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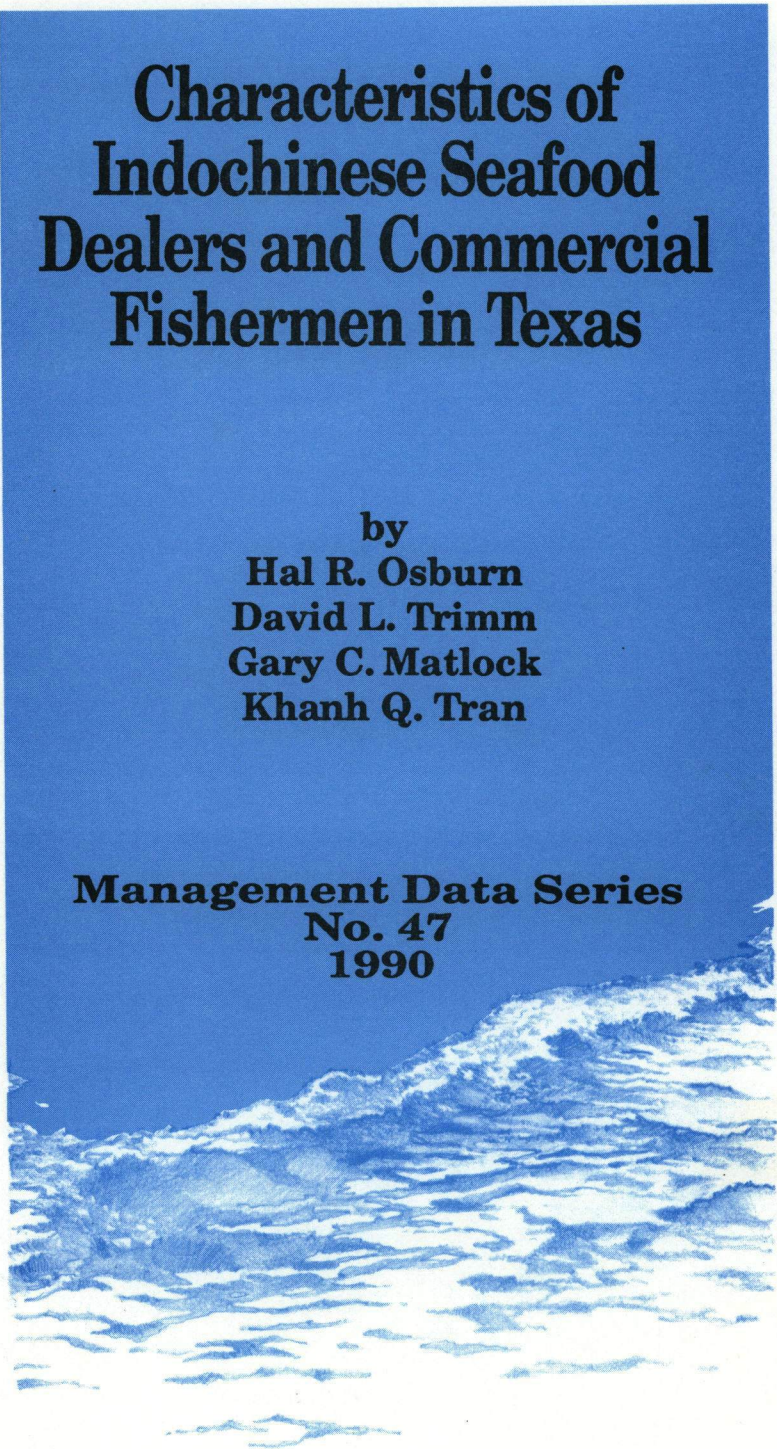
Characteristics of Indochinese Seafood Dealers and Commercial Fishermen in Texas

by
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Management Data Series
No. 47
1990



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ABSTRACT

Indochinese seafood dealers and commercial fishermen in Texas were interviewed in the summer of 1985 to determine major characteristics of their business and fishing activities. They comprised less than 9% of all licensed seafood dealers and less than 15% of all licensed commercial fishermen in Texas coastal counties. The majority of Indochinese seafood dealers (78%) and commercial fishermen (57%) were located adjacent to the Galveston Bay system.

The Indochinese impact on the Texas commercial fisheries was greatest in the shrimping industry. Networking among the dealers, the fishermen and their families may increase the ability of Indochinese to compete in the shrimping industry. Noncompliance by Indochinese with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department reporting requirements contributes to the difficulties in monitoring Texas commercial fisheries. The precedent of serious conflicts between Indochinese and non-Indochinese fishermen, and the potential for more, dictates the need for better communication, education and understanding among the ethnic groups involved in the commercial fisheries of Texas.

INTRODUCTION

In 1975 the U.S. government began relocating Indochinese refugees to the Texas coast (Spruce 1985). By 1980 approximately 25,000 Indochinese (principally Vietnamese, Cambodians and Laotians) were living in Texas with nearly 14,300 located in coastal counties (U.S. Department of Commerce 1983). Many of these Indochinese became involved in the commercial fishing industry, particularly shrimping (Johnson and Libecap 1982). The shrimping industry, however, was already overcrowded and economically depressed (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department 1987). The number of commercial shrimp boat licenses increased to a record high level (nearly 13,000) in 1984, reflecting a 100% increase since 1964. A Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (1987) report notes that "since total production is not increasing significantly, the proportionate share of the catch per boat is decreasing, resulting in more effort at higher costs for fewer shrimp." At the same time, language and cultural differences resulted in poor communication between Indochinese and non-Indochinese fishermen (Haines 1982, Orbach 1982, Spruce 1985). Fishery-related conflicts resulted and led to acts of violence including the self-defense killing of a non-Indochinese by an Indochinese in 1979. Physical hostilities, including boat-burnings and residential fire-bombing, between the ethnic groups continued until at least 1981. In his assessment of the status of the refugee situation on the central Texas coast in early 1985, Spruce (1985) found the potential still existed for severe conflicts with "many communities...near a refugee saturation point sociologically."

Howell (1982) points out that the study of refugee adjustment is relatively young with little definitive scientific analyses conducted. Conflicts with and resentment toward Indochinese refugee fishermen, similar to those in Texas, have been noted in fishing communities in California (Orbach 1983). As in Texas, Indochinese refugees entered fisheries already overcrowded and heavily restricted, thus contributing to the tensions that developed between the refugees and the local fishermen.

Despite their problems with other local fishermen, these California Indochinese were generally successful in regards to politics and administrative matters (Orbach and Bechwith 1982). Fishery regulatory decisions made by the county Fish and Game Commission were influenced by an awareness of the ethnographic context of these refugees. Such information may also serve to dispell myths about the fishing habits of these new entrants, and thus, may lead to a reduction in fear of what their entrance into the fishery will mean to the local community.

The current study was designed to increase the information base on the Indochinese seafood dealers and commercial fishermen in Texas. This information will increase the effectiveness of fishery management decision-making by better defining the characteristics of a commercial constituency that impacts the fishery resources and the enforcement of regulations designed to conserve those resources.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Seafood dealers and commercial fishermen with Indochinese surnames living in Texas coastal counties (Figure 1) were identified from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) 1985 fiscal year (September-August) license lists. Names and addresses on the license list were used to locate Indochinese seafood dealers and commercial fishermen at their home, place of business or boat-docking facility. From June to August 1985, dealers and fishermen were interviewed in their native language (when possible) by a TPWD employee of Indochinese descent. Eleven of the 16 licensed Indochinese wholesale dealers in Texas coastal counties were interviewed (Table 1). Four of these wholesale dealers were also retail dealers. Seven of the 66 licensed Indochinese retail dealers were interviewed. Four of the 66 dealers refused to be interviewed. Forty-two of the 1378 licensed Indochinese commercial fishermen were interviewed; 11 of the 1378 refused to be interviewed. Each fisherman interview, however, generally represented the consensus of a group of up to five other Indochinese fishermen who were working together at the time of the interview; only one set of answers was recorded for each interviewed group.

Since dealers and fishermen were sought randomly, those who were interviewed were assumed to have the same mean and range of responses as would those who were not interviewed. The degree of non-availability bias in the interview process was unknown. Considerable prompting was often necessary to overcome dealer and fisherman reluctance to being interviewed. Interview questions for dealers (Table 2) and fishermen (Table 3) were designed to measure the extent of their involvement in the fisheries, their normal fishery-related practices and major fishery-related problems and plans. Recorded answers were tabulated and summarized.

RESULTS

Indochinese comprised less than 9% of all licensed seafood dealers and less than 15% of all licensed commercial fishermen in Texas coastal counties in 1985 (Table 1). Nearly all Indochinese fishermen had not obtained U.S. citizenship or had not been a Texas resident for at least 6 months, since 93% possessed a non-resident commercial fishing license. Interviewed Indochinese seafood dealers generally (61%) possessed a wholesale dealer license while all interviewed Indochinese commercial fishermen had shrimping-related licenses (Tables 2 and 3). Most (55%) interviews were conducted in the Houston-Galveston area.

Indochinese in Texas coastal fisheries were geographically concentrated on the upper Texas coast. The majority of Indochinese seafood dealers (78%) and commercial fishermen (57%) were located adjacent to the Galveston Bay system. The Aransas Bay, Matagorda Bay and Sabine Lake systems also had sizeable contingents (30, 21 and 14%, respectively) of Indochinese commercial fishermen. No Indochinese dealers or fishermen were located south of Nueces county.

Indochinese have only recently emerged as seafood dealers. Interviewed dealers had been in their present business an average of 2 years despite an

average length of residency in the United States of 8 years (Table 2). Indochinese commercial fishermen (40%) were more likely than dealers (17%) to have been in a fishery-related business before coming to the United States, and their average length of residency was shorter (6 years)(Table 3).

Seafood business operations by Indochinese were generally limited in scope. Most (83%) dealers had not expanded their business beyond one location while most (90%) fishermen owned only one fishing vessel with an average length of 15 m; 33% of the dealers also owned at least one fishing vessel. Each dealer normally employed 5-6 persons, 33% of which were family members. Commercial fishermen were normally assisted by 2-3 persons of which 40% were family members (Tables 2 and 3).

Most (83%) Indochinese seafood dealers handled a variety of seafood products; 11% sold only shrimp and 6% sold only crabs (Table 2). Seafood products bought and sold did not vary among seasons for the majority (56%) of dealers.

Indochinese fishermen exerted most of their fishing effort toward shrimp and the least of their effort toward finfish (Table 3). All interviewed fishermen sought shrimp with trawls; three fishermen also trapped for crabs and five fishermen also dredged for oysters. None specifically sought finfish. In fact, 86% of the fishermen reported they discarded all finfish species when caught.

Indochinese fishermen generally (76%) fished close to their home port and had a moderate to heavy work schedule (Table 3). All (7) of the Gulf-only fishermen but only three of the bay fishermen indicated they trawled anywhere they thought shrimp were available. The work schedule of the fishermen, particularly the Gulf shrimpers, was dependent on the weather and the availability of their preferred catch. Shrimpers in the bays generally worked 7 to 8 hours a day, 5 to 7 days a week.

The Indochinese displayed a structured marketing network. All retail-only dealers bought exclusively from wholesale dealers and nearly all (82%) wholesale dealers bought only from commercial fishermen. In addition, the majority (56%) of dealers always bought from the same sources and most (81%) fishermen always sold to the same dealers (Table 3).

A large portion (39%) of Indochinese dealers claimed no knowledge of the reporting requirements of the Monthly Marine Products Report (MMPR), despite being notified by TPWD through the mail of these requirements (Table 2). Some dealers, however, were not consistent in their answers regarding the MMPR since only 10 reported knowledge of the MMPR but 12 reported having no problems with the MMPR. Nearly 18% of the dealers had negative comments regarding the MMPR.

Most dealers appeared to be generally satisfied with their present seafood business. Few (12%) anticipated making changes in their business and only 28% mentioned any problems encountered; however, 39% had been cited by TPWD game wardens for at least one violation (Table 2).

Indochinese commercial fishermen, particularly those who fished in the bays, were more likely than dealers to have encountered fishery-related problems and to anticipate leaving the fishery. One-half mentioned problems including difficulties in catching enough shrimp, overcrowded fishing conditions, the necessity of hard work and conflicts with other fishermen and TPWD game wardens (Table 3). For the 28% of the fishermen who anticipated changes in their fishing business, all who fished only in the bays planned on leaving the fishery while all who fished in the Gulf planned on expanding their fishing business.

DISCUSSION

The relocation of Indochinese to the Texas coast by the U. S. government, as well as secondary migration from other relocation areas (Haines 1982), resulted in a change in the ethnic composition of commercial fishery participants in Texas. The present study indicates that while they are still a numerical minority, the addition of Indochinese into the fisheries has increased the diversity among Texas seafood dealers and fishermen and has compounded the potential for user-group conflicts. Fishery managers must also now be aware of characteristics specific to this ethnic group, including the language difference and culturally-dictated business and fishing practices. A repeat of this study is needed to measure changes in these characteristics as they relate to the fisheries. In addition, a more detailed information base for comparative purposes is also needed on the fishery-related characteristics of non-Indochinese seafood dealers and commercial fishermen.

Spruce (1985) points to language and cultural differences as explanations of the Indochinese's seemingly high disregard for fishery laws and regulations. The present study documents a large degree (39%) of noncompliance with the seafood dealer reporting requirements. Osburn et al. (1987) and Campbell et al. (1990) reported that monitoring the Texas commercial fisheries has been hampered because some seafood dealers fail to report their purchases of seafood products. However, in 1985 at least 47 or 18% of all non-Indochinese seafood dealers were delinquent (Campbell et al. 1990).

The poor economic state of the bay shrimping industry was reflected in the high proportion of Indochinese fishermen in the current study who had experienced related problems and who desired to leave the fishery. However, the relative economic satisfaction of interviewed Indochinese Gulf shrimpers indicates that Indochinese involvement with Gulf shrimping will increase. While Indochinese are expanding into non-fishery-related businesses, the influx of Indochinese into some fishing communities is also continuing (Spruce 1985). Negative trends in the economics of the shrimp fishery could force a reduction in the number of commercial fishermen in the industry. Indochinese will have an advantage in any economic "war" given their ability to operate on a lower profit margin and their willingness to pool their resources through the use of extended families and neighborhood cooperatives (Haines 1982, Spruce 1985). Orbach (1982) noted that Indochinese fishermen in California spend more continuous time and effort fishing than many local fishermen.

The precedent of serious conflicts and the potential for more dictates the need for continued efforts by community and fishery leaders to increase communication, education and understanding among the ethnic groups involved in the commercial fisheries of Texas. Spearheaded by the Community Relations Service of the U.S. Department of Justice, efforts have been made to develop a coastwide information network to facilitate communication among the fishermen ethnic groups and government agencies in Texas (Efrain Martinez, personal communication). Meetings were held in 1987 with leaders of these groups and resulted in the formal establishment of a coordinating organization to primarily disseminate information and provide assistance to Indochinese fishermen associations. Similar efforts have been made for Indochinese fishermen in California through the Indochinese Resettlement Assistance Program, although that program has been criticized for focusing on jobs for specific individuals rather than addressing the needs of the whole fishing industry.

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Table 1. Number of seafood dealers and commercial fishermen residing in Texas coastal counties during fiscal year (September-August) 1985.

County	Retail seafood dealers		Wholesale seafood dealers		Commercial fishermen			
	Indochinese		Indochinese		Resident		Non-resident	
	Indochinese surname	Non-Indochinese surname	Indochinese surname	Non-Indochinese surname	Indochinese surname	Non-Indochinese surname	Indochinese surname	Non-Indochinese surname
Aransas	0	45	1	13	20	502	230	19
Brazoria	0	78	0	8	0	592	2	2
Calhoun	0	26	0	14	7	748	34	2
Cameron	0	84	0	23	0	419	0	92
Chambers	0	29	0	5	0	378	3	14
Galveston	0	104	4	25	9	1620	290	44
Harris	50	731	10	38	20	1595	457	28
Jackson	0	12	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jefferson	15	206	1	15	37	751	133	30
Kenedy	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kleberg	0	23	0	0	0	32	0	1
Matagorda	1	56	0	13	5	454	119	0
Nueces	0	91	0	13	0	487	3	0
Orange	0	85	0	0	1	271	5	1
Refugio	0	8	0	1	0	51	0	0
San Patricio	0	22	0	6	0	445	2	3
Victoria	0	33	0	3	0	94	1	0
Willacy	0	10	0	1	0	52	0	0
Coastwide	66	1644	16	178	99	8491	1279	237

Table 2. Summary of responses by IndoChinese seafood dealers to TPWD interview questions during June-August 1985.

Interview question	Number of respondents	Response category	Response	
			No.	(%)
How long have you lived in this country?	17	3-5 years	3	(18)
		6-7 years	3	(18)
		8-10 years	11	(64)
What business were you in before you came to this country?	18	Fisherman	3	(17)
		Soldier	6	(33)
		Student	4	(22)
		Other	5	(28)
What seafood dealer licenses do you presently have?	18	Wholesale	7	(39)
		Retail	7	(39)
		Both	4	(22)
How long have you operated as a seafood dealer?	18	1 year	4	(22)
		2 years	6	(33)
		3 years	4	(22)
		4 years	4	(22)
How many seafood business locations do you have?	18	One	15	(83)
		Two	3	(17)
Do you own or operate your own fishing vessel(s)?	18	Yes	6	(33)
		No	12	(67)

Table 2. (Cont'd.).

Interview question	Number of respondents	Response category	Response No. (%)
How many people are normally involved in your seafood business operation?	17	3-4 5-6 7-10	7 (41) 5 (29) 5 (29)
Are the people normally involved in your seafood business operation related to you?	18	Yes No	6 (33) 12 (67)
What species do you usually buy?	18	Shrimp (only) Crab (only) All available species	2 (11) 1 (6) 15 (83)
Does what you buy vary by season?	18	Yes No	8 (44) 10 (56)
From what sources do you regularly buy seafood?	18	Fishermen Wholesale dealers Both	9 (50) 7 (39) 2 (11)
Do you buy from the same sources all the time?	18	Yes No	10 (56) 8 (44)
Are you familiar with TPWD's Marine Monthly Product Report?	18	Yes No Refused to answer	10 (56) 7 (39) 1 (6)

Table 2. (Cont'd.).

Interview question	Number of respondents	Response category	Response	
			No.	(%)
Do you have any problems or comments regarding the MMRP procedures?	18	No problems	12	(67)
		What is purpose	1	(6)
		Time consuming	1	(6)
		No good	1	(6)
		Don't know	3	(17)
Have you ever received a citation or from TPWD game wardens relating to your seafood business?	18	Yes: 1 citation 3 citations	6	(33)
		No	10	(56)
		Refused to answer	1	(6)
		None	1	(6)
What problems have you encountered in relation to your seafood business?	18	Game warden intrusion	13	(72)
		Money problems	2	(11)
		Product shortages	2	(11)
		None	1	(6)
What changes do you anticipate making in your seafood business in the future?	18	No changes	2	(11)
		Quit business	1	(6)
		Expand business	1	(6)
		Noncommittal	14	(78)

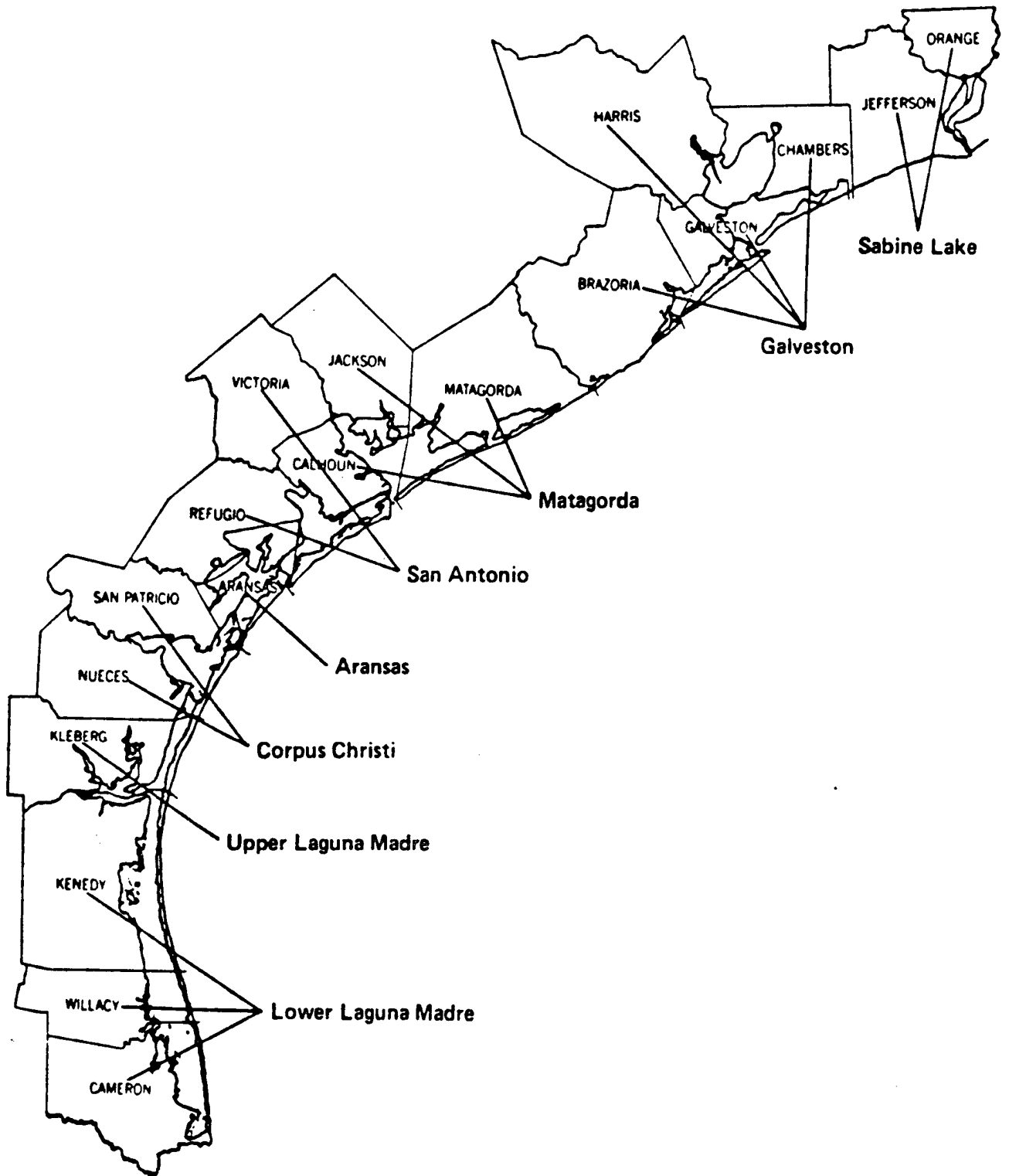
Table 3. Summary of responses by Indochinese commercial fishermen to TPWD interview questions during June-August 1985.

Interview question	Number of		Response category	Response	
	respondents			No.	(%)
How long have you lived in this country?	42	1-3	9	(21)	
		4-7	19	(45)	
		8-10	14	(33)	
What business were you in before you came to this country?	42	Fishermen	17	(40)	
		Soldier	10	(24)	
		Student	8	(19)	
		Other	7	(17)	
What commercial fishing-related licenses do you presently have?	42	Bay	22	(52)	
		Bait	8	(19)	
		Gulf	7	(17)	
		Bay/Bait	1	(2)	
		Bay/Gulf	4	(10)	
How many fishing vessels do you own?	42	One	38	(90)	
		Two	4	(10)	
What is the length of your fishing vessel?	39	9-14 m	22	(56)	
		15-20 m	11	(28)	
		21-26 m	6	(15)	
How many people normally assist you when you fish?	42	1-2	29	(69)	
		3-4	8	(19)	
		5	5	(12)	
		Yes	17	(40)	
Are the people who normally assist you when fishing related to you?	42	No	25	(60)	
		Yes	17	(40)	
For what species do you normally fish?	42	Shrimp (only)	35	(83)	
		Shrimp/oysters	4	(10)	
		Shrimp/crabs	2	(5)	
		All commercial species	1	(2)	

Table 3. (Cont'd.).

Interview question	Number of respondents	Response category	Response	
			No.	(%)
What species do you normally discard?	42	Hardhead catfish (only)	6	(14)
		All finfish species	36	(86)
Where do you normally sell your catch?	42	Specific docks or seafood houses	34	(81)
		Anywhere available	8	(19)
In what waters do you normally fish?	42	Close to home port	32	(76)
		Anywhere product is available	10	(24)
How many days a week do you normally fish?	28	1-2	4	(14)
		3-4	4	(14)
		5-7	20	(71)
How many hours a day do you normally fish?	26	2-4	2	(8)
		5-8	15	(58)
		9-12	7	(27)
		>12	2	(8)
What problems have you encountered in relation to your commercial fishing?	42	None	21	(50)
		Not enough shrimp	8	(19)
		Overcrowded conditions	3	(7)
		Hard work	5	(12)
		Conflicts	5	(12)
What changes do you anticipate making in your commercial fishing in the future?	42	No changes	27	(64)
		Quit business	9	(21)
		Expand business	3	(7)
		Noncommittal	3	(7)

Figure 1. Texas coastal counties and bay systems.



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