

Mary Williford: All right. This is Mary Williford with the Fisheries Reform Act project. It is August 9th, 2016. I am in Selma, North Carolina with Bob Lucas. Again, my name is Mary Williford. M-A-R-Y, W-I-L-L-I-F-O-R-D. Mr. Lucas, could you say and spell your name, too?

Robert Lucas: Okay. My name is Robert, R-O-B-E-R-T. I go by Bob, B-O-B. Vernon, V-E-R-N-O-N. Lucas, L-U-C-A-S.

MW: All right. Bob, I was hoping we could start out from the very beginning. Can you tell us a little bit about where you were born – where and when you were born, and your education?

RL: Well, I was born in 1952, in Raleigh, grew up out on the east side of Raleigh, occasionally going to the coast and that sort of thing, and then went to Enloe High School and then went to East Carolina University, and then on to law school, and been practicing law ever since.

MW: What made you go into law?

RL: Well, I always had an interest in it from a youngster. I always liked the arguing process and trying to convince someone of a point of view. It always seemed challenging to me. I thought it was something I would enjoy. I have enjoyed it. Now, I've practiced all types of law. Now I do just trial work, which is what I like the best. I'm doing it to this day. This month begins my 38th year.

MW: Wow.

RL: Yes.

MW: So, you mentioned that you went to the coast a good bit, growing up. What are some of your memories? What are some things that stood out about that time?

RL: Well, I love the coast. I loved fishing. I loved just the atmosphere of it and just being there. It was only one problem, I did not get to go enough. I remember, as silly as it sounds, as a youngster, leaving with my parents. We didn't have a place or anything like that. We really only went a few times in the summer because we couldn't afford it. But I remember standing near the dunes, staring at the water, trying to remember it so that I wouldn't forget it as a kid. As I finally got on my own, practicing law a little bit, I got my first boat. I think the first one was an 18-foot small boat, just to fish around in the sounds and that sort of thing. All of this was in Atlantic Beach, Carteret County area. Then got a little bit bigger boats and so forth, and went to Harkers Island. Then got a really big boat that wouldn't fit in Harkers Island. So, I had to come back to Atlantic Beach. So, I fished a lot. But as I fished through the years, I began to really more just appreciate the nature of it all. I mostly was in catch and release and that sort of thing anyway. But I cared about it. Other people did too. I wanted to do whatever I could do to help preserve it. That's ultimately what led me into the fisheries experience.

MW: Yes, that was that leads perfectly into my next question. Prior to the fish, your involvement with the moratorium, the Fisheries Reform Act, what was your relationship with fisheries management, if any?

RL: None. In fact, I guess the next question would be how did I get into it? It's a funny story, but what happened was I had worked carefully or strongly, whatever the word may be, with Jim Hunt. I've always thought the way that – he has fished with me many times, Governor Hunt and his family. He's been a real mentor to me. So, I helped him in, I think I was in charge of Johnston County and worked for his election, and he won. I remember him mentioning to me, "Bob, anything that you might be interested in, I certainly would like for you to play a role." So, when I called his people and said I would like to be on the Marine Fisheries Commission, of course they laughed. "You don't want to be a judge? You want to be on the Marine Fisheries Commission. That's what you want."

MW: The prestige.

RL: Yes. [laughter] So, everybody had a big laugh at my expense, but – and I only asked to be on the board. So, what happened, there was one vacancy on the board, and I went on as chairman. So, you can imagine what that went over like. Plus, that was first time that a recreational fishermen had ever been chairman of the Marine Fisheries Commission. So, that was controversial. I understand why it would be because I didn't make my living there. But here's the funny part. So, I get a call asking me, can I go to the next meeting which they're holding public hearings. I said, "Well, where is it?" "It's in Beaufort, at the Duke lab. Can you conduct the meeting?" Yes, I mean, a public hearing, there can't be much to that. I used to be mayor of Selma, by the way, and nobody came to the public hearings because I knew that would be a piece of cake. So, I go down there. I drive in there to the Duke lab. There were three television trucks. I'm thinking, "You think these people would be smarter than to schedule a fisheries meeting with something else going on" So, I go in there and ask people. I say, "Do you all know where the fisheries meeting is?" Of course they looked at me like I was stupid. "This is it." The place was packed. I was thinking, "Are you kidding me?" So, I go up there and introduce myself. Hadn't met anybody yet. The director, Bill Hogarth, said, "Anytime you're ready." So, I had to leave the meeting. But look, it went fine. They were arguing over a variety of issues. I won't even get into all of that. But that was the beginning. So, you'd have to say that I got involved by politics, honestly, to get in. Then I felt like, after that, I hopefully – I hope I did a good job on the merits. It's not something that necessarily you would aspire through politics. So, anyway, I think I was on chairman for – of course the record would speak for, but I think about six years, something like that.

MW: Yes. So, you had noted that when you started on the committee that you were the first recreational fishermen to head it.

RL: Mm-hmm.

MW: You hinted that there was a little tension there. Would you be willing to talk a little bit more about that?

RL: Oh, sure. Yes. It wasn't a little bit. It was a lot. Again, I understood why. I think the last thing I'd want is somebody from Timbuktu wanting to tell me how to practice law. So, I could understand how you wouldn't want to – how a commercial guy wouldn't want a guy from Selma

trying to tell him how to run his business. I got that, but I wasn't trying to tell him how to run his business. But what I did care about was the resource. Anybody with half a brain would know that we had some problems. You didn't have to be in fisheries management to know that. So, anyway, we began –I spent the first year as chairman, learning. Not only learning the process, but we had this regulation passed, that regulation passed. Into about a year, I was starting to get rather frustrated. I called it, as I gave many, many speeches, I called it regulation by ambush. Because we would go to the meeting and "I think we all do something on crabs. Well, I think we need to do something on flounder." So, we would just do it whatever anybody kind of thought. Somebody might have brought something up or whatever, but there was no rhyme and reason to it. We just did it. Not that it didn't need to be done perhaps, tell you the truth, I don't even remember. But it just didn't make any sense to me. I was frustrated with the process for that reason. So, on blue crabs, there was talk about a moratorium on maybe limiting the number of licenses until we could get a better handle on the blue crab fishery and so forth. So, you know, my thinking was, why can't we just do it for everything at one time? Just put a stop to all licenses. Of course, at that time, the only license was a commercial fishing license. So, why don't we just stop it? So, I went to Bill Hogarth. We talked about it. He said, "You're crazy. You can't do that. You can't just do everything at one time." I said, "Well, if we don't do it at one time, it's not going to make any sense." How are you going to do blue crabs, and then we're going to go here. It's the same thing we're doing right now. You can't fix one process unless you fix all the processes. So, anyway, we talked and ran it by other folks. It wasn't certainly nothing like a one man deal or anything like that. It was just the idea came not so much from insight or smarts. It really came more from frustration of the system not working. I could also appreciate the people that came to the public hearings. They was like, "Where did you come up with this? You're going to do this. Why? What are you going to do next year?" So, you're sitting there and thinking, "They're right." But at the same time, you didn't feel like you could do nothing. So, like I said, we came up with the idea of a moratorium to stop it all and try to bring the best minds together. Some of those were people on the commission, some were not. Some were commercial fishermen, recreational fishermen, people on the Marine Fisheries Commission, people from habitat and water quality background professors, scientists. I can't remember how many people were on the committee, but I'm – and the record will speak for it, but I'm thinking eighteen something like that. It was quite a crowd. All of these people were leaders. So, if they're a leader, they got something to say. So, that means we had lots of folks and some want to speak louder than others. So, just having a meeting was a task in itself. Much less, this committee is going to be charged with the responsibility of coming up with a plan to do all fisheries in the future. I mean, that was hugely ambitious. To me it was. Everybody else thought so too, particularly after we got going. So, that was formed in the legislature. As you already know, I'm sure, I was named chairman of the moratorium steering committee. I was chairman of the Marine Fisheries at the same time, which was kind of a balancing act. I was really spending more time on the moratorium steering committee than I was the Marine fisheries. But the marine fisheries got to go on. It can't just stop its existence. Another thing I was frustrated about, not only the system of regulation, but the components of regulation in that. We had three commissions at one time. We had one for fisheries, one for habitat, and the other for water quality and that sort of thing. Well, I got in trouble for this, but I suggested that the commissions be all disbanded and just form one so that – how can you manage fisheries without managing the water that they swim in? What about their habitat? You can't manage it in the same concept about looking at all the species. You also have to look at the water quality and the

habitat and so forth. Well, that went over like a lead balloon. The folks on the habitat and all that, they didn't want anything to do with fish because it was so controversial. At that time, look, it was nothing to be on the front page of *The News Observer*. We stayed there all the time. I think one of the reasons was, Mr. Daniels, who owned the paper, was a recreational fishermen. He was very interested in the topic. So, we got a ton of coverage, much more probably than it deserved. It was very controversial. In fact, one time I asked Governor Hunt, I said – I just didn't understand. It was so controversial. I said, "Is there anything in state government that's more controversial than fisheries?" He said, "Hazardous waste. That's it." Well, aren't we in some kind of company. It was that tough. I'm not exaggerating. What I mean by that is this. So, the group met and met and met. Again there's been so many years, I could get some of my facts wrong. But I remember the meetings well. At first, we just met together at different places, primarily in Carteret County because that's where the staff was. But then once we got the plan together for the marine – for the, what ultimately became the Reform Act, we went on the road. We were like rock stars, except not the stuff that goes with rock stars. [laughter]

MW: It was glamorous. [laughter]

RL: Slightly, but we went everywhere from, you know, Manteo to Charlotte and Wilmington. I think we went, honestly, I think it was 20-some towns, Pittsboro, you name it, just places you wouldn't even think about as fisheries. But the meetings were well-attended, lots of arguing. The ones at the coast were tremendously attended. Their concern was – I remember giving a speech in Beaufort. It was standing room only. People were concerned. One of the biggest concerns was not so much the real big commercial guys, but it was the people that maybe did it part-time, that maybe supplemented their income in the summertime. Those folks were very concerned, and rightfully so, based on what some of the things that happened. I was, look, I was straightforward. A lot of folks got a little frustrated with me, but you had to – you can't let everybody take anything they want out of the fishery. You can't do that. At the same time, you're trying to preserve a way of life which is commercial fishing, but you also have – what people don't sometimes grab is how big a business recreational fishing is and how many tens of thousands of people are involved in it and countless jobs. So, it's a very big thing. So, we went on the road. One of the things I did I remember which I thought was a good idea, even though I was chairman, when I went to an area, I asked the people that were from that area to conduct the meeting. I was there. I sit beside them. That also helped. I was trying also not to be such a – I didn't want it to be the Bob Lucas act, okay? Because I'm already – I'm chairman of everything. The last thing I need is all this attention which I did not want. So, when we would go to Morehead, for example, I asked Joe Whitley, who was a very good friend. He's a commercial guy. He's passed away now. But we talked for many years about these meetings. We'd laugh and carry on and some of the things that were said and so forth. I remember one meeting that a lady [laughter] got up so mad at Joe Whitley leading the meeting. He had a big menhaden business. She said, "Joe, we wouldn't expect this from you with this act. We'd expect it from Bob Lucas. He's a lawyer. But not you. Joe, you live here." When it was all over with, one of the political guys came up and shook Joe's hand and said, "Joe Whitley," I'm standing right there, "Bob Lucas is smarter than you are because he got you to hold this meeting. You called hail, and he's just sitting there beside you." [laughter] So, you had to laugh. Some of it was a lot of fun, but it was a very, very serious topic. Meanwhile, we're having to go back to seafood and agriculture, giving them updates. I had this stuff so much in my mind and so much in my brain.

I didn't even use notes. I knew it that good. I'm talking about standing in front of the legislators. You knew the elements of the act in your head and how it needed to be presented. We began to work on the act. Lord and mercy, it was changed a lot. Tim Nifong, I don't know if his name has been mentioned, but he was so instrumental in writing things. It's one thing to talk about it, but everything that you talk about ultimately has got to be reduced to writing. He was, bless his heart, his role was really our lawyer, but he ended up pretty much writing the act and just did a wonderful job. But that's a little bit of background. I don't want to talk too long, but that's how it happened. We, of course, I don't want to forget the division. They played a huge support role because – I can't overemphasize to you, it was two things. One was the public trying to get input back from them. It was two things. One, you wanted the input, and many ideas came from the public, but you also wanted them to buy into it. The way to get them to buy into it is explain it to them. You got to go where they are. That's what we did. It took a tremendous amount of time. But don't forget, that's one. That's the public. But we also had to get the 18 people to agree. Then you got the Marine Fisheries Commission over here that doesn't want to be left out either. So, you got to take it in front of them as well. You've also got the other commissions that play a vital role in all of this. Meanwhile, you're trying to practice a little law, make a little bit of money so you can eat. But that's how it happened. There's so many more stories to tell. But that's the background on how this thing came to be. Does that make sense?

MW: Yes. Yes, it does. I am interested, since we are talking about the background and you mentioned how you got involved, can you talk a little bit about what do you think it was about this period in the early to mid-[19]90s that got the legislature concerned about fisheries? Why 1994? Why 1997?

RL: You know what? That's a really good question. That is a really good question. I'll tell you how good it is. I was at a meeting with the governor going over the fisheries stuff. He said, "You know, I don't remember the last administration ever talking about fisheries." Then he said, "Jim, who was the fishery person those years?" Because you're so right in that it hadn't played a role. I think it was a combination of things. I think the News Observer had a lot to do with it because they had such an interest. You also had coastal legislators that were in leadership. Marc Basnight, can't even begin to put how important he was. I learned that the hard way. I learned who was in charge. Let me say this, it wasn't Bob Lucas. Also Beverly Perdue, because she was in Houben at that time, and others in the Jacksonville area. I never will forget, and I'm sorry to digress, but I got to tell you because it's funny. At the agriculture and seafood, I was presenting it. I wanted some teeth into the enforcement part. So, if you – I can't remember what it was that if you violated, I wanted it to be a felony instead of a misdemeanor. Now, granted, it could be a lower felony. But if you want a deterrent, you got to put it in there. Well, I cannot remember the fellow's name in Jacksonville. I don't even know if he's still there. "But a felony, I can see it right now in Central Prison, two guys beside each other in cells. They can't speak. So, they're hollering around. Joe, what are you in for?" "I caught too many spots." [laughter] What an argument. So, there were things like that. So, to answer your question, I think it was I News observer wanting to make this thing public. I think the leadership of – I'm trying to think of the recreational fisheries organization. I can't even think of them right now. They were very active. They were building membership. I think having some people on the commission and a chair that was recreational made them feel like there's a voice and that people will listen to them. I think we had a forward-thinking director, Bill Hogarth, who very much cared about the resource.

People wanted to change things because I think there's one thing we all agreed on, commercial, recreational, everybody, scientist, that the system we had wasn't working and that we needed something else. So, I think that was the number one. The rest of it was probably just circumstance. People coming together, willing to put the time in and so forth. It's like anything else in life, if you want it to happen bad enough, you have to push. That's what happened. I would say it was a combination of things.

MW: Yes. I am wondering if – and this is not a pop quiz. If you do not remember, that is okay. If you could recall some of the major players involved at this time?

RL: Well, I think I've mentioned several of them. Bill Hogarth was the director. Without that, without his just really buying into it, it would never happen. He's the man in charge. I'm just a volunteer. So, without him pushing the division to support this concept, it would have never happened. So, I would put him at the top. Tim Nifong, who was a lawyer with the AG's office, without his drive, it would have never happened. Joe Whitley, Joe was one commercial guy, but he demanded so much respect from the commercial fishing industry. They followed him. He gave the whole process credibility. Then there were many others, like Susan. Just I could think of different areas of the coast, and I can think of those people that were involved. Who was the lady in Harkers Island, not Harkers Island, but she lives near Harkers Island that she's an anthropologist? Susan Blake. Barbara Blake.

MW: Barbara Garrity-Blake.

RL: Yes. She played a big role in it. There were many others like her and some other recreational guys, a lot of commercial guys. But there were so many people if I had a list in front of me. But I really think some of the Keys, and we had two or three scientists that were involved. I can't think of the fellow's name that was in charge of UNC, the fisheries that UNC at Carteret County. I cannot think of his name right now, but he played a big role. Then there was the fellow at North Carolina State, was the scientist there, and he was in charge of another organization. I probably should have looked all this up before you came. But...

MW: B.J. Copeland, he was with North Carolina Sea Grant.

RL: Yes. Yes, that's who I was trying to think of. He played a big role. Look, the committee was really, as far as fisheries go, it was who's who group. You weren't going to put somebody on there unless you really thought, look – they really knew what they were doing. They did. Everybody took it very seriously. It was a lot of work. That's how it developed.

MW: You are mentioning all of these different stakeholders coming mostly from the coast, but also from across the state. We have scientists. We have commercial and recreational folks. We have lawyers.

RL: Professors.

MW: Professors. Yes. Do you feel that there was a sort of unity in purpose, or was it a little all over the place?

RL: Yes, it's a good question. I would say there were degrees of unity. First of all, I think everybody was united in wanting it to work, particularly once we got into it. I think most people could see, wait a minute, this isn't just an exercise. This is going to turn into a law. It's a real good chance. Now, probably the closest that came to derailing the process probably wouldn't surprise you. That is politics. When you have certain politicians that mean well, maybe somebody sees something's not going to go their way. So, they're going to bypass the process and go to the politician to get it done. That was some of that. But what kept that from happening was the broad base of the group. Because if it had been a Bob Lucas thing, it would have never made the light of day. But it was so many people that I think once it got going – particularly the commercial guys. Because the commercial guys had never really bought into anything, because they saw government as the devil and doing nothing but regulations to keep them from making a living. Some of their complaints were very valid and true. But you also had – the biggest complaint I have about the recreational guys was the lack of patience. They wanted it and wanted it now. They wanted this banned and that banned. Some of the stuff they wanted banned, they just didn't understand. I didn't understand, not until I got into it. Once you spend year after year in this stuff, you begin to think, "Wait a minute." I'll tell you one thing, this stuff's not as simple as I thought it was. I thought you could just go in there and figure out what to do and be done with it. But it's so much more complicated than that. So many people involved. So many issues involved. It's a very good question. There were degrees, if we were going down the tracks, we were going like this. We weren't going in a straight line. There were highs. There were lows. There were some meetings you go to, and you'd think, "Ain't no way this is going to work." It was just tough. Then there would be days where you're just like – it's like it was a special moment. Everybody's kumbaya. But ultimately, we got there. The biggest thing that didn't make it that I thought was a huge, huge mistake, it wasn't lack of effort on my part. I tried so hard to get the recreational license in there. To this day, I can't understand why it wasn't put in there. It's there now, of course, but it did not make the cut. I'm convinced that – it didn't make the cut on account of recreational fishermen. Believe it or not, they wanted it. Even though they're the ones paying. They wanted it. The reason it didn't make it, there was fierce opposition from commercial people. Here's why. Undoubtedly, everyone knew that the usage or the number of recreational fishermen was huge. Everybody knew that. It was estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands. Well, by doing the recreational fishing license for the first time, you can document it. You can document exactly how many people are participating in the fishery. My argument was this, you ask me, you charge me to protect this resource, how can I manage the resource when I don't know the degree of this huge amount of taking of the resource? How can I measure it? You won't let me. So, you're going to make me guess. You're going to make me guess how many recreational fishermen there are and how many fish they're catching. Why? Why would you do that? You want all these regulations on commercial guys? We want to know. We're even putting observers in boats sometimes. But you're going to let hundreds of thousands of people fish. You have no idea what they're catching, but you're going to manage the resource. It makes no sense. I said it, and I said it and I said it, but people were scared to death. Then for the first time, a politician would be able to see, "Wait a minute, there's 400,000 votes. See how many y'all got? 3,000. I see where the wind blows." Which was silly because it's never happened that way. Even after the license passed, it never happened that way. I'm a strong believer that the commercial fishing needs to be protected. [laughter] Every once in a while, I have – it was funny. I had some of the commercial guys. I remember one of the big

ones told me, I hate I like you. Because you wanted that relationship because it was bigger than commercial or recreational. You needed a way to manage it so that the stakeholders bought into it, and it made sense. So, anyway, that was the gold. Also, if you look at the act we – and this to me was huge – that we didn't just mandate the control or development of fishery management plans. Fishery management plans was the keystone. I just mentioned that a little while ago about – I think I did. But anyway, it's like trout. Okay, here's trout. All right. Well, first of all, before we can manage trout, what kind of shape are trout in? Are they good, bad, poor or what? So, the first thing we got to do is make a stock assessment. This is part of the management plan. Then what do we need to do to get it to good? But also when we get it to good, what's the mechanism of taking those restrictions or regulations off? You don't want regulations to stay forever. Because if the regulation is make the fishery good, then at some point, we ought to arrive, not keep the regulations forever. So, the first thing was mandate the fishery management plan. That was the key. But as I see it, you've got to have the habitat and water protection as well. So, it also mandated the development of coastal habitat and so forth. That was done in other commissions. So, it was an effort on our part to acknowledge that the problem with fisheries is not just Bob Lucas and everybody else catching too many of them. There's other problems such as water quality and habitat. So, what are we going to do about that? So, that's why those plans were mandated. But you know what all of that is worth the paper it's written on, unless you provide the funding to do it. The people have to go do it. They don't need to take forever to do it. Go do it. Anyway, I don't want to get on too much of a soapbox, but the blueprint, if you will, of the act, to me, even today – I'm not saying this because I had a small part to play in it, but it will work. It will work, but you got to follow it. You can't help everybody. Even though it's there, it passed. There's still that human inclination to want to bypass it because we need the results now. So, let's ban this. Let's ban trawling. Let's do this. Let's do that. If you want to ban trawling, then you've got to ban trawling for a reason to protect the resource. You don't just ban it because you want to ban it. You've got to have the evidence to back it up. It's the same thing practicing law, as I tell clients. There's this one thing we got to go by. They call it evidence. If it wasn't for that, we'd be all right. But we've got to have it. So, anyway, that's where we went. Some of, like you asked, some of the key people as well, but anything else?

MW: Yes. Well, talking about this need for evidence and studies and having these ideas and laws backed by data, the I do not have a number on me, but the whole moratorium steering committee process and a lot of the studies and everything that went into it, I imagine was fairly expensive. Would you be able to talk a little bit more about how that funding was secured, how the state was able to put that much money into fisheries?

RL: Well, I'm really not the best person to do that because again, that would have come through the division. But I do know that it was a struggle to get the funding. My guess is it still does today. In fact, another point that was so important in this process was not just these plans and so forth, but was the advisory committee process. It's all in here. I remember it because I remember going to the people in these towns and saying, "Look, I hope this is not the last time that we hear from you. We need to set up a mechanism so that if we're going to do something on trout, we know what the people in Pittsburgh think are here." So, we set up the advisory committees so that we would get that flow of information to the decision makers. The reason I say that is I heard that when – after I was out, everything, that the funding was so tight they



couldn't pay the travel expense for the people on the committees. So, I don't know how much all of that went down. So, I know it was a struggle with money. But it's like anything else, if you're going to do something like this, you've got to give the resources to it to make it work. So, the real question is, is there a commitment in two places? One, in the division, does the division really want this to work? Then two is the Marine Fisheries Commission. I don't care what you have on paper. These can be some of the best ideas ever was. I don't know. But unless you appoint people that have a passion for it and want it to work, it's not going to work. If you put political hacks on commissions or people that just, "Okay, I'll do it, but I don't want to do it," you're not going to get good results. I'm not saying that there's bad people put on there or not. The truth is, I don't know. But I do know that's what it takes for it to be successful. I know the funding hasn't been there like it should be for the division. I understand there's other fisheries is not the only thing. It doesn't exist in a vacuum and – but North Carolina is so unique, and this is worth taking a minute to tell you. We used to make the comment, we grow fish. We grow fish. Because where is there another estuarine type system, a sound system up and down the coast? There's not. It's because of the Outer Banks. There's so much water, so much acreage of water that were fish are grown. North Carolina is just so unique in its resources. I know when I used to go. I was also representing North Carolina in the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, and I went to meetings all up and down the coast. Man, they didn't like North Carolina because they felt like no matter what they did, it wouldn't work if North Carolina didn't do it. Because, see, we have the fisheries from boat. You've got the Gulf Stream currents coming up. Then you've got the Labrador current going this way. They all come off at Hatteras. But of course they bring fish with it, and not just fish but all other kinds of resources. North Carolina is just so unique. Plus North Carolina didn't have a Myrtle Beach and all of that. It had so many fishery areas such as Hatteras and Harkers Island and Charlotte and all of these other places, Manteo. The reason I say those things is so unique to North Carolina. To me, whether you're a Democrat, Republican or whatever, it ought to be something that you want to maintain. Not just we always talk about it, not just for us, but for the kids and the kids of the kids. You just feel like you have that responsibility. That's how I felt. I'm not looking for a little gold star or anything. I just felt that way. Why else would I spend – if I got asked one question more than any other question over the years, why are you doing this? Why? I don't get it. I don't get you, Lucas. Why are you doing this? Why do you care? It was a genuine question. There were tons of people. They just couldn't understand it. Why would you spend all that, particularly being both chairman? Why would you do it? Then other times, I asked the same question, but it was for one reason. Because you just care so much about it. If you've ever been on the water and you spend any time on the water, it's just such a magical thing. You just love it. You obsess with it. I've spent time all kinds – Look, I've been all over everywhere. I spent years in Costa Rica and other places, fishing because I just I love it. But of course, what I love more than anything else is North Carolina. Anyway, that's kind of what my thoughts are on it.

MW: You had mentioned some of these public hearings. I was wondering if maybe you had – well, one, if you had any interesting stories about how those went generally. Two, you mentioned that you did these throughout the state. I am wondering what differences you may have noticed from a hearing in, say, Davidson or Hendersonville or something versus one on the coast, like who is coming to these ones in the Piedmont?

RL: Well, they were well-attended. CCA is the name of the organization, Coastal Conservation

Association. They really turned out the members. I remember having one in Greenville. It was an auditorium. It was packed. We couldn't even have the – everybody couldn't speak. We were there hours. Even Charlotte, lots of people. One thing you got to remember, we were getting so much publicity. We're on front pages. So, it was a huge difference between where we went. There was, excuse my language, but there was bitching wherever we went. But it was different type, the recreational problem was, to them, it was simple. Just do away with the commercial. Everything would be good. But if we did away with the commercial, it really wouldn't make that much difference. It would help some maybe. But first of all, you just did away with a big part of our history. But just for argument's sake, are we not going to regulate hundreds of thousands of people? But again, we didn't have the license, which was a big weakness. But anyway, it was a real big difference. At the coast, it was intense. But I will tell you this, as time went on, it was both. You had a lot of folks get up and say, "I applaud this effort. I see what you guys are trying to do. I think you're on the right track." Then there were others, I swear it was – you wanted to make sure you had law enforcement there. There was yelling and all of that stuff and called all kinds of names and silly mess. Good. Here's what I did. You talking about it, I had one of those meetings like that. It started to raise hell. I said, "Look, let me just tell you something, if you don't mind, if you want to yell, blame somebody, blame me. You go right ahead. I'm going to sit right here, but I'm going to tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to tune you out. I might look at you, but I'm not paying attention to what you're saying. Now, I will say this. However, I can be persuaded. I can be persuaded to a point of view. I'm a lawyer. I live in an adversary system. So, I spend my life in a courtroom. If you can convince me, I'll go your way. If you're going to try and convince me, I'm going to hang on every word you say. So, it's your choice. Come right down." They go to work. They come in there with pictures and graphs. You wouldn't even believe some of the presentations. They were good. They were excellent. Like I say, we picked up a lot. But the answer to your question, it was a huge a huge difference between the groups, you know.

MW: I can imagine.

RL: Yes.

MW: We have talked a good bit about sort of the development of the steering committee in the FRA. I am wondering if we could talk some about the results. What you think were some of the most effective and least effective results of the FRA?

RL: Well, the least was by far not having the fisheries, I mean, the recreational license. Just huge mistake. But look, the good news is that was remedied a few years later and picked it up so that – so it wasn't as big a – it just took a lot of enthusiasm out of it for the recreational guys because they felt like, okay, you're not going to listen to us. You're not going to get our data. So, I guess we don't matter that you had that bitter taste. But the positives of it was you began to develop plans. As I looked up – I looked this up before you came. I see crab, shrimp, river herring, bay scallops, king fish, hard clams, oysters, the list goes on that these management plans have been done. When I occasionally look at the fishery stuff, the lingo is management plans, the same thing with the habitat plans. So, the stuff is working. Where I get frustrated and where I think things go south is, when the politicians get involved. Here's what politicians have to decide. Either you need to delegate. I've said this to my detriment more than once, publicly. I

remember right out of the gate, I crossed Marc Basnight. He was trying to ban menhaden off Mineo, menhaden boats. You talk to any of these folks, they'll remember that. Well, and Marc and I were friends. Well, that didn't last long. I just didn't think that the Senate and the House should be dealing with menhaden boats. Why? Why do you have a Marine Fisheries Commission? Why don't you let them handle. So, I opposed it. Not so much because of the menhaden boats where they were and where they should be, and the risk of spills. Those were all real issues. But I opposed it because where are you going to stop? What are you going to do? Oysters next? You going to tackle shrimp? What are you guys going to do? So, you've got to leave it to the Marine Fisheries Commission to handle it, or you handle it yourself, if that's what you think. But you can't. You just can't do both. Because if you let politicians bypass the process, which they recently tried to do this past year with flounder – Jerry Shield, you may know Jerry, he's back involved. I understand with the commercial guys, he called me in one day, was just riding by. He said, "Man, I was just thinking of you." We were having this same conversation that you just can't have the politicians trying to bypass the process and cherry pick certain things they want done because it kills the act. It kills the process. So, the politicians have been the downfall of it, although fortunately it's not something you see every day. It's just, I guess, it's just something where somebody has their ear. Again, I don't think that shocked you.

MW: Speaking of the process, what is your take on sort of the overall process of this creating the steering committee and then creating the FRA just as a political or legislative act or series of acts? Do you think it was the way it was set up and carried out? Do you think it was beneficial? Is there something we can learn from it? Was it a total disaster that we would have done totally differently or?

RL: No, I mean, no, and maybe I'm a little prejudiced in that I was involved so heavily in it. But it's a good question because any time you have the ability to look at something with 20/20 hindsight and are there things I'm sure we could have done better? Of course. But seriously, I think it's one of the best things that I've ever seen done. Not because of Bob Lucas or anything. It was just so many people involved. It was refreshing to see them trying and to make it better. I think it worked. Now, can you duplicate something like that? Yes, but man, you remember all this is for free. You got all these people working just hours upon hours. So, it's something almost unique. I met a professor in Greenville that was writing a book about the process. Because it was such an enormous thing to – what would have been enormous was blue crabs. But doing every species and see, don't forget too, you couldn't buy a commercial license. So, that right there made a lot of folks mad. You mean to tell me I can't get a license? Why? Because y'all studying this stuff. Well, that went over real well. But you had to stop it because otherwise, what you're trying to manage is a moving target. So, look, I think in hindsight, it was great. I applaud the legislature. Let me tell you somebody else that played a huge role, I thought about this. That was a tough vote on this thing. The biggest vote was not the legislature. That went right on through. Before it can go to legislature, I just happened to think of that, sitting here with you, it had to go through seafood and aquaculture committee before we could make it to the floor. I went to a meeting in the afternoon and made a presentation on it. I thought, this isn't going to make it. This isn't going to make it.

MW: Why?

RL: If we don't make it, all this works for nothing. You had to have some commercial guys and recreational that had gotten to a few of these politicians, and you could tell they weren't going to vote for it. To his credit, I called – I don't think I've ever said this publicly – I called Governor Hunt that evening. I don't think this is going to pass. It was a big thing for him, too. Because remember, the stuff had been in there, I can't tell you how much publicity it got. So, here we are on the edge of results where you want them, just like you'd want anything pass that you spent time on. Well, he sat down and hand-wrote notes. If it wasn't to every committee member, it was close, and they were delivered. I saw them delivered the next morning, not by the governor, but they were delivered by somebody else and handed to them. They were personal notes from Jim Hunt telling them how much this meant to him and that he would appreciate the vote. It went right on through. Right on through. Every once in a while he'll see me and tell me, "You know, Bob, I appreciate all you --" I said, "Look, you appreciate all you want to. That's great. But it would have never happened without you." Because he's the one. He's the governor. I was a peon and he got it done. You think about that, a governor sit down, handwrite something. He and I were friends. We're still friends. But you're going to sit down and handwrite all this. That's a lot of work. You got to do it overnight. He did it, and it passed. That was a big signing ceremony. I got a picture at the House. Now, I think he even had hair back then. It was very rewarding. I don't regret spending the time, wanted it all. Things like that, that you remember. Same thing if you're on the board of trustees at East Carolina, stuff like that. You do things. If you've got a passion for it, you're probably going to do a pretty good job. If you don't, then you're going to do a poor job. In my opinion, that's true with most anything in life. So, I think a lot of people deserve a lot of credit that probably never got it, particularly, people like Tim Nifong and Bill Hogarth and Joe Whitley. They deserve so much credit for what they did. There's so many times, I – every once in a while, I'll think back and just get laughing, just thinking about all the stuff that was said. I remember one time, Joe, I told him I wasn't never going to call on him again. [laughter] One time – I'll tell you this one last story – it was in Hatters. Man, was that place packed. They were pushed up on the table where we were sitting. It was that packed. It wasn't for public hearing. It was just a regular meeting of the Marine Fisheries Commission, but they were going to be heard. I went to Bill Hogarth. I said, "Look, we're going to have to let him talk." "Well, it's not on the agenda." I said, "I don't care. They're going to have to talk. If we don't let them talk, we ain't going to get out of here." So, I said, "Look, folks, we don't usually have the talk. We want to let you all talk or ask questions or make comments, whatever you want to do." Well, evidently, they had thought about it because they – I wish I could think of the fellow. He's barrel-chested, commercial guy.

MW: Had a lot of them. [laughter]

RL: I can't remember his name. But anyway, here's what he said. You could have heard a pin drop. He said, "Folks, I'll tell you the problem in North Carolina. He's sitting right up there in the front. The governor has put him in charge of everything. He's chairman of the Marine Fisheries Commission. He's head of this moratorium thing. He don't live here. He's in charge of it all, and he doesn't even know what he's doing. He should do the honorable thing and resign right now. What do you say to that, Mr. Lucas?" He's in the back of the room, by the way. Well, like I said, you could have heard a pin drop. [laughter] People are looking at me. I said, "Well, if I'd known you was going to say all that, I would never let the public speak." [laughter] Everybody laughed. We just went right on. But you had to have a sense of humor. If you didn't,

if you took yourself so serious, good grief, you wouldn't be able to sleep at night. So, it all worked out well. But there were times where it was tough. But it's worth taking a few minutes and reflecting over, I think.

MW: Since it has been almost 20 years, we are coming up on 20 years now, what impacts of the legislation have you seen over the past 20 years? Do you think that it has fulfilled its original purpose?

RL: I do, and I've heard many people say, particularly on the inshore species, on how the fishing has helped, has come back so much. For example, the striped bass. I remember fishing a tournament up in Manteo. Man, you could just throw your hook in the water right there. You could catch striped bass right there by boats. They were everywhere. That was the species where you couldn't even catch a striped bass when it was in trouble. So, yes, I've seen a lot of the species come back. I've heard countless people say that. But there are also failures. I think the failure is not doing enough plans quickly enough. They take too long. I know they've got to do what they've got to do. They probably just don't have the resources of personnel to do it. But we're getting plans done. But we're not getting enough of them done and getting them done fast enough. That's a failure. Again, I don't care how good the plan is. The plan is, it's got to have these management plans done and not one every two years. You've got to get them done. So, it's good there's been successes, but they're failures too. The failures primarily tied to the effort, the effort and the money. Is that it?

MW: Well, do you have anything else that you would like to add?

RL: I can't think of anything. I think I've said it all out. I do appreciate. I would like to say that. On behalf of all the people that served on that committee and just speaking as chairman, I'd like to say to all of them that how much I appreciate what they did. I think the people of North Carolina should appreciate it because it was a great effort. They're to be commended for what they did and how they cared. It's something that, by non-professionals, it's not something you see duplicated very often. Where else can you look in state government where only citizens, everyday citizens like me and many others met on themselves and came up with their own solutions and got it passed and had the courage to fight people in their own group? I think Susan, she probably caught flak over it for supporting it because there were people that didn't want to take the time to understand it. First of all, you had to sit down and understand what we were trying to do. You can't read that in five minutes. Not only that, understand it. Most of the time, once you get people engaged in the process and they fully understood what you were trying to do, most times they buy into it. But I think they're to be commended. I would just – I would love to see it just expanded is what I'd like to see. But the blueprints there – and I think the blueprint will stand the test of time. The question is, do we have the resolve as a people? That's the question. So, I don't know. I guess that stay tuned on that one.

[end of transcript]