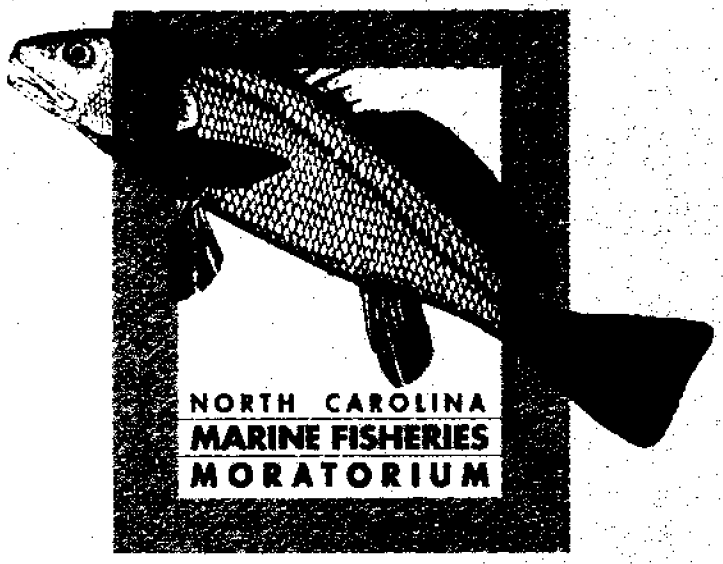

Fisheries Research Reports to The Fisheries Moratorium Steering Committee

To Fish or Not to Fish: Occupational Transitions Within the Commercial Fishing Community, Carteret County, N.C.

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Abstract

The goal of this project was to investigate the experiences of former full-time commercial fishermen of Carteret County who sought alternative sources of employment. The intention was to interview people who had completely abandoned fishing, to inquire as to what type of new employment they found, what fishing skills were transferable, what training programs were utilized, what level of job satisfaction they now had, and what impact their new work had on family life and income levels. But it was discovered that a true "ex-fisherman" was hard to find in Carteret County: the majority of people contacted held non-fishing jobs but continued to have some participation in commercial harvesting.

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Executive Summary

The goal of this project was to investigate the experiences of former full-time commercial fishermen of Carteret County who sought alternative sources of employment. I intended to interview people who had completely abandoned fishing, to inquire as to what type of new employment they found, what fishing skills were transferable, what training programs were utilize, what level of job satisfaction did they now have, and what impact their new work had on family life and income levels. But I discovered that a true "ex-fisherman" was hard to find in Carteret County: the majority of people I contacted held non-fishing jobs but continued to have some participation in commercial harvesting.

The focus of this project remains on the transition process from commercial harvesting to non-fishing work. However, I also consider why people seem reluctant to give up fishing entirely, as well as why people are becoming less dependent on a mode of work they profess to love. My main findings are the following:

1. Instead of a steady flow of people out of the commercial fishing sector, there is a tendency for people to exit and re-enter commercial fishing, or to straddle both fishing and non-fishing sources of income. Thus the pattern of flexibility within commercial fishing, i.e. the practice of North Carolina watermen switching gears and fisheries throughout the year, extends to non-fishing work as well. Historically, a pattern exists whereby people exit commercial harvesting temporarily during poor fishing months, seasons, or years, and re-enter fishing when conditions improve. The tendency to seek non-fishing employment during "slack" periods of time is a matter of economic survival, as fishermen (aside from those working for menhaden companies) receive no unemployment benefits, and are determined to avoid welfare dependency. The ability of people to remain commercial harvesters at all, in an inauspicious era for fishermen, seems to be partly due to increased participation of their spouses in the work force.

2. Fishermen who abandon commercial harvesting, whether temporarily or permanently, tend to find jobs which are in the blue-collar sector. Although the economy of Carteret County is becoming increasingly leisure and marine science oriented, with a growing number of jobs in the service sector, there seems to be little cross-over from commercial fishing to the tourism or marine science industries. Fishermen enter work requiring skills that they already hold from commercial fishing, such as diesel mechanics, carpentry, welding, navigation, and hydraulics. Jobs held by those interviewed tend to be maritime oriented, such as dredge, ferry, and tug boat work. Other blue-collar jobs include mechanical work at Cherry Point Marine Corps Air Station, heavy

machinery operating at the North Carolina Ports Authority, carpentry, trucking, and auto mechanics.

3. The primary reasons why fishermen are discouraged from working toward higher paying white-collar employment involve age and education barriers, as well as economic uncertainties. The average age of those interviewed was 44; most had a maximum of a high school education. Obtaining post-secondary education/ training, whether at Carteret Community College or more distant institutions, involves a time and financial commitment most fishermen are unable to make. Most had families to support, and simply could not stop working. Many felt they were "too old" to enter new fields such as computers, and could not compete with younger students in the job market. Some felt they lacked the temperament for classroom textbook learning, and preferred on-the-job and apprenticeship training. Failing to see any guarantee of financial security in the white-collar sector even if age and educational barriers were overcome, most respondents preferred to keep at least one foot in the field they knew best, commercial fishing, while working another job that could be obtained without an overwhelming investment of time and money.

4. Personal identity and job satisfaction considerations play an important role in fishermen's reluctance to abandon fishing entirely. Several of those interviewed referred to "jobs" as a category separate from fishing, that is, one fishes and/or gets a "job". This reflects the strong sentiment of Carteret County fishermen that fishing is more than a job: it is a way of life, typically passed down from father to son, and comprises an important source of identity, as expressed in the common term "fishing is in my blood." "Jobs" refers to wage-labor employment whereby one works for a "boss man" and sacrifices the much valued sense of independence associated with commercial fishing.

Although some reported an increase in income once they secured non-fishing jobs, an equal number reported a decrease in income, and several saw little or no change. Several reported that their "quality of life" improved with a non-fishing job, mainly in regard to more time spent at home and more security associated with job benefits, but overall most said they were not happier in their new jobs compared to fishing. Whether or not they still fished, almost all of those interviewed answered "yes" to the question: do you still consider yourself a waterman?

5. The most commonly cited reason as to why fishermen have sought alternative sources of employment is government intervention: an increase in "ineffective" or "non-sensical" regulations imposed by state and federal agencies has made it difficult for fishermen to make a living solely from commercial harvesting. "Bad fisheries management" for fishermen is that which has little relation to actual environmental conditions, that is based on politics and perception, and that disregards the

input and knowledge of fishermen. Other reasons why fishermen say they have sought other work include the desire to become less dependent on seafood dealers, the desire to spend more time with family, the quest for financial security, and because a particular job alternative become available.

Introduction

Although several studies have examined job satisfaction among working fishermen (Garrity-Blake 1994, Gatewood and McCay 1990, Pollnac and Poggie 1988), current forces and pressures causing the marginalization of fishermen (Durrenberger 1992, Garrity 1988, Berkes 1984), and the impact of various regulations and policies on fishing communities (Moberg and Dyer 1994, Gale 1992), few studies examine the actual transition process of fishermen into non-harvesting modes of work. Considering the major changes occurring within North American fisheries in recent years, including the imposition of limited entry plans, changes in resource allocations, and gear limits or bans, all of which may cause displacement among commercial fishers, studies on the occupational transition process of people caught in the middle of this major social, economic, and political restructuring process are needed.

This study examines the occupational transition process of a sample of former full-time commercial fishers of Carteret County who have, in recent years, abandoned commercial harvesting as a principle source of income. Although North Carolina fishermen have faced nothing as severe as a ban on commercial nets, a biological collapse of major fisheries, or a restrictive limited entry policy, all of these possibilities real or imagined have been prevalent in fisheries management discourse in recent years. An increase of fishing restrictions, high operating costs, low market prices, and a decline in water quality also play a major role in making commercial fishing a less than secure way to make a living in North Carolina. There has yet to be a large-scale displacement of fishermen in this state; however, watermen are pondering that possibility. Some have ventured to secure non-fishing jobs; most fear for their future, their families, and their capital investments.

Questions addressed in this project include the following:

* What are the reasons compelling people to seek employment outside of commercial fishing?

* What kinds of alternative non-harvesting employment are people getting into?

* To what extent are commercial fishing skills transferable to new jobs?

* What types of job training/educational programs are fishermen taking advantage of in their pursuit of new work?

* What are the income/standard of living changes once people become employed outside of commercial harvesting, as well as changes pertaining to level of job satisfaction?

Methodology

Informants were located using a snowball sampling method (Bernard 1988:98, Johnson, Boster, and Holbert 1989), whereby a small number of key individuals are asked to name as many likely candidates for the study as they can recall. Key individuals were located by contacting people with boats listed for sale in the classified ads of a Carteret County newspaper, as well by asking members of the Downeast fishing community if they could name any fishermen who have abandoned their trade within the last five years.

The resulting sample consists of thirty Carteret County residents, most of whom who have become employed in a non-commercial harvesting occupation within the last five years. All interviews were face-to-face with the exception of one telephone interview with a man in Durham studying to become a nurse practitioner. Almost half of the interviewees were from the western portion of the county (Morehead City, Salter Path, Mill Creek, Newport, etc.) while the remainder were from Beaufort east (including Harkers Island, Davis, Atlantic, etc.).

I administered a structured interview of open-ended questions to members of the study sample (see appendix), which consisted of demographic, household, and occupational questions. Data from these questions were coded for statistical analysis. When individuals consented, interviews were tape recorded, and open-ended discussions and life history recollections were encouraged.

In addition to the interviews, this research is informed by long-term discussions I have had with men and women from fishing families involved with the North Carolina Fisheries Association, Carteret County Auxiliary. The anthropological method of participant-observation was employed when appropriate (Spradley 1980) to collect ethnographic data.

To Fish or Not to Fish

One unexpected finding of this study was that ex-commercial fishers of Carteret County are difficult to find. That is, although most of the interviewees had primary employment outside of commercial harvesting (25 out of 30 cases), few abandoned commercial harvesting entirely (only 10 out of 30 cases reported that they no longer fish now). There is a strong tendency for people to supplement their non-fishing income with part-time participation in shrimping, mulleting, scalloping, menhaden fishing, and so on. Many held jobs with schedules that facilitated participation in various commercial fisheries; others had employers sympathetic to the "call" of the mullet fishery, shrimp, etc. In 15 cases people held non-fishing jobs but still fished "on the side", while an additional 5 fished for

half or more of their total income, supplementing commercial harvesting with a "side-job" (Table One).

	Number of Cases	Percent of Total
Non-Fishing Jobs Only	10	33
Non-Fishing Jobs Supplemented with Commercial Fishing	15	50
Non-Fishing Jobs as a Supplement for Commercial Fishing	5	17
Total	30	100

Table One: Breakdown of Sample into Occupational Categories

The reasons for continued participation in commercial fishing are both economic and cultural: some interviewees stressed a financial necessity to supplement their non-fishing income with that from fishing, and many were furthermore compelled to "do what comes natural" as born-and-bred watermen. One man declared that if he couldn't commercial fish as his father and his father's father had done, he would go insane.

Most of those who were no longer commercial fishing in any capacity acknowledged the possibility of renewed participation in the future. There was a strong "wait and see" sentiment, both from those in and out of commercial fishing. Some with non-fishing jobs were afraid to sell their vessels and abandon fishing entirely because of the present moratorium on vessel licenses: they feared that if they gave up their license or exhibited a low-participation in commercial fishing they would be forever shut out in the future. Several felt insecure in their present non-fishing jobs, and considered commercial fishing to be a real alternative in the future, something they very well may have to "fall back on".

People who held non-fishing jobs frequently stated that if it was safe to return to commercial fishing as a primary source of income, they would. What held them back, however, was a bleak outlook on the future of fishing. Many felt that commercial fishing could very well cease to exist in North Carolina in the near future because of political reasons such as a net-ban and tourism/recreation encroachment, and/or ecological reasons such as water pollution and declining resources. Thus many who would otherwise commit further to fishing are afraid to "throw the

hammer", or abandon the security of a non-fishing job, as one carpenter/ fisherman declared.

In sum, based on these interviews and discussions with those still heavily dependent on commercial fishing, this is a pivotal point in history for present and former commercial fishers. It seems risky for people to give up commercial fishing entirely, just as it seems risky for people to rely principally on commercial harvesting with no alternative means of support. Rather than there being a steady flow of people out of the commercial fishing sector into new occupations, there is a tendency for people to exit and re-enter commercial fishing, or to straddle both fishing and non-fishing sources of income.

Although the movement of people in and out of the fishery is more intense in light of the problems and high degree of uncertainty experienced by fishermen in recent years, it is not necessarily a new phenomenon. Fishermen have historically had to rely on alternative sources of income during slack seasons or poor fishing years when fish and money were scarce. Lack of unemployment benefits and a fierce desire to avoid welfare dependency make alternative jobs an economic necessity. The burden of seeking new sources of income has not been borne solely by fishermen: spouses of fishermen have increasingly participated in the wage labor work force as well.

To Leave Commercial Fishing

Although most of the interviewees did not completely abandon commercial fishing, and some of those who did leave predicted they may re-enter fisheries, all were willing to discuss reasons why alternative jobs were sought. The most frequent factor mentioned pertained to fisheries management (table two). Several people felt alternative jobs were needed because "ineffective management" or "non-sensical regulations" made it impossible for a person to make a living solely from commercial fishing. "Bad fisheries management" for fishermen is that which has little relation to actual environmental conditions, is based on politics and perception, and disregards input and knowledge of fishermen.

Specific examples of "non-sensical management" discussed by interviewees include rules passed in regard to clam kicking, sea turtles, and "multi-use conflicts" (Table Two). Some felt that the state did not control clam kicking properly: managers allowed particular areas to get overworked with no restrictions, and then intervened after areas were "kicked to death". TEDs (Turtle Excluder Devices), required in trawl nets since 1993 for the protection of endangered sea turtles, discouraged five interviewees from continuing a livelihood in commercial fishing: they felt that the federal government was arbitrarily imposing an inappropriate restriction that resulted in loss of shrimp. One

man sold his boat because he would have had to repower it to pull TEDs. Others resented the state's methods of separating "user groups" in the event of "multi-use conflict", saying that such "zones" amounted to the allocation of fishing areas and/or resources to recreational fishermen.

Reasons Why Non-Fishing Job Sought	Frequency of Mention	% of Sample
Poor Fisheries Management	12	40
Family Considerations	7	23
Alternative Job Available	4	13
Dealer Dependency	3	10

Table Two: Reasons Why Non-Fishing Jobs Sought

Some people felt strongly that the reason fisheries were managed poorly was because the state and federal government wanted to eliminate commercial fishing, in favor of imported seafood and a growing domestic recreational economy. One questioned why the government's method of eradicating fishermen was to "tighten the noose little by little until we strangle" rather than offering small business grants, educational out-reach programs, or types of financial assistance for those who have much invested in commercial fishing but would like to get into a new line of work if they could afford to. Others felt that commercial fishing could be a viable livelihood in the future with proper management and support, and resented sorely the political climate that is unnecessarily "destroying" the industry with fisheries mismanagement, water pollution, and recreational encroachment.

Family considerations weighed heavily in the decision to seek alternative employment. Some interviewees had worked on larger vessels in out-of-state waters and would be away from their loved ones for weeks at a time. This sometimes created a strain on relationships; two people experienced failed marriages as a result. Even those who were home daily but shrimped at night missed seeing their families during the bulk of the day, and preferred to seek alternative employment that would let them be with their spouse and children more. On the other hand, spouses of two former fisherman expressed the hope that their husbands would return to fishing, because the men had become "miserable" in their new jobs.

Financial stability was a strong factor as well: some sought the security of steady pay and possible benefits once children entered the picture. One person who took a job on the ferry in addition to fishing stated "you can't support a family just in commercial fishing anymore. Not with kids. You show me a full-time commercial fisherman, I'll show you a man whose wife works." Most people stressed that their new jobs did not necessarily bring in more income, but rather, a "steady check" without the periods of scarcity so common in commercial fishing.

Dependency on seafood dealers was another factor inspiring some to look into a new occupation. "Price fixing" was a common complaint, as several described their frustration what they perceived to be low local market prices from dealers in cahoots. "The expenses involved in fishing have skyrocketed," one man explained, "yet we're getting the same prices for our product that we were getting fifteen years ago." Those who worked on company-owned vessels complained about getting re-classified from a company employee to "self-employed" during the Reagan years when businesses wanted to avoid having to pay social security taxes. Thus men lost benefits such as unemployment eligibility and insurance; many furthermore faced large tax bills at the end of each year as taxes were no longer deducted from paychecks.

Some respondents did not name negative reasons as to why they sought other work, but simply took advantage of other work opportunities as they appeared. One "saw the writing on the wall" in general regarding the future of commercial fishing and decided to "have the foresight" to get into a new line of work. Two others chose to start small businesses, preferring to be self-employed instead of working on company vessels.

Occupational Alternatives

Several of those interviewed referred to "jobs" as a category separate from fishing, that is, one fishes and/or "gets a job". This linguistic usage reflects the deep sentiment of many Carteret County fishermen that fishing is more than a job, it's a way of life and a source of one's identity. Thus a shift away from commercial fishing for fisheries-dependent people often represents a shift from a historically-derived, community-based way of life to a "job" in what is usually thought to be mainstream society. This entails fundamental changes in social relations, community roles, and personal identity. The nature of community embeddedness of commercial fishing is described by Carolyn Creed in her study of New Jersey fishermen's wives:

> Fishing communities are occupational communities. In occupational communities social relations of production largely determine the sociocultural framework of everyday life and therefore the social context within which individuals interact (1988:85).

"Jobs" for Carteret County fishermen typically refers to wage-labor employment where one may work under a "boss man" for steady pay and perhaps benefits. Often gained is a sense of financial security because of steady paychecks. Often lost is the much coveted sense of independence and autonomy many find in fishing.

Those interviewed exhibited a wide range of occupations (Table Three), but generally worked in a blue collar profession such as carpentry, mechanics and trucking. Several former fisherman sought jobs related to the water, becoming employed by dredge companies, barge companies, or the North Carolina Ferry Division. One person worked for the state in testing fishing gear innovations. Eight people entered work that can be classified as self-employed, while twenty one worked for someone else.

Non-Harvesting Occupations	Number of Times Mentioned
Diesel Mechanic (Cherry Point, NC Ferry Division, self-employed)	7
Seaman (dredge, ferry, tug)	7
Carpentry (laborer)	4
Carpentry (self-employed contractor, sub-contractor	3
Services (clerk, management, nursing, storage business)	4
Heavy Machinery Operator (NC Ports Authority)	2
Trucking	2
Head Boat Captain	1
Marine Technician	1
Land Surveyor	1
Painter (self-employed contractor)	1
Flooring (self-employed)	1
Aquaculture (self-employed)	1

Table Three: Types of Non-Commercial Fishing Jobs Named in Sample

Three of the interviewees worked at Cherry Point Marine Corps Air Station in Havelock as civilian employees. Cherry Point has been a significant source of jobs for residents of Carteret County since it was established in the 1940's. With each expansion, waves of coastal residents were employed, including many former fishermen of Carteret County. Today the "Cherry Pointer" who commercial fishes during his or her off-time raises the ire of some full-time fishers, as Cherry Pointers can often afford good quality boats and equipment, and fish during the height of various fisheries while full-timers "slug-it-out" during the bad as well as the good times. Other fishermen are more judicious toward Cherry Point employees, pointing out that some have poor salaries that require supplementary income, and that these former full-time fishermen have a right to the resources "just like everybody else".

Ferry workers enjoy a work schedule that accommodates participation in commercial fishing, as they work seven days on with seven days off. Three of the interviewees worked for the ferry division, one part-time and two full-time. All three commercial fished during their time off, and two relied heavily on this additional income. One described himself as having two full-time jobs, as his $20,000 annual salary from the ferry division was not adequate to support his wife and three young children.

Dredge boat workers had a schedule somewhat conducive to commercial fishing as well, as they tended to work a three-weeks-on and three-weeks-off timetable. However, dredge boat work takes most men to out-of-county and out-of-state waters; this absence makes it more difficult for people to maintain steady fishing operations during off-time. In some cases dredge boat work pays well enough to reduce the necessity of commercial fishing income.

The few white collar professions held by ex-fisher interviewees were property management, nursing, and data processing. As a whole, there was little "cross-over" from commercial fishing to the leisure/tourism sector of Carteret County among those interviewed, with the exception of a head boat operator and a condominium manager.

Education, Skills and Re-training

Although five respondents had some college, and five had not graduated from high school, most held high school diplomas (Table Four). Of the five with college training, two were entering fields requiring post-high school education.

Education Level	Number	Percent
8 through 11 yrs	5	17
High School Grad.	19	63
1 through 3 yrs college	5	17
4 yrs college	0	0
No response	1	3
Total	30	100

Table Four: Level of Education

When asked "what kind of special training have you had," the most frequent answer (30%) pertained to maritime certification. Several had acquired a captains license, mates license, chief engineers license, or "Able-Bodied Seaman" certification enabling them to qualify for various positions on dredges, ferrys, or tugboats. Three people had taken a welding certification course, three took a variety of courses offered through the Cherry Point air station, two were licensed pilots, and one had taken a small company-sponsored business course to launch his own carpet/ flooring franchise.

What skills from commercial fishing were transferable to new occupations? Respondents described numerous skills involved in commercial fishing. Almost three fourths of those interviewed (73%) named specific watermen skills which were useful in their non-fishing jobs (Table Five). The most popular answer was "a combination of skills" (broken down in table five). Jobs in which several or "all" commercial skills were useful include ferry work, dredging, tug boat work, marine technician, Port Authority work, mechanics (independent and for Cherry Point), head boat skipper, and carpentry work. Thus commercial fishing skills are most transferable to jobs pertaining to seamanship, mechanics, and carpentry (carpentry because fishermen commonly repair or even build their own fishing boats). Dredge boat, barge, and ferry workers who came from a commercial fishing background possess skills precisely needed for those occupations, and need only pass requirements to qualify for various occupational statuses such as captain, mate, or engineer.

Few commercial fishing skills seem transferable to white-collar jobs. The nurse-practitioner student reported knot-tying as the only useful skill from his fishing days, as he could readily "tie down violent or deranged patients." The condominium manager joked that net mending came in handy as he had "repaired nets on the tennis court" and built a cast net or two for residents.

Significantly, the second most popular answer was that "no skills" were transferable from commercial fishing to a new job (n=6 or 20%). These jobs pertained to computing, property management, house painting, carpet laying, carpentry, and roofing. Most (57%) reported that they learned "on the job", or were "self-taught" or simply did not receive training. "On the job" includes a variety of training programs offered at the Cherry Point base for employees. Six respondents (20%) had passed requirements for various levels of maritime (ferry, dredge, tug) work that they were currently engaged in.

Three people had passed or were enrolled in college vocational programs: one for nursing, two via the NADEP (Cherry Point Naval Aviation Depot) Cooperative Education program. This "co-op" is a federal program administered through community colleges: electronics, industrial maintenance, machinist, and air conditioning/ refrigeration programs are offered at Craven Community College, aviation maintenance is offered at Wayne Community College, and business technology is offered locally at Carteret Community College. Participants gain on-the-job skills and earn wages at Cherry Point while taking courses at a community college; one interviewee was placed full-time as a Cherry Point civilian employee, while the other was finishing the program and had expectations of getting placed full-time.

Skill	Number of Times Named	Breakdown of "Combination" Skills
Combination	**10**	**Mechanics**
None	6	**Navigation**
All	4	**Loran, radar, plotter skills**
Mechanics	3	**Rope tying**
Carpentry	2	**Cable braiding**
Navigation	2	**Winches**
Knots/rope handling	1	**Metal smithing**
Net handling	1	**Welding**
Seafood handling	1	**Fiberglass skills**
		Knowledge of bottom
		hydraulics

Table Five: Transferable Fishing Skills

Several people commented on the difficulty fishermen or former-fishermen had in taking community college/vocational courses. A commonly-mentioned hurdle was the distance between many downeast communities such as Atlantic or Cedar Island and Morehead City: this involves an investment in time and gas money just to get to the college and back. The length of courses presented a problem for those who cannot afford to take large blocks of time off, and many would be compelled to forgo class during good runs of fish in order to continue supporting their families. In short, commercial fishermen lack the luxury of having spare time and financial resources for education and training.

Commercial fishers are often thought of as having a low-level of skill, or at least having specialized skills not transferable to other occupations. On the contrary, the skills held by fishers are many, although the quality of those skills differ from skills learned through vocational technical programs and the like. As one person put it, just as some musicians read music while others play by ear, fishers "play by ear" in having hands-on experience at various skills. Out of necessity fishers are "jack-of-all-trades" or, as some local old-timers call it, "proggers", who know carpentry, mechanics, welding, electronics, plumbing, navigation, mathematics, etc. In many cases this knowledge does not come from books, courses, or certification programs. An interviewee stated "on the water, these skills come down to a matter of life and death. You have to do it all for basic survival. On paper, they add up to nothing."

A Cherry Point worker remarked on the bias against fishers in the workplace. "Employers tend to look down on 'poor ignorant fishermen'. They don't want to hire us because they think we have no skills. But no one works harder than a fisherman." The lack of formal training or "book learning" appears to work against those who learned by experience. "My husband can do anything" a woman declared, "but he has no certificates or degrees to show for it. And he doesn't have the temperament or patience to sit in a classroom and learn by the books."

Job Satisfaction

What many people valued about their non-fishing jobs was the security of having a steady income, in contrast to the economic uncertainty involved in commercial fishing. Although they were not necessarily making more money than when they fished (Table Six), several interviewees appreciated a "steady paycheck" and the fact that taxes were regularly taken out, avoiding a heavy tax debt at the end of the year that commercial fishers often face. Some experienced a general reduction of stress in "knowing that check is coming", rather than wondering what will pull them through the winter months, worrying about the availability of various resources, adverse weather, etc.

On the other hand, some experienced stress or boredom at the sheer predictability of wage labor work; several missed the "excitement" of fishing, and the chance to make a lot of money. One man reported a high degree of what he termed "mental" stress in working for a "bossman" at Cherry Point, to the extent that he required medication. Others resented loosing control over their time and money: they had to be at a certain place during a certain time, and their rate of pay did not vary.

Rate of Earnings	# Respondents	% Respondents
Increased	8	27
Decreased	7	23
No Change	6	20

Table Six: Changes in Earnings from Fishing to Non-Fishing Job

Although 33% (n=10) said their quality of life improved since leaving fishing, compared to 27% (n=8) who felt it had declined and 10% (n=3) who saw no change, more people than not answered "no" to the question: are you happier than when you fished? Those who left fishing and began their own business seemed to experience a higher degree of job satisfaction than those who were not self-employed. Overall, about one third of those holding non-fishing jobs said they were doing exactly what they wanted to do, while the remaining two thirds were not, or were undecided.

To explain the apparent ambivalence regarding job satisfaction in the non-fishing work domain, it is useful to examine why people entered fishing in the first place. Of those interviewed, 57 % entered fishing because of family inheritance: fishing was "in my blood" or "my daddy fished and my daddy's daddy...". Several "fell right in to it" because of having fished with relatives as youngsters, and eventually fished a relative's boat until acquiring a boat of their own.

The next frequent answer related to job satisfaction: four reported that they simply loved fishing as a way of life, loved being on the water, and were addicted to the "challenge" of commercial harvesting. Overwhelmingly, people valued the "freedom" and "independence" of fishing, claiming they had more control over their time and money compared to working for a "boss man" for set wages. Several men furthermore stressed the

financial opportunities commercial fishing presented in Carteret County. For those with a high school degree or less, commercial fishing was virtually the only viable alternative for those with families to support.

Commercial fishing thus tends to be a strong source of identity as well as a source of income for many in Carteret County. In representing generational continuity, as well as personal freedom and self-sufficiency, this activity is more than "a job" for participants. Although several interviewees expressed a certain relief of giving up the economic uncertainty and "aggravation" of fishing for a steady job, there was some bitterness or regret at having left this "way of life" for a "job". Significantly, when asked "do you still consider yourself a waterman", a full 87% of respondents answered "yes". Many were emphatic that, although they no longer fished for a living, they would "die a waterman" or be a "fisherman at heart" if not on paper.

Discussion and Recommendations

There are numerous pressures on those making a living via commercial fishing in Carteret County and North Carolina in general. Some are part and parcel of the industry itself, such as dependency on seafood processors, low market prices, high operating costs, family considerations, variable weather conditions, and periodic scarcity of resources. Other pressures appear more external to the industry, but affect fishermen tremendously, such as state and federal regulations, conflicts with sport fishermen, leisure/tourism industry encroachment, and water quality degradation. As one man emphasized, "if you're a fishermen, the odds are against you before you get out the door."

Yet for the most part Carteret County fishermen seem to be tenacious in maintaining their livelihoods, as evident from this researcher's difficulty in finding people who have completely abandoned commercial fishing. Some are able to continue fishing by virtue of their spouses entering the workforce. Others have taken second jobs as a secondary or even primary source of income with, in some cases, benefits. Yet continued participation in various fisheries holds an importance for people that is both cultural and economic.

"Jobs" for Carteret County fishermen typically refers to wage-labor employment where one may work under a "boss man" for steady pay and perhaps benefits. But whereas a new job for an average American may represent new activities and maybe a new pay scale, for fishermen it represents a change in lifestyle, and strikes at the heart of one's sense of community and personal autonomy.

Generally participants in this study were deeply rooted in their communities and, although some took jobs that involved traveling

such as trucking and dredge boat work, maintained a household within the county. Although most expressed relief at having a relatively secure source of income outside of commercial harvesting, there was a high degree of bitterness toward North Carolina policy makers and government officials regarding the current state of fisheries that compelled many to seek work outside a family profession that many so strongly identify with and that is potentially lucrative.

Participants in this study who have entered non-fishing work domains differ from displaced fishers in New England and Florida because they all, to some degree, had a choice. Nobody in this sample was abruptly forced out of commercial fishing, no one reported having to take advantage of social services, and no one experienced unemployment between fishing and their new jobs. Although most left fishing because they became "fed up" with the many pressures and restrictions involved in commercial harvesting, all had an alternate job available to them. Thus this study is useful to examine the transition process for "the lucky ones", but is not an appropriate example to understand the fate of large numbers of fishers in the event of future displacement. Not having yet experienced a crisis of rapidly dislocated fishing communities, North Carolina is perhaps in a unique position of preventing such a scenario.

Judging by the frequency of maritime-oriented jobs held by respondents, the best "match" between commercial fishing and non-fishing jobs is in the seamanship domain of dredge, tug, and ferry boat work. It is in these jobs that commercial fishing skills are most transferable, and involve requirements most attainable to former watermen. People who leave commercial fishing but enter or remain in the realm of "self-employment" maintain some of the qualities highly valued by commercial fishers, such as independence, control of one's own time and money, and freedom from working under a "boss man".

That most of the non-fishing jobs held by respondents are in the blue-collar category, and did not necessarily represent an increase in pay for workers, has important implications. In the economic restructuring of coastal areas from places of farming, fishing, and production to places of tourism, recreation, and service industries, it seems likely that those long dependent on fisheries resources risk further social and economic disenfranchisement. This is not only due to age and educational barriers preventing a smooth transition from commercial fishing to white collar jobs, but also due to a bias against the quality of knowledge, experience, and skill held by fishermen.

Strategies by which widespread disenfranchisement of commercial fishers can be avoided may include the following:

- Take steps to ensure a viable commercial fishery in the future whereby a whole class of people are not faced with the problem of finding a new mode of living. This option not only helps maintain cultural diversity on the coast, a healthy seafood industry, and a strong year round economy, it allows people to do what they choose to do for a living. This option could be met by more stringent environmental regulations to improve water quality conditions, a fisheries management system that includes the participation of fishermen and makes use of their experience and knowledge, and the establishment of a policy that prevents political maneuvering whereby coastal resources are allocated away from commercial fishermen.

- Implement a program encouraging collaborative work between the commercial fishing and marine science communities. Marine science/policy is becoming a predominant industry in Carteret County, between NMFS, UNC-CH, NCDMF, Duke and NCSU. In many respects marine scientists, whether biologists, physical, or social scientists, have been dependent on commercial fishers to assist in the collection of data, to experiment with new fishing techniques, or as subjects of study. Yet the relationship between marine scientists and fishermen has been rather one-sided, as fishermen are rarely seen as collaborators. Would it not benefit both the scientific and fishing communities to integrate the knowledge and hands-on ingenuity of fishermen with the theoretical and scientific expertise of scientists in the formulation of experiments, new equipment designs, and resource management strategies? This collaboration could be encouraged through the NC fisheries resource grant program, Sea Grant, etc.

- The state should offer incentives and programs to assist people wishing to change livelihoods in the transition from fishing to non-fishing modes of work. Although other states have initiated vessel and gear "buy-back" programs to assist people out of fishing, the effectiveness of such plans in facilitating the transition to non-fishing occupations is highly questionable. North Carolina should establish a program that offers educational and small business grants to enable fishermen to have the means to retrain for a new vocation, and pursue a line of work with a degree of dignity and satisfaction.

I recommend such a program be developed as a matter of normal procedure, not only in the event of a "crisis" or major displacement should it occur. Just as there are commercial fishing families determined to survive well into the next century, there are others that may be interested in exchanging a dependency on fishing for a different occupation, were they to have strong ongoing financial and educational support to make that transition. Such a program could be made available to fishers and/or spouses of fishers wanting to improve their family income in economically stressful times, perhaps to enable one person to continue fishing for a living if they so choose.

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Appendix

Sea Grant Occupational Transition Questionnaire (quest. pg. 1)

Informant Number _____ 1.___
Community _____ 2.___
Interview Date _____ Mo: 3.___
Dy: 4.___

Demographics

1. Gender 1. Male 2. Female

2. Date of Birth _____

3. Ethnicity 1. White 2. Black 3. N. Amer.
3. Asian 4. Latino 5. Other

4. Place of Birth _____

5. Length of Residence in Carteret County

6. Schooling Completed?

7. Special Training or Trade School (incl. captains lic.)?

Household Information

8. Marital Status 1. single 2. married
3. separated 4. divorced
4. widowed 5. other

9. How long married to present spouse?

10. How many children do you have?

11. How many dependents?

12. Who lives with you (and how many)?

13. Who contributes income to household and how much?

1. myself only (percentage) ____
2. spouse only ____
3. myself ____
and spouse ____ ____
4. myself and other(s) ____ ____
5. other(s) only ____ ____

14. Average annual household income before taxes (with current job/preferably 1994)

    1. 0 - 4,999
    2. 5,000 - 9,999
    3. 10,000 -19,999
    4. 20,000 -29,999
    5. 30,000 -39,999
    6. 40,000 -49,999
    7. 50,000 or more

15. Do you have private health insurance?

16. How much do you pay monthly for health ins.?

17. Is there a church you attend regularly?

    Denomination?

Occupational History

18. How many years were you dependent on commercial fishing?

19. Did you hold a job before you entered commercial fishing? What was it?

20. What type of fishing were you mostly dependent on?

21. Was your fishing income sufficient to support your household?

    How dependent was your household on your fishing income?

22. Did your spouse work while you fished for a living? (part or full time)

23. Did you own or partly own your boat and gear?

24. Did you fish on a dealer/company owned vessel?

25. How large was the boat you usually fished on?

26. What was your usual position while fishing?

    Did you hire crewmen? How many at any one time?

27. What was your average annual net income from commercial fishing?

1. 0 - 2,999
2. 3,000 - 4,999
3. 5,000 - 9,999
4. 10,000 -19,999
5. 20,000 -29,999
6. 30,000 -39,999
7. 40,000 -49,999
8. 50,000 or more

28. Did/do you make money on the side informally (growing and selling produce, decoy carving, etc.)?

29. Did/do you subsistence hunt, fish, or garden?

Occupational Transition

30. Why did you become a commercial fisherman?

31. What did you like about commercial fishing?

32. What did you NOT like about commercial fishing?

33. What was the primary factor influencing your decision to abandon commercial fishing?

34. Do you feel like you had a choice whether or not to leave fishing?

35. How many years have you been out of fishing?

36. Since leaving commercial fishing, have your earnings increased, decreased, or stayed the same?

37. Between fishing and your present status, were you unemployed or underemployed? How long?

38. Were you dependent on any social services while fishing? (what services and how long)

    Once you left fishing? Presently?

39. Once leaving fishing, what did you do with your boat/gear?

40. Are you still paying off a boat mortgage?

41. When you left fishing, were you in debt to a dealer?

    Are you still in debt to a dealer/fish house?

42. In leaving commercial fishing, do you consider yourself lucky or unfortunate?

43. In the 3 or 4 years before you left fishing, had your fishing income declined?

44. What are you doing now for money?

45. What special training did this job require?

46. What commercial fishing skills were transferable to your new job?

47. Are you now doing what you want to do?

48. What do you like about your present status/job?

49. What do you like least?

50. Since you quit fishing, has your spouse worked more outside the home? Occupation?

51. Have you noticed more spouses of fishermen entering the workforce over the years?

    If so, when would you say this trend began?

52. What other relatives do you have in commercial fishing?

53. Would you want your child to go into commercial fishing?

54. Is there a future in this county for children of commercial fishing families?

55. What role do the local community college/vocational technical programs play in preparing people for a future outside of commercial fishing?

56. Do you think there is a future for members of the commercial fishing community in aqua/mariculture?

57. Since you quit fishing, has your general quality of life improved?

58. Do you think you'll fish commercially again?

59. Are you happier now than when you fished?

    Is your spouse?

60. Even though you no longer depend on fishing, do you still consider yourself a fisher/waterman?

61. Do you continue to fish commercially?

62. Do you continue to hold a commercial vessel license?