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Michael D. Hogan oral history interview by Terry Lee Howard, April 26, 2010

Michael D. Hogan (Interviewee)
Terry Lee Howard (Interviewer)

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Terry Howard: My name’s Terry Howard. Today is April 26, 2010. I’m at … my home here at St. Lucie Village in Fort Pierce, Florida, conducting an oral history with Mike Hogan for the Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation’s project with Fort Pierce fishermen on the Oculina Bank HAPC [Habitat Area of Particular Concern]. Welcome, Mike. Please state your name, spell your name, your complete name, your place of birth, and date of birth.

Mike Hogan: Michael D. Hogan. M-i-c-h-a-e-l D.—

TH: What’s the “D”?

MH: It’s just an initial is all.
TH: Okay.

MH: Hogan, H-o-g-a-n. Born in Fort Pierce, Florida, 11-6-54 [November 6, 1954].

TH: Okay. When did you move to Fort Pierce? You were born here.

MH: Born here.

TH: Okay. Are you married?

MH: I am.

TH: How old were you when you got married?

MH: Mm, gotta do a little math. Probably twenty-seven.

TH: Okay. Do you have children, and how many?

MH: Yes, two daughters.

TH: How old?

MH: Twenty-eight and twenty-four.

TH: Two daughters. Okay. How much schooling do you have?

MH: College graduate.

TH: From where?
MH: University of Florida.

TH: Cool. Okay. What do you do for a living?

MH: Manufacturer’s representative in the aircraft industry.

TH: Okay, parts?


TH: Electrical components?

MH: Mechanical components.

TH: For example?

MH: Bearings, cable hardware, tubing inducting.

TH: Okay. Cool. Other jobs that you’ve had?

MH: Carpentry—

TH: (laughs) You have to say carpentry.

MH: Labor apprentice, that sort of thing; in high school and at times during college.

TH: But this has been basically the industry you went into right out of college?

MH: Since I got out of college, yeah.

TH: Okay. Have you worked in the fishing industry? Commercial, charter?
MH: No.

TH: Okay.

MH: Well, let me change that a little bit. At one time, I handled a certain lure on the east coast of Florida for about five or six months, trying to help a guy get his company going.

TH: What lure was that?

MH: Called the King Getter.

TH: King Getter.

MH: It was a spoon-type lure with treble hooks on it.

TH: Okay. All right, and did it go?

MH: Yeah, and they’re still available. The fellow that I was working with decided to start selling his product direct instead of through me, and so then I just kind of backed out of it.

TH: Okay. Do you currently own a boat?

MH: Yes.

TH: What kind and length? Can you describe the boat?


TH: A sixteen foot—
MH: Scout.

TH: S-c-o—

MH: S-c-o-u-t.

TH: Okay. With a—

MH: Sixty-five.

TH: Okay, very good. Now, how familiar are you with the Oculina Bank?

MH: I would say very.

TH: Okay. Why was the Oculina designated as—well, first of all, tell me what you know about the Oculina Bank. And then, why do you think it was designated as an area to be protected?

MH: Well, it was designated—the story was it was protected to save the Oculina.

TH: The Oculina coral.

MH: The Oculina coral, mm-hm.

TH: Okay. You’re very familiar with it. You fished it a lot?

MH: I fished it for a lot of years.

TH: Okay. So tell me, you know, can you elaborate on your personal history with the Oculina Bank?
MH: I started fishing it probably in the early eighties [1980s]; primarily deep jigging for grouper and snapper, little bit of cut bait fishing for sea bass and trigger fish, and fished it up until the time of the closure. I probably had—

*Pause in recording*

TH: Okay, the question was—you were talking about jigging on the Oculina Bank.

MH: Yeah, deep jigged there since the early eighties [1980s], primarily snapper, grouper, some sea bass, trigger fish.

TH: Okay. How do you think—what do you think about the closure of the Oculina Bank to anchoring and bottom fishing?

MH: I can understand the justification for anchoring, but not for bottom fishing.

TH: Okay. Can you elaborate?

MH: In this whole story, the thing that has come out is the fact that the trawlers are the ones who destroy the Oculina. It was not people anchoring or fishing, it was the trawlers that came in with the big drag nets. I’ve certainly heard that stated by the Oculina experts at Harbor Branch and public meetings before the [South Atlantic Fishery Management] Council, and I don’t think there was any justification whatsoever to stop anchoring or recreational boats.¹ The reality is, the current runs so much in that area you can’t anchor very often, and the recreational guys very rarely anchored anyway.

TH: They do what kind of fishing?

MH: Drift fishing.

TH: Or power?

MH: Yeah, some of ’em power fish while they’re bottom fishing.

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.
TH: Okay. Has the closure affected your fishing?

MH: Yeah, I’ve almost quit fishing since then.

TH: So this was one of your main—

MH: It was what I enjoyed doing best. My family likes to eat snapper and grouper, and they took that away from us.

TH: Okay. If anchoring and bottom fishing in the Oculina Bank were permitted, would you fish there?

MH: Sure.

TH: Okay. For what, primarily; and how, primarily? You’ve already mentioned that.


TH: Okay. Overall, how has fishing changed since you began fishing in Fort Pierce? This is a wide open question.

MH: Yeah, it really is. When I grew up here, I spent most of my time in the river, and we went through a time, when I was young, of very good river fishing. Then it got worse. A lot of it had to do with all the netting that was going on. Now it seems to have rebounded considerably in the river.

Offshore, I’ve seen the king mackerel and the mackerel fisheries destroyed by drift gill nets and runaround gill nets, and most of that’s come back because those gears were taken out of the fishery. I can’t really comment on the grouper [and] snapper in the Oculina Bank because I haven’t fished it since it was closed. But from the time I started till the time I finished, it seemed to me it was a fairly healthy fishery. I will say that the snapper fishery has got the potential to be better that it ever was. I was on the South Atlantic advisory panel for snapper and grouper when they went up to a twenty-inch limit and was not convinced at the time that that would help, but it
did. And now we’ve got more and bigger snapper here than I can remember in my lifetime, and yet heavier and deeper cuts are being put into place limit-wise and closure-wise.

TH: I’m gonna come back to that. Have you had any experience with law enforcement within or regarding the Oculina Bank?

MH: I’ve tried.

TH: What do you mean you tried?

MH: (laughs) I sat out there one day and watched a bottom long liner in the peak area. At that time there was a gentleman working out of Sebastian for National Marine Fisheries Service. I had his phone number, I called him, I offered to take a picture of my LORAN with his boat in the picture while he was pulling his long line gear, and was told that they weren’t really interested in having something like that: they didn’t have a boat they could come out with. [It was] a little bit of a disappointment.

TH: So the lack of enforcement, if anything, is what you’re—

MH: Well, yeah, and I know we’re gonna talk about enforcement later. On-water enforcement doesn’t work in any fishery. The only enforcement that works is dockside fishery.

TH: Dockside enforcement.

MH: Yep. Check the fish at the boat ramp; check ’em at the commercial house. Anything else is not gonna work because you just catch whoever you happen to see on a given day. But dockside enforcement will work in any fishery.

TH: Good. Okay, now your fishing history, you specifically. Then I’d like to come back to—okay, that other earlier question. What is your earliest memory of fishing and how old were you?

MH: I would say probably four or five years old, trout fishing with my father.

TH: On the Indian River Lagoon?
MH: Yeah. He was a—in addition to his daytime job as a carpenter he was a hook and line commercial trout fisherman, just catching trout nights and whenever he could go.

TH: Now, you say “hook and line,” did he live bait, or use trout touts?

MH: He used MirrOLures with conventional casting gear.

TH: Okay.

MH: And I can remember him picking me up in the morning to go to the fish house with him, and the back of the pickup truck would be full of boxes of trout that he’d caught by rod and reel.

TH: Boxes?

MH: Cardboard boxes of trout.

TH: Okay. Now, your earliest memory of fishing was going with your father. So he taught you to trout fish?

MH: I pretty much just watched him. I was never patient enough to do it the way that he did, but I went with him a lot.

TH: Okay. Now, describe how he caught these fish again.

MH: Well, back in that day, and I don’t know if you’d ever catch one like that today, he had a casting rod with twenty-pound Dacron line, used a swivel, number seven wire and a snap, and would hook a MirrOLure to it. And he was fishing—

TH: A spoon MirrOLure?

MH: No, a regular MirrOLure, which is a little bait fish imitation with three treble hooks on it. That’s a brand name of a plug. He would fish places like behind the old Fort Pierce Hotel, or up
in the canals on the west side of the river, up near where Bud Tillman lives.² I don’t know the names of those streets. But Dad built most of those houses up there off near Torpey Road.

TH: Okay. That’s north of St. Lucie.

MH: Yeah, we would fish those canals after three freezing cold days. Dad would always believe that the trout that had gone in there during the cold water had already eaten all the bait fish that were in the canal in three days, and then they would eat the lures.

TH: He caught a lot of fish?

MH: He did.

TH: So he was—

MH: I can remember a couple of years—it was always cold around Christmas—that we, after about the second or third trip, the fish house would say, “You know, people really aren’t eating much fish during Christmas; they’re eating turkey. We don’t want any more trout.”

TH: So he was one of the biggest trout providers then for—what fish house did he fish for?

MH: You know, it was right there at the North Bridge. I don’t know.

TH: It was probably Steve Lowe’s.³

MH: Probably Steve Lowe. Glen Black, I don’t know if [he] was in business then. I don’t think so.

TH: He came a little later.

² Murray “Bud” Tillman, Jr. was also interviewed for the Oculina Bank Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is O6-00001.
³ Steve Lowe was also interviewed for the Oculina Bank Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is O6-00014.
MH: And I don’t have a feel for how many other guys were doing the same thing. It was just something he did to supplement his income.

TH: Okay. So you started fishing at about what age in Fort Pierce?

MH: At four or five, I started going with him. When I got into junior high and high school, I spent a lot of time wading in the river trout fishing on my own. In junior high school and high school during the summers, I’d spend every day at the old South Bridge fishing during the summer, catching blue runners and Spanish mackerel and getting busted off on kingfish.

TH: At South Bridge?

MH: Yep.

TH: What did you use for bait mostly, and gear?

MH: Spinning rods and spoons. That’s primarily why we couldn’t catch those big kingfish. Every once in a while, somebody’d get a little bigger rod they’d bring out, and we’d put a mullet on there and all of the line would get stripped off of it.

TH: Okay. So you began fishing South Bridge, catwalks?

MH: Yeah. Well, at that time there weren’t really catwalks on the South Bridge. It was the old South Bridge and it had the integral fishing lanes on it.

TH: Right. Okay

MH: We’d stay there and fish for snook during the night. It was really kind of a social deal. There was a guy that walked the bridge every night about every half hour telling everybody how many snook had been caught. It was a pretty good social event.

TH: When did you get your first boat?
MH: My dad had a boat [when I was] growing up, but I had bought my first boat in 1979. It was an eighteen foot SeaCraft.

TH: Okay. And who did you fish with?

MH: Just good friends. Just anybody in the neighborhood I could get to go with me.

TH: Okay. During what months did you fish for what fish? Do you recall?

MH: Snapper and grouper were primarily late winter and spring. We’d chase the sailfish during the wintertime. The cobias—February and September, I guess, would be the months for that. Did a lot of African pompano fishing at the time when those fish were still here and hadn’t been caught in the drift gill nets. Just whatever happened to be here at the time was what we fished for.

TH: Okay. Average fishing trip: how long would it last? That’s a hard question to answer.

MH: About ten or twelve hours. It always started before daylight and ended up, you know, four or five in the afternoon when you get home.

TH: Long days.

MH: Yeah.

TH: How much would you catch on an average trip? I guess it depends on what you’re after.

MH: That’s pretty hard to say. We didn’t keep a lot of some of the kinds of fish. If we had two or three grouper for a trip, we were happy with that. If we were kingfishing, we might catch a couple of twenty or thirty pound fish and keep those, release the rest. We didn’t keep everything we caught.

TH: Mostly trolling for kingfish, I assume; or did you use live bait?
MH: Trolling for kingfish. We started using plugs, trolling with plugs. I was probably one of the first people to start using live bait here, and I really didn’t do that for a long time. I knew the guys up in the Carolinas were doing that, but I didn’t think I wanted to get it started here. I’d seen what had happened down in Jupiter. I think they were live baiting down there, weren’t they, pretty early?

TH: I couldn’t tell you.

MH: Well, I guess my train of thought was the sailfish live baiting thing started down there, and then it made it tough for the guys up here to compete if the live bait guys were fishing, the guys that were trolling the ballyhoo here. For the longest time, I knew that you could catch kingfish on a live bait, I just didn’t do it. Once it got started, that became the predominant way for the recreational guys to catch ’em.

TH: Live baiting?

MH: Mm-hm.

TH: Okay. For how many years have you fished for—well, I guess for everything. Let’s start with snook. All your life?

MH: Yeah. I’m fifty-five now. I probably started catching snook on my own when I was fourteen or fifteen.

TH: Okay, and grouper?


TH: When you started going in the ocean?

MH: When I started going in the ocean.

TH: Was that about 1980?
MH: Yeah.

TH: Grouper and snapper, probably, when you fist stated?

MH: Yeah. When I first started fishing the ocean, we didn’t do much grouper fishing; didn’t know enough about it. About 1980, I started to set about learning to do it.

TH: So when you first stared fishing, I would guess you trolled mostly for—

MH: Yeah. Kingfish, dolphin, whatever we could catch.

TH: Okay. Trout; you started fishing for trout, I guess, early on, probably, and fishing the river?

MH: Right.

TH: Okay. What else do you go fishing for in the Fort Pierce area? Okay, you pretty much—

MH: Well, over the years I also did a lot of freshwater fishing, a lot of bass fishing, fly rod fishing.

TH: Okay. The African pompano; you’re the first one I’ve talked to that—is that different than regular pompano?

MH: Yeah, yeah. Too bad you didn’t ask Sam about that.⁴ He’s caught more than anybody alive, I think. Yeah, the Southeast Wreck in Fort Pierce used to have schools of African pompano.⁵ An African pompano[’s] average size is twenty-eight to forty pounds, something like that. They’re big silver fish with a high back on ’em, and they used to come to that wreck. I had divers tell me there were hundreds of ’em at a time there.

TH: Did the divers shoot ’em?

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⁴ Sam Crutchfield, who was also interviewed for the Oculina Bank Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is O6-00032.
⁵ The Southeast Wreck is another name used by Fort Pierce fishermen to refer to the SS Halsey, a boat sunk by the German submarine U-333 during the Second World War.
MH: Some of ’em did, I think. Charter boats caught a lot of ’em and kept ’em. They’re white meat and good to eat. We never kept very many. I kept one or two to eat over the years. I kept two for world records, and I know I probably released four or five of the world records off that wreck.

TH: World records, can you elaborate?

MH: IGFA [International Game Fish Association] world records.

TH: I know, but how big were they?

MH: Let’s see if I can remember the numbers. Karen’s [his wife] fish was about—it’s hard for me to remember. We had one sixteen pound record, one twenty pound record. I think both of those fish were in the thirties. But I certainly caught some in there that I released that were well into the forty pound range.

TH: Okay. And you’re talking about with the light line, fifteen to twenty pound test line?

MH: Yeah, and even less than that. The day that we caught the world records, we caught the sixteen first, we caught the twenty—we went to catch five records that day because trialing was paying a thousand bucks a record. So then my wife picked up the eight pound outfit and we hooked a fish that we—I chased it around in the boat for forty-five minutes before we saw it was a huge Jack Crevalle. (TH laughs) It might have been a record on eight pound, but we lost that fish. The ladies who we wanted to catch all the records that day were tired. They’d had enough of the sun, so we bagged the rest of the day.

But that was a pretty special fishery. It started going away about the time the drift gill nets were here. There was also one particular charter boat out of Stuart that would go to that wreck every time those fish were there and just cover the dock, turn it silver with African pompano at the end of the day. I don’t think I’ve heard of anybody catching any number of ’em here in fifteen years, twenty years, maybe.

MH: Live bait, spinning or light weight conventional gear. Spanish sardines were probably our favorite bait. We called those low IQs because you could hook a hook in ’em and they would swim down where the other fish were. Most of the other live baits would stay on top or hide around the boat. (both laugh)

TH: Okay.

MH: But yeah, for the Africans, that was probably the favorite bait.

TH: Sardines, how’d you catch the sardines?

MH: Either with a cast net or with gold hooks. Back then there were no Sabiki Rigs. You’d buy little gold hooks and tie strings of those together to catch live bait.

TH: Okay, with the lead on the bottom?

MH: No. We were free lining for the African pompano. We’d just use a mono leader and a hook and—

TH: No, I mean for the bait.

MH: Oh, yeah. To catch the bait, you have a half or three-quarter ounce sinker on the bottom.

TH: And then you’d tie the hooks?

MH: Yeah, you’d have seven or eight little gold hooks on little droppers off the main line, and you’d drop ’em down into the schools of fish that hopefully you mark on the recorder or you’ve seen flipping on top, and catch the bait that way.

TH: All right. Average trip, how many years have you fished, all right. Are you still fishing?

MH: Very rarely.
TH: Okay. How often do you go offshore fishing, when you fish?

MH: I’ve been offshore twice in the last year. And to give you an idea: when I was fishing a lot and able to do the kind of fishing I wanted, I was probably fishing eighty days a year.

TH: Wow. That was quite often.

MH: There were two days on a weekend, plus whenever you could sneak off work.

TH: I remember you one time, I think—anyway, okay. Interesting. When you were really hard at it, you were going at the Oculina Bank. That was your—

MH: We were there almost every trip; you know, if the sailfish were biting, we’d fish sailfish. But if we ended up in the area, we would go there at the end of the day and try to catch a grouper or snapper to take home for dinner.

TH: Okay. That was at least twice a week, if possible?

MH: Yeah, yeah.

TH: Did you take your daughters fishing a lot?

MH: Oh, yeah.

TH: And your wife? She likes to fish?

MH: Yeah, the whole family.

TH: Were there some months where you fished more frequently?

MH: Yeah, especially during the late winter and early spring when more of the fish were on the Oculina Bank; that was when we would concentrate our effort there.
TH: Okay. Are there any months when you rarely or never went fishing?

MH: Probably not.

TH: Sounds like it. (MH laughs) On the average, how far offshore would you go?

MH: I would guess—as far as getting straight off a beach somewhere, maybe fifteen or twenty miles. But it’s not uncommon to run way north or way south and be that far offshore. When we fish the Oculina Bank, a lot of times the LORAN would say it’s twenty-six, twenty-seven miles home, if you end up at the north part of it.

TH: That’s twenty-seven miles to the inlet.

MH: Right.

TH: Yeah. Okay. It might be fifteen miles offshore, but way north of the inlet.

MH: Right.

TH: Who do you fish with, who owns the boat. Now, I guess you fish with your own family, mostly.

MH: Yeah.

TH: Friends, fishing clubs?

MH: Family and friends, that’s it anymore.

TH: Okay. Where do you go for fish now when you do go offshore?
MH: If we go offshore now, we’ll go catch a couple of kingfish. If it’s sailfish season, we’ll do that. If it—yeah, the dolphin fishing is so much worse than it used to be before. I don’t spend much time doing that.

TH: Do you attribute that to anything?

MH: Yeah. My theory on that is if we’ve had really bad weather and we get a good day, the dolphin fishing can be okay. That’s because the fish that have started in the Keys have been able to run the gauntlet all the way up from Miami and [Fort] Lauderdale and Palm Beach without those boats hammering ’em on the way up.

TH: Okay. You think the boats south of here are fishing so hard—

MH: Yeah.

TH: And they follow the edge of the Gulf Stream, the dolphin?

MH: Primarily, yeah. Mm-hm.

TH: Interesting.

MH: You know, another part of that, Terry, we have never have had as good dolphin fishing here as they have in [Cape] Canaveral. My theory on that is the fish that we see come up, they run the gauntlet from Miami. But I think there’s another body of fish that come around the Bahama Bank, and once they get up there around Walker’s [Cay] and come around Matanilla [Shoal], they start working their way back to the coast here and they come in somewhere between here and Canaveral.

TH: That’s interesting, very interesting. How do you decide where to fish when you leave the inlet? This is something that everybody kind of—

MH: Generally, when I leave the inlet, I know where I’m gonna go, because I’ve talked to—if I haven’t been out in a boat for a while, I’ve talked to the guys I know [who] can tell me what’s been going on; or I’ve read the various fishing reports on the Internet; or I know, based on the time of year, what I’ve done before and what fish I’ve caught. It’s all pretty well set by the time I leave the inlet.
TH: What on the Internet?

MH: Well, White’s Tackle has a fishing report on there that’s up almost every day. I trust what those guys say.

TH: Okay. Interesting.

MH: The *Florida Sportsman* [Fishing] *Forum*. I don’t—there’s a lot of guys that just want to be fisherman there that aren’t really. But between the guys at White’s Tackle and—

TH: The friends that you know?

MH: —a couple of my other buddies, I can generally get a feel for that.

TH: Charter captains or just recreational?

MH: Used to be, but not so much anymore. I’m out of the loop with the charter guys. I know Glenn Cameron; but the rest of ’em that are here, I don’t know ’em that well.⁶ I don’t—haven’t heard of great catches.

TH: We’ve already talked about during what months of the year do you fish for what. You already went down that, didn’t you, pretty much?

MH: Mm-hm.

TH: How long does a fishing trip last? We covered that. You fish hard, ’cause you fish ten hour days.

MH: Oh, yeah, yeah.

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⁶ Glenn Cameron was also interviewed for the Oculina Bank Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is O6-00006.
TH: How much do you catch on an average trip? It depends on what you’re fishing for.

MH: Mm-hm.

TH: Okay. Now I’d like to talk about how your fishing has changed over time in regards to the Oculina Bank. This is a little repetitive, but bear with me here, please. Since 1984, several changes have been made in the regulation of the Oculina Bank. I’d like to know if any of these regulations affected your fishing; if so, how? To start with, the Oculina [Bank] was initially closed to trawling, dredging, and bottom longlining in 1984. Did that affect your fishing?

MH: Well, it did from the standpoint that there was no enforcement and people didn’t quit doing it.

TH: You still saw trawlers out there? You did see long liners?

MH: Well, yeah. But I think, if I remember what I’ve heard from the guys at Harbor Branch, they’ve seen a lot more trawler damage, or they’ve seen a lot of it since this came into effect.

TH: In 1984?

MH: Yeah. I think I heard one of the guys from Harbor Brach say that there’s more trawler damage now than there was when they closed it.

TH: Hmm. This is the first—this is interesting, very interesting. Okay, but did it affect your fishing there?

MH: Well, just from the standpoint that when they destroyed the Oculina, it probably didn’t hold as many fish and we didn’t catch as many fish.

TH: Okay.

MH: That’s the way that it affected us: there weren’t as many fish available to us.

TH: Then, in 1994—
MH: One last thing, Terry—

TH: Go ahead.

MH: Let me say that when the Fort Pierce Sportfishing Club put the [USS] *Muliphen* down, we’ve had trawl nets on that thing two or three times since then. So, those trawlers aren’t just staying inside those peaks. It just would defy logic that they’d be staying on the outside of that well-defined boundary, when they can’t even find a ship the size of the *Muliphen* and stay away from it.

TH: The *Muliphen* is a—how long is the *Muliphen*?

MH: I think it’s 460 foot.

TH: That’s a ship that the Sportfishing Club sank to—

MH: As an artificial reef.

TH: Okay, very good. Nineteen ninety-four, the Oculina Bank was designated as an experimental closed area where fishing for and retention of snapper grouper species was prohibited. Snapper grouper fishing boats were also prohibited from anchoring. Was your fishing impacted by this regulation in 1994?

MH: Yes. Couldn’t fish there anymore.

TH: Okay. That was one of one of your primary targets when you left the inlet?

MH: Yeah.

TH: In 1996, all anchoring was prohibited within the Oculina Bank. Did this impact your fishing, and if so, how?
MH: No, because I wasn’t allowed to fish there. (TH laughs) So it wouldn’t matter; it wasn’t a place where I was going to anchor and go swimming, and I thought the anchoring was prohibited before that.

TH: Yeah, it was, but this was all anchoring. (MH laughs) And they also expanded the area, too. They expanded the Oculina Bank, the area of the Oculina Bank. It went further north and a little bit east, I think.

MH: It might have gone a little bit east, too. (papers rustling)

TH: There’s the new area (indicates on map), a little east, and when you first—

MH: Well, actually, they never moved it all the way up here.


MH: Just for dragging, maybe. Yeah.

TH: And I think maybe for anchoring.

MH: Yeah.

TH: In 1996, trawling for rock shrimp was prohibited in the area east and north. Excuse me, here’s where it goes (indicates on map) in 1996, the designated Oculina Bank. And in 1998, this area was incorporated into the Oculina HAPC. Fishing with a bottom long line trawl or dredge was prohibited in this expanded area, as was anchoring of any vessel. Was your fishing impacted by this regulation? How?

MH: No. I was already out of the fishery, and I wasn’t gonna run that far north, anyway.

TH: Okay, cool. 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 such as quotas, closed seasons, et cetera?
MH: I completely disagree with the concept of Marine Protected Areas [MPAs]. Enforcement will forever be a problem. The only type [of] fishery management that I believe will work is dockside, and that can be at boat ramps, fish houses, guys—you check boats when they come in the inlet if you’re worried you’re not getting everybody ’cause guys are docking at their house and stuff. But as soon as you designate something a no fish area, there’s a certain percentage of fisherman that are gonna say to themselves, “Man, that’s gotta be a great place to fish.” So, all of a sudden, that’s where they go, realizing that the enforcement’s gonna be slim, which causes the enforcement people to spend a bunch more money on special boats like they’ve got here that don’t go out very often. I just think it’s a terrible management tool, and I think it’s being pushed on the Councils by some of the wrong people, whose objectives are other than fisheries.

TH: Such as?

MH: I’ll leave it at that. I don’t really want to say much more than that about it.

TH: So, if the—you’re against, totally against, protected areas. What do you think—’cause if you’re checking boats at the inlet or at dockside, you don’t know where the fish were caught.

MH: It shouldn’t matter.

TH: So, elaborate. What regulations—

MH: If you got a bag limit of anything, for grouper and snapper, if you check the boat and there’s more than there can be in the bag limit, then you’ve got a violation.

TH: Okay. So, bag limits or trip limits.

MH: Right. We got rules now that say you can’t claim grouper and snapper before you get back to shore. So, it’s not like a guy can legally have a bunch of fillets on his boat. So, I mean, everything is in place for dockside enforcement without taking big chunks of the ocean out of people’s available fishing area.

TH: Okay. How ’bout protected areas from dragging or longlining?
MH: Well, that’s about the only way to protect habitat. As far as the longlining goes, you can do the same—

*Pause in recording*

MH: Okay, you asked me about using protected areas for bottom longlines and dragging. If the idea is to protect habitat, I can see that that might work. It will work if you keep the boats out of there, but only if they have GPS type devices that are continually monitored. But as far as fisheries go—you know, a bottom longline guy, you can put trip limits on him like everybody else. But if you want to keep him out of a particular area, then that—maybe real estate closure may be the only way to do it. But fisheries can be managed from a bag limit standpoint, or trip limit standpoint.

TH: Do you see that the longline commercial boats are doing the damage that the draggers are doing?

MH: You know, that was the first time I’d ever seen a commercial longline boat out there and working, so I don’t know. I don’t dive in that area. I can imagine they get hung up in the coral, but certainly not to the extent that a big diesel boat dragging shrimp nets or scallop nets would.

TH: Okay. All right, so let’s go back to your—if you can expand on again on your idea of the fairest, most equitable way to manage the fisheries in the oceans off the southeast coast of Florida.

MH: Size limits, bag limits, and trip limits that are shore-side enforceable.

TH: Okay.

MH: I think anything else can’t be enforced.

TH: How ’bout closed seasons?

MH: If they’re biologically justified, that’s okay, and in some instances they probably are. But again, that can be handled with dockside enforcement. You know, if there’s no grouper allowed to be caught and you find one on a boat, you got a violation. It’s certainly a whole lot cheaper to let a guy sit at the boat ramp for a day than to give him a $100,000 boat and tell him to run around and check people.
TH: Okay. So you think closed seasons—you say, if it’s scientifically [justified], is that what I heard you say?

MH: If it’s scientifically justified; and I think in a lot of instances, the closures we’ve had now aren’t.

TH: How are they justified, if they’re not scientifically justified? What’s your thinking, or your opinion?

MH: Politics in the Councils.

TH: Politically, why is it?

MH: Well, for instance, if we talk about red snapper, until there are fish excluder devices on shrimp nets that keep the kill of juvenile red snapper to a much lower level than it is today, we’ll never reach the potential we could have for a red snapper fishery. And the commercial shrimp industry is a very big industry, and the Council’s tread on them very lightly since the turtle excluder days.

TH: Okay. And scallop, same thing?

MH: I don’t know how much scallop fishery there is now anymore. The last time I drove by the Cape, it didn’t look like there was much. I don’t think that the—my guess would be the scallop boats off the coast here in the deep water aren’t doing the same amount of damage as the shrimp boats are in the gulf that are trawling that real shallow water. I can remember being in Biloxi for the national Southern Kingfish Tournament looking out the window of the hotel seeing shrimp boats within 100 yards of the hotel.

TH: Shallow.

MH: Mm-hm.

TH: Okay. How far out do the draggers go for scallops out here?
MH: I don’t know for sure. I’ve seen ’em anchored from 160 foot—well, even shallower than that sometimes, if the current’s way in. I’ve seen ’em anchor during the days as they clean their nets and sleep and stuff. I don’t know where they drag.

TH: Okay. All right, thinking ahead to the future, what do you think fishing in Fort Pierce will be like in ten years?

MH: I would say there’s a pretty good chance that our river fisheries are gonna be pretty good, assuming that we can get a handle on the runoff and the Okeechobee Waterway problem with all the freshwater discharge. Offshore fisheries will probably remain good for kingfish and Spanish mackerel. Sailfish have been pretty good for quite a while. Snapper and grouper—you know, they’ll probably be okay, but they’re just not in areas that I want to fish for ’em. But I will say that the fisheries have decreased in the last twenty years, despite all the increases in bag limits.

TH: The fish have increased? Say that—repeat that again, and elaborate.

MH: I would say some of the fisheries have decreased, even though we’ve had much stricter bag limits.

TH: Okay. Which fisheries?

MH: Which means to me that those type regulate—that those regulations aren’t really working. Dolphin is one instance.

TH: Smaller bag limits?

MH: Well, when it was at its best, there were none. Right now, it wouldn’t—I wouldn’t consider it even worthwhile most days to even go try to go catch dolphin.

TH: Okay. So what’s the trip limit for dolphin for recreational right now?

MH: I’m not sure.
TH: I’m not either.

MH: You know, whenever I think about fishing, I realize I’ve gotta go download the latest chart of what you can keep and what you can’t keep. (TH laughs) And that’s oftentimes just enough motivation to say, “Shoot, I’ll go do something else.”

TH: ’Cause when you started, you could catch as much—

MH: Yeah, or it was simple: you could have two of these. Now, it’s gotta be—you can have two of these if they’re between this length and that limit.

TH: It’s way more complicated.

MH: Yeah, and I think a lot of that’s by design. I think that’s certainly one way you can get fisherman off the water, if you make enough regulations and make ’em complicated enough that a guy figures it’s not worthwhile.

TH: So you think a lot of the regulations are driving people out of fishing?

MH: No doubt.

TH: Okay, excellent. Anything else you’d like to share?

MH: (laughs) No. That’s plenty.

TH: Okay. With that, I thank you very much, Mike Hogan, and it’s been a pleasure. I’m gonna shut this off now.

*End of interview*