

OREGON FISHERMEN PROFILED

The men behind the gear in the nearly \$70 million Oregon fishing industry are caught in a study by Oregon State University (OSU) as part of the NOAA Sea Grant Program.

Who are they? Frederick J. Smith, Extension Specialist in Marine Economics, writes: "The typical Oregon fisherman is clearly not the old, weatherbeaten, long-time waterfront dweller that many imagine him to be. If the typical fisherman of 1968 and 1969 could be assembled from the nearly 6,000 fishermen he represents, he would be 41 years old, live about 45 miles from the coast, have a 51% ownership in a vessel for less than three years, earn 66% of his income from fishing and would have fished for less than six years."

Mr. Smith emphasizes the importance of knowing these men: "An appreciation of these characteristics will contribute to more relevant, effective and efficient research and educational efforts directed towards Oregon's fishing industry."

Data Sources

The researchers used data from the files of the Fish Commission of Oregon and from surveys conducted in 1970 by OSU Marine Advisory Program.

The Commission issues commercial fishing licenses to persons who catch or help to catch food fish for commercial purposes in Oregon waters; to those who land food fish for commercial purposes; and to persons who operate (or assist) commercial fishing vessel or gear. Also, the Commission

licenses every commercial fishing vessel. Name, age, mailing address, and numbers are on these licenses.

Number of Fishermen

In 1968, the Commission issued 5,923 commercial licenses; in 1969, 5,663. During 1968 and 1969, 8,085 different persons held Oregon commercial fishing licenses. Up to 53% of these license holders are crew, not captains. Nearly all licensees are fishermen because there are very few vessels with crew members who do not handle fish or gear.

Average Age Is 41

Licensed fishermen are relatively young. Nearly 12% were college age (17 to 21). There were more 20-year-olds than any other single age; many in 30 to 36 group; more than half in 42 to 50 range. The average age was 41, "and there is no reason to believe that this is rising." Nearly 45% of all licensees were under 41, and nearly 65% under 50.

21% Non-Residents

All licensees do not live on Oregon coast or in state. Over 21% were non-residents. Resident license holders lived an average 45 miles from Pacific. Nearly as many commercial fishermen lived inland as in major ports. The majority of non-residents lived in California or Washington.

Many fishermen lived inland during most of year and on coast during fishing season.

Do They Own Vessels?

More than half the licensees obtained a vessel license; over 95% of licensed vessels were licensed by persons who also held fishing licenses. Absentee vessel ownership is minor. About 3% of vessel license holders licensed more than one vessel in 1968 and 1969. The person who licensed the vessel may have been running it under lease or share arrangement. The true owner's name, often the mortgager's, may never have appeared in records.

The number of owners-operators probably was a little under 90% of 3,000 vessel licenses issued--but over 50% of all commercially licensed fishermen. "This is a significantly large percentage compared to other states," writes Mr. Smith.

Vessel Owners Average 45

Of all 44-year-old fishing licensees, 75% also held vessel licenses. Of all 26- or 67-year-old fishing license holders, only 25% also held vessel licenses.

During 1968 and 1969, the average age of all vessel licensees was 45. This was a little above the average age of 41 for all fishing licensees. Of all vessels, 52% were licensed by persons 45 or younger; 66% of vessels by those 50 or younger. Vessels were licensed by 16-, 17-, and 18-year-olds as well as 71-, 72-, and 73-year-olds.

Where Owners Live

Of all vessel licensees, 1,000 lived on the coast and over 700 in the Willamette

Valley. The average distance was 34 miles, although some lived up to 200 miles from Pacific. Resident fishing licensees lived an average 45 miles from coast. "In general, the geographic distribution of vessel license holders is surprisingly close to that of all commercial fishing licenses."

The Part-Timers

A commercial fisherman is a part-timer if he holds a second job while fishing or fishes one year and lays off the next. In 1970, nearly 38% of Oregon licensed fishermen received less than half their annual income from fishing; 46% received all from fishing.

Nearly 43% of licensees had fished 5 or fewer years. The fishing industry sees many persons enter one year and drop out the next.

In 1968, of 5,923 persons who obtained licenses, only 3,501 renewed their licenses. They were joined by 2,162 new licensees in 1969. The turnover for 1968 and 1969 was over 25%.

Vessel license holders change vessels at a faster rate. In 1968, of 3,048 licenses issued, 68% renewed with same vessel or vessels; 32% either changed vessels, did not renew, or were new licensees.

"In general," states Mr. Smith, "there are many part-time fishermen in Oregon and even the full-time fishermen change vessels frequently."