Interviewee: Michael Theiler, Jeanette T Fisheries, Waterford, Connecticut

Interviewer: Ian Bradley, University of Connecticut undergraduate student

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Michael Theiler final unedited

Telephone Interview by Ian Bradley

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00:07
Ian Bradley (IB):
This is Mike. All right, it's Ian (Bradley) just calling you back with the recorder. So at any point, just give me a heads up if you want to stop because you got to do something else or we need to switch or whatever. So let me do the regular stuff I gotta go through. So my name is Ian Bradley and I'm calling you from the Connecticut Sea Grant and I'm a University of Connecticut student that's working with them on the American Lobster Initiative Project. And I'm interviewing speaking with Michael and is your last name pronounced "Tyler"?.

00:47
Mike Theiler (MT): Theiler, correct.

00:49
IB: Okay. And we're just gonna be talking about your involvement with the lobster industry and being a fisherman, I believe you did both right?

01:01
MT: Yep. We've been involved in a lot of different fisheries.

01:06
IB: Okay. And I guess Yeah, to get started, one of the things I just like to say, again, just so we both know. We'll be sending you a release form, like we were talking about before, that just basically will explain what's going to happen with your history. And it's just going to be on file as

historical references for people to learn from based on what's been going on with the fisheries and NOAA, if you decide that you want to give it to them, NOAA held as a usable source for research related to historical documentation of the lobster fishery in Long Island Sound. Yep. And the Connecticut Sea Grant will do the same thing. All right, hey, so and today is January 20 2021. So yeah,

IB: if you can just give me an idea of what got you connected with, involved with working on the water and with getting into lobstering and stuff related to that.

02:12
MT: So, you know, when I was younger, my father was my father was a school teacher and and he he's from northern Wisconsin. So in the summers we'd spend you know time out with his family. I'll put up a camp with a lake and a river and I always had a fishing pole in my hands when I was a kid but it was always freshwater very little saltwater. As I grew older, I you know, worked paper routes and whatever. And when I finally had enough money I was about 16, I bought a skiff and from then on it was, you know, a whole new opportunity for me and we'd go clamming crabbing, just poke around the water. It was a small boat, but catch some blue fish occasionally catch a striper and, and really enjoyed being on and around the water.

03:10
IB: Makes perfect sense.

03:12
MT: Yeah, I went to college and after college, I got a job at a major pharmaceutical company. And then all the time I had boats gradually getting a bigger boat and ended up with a 24 foot boat by the time I was working and in the laboratory and the lab had a window overlook the Themes River. One day, I came home and I told my parents that I was going to quit my job that I could see the boats going out every morning and coming in every afternoon and I didn't want to work inside I wanted to be out on the water. And then my mother thought she was gonna have a heart attack. But my father, you know, wished me well and told me that I came from a long line of independent independent thinkers and and I just kind of hit things right I ended up buying my first big boat, I worked for a couple other guys and then bought my first good sized boat was a 35 foot lobster boat. I bought that in 19 I guess it was 1989 and went off on my own. And we actually started tuna fishing so we started doing and we would travel up and down the coast or out to the canyons and and then we'd set lobster pots during periods when it was slow when we gradually figured out that we're making a lot more money lobstering and then we were making tuna fishing, though it really wasn't quite as much fun. So that's how I got involved into into being a lobsterman was a period of great lobster fishing, particularly in Long Island Sound through the late 80s and right to the end of the 90s I mean fantastic phenomenal fishing. So we kind of rode that wave in 1994 I built a brand new boat. And I still have that boat I'm on my third engine, put over 60,000 hours on that boat and still like I said I'm on my third engine on that boat but it's changed the fisheries changed a lot we had a big die off and in 99 and that really changed the the whole scope of things

05:29
IB: did you one so with with that first boat you said you had like a 24 foot boat initially. What is that one? Yep, one that use you started doing the tuna fish fishing from that and a little bit of a lobster pots from that same boat?

05:47
MT: Yeah, yeah, we started with that. But in 89 I in 89 I had quit my job. I'd already worked for I think I quit my job in 87 worked for another fisherman for through 88. In the spring of 89 I bought the sold a smaller boat bought the 35-footer and and started working on my own and then never really looked back. I've been fishing mostly lobsters. But I had two lobster boats through the mid to late 90s, ran one lobster boat with a crew. And then I had another, well, since then since the mid-90s. I've had at least two boats sometimes three boats with some with other crew, some with just myself and and just swapping out fisheries. We've had to diversify. Otherwise, we never would have stuck around, you know, been able to make it in this business for that long. Without making some changes. The lobster resource crashed in the in 99-90 Yeah, big die off in 99 we went from catching I think, three 3.1 million pounds in 98. And then last year here a, 2020 I betch you the Sound didn't see 100,000 pounds of lobsters. So it's just been a fishing, lobster fishing has been pretty poor. We made it up through diversification.

07:21
IB: I was just saying that's a catastrophic drop obviously intense.

07:25
MT: Yeah, yep. Yep. And they sprayed for mosquitoes, they sprayed to prevent West Nile virus. And basically, right after they started spraying spraying program that killed all the lobsters. And, you know, they they put a lot of money towards research. And those researchers did a nice job. And I'm sure that right now they're they're making the money. The academics and scientists are making their money doing studying whatever, you know, whatever is the disease does your or whatever is in vogue, and whatever's following the grant money. And, you know, we had all kinds of, you know, presentations that the smoking gun was calcinosis or it was this or was that, you know, at the end of the day, none of them ever panned out. You know, you can't prove conscious, the hypothesis, you can't represent it, you know, you know, under under scientific conditions, and the one thing that we kept coming back to is it's the pesticides, it's the pesticides. Now, you know, it's difficult, because it would, it would cause, you know, the state would be liable. And, and we ended up winning a judgment of $16 million dollars against the two of the, the two of the companies that applied the pesticides. And they didn't do that because we were nice guys. You know, we they wouldn't admit guilt, but they're getting good, give us $16 million dollars. The problem is $16 million dollars divided among 1200 lobstermen ends up being, you know, maybe a year's pay. And, and the lawyers got money and the academics got money to do the studies and the fisherman got a year's pay and then their fisheries go on for the next twenty years. So we kind of have a hard spot but what the difference is, is, you know, some of us are able to get into other fisheries, other aspects, stay on water, you know, whatever we could. Some guys were able to do it and some guys weren't and, and a lot of a lot of people

went out of business. It was really, really pretty disturbing. A lot of friends of mine went out of business, it crushed them and their families, you know, and the chances of seeing the fishery back like it was back in the 90s is not there's not really a very much chance that that's going, that that's going to happen. You know, we we had a dramatic downturn in fish stocks, particularly aggressive predatory fish stocks, such as striped bass and ground fish in the in the late 80s and early 90s. We also had conditions, environmental conditions, where there was an awful lot of nutrients in the water in Long Island Sound in particular. So it was the color of Coca Cola, or black tea. And the sunlight really didn't filter down to the bottom lobsters were active 24 hours a day, they had relatively little or no predation, and the lobster population exploded. Matter of fact, we were probably overcapacity with lobsters. Long Island Sound was a lobster pump that lobsters were always on a west to east migration. And they're always leaving the sound, but there was always more of them being produced in western Long Island Sound that we're spilling out, like jelly beans out of a jar. No, I'm on the eastern end of Long Island Sound with more influence from the ocean. We had tremendous stock of lobsters here. And, you know, there were many years that we caught over 100,000 pounds of lobsters. And just to put that in perspective, as I mentioned before, last year, I don't think the whole state caught 100,000 pounds of lobsters.

11:36
IB: Oh, sorry. Are you saying you like individual groups back would have backed and honor DAX back then back then?

11:44
MT: Back in in the 90s there are many full-time lobstermen, you know, the better fisherman the guys that fished all year, could catch 100,000 pounds a lobsters there are many guys that caught that. Now the past couple of years, the whole sound doesn't produce 100,000 pounds of lobsters. That's how precipitously the population of the resource has dropped. We also had management decisions that were made back in the 90s that weren't weren't that weren't that weren't productive. So when we had these years of over abundance, if I if we can call it that, where we're where you could put a peach basket down at the dock and catch a lobster or you could haul the same pots twice in a day the bottom was covered with lobsters. We should have been, we should have went down on the gauge size and caught more of them because there was too many. Instead we went up on the gauge size to preserve more lobsters. And what's what happened was we were at a classic example of overpopulation where it just takes one event you know and then and then it it causes a mass die off or mass exodus of the species. It doesn't matter what you have if you have too many of them it's not conditions aren't you know. So when we had, like I said, we had too many lobsters in the Sound and we had the they sprayed for pesticides and next thing you know, all lobsters are dead, even the broodstock, so although us lobsterman thought, well seven to 10 years we'll have the fishery back, and the young guys will still make it it just didn't happen all of a sudden we've got sewer plants that are hyper chlorinated, chlorinating the water so there's you know, the water in Long Island Sound now is as clear as a glass of gin in the summertime. Problem is nothing lives in a glass of gin and nothing lives in the water in the in Sound this time in the summer. Mostly indigenous species from Long Island Sound are gone. Whether we want to admit it or not. There's been a

tremendous amount of relocation of population along the shoreline. It was probably better when we all shit in the hole in the backyard. But now we're all hooked up to the sewer. And everything goes to the sewer, everything's treated chemicals and chlorine and then it's pumped out into Long Island Sound and there's a sewer plants that are antiquated up and down the coast where if we get too much rain, they just treat it with chlorine and pump it over. And the problem is is that you know, after a rainfall event, most of these rivers smell like your swimming pool. You can smell the chlorine, well, chlorine is a poison and it's going to kill the eggs. It's gonna kill the larvae. And you know like I said when we are talking about the indigenous species, winter flounder they're gone. Blue Mussels, very rarely do you see them? It should come to maturity. Bay scallops, they're gone. Don't have them anymore. Yeah, their populations is severely impacted. I mean, these are just in my lifetime, I'm only 55.

15:20
IB: It's relatively short story

MT: That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

IB: Yep, you can see, because somebody asked you this, they still just kind of go in amongst some of that stuff. And he covered a lot of the things that I was definitely going to ask if you don't mind. Can you give me an idea? Like, what what did you guys start to use? For traps? And for lobster pots and traps? Like what? What was the structure? And what what were they made out of? And then how did that progress. Did you stick with the same kind of traps throughout the whole time even till till now? Or has that altered?

16:00
MT: Most people ask a question they know the answer already. We started with wood traps in in very quickly in the 90s, went over to wire pots. And in fact, there's been different designs and stuff that made the wire pots more effective. The difference between this fishery and many others is is that for the most part, we're doing a lot of husbandry. Right, you got to trap on a…. Particularly in western Long Island Sound, you got a trap on our featureless bottom that provides structure, provides safety, provides food. And until the lobster gets to be too big to crawl through a vent that's two inches by six inches, it's 12 square inches. We're letting that lobster go. So we're doing everything we're protecting it from predators, we're feeding it. And then, like I said it for the young lobsters. This is a whole ecosystem, a whole little miniature habitat. And you put a bunch of these on the bottom. And the next thing you know you, you've got little individual ecosystems around each trap. Yeah. So I don't think that it's been a terrible thing to put the structure on the bottom again, and feed the lobsters and everything else that we do to them. It's a lot of husbandry, it's a very rudimentary form of aquaculture. And it isn't until the lobsters are, is until lobsters are, you know, about a pound and a quarter, or three and three inch curbs length, that we actually keep them. Now that is that has hindered us in Long Island Sound, since we're mostly an estuarine fishery. The lobsters, as they, you know, back in the day, there used to be more of a migration where the lobsters would come in, they'd breed in close to shore, and then they move back off shore where they live the rest of the year, they come up into the warmer waters, the shallower waters that warmed with the, with the sun and

warmed much, much sooner. And they breed up here and get rid of their eggs and and then they would go back into the deepwater. Doesn't happen quite like that anymore. But you know, that was, again, that was that was the way it used to be. And we should have, for us to have such a big gauge size has been a real detriment. Because our lobsters are mature at a much smaller size. So theoretically, we could have been taking these at the old gauge size a three and a quarter, which is the perfect. Maine, where their lobsters don't mature until they're they're well above the gauge size, particularly females, they have a much smaller gauge size than us kind of doesn't make any sense. You know, if you go to Florida, the deer there are the size of dogs, and if you go up north than their size of horses, I mean, it's just getting remember the guys name, but there's a biologist, his theory was that you know, towards, you know, as you as you go further north and you know, higher latitudes then then it was, you know, it was the, the physical stature of the animal has to be bigger to survive. And as you go further south towards the equator, they're smaller. And that's certainly true with lobster. Difference is we're right on the southern range of lobster. You know, New Jersey might be the southern range, but Long Island Sound isn't too far ahead of that. So we're right on the southern range of lobster. And then you'll still look at some north all the way to Labrador. But, but for sure down here is where you know we're on the southern range of them.

20:00
IB: Yeah, again down to the bottom, bottom edge of where it can exist, right?

20:06
MT: So that's, that's a long answer. But yes, we use wire traps. And we've, we've, we've been more efficient with wire traps, double parlors, shrink twine mesh in the heads, you know, different things that they work out better. And, you know, there's a handful of guys that were kind of on the cutting edge of technology, they try anything, we were one of them, you know, we'd try putting light sticks in pots or, you know, whatever, we fooled around with some acoustical stuff. I mean, whatever we thought would be able to catch a little bit better than the next guy. And most of it was a pipe dream and didn't work out. But there were a few things that worked out that the shrimp twine was one we were way ahead of the curve on the shrimp twine. It's a much smaller mesh in the heads, particularly particularly in the back head. In the parlor head, there's two parts of a lobster trap the kitchen is the front one where lobsters eat, where they initially come in through the through the hoops. And then the parlor is the back after they eat, they go into the back of the pot, which is the parlor, where it’s actually trapped. And if you get a few lobsters in there, they're always lifting their claws up in the only place the only part of lobsters vulnerable is the underside of the lobster. So as those lobsters are crawling into the parlor, over this vent that's kind of shaped like a wedge with a bigger mesh. The smaller lobsters are the lobsters trapped back there would be sticking their claws through trying to bite the underside. So if you go with shrimp twine, which has a smaller tighter mesh, those lobsters that are stuck in the parlor are trying to get at the end underside, and they catch a lot better.

21:55
IB: Okay, I see

MT: Ian it’s been 20 minutes on the phone, you'll be ready to go lobstering .

IB: Oh, I'm gonna go. I'm sure I could try. I bet I'd run into some trouble

IB: there was I guess what one of the other things I wanted to ask is like with the so you said at times you did have more than one boat you guys are running at once, right?

MT: Yep, yep.

IB: And did you did you want to just do an like small cruise per boat or was it just however many you thought you needed to go out there and just Just do as much as you needed per day? Based on weather and stuff like

22:45
MT: we're pretty we're pretty efficient. I mean, we usually generally ran each boat with a captain and two crewmen. I mean, in in the 90s when we move Randles as much as four crew men before but but generally it was a captain and two crew just depends on how much your catching

23:06
IB: Did Did you run into pre dieoff were issues with weather and and climate kind of stuff really affecting how the fishing would go and those are certain days that were totally not worth going out there.

23:24
MT: Nope. We went every day. First three years I was married I took four days off the whole year. That's in three years. So we worked every single day. I knew that if I wasn't out there that one of my competition I don't care if it's Christmas if it's birthdays if it's anniversaries we were out there every single day I missed four days and that was two weddings and a hurricane I think.

23:54
IB: that's pretty amazing.

MT: That's no joke pattern of work is that is no joke. And Did did you pretty much stick to just one one segment of the of the sound where you're going or as you guys expanded were you able to move around and start up new locations new harvesting areas

24:14
MT: no we never had to we stayed we stayed in pretty much one area but but we're since we were able to work together we could catch it didn't just double our catch it exponentially increased our catch because you know we could tell when the lobsters were moving from one area to another and and really stay ahead of them by working together. When we you know when we came to buy bait, we'd buy a tractor trailer they just bring down a refrigerator a tractor trailer and drop it off and then a week later they pick up the empty empty body and then bring

the another tractor trailer in its place. I mean, a lot of it was just like clockwork and and you're just like you said you just we just went we just worked But I will tell you that my son was born in 1992. I had a daughter, born in 1995. And my last daughter was born. Let's see 92,94, 95. So in 99, my son was seven years old. In in 99, I was, let's see here, where would I have been? I was born in 65. So I was, you know, let's see, '92, Jerry was, well, whatever. You know, I was 30 years old 35 making a lot of money. And paid everything off very quickly house car, you know, boats. But we had the die off. And I'll never forget, I was interviewed by I think, by the Associated Press, they had sent someone down to the dock to do a story about the die off. And, and they said, was there any one? You know, was there any one point in your career or any, any, any definitive point in your career, you know? And I said to him, you know, it's, there's, you know, I've always been very task, very goal oriented. And there's not one point in my career that I can say, that was a shining moment, that was a big moment of change, or anything that definitive moment. And, you know, I said, I was wanting to catch 1000 pounds of lobsters in a day. And I went out and did that I wanted to get to 2000 pounds in a day. And I went and did that? You know what, for monetary benchmarks, I always met those. So no, there's really hasn't been any one defining moment in my career. When we wrapped up the interview, and as and as this, this lady walked off the dock and say, Wait a minute, you know what, there was one moment in my career, but not for the reason that you think. And I said that that moment was September 19th, 1999, when the lobsters died, I said, because up until then, we just worked like dogs. I mean, I'm not in any family photos, with the, you know, kids birthdays, and very few of them. Even Christmas, you know, just we're working all the time. And then, once the lobsters died, I thought that my world had crashed, and that, that it was the worst thing that ever happened, when in fact, it was probably the best thing that ever happened. Because from 99 on, you know, I got to watch my kids grow up. It wasn't it wasn't as important to go out fishing every day because we weren't catching 1000s of pounds of lobsters. You know, I started, my kids started playing hockey, maybe a year or two later, and spent the winter going to hockey games. You know, never before that. I just wasn't around I was always working I was a machine. And like I said that when the lobsters died in a queer way, probably the best thing happened to me I've got a great relationship with three great kids, fantastic wife. But in those formative years when they were young, I mean the girls were only you know, five years old four years old when the when the lobsters died and from 90 on from 99 on I spent a lot more time at home and of course we went to some different regulations we'd close seasons, in the fall and such but by then I'd already things had already changed. And like I said, for me it was probably for the better.

29:11
IB: now did you have did you have other fisheries who were still involved in even before the the die off? Like did you have some bouncer you've tried pushing harder for more into

29:23
MT: we pretty much gave up every other fishery during the years when the lobsters population has exploded. You know when we when we first started out in the 80s all of us all the fishermen in the sound that's what we we were fishermen. We would take the cream off the top if there was a you know, big year on winter flounder we'd all be dragging even guys lobster guys, we'd

rig up our boats up with little nets and we go fishing for flounder. And then, and then we we go maybe we go fishing with rod and reel for porgies or we'd go spotting for for bay scallops. We participated in a lot of different fisheries. And we always took the cream off the top. So there was never any issue with fishing on a population that was so beat up that. But then in the 90s, once they started fisheries management, all of a sudden, they looked at me and said, well, listen, you never use the net to catch those porgies. So now you can't use you can't use the net to catch those porgies, but we had so many lobsters, we didn't give a shit about the 60 pounds of porgies, he said, Let us that we that we had to throw back that we couldn't keep now we only keep 10 porgies, or the summer flounder that that they that they wouldn't let us catch with the dragger net because in the three years that they gave us for qualifying all of us were too busy lobstering to go fishing, you know with a net or anything else. Then the next thing, you know, lobsters die. And we're fishing on a beat up population for the next 20 years. Because most of us didn't have the opportunity. We didn't have the proper licenses because we didn't qualify. Even all of us made our living from the ocean. We just we lost those opportunities. So we were lucky I got into several different businesses. We clammed we hard clammed for a while with hydraulic dredge. We've, we've done a lot of scalloping offshore, sea scalloping and so we do a lot of sea scalloping right now. I ended up buying a boat for my daughter, a dragger. So we have a dragging license and a small dragger. And then I've diversified and I do a lot of contract jobs. With the lobster boat, I work for the state. I do buoys, beaches, sailboat moorings, environmental studies for different organizations do do quite a bit of multi beam surveys for some environmental companies, stuff like that. So it's probably my incomes probably 50/50 between fishing and the rest of the jobs.

32:25
IB: Yeah. And you're saying you're you're still able to use the same lobster boat for for the other stuff that you're doing as well, the environmental thing.

32:34
MT: I went ahead and got my captain's license and my, like my crew, some of them have licenses, captain's licenses, you know, US Coast Guard, Master mariner certificates. You know, we took classes, we've got a lot of safety certifications and stuff, which make us kind of unique, so we're able to go and do a lot of these jobs in areas that that makes us more marketable.

33:06
IB: And got it you got to do what you got to do, obviously, when you're going to have a whole change. like that, makes a lot of sense. Yep. What do you what do you see happening with the rest of the people that are still actively out there? Have you seen Could you give me an idea like what developments you know, recently, you've seen quite a few people either left the industry altogether in recent years that were still hanging on or or do you see some changes similar to the things you've you've done, give me an idea of what you've seen your guys

33:41
MT: most most of the guys that are my age are are working another job somewhere on the waterfront either you know, running other boats or getting into other things. They're still on the

water, but not the same. The same capacity? Excuse me, but yeah, the effort is way way down. Yeah. And if you look at it, you know, the price of fuel used to be 60 cents, and now it's $2.60 or higher and rising every day. Price of bait is used to be you know, $25 a barrel now it's $85 a barrel or more. The the price the traps used to buy our traps for $28 apiece. Now they're almost $100 apiece. So the price of lobsters Yeah, we've gotten as low as $2.50 or two bucks. But the past couple of years it's been around $5 and, and it just doesn't keep up with the cost of doing business. People knew what it costs. You know what it took this to catch one lobster I mean, I know what it takes me to leave the dock every day and it you know it If we use lobsters as a metric, well, heck, I gotta catch, you know, 60 to 80 lobsters a day just to just to make ends meet just to just to breakeven. So if I can't go out and catch, you know, 150 or 200 pounds, it doesn't sound like a lot of lobsters and I would have laughed. If it was back in the 90s. I probably wouldn't leave the dock to catch 150 pounds of lobsters. Now we catch 200 pounds of lobsters, and we're high fiving each other and it's a great day.

35:34
IB: Yeah. Do you do first see, what would you think of for the future? With any anybody that's involved with the lobstering? Like what do you think will happen during the
MT: Don’t leave your day job. Yeah.

IB: Do you think it will see any, any development within at any any different approach any any growth within people trying to get back into it? Or do you think it's really just going to

36:02
MT: Well it depends, I mean, you know, if environmental change changes could happen, and all of a sudden you could have a huge year class and I'd never say never. But I wouldn't put a lot investment into it either. I've been lobstering for most of my adult life. And I mean, I think this is my 33rd year. Yes, we would, we would certainly hope to see lobsters come back. But again, I I'm not betting my future on it.

36:44
IB: I guess definitely getting a really good idea of what was going on what you had to deal with and what you saw and what what your thoughts are within the whole general process. Is there anything else you want to point out or anything you think I should probably take a look at or recognize about it that I didn't bring up

37:05
MT: Not much. There's a there's a girl from Australia that came and did a short video, you can check that out if you want. That's that's pretty much as far as people that have, you know, heard the story and done the little interviews and stuff. She pretty much nailed it. It's on Vimeo. It's called “Hauling in the Sound” on Vimeo “Hauling in the Sound.” If you just Google it'll come up. It's like three minutes.
She did a nice job.

IB: Yeah, marking it down.

MT: It’s real short,
IB: how long? How long,
MT: IT was done a good number of years ago. Yeah, it was done. You know, probably 10 years ago, maybe more? I don't know. You'd have to take the check the date on it, I'm not really sure. Remember, it's been a while. Yes. Okay. But if there's anything if there's anything that, you know, management of all the Fisheries has always been done from a resource point of view, and looking at maximum yields or sustainable yields. And in very little of it has been done on a socio or economic standpoint, particularly a business standpoint. So we've got states with quotas, states with open and closed seasons. And if we looked at all of the fisheries, from an economic standpoint, you'd probably find that there would be a lot of ways to streamline the marketplace, the ups and downs of the marketplace, as well as creating maximum value for for the fisherman. Again, if it was looked at it from a business model, I mean, we can catch porgies, for example, scup, we can catch those in the fall, September, the prices will be really good, because of the fish that people enjoy eating outside their fish fries, their ethnic fish. And, and in the wintertime, there's really not much of a demand for it. But usually sometime around October 1, it opens up from a daily small boat fishery of a 100, couple 100 pounds, maybe 1000 pounds a day, to 50,000 pounds a trip or and the price goes to like a nickel 10 cents. It's hardly even worth catching those fish. It doesn't really pay to even ship them. And then in the summertime, the fluke and sea bass they have rolling closures where different states will open and close but a lot of times what will happen is two states that have big limits, their openings will coincide with each other and the fish prices just crash where if we spread those openings out, looked at it from a business standpoint and said alright, we could catch you know 200 pounds of sea bass at $5 is $1,000. But if we open it up to 1000 pounds a day, the price is going to crash to $1. So the value is still the same, but we're killing five times as many fish. And we don't look at it very rarely do we look at it from a business standpoint, or from a social standpoint, you know, what does it take to keep the guy and his family? What's it take to pay their heating bill in the wintertime? You know, how can we make this so that guys that maybe they're not quite as responsible or don't have the capabilities of saving money? How can we make this so that they can make a little bit of money year-round, you know, is there but instead, we've we've limited opportunities for guys, we closed doors, compartmentalized fishermen, you know, if you look at, you look at the department of agriculture, they've got 100 programs, to keep farmers in business. And you look at National Marine Fishery Service, and their programs are made to keep fishermen out of business. It's just night and day.

41:11
IB: I certainly hope there's a brighter avenue they can take with that. And then that's obviously a really important thing to consider. And it's really sad to see, in my opinion,

MT: It used to be that we had a fairly strong lobby, in Washington, and that we really felt like we had a seat at the table or a say on various boards and councils. And now those, that voice has been been been overtaken by, by a lot of it's the environmental movement. And I was at, at a workshop, not recently, maybe a few years ago, and a young, very well-educated young lady says to me, yes, but you're making money off of this. That was her rationale for, you know, me when I said that, you know, that, you know, we needed to have more of a lobby and everything

else than the the environmental movement. And I said, missus, you know, with all due respect, your movement makes a whole lot more money off of this than we do. And it's true, that environmental movement is a business, just like any other business. And, and now, instead of fishermen dictating policy, we've got our environmental groups dictating policy. And I'm just stating facts. I'm not saying it's right or wrong, we need both people at the table. But the guys that are on the water every day, the guys are on the water every day need to be the ones that that that have a little more of a voice and should be looked at as an asset rather than a liability. And that's disappointing.

43:03
IB: Yeah, I certainly hear what you're saying. I'm just Very, very clear. I think it's covered. Excellent amount of stuff. I absolutely appreciate you giving me time to go over all this. And like I said, if there's any, any questions or any, if there's any specific thing that didn't come through in the recording just that small little blip or anything like that. If you're okay with that, I would just send me an email and ask you if I can go over and see if we can figure out something or if I didn't come through and beyond that, I want to thank you very much.

43:47
MT: No problem. I'm always happy to you know, Nancy and Nancy Balcom and everyone over at Sea Grant has always been wonderful to us and, and accessible and done everything they could to do to help us. I mean, you know, Nancy has been there for a 100 years, even through the die off and everything back in the 90s. I mean, she was she still offers up resources for Pennsylvania geese for that matter, with with fishing and training now. We do some training over there programs that they're, they're over at Avery point, and whatever resources they can offer up to us to help keep guys safer and, and bring guys home every night. It's very much appreciated. So anytime we have an opportunity to help them out. We're always happy to help them out as well.

44:40
IB: Yeah, it's been good to work with her and I yeah, I certainly appreciate this. It's it's opened my eyes to a lot of different stuff. And as I continue on, I'm sure it'll be even better. You know, as I get 10 to 18 different people's perspectives on stuff. I'll start learning a lot more about so I really do appreciate your time, man. Thank you.

44:59
MT: Sure. Sure, good luck Ian? What do you? What are you gonna do? Are you a graduate student now or

45:07
IB: No, I'm an undergrad. So I'm actually returning. I shouldn't even call it returning student, I'm an adult student, I, I've worked in the trades for about 25 years. And then I was a locksmith for 15 years, and then decided to get out of that, for a lot of different reasons. And I've always wanted to be involved in find out a lot more about, like, what's going on with agriculture and fisheries management, and a lot of the stuff we're talking about public policy related to it and just

find out like, how assumptions what's been going on, get to the bottom and a lot of this. And so I'm doing a Maritime Studies Major at Avery point, actually, it's where my, I've been situated there for the last year and a half.

45:57
MT: What do you hope to do with it?

45:59
IB: Honestly, if at all possible, I really would like to get to the bottom of, you know, it's strong, it'll, it'll guide me as I go. But I really would like to be involved in public policy, as I learn more about it, I get directed, and if, if at all possible, I'd like to physically be out in the field, doing some of this as well. So you know, fisheries management at some level and hoping to make a difference that hopefully is beneficial for everybody involved.

46:33
MT: I go speak at the Coast Guard Academy, a couple times a year to second semester seniors. And, and as they when they graduate, they become officers and run vessels and, and various. You know, some of them go into engineering and whatever. But I tell all of them that listen, in especially in a congested port, like New London, there's no one that has a better idea of what's coming and going along the waterfront and the fishermen. This isn't the cowboys and Indians or the cops and robbers we should be looked at as an asset. Where if there's something that that we see, whether it's Eb, whether it's a navy, whether it's an another port, whether it's a spill, whether it's migrants, drug activity, whatever, if it happens along the waterfront, we are we are, that's our backyard, we spend a lot of god darn time on the water. And if something's out of place, it does something doesn't belong. We understand it first. For many of these officers, they might be from Tulsa, Tulsa, Oklahoma, or Santa Fe, New Mexico, or some little town with 100,000 people and, you know, Appalachia, whatever, and they don't have the last idea what goes on along the waterfront. And, and the same thing with the scientists. As you get further and further into academia, you get farther and farther away from the thing that brought you there in a few in the first place, which is like yourself being on the water or being involved in the water. And so you're relying on what we call science now, or secondhand information or computer models, when most of the answers are right in front of you. And, and but because we're fishermen and we're perceived to be uneducated or biased or such, most of the things that we come up with are termed or classified as anecdotal. Yeah, but that's anecdotal information, we can't back it up. Well, at the end of the day, it's kind of hard to count fish or see trends or whatever. But I could tell you, based on 30 years' experience what's going on what's happening, why fish aren't being landed at certain rates, maybe just the market dropped out. So all of a sudden, there's no landing, see, the fish is worthless, could be fisher aren't as deep. But if you're tracking based on landings, you get to say, Geez, Connecticut, they didn't land any fish last year because, well, maybe it was you know, it was a time of year that something else was going on. I mean, who knows there's a lot of but but again, we're not looked at as an asset. We're looked at as a liability. We do have some good people in DEP now that have a little more of an open mind but like I said, for years, the management to the council's and stuff has been extremely disappointing. extremely disappointing. Conneticut's seat on the New England

Council as you might have had him if you're at Avery point, Matt McKenzie, during that Mackenzie

50:00
IB: Yes, I've met him. Yeah.

MT: Yeah. So he's great guy. He's a, he's a, he's a professor over there. He's our seat on the New England fisheries Council, because he's an environmentalist. And he was nominated by the by the, you know, the Green Movement. I think he's done a fine job. But that post has always been environmentalists in Connecticut, it was Doug, Doug Hopkins, Sally McGee. And, and, you know, these are it's a fisheries, you know, New England Fisheries Council. We've never had a fisherman on that council. And for me, that's just like you said, if you're going to have a green person on there, and environmentalist on there, then make sure that they float around from state to state. So our state gets some representation. It shouldn't be just from one state, is it? It's just one example of where I think that we're failing our, our fishing industry. And the again, no knock on that Matt's done a great job. But again, at some point, instead of having a professor on there, or maritime history professor probably should have a fisherman on it would be the best. You know, we don't always get to decide a lot of us decided by the governor or by the Secretary of Commerce. And those decisions are made, you know, they're made at the bar after the meeting in the back room where some lobbyists there, you know, that's not I mean, that's just the way politics are done. which side you're on.

51:38
IB: I was gonna say, unfortunately, I think that's across the board. For most politics. Yep. of whatever level it is, whatever. Lobbying is no doubt. We, locksmith we had we got knocked out for we were trying to fight really hard to get locksmithing to have a license in Connecticut, like electricians, carpenters, and plumbers, and whatever. And we got, we got bumped out, because they actually wanted that we didn't lobby with the right people, I guess. But we flopped for for years. It was like 20 years before I got into business. And then five years me go into a lot of a lot of effort trying to be involved when I was just brand new to it too. And we got bumped out. At the last minute, they actually went with licensing interior decorators instead of us. So that's ridiculous. I realized that when I was like, 20, whatever I was 24 or something at that time, my jaw dropped as a so you guys felt it was more important to have that have somebody that's that's, you know, comfortable giving you throw pillows, and different kinds of curtains, and then being licensed than the person that has the keys to your your family and your house and your business. Okay, good luck. So, yeah, we've had about eight politics, and

53:04
MT: you could probably use background checks and everything else when it came to locksmiths were right.

IB: So that'sthat's what we thought, you know, we were hoping

MT: Well listen Ian, I appreciate you taking some time after hours. I know what's after your your posted hours. Yeah.

IB: So we're sure you were at being able to do this. I know you got a long ass day out there. So this is a really, I'm happy we were able to do it. Thank you very much, man. This is great.

MT: And certainly any questions? Give me a shout back don't hesitate.

53:35
IB: Yeah, and like I said, I'll send you that follow up email and I'll, I'll attach the recording. And you know, I'll just, I'll just trim it down. So it's less time basically, that's the only thing I'm going to edit out. Just so we make it concise and I'll send it out and then Nancy is the one that's going to send out the letter from Sea Grant. You'll see you'll see it from there and he's gonna pop an envelope with a stamp on it and you can just you can indicate on it whatever you want it to be certain parts he doesn't like or you want to pull that or whatever. Just write it right on there. You know?

MT: Yep. Sounds great.
IB: Hey, man, thank you very much.
MT: No problem. Have a good night.

IB: Take care. Good luck with everything.
MT: But thanks.
IB: Bye bye.

End