a lot of time with the legislature, just trying to convince them it was the right way to go. After, like I said, about six years of hard work by a lot of people, we were able to get that. Since then, I think we've raised probably maybe \$50 million or more with it.

CPW: Wow.

DC: This has been used for recreational fisheries management development in our state research, as well as building reefs and tagging and things like that. So, it was quite an exercise. [laughter]. A lot of TV shows and radio shows [laughter], and just wherever we could get our foot in the door to try and tell people the benefits of implementing something like that. So, eventually, we succeeded.

CPW: I do not have any more questions on my sheet. But is there anything else you would like to talk more about or mention or discuss?

DC: I don't know of anything. Like I said, I've had a long career, forty-four years. It's been a fulfilling career. I never regret changing my major in college. [laughter] I've been fortunate and blessed.

CPW: It must be amazing to watch the council throughout this whole process, from the beginning until now?

DC: Yes, it's been an interesting process. I was thinking the other day when the councils first got started the committees, if somebody were not a committee on the committee meet, they wouldn't even be there. They'd be off somewhere. But nowadays, all the council members attend pretty much all the committee meetings, whether they're on a committee or not, which really helps because they get introduced to the issues and don't have to wait for council meeting. If you've had some reconsiderations, like you need to change something, it kind of gives you a second opportunity to make some changes and fine-tune some things you did earlier. It's an interesting process. I know people, particularly fishermen, get frustrated with. I can tell you, as a council member, we get frustrated [laughter] too. Sometimes it seems like things don't move as quickly as people would like. I think the council process was intentionally set up that way so

that you could really try and think things out before you rush ahead with things. So, it gets frustrating to everybody at times.

CPW: Are there any big changes that you have seen in particular species or –

DC: Honestly, we're managing a lot more species now. I've seen species rebound. The first one we had real success with was king mackerel back in the late [19]80s, I guess, early [19]90s. In other words, there's a lot more to consider now than there was back then. There's a lot more data available. It takes a lot more time to study and get ready [laughter] for the meetings, though. I'm not sure, but I realized just when you're sitting on the other side of the table having to make these decisions in there, sometimes they're hard decisions, and you know they're going to have significant impacts on not only resource but on people in their communities. They're decisions which should never be taken lightly. So, I'm not sure people appreciate how difficult that is. It's a serious thing.

CPW: So, I do not know if I have anything else to ask then.

DC: I don't know if I've told you anything. [laughter] But it's hard to condense forty-four years into a few minutes, but if you think of anything else.

CPW: I am just thinking, when you do have to weigh things and you are considering just stocking the people's livelihood, I guess. How do you make a decision?

DC: For me, I've always considered stock extremely important. I think our first obligation is to try and conserve the resource. The second very much important right behind it is to try and make that resource available to the users of that resource in such a way. But in my mind, conservation trumps everything. It's hard decision to make sometimes because you see people who were really impacted by those decisions. But we were appointed to the council to do a specific job, and that's to manage our resources and, hopefully, for everybody's benefit. Sometimes it takes a while to those manifest to improve to be realized.

CPW: I am interested to hear. You were talking about the economic and social data. I guess, how has that changed over time? What are the changes you've seen?

DC: I think there's more of that type of data available. There's certainly more economists, I think, and sociologists involved in the process than there was originally. Even our SSC now has got a socioeconomic subpanel, which participates in that. When the councils first started out, we didn't have the benefit of those types of people to call on. Like I said, a lot of decisions are based strictly on biological data. Not that we want them to be, but that's all we got to work with at the time.

CPW: As far as the different states and the federal government, are there ever clashes between what the states want and the... [laughter]

DC: I think it depends. Like, one of the things that I did when I was director of the Office of Fisheries Management, South Carolina, I worked with the legislature to get a bill passed. I call it

the Federal Consistency Act, which meant whatever the council regulations were, that we would automatically track those in stateside. Again, that was to do away with loopholes and then make sure that the regulations are enforceable and things like that. Since that was passed, there's been a couple of occasions where the legislature has decided they want to go a different route. That's their prerogative, but it does create problems. For example, like in the Gulf in Texas, where they don't always implement the red snapper closure in state waters. So, what happens is, you're still operating under an ACL. But by keeping the waters over, it results in overage. They have to subtract that off next year's ACL, which impacts other people in the Gulf. So, that's been a change. Another big change that I've noticed over the years is that the fishermen are more involved in the process and are more knowledgeable. Things like this MREP, Marine Resource Education Program, I think we need more of that kind of stuff because the more informed the fishermen are, the better input we're able to have and understand what we're trying to do, and vice versa for us to understand better now some of their concerns. So, it's not true in every case, but I've seen a lot of fishermen over the years that stick with the process of trying to understand it and really have had a big impact, not only around the culture of this council but on the council process itself. So, that's been a healthy sort of thing, but it hasn't happened overnight. There's always going to be room for improvement. As always, there's going to be a need to educate people. It's not something you can do one time and that's covers it. It's a constant, ongoing thing, but it's a very necessary thing, I think.

CPW: So, in the beginning, there was not much involvement then, right?

DC: I remember when the council first met, we used to meet in the council office [laughter] in a room around a table that had about – honestly, it had enough chairs for the council members. But if you ever saw a member in the public in a town-set meeting, you were lucky, I'll tell you. It was a very small room. It was able to hold everybody that [laughter] attended council meetings in the beginning. So, sometimes we get good participation, sometimes we don't. A lot of times, it depends on the issues being discussed and how controversial they are and whatnot. Probably the most controversial issue this council has ever dealt with is the fish trap issue, where they banned fish traps or the use of fish traps except for black sea bass pots. That was a very contentious issue. A lot of people came out. There were threats and everything else involved. It got pretty ugly.

CPW: What species do they use to be able to fish for in traps?

DC: Snapper grouper fish where they're laying fish traps, just primarily snapper group. There's been a lot of changes over the years with council process. But I think, by and large, most of them have been good. They've tried to improve the process and whatnot. Sometimes I think they reauthorize things too much and make [laughter] changes before we really give plans or amendments time to work and see what the actual impacts are going to be. We want to move ahead on some of these things without really giving them time to see what's going to come out of it. I know that's frustrating the people too.

CPW: Interesting in public participation. So, when did people start being more involved, do you think?



DC: I think originally, they weren't used to the idea of the councils. They didn't know who the councils were or what they were trying to do. So, as people became more and more aware of the councils and the council process, we started to see more and more people. We've tried to make changes to make it more fishermen friendly. For example, our public hearings, at one time, people would just come and just speak to the hearing officer and give us their comments. There wasn't any give and take. I think sometimes they felt like their input was being ignored or they had questions they wanted answered, and the format was such that we were there to hear their comments, not so much to answer the questions. Since then, the council has changed the public hearing process, where now, the amendments that are being discussed, council staff is available to make presentations to the fishermen before they give their comments on the amendments and to answer questions, and to give them a little better idea of what the impact for the amendment might be so that they can comment on it and have more knowledgeable than just coming in cold. So, I think a lot of them appreciated that because, again, it's an opportunity for some give and take, getting their concerns and questions answered before they comment on the record. That's been a good change.

CPW: With the SSC, has there always been an SSC from the beginning in that?

DC: Yes. But honestly, it didn't have the same requirements or the same responsibilities that I had with the reauthorization, where they have to recommend ABC levels and things like that. But, yes, there's always been SSC. Obviously, that was another area that started from scratch, nobody had any experience with it or anything. So, we had to develop the roles and responsibilities with SSC over the years and things like that.

CPW: You were mentioning with the different committees how it used to be where not every member of the council attended. That is interesting to me. I come from Seattle, and I'm used to dealing with the North Pacific Council, and things are very different there.

DC: Yes. I've attended other council meetings in my role as chairman, with other opportunities in it. It's always been kind of interesting how all the councils were established by the same law, but yet how they've evolved, how different they are. I mentioned the culture of this council earlier. We've had disagreements. We disagree at the table and then we lay it aside and it never gets carried outside. I've been at some council meetings where there's obvious factions that are pushing for certain things. It gets pretty fiery sometimes. But this council has always had a reputation for not operating in that way. Again, I think it's because of the original council members. They kind of set the tone for the council process, and it's been followed through the years. Like I said, it's not that we don't sometimes disagree, but we disagree and then go about our other [laughter] business.

CPW: I guess, could you talk about any other changes in different species or fishery management plans?

DC: There's been some changes over the years in terms of the species that this council manages. I mean, I remember at one time we had responsibility for swordfish. This council spent a lot of time working on a swordfish plan. One of the things that we came up with was the variable season closure. Then swordfish got taken away from the councils. We were the lead council for

five councils on swordfish. Lo and behold, about ten or fifteen years later, (NMFS?) came out with a variable season closure [laughter] in their plan. So, I felt like, "Yes, we were [laughter] there quite a while ago." But again, the responsibility was taken away from the council. So, there was time lost on thinking and sort of reinventing the wheel in some regards. So, we've lost swordfish over the years. Now, there's talk by the highly migratory species fishermen about that maybe dolphin ought to be under (NMFS?), HMS, rather than the councils. So, it'll be interesting to see what happens in regard to that. But our council, particularly, I think, we've got so many species in our management plan, particularly the snapper group. It's a lot to cover. One other thing that we have that some of the other councils don't have, some of them do, because we've got such a wide latitudinal difference in the area we manage, there's a lot of differences in the past. So, I think because we haven't had the information to do otherwise, we tended to use one-size-fits-all for management actions. What's good in North Carolina may not be good in the Keys, and vice versa. So, I think we're kind of evolving more and more towards trying to take into account regional differences within our FMPs to accommodate some of these things. I think that's a good way to go. In some ways, it's going to be maybe more complex in terms of numbers of regulations. But hopefully, it'll give the fisheries the flexibility they need to deal with some of these latitudinal differences that we see throughout the range of our jurisdiction.

CPW: Have you seen new fisheries develop?

DC: [laughter] We've heard about one today.

CPW: Yes [laughter], about jellies.

DC: Yes, cannonball jellyfish. We've had some unique things. We have a plan. We do have a fisheries management plan for Sargassum, [laughter] which some people will say, "Well, that's kind of weird." Again, I guess it was back in the early [19]80s, maybe the mid-[19]80s, we started dealing with live rock. I remember the first time I went to our legislature, trying to get them to approve a federal live rock. They looked at me like I was crazy [laughter], "What is live rock?"

CPW: What is live [laughter] rock?

DC: Well, it was organisms that grow on rocks that was harvested for the aquarium trade. Sometimes you're chipping off [laughter]. Let's wait.

CPW: I know I do not think anything is on fire.

DC: I'm sure you can hear that.

CPW: There it goes.

DC: In harvesting this live rock, a lot of times it contained coral growing on there, which, of course, we want to protect as much habitat as we can. So, we came up with a method working with the live rock industry, where they were mining rock to put out specifically to capture marine

organisms that would grow on this rock. Then they were allowed to harvest that because it would naturally occur, and it was things that were added to the environment to grow marine-grown ponds. The Sargassum thing, I think it was concerned – again, it was a habitat issue. It's important habitat for things like dolphin and billfish, sea turtles, and everything else you can find in those things. There was a concern that the fishery might develop where they go out and start harvesting large quantities of Sargassum, which would have an impact on the habitat that was available. There was one individual in North Carolina who was convinced, I think, that there was going to be a cure for cancer in Sargassum. So, council was afraid it was just going to grow out of hand, so we put the Sargassum FMP in place. But that's a little different from some of the other [laughter] fishery management plans [laughter] with different councils around the nation to kind of deal with. So, it has been interesting, though.

CPW: Do you think you will be involved in the management process for the foreseeable future?

DC: Well, I'm (turning out?) As my father-in-law used to say, "I think I'm about done all I was put on this earth (to do in terms of?) fisheries management." Maybe now I can spend more time with my family. Forty-four years is a long time [laughter] with the Fisheries. But it had been good years.

CPW: Was there anything else you want to talk about?

DC: Nothing I can think of. I'm sure there's [laughter] a lot of things. But again, if there's anything you want to follow up with me, I want you to let me know. I've got a copy of my resume now. I don't know if you want it. You probably don't need it.

CPW: Yes, that will be great.

DC: I have to update it [laughter] by hand because I didn't put it on my council committees for this year on there. So, I just updated it by hand. I'm glad you all are doing this project because there's a lot of corporate history that gets lost. People spent a lot of time reinventing the wheels. It's good sometimes to have somebody around who's been through this [laughter] to remind people that "Hey, look [laughter] about twenty years ago, we did this." I think it's a worthwhile project. I appreciate it.

CPW: Thank you.

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