3-2-2010

Tris Colket oral history interview by Terry Lee Howard, March 2, 2010

Tristram C. Colket IV (Interviewee)

Terry Lee Howard (Interviewer)
Terry Howard: First question: Your full name. Just a minute, it’s March 2, 2010. I’m with Tris Colket, and Tris, please tell me your full name.

Tristram Colket: Tristram Coffin Colket IV.

TH: Spell that, please. (laughs)

TC: T-r-i-s-t-r-a-m C-o-f-f-i-n C-o-l-k-e-t, Roman numeral IV.

TH: (laughs) I didn’t get that the first time! Cool! Family names?
TC: Family name; dad, grandfather, son: son is the fifth.

TH: Okay. And when and where were you born?

TC: Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.

TH: And when?

TC: September 13, 1948.

TH: You’re sixty-one years old.

TC: I am sixty-one years old.

TH: Okay. You’re older than I am.

TC: One foot in the grave.

TH: When did you move to Fort Pierce?

TC: I moved to Fort Pierce two years ago, two and a half years ago.

TH: Okay, and what brought you to Fort Pierce? I know—before that, where did you live?

TC: Oh, I just lived in Vero [Beach], so I was very familiar with Fort Pierce and had my boat docked at the city marina, so it just was very convenient to be down here.

TH: So, next question is kinda on the same lines: What brought you to Fort Pierce—but elaborate on that, too, ’cause you didn’t fish out of Vero Beach.

TC: Ah, that’s a very significant point in that equation of the inlet. Fort Pierce has an inlet; Vero Beach does not have an inlet. The next inlet north is Sebastian. Fort Pierce is a very safe,
beautiful inlet; it’s an incredible spot to just enjoy in a recreational aspect. It’s also very user-friendly and a terrific place to fish out of. I’m very happy to be down here.

TH: I’ll get to that later, but one time, Fort Pierce—do you recall Fort Pierce being known as the “fishing capital of the world”?

TC: I do not.

TH: I mean, in advertisements, like, you know, “The Big Apple” is New York; have you ever heard that in the past?

TC: I’ve seen reference to it. It never was a big aspect in what I heard about Fort Pierce over the years. I like the concept.

TH: Next question is a personal question: Are you married?

TC: I’m divorced.

TH: Okay. Have any children?

TC: Have two children: my son, Trist, Tristram V, who is thirty-two; and my daughter, Ryan Elizabeth, who will be thirty on April 10.

TH: Okay. And school: How far did you go in school?

TC: I have a college degree in history and public affairs, a bachelor’s.

TH: Bachelor’s degree from?

TC: From Rollins College.

TH: Winter Park?
TC: Winter Park, Florida.

TH: Yeah. Cool little place.

TC: Pre-Disney; it was very cool then.

TH: Brick streets, (inaudible); it’s a cool city. Been there, did a workshop there. Do you have another job besides charter boat?

TC: I do not.

TH: What other jobs have you had—since college, I would assume?

TC: I painted billboards for a year, worked construction for a year or two. I was a lifeguard when I was in the last couple years of high school in the summertime. Most of my life was devoted to commercial fishing.

TH: Do you currently own your own boat, and what kind of boat, and length? Describe your boat, please.

TC: (laughs) My boat is a lobster boat design, built in Corea, Maine by Young Brothers. It’s your—

TH: Built in Korea?

TC: Corea, Maine.

TH: Oh, Corea, Maine. Okay.

TC: And it’s forty-feet. We tore it—I used it as a commercial boat. I had it built and took delivery in 1987, and six and half years ago decided that the commercial fishing business had seen its days of glory come and go. So we—my son and I tore it down to the hull, essentially to
the hull, and rebuilt it over an extended period of time—actually several years—into what it is
now, which is the premier charter boat in South Florida.

TH: And the name of the boat?

TC: *Last Mango*.

TH: Okay. Now, we’re gonna go to the Oculina Bank. How familiar are you with the area of the
Oculina Bank?

TC: I am very familiar with it dating back to, probably, my initial introduction to it by being
friends with Grant Gilmore and discussing the sub dives that he had made on some of the bigger
ledges out there, and the grouper populations that existed there back when commercial fishing
was still taking place.

TH: Now, I guess the Oculina is the name of the reef itself. There’s a name for it?

TC: I think it’s a name for the coral.

TH: Yeah, the coral. Okay. Do you know why the Oculina Bank is designated as an area to be
protected, or to protect?

TC: Well, my feeling is, without all the scientific evidence to back it up, that it was a spawning
grounds for several species of grouper in particular, one of them being the scamp grouper, which
was found there in huge aggregations at one point in time when they dove on that in the Harbor
Branch sub.¹ The Oculina coral itself was unique and very special, very fragile, and at that time
there were, of course, rock shrimp boats dragging across it, people anchoring on it, and
longlining across it. It had to be obvious way before anything was ever—any measures were
taken—that it was a special area that was going to suffer sooner or later by the efforts of
fishermen to harvest fish in the area.

TH: Commercial fishermen?

¹ Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution at Florida Atlantic University conducted scientific research referenced in
the Oculina Bank closure. It is a non-profit oceanographic institution dedicated to marine and ocean research and
education operated by Florida Atlantic University.
TC: Well, both, recreational and commercial, but commercial for sure.

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

TC: Having been a part of several committees and a part of the effort to come to grips with what makes sense in the world of environmental protection efforts and regulations, there’s an obvious problem that always crops up on how to regulate things efficiently, and there’s way more to it than meets the eye. So, it’s difficult for them to regulate things without doing it across the board. Long story short on that, to regulate against it against charter fishing boats or commercial fishing boats and not recognize the significance of the recreational impact as well means, in my mind, ultimately leads to the fact that they just have to close areas entirely. Enforcement is one of the biggest problems. But what’s left unsaid lots of times is the impact that the recreational industry has on things. Way more boats; they might not catch as much, but in the end—per boat—but in the end they catch more lots of times, and impact different species.

TH: Has the closure of the Oculina Bank affected your fishing as a charter boat captain?

TC: It’s certainly a place where we would go to grouper fish. And in the sense that it would be an opportunity to have better catches of grouper, it has affected my effort; but I have more or less tailored my effort around what the other options are, and that just makes sense for me.

TH: Now, do you anchor there? Could you elaborate on why or why not, why you do or do not anchor there?

TC: You know, back in the day people did anchor in that deep water, back in the fifties [1950s] and sixties [1960s], seventies [1970s].

TH: How deeply?

TC: It wasn’t uncommon for someone to anchor in 200 feet of water, 250 even. The tide runs very hard and it’s—there’s a great chance of losing an anchor, getting it caught up in the bottom, and especially, at great depth, not getting it back. However, people who do it on a regular basis—particularly, I guess, commercial fishermen, but not necessarily—you could do it. These days, with the advent of the technology behind GPS and other and good color machines, speedometers on boats, I think that there’s more of a tendency for people to disregard anchoring and just—they can stay on a spot without any trouble at all. Nobody really anchors in deep water anymore, that I know of.
TH: Is there a term for that kind of fishing, where you hold the boat on the spot?

TC: There might be. I can’t—it’s escaping me right now what that might be.

TH: Okay. If anchoring and bottom fishing in the Oculina Bank were not permitted—how should I put this? I think she [the researcher] means “was permitted”—was permitted, would you fish there?

TC: Yes.

TH: Would you anchor there?

TC: Probably not.

TH: Okay. So, you already said grouper, how about snapper? What would you fish for if you did fish there, primarily? What would you target?

TC: I would expect to target grouper there. I haven’t had much of a background or paid much attention to snapper fish.

TH: Overall—now, one other thing before I move on, here. You longlined for swordfish and for sharks for a while.

TC: And for tilefish.

TH: And for tilefish. Did you long-line in this area?

TC: I did.

TH: This was back in what years?
TC: I longlined for sharks and tilefish—and this is the longline that goes on the bottom, opposed to the swordfishing longline, which drifts.

TH: Okay.

TC: From the early eighties [1980s], probably from about eighty-two [1982] up to 1995: 1982 to 1995. And, of course, the regulations came into effect there, if I’m not mistaken, in eighty-four [1984].

TH: Yes.

TC: So, probably—you know, I don’t think there was ever a time when I didn’t recognize the fact. By the time I got longlining in that deeper water in eighty-four [1984], I knew about the Oculina Bank, and paid very close attention to where I set my longline when I was in that area, and would indeed run my longline down the side of the Oculina Bank: north and south according to the lat-long [latitude and longitude] coordinates to take advantage of what was there, but not go into it directly.

TH: Interesting. When you did this—so you ran your line north and south. Did you anchor? I guess it would be south end of it so the line didn’t ball up.

TC: We did. We did. The line was going on the bottom, we put about forty pounds of weight to start the—

TH: From the south end?

TC: From the south end, and then weighted it periodically along the way.

TH: Okay, ’cause the current—about how fast is the current going out there?

TC: It’s not unusual for it to go two and half knots and up to three and half on up; really strong current.

TH: Okay. The current runs faster as you get further offshore, I assume.
TC: Yes, it does.

TH: All right. We’ve done our deposition here, or something. Overall, has the fishing changed since you began fishing in the Fort Pierce area? So, it goes from the Oculina, now we’re talking the Fort Pierce area. How has the fishing changed, overall, in this area?

TC: Well, from the commercial standpoint, regulations have had a huge impact. The only—there are very few people left in the tilefish sector. Commercial tilefishing is all but gone.

TH: Because?

TC: Because of the limitations on your catch, catch quotas and hook. Now they’re talking about ITQs [individual transferable quotas], which is a death sentence for individual fishermen. It’s just the worst idea there is in the whole world. So, yeah, it’s just the quotas that did it and the regulations, and the impact that’s had on most commercial fisheries and different species has made it very difficult for a single operator running one boat to make any money, to make it work.

TH: All right. We’re jumping around a little bit, but the, uh—when you started fishing, when you began your commercial fishing career, I believe you were a king mackerel fisherman.

TC: Hook and line king mackerel trolling.

TH: Right. And at the time, that was—you could make a good living at that, when you first started, probably in the late seventies [1970s]? Could you help me out there?

TC: Ah, early seventies [1970s].

TH: Early seventies [1970s]. Okay. And were the kingfish plentiful then?

TC: Yes, they were. The kingfishing was an idyllic possibility for me, an idyllic way to make a living and fish with just—the combination was too good to be true. It just suited my temperament and I loved it. Still do.

TH: And what finally got you out of kingfishing?
TC: The net fishing. These giant boats, fifty- to sixty-foot boats; we call them “roller rigs,” because they haul their giant nets over a hydraulic powered roller to get them back in the boat, but with all the fish in it. In previous years, [they] targeted Spanish mackerel as the species, target species, and then they—I guess they thinned out the Spanish mackerel populations to the point where they were looking for a way to justify running such a big operation. They were smart enough to figure out that if they targeted kingfish, they could catch them with the same alacrity that they approached the Spanish mackerel fishing, and they were incredibly successful. They had spotter planes that flew out over the ocean in the areas where the kingfish hung out and where we, as trolling boats, caught our kingfish.

And the next thing we knew, in a matter of one year, the ocean was full of big net boats that came from all parts of Florida, east and west coast, to net kingfish in tens of thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands, pound sets. And, of course, the way they did that with the spotter planes was that the pilot of the spotter plane was familiar with what a school of kingfish looks like; they could see just sometimes acres of kingfish schooled up in certain areas that the kingfish moved into every year with, like, clockwork. So they came in, and the next—we’d be out there trolling for kingfish and the next thing you knew, a net boat had come and wrapped his net in a big, wide circle around you and around all the fish. And the fish stopped biting, and you were done for the day, and you were done for the week, and you were done for the next few years, as it turned out. It took six or eight or ten years for the kingfish to bounce back once they outlawed the net fishing.

TH: Well, actually, another—didn’t they first outlaw the circle nets and then, did not another form of net fishing for kingfish come into play?

TC: Yeah, as a matter of fact, they used drift nets on (inaudible). To get back to the original question, I had moved on from hook and line kingfishing once the nets played such a significant element in the scheme of things, because it was just almost a pathetic effort at that point. Many of my friends left the kingfish industry and went and got jobs as carpenters. Fishermen always have something else they can fall back on. You can’t really be a fisherman without being a handyman, without knowing how to take care of all different kinds of circumstances that crop up, especially when you’re out on the ocean and you can’t call anybody to help you. You have to be able to make things work. But the drift nets, as I recall, were—once they regulated against the seine, the circle-half gillnets, continued to pound the kingfish, and God knows what other species. Turtles and—

TH: Sailfish.

TC: Yeah, sailfish.
TH: I found several sailfish floating belly-up.

TC: So—

TH: Okay, so that got you out of king mackerel fishing. So you went—you began longlining swordfish, first?

TC: Yeah, I longlined swordfish for a few years. Actually, I was still kingfishing at that time; but swordfishing was a bonanza that came our way in the mid-seventies [1970s], so I took advantage of that, just in the summers, with a thirty-four-foot boat. It was a one-night effort on my part. The swordfish were so thick that you could catch 1500 pounds dressed weight on swordfish, with six miles of gear and a few hundred hooks; a couple hundred hooks, sometimes. Where were we going with this?

TH: Okay, I’m gonna go back. We’re bouncing around here. Overall, how has fishing changed since you’ve been fishing in the Fort Pierce area? I mean, this is a lengthy question, and the follow-up question is: Have you had any experience with law enforcement within the, or regarding to, the Oculina Bank, regarding the Oculina Bank?

TC: Well, as far as fishing changing, the regulations have changed a lot. The regulations came along because of the impact fishing was having on the populations of the fish. So, that was certainly an aspect of change that I saw take place. Grouper populations diminished. Actually, the kingfish seem to be a success story in my mind. I think they’ve come back. Tilefish populations seem to be coming back now as well, but they were at an all-time low for quite some time.

TH: From being overfished?

TC: From being overfished, yeah. They were some—the beeline fleet was the name that strikes me as being the most significant element in the equation. They were three or four big fifty, sixty-foot boats that came down from—I believe it was New Jersey—and had had the experience of longlining tilefish that the locals hadn’t considered. At the time, we were catching them with bandit reels. And it didn’t take long; they’re such a small strata that you target for tilefish that it’s not hard for ten or fifteen boats to just have a huge impact on what’s going on.

TH: The strata for tilefish; be more specific. Talk about their—
TC: Yes. Typically, in the areas that I’ve fished from Daytona down to Stuart, it’s a muddy bottom that they used to burrow into, and the tilefish don’t hang out over sand or hard bottom or rock bottom or anything; they want that mud. So, they—and that is typically from about 575 feet in depth. For some reason, it starts there and goes out to about 800, sometimes 850 feet, so that’s where you look for tilefish.

TH: Okay, and we’re talking about changing fishing in Fort Pierce; we’re gonna come back to that. I think that’s how we wrap it up. Have you had experience with law enforcement regarding the Oculina Bank? Been boarded?

TC: Yeah. When I was shark fishing in the late eighties [1980s] and early nineties [1990s], one of the phenomenons that occurred was George Bush Senior’s—what was that called? No tolerance? No—? My God. Anyway, they had the Coast Guard—

TH: Zero tolerance?

TC: Zero tolerance. Well, I guess that was it. They had the Coast Guard and the Navy all grouped together, so the Coast Guard was right on these big Navy cutters. Steam around the ocean waiting to find an unsuspecting fishing boat that they could target, and oh, my God. A search light would come on, and these giant naval ships ran without lights; I’m sure they had the capability of knowing where they were going and what they were doing. But they’d sneak up on a U.S. commercial longliner, blast you out of the water with a spotlight that just about sets your boat on fire.

*Pause in recording*

TH: You’re talking about—

TC: Operation Zero Tolerance and the Bush administration, and the law enforcement after it. They beefed up to encompass an effort by the Navy and the Coast Guard to find drugs on hard working commercial fishing boats. (laughs) And the fact that they came on board, and we had 300 pounds of bait thawed out and all this gear and ice and, quite often, thousands of pounds of fish in our fish holes did not slow them down in the least. They were just carrying on, measuring for secret compartments, and suggesting that we had drugs hidden underneath our fish, and—

TH: Well, you were talking about the specific night when the Navy—
TC: Oh, that happened, actually, twice! But yeah, they came on board—and a lot of times we’d be involved in our fishing effort, either hauling back our gear or getting ready to set it. It’s all a matter of timing and it’s very important to us to finish our job in a timely fashion, because you work so hard at what you do. I mean, we’re getting six hours of sleep and working the rest of the day, and then to put up with the enforcement was a bit of a trial. But, it was obvious there was nothing we could do about it, so—

TH: So, tell me; be specific. So they came aboard, or they said, “Captain, we’re gonna come aboard?”

TC: In the case with this one night with this big naval ship, you could hear the turbine engines when it finally let us know it was there and the spotlight came on. It was huge. It was 200 and some feet long. They lowered a Coast Guard inflatable with a hard hull, you know, the fiberglass hull with it. It was probably a thirty-some foot inflatable. Turns out it had the same diesel engine as the Last Mango did, which was a 350 horsepower inboard Volvo diesel—in this Coast Guard inflatable.

TH: Can you tell—first of all, about what year was this?

TC: This probably was—guessing somewhere between eighty-four [1984] and eighty-six [1986].

TH: And you were fishing for what?

TC: Shark fishing.

TH: Shark fishing.

TC: Might’ve been a little later than that. We should know from when [George H.W.] Bush was president, Senior; but I don’t know.

TH: Okay.

TC: Whenever zero tolerance was going on. So, this big naval ship hovered fairly close by, lowers the inflatable; the inflatable’s big enough to have a machine gun mounted on the bow. And six guys, all dressed up in, like, movie-star SWAT outfits with their custom 9 millimeters on
their side; head-sets; kind of, maybe some kind of deep-sea looking camo [camouflage] outfits on. Very sleek; they could’ve been movie stars. And then they got to the boat and there was always a guy with a shotgun, there was always a guy at the machine gun until they got so close it didn’t make any sense anymore. (laughs) And none of them were more than, like, twenty years old, and they were all from Oklahoma or somewhere like that, Iowa cornfields. So they were pretty scary when they had guns in their hands and you saw how young they were. But they’d hold my crew at gunpoint on the back of the boat.

TH: And you were in the middle of pulling your lines in?

TC: Or setting gear out.

TH: Okay.

TC: In this case, in this particular case, we were cutting bait. We were chugging to our destination; it was probably eight o’clock at night.

TH: Okay.

TC: And we were getting ready to set with them for the next half hour, just finishing up all our effort to have everything ready to set twelve miles of line and a thousand hooks, which takes some time.

TH: And you know, your—okay, go ahead. Set up; that’s a big deal.

TC: Yeah, it is. Very inconvenient.

TH: Watching the clock.

TC: I almost thought maybe they’d let us set our gear. I mean, what else are they doing out here in the middle of the ocean? Go back and have a cup of coffee, come get us later. (laughs) But, no, that wasn’t gonna happen. So, they pull up in the inflatable and come along inside. I knew the drill by then, ’cause this had happened before in various other ways with being boarded by the Coast Guard. So the crew stands—I had a two-man crew, so they stand in the stern; they’re asked to stand in the stern. One of the Coast Guard guys gets on the boat with a shotgun and holds my two deckhands at gunpoint with a shotgun.
TH: Pointed the gun at them?

TC: Yeah. Now, you know, the boarding takes some time, so eventually, they get a little more relaxed about things, but their initial effort is to make sure you know that they’re armed and dangerous. (laughs) And they are armed and dangerous! (laughs) Then there’s six guys on the raft: two of them stay on board, four of ’em get on the boat. By then the boat’s getting a little bit crowded because the fish box took up so much room on the deck. And the longline spool, and everything, you know, all our buoys and bait, everything that goes on in our effort is kind of geared towards the three-man crew, counting me.

They asked all the questions. They want to know if you have guns on board, of course, and of course, you do when you’re out in the middle of the ocean. In fact, I needed a gun from—’cause we used to use it to kill the sharks before we brought them on board. And that’s a fairly lengthy process where they want to see your guns, and they want to write down the serial numbers, and the models, and they—so they ask you about guns; you say, “Yes, they’re down in the cabin.” And then the captain usually says, “Well, I’ll get it for you,” you know, and they say, “No, no, Captain. You stay here. You just tell me where it is.” (laughs)

So, that kind of makes sense, but it was repetitive to the point where it got to be kind of comical. And then, if they’re really serious, they don’t take the obvious signs of what you’re doing as an indication of what makes sense, so they approach it more—it had to be more—it seemed to me like a training exercise or something like that. Or else they were just taking themselves too seriously, ’cause they would actually—in this case, they got tape measures out and had some—they even had one guy crawl down under the deck, where it had to be hotter than hell, (laughs) ’cause we’d been running that diesel down there, right? The head guy of the Coast Guard crew sends this poor son of a bitch down there under the deck, crawling around in a dirty old—

TH: How much space do you have under your deck?

TC: Well, the exhaust pipe ran down one side, so he couldn’t go down that side. He went down the other, and the fuel tanks and everything else are in the way there. But they sent him with a flashlight, and he paid his dues and looked around for a while, came back up, said the coast was clear. At which time, they started measuring for secret compartments, like checking the total width of the boat versus the inside width; and you know, here again, it seemed more like a movie than a practical approach to what they were supposed to be doing.

TH: How long did it take?
TC: It was an hour and a half, easy. And you have to keep in mind that the ocean’s not necessarily always a user-friendly place to stop, and we were much more comfortable most of the time we were out there underway. Now, once the Coast Guard boards you in a sloppy ocean, you can’t make headway. So, we’re just drifting there and everybody’s being thrown around the boat, getting beat up, feeling half seasick, I think, from the whole ordeal. But that’s their job, and that’s what they did.

The other funny Coast Guard story, really quick, is—

TH: Oh, no problem.

TC: Fishing closer to the beach out of Ponce Inlet, Daytona. When I first started, we set for blacktips [sharks] right in on the beach, which was legal then; but eventually state laws changed, of course, and you weren’t allowed to fish in there. But we did quite well catching thousands of pounds on a single set of blacktips and spinners, and some larger fish like bull sharks and lemons [sharks], in on the beach. But invariably, once it got light enough for the people in the condominiums—and I’m guessing we were half a mile offshore—to see that there was something going on that appeared unique to them. The follow-up was certainly that the law enforcement was on its way, ’cause they would call up and say, “Oh, my God! The world’s largest shipment of pot has now landed on New Smyrna Beach!” (laughs)

But the one funny time that happened was that, first of all, a Marine Patrol boat came zooming down the beach. We were probably eight miles south of Ponce Inlet, and just looked like any other little, you know, upward boat that comes around—until he started doing circles around us, and we noticed, that it was indeed a Marine Patrol boat. And he continued to do circles around us until this larger—once again, it was probably a hard-bottomed Zodiac—Coast Guard boat showed up. And then the Marine Patrol guy pulled up, and the first Coast Guard boat started doing circles around us, getting a little closer, and closer until their—

TH: Were you still fishing at the time?

TC: Yeah. We still were hauling gear. I mean, we’d become somewhat inured to the whole process of whatever law enforcement figures is appropriate for a commercial fishing boat. So, we continued hauling our gear. Hell, you have to, because you’re trying to get your work done and get home. A day’s only so long.

TH: So you’re getting wake from this boat the whole time?
TC: It was minimal. The wake was not significant; just the fact that they were circling us seemed odd. Then the forty-some foot cutter shows up.

TH: (laughs)

TC: And that, again, has the big machine gun mounted on the bow, and a whole bunch of Coast Guard guys on board. We had our fish boxes full of sharks on this, as opposed to being ready to set our gear on the other one. And, so, they come on board and I think, well, it’s really gonna be obvious to them, even though they’ve committed, like, three different boats to this effort that—

TH: (laughs)

TC: “Hey, we’re innocent!” (laughs) Guilty! Innocent until proven guilty, right? And the guy was a jerk. (laughs) He was a bigger honcho than we usually ran into in the scheme of things.

TH: Was he Coast Guard? Customs?

TC: Yeah, Coast Guard guy.

TH: Drug enforcement?

TC: Trying to. Just Coast Guard, Coast Guard officer; doing his job. So, he had—the funny thing here was that when we—to take care of a shark properly, as opposed to most other fish, you can’t just ice them down. You put them in a salt water and ice brine to chill them down to ice cold, like you’re making ice cream, you know, salt and ice. The salt water and ice, plus our other ice, and we chill these fish down to the core really quickly to make them suitable for market. So, they get on board and we’ve got probably 2,000 pounds of shark carcasses iced down. They want to know what’s underneath the sharks. (laughs) And I said, “Well, if you feel like you need to know that, then I’ll turn this over to you, because I’m not taking my fish out of the cooler fill tank.” So, we have these big hooks when we move the sharks around out of that water—you know, we stick a hook into ’em and pick them up. But they didn’t know about the hooks, which were hanging right there.

TH: (laughs)
TC: (laughs) So he’s got his guys, the Coast Guard guys are reaching way down in this water that’s probably twenty-eight degrees (laughs) Fahrenheit, checking to see what—they lost interest in it pretty quick, the guys. But the officer didn’t realize how painful it was reaching, so he would encourage them to look a little harder, you know? The look of pain on their faces made the whole inconvenience a little bit more palatable, because we got such a kick out of it. They finally left; they always left.

TH: They didn’t make you pull the sharks out?

TC: Nope. I never had to do that, but they suggested it, and I balked at that. I thought that was beyond reason.

TH: It could’ve messed up your catch.

TC: The other interesting thing—yeah, among other things. The other interesting thing is we didn’t always get paperwork from them. I always asked for it, because it seemed like it was my right to be able to prove that I’ve been boarded. The Coast Guard was better at it; the narco [narcotics] guys, they would just trash your boat. Had that happen a few times, too; [the narcotics guys would] come on board.

TH: Tell me about the narco guys. I’ve had Coast Guards, but I don’t think I’ve had any.

TC: DEA [Drug Enforcement Agency].

TH: I don’t remember any DEA.

TC: This would’ve been early eighties [1980s] when I was still kingfishing outside of New Smyrna, before I really launched my shark effort. Maybe even late seventies [1970s], when Al Tyrrell and I were going up there, and Frankie Bragg and Louis Wells.² I think Jack Albinson was there a couple times; he was the tall guy with the lobster boat. You know him?

TH: Clyde Marshall?

TC: Clyde. That was pretty much my travelling gang. And I came in from a long day or two of kingfishing, by myself, and got stopped at the New Smyrna bridge [Harris Saxon Bridge] by a

² Al Tyrrell was also interviewed for the Oculina Bank Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is O6-00029.
gray cigarette boat around midnight, eleven o’clock, twelve o’clock at night, convinced that I
was smuggling a load of dope. And when the two guys didn’t find anything, they started turning
over trash cans—you know, my bucket with my trash in it—and boxes with books in it. I don’t
know what kind of big drug haul I would’ve had in them, but they were definitely movie stars
and caught up in the—

TH: They rude?

TC: Yes, these guys. The Coast Guard wasn’t rude, they were all business. These guys were
rude and left without a sign of their being there. I kind of demanded that they give me
something; they said, “Don’t push your luck.” (laughs)

TH: Were they armed? Did they have their guns on them?

TC: I can’t recall that they had them out, but it was a show of force, nonetheless.

TH: Did they have any sign that they were law enforcement?

TC: No. In fact, they weren’t even uniformed. They may have had a blue light, and guns.
Nobody was gonna argue with them.

TH: Interesting. Okay. Fishing: When did you start fishing the Fort Pierce area, age and year?

TC: Twenty-two years old, 1971.

TH: You were fishing commercially?

TC: Commercial kingfishing.

TH: And how did you fish for the kingfish, gear and bait?

TC: Sure. Trolling, typically two lines, using piano wire, nine-ought hooks, strips of mullet or
pogie, and a sea witch catching the fish one at a time. Typically, having great catches.
TH: George Paul said when he first started fishing in the—seventies [1970s]? Right after Vietnam, in the seventies [1970s], he averaged 900 pounds a day—average. Does that sound about right when you first started?

TC: Well, there’d be a summertime average and a wintertime average. I’d have to split it in half. Summertime average was 300 or 400 pounds. Wintertime average was more like 900.

TH: Okay, and who did you fish with?

TC: This one friend of mine, John Langfitt, had a silly little kingfish boat. It was an outboard boat that just had some old wooden poles out there for outriggers and he was playing around with it ‘cause it was kind of fun. I went out with him one time and he really didn’t know what he was doing, but he’s done a little bit of research from Denny McGauran. Denny and Donny McGauran; there’s some names from the past, back in the good old days. Anyway, he had a rough idea of what we needed to do. Didn’t have a bug reel. We ended up pulling up two pair of eights in, and not doing too well, so we made a bug line that we pulled by hand. (laughs) As rookies, you can imagine what that was like! (laughs) A big mess. But I think we caught 200 or 300 pounds of kingfish without even knowing what we were doing. That pretty much led to the beginning of my commercial fishing for thirty-five years.

TH: You got the bug.

TC: I got the bug. Salt water in my veins, for sure.

TH: Okay, so that was your friend’s boat. Where’d you go to fish when you began fishing in the ocean? Can you show me on this map?

TC: I can show you on the map, but I can tell you that back in the day when there were that many kingfish, you ran either straight out or to the northeast grounds. Everything was about ten, twelve miles offshore, and that’s where we fished. Summertime out of Fort Pierce was straight out; anywhere from 100 and probably 110 degrees to 60 degrees would take you to the northeast grounds.

TH: Okay, you don’t have to show me on the map. (laughs) I know where you’re talking about.

TC: In the wintertime, I went to Sebastian, and we fished north of Sebastian almost always.
TH: Okay, and during months of the year—during what months of the year did you fish for kingfish; that was year-round, I guess? Is that correct?

TC: It was year around. It was.

TH: Fishing trip usually lasted a day?

TC: One-day trips. Had no intentions of spending the night on the ocean back then. That would’ve scared the hell out of me. Although, every once in a while we did a—in the flat, calm summer months you could, we used to fish for kingfish at night. And there’d be big schools of squid and sardines out there if you turned your lights on and anchored up. We’d anchor up, and that was a blast.

TH: Is that float lining?

TC: Float lining, kingfishing.

TH: Tell me how you did that, please.

TC: A hundred, probably it was a 100 or 150 pound test; probably a 150 pound test. Ideally, you took your dip net with you, you’d anchor up on the offshore bar, ideally over a school of bait, turn your outside lights on or your overhead lights on to attract the bait to the boat, keep it there, and you could let out a piece of bait and lure the squid in. If you let it out just past the range of the light that shone out of your boat, right on the surface of the water, the squid would come to it, and then you could slowly bring it back until you could dip net the squid. Back then the nets—

TH: Dip net one at a time?

TC: Well, no, there would be sometimes six or eight of them stuck on. You needed to get one, because the squid would rather eat another squid than anything else. So, once you got one squid up on board, then the rest of them were easier to catch, ’cause you always wanted to use them for bait. The trick with netting squid was having a monofilament dip net, which back in those days was more expensive than what I wanted to deal with, so we used crappy nets that were harder to move through the water fast enough to catch the squid. It took me a while in the fishing business
to realize that you needed to spend money to make money; it certainly paid off once that became clear.

TH: Now, once you got the squid, and you explained—and you had monofilament line, you didn’t use—you took the paravanes off, you used the outriggers? Is that correct?

TC: No. We just let them out the back of the boat. Typically, just two lines, direct drive; you held on to the line, wear your cotton gloves, and let it out. And, my God, when a ten or fifteen-pound kingfish hits a line that’s tied to your hand and you’re not trolling, you have no nothing, but it’s kind of like you’re there stuck in the water and the fish tries to go the other way so fast it pulls you down to your knees in a second. It’s great.

TH: (laughs) It’s fun.

TC: Not sure I’d want to do it now, but it was fun then.

TH: I’ve never done that. I’ve always wanted to do that—I’ve done it before, but I’ve never caught anything. I did it with Moby [Paul] a couple of times. We never hit on the fish, but I’ve heard about float lining. So, an average trip catch, you already talked about that. It’s wintertime when you first started, you know, 800, 900 pounds; in summertime, 200, 300 pounds.

TC: Yep.

TH: How many years did you fish for kingfish?

TC: Oh, gosh. Came and went, but I guess it was from seventy [1970] or seventy-one [1971] to 1982. I started making those kingfish trips up to New Smyrna and I was up there with Al and some of the other guys, and I bought this one mile longline spool from George Paul just for fun; he had played around with it and lost interest. I think it must’ve been electric. I stuck it on the boat and went out and just played around with the sharks a couple of times when the kingfishing was slow, up in New Smyrna in 1982. There wasn’t even really a market for the sharks then; but my gosh, were there a lot of sharks! Every time I did it, I learned a little more about where to go for them, the more surprised I was at how many there were.

TH: Oh, so you were shark fishing first? I thought you were swordfishing?
TC: Shark fishing.

TH: In eighty-two [1982]?

TC: Is that what—I’m sorry, I thought that’s what you were talking about. Yeah, the swordfishing was in the mid-seventies [1970s].

TH: Oh, okay. In the short—okay, we skipped the swordfishing. You kingfished till about seventy-eight [1978]?

TC: I did. The swordfishing was a summer time effort from seventy-five [1975] to seventy-eight [1978], after which the impact of our effort in that short a time was very obvious. The big fish—

TH: The swordfish.

TC: —had been caught. Every year the fish got smaller. Every year everybody fished more gear, caught less—well, not necessarily caught less fish, but put up more effort into catching the same amount. And by the third year, my third effort at it, it wasn’t profitable enough to continue.

TH: That’s when you changed to swordfishing? I mean, to shark fishing?

TC: I went back to kingfishing and travelling. That was kind of like the obvious approach at that point. There was no—the net fishing had taken their toll on our local fish populations and some of the guys that travelled were still coming home, telling stories about lots of big fish in other parts of Florida, so—

TH: So most of the net fishing was targeted right here, Fort Pierce area.

TC: Yes, it was; more so than even Sebastian, for some reason. I know they got up that way, but they were not as successful. Fort Pierce was the spot, and Fort Pierce felt the impact and suffered the most from the consequences of that slaughter.

TH: Okay, so why did that turn you—you told me why you stopped fishing for kingfish: basically, the nets in this area and then the swordfish was a radical decline in just a few years of
—’cause everybody got into swordfishing. You said that’s when you moved to shark fishing, and you did that for how many years?

TC: Did that for—from eighty-two [1982] I was still doing a little kingfishing up the road there and shark fishing, and that evolved into a major effort that probably took place from 1987 until 1995. Nineteen ninety-five [1995], I brought the boat back down to Fort Pierce—I took it back to Sebastian, actually, and said goodbye to my effort. By then, the government regulation had severely curtailed the amount of effort and success we could have on the sharks. The fishing, as opposed to the swordfishing, had not slowed down; it had continued to be fantastic, and so it was a real shock to me that that much regulation came down from on high so quickly.

TH: Specifically, what regulation?

TC: Quotas. They had several different approaches to quotas that—can’t remember now, exactly. The first quota limited us, took away about—turned out it took away, I believe, four months of our fishing season, one way or another. It was split into two seasons. It was a January quota, started in January until we caught the fish; and then another one started in July until we caught our quota. It was an across the board quota for—it wasn’t per boat, it had to do with how many fish were caught in the entire Atlantic Seaboard.

TH: Hmm. So, quickly, what kind of gear you use for—you mentioned for the swordfish, you set out, basically, a big trout line with hooks that floated and traveled—

TC: North in the Gulf Stream.

TH: —traveled in the Gulf Stream. So, your swordfishing was a line that laid right on the bottom.

TC: Shark fishing.

TH: Shark fishing, excuse me. How many hooks, you know, and how big a leader, how long were the leaders off the—can you describe it?

TC: Yeah, yeah. That all evolved a little bit as time went on, but we sat twelve nautical miles aligned, on the bottom, with anywhere from 900 to 1,000 hooks on it: and that just depended on how many leaders got cut off, tangled, became inoperative over the course of a day or a trip, or whatever. But we typically set, probably, 950 to close to 1,000 hooks every night. We went out
on three night trips, sometimes four night trips if we got further from home. I fished out of Ponce Inlet 95 percent of the time and traveled as far as South Carolina waters, probably 150 miles from home. When we were up that far, we occasionally found fish houses in St. Augustine or Jacksonville, Mayport or where we could sell our catch. But my—I had a buyer that came to the dock in Ponce Inlet, Daytona area; that was my main buyer.

TH: Now, you did say at one time that you caught and kept some alive for Sea World?

TC: Yeah. Let me get back to the leaders, one time.

TH: Okay, yeah.

TC: You did ask about that. Our leaders were—I had a rack, we used big circle hooks. We started out with the J-hooks, and found out that the circle hooks were actually very effective on the sharks.

TH: Oh, yeah?

TC: Which was interesting. It was a smaller hook than those giant J-hooks, and—

TH: What’s a giant J-hook?

TC: That’s what we all started out using for both swordfish and sharks. The shank on it’s probably four inches. It’s probably almost a quarter of an inch in diameter, the steel that it was comprised of, and I would guess the gap was an inch and a half, inch and three-quarters to the point of the barb. That was a hook you didn’t want to get stuck in you! (laughs)

TH: And the circle hook, there’s different sizes, obviously.

TC: Yeah. I think it was called a Number Three. It was a good-sized circle hook.

TH: I mean, in diameter? Circumference?

TC: Probably, yeah; diameter would be an inch and a half.
TH: Okay.

TC: And then we made them on cable leaders to start with, thinking, you know, as all shark fishermen think, whether they’re recreational or whatever, that you need to have these huge rigs, cable rigs set up for them. And that evolved into us using scraps from our monofilament main line, which was 900-pound test.

TH: Nine hundred pound test, monoleader.

TC: And although a shark can bite through that without any trouble, the circle hooks, in particular, led themselves to the monoleaders because the sharks would get hooked in it, in the corner of their mouths, which is the design of the circle hook and why it’s now popular for—and mandatory in—billfishing tournaments to use, because it can’t gut the fish, or it’s much less likely that it will. So the sharks would get hooked in the corner of their mouth, the 900-pound monofilament; unless the shark slammed back across the line and got it in its mouth, it was more than strong enough to pull him.

TH: They would come up? They would wear themselves out?

TC: Yeah, they wear themselves out. Sometimes they die depending on the species: blacktips die, and hammerheads die, because they need to swim faster. Some sharks, like a nurse shark, could sit on the bottom forever and not be affected by that and probably not even bother fighting it all that much.

TH: Interesting.

TC: So, that was the gear.

TH: And, what was my other question on that? You talked about where you went, average how far, told me about the trips, year-round and then depending on quotas, that’s your fish. Fish trip two to three days, how much the average catch, how much—yeah, did you catch a fish on every hook? Thousand hooks? Thousand fish? (laughs)

TC: Our average catch was, in three days of fishing, probably about 6,000 to 8,000 pounds dressed-weight sharks. It was lucrative, the most lucrative of all the efforts that I put into.
TH: Now, this is a little side-note and you don’t have to elaborate very much on this, but did this affect your family life, being away three, four days at a time and then going right back out to sea?

TC: I missed a lot of Little League games.

TH: Yeah. That was something that you think about?

TC: Yes. The end of this story is of course, rebuilding the Mango with my son and having a lot of time to bond with him, which kinda made up for lost time.

TH: It meant a lot to you. Okay, finally, finally, (laughs) I would like to talk about your fishing, how your fishing has changed over—so then you got into charter fishing. I guess I gotta go back to this again, on charter fishing. Tell me a little bit about charter fishing: is it more friendly to you as a way of life? Is it—?

TC: It’s more civilized. You spend more time with people, less time fighting Mother Nature and dealing with a couple of guys who, you know, you’re around way too much by the time that fishing trip is over. I love that aspect of charter fishing, where I meet new people every day. It’s a challenge to make them feel comfortable, quite often, and it’s never the same. Every day, it has a little something different to offer.

TH: Well, tell me this: what’s a successful fishing trip as a charter captain?

(telephone rings)

TC: Successful fishing trip is when the—

*Pause in recording*

TH: You’re doing very good, Tris. I want you to know this [interview] is harder than fishing.

TC: (gushing playfully) Gosh, Terry, thanks! (laughs)
TH: I’ll give you an “A” so far. So, now you’re a charter boat captain, and what do you fish for and how?

TC: We fish for everything, however we can.

TH: Okay.

TC: You have to be versatile. And definitely, the seasons change and the species that you’re going to target changes along with them. And the people change, and the things that they’re interested in change, so it’s always in a state of flux.

TH: So, a successful trip?

TC: That gets back to that interesting aspect of meeting the different people and trying to get a feel for what it is they want, and that’s a really cool challenge. So, when it comes to what makes a good catch—obviously, in January, December and January when we’re sailfishing, if I can catch some, you know, two or three or four, or sometimes six or eight or ten sailfish, that’s a great day. You know, usually, if you can catch two or three, it’s a great day. It’s such a thrill catching a sailfish. Dolphin season in April and May, same thing: the fish are there, it’s not so hard to catch ’em. Sometimes you don’t catch as many, but the people know. I prep my people when I’m talking to them on the phone. I don’t want to get people out there who are going to be unhappy, and I don’t want any surprises along that line. ’Cause I die when my people—I suffer way more than they do, when they think they’re out there paying all that money and not getting, you know what I mean? (laughs)

TH: They don’t catch fish.

TC: I guarantee I hurt more than they do. So, I try to make sure they know what to expect because of our slower months when we’re just targeting—well, in between the bites on the sailfish, you know. Like right now, February, if the cobia aren’t there, then it’s a tough show. The amberjacks seem to be a good place to go, so you have to be good at catching something. You have to be good at preparing the people so they know what to expect, and you have to be a little bit humble there, because you could lose a charter when you tell the truth about what’s going on and what they can expect to catch, and the next guy they call for the same dates in the same town will say, “Oh, sure! You know, I’ll put you on, we’ll catch this and we’ll catch that.” They might not go back fishing with him, but they’ll go that one time, and I’ll lose it.

TH: Well, when the tape was off, you mentioned that—so, a successful trip is—
TC: Is keeping the people happy.

TH: Smiles on their faces.

TC: Smile on their faces, yeah.

TH: And so they want to come back with you.

TC: No, that’s—yeah. However, you get the hardcore element, and they want to go out there and they want to see fish, so it’s not always easy to do that even when you try as hard as you can, even when you catch a fish. It’s an interesting aspect of the job. But you’re right in that, that’s what we look for. You continue to try and read the people during the course of the day, and do whatever you can to make them happy and make them feel that they’ve had a fun time. The ideal charter customer is somebody’s whose going out there to enjoy the people he’s fishing with and have some fun catching some fish. It’s not four good ol’ boys, you know, from down the street who think they’re going to fill up a cooler full of grouper. (laughs) You can’t please them, no matter what.

TH: So, on the average, I have to ask you this: How far offshore do you go?

TC: The offshore bars are ten or twelve miles offshore; the wrecks are about a fifteen mile run from the inlet. Dolphin fishing—if they move offshore, on occasion, we’ll probably go fifteen to twenty miles out, but that’s very rare.

TH: How do you decide—you already said that—what to fish for, depending on the season, I guess; and you just talked about during what months you fish for what. How long does a fishing trip last? One day. You have three-quarter days and one full days.

TC: I do, in this area—as opposed to South Florida, where a boat can actually pull off two half-day trips in a day, and catch fish for the customers. We pretty much still have to go offshore. So there’s no way I would think that realistically you could go out and do a half day. We run a three-quarter day, which gets in at one o’clock, as opposed to four; cheats the people out of three hours of fishing because it’s the travel time.

TH: Travel time.
TC: It makes no sense whatsoever, but occasionally people will think that they don’t want to spend a full day on the ocean, and it’s a concession that I make for them.

TH: Now, the question’s how much is an average trip’s catch, but you’ve already kinda explained it, because it depends what you’re fishing for. Like, sailfish, if you just have hook ups—I assume you don’t keep the sailfish?

TC: No. We count the illegal releases when the knot from the end of the Bimini Twist, and then attached it where the leader attaches the line, goes through the eye of the hook on the tip the rod, and we fly our flags accordingly there. So, the trophy that—the fish box makes way for the flags on sailfish that you come in with, the flags for your releases. People want to go catch sailfish, they don’t expect to come in with something to eat; although we do catch dolphin in December and January, typically along with the sails, and that makes for a nice day when you have—

TH: Or kingfish.

TC: —half dozen sailfish releases and a dolphin. People are not as ecstatic about catching kingfish. They know the difference in the taste, and kingfish just doesn’t appeal to them as much. That being said, summertime is a kingfish kind of trip for us, and I let my people know that ahead of time.

TH: I like kingfish.

TC: I like kingfish, too. (TH laughs) And Marianne knows how to cook a kingfish just right.

TH: Cool. Okay, finally, would you talk about how fishing has changed over the time in regards to the Oculina Bank? [Since] nineteen eighty-four [1984], several changes have been made, and regulations on the Oculina Bank. I’d like to know if any of these regulations affect your fishing, and if so, how? Pretty much already talked about that; but I guess as a charter boat captain that would be your bottom fishing for snapper [and] grouper, and that’s been taken care of because you can’t catch snapper anywhere.

TC: That’s true. The new grouper regulations and new snapper regulations are both tough for us. I believe the grouper are closed from January 1 to April 1, which is their spawning season. Once again, there’s no doubt in my mind that all these regulations are coming down for a reason, so
I’m not an advocate of just turning everybody loose until there’s no more fish left to catch. It all makes sense. The Oculina Bank would be important to me in my fishing effort—

*Part 1 ends; part 2 begins*

TC: —because it is probably the most prolific fishing grounds in this sphere of area that I would fish on a charter trip. So, to have that available would be one more arrow in my quiver, one probably more of a sure shot of going out and catching somebody a grouper. And getting back to the question—or snapper.

Getting back to the question of what makes a good day, sometimes just having one fish in the box is the difference between someone thinking that they just spent the most miserable day on the ocean and, alternatively, seeing that nice grouper coming out of the box at the end of the day and having it to take home to his wife, or split up with his buddies and still take home for dinner, and feel that it was a successful day. So, yes, it would be nice to be able to fish there.

TH: Okay. The Oculina Bank was officially closed to commercial longlining; did this affect your fishing? Obviously not. The Oculina Bank was designated as an experimental closing area where fishing for and retention of snapper/grouper species are prohibited; snapper/grouper fishing boats are also prohibited from anchoring. Was your fishing impacted by this regulation? You just explained how. It was usually a sure bet you could go there, you know, and I don’t want to be speaking for you, but it was high odds you could come home with a grouper or snapper.

TC: Absolutely. The habitat there is so unique and offers so much more attraction to snapper and grouper that, even if it were being fished on a regular basis, it would supply you a much better chance of catching a bottom fish. And you asked me if there was a name for the fishing that is done when you don’t anchor off it, and I believe that’s referred to as power—we refer to it as power fishing, where you actually can run the boat into the current and stay in one place; which also, as I alluded to before, is easier to do now because of the electronics that we have, where you really know what’s going on.

TH: Okay. But the prohibition of anchoring, has that affected your—

TC: No, no. I think that’s a great thing, and because of the fragileness of that Oculina coral and the fact that anchors just damage whatever structure that’s down there, it makes a lot of sense.

TH: How do you feel about expanding of the area [of exclusion] especially for dragging for shrimp, bottom longlining, trawl and dredging; was your fishing impacted by this regulation?
TC: No. That’s a common sense measure. When I was longlining and they closed the Oculina Bank, for what I was doing, the impact was an inconvenience because it was a place that I could go, but it actually did not impact my effort so much. But I did notice when I was longlining near the Oculina Bank when it was closed was that the rock shrimp boats continued to drag across it for years after Oculina Bank was established and the enforcement was not there. Those guys had a free hand in ripping apart that coral for a long, long time. I’m not there anymore so I can’t tell you, but I wouldn’t be surprised if there’s still some rock shrimp boats that come across there.

TH: Mmm. So, enforcement is an issue?

TC: Yeah. Well, it’s a big ocean. I’m not sure that’s anybody’s fault. I’m not trying to lay blame. I’m just suggesting that it was a difficult situation that was not necessarily resolved by setting up those boundaries.

TH: All right, this next question—we’re wrapping it up here. The designation of marine areas that are closed to fishing is being used more frequently as a fishery management tool. What do you think about the use of closed areas to fishing compared to other types of management regulations: quotas, closed seasons, ITQs?

TC: That’s a—

TH: What if—like, if you were in charge of managing the fishery, what do you think is the most equitable form of fishery management and how, compared to just closing an area?

TC: Two particular things that strike me come to mind with that question. The first one is closing the areas. That’s a good concept, you’re—I can see where it must be tough to make that equitable. I mean, nobody who fishes out of a certain inlet wants to see the area that they use as their fishing grounds to be closed. You don’t want to have to run an extra twenty miles just to get to where the fish are. So I think that there are places, perhaps, where that’s—I mean, if they wanted to close off the front of our inlets so that we couldn’t fish anywhere, that would be a death sentence for my business. And I think that a lot of fisheries see different regulations, including these closed areas, as very threatening to what they do.

When it comes to other types of regulation and the quota system, which has been implemented in both commercial and recreational and sport fishing charter boat realms, that seems to be the most practical way to deal with it. If you can limit boats to X number of fish per person, X number of fish per boat, which has been done with almost every fish that we catch now, and make that work within the parameters of what the fisheries’ resource is and what a sustainable fishery is thought
to be, and still provide everybody with the opportunity to catch fish—and, in my case, make a
living in the charter fishing business—that’s fine. As I’ve said once before, it’s pretty hard to
make regulations and not put them across the board. It’s pretty hard, I’m sure, for fisheries
management to figure out how to regulate the commercial fisheries, because they appear to have
more impact on the fish populations. They don’t necessarily, because it’s been determined that
there’s so many recreational anglers now that their impact, even in smaller numbers, is just as
vast, if not more significant, than what the charter fishing take is, or the commercial fishing.

So, I think that the quota system is a good idea. I think that the recent emphasis and promotion
of an ITQ, based on all my experience of both commercial fishing and charter fishing, is that
you’re taking a resource away from the general public when you create an ITQ. And the
commercial fishing world is full of a lot of one-man operations who go out there and work hard,
make a living, have a unique existence that is historically significant and very special in the
scheme of things in a world where independence is less and less available. The single-handed
fishermen are a treasure to our whole society, and the ITQ system takes that away. It’s been
shown time after time that the individual quotas that are allocated when they implement that
system all end up in the hands of corporate structure, because it downsizes the individual
fisherman’s ability to catch enough fish that—that’s hard to explain, but the quotas end up being
smaller for the individual fishermen, and then they have to sell their allocations so that they buy
more, and it eventually ends up all being bought up by a couple corporations.

So, the ITQs a bad idea. Regular quotas are a great idea. Making it—structuring it so that
people can still make a living is probably the big trick; but it seems to be working for me in the
charter fishing business, and I think that they’re on the right track in that approach.

TH: One last question on the Oculina Bank. Now, I think for the time being, you can still troll
through there and catch bonito, kingfish—

TC: Sailfish, wahoo, tuna.

TH: Does this impact—I mean, troll fishing, does it impact the reef in a negative way? Or does it—?

TC: I don’t think that there are—I haven’t run across anybody who has suggested that that could
be detrimental to the Oculina Bank area, or any out-of-bounds closed area for bottom fishing.
It’s a—I can’t envision any kind of impact that would take place from trolling.

TH: Okay. And finally, finally, it’s the question we’ve been looking for; it’s like the cookie
you’ve been looking for: the last one.
TC: The *Last Mango*?

TH: Think ahead, in the future: What do you think fishing in Fort Pierce will be like in ten years?

TC: For me, as a charter boat captain?

TH: Or in general, any way, yes.

TC: I would be optimistic about that. I think that it’s particularly beneficial for us that the fisheries management people, and the world in general, is much more knowledgeable and aware of the fact that regulation needs to take place. If ITQs come into play, I don’t know how it’s going to work out for the commercial sector; that’s not going to be good. I still have my kingfishing license, and I like the idea of being able to go out there and hand-line kingfish. I hope that in the scheme of things, the National Marine Fisheries Service comes to grips with—comes to its senses and comes to grips with that whole concept and keeps the quotas in place and monitors the fisheries that way. I think the tilefish should be looked at the same way. It’s just a quota system.

I can see where small operations will survive. I think that the kingfish trollers will survive. I think that the tilefish guys could survive, if it’s managed correctly. I think that recreational fishing should continue to be good. I don’t think people can expect to fill their freezers, or fill their coolers and then fill their freezers, every time they go fishing. When things change and regulations like we’re having now come into play, it doesn’t work right away, but people kinda come around and learn to appreciate what they can get out of something and not necessarily expect for it to stay the same. So, it’s very much of a more enlightened community that I see—not just in the fishing world, but just in general these days, with our concerns for natural resources. I think there’s hope. I’m looking forward to good fishing for everybody, days to come.

TH: Uh, I’m supposed to say something. (rifling through papers) Thank you. (laughs)

TC: (laughs) Yeah, it’s good you looked that one up!

TH: Thank you for sharing your fishing history with us.
TC: Ah, man.

*End of interview*