

Female Speaker: We have the privilege today to have a local fisherman, Jim Moser, here. He fishes for salmon and albacore in the National Marine Sanctuary, Monterey. Correct?

Jim Moser: Yes.

FS: So, should we sit there?

Male Speaker: Front and second?

FS: You can sit. Okay. So, how many of you know where the Marine Sanctuary is? Raise your hand if you know where the Marine Sanctuary is. (Gage?)?

MS: The Monterey one?

FS: Yes.

MS: The Monterey Bay.

FS: What do you think the boundaries are? Do you know?

MS: No idea for the entire sites.

FS: Do you think it's just this little part?

MS: No, it is a whole. It is 200 yards.

FS: All the way from San Francisco, above San Francisco, Rocky Point out here. It covers 6,000 square miles. So, that is a big area. What does the word sanctuary mean? Who knows that?

MS: Safe place.

FS: A safe place, yes. So, a safe place for who?

FS: Fishes.

FS: Marine.

FS: For fish, marine animals, marine life. Yes. Today we are going to ask some questions to our local expert.

MS: Could you start by telling us a little bit about yourself?

JM: Sure. Well, I started fishing about thirty-seven years ago.

MS: Started fishing commercially?

JM: Yes, commercially for a living. I've been doing that all along and mostly out of – well, I started (Moss Santa Cruz?) and Moss Landing. But I'm kind of a transient fisherman. I don't just go out in the bay and fish and come back every day. I travel where the fish are, which can be as far south as Morro Bay or San Diego for albacore, and then I go up to Oregon and Washington for albacore fishing. Salmon fishing, we just go up and down the coast, Fort Bragg, Morro Bay, all over the place, and make trips. So, that's kind of what I've been doing most of my life.

FS: Is there a way to track how many fish are in the area or where indigenous ones could be?

JM: Not really.

FS: What do you mean?

JM: Our job is to find fish.

FS: How do you decide where you are going to fish?

JM: Well, in the old days – it's quite evolved now. But in the old days, we looked for feed because big fish eat baby fish. So, we look for birds that are feeding on baby fish. We look for water conditions, which for salmon, it's the plankton-rich water, which would be dark water, brown water, and water edges where warm water or dark water and clear water edge is because on that edge is plankton, and then krill, and then up the food chain, anchovy, squid, everything else. So, we look for these with visual signs in the old days with our eyeballs and stuff. Now, we have a lot more data from satellite photos, satellite imaging. It's available off the internet or through satellite cell phone service that we can see down, and we can actually see the plankton layers and the water temperature edges up and down the coast, so we can have a little better judge of where to go. But in the end, the bottom line is you have to put a hook in the water. I mean, the fish could be there, and they're not biting. That's always time of day, tide, moon phase, all that kind of stuff. But all these other predictors are where they might be and where they might be biting. So, we used all those tools to figure out where to put the gear in the water. In the old days, the old Italians used to just get side by side and start trolling, and (Joe?) would get one, and B would get three or four on this end of the fleet, and they'd turn around and turn to that direction. So, that's the old school.

FS: Have you noticed a decline in the fish population over the years that you have been commercially fishing?

JM: Well, yes, [laughter] but no. Over the entire time that I've been fishing, I've actually seen more salmon in the last – in the last three or four years, we've had a major decline in salmon fish. In fact, we haven't had any seasons whatsoever until this year. I haven't been fishing this year. I have a little knee injury. But my friends are not catching much salmon, even though the biologists predicted more fish in the ocean. So, in the last three or four years, we've seen a drastic, almost catastrophe reduction in salmon fish. A lot of that is to be blamed on water issues in the delta, and hatchery processes of how they launched the hatchery fish, and actually, the

business of raising because most of our fish are hatchery fish. They're raised in hatcheries in Sacramento. But I've seen these declines in the past, and I've seen a robust repopulation of the salmon. So, I'm not a doomsday. I think the salmon will return if we can concentrate on water issues because the salmon are not caught by fish – the majority of the fish are not caught. They're actually just dying in the rivers or don't get down to the rivers and stuff like that. So, there are a lot of other factors. We've seen terrible years, El Nino years where we had no salmon. Then two or three years later, we had lots of salmon. Like I said, five or six, seven years ago, we had more salmon than I've seen all my life. So, I mean, that was six, seven years ago – five, six, seven years ago, we had just phenomenal salmon fishing. I mean, more than anybody caught 30 years ago when I started fishing. So, it's a real roller coaster as far as the population of salmon in the ocean. Albacore, which is the other fishery that I fish, is a very robust fishery. They're a highly migratory species. They mostly live out in the middle of the Pacific, and they come to forage like I was standing on that plankton-rich water on the coastlines because there's not much food in blue, clear water out in the middle of tropic and stuff like that. But it's warm water. But they come to the coast to find that plankton-rich water that's full of anchovies and squid, and other food. I've been going albacore fishing for the last three or four years because there's no salmon. It's been pretty good. Quite a few albacores around still. The Japanese catch them, and they catch them in the Atlantic, and they catch them everywhere. They're a pretty prevalent species in the open oceans.

FS: Sorry, go ahead.

MS: How many lines do you run when you fish salmon and albacore?

JM: Six lines. We use wire and a bigger lid than this. We use six of these wires. On each wire, we have different types of lures: hoochies, flashers, and hoochies and spoons, maybe eight to ten wire. So, that'd be like sixty hooks at the most. They're trailed vertically in the water deep down. Whereas albacore fish, we drag about ten hooks, and they're all on the surface.

FS: So, how often out of the year do you fish?

JM: Not very much anymore. [laughter]

FS: Really?

JM: But for the last eight or ten years, I've fished about three or four months a year. I'm kind of scaling back, and I do a few other things in the wintertime. I work on other people's boats. I used to fish five or six months a year when I first started fishing, fished all salmon season and albacore season. Sometimes the tail end gets slow, but sometimes the price gets up. So, it's worth catching a few fish a day. People that fish other fisheries, crab, and rock crab, swordfish, will fish nine to ten months a year. Of course, they make a lot more money. It's kind of my choice to make less money and be home more than to be on the ocean nine to ten months a year.

FS: Would you say that fishing in the sanctuary affects your limit on how much you can catch?

JM: No. The sanctuary itself doesn't have any fishery exclusions. But within the sanctuary,

they've come up with these marine-protected zones, which are not the sanctuary limits. It's little spots inside the zone. There's a bunch of new ones last year, and they will have a severe impact on salmon fishing. Not albacore fishing, but salmon fishing.

FS: Just salmon fishing?

JM: Yes. They fix some really, really good spots to put these little black boxes on their screen to tell us not to fish there, which is, in my opinion, it's credible.

MS: How many fish do you bring in when you are fishing?

JM: Sometimes nine.

MS: Nine?

JM: Mostly nine. [laughter] But no, we can load them all up. Like I say, maybe we have fifty hooks in the water or something. I've had times when I went through the gear for thirty fish, thirty big salmon. That's three or four or five to a wire. Sometimes you get six or eight big salmon on one wire, which is pretty phenomenal. Doesn't happen all the time with albacore. In tuna fishing, a lot of times, they'll hit all ten hooks all at once and just keep coming as fast as you can foam.

MS: How many hooks, again, do you have on each wire? Does it depend between –

JM: Six or eight. Eight, a common average, six or eight hooks on a wire and six wires round. So, getting that wire on every hook is like eight. It happens, but not – usually, you get one or two or three or something on a line.

MS: So, what would be the percentage of fish you catch each year?

JM: The percentage of what?

MS: For an entire year, how many fish for each year? If you catch...

MS: I guess the question is how many fish on average a year do you catch? Would you measure it in pounds?

JM: Yes. Well, tuna fishing the last three or four years, I caught about thirty tons a year. That was a good goal. That was a decent season. Salmon fishing is more like it kind of depends on the price. Sometimes you're fishing for price. Right now, salmon is seven bucks a pound. Catch ten fish a day, it's kind of an okay day. But in the old days, we fished for a buck and a quarter pound, or three bucks a pound. But twenty thousand-pound salmon season, decent season, thirty thousand pounds for each season. Those are the poundage. Those are kind of the ballpark-decent figures. Of course, I've had seasons with a lot less, and there are seasons with more.

MS: What factors impact the size and health of the fish?

JM: Water conditions, feed. They need to eat. The color of the salmon is really interesting because you'll see a really bright red salmon versus sometimes, they have a pale, not bright red, but bright pink. With the farm salmon, they put food dye in it to make that pink color. But our fish get that color from eating a lot of krill, which is little baby shrimp, kind of the bottom of the food chain. Whereas you get a place where the fish are feeding on anchovies and squid, they'll be a little pale in color. But we've had El Nino years where the water is really warm, and there was not much feed around, and all the fish were little snakes. We call them snakes. They're just little, skinny things like that. I mean, they were legal length, and they're long, but they were starving to death. Then other years, they're just big, fat, chunky things. They've just been chowing down like that. So, ocean conditions make a big difference as to how fat and nice the fish are.

MS: Have you fished anywhere else besides in the sanctuary area?

JM: Well, like I said, I fished all the way up. This sanctuary doesn't go to Oregon, so yes, I fish around here a lot. But for Oregon, I went another sanctuary. There's another sanctuary here. That's one of my favorite pole fishing holes, and Point Reyes, Cordell Bank, up in Fort Bragg, and then we go down to Morro Bay down there and fish. Like I say, albacore fishing, we go up to Washington, fish off the Columbia River, and stuff like that. So, we kind of get outside of the sanctuary.

MS: How does rainfall affect the fish?

JM: I think it does, and I don't know. An old friend of mine was wherever it rains – sometimes you have a northern rain, it gets really wet. Well, mostly, it gets really wet in Oregon, Washington. When you have a really heavy rain down here, the albacore, he was always saying the albacore would come wherever it rained a lot. But I'm sure it affects it, but I can't be definitive on how it affects it. Everything affects the ocean, everything. Wind is the biggest factor. When we get strong northwest winds in the springtime, April, and May, the hard winds blow down the coast like this. What it does is when it hits these canyon edges, it squirrels, kind of creates a turbulence, and it pulls the ocean, the really nutrient-rich cold water, from the bottom and brings it to the surface. It's kind of like stirring the soup, stirring the pot. So, all its feed comes to the surface. Then after the wind stops blowing, it settles down, and that feed starts lying up on little current edges and stuff like that. Then that's where the fish concentrate on that. So, it's really healthy to have strong, strong winds where, first of all, we can't fish. I've tried going out and fishing thirty, thirty-five knots of wind, but the water's just really cold, clear, and green, and there's nothing in it. It's just blown. But then the next day, it blows for three or four or five days, and it stops. The next day, you go out there, and you get right out there because you're hungry. You want to go make some money. You get out there, and nothing happens. But then maybe the next day of calm weather, all of a sudden you start seeing krill showing up and foamy edges where the cold water's here and warm water's there and plankton and all of a sudden salmon will find it. Then they're all grouped up. See, there's probably salmon all over the place, but you're just a little boat with a little, very small spectrum that you're traveling through and trying to entice them to bite a hook. But when you get all of the salmon to pile up in one spot, then if you can drive your boat through a pile of salmon, you're going to get more bites than you

are just driving around the ocean with one over there and one over there. So, that's how we look for congregated masses of fish rather than just trying to catch one here and there.

MS: How many people go out fishing, and how long do they stay out?

JM: How many people on the boat?

MS: Yes, how many people?

JM: Well, just me on my boat. There's a lot of single-handed boats. A lot of two-person boats, some mom-and-pop operations. Some guys have two crew. But for trolling, which we do with salmon and albacore, it's usually one to two or three guys. Salmon fishing, we stay out for five days because we ice the fish. So, we can't keep them any longer than that, about five days. In tuna fishing, we can stay out as long as we want because we freeze the fish on the boat, which means you can stay out as long as you have room in your fish hold, as long as your refrigeration keeps working, or as long as you got fuel. In my situation, I only have a seven-ton boat and two weeks' worth of fuel. If the fish is good, I stay out for five to seven days or ten days if the fish's not good. Now, I've got friends that stay out thirty days at a time. They've got forty-ton boats. They just stay out there. There are guys with seventy-ton boats, and there are guys with hundred-ton boats, big a hundred footers. So, it varies, but my boat's kind of small for albacore fishing, but that's all I could do the last four or five years. So, that's what I've been doing. [laughter] A decent-sized albacore boat is usually like twelve to fifteen-ton boat, and they'll stay out twenty days, fifteen days.

MS: What inspired you to become a fisherman?

JM: A lot of fishermen just love to fish. Well, that wasn't so for me. I just kind of loved boats, [laughter] and I hated working for anybody. I tried jobs when I was a kid, and I could never, like, eight to five type of deal. I never liked somebody telling me what to do. Actually, I started out in the marine electronics business as a technician. I worked on fisherman's radios, radars, and stuff. But I worked for a guy, and I was always under the – and I just looked at the fishermen. They were coming in with big loads of fish, big paychecks, and they were sitting around taking it easy for a week at a time when the wind blew. They went out, and then they had some nice boats. I just wanted a boat. I wanted a business of my own. So, basically, that's what drew me. I'm a small businessman. Sometimes, I used to take a crew. My wife went fishing with me for a while. But mostly, I like to fish by myself. I like to work by myself. Even the kind of work I do now is by myself. So, the draw to me was self-employed on my own boat and being out in the ocean. The ocean's just a beautiful place to be. If you can make a living working for yourself on the ocean, it's got some pretty negative deal. It's not comfortable all the time.

MS: Did you name your boat? Does your boat have a name?

JM: Yes, it's *Trade Wind*. It's down in Santa Cruz Harbor down there.

MS: Did it get affected when the tsunami came?

JM: Well, no, it didn't hurt the boat. I broke a cleat off. We were down there all day watching and hanging on and stressing out, [laughter] fending off chunks of pilings and sunken boats and this and that. But no, the boat itself didn't get hurt.

MS: Have you ever been in any heavy storm?

JM: Yes.

MS: Where?

JM: 200 miles out of here. Wait, probably something like out here, 200 miles west of Moss Land.

MS: How has it been?

JM: Huh?

MS: Do you get scared?

JM: Oh, yes. It was life-threatening. It changed my whole philosophy on tuna fishing. In fact, I never went tuna fishing again for about ten years. Tuna fishing, you're out there, and you're – in those days, that was at least twenty years ago. We didn't have the weather stuff, the weather data that we have now. Now I have an XM satellite receiver that actually puts true weather iso graph bars on my computer anywhere out in the ocean. So, I could tell what the weather's going to be like tomorrow, and I start heading home. It's just a lot safer now. But in those days, it wasn't. I was greedy. I mean, I was hungry. I had boat payments, and I went offshore because we were getting a ton a day or more. It blew about seventy knots and seas just sweeping the – in fact, a friend of mine – well, he lived, but his boat sunk. Just knocked him down, just buried the boat. Bigger boat than mine. Yes, it was pretty scary. Kind of changed my mind about...

MS: Just on the same day, or were you close to each other?

JM: He spent the night and tried to go fishing the next morning. I started about midnight. A friend and I said, "Let's get out of here. This isn't tolerable." So, we started running in at midnight. The next morning, he tried to go into it and just got rolled over and had to swim out of the wheelhouse. But luckily, another guy found him because he put a mayday out, but it was atrocious. So, you got to stop and think how. [laughter]

MS: Is it worth it?

JM: Yes. Is it worth it? So, no, now it's not. But at that time, it was kind of like, you're young, and it's like kids. It's taking a risk that you don't even think about. So anyway, yes. That environment's out there, and that's part of the game. That's part of the business. You have to fish tough to make a living. I mean, you can't go out there just when it's sun is shining and balming. You got to fish a pea soup, fog. You got to fish in 2025 knots of wind, spray coming over the

bow all day long, full oil skins. I've done it day in and day out for years. But salmon fish is not bad because you're always within an hour of (anchorage?) or something. So, you just go until you can't stand any longer. It's not really dangerous. It's just not comfortable. It's just if something breaks, it's dangerous. Yes, if you break a mast or stuff does happen. But if you take care of your boat, stuff doesn't normally break. But it happens. Engines go bad, or you get stuck in situations. So, that's just part of the business, though. If you want to make a living, you got to fish tough. You can't just go out there. There's a lot of fishermen down in Santa Cruz Harbor who just have these little bows, and they go out when there's sun shining or in the morning, and it blows about 15 knots, and they come in. You know what I mean?

MS: They are not going to make money?

JM: Most of them have separate incomes and this and that. If you want to fish for a living entirely, you got to fish tough.

MS: Do you guys have a limit on albacore?

JM: Have a limit? No. No limit on albacore. Well, there's no limit on salmon, either.

MS: Oh, really?

JM: No limits. I mean, the limits are time and area for salmon. You can only fish between here and there.

FS: Outside of the black boxes?

JM: Pardon me?

FS: Outside of the black boxes?

JM: Yes. But like right now, in May, it was Point Arena, which is, here's Bodega Bay, but Point Arena's here. We could fish in May from Point Arena South. Then in July, I think we can fish from Point Arena South. Then in, I think, the end of July and August or sometime in August, we can fish up to Fort Bragg, a little bit farther up north. But we can't fish in the Klamath Zone, which is around Eureka and Crescent City. That's pretty much closed for good because the Klamath River has its issues. It's problems with the fish coming back.

MS: Do you like eating fish?

JM: Pardon me?

MS: Do you like eating fish?

JM: Yes.

FS: What's your favorite?

JM: Well, we eat a lot of albacores. We eat some salmon too, but we freeze – we can both of them, the home can, the albacore, and the salmon in jars, and we freeze the – we clean the albacore into loins and in a vacuum bag. They last a long time. They're good.

MS: Who do you sell your fish to?

JM: Well, the albacore, well, I just sell to wholesalers, different ones. We have a co-op that we sell a lot of salmon to. When we have price problems, there's a buyer down in Santa Cruz, but he's not very competitive or not very good. But there's usually buyers in every port that you just pull up to the dock, and they lower it always down, take the fish away, and write you a check next week or whatever. I sell to the wholesalers. I never try to sell fish off the boat. I bring some albacore home at the end of the year from Oregon. I'll sell to both basic friends and neighbors and whatnot. Just people who want them. [laughter]

MS: Do you ever get a bluefin when you are pushing tuna?

JM: No. I know guys have, but I haven't.

MS: Have you ever thought of selling your fish at the farmer's market?

JM: No.

MS: I think fishing is kind of like farming.

JM: Oh, yes. There's a guy that left that way, had the interview. I think he shared it with me. He sells fish at the farm. But that's a full-time job. That's a whole other job. I mean, you have to process them to a size that a housewife or somebody wants. They want whole fish. That's all another job. We had some years where the albacore price was terrible, and we tried keeping the fish and selling them out of the freezer, this and that. It wasn't my thing. It's marketing. You have to be a salesperson to do that. No, I never wanted – we sold them out of the parking lots. So, we've had times where we had to sell them to the public because the buyers were just – the normal channel was not very good. We didn't have very many fish. We weren't getting as much as we could for them. So, we have sold like that. It takes too much time. I'm better if I spend the time on the ocean catching them and just selling wholesale.

FS: Are there many young people going into the field of fishing?

JM: No. Unfortunately, no. No. Somebody did a survey. The average age is over sixty [laughter] for fishermen. Actually, right now, it is a pretty lucrative business. Not salmon fishing, but crabbing and albacore fishing are both – the albacore price is higher and higher and higher. This year it's going to be really high because the Japanese lost all their albacore boats and they lost all their cold storage facilities. So, they lost all the albacore in cold storage in their disaster over there. So, there's quite a bit of money to be made in albacore and crab. But really, to do it right, it takes a lot bigger boat than I have. So, a lot of the younger guys, you see a lot of younger guys up in Oregon as deckhands and crew, and even skippers. But they're like sixty-

foot steel boats. So, you're talking about half a million-dollar investment to buy a boat. So, it's kind of hard just to go out and buy a boat. My boat's just a fraction of that to buy. The first boat I bought was, what, \$12,000 or something, then I moved up to this one. But that's what guys do. They buy a little boat and jump up. I know a friend of mine here that started with a smaller boat. He bought one of the big steel boats. But it pays for itself because you can – like crabbing, you can fill a boat. You can just stay out and run the gear. Last year, guys were crabbing, and they usually have three or 400 pots. Well, the crabs are so thick. They'd go out, and they'd pull a hundred pots, and they'd have seven thousand pounds. That's what forty, forty-five-foot boat hole in a tank could have. They couldn't get through the gear. Then they had, of course, come into town, which is a day getting it down and then a day getting unloaded, then a day getting back out. So that's three days of nothing. Whereas if you had a sixty-foot boat that could hold twenty thousand, thirty thousand pounds of crab, you just go back and forth and run that gear, and you come in with thirty thousand pounds of crab after a week versus this other guy having seven thousand pounds, maybe twice. So, it really pays to have a bigger boat. The same thing with albacore fishing. If I go out and I fill the boat up in three days one time, but five or six days, it's kind of normal in decent fishing. So, you go out, and then it takes me a day to get in, the day to get unloaded, the day to get back. If everything goes perfect, usually four days. In the meantime, somebody else is getting, with a thirty-ton boat, getting a ton a day, a ton a day, a ton, just like clockwork. So, with albacore fishing and crabbing, the net income goes way up with the bigger boats. But then again, you have to fish more, and you have to have a crew, and there are all kinds of negatives.

MS: Are there any corporations, like big corporate boats like Kirkland, who make them?

JM: Like what?

MS: Do you know how Kirkland makes freeze-dried fish stuff?

JM: Oh, yes.

MS: Do they go out there and fish?

JM: Well, that's mostly up in Alaska where they get those factory drawers, that type of stuff. I don't know where Kirkland gets all their fish. It's questionable.

MS: I was just wondering if you had seen them.

JM: Yeah. No, in the crabbing business, a lot of those big rigs are owned by a fish buyer. Fish companies will own the boat and lease – hire a skipper to run it and lease the boat out. There are quite a few situations like that, and the same thing in Alaska where a corporation will own four or five boats and they'll hire a skipper and stuff like that. But not in the salmon industry, not in the albacore. Like I said, the salmon and albacore are kind of like a really small business model.

FS: So, we have about four minutes left. Maybe you could show us some of the things you brought in.

JM: Oh, okay. Well, this is a gap hook. So, with salmon, we're not going ahead and bringing them in like that. This is salmon gear. There are two major things we catch salmon with. This is a flasher and hoochie. Now, this just goes to the water. It kind of go swirl like that. We only go three knots, three miles an hour when we're going. So, this ends up looking like a squid or an anchovy or something. It gives it motion. Then we have a barbless hook behind it. Now that's salmon fishing. Then we have spoons, different kinds. This is just a white spoon. But we use gold spoons, gold-plated spoons, chrome brass spoons, all kinds of painted-color spoons, trying to figure out what the fish want to bite. So, that's basically what we use for salmon fishing. In tuna fishing, we just use a jig like this. We use this another barbless hook here too. It's a dual, double-level look like that. But we're going a little bit faster through the water, and these are all on the surface. Of course, we use a hydraulic. We put the tuna cord in a hydraulic puller. It's kind of just the pinch puller, we call it. It just brings it mostly to the boat. We still have to pull the lures. On both these fisheries, we have to manually pull monofilament three or four fathoms, or eighteen or twenty feet of line. Albacore, we just kind of go like that on the boat. Then salmon, we use the gap. We have power cys, but bottom line, it's still like sports fish. You got, especially salmon, you got to play the fish because you can't just pull on them. Tuna, you can just pull on them. They're either going to stay or they're going to go off. The salmon, you got to play that. If you break the lure, you could break his jaw. He's not hooked very good. You see him there, and he's fighting. It is a kind of sport. It's kind of like sport fishing. You got to play with them. So, that's why a lot of people like salmon fishing because they're basically sports fishermen that want to make a few bucks doing it. So, it's exciting. When the fish are biting it, it's pretty intense.

FS: Any last questions for Jim?

MS: I wanted to say, out of 35 years of your career, what were your best years of fishing at sports fishing?

JM: Well, I had a couple of good albacore years, not last year. The last two years of albacore fishing, two or three years ago, were pretty good. Then I forget what, maybe 10 years ago, we had a couple really, really good salmon years that were just all – and you get a hundred. You go out and catch a hundred salmon a day pretty often. It was kind of average. Of course, the price was terrible, but there's just a lot of salmon around. There are lots of them. So, it was kind of like I had some 150, 200 fish days. King salmon. If we'd gotten any money for them, it would've been awesome. [laughter] But at that time, of course, that's the way it is. Supply and demand, too much sound and not worth much.

FS: It looks like our time is up. But let's give Jim a round of applause for his time.

[applause]

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