

Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
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Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety

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Good morning ladies and gentlemen. I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my thoughts with you on this very important subject: Fishing Vessel Safety.

By way of introduction, as noted, I am the Executive Director of Shore Support, Inc., which is a non-profit organization that has been working in the interest of commercial fishermen in our great Port of New Bedford, MA for the last ten years. I am also the wife of Captain Ronnie Shrader, a scallop boat captain. I am sure that it is easy for you to understand why these issues would be important to me, on both a professional and personal level.

Shore Support has a committee within our corporation called the Fishermen's Emergency Relief Fund which was started after the tragic loss of F/V Northern Edge. Through this fund we help fishermen in need, especially in the circumstances of a tragedy, or loss of life at sea. Recently, I have spent some of each day of the last four months assisting the family members of the F/V Lady of Grace, lost at sea on January 26, 2007, with four of our fishermen aboard; and also the F/V Lady Luck out of Newburyport. The results of the power of the sea are a reality to me.

First, I would like to address all of you from the perspective of a fishermen's wife, because, primarily, that is who I am. I want you to realize that I, and other women like me, know that there is only so much that we can do to keep our men safe at sea. The job itself is one in which my husband and I know each time we embrace each other for that last hug when we say goodbye, it could be the **VERY** last hug. There are some things about industrial fishing that they as fishermen, and we as their wives, know are matters of nature and man that we cannot impact, but we have seen some things that help, and I have outlined a few of those items for you here.

- **Safety Training**—Shore Support is currently in the process of wrapping up a study on the economic impacts of Amendment 13 on our groundfish fleet. We are partners in the study with Professor Daniel Georgianna of University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth's School for Marine Science and Technologies. During the survey process we spoke with the crewmembers of 94% of the groundfish boats with Multi-species licenses in our port. Easily, **90%** of the men we spoke with had taken the FREE safety classes given in New Bedford, which were sponsored jointly by NMFS, Massachusetts Department of Employment and Training, the US Coast Guard, and the City of New Bedford. Many of our

men also took the “Conductors” course, allowing them to teach new crewmembers, and review on a monthly basis, as required by law, what their crew has learned. This has had a huge impact, not just on practices of our men, but their **prospective of safety at sea**. When I had surveyed boats in an earlier study, just 1 ½ years before, when I asked where survival suits were, the men showed me the forepeak, or they were down in the engine room. Now they are either in the wheelhouse, mudroom, or bunkroom. None a perfect situation because we never know where/what will happen, but they are much more conscious of what to do when emergency arises. Many crews go over the material on a monthly basis, just as a general practice. Previously, suits and drills had been neglected, and one of the facts found in the classes was that many of our fishermen had not just grown older, but larger!! Many suits have been replaced for new and well fitting suits that will be easier to work with, and a correct fit to ensure the garment works to the best of its ability. Fishermen told me of learning about electrical fires, and how another spoke about the security he felt about their safety equipment now, because they actually used it, not just spoke of it. Recently, the Mass. Fishermens’ Partnership did a follow-up course, including stability of the vessel and some very important first aid information. **In short, please help us to keep funding going for programs like this in all of our ports.** Fishermen **willingly** give of their time and energy when you make information like this available.

- **Voluntary Dockside Inspections by Coast Guard Safety Officer---**This is another **voluntary** program that our fishermen feel is invaluable. Kevin Coyle, New Bedford’s Safety Officer, offers inspections of vessels for proper EPIRB, life raft, and survival suit placement. Again, a **voluntary** program that we can only hope continues to be funded, but that fishermen make use of repeatedly. Kevin Coyle is looked at as a huge asset to our fleet in our port. Again, it has been proven that funding to make this type of information available to fishermen is essential, with a long lasting benefit.
- **Stability Inspection of vessels 50 to 79 feet---**I am very much in favor of including smaller vessels in the **mandatory** stability tests. This is especially important with so many of our smaller boats venturing further and further offshore to make their Days At Sea as profitable as possible, modifying their vessels as best they can. There are small draggers hauling back 10’ dredges, trying to take advantage of the General Category scallop permits, again trying to supplement their incomes any way they can. The variables in the different designs of these boats makes mandatory stability inspection by length the only viable way to include this growing number of boats, and the versatility they now require..
- **Certification/Licensing of Captain & Mates---**I do not feel that licensing of **EXISTING** Captains and Mates will be a positive step. In a previous study with Dr. Georgianna of SMAST, Economic Effects of Days on the Fleet of New Bedford,(2003) we showed that the medium age for a scalloper was 40 with 19 years experience, and 46 years old for a draggerman with an average of 23 years at sea. My husband, just for example, has been a Captain for 19 years. We found that few men had entered the industry in the last few years, due to regulations, fish prices, etc. So we are left with a very experienced rank and file. It is unfair that after being Captains in their companies for a number years, who should not endure the expense of time and money to prove they are a capable

captain. I also question how this transition would be made. I would think that it would only be fair to “grandfather” men with a certain level of experience, due to the fact that they have displayed their seamanship by their success over the years. **I believe that there is a commercial interest in making this requirement pass; businesses that are positioned, and marketed, ready to “help”.** If licensing is made a requirement perhaps it should be NOAA and the Coast Guard who gives this education, free of charge since they have been so effective in working with fishermen (as in the Safety Classes), and develop an abbreviated qualification standard for fishermen already working in their jobs. My last, and most extreme concern with this portion of the safety bill, is that if Certification is written as part of this bill, that I would hope that the fishermen and Captains on the boats do not become responsible for accident and liability on the vessels. As semi-self employed men, fishermen are accepting the cost of huge fuel bills, shared costs of observer programs, etc. With the fleet ownership that is being created by the natural consolidation of our vessels as a result of our regulatory system, Captains have less and less authority over their vessels. Multi-vessel owners have a great deal of input in the decisions of the Captains. Though the Captain is the only one who directly makes decisions of life and death level while at sea, often whether to stay or go, or to return early from a trip, is one made by the universal and constant communication now possible between owners and captains. Often, cooperation with the owner in the situation could mean keeping or losing your job. With so fewer Captains positions available everyday, and a family to support, there is a direct loss of power. **Remember, the captain of the Oil Barge Valdez was licensed; it didn’t seem to make a difference. It’s a matter of seamanship, and dedication that has, to date, been passed down from generation to generation. Every fisherman leaves the dock with getting home safely his primary goal. That need not be taught.**

In closing, I would like to express my eternal gratitude to the Coast Guard. In our most recent crisis, they and the State Police divers, tried again and again to bring our fishermen home. They took the time to sit, eye to eye, with families suffering devastating loss of their loved ones, treating them with respect and compassion I have never witnessed before. They are truly officers, and gentlemen.

Thank you for again for this opportunity.