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Robert Cardin: Good afternoon, this is Robert Cardin. Today is April 25, 2010, and I am at my residence conducting an oral history interview of Scott Osborne for the Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation project with the Fort Pierce fishermen on the Oculina Bank HAPC [Habitat Area of Particular Concern]. Welcome, Scott. Would you please state your name and spell it for us?

Scott Osborne: Scott Osborne. S-c-o-t-t O-s-b-o-r-n-e.

RC: And your place of birth, Scott?

SO: West Palm Beach, Florida.

RC: And your date of birth?

SO: June 8, 1969.

RC: Scott, when did you move to Fort Pierce?

SO: I moved to the Fort Pierce area in 1999.

RC: And what brought you to Fort Pierce?

SO: Fishing. I gradually moved northward up the coast.

RC: Are you married, Scott?

SO: Yes, I am.

RC: And how old were you when you got married—the ninth time? (SO laughs) The last time, excuse me.

SO: The last time I got married, I was thirty-nine.

RC: Do you have children, Scott?

SO: Yes, I do.

RC: How many?

SO: I have four.

RC: What are their ages?

SO: At this time, from eleven to sixteen.

RC: Could you say each child's age, please?

SO: Yes. I have a daughter that's eleven—want their names, too?

RC: No, just ages.

SO: Daughter that's eleven, a son that's twelve, a son that's thirteen, and a daughter that's sixteen.

RC: All right. Scott, how much schooling do you have?

SO: I have a high school education and two years of junior college.

RC: Scott, do you have another job besides fishing?

SO: No.

RC: Have you had other jobs besides fishing?

SO: Once, for about six months, I worked in a fish market.

RC: And that, like you said, was still in the fishing industry, in the fish market. What were you, cutting fish?

SO: Cutting and delivering.

RC: And, Scott, do you currently own a boat?

SO: Yes, I do.

RC: What kind and how long is it?

SO: It's a thirty-four foot Crusader.

RC: Now, Scott, I'd like to ask you some questions about the Oculina Bank. How familiar are you with the Oculina Bank?

SO: Very familiar. (laughs)

RC: Very familiar, and you laughed. Why did you laugh, Scott?

SO: (laughs) Because it's a familiar part of my mental history.

RC: Mental history; you mean your memories of fishing and catching fish?

SO: Yes, yes.

RC: All right. Scott, why was Oculina Bank designated to protect?

SO: It was originally designated to protect deepwater corals.

RC: Scott, I noticed you said "originally"; what did you mean by that?

SO: Well, it later turned into a marine protected area for snapper grouper species.

RC: Okay. Is there anything else you can tell me about the Oculina Bank?

SO: (laughs) Oh, there's piles and piles of fish in the Oculina Bank that are no longer able to be harvested because of this MPA, that were historically harvested.

RC: Historically harvested. Well, you mentioned the term "historically harvested," and you know that brings to mind—what was historically harvested? You mean like a historical fleet or—what do you mean? Excuse me, but what do you mean by historically harvested?

SO: I mean from the time I was a kid and started fishing, there was many fishing boats out of Fort Pierce and the adjacent areas that ran to the Oculina Bank area to harvest amberjacks, groupers, snapper, and other species. That was a very vital fishing ground.

RC: Okay, and were you one of the people that was fishing the grounds?

SO: Yes, I was.

RC: Okay. What do you think about the closure of the Oculina Bank to anchoring and bottom fishing?

SO: Repeat that?

RC: What do you think about the closure of the Oculina Bank to anchoring and bottom fishing?

SO: I think it was a huge impact on the fishing industry.

RC: By “huge impact,” you mean a positive or negative?

SO: A huge negative impact. It cut out—not 100 percent, but very close to: almost all snapper, grouper, and amberjack fishing in the area.

RC: Okay. Has the closure of the Oculina Bank affected your fishing?

SO: Oh, absolutely.

RC: And how, Scott?

SO: Oh, anymore, the fish that we catch are just hit and miss fish on the edges of the Oculina Bank. We can no longer touch the massive part of the bottom that we need to get to to catch fish.

RC: Scott, this isn't a question on here, but you bring it to mind. You said that you catch the fish at the edges. So, are you saying that the overflow is a positive thing? Or are you saying the edges, you think there's an overflow of fish— is that a positive thing?

SO: No, no I just think that it's—

RC: Cutting them off at the pass or something?

SO: Conditioned, depending that sometimes fish move out of that area but, for a short period of time, they move back in. And we only get to touch the fish when—sometimes we never get to touch the fish. And if we have conditions that may run some fish out of that area for a short period of time—

RC: So, you're thinking of like yearly cycles, different times of the year that might or might not.

SO: Right, right.

RC: Okay, interesting, thank you. If anchoring and bottom fishing in Oculina Bank was not prohibited, would you fish there?

SO: Absolutely.

RC: (laughs) How would you fish, Scott?

SO: How would I fish? Power fishing and anchoring.

RC: All right. And, like, what kind of gears would you be fishing with?

SO: With bandit gear. Bandit and rod and reel gear.

RC: Bandit or deck reel, vertical?

SO: Yeah.

RC: And what would you fish for, groupers and snappers?

SO: Grouper, snapper, and amberjacks.

RC: All right. Overall, how has the fishing changed since you began fishing in Fort Pierce?

SO: How has the fishing changed? Including the Oculina Bank closure?

RC: Yeah, overall, that and any other effects, you know. Is it better or worse? Just overall, how has fishing changed since you began fishing off Fort Pierce?

SO: Well, like, fishing production has gone down in relation to the Oculina Bank closure. As far as the fishing potential, I don't think it's gotten any better or any worse. There's cycles that come and go, but the problem is that we can't get to the fish.

RC: So, if I understand you right, you're not saying— you don't necessarily think there's less fish, but less opportunity to—

SO: Absolutely. Less fish that we can harvest. Not less biomass, but less fish that we are allowed to get to.

RC: And I would assume not only—I wouldn't—excuse me. Oculina Bank, as you stated, had a big effect on you, but could it be other regulations, also, that you're speaking of that's lowered your catches?

SO: Oh, yes. Well, we have snapper grouper closures—March and April, which has now extended to January, February, March, and April— which takes away almost 100 percent of our grouper fishing in this area, because not only can we not fish in the Oculina Bank, but when the fish are inshore during the time of year when we can catch them, now we can no longer catch them because of this four month closure.

RC: Okay. Interesting, Scott. It sounds like you said during the time of year that they're—did you say not in the Oculina Bank, or in shore, or— ?

SO: No, there's still fish in the Oculina Bank, but also some fish come in shore.

RC: During the month of January?

SO: The only time in our area that we would get to catch those fish would be in the winter months. And now we are closing those winter months, and we can no longer to catch the fish, pretty much the whole year.

RC: Okay. Man, that sounds very knowledgeable; thank you. Have you had any experience with the law enforcement in or regarding the Oculina Bank?

SO: No.

RC: Now, this isn't a question, but I want to clarify something. You said that you moved to Fort Pierce in ninety-nine [1999]; it was one of the beginning questions. But you've talked—you actually had fished in the Oculina Bank and caught fish. So, are we to assume that you were coming to Fort Pierce to fish the Oculina Bank pre-ninety-four [1994] when it was open?

SO: Yes, the Oculina Bank. At that time, I lived in the county directly south of Fort Pierce; but it was no further than running out of Fort Pierce to the Oculina Bank, so I ran to the Oculina Bank from the south.

RC: Okay, thank you. Now I understand, thank you. And once again, now that you are in Fort Pierce, one of the questions was would you fish in the Oculina Bank if it was open? And, of course, you would say yes.

SO: Absolutely.

RC: Yes. All right, thank you for clearing that up for me. Now, I want to talk to you about your fishing history. You know, from like the beginning or whatever: a little bit of detail and on your history on the fishery. I want to start with: What's the earliest memory of fishing and how old were you? I'm not talking about commercial fishing, I'm talking about fishing in general, you know, fishing at the lake with your grandpa or something like that.

SO: I've been told that I was locked in my room at night when I was less than three years old, because I would leave the house and go fishing. Yeah, I grew up fishing with my father and friends and neighbors, ever since I could walk. So, I've been— yeah—

RC: But your earliest memory is, I would assume—

SO: Four or five years old, yes.

RC: Okay. And now, how did you learn how to fish? Like, did someone teach you? Did you walk out to the pond in the backyard or something?

SO: From my father and relatives.

RC: And now you made me think that you were—you said you were in trouble because you would go fishing by yourself, just walk off, as a child. What were you near the water or something?

SO: Yes, we lived on the water, on a saltwater canal.

RC: Saltwater canal?

SO: Mm-hm.

RC: Where would that be at? You mind me asking you?

SO: Oh, it was in Jupiter [Florida].

RC: Jupiter, okay. Cool. You've been here a long time, then. How did you decide to become a fisherman? And I think what I'm referring to is a commercial fisherman, I mean.

SO: When I was in high school, the fishing docks was very close to the school, and after school we would—and there was a fish market right by the school. We would ride our bikes or drive by the docks and the fish markets and stuff. It just became very intriguing. We got to know some of the older fishermen and go fishing with them, and it just—we didn't see any other way to do it but to be fishermen.

RC: So, it just sounds like you—what, you go with an old man and he'd would give you twenty bucks for going fishing or something?

SO: Right, yup. We'd catch bait and clean the boats, and they'd give us a few dollars.

RC: Did you know a point—can you recall a point in your mind where you said, you know, "I'm going to do this for a living"? Or have you never even just thought about it, you've just been doing the whole time?

SO: Never really thought about it. When I was fifteen years old in high school, I bought my first boat, and have been fishing on my own boat since I was fifteen.

RC: Okay. That's a long time ago, it's hard to remember. (both laugh) Thank you. Scott, when did you start to work as a fisherman in the Fort Pierce area?

SO: In my early twenties.

RC: Um, can we figure the math out here? Like, how old were—like, twenty, so that would be like twenty years ago?

SO: Maybe before that, maybe I was eighteen.

RC: So, that would be like 1987 or something like that?

SO: Exactly, yup.

RC: And what did you fish for at that time?

SO: Snapper, grouper, amberjacks was my main stay.

RC: Okay. And this might be the same question as earlier, but how did you fish for these amberjacks, groupers, and snappers?

SO: A vertical gear, bayonet reel.

RC: Okay, and what does— you catch bait or buy bait?

SO: You catch live bait, catch goggle eyes, or silver mullet or blue runners.

RC: And here I want to ask you a question that's not in here. I keep hearing "gear," and when I speak to some fishermen they talk about using forty hooks, and some talk about twenty hooks and ten and five and two and one. Could you describe the gear that you use?

SO: It's basically a one-hook rig for groupers, and sometimes what we call a stack rig with three or four hooks for snowy groupers or amberjacks, depending on how well the fish are biting.

RC: Okay, thank you. In the eighties [1980s], when you started fishing here in the Oculina Bank, who do you fish with?

SO: I fished with a friend of mine, Rodney Kale. We fished together. We had a boat.

RC: And who owned that boat?

SO: We were partners in that one.

RC: Okay. How were you related to this person?

SO: I'm not related to him; we were just friends.

RC: Okay, and what size was that boat?

SO: It was a thirty-one foot Stapleton.

RC: I bet you could put quite a few fish on that one, huh?

SO: Yup, 5,000.

RC: Wow. Where did you go to fish when you began fishing?

SO: We fished between Jupiter and Daytona.

RC: Okay. I think this question might have us talking in the Oculina Bank. Actually, we are talking about Oculina Bank. So, when I said, “Where did you fish when you began fishing?” I think I’m referring to something like twenty years ago in 1987 when you were fishing in Oculina.

SO: Oh, yeah. The Oculina Bank closures is what put us going further north. We had to go on the other side of the boundaries. But, yes, pretty much from the Jupiter to Fort Pierce area.

RC: Can you show me on this map where you fished?

SO: Yes.

RC: I see you pointing— that’s the south end of the Oculina Bank.

SO: Yeah, it’s the south end.

RC: It’s like Jeff’s Reef. In there, that’s, like, at 330. I think people refer that to the Chapman’s Reef.

SO: And then, on up to the north, these other lumps.

RC: And what, did you stop here off of Vero [Beach] or keep going?

SO: Um, all the way up to Sebastian and towards the Cape, Cape Canaveral. There's the wrecks towards the Cape, and a closed area that we can no longer fish, that were very good.

RC: Yeah. I heard that there were a couple wrecks right off Sebastian that used to be loaded.

SO: Absolutely. There still is.

RC: People would be there—I heard there would be one or two boats at daylight every day. Were you one of those?

SO: Yes.

RC: (laughs) Excuse me, I'm sorry. I'm trying to stay on track here. Um, where did you begin fishing? I mean, would you—like, what depths? Would you go right into the Oculina Bank, or did you fish some of these other depths first?

SO: Depending on the conditions, but most the time we were pretty dead set on getting on the Oculina Bank to catch some fish and get it over with.

RC: That's interesting. What do you mean by "getting it over with"? You mean go ahead and—

SO: And that's where the larger concentrations of fish were and just—

RC: "Get it over with," you mean go fill boat up or catch—

SO: Catch them and get back in and make another trip.

RC: I'm asking because not everyone's that's going to listen or study this is a fisherman.

SO: Oh, yeah.

RC: So, by “get it over with,” you just mean go fill the box and get-r-done?

SO: Yes.

RC: Get-r-done. Okay. I guess this might get us to the point when maybe the Oculina Bank closed, say, in ninety-four [1994]. I’m sorry, let me back up; let me back up here. Will you show me where you fished at on the Oculina Bank and stuff? And during what months of the year did you fish there or for amberjacks and grouper and stuff?

SO: What times of the year?

RC: Yeah.

SO: We fished there all year round, off and on, until the federal amberjack closure in April. But the springtime was a good time, and the fall was a good time.

RC: So, are you saying, like—was it weather permitting?

SO: Well, of course. But, for most of the time, anytime the weather was calm enough to go fishing, we could catch fish in the Oculina.

RC: So, basically you try to fish year-round. Don’t let me put answers in your mouth, but that’s what you are trying to say, I think. And how long did a fishing trip last?

SO: Um, usually one day. Sometimes two.

RC: And how much was an average trip’s catch?

SO: Uh, amberjacks 3,000 to 6,000 pounds.

RC: And how about—would you—I think before you said you caught groupers and snappers?

SO: Yes, we caught groupers in the Oculina, of course; we caught a few hundred pounds to 1,000 pounds. Gag groupers.

RC: Were these, like, the same—are you saying you'd average 5,000 pounds of jack [amberjacks] and 500 pounds of groupers on the same trip or which—

SO: At times, but some of it was more directed, especially with the groupers. But of course, we did catch amberjacks and groupers on the same trip at the same time, without even trying.

RC: When you catch 1,000 pounds of grouper, you were probably trying to go for grouper.

SO: Yes, yes.

RC: Okay, thanks for clearing that up for me. And, Scott, where did you sell your catch at?

SO: Um, most of my catch was sold to Jupiter Seafood, Cod and Capers Seafood, and Penders Seafood.

RC: And did you ever sell any here in Fort Pierce?

SO: Um, New England Seafood.

RC: All right, thank you. Now, we're on the next page. For how many years do you think you fished in the Oculina Bank? That would bring us to—you stated eighty-seven [1987]; it closed in ninety-four [1994]. Did you stop fishing when it closed?

SO: Yes.

RC: So, eighty-seven [1987] to ninety-four [1994] would be about seven years, does that sound right?

SO: Yeah, six to seven years.

RC: Okay. And why did you stop fishing for amberjacks and groupers in the Oculina Bank?

SO: (laughs) I didn't want to go to jail. It was closed, that was it.

RC: Okay. And, Scott, what did you do next? Now, I think we're like ninety-four [1994] till now.

SO: I moved to Daytona, participated in the rec fishery for a while, some kingfishing. And then, after a while, I moved to Mexico and fished out of country for a while—snapper grouper fishing. And now, I'm pretty much 90 percent a kingfisherman; do very little bottom fishing.

RC: Well, let's break that down a little bit, if you don't mind. It sounds like you went from the Oculina Bank to rec fishing. So, that would be ninety-four [1994] to—

SO: Oy!

RC: Is this actually—I mean, you said all these different things. Are they jumbled together?

SO: Some of them are. I jump back and forth.

RC: Okay, okay. Then, you've answered my question.

SO: I went wherever I had to go at the time.

RC: Okay. Well, then, let's say what are you not fishing for now? Because you're not in Daytona, you're not a snapper grouper fisherman.

SO: I'm not a snapper and grouper fishing now.

RC: And you're not in Mexico now, and you're not rec fishing.

SO: Right.

RC: Thank you. In one sentence, I get the answer to one page of questions, thank you.
(SO laughs) And so, what are you fishing for now?

SO: Mostly king mackerel, very little snapper grouper fishing.

RC: But some snapper grouper?

SO: Some, yes.

RC: You're still permitted?

SO: Yes, I am. I still have my permits. Certain times of the year, the little windows that we are allowed to fish, if the conditions allow it, I will target snapper grouper species.

RC: Okay. And how do you fish for these kingfish?

SO: Trolling.

RC: And it says "bait"—like, live bait? Dead bait? Artificial bait?

SO: Dead bait and artificial bait.

RC: Okay, and earlier you said you used vertical bandits. What kind of gear are you using for the kingfish?

SO: It's mostly hand line gear and hand reel.

RC: Oh, you still use your bandits?

SO: Sure.

RC: Okay, but you just—before you stated that you fished 'em up and down. How are you fishing right now?

SO: Oh, now we're fishing them horizontally in a trolling manor.

RC: Oh, okay, trolling. Thank you. And who do you fish with now?

SO: I go fish by myself.

RC: Who owns the boat?

SO: I do.

RC: How are you related to yourself? That's a joke. Excuse me.

SO: (laughs)

RC: Where do you go to fish for kingfish and groupers and snappers? Will you please show me on the map here? (indicates map)

SO: Your map's not big enough. (laughs)

RC: You point way down near the south. What are you talking about, Jupiter or something?

SO: Yes, all the way through inshore—

RC: Is it anywhere on this map?

SO: Yes. Through Fort Pierce and—

RC: Pointing out the *Halsey* wrecks area and up through the—

SO: Inshore, yeah. The sixty to eighty foot swath through to—

RC: Bethel way.

SO: Yep. Bethel Shoal on up to Sebastian and Cape Canaveral, Daytona, St. Augustine—all the way to North Carolina this year we went.

RC: Whoa! So, you used to sit in one place and fish. And now, you're fishing—did you say all the way from Jupiter to North Carolina?

SO: Yes.

RC: Let me ask you this: is this an effect of this closure?

SO: A big part of that is an effect of that closure. Just because there is no kingfish in an area, it doesn't mean I would leave there. Of course, I would fish kingfish when they are in my area but that would give the snappers and groupers a break. And when those would leave, then I would go back to my snapper and grouper fishing. But now, I no longer have that opportunity to target any other species in my area, and I have to follow the king mackerels geographically up and down the coast wherever they go.

RC: Whoa. That's interesting. Thank you. I'm still thinking about that answer. Seriously, you follow these fish all the way to North Carolina?

SO: Yup.

RC: Thank you. And, on average, how far do you go offshore to fish?

SO: Ten to sixty miles.

RC: Ten to sixty miles, okay. And I assume that both encompasses your occasional grouper fishing and the kingfishing?

SO: Yes.

RC: A lot of people wouldn't understand why you would go sixty miles offshore for kingfish. Could please explain it to me?

SO: Well, in the northern regions, the trip limits are higher and it makes it economically feasible to travel. You could make a two-day trip instead of a one-day trip. And, basically, you could—

RC: So, is this sixty miles distance you travel, or is that actually offshore?

SO: It can be offshore. Sometimes we travel over 100 miles, if you cover overall mileage.

RC: To get sixty miles offshore? But why would the kingfish be that far offshore?

SO: Because the shelf widens as you go north, and the depth of the water they want to be in is further offshore.

RC: Oh, okay. So, basically, you follow the bottom of the cone. Well, I see here on this map where you pointed. It's skinny here at the one end and it goes further offshore as you went north. I guess it's all the way up the coast, I guess.

SO: Yes.

RC: Oh, interesting. I guess you learn something new every day. During what months of the year do you fish for kingfish and the groupers and snappers? It sounds like—well, perhaps that should be two questions. During what months of the year are you fishing for your kingfish?

SO: All year round, twelve months out of the year.

RC: And then, let's ask you when do you do these grouper snapper trips? What months of the year?

SO: I do a few in May, condition depending, on the southern end; and a few later in the summer, in June and July. A very small number of trips: you can count them on two hands.

RC: And that's because of opportunities or—?

SO: Yes, but it would be a very wishy-washy opportunity, depending on cold water, thermo climes and tidal conditions that would put those fish and me in the same area at the same time.

RC: Whoa! (laughs) I think you understand your answer, thank you. Now, how long do these fishing trips last? And I keep having to break this into kingfish and groupers. Do you ever do both at once?

SO: Kingfish and groupers? Yes, but very, very rarely. At the time of the year we are kingfishing, we don't really have any grouper opportunities inshore.

RC: Okay. Well, then, let me ask you a two-part question. How long does a kingfish fishing trip last?

SO: It can be a half a day to three days.

RC: And would that be due to geographical location?

SO: Geographical location; but with the geographical location comes the trip limit issue, where a smaller trip limit would result in a shorter trip. A bigger trip limit would be a longer trip.

RC: And I think you stated earlier that when you go further north, when the fish are further offshore, you actually have a bigger trip limit in those areas?

SO: Yes.

RC: Okay. And then, let me ask you this: when you did do these summer and some fall grouper snapper trips, how long do they last?

SO: Um, one to two days.

RC: Okay. And is that, once again, geographical, depending on how far out you are?

SO: Yeah, of course. Depending on how far out I am.

RC: Okay, thank you. Where do you sell your catch? Well, wait a minute, if you fish from here to North Carolina—I don't know if you really need to name off dozens of markets. I assume you're not catching fish in North Carolina and bringing them back here to sell.

SO: No.

RC: Is that once again a geographical thing, you're selling them in the area you are?

SO: Sell them in the port that I come in, usually.

RC: All right, so would you answer that again in your own words? I'm sorry, I'm trying to figure out—I'm thinking out loud here.

SO: Where do I sell my catch? I sell my catch at the seafood dealer in the port that I come into. I have favorite ones that I sell to up and down the coast, but there's many.

RC: So, when you might come in, there might be two or three different deals in a port and you may have your favorite dealer.

SO: Right, right.

RC: Got you a traveling show there, don't you?

SO: My favorite dealer is the one that pays the most.

RC: (laughs) We could have answered the question. Where do you sell your catch? "To the highest bidder." Okay, and for how many years do you fish for—and we've been talking about kingfish and grouper snapper since the ninety-four [1994] closure. Can I assume that this has been going on from ninety-four [1994] to now, which would be sixteen years?

SO: That what's been going on till now?

RC: For how many years have you fished for these kingfish trips you're talking about, and these grouper trips?

SO: Oh, yes.

RC: Is that since ninety-four [1994] till present, or is there a point you quit? Does this bring us currently to your fishing history?

SO: Pretty much, yup.

RC: Okay. So, when we say for how many years did you fish for kingfish and grouper snapper since the Oculina Bank closed in ninety-four [1994], we would say sixteen years?

SO: Yes.

RC: Okay, it sounds like we got you up to date from childhood till now. Well, let's really get you up to date. What did you fish for yesterday? Have you been fishing lately?

SO: King mackerel.

RC: (laughs) Okay, we're up to date. Finally, I'd like to talk about how fishing has changed over time in regards to the Oculina Bank, since 1984. Excuse me, in regards to the Oculina Bank. Since 1984, several changes have been made in the regulations of the Oculina Bank. I'd like to know if any of these affected your fish, and if so, how? I'm going to read out what happened, I'm going to point on the map, and if you have problems following me, just let me know. In 1984—this is the original Oculina Bank, this little area, the original. (indicating map) In 1984, it was initially closed to trawling, dredging, and bottom longlining. Did that affect your fishing?

SO: Not too much. Except for shark fishing, but that wasn't on my boat.

RC: Did you say—you said that this closure affected your shark—what, the bottom longlining?

SO: Bottom longline.

RC: So, you shark fished bottom longlined here?

SO: Yes.

RC: Okay. At this time I would like to see if we can—let's back up; I guess I missed that. Let's throw this into the mix here. Okay, how did you fish for shark, and the gear type was?

SO: Bottom longline.

RC: Okay, and who did you fish with?

SO: I ran a boat for King's Seafood out of Daytona.

RC: Okay, and King's Seafood owned the boat, you stated that. How were you related to this person? This person—

SO: It was a situation to where we were fishing in the Daytona area at the time and it was too rough for us to get out on our little boat. We took the opportunity to fish a bigger boat and catch some sharks, which became pretty lucrative.

RC: Since we are talking about a business—and I guess I will say, how are you related to this business? You were selling them the fish or something?

SO: Yes, yes.

RC: So, you're not really working for them, that's called—they're one of your buyers. Would that be a good word for your relation to this business? (SO agrees) They were your buyer? Okay. And this boat that you would fish for your buyer, what kind of boat was it and how long was it?

SO: It was a fifty foot North Carolina-built, commercial fisherman.

RC: And where did you go to fish for sharks? Can you show me on the map?

SO: Oh, we fished the whole Oculina—what is now the entire thing, but at that time [was] the south end. In the spring and the late part of the winter, early spring, was a lot of sharks.

RC: And what depth are you talking about?

SO: One [hundred and] eighty to 230 foot.

RC: Okay.

SO: One hundred and eighty to 300 foot.

RC: And during what months of the year would you do this?

SO: From—

RC: Were you saying the summer, you said?

SO: Oh, yeah. January to April.

RC: Okay. And how long did the fishing trip last, a shark fishing trip last?

SO: Two days, three days, maybe.

RC: And how much was an average trip's catch?

SO: Eight to ten thousand.

RC: Pounds or dollars?

SO: Pounds.

RC: You said eight to ten thousand pounds, okay. And where did you sell your catch? I guess it would have had to been from the—(laughs)

SO: King's Seafood.

RC: It's the business's boat you're using. Okay, and for how many years did you fish for the sharks?

SO: Off and on for about four years.

RC: And just for some clarification on this, is the four years mixed in with the years we've already spoke of? You said [depending on] weather conditions you would switch fisheries?

SO: Yeah, pretty much.

RC: And why did you stop fishing for the sharks?

SO: Well, the Oculina closure was a big part of that, and some federal regulations at the shark fishery.

RC: Okay, all right. So, can I go on now? Do you think that covers your fishing history? Did we mention about any bass or anything?

SO: No.

RC: Okay. Now, then, back on to the Oculina Bank and the time periods and closures. In 1994, the Oculina Bank was designated as an experimental closed area where fishing and retention of snapper grouper fisheries were prohibited. Snapper grouper fishing boats were also prohibited from anchoring onto that northern end there. Was your fishing impacted by these regulations?

SO: Absolutely. Catching gag grouper and red snapper is extremely dependent on anchoring. Without being able to keep your boat on one spot, then you're pretty much out of business for that type of fishing.

RC: Okay, and this states that the retention of snapper groupers was outlawed at the same time.

SO: Yeah, it didn't matter. We were done overnight.

RC: Okay. Then, in 1996, all anchoring was prohibited within the Oculina Bank. Did this impact you? And I guess that's where your answer, the anchoring? That you couldn't grouper snapper fish no more?

SO: Yeah, there's—

RC: Didn't allow the area that you weren't allowed to anchor.

SO: Right.

RC: So, that affected your fishing. Okay. And in 1996, the rock shrimp fishery was prohibited in the area east and north of the designated Oculina. And—okay. In ninety-six [1996], it was closed to trawling to rock shrimp on the area east and north of it. In 1998, the area was incorporated into the Oculina Bank and was—that it, that's the same question. Sorry for bothering you there.

All right, Scott. This brings us on to another segment of the interview. The design of marine protected area closed to all fishing—or, in some cases, just bottom fishing—is being used more and more frequently as a measurement tool. What do you think about the use of closed areas to fishing compare to other types of management regulations? So, what they are asking is, what do you think of this, like, type of Oculina closure being used, compared to other management tools?

SO: I think it's—

RC: Now, they're using quotas and closed seasons, et cetera.

SO: Right. Well, closed areas— (laughs) Yeah, closed areas are—

RC: So, do you like closed areas better than other management measures?

SO: No, no.

RC: Or do you think, quotas and closed areas, closed seasons are better?

SO: I think quotas and closed seasons are much better. Closed areas are—they're running crazy with these closed areas, and pretty soon we're going to have nowhere else to fish. And all this talk about an IFQ [individual fishing quota] situation or catch share program to where our percentage of fish that we're allowed to catch are represented by our historical catches, when in our area, we've been historically handcuffed from fishing in our area for so long that—that's going to be a huge impact on the fishermen in our area. We don't have any catch histories. That one closure has single-handedly taken the snapper and groupers away from the fishermen in our area and the historical snapper grouper fishermen, to the point to where most of them have sold their fishing permits.

RC: All right. So, in the interview, you said you had a lot of history of catching snappers and groupers and 5,000 pounds of amberjacks in the Oculina Bank. And now, you're stating that you have no history in an IFQ situation?

SO: No, there—not enough to worry about. But we've—

RC: I don't understand. It sounds like you used to catch a whole bunch of fish in the Oculina Bank. Is there—was this a timeline thing?

SO: Well, yeah. It would depend on what kind of years they took for history.

RC: Oh, you're talking about, in an IFQ situation, the allocation of scenarios based on landings.

SO: Right.

RC: So, it's not that you don't have history; it's that you don't have—

SO: A current history.

RC: Since—are you referring to the 1994 Oculina Bank closure?

SO: Yes.

RC: Okay, all right. I see your point. So, when I asked you how you liked the MPA, you didn't like it, and you said, "quotas and closed seasons." Oh, quotas is—you are talking about IFQ. Okay, but how about the term "quota" in general? Do you like that? Do you like that management tool?

SO: An overall quota?

RC: Yeah. Like, right now, there's, like, certain amounts of grouper and kingfish that the whole fleet's allowed to catch.

SO: I would like it if the science was right. (both laugh)

RC: Okay. I think I've heard that one before. All right—

SO: But I think that's a more fair management tool than closing areas, where some fisherman up and down the coast can fish, some are left to fish on bottom wide open, and others can't fish and are displaced to fish in other areas, which they may or may not be able to do. And then, to be thrown in an IFQ situation based on landings when you weren't allowed to fish. I think the fisherman in the area paid a heavy price for that, and it wouldn't be fair.

RC: I understand that point, and thank you. What I've done is I've actually moved on to the question of which do you prefer, like, the closed areas or the quotas or the closed seasons. You don't like the closed areas, you don't like IFQs. You do like quotas for the whole fishery?

SO: Sure, we have to fish under a quota. We can't—you know.

RC: And another thing, here on this questionnaire sheet it says "closed seasons." I guess that's a tool used to stay—is that—yeah, that's used to stay within the quota, maybe, or—closed seasons usually—

SO: Closed seasons are usually used for spawning aggregates of fish, which—if the fishery, under good science, needs that, then I don't have a problem with that as long as all sectors of the fishery have to abide by the spawn season.

RC: Long as it's closed to everybody?

SO: As long as it's closed to everybody.

RC: Okay, all right. Well, I got twisted up there, so I'm going to summarize what I believe you said, that you do like quotas and spawning season closures. I guess we would call that—that would be more traditional management tools, I guess, is what—

SO: Right.

RC: You like traditional management tools with better science. Okay, thank you. I hope I didn't confuse you there. I confused myself. Okay, Scott, on to the next thing here. Thinking ahead to the future—what do you think that fishing in Fort Pierce will be like in ten years?

SO: (laughs) At the rate we're going, I don't think we're going to have much fishing in ten years. With the National Marine Fisheries proposals that are on the plate right now, and everything that's going, I just don't see it. I don't know where we are going with this. But yeah, the increase of fishing, pressure coming all areas, recreational fishery sectors, fishing completely with no responsibilities to anything in the fishery. They have no—what's the word I'm looking for?—no accountability measures; there's no way to control them. The trips are more and more each year, the recreational sector is growing rapidly, and they're not regulated to any extent. I don't know how we are going to have any fishing left. The commercial fishery takes the blunt of the blow for both sides, where the recreational sector is left to fish unregulated, basically, is what it boils down to.

RC: Okay, so if I were to summarize your answer, thinking ahead to the future, what you think fishing will be like in Fort Pierce? You think it will be—I think you said less of a commercial fishing fleet?

SO: There's going to be less of a commercial fishing fleet because the commercial fishing fleet is going to be the ones to take the heaviest regulation to counteract the recreational fishery.

RC: So you say—

SO: I'm not saying anything bad about the recreational; I'm just saying it's the nature of the beast. There's more and more and more recreational fishing pressure going on every year. They are totally unaccountable for what they do; there's no management in effect for them.

RC: So, what—you mean, the more pressure, the biomass or the stock of the fish are dropping?

SO: It's going to have to drop. And so, with that kind of fishing pressure—

RC: And the National Marine Fisheries, you say, will charge the commercial fishermen?

SO: Yes, because we're the ones that hold permits and things. We're the ones who that are accountable. We have accountability measures in place in our fisheries—

RC: So, you think you're going to take more of the burden of the—

SO: Absolutely.

RC: Stock reductions and—

SO: Our landings are reported. They know exactly what we catch, and they have absolutely no way of telling what the recreational sector catches.

RC: Okay. So, with fishing pressure increased, the stock size gets smaller. The National Marine Fisheries, you believe, will govern the commercial fishermen—will reduce the commercial fishermen more, is that what you are saying?

SO: Yes.

RC: Okay. We'll get the regulatory impacts.

SO: That's what I'm trying to say.

RC: All right. Well, Scott, I really appreciate you helping me, and I thank you very much for sharing your history with me, and thank you.

SO: You're welcome.

RC: This concludes the interview.

End of interview