We're in Rincón. Today is February 10, 2025. Thank you so much for coming and sharing this information with us today. I'll start by asking you to tell us your age.

-I was born in '62, on April 2, '62, going on 62. I've been fishing all my life, I've been fishing for more than 45 years or more, 45 years of fishing, or more, much more.

-How did you get started in fishing?

My entire family was a fisherman, but at a very young age, I dropped out of school. I didn't learn anything at school. I dedicated myself to fishing. There were twelve of us at home, and I dedicated myself to bringing in a living. And we fished. I've been a commercial fisherman all my life. I'm one of the fishermen who currently has a license, one of the oldest. Because back then, they gave it to you at age 16. If you want the license number, it's…

"No, I just want more general information. You don't have to give me your private information. What I'm interested in is that you told me your family was fishing..."

Our whole family has been seine fishers. The fishing I did most was silk snapper and queen snapper, which are two deep-sea snappers (Snappers, \*Lutjanidae\*). But I fished with pots, trawl seine nets, lobster seine nets, Mallorcan spiny lobster (Panulirus argus\*), longlines, diving, all kinds of fishing. But we've reached the point where we're fishing less, due to our age. We don't have good spots either, because you can't fish along the shore anymore because of the structures. It's a lot of damage.

-Let's start a little at the beginning, when you started fishing, you told me you left school, what grade?

-I left after third grade.

-How old was he?

-8 years.

-And at that time he was fishing with his dad…

-At that time I fished with my uncles in a seine net, a famous one they called Guillo, he is still alive, a very old fisherman, (Burro grunt, \*Pomadasys crocro\*) Muise, who has already passed away, Pedroza, many people, old fishermen who died years ago.

[00:03:00]

-And at that time, where did you sell the fish?

-Here in Rincón, yes, people used to come here. There were some people who were dedicated to buying fish. You would bring it and they would take it from the net. There were people who were dedicated to that.

-Where did the people come from?

-From right here in the town of Rincón, and they sold it. They distributed it in every neighborhood. And they caught a lot of fish.

-And were you catching a lot more fish than you are now?

-Yes, much more, because before we caught the cicada (maybe: bigeye scad): 20,000, 30,000 cicadas. And that was sold, and sometimes the herring, which they call sardines (herring), and that fish was caught by the bucketful: sometimes 30 to 40 bucketfuls were caught, but that can't be caught anymore, because we don't have places.

-Don't you have places to go out to sea?

-No, you used to cast the seine and it would reach the shore. Because of the structures, because they threw rocks, you can't fish anymore.

-You're telling me that the maritime room changed a lot because of that... You told me that you're deep-sea fishing, was that what you did from the beginning?

-Not back then. Most of the fishing we did was from the seine. We caught yellowtail snapper, southern sennet, and lane snapper at night. We did shore fishing, which was done in a small boat close to the shore. Motors arrived later; the first motors were from the 1982s; from 1975 onward, motors started to appear. Then we went to different fishing spots further away because before, we did it by sail and oar.

-Is it difficult?

-Yeah.

-In 1980 you changed too…

-Yes. We've changed.

-And since then, what other changes have you made?

-During that change, we caught a lot of snapper, in deeper water, we fished with traps, from the Rincón lighthouse to Añasco, we fished with seine nets, with a gillnet, with trammel nets...

-And how big were they? When it started in the 1980s, were they bigger or smaller than the fish are now?

[00:05:55]

-Look, it hasn't decreased; it's just that you can't fish, because the type of fishing most commonly done was with nets. Back when it was deep-water snapper, it was always caught. But recently, it's become scarce. Technology has killed fishing a lot. I mean, technology, because before, we fished and you looked from the beach and saw, and you caught a good catch. You fished, you saw the beach and you could mark it and catch a good catch, but now fishing is much further out. Because one of the things we need is for them to impose closed seasons on certain types of fish during spawning season. And that's been largely overlooked here.

-What you're telling me is that there aren't enough rules for fish...

-It's not that there aren't any rules, it's that there are some that need to be made and there are some that need to be amended. Because right now we have the entire western area, Desecheo closed, Bajo Sico closed, Abierto La Sierra closed, La Mona closed. When you close a site permanently, you do damage to the other sites, because they exploit it. So, I've never agreed that it's okay if they impose a two-year or three-year ban, open a year for fishing, because what are the fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) doing there? They die of old age. (Burro grunt, \*Pomadasys crocro\*) So that year other schools of fish rest, because it's not the same as taking all your time out of your wallet, in the same place, when you can have another side to fish.

-Why did they close those places, you know?

-It's because there are things from the Federal Government, many influential sinners and many influential people, because I'm going to be clear; here the rope always snaps at the weakest end. Here, sometimes there are people who make laws without doing studies. So, sometimes they make regulations without doing studies. So when they come to see the study, it's even poorly done, because then they protect the site or the fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) when it's not the season. Because there's the mating season and the season for their little fish, the roe, to emerge. Then a good period began with the silk snapper, which they closed.

[00:09:03]

First, one size was closed the first year, another size the second, but then they opened it. It's fine, there's plenty of red snapper. But what's happening? Right now, they're closing it for three months. It's good. They must do the same thing with some fish that mate and spawn in those three months, and they never do that. They do the studies, and if someone has a conflict of interest, if someone is importing fish from somewhere else, if someone has a profit somewhere else, then they come and what happens? And you know what's going on in this country...

-No, I don't know, you tell me because I don't know.

-We can't talk about this, but you know that the big fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) eats the small fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*). There are people who have great interests in fish exports, and sometimes they get close to today's politicians and damage everything. This is a shame, this is regrettable, but it's what we're experiencing. The same thing has happened with the coast, with the maritime-terrestrial zone, where we used to fish and needed a space to pull in that seine, and today we can't fish because we have nowhere to pull it in, to land the seine on the shore. And that's why there are many types of fish that aren't being caught. And we have that problem.

-What I hear is that one of the problems is coastal development. But there are other issues that have to do with where fish is sold and what fish is sold…

-Not so much, because nowadays there are people who buy fish, who dedicate themselves to buying fish, but most of them sell fish outside.

-Outside…?

-There was a person who bought all the fish. A hoarder, he bought everything. What happens is that sometimes when you take fish to that person, they lower the price. So you're not going to sell a fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) that's worth $12 a pound, and you're going to sell it for $6. What happens is that when you sell it to the hoarder, they're going to make those $6. It's not fair; you have to invest in a boat, gas, you have to make an investment. So the person who buys it benefits more than the other person. What the fisherman does, most fishermen, is they distribute their fish themselves. Because then with less fish, there's more money.

[00:12:11]

-And you do the same?

-Of course we do.

When did that change in the relationship happen? When you started, you were selling your fish to someone who sold or distributed it. When did you start to see or have to make that change?

This change had to be made because there are almost no more people dedicated to buying. That's why you see that the fish from here has to compete with imported fish. It's not the same quality because the fish from here is much higher quality than imported fish, because the fish from here is caught from here to the table, so the import takes two weeks, three weeks, a month to arrive in Puerto Rico. So what happens is, since in other countries the fish trade is much cheaper, there are many of these people who buy and bring it to Puerto Rico. So they fill the market. We also have this: the government has considered on many occasions that commercial fishermen have to obtain a license for a type of fish. (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) So recreational fishermen don't have to obtain a license. Recreational fishermen have damaged many of the businesses because they take them out and sell them to other businesses. We have that problem in Rincón, which you can't imagine.

-There are many recreational fishermen in Rincón.

-A lot of American recreational fishing and a lot of people chartering, and they catch the fish and sell it.

-And there's no limit to how much fish you catch?

-There are no laws.

-(Jannette) Yes, there is a limit for recreational activities.

-Yes, but that's what they pass on...

-But nobody checks it…

-So Natural Resources takes a commercial fisherman and turns the boat upside down. So you have everything you need, and a commercial fisherman climbs onto the boat, searches the entire boat, down to the smallest fish. (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) So they don't ask as much of a recreational fisherman.

-For every commercial fisherman, how many recreational fishermen do you think there are in Rincón?

-In Rincón right now, I think there are more than 30 boats doing that or more, much more.

[00:15:00]

-30 boats in total?

-Or more. And be careful, they're recreational.

-And commercials?

-There are about 20 or 25 of them. The area where there are the most commercial fishermen is in Rincón…

-The number is roughly the same. Is there any difference in the types of boats used by commercial fishermen? Can you tell me a little about that?

-The commercial boat is an open boat, because you're waiting to see the peje, to catch the peje, but there are boats that are closed, but most of these people go out on charters, most of them are Americans, they come, they rent their little house, they take them fishing for a cut of money. They go fishing and then the one who has the boat, maybe has a commercial license, I'm not saying they don't, many do because nowadays they give a commercial license to everyone, simply for filling out two or three papers. And good for that, but most have damaged boats, so one fishes from a 20-foot boat and one of these people fishes from a 30 or 40-foot boat. And they have more opportunities, they go out further, specialists go out to fish for dorado (dolphin, \*Coryphaena hippurus\*) (dolphin), to fish for marlin, to fish for silk snapper and queen snapper, because for them there is supposedly a rule, but for them there isn't. They don't have one. You go to a tournament today in Cabo Rojo, they're holding a Dorado (Dolphin, \*Coryphaena hippurus\*) fishing tournament. And there are boats that are supposed to have 10 pieces per boat or 8 pieces per boat, and sometimes there are boats that bring 40 or 60 pieces. So there's no control. And I know it's very difficult, there's no staff.

-Tell me a little about how difficult it is for a young person to become a commercial fisherman. Are there any young people who are interested in that?

-Look, I'll tell you this story: I've been fishing deep-sea fish all my life. I had a fishing license, and I had a deep-sea fishing license when that license first came out. They took it away from me. They never told me why.

[00:18:00]

I went to San Juan, I did 20,000 things. And the day before yesterday, because when the government changed there, they opened it and gave it to everyone. And a year ago they gave it to me, because they had taken it away from me, and I spent about 10 years struggling to find a way because there was someone who was pushing for it. And I think it's good to give equality to everyone, and this happens a lot. So, new fishermen today, with the advancements in GPS and Fish Finders and boats, many new fishermen come, ask certain questions, you teach them, and they become independent. But it was very difficult for them a while back, because of the license, because you couldn't fish for snappers (snappers, \*Lutjanidae\*) in deep waters.

Did they give you any idea why they revoked your license and why they didn't want to give it to you for that time?

-I was once sick, and a law had been passed here, requiring you to report everything you caught every three months. Since I was very sick for a while, I couldn't report what I caught, simply because of that. They punished me and I had to pay. They gave me a courtesy ticket. Thank goodness I didn't pay it. I had to move. And that's what happens to many, and now it's been announced that they've given deep-water licenses to fishermen. I'm happy about that. Because many people who have the desire to fish, the desire to work, have made a mistake...

-And that happened in the last 10 years?

-No, that happened now, 2 years ago, the license is not even valid for 2 years, a year ago.

-And have you seen more young people coming in over the last two years?

-Many more fishermen.

-But not until now? Was it harder up until then?

-It was very difficult, because there was no way in, because you could get in, but not for that type of fishing, because they tried to do this other type of fishing: diving, towline fishing, running fishing.

-Tell me a little slowly so I understand it clearly, what kind of fish do you catch at depth? And then we'll talk about what changes you've seen with the fish, if you've seen any changes.

[00:21:00]

-We fish in deep water, we fish for silk snapper.

-That's the main thing

We fish for silk snapper in deep water, and the silk snapper fishery is quite healthy. The one that's a little underpowered is the snapper fishery, which we call queen snapper. It's in much deeper waters, and up until now, it hasn't done anything. It's being fished during the spawning season, and NOAA knows when it spawns, when it mates, and when it spawns because there are a lot of people doing studies now. And that fishery, I used to go out there, catch 200, 300 pounds, right off the coast. But what's happening? They've given it so much, because when one fishery closes, the other exploits it. And this might sound familiar to many people who won't like it, but I'd like it to be closed along with the silk snapper. Three months for that fishery so that... Or if the studies say it spawns after the silk snapper, well, look, two or three months is healthy. We've seen that. Just like the spiny lobster (Panulirus argus) fishery. There's a lot of spiny lobster (Panulirus argus) now, and you catch the spiny lobster (Panulirus argus) that's enough, because they passed a law that you have to release it, the one that doesn't give. And there's spiny lobster. There's always someone who catches it, but you know how it is. But the majority of that fishing isn't sustainable as it was at the time, I would say, 10 years ago.

-Was there a change 10 years ago?

-The warmer waters, when there is a lot of earthquake, the fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) does not pull you, most of those fish pull you with the change of tide, new moon, with the changes.

-And the change you noticed is that there are fewer fish or the size?

-A lot fewer fish. I'll tell you this: if the big fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) continue at this size, they're going to finish them off. Because before, the most they fished was 200 fathoms, 225. Well, now they're fishing up to 250 to 270 deep. So they're catching the big fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*). And that's the fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) that when you open it, it's full of roe; that's the one that comes inside to spawn. And they've hit it hard.

[00:24:20]

-Interesting. And when you started fishing in the 1970s, because you fished closer to the shore, the fish were smaller, right?

-Closer to the shore. And there were fish everywhere. We never fished deeper than 225 fathoms, because even at that depth, we caught big ones. And many types, because there are two varieties of deep-water snapper, three with the silk snapper. There's one that's almost eliminated, the yellowfin mojarra, which are very rare. Before, you'd go and catch 200, 300 pounds, and it was worth it because they were 5-, 4-, 3-pound fish, but that's almost gone. I think they've wiped it out because that fish takes a long time to reproduce. Or the size. I can't tell you because there's no study on that. So it's a fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) that you can't study, because by the time you catch it, it dies.

-Can you tell me a little more, I want to understand a little more, when you started fishing in the 70s, did you sell the fish at the local market?

-Yes, there were some merchants who bought all the fish. In fact, we fished from their boats; they had boats, and we fished for them. We caught deep-water snapper, silk snapper, yellowfin mojarra, and queen snapper.

-And do you know if they sold it locally?

-They sold everything locally, there was a lot of demand.

-Was that connected with tourism?

-There was tourism because at that time there was more or less Villa Cofresí, which was the one that bought the most, a lot of that chillo (silk snapper) and cartucho (queen snapper), sea bass, they bought a lot.

-At that time, the person who sold the fish worked on the boat, and after a while…

-I bought my own boat.

-When did you buy your own boat?

-More or less in 87, around there, I already had my own little boat.

[00:27:00]

-And how did the business change?

-Far better.

-Much better, can you tell me a little?

-Sure, when I first bought a rowboat with a 25 Evinrude engine, we fished with that, we caught a lot more, because the value of fish back then was one peso, one dollar per pound. When we had the boat, it went up more, it was like 25, but you'd go out there and catch close to 100, 200, 300 pounds of fish. A lot, but it's not the same anymore. I fished for a long time, I was fishing in rowboats until I was in my 90s. Then they gave us a 20-foot boat and then the fishing became even more successful. We caught a lot of silk snapper, queen snapper, big fish. Nowadays, all the fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) you catch aren't very large; they're edible, because from a pound and up, restaurants fight over them.

-If you can fish along the shore, the fish are much smaller here. But most people fish deeper, and the fish there are much larger.

-There isn't as much quantity as there was before.

-When you had your own boat, how did selling fish change?

-That's what everyone bought into. I had the last people I sold fish to. I can name their names. The first was called Amado Elías, the other was Rafael Interviewee, and the other was called Pancho, who bought the fish. I sold fish for a while to someone they called Papo; he had a fishmonger. The second-to-last person I sold fish to was Geño Piñero. I sold fish to him for many years.

-When did it change? When did you say, 'That person isn't worth selling'?

-About 15 years ago, because I sometimes had the freezers and I had the fish stored from them, then they paid me a price for the fish, sometimes I went and delivered the fish, and when I saw: come here, if you pay me 2 dollars and sell it for 7. Well, I became independent.

-How did you manage to have your own nets, where are you going to sell, how do you manage to work fishing and then selling too?

[00:29:57]

-Before, they would take it quickly, and the other thing was that I would put it in the freezer, because I've always been independent, having my own things, I would put it in the freezer with ice and they would take everything the same day.

-Who took it?

-I took it to Geño Piñero, Amado, Rafael Interviewee…

-No, but when he started selling…

-I delivered it myself, with my son. I delivered it to restaurants; we sold it to Gran Café, Arecibo. We brought in a lot of fish and spiny lobster (Panulirus argus).

-Outside Rincón too? To Arecibo, mostly?

-To Arecibo, yes.

-And they still do?

-No, not now, because they won't let us get here now. Now you catch it, and they'll come looking for it right away.

-Who's coming to get him?

-Sometimes we sell it to Geño, he used to sell it to this man, who died not long ago, Elliot, he bought a lot from us, a lot of silk snapper, and he paid well.

-Do those people buy it for their restaurant?

-No, they bought it to sell it, but he came here to pick it up.

-Is this where they take it?

-From here I came to pick him up for Cabo Rojo. And from there I took him to San Juan.

-I understand. So it's going to the bigger market, but it stays local. So you sell it, but not directly…

-Yes, sometimes you arrive tired and sometimes, you take them to one restaurant today, tomorrow you take them to another, sometimes those people need it and you have to learn to keep one person happy, because then when this one doesn't take you, that one takes you and the other one takes you, business.

-And are there people who come from the village and say, look, can you sell me two pieces of I don't know what?

-That's right. A lot of people come here to buy fish. The thing is, I've stopped selling fish right now, but people here order it: Look, get me 10 pounds of this, 20 pounds of spiny lobster.

-What is the fish you like the most?

-Here in Rincón, silk snapper is a big seller, as is blackfin tuna (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*). It was the Blue Marlin (\*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) that I dedicated myself to the most. I held off on certain fishing trips, I stopped, because there was a time when I did better with that one than with any other fish.

[00:32:51]

-What fish do you personally love to catch the most?

-That one.

-Is it because it started with that one, or why?

-I like that kind of fishing, a lot. Because to fish for deep-sea snappers (Lutjanidae), you have to get up really early, you have to buy bait, you have to time it, you have to get to a faraway spot, throw a line down 2,000, 2,500, 2,800 feet; to lift it up, it takes time. On the other hand, the way we fish for tuna is with live blue marlin (Makaira nigricans XLII). We catch live blue marlin (Makaira nigricans XLII\*) from the shore, we bring it in, we throw food to them. When they start jumping, we throw in the line. So... good fishing.

-Tell me a little about what a typical fishing day is like.

-We get up at 5 in the morning when we go fishing, because we have to do it among the clear waters. We look for the small fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*), which is the sardine, catch it with the cast net and go out. We go out to sea up to 12 miles, 14 miles, to the north. Or we go to Desecheo Island and there we catch that fish, (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*), but it's a beautiful, precious fishery. You see them jumping, (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*), and when you catch one, you spend a long time fighting with it.

-Does it give you a bit of work?

-Yeah.

-And are you going with someone from your family?

-I fish with my family, I fish with my older brother and with my son who is a fisherman.

How old is your son?

-He's 34 years old, around 35.

-And how did he start, seeing you?

-That's right. He was working, but he quit.

-Do you have more children?

-Yes, but they're out of town. I never involved them in fishing.

Let's talk a little about the impact of disasters like the hurricane and the COVID pandemic between 2018 and 2020. What can you tell me? How did you, your family, and the community handle it?

"It was sad because you saw all this, what was happening. They gave us the freedom to fish, because we could go out because it's our source of income, and it was to feed people."

[00:35:55]

We caught a lot of fish, but it was a sad thing because you couldn't go out to the places, and first of all, when the storm hit that devastated us, it was really hard to get back on your feet. The only help I have is fishing, the only income. Not being able to go out to sea fishing sometimes, the pandemic, and that's like everything, sometimes what's a misfortune for one is a blessing for another, even if you don't see it that way. But, look, we were doing well during the pandemic, financially, with the aid the government gave us. It's true that it sometimes comes late, but you have to learn.

-The impact was sad, but you were able to work…

-Surviving wasn't enough to buy what you wanted, but it was enough to live on. After you pay for electricity and water, and the food arrives, because we have to get it by hand. But it was very difficult, for many, sad.

-Tell me a little about the community, what did you notice?

-I'll tell you about the storm first: the good thing is that when the storm hit, the entire community came together. When that first disaster hit, the entire community here came together. The few who had electricity, those who had a small plant gave electricity to their neighbors, we cleaned the yards, we cleaned everything, whatever was there, everything was shared among the neighbors. And the government helped us; many agencies came to bless, to give water, food, medicine. The neighborhood moved a lot of people, but it was sad; there were months without electricity, without water. But we survived. Then the pandemic was very difficult, but look, for us, fishing was good because only commercial fishermen could bring in fish, and we caught them. It was a time of year when there was more fishing for us.

-So, the arcade couldn't come out...

-He couldn't get out, and there were fish everywhere. So you sold all the fish. It was true that you couldn't sell it at the price it was being sold, but it was sold. Everything you brought in was sold, because then you know this is bad. We're going to go down so many people are out of work, and a lot of fish was sold. We sold a lot.

[00:39:02]

-When did you see a change when the arcades were able to return, and how was the change noticeable?

-You can quickly see that; it's not the same when there are 10 boats fishing, as when there are 30 in an area, or 40 boats. If you look, Rincón has boats, a small town right on the coast, but if you go there, there's a daycare center, and that daycare center has 50, 70 boats. You look at the backyards of the houses, the boats there, and there are a lot of people going out.

-He told me there are 30 recreational boats but there are many more.

-A lot more.

-During the pandemic it was much calmer.

-Yes, many more fish.

-Was the impact on Maria huge? What can you tell me about that?

-The water reached here, it reached there.

-And they stayed here during the hurricane?

"No, we went to a house up there on the hill. A man told us to come here, an acquaintance, so we went there. But this whole place flooded, from here down. No water got in here. But those houses over there are submerged with water."

-And your house?

-No, everything was damaged for me. It damaged my freezers, because it was salt water that was coming out. It damaged my air conditioners, it damaged everything. It was tough. We survived it there.

-What impressed you most about that time in the community?

-The community came together. Even though we were there in that aspect, there was more warmth between each neighbor, because we sat, shared, everything. These are things that sometimes work, people, bring out. You have a neighbor and sometimes you don't even know their name, but when all these things happen, that neighbor, who you might call a dog, is the best neighbor you have and helps you with everything.

-If another hurricane like Maria passes…

-Oh my God, no.

-What do you think is going to happen here?

[00:42:00]

"The good thing is that we have breakwaters right there in front of us now. Because all the houses are right there, but I'll tell you, the rocks that the sea washed up... if you go out there right now and turn down at the intersection, the rocks from the sea would be thrown there when those swells came here. That was incredible; I'd never seen it in my life. And look, I've seen bad weather, but I've never seen it like that."

-I ask further about whether you think the community will be better prepared to face a hurricane like Maria.

-Nowadays, they're a little more prepared, but the problem we have here is the electricity. A little breeze comes and it goes out. Many people have their own generators, many have installed solar panels, whoever can install them, but we're better prepared, I can guarantee you that.

-Are there any community organizations here that are ready to help?

-The churches were very active here. All the churches helped. They brought food, water, meat, they brought everything. Sometimes they gave you money to go and buy gasoline for the plant. We lived through it. People came with bags of ice, from somewhere else, from another town. These are things we've experienced. But nothing like this can catch me empty-handed anymore. The only thing that can catch us is a tsunami. But I'm not leaving here now; I'm dying there in my house.

-But what I understood is that the best thing that happened in this tragedy is that he was able to go out on the water and fish without the rules putting up barriers, he had freedom…

We were free to fish, but within the law. When the storm hit, we couldn't fish because there was nowhere to launch a boat. Months went by because the entire coast was washed away, everything there was, so it was rare that you could. Then months went by, and then fishing started when the storm hit.

[00:45:00]

-When he says the storm…

-Maria. The hurricane.

-OK, temporary. And we were able to go out with the boat for months…

-Without going out on the boat.

-Was the boat ruined for people?

-Not my boat, because I have them here.

-But he couldn't get out by the coast...

-For months, months.

-What did they do?

-On one occasion we were in the town of Rincón. They sent the tickets, which they filled out, or there were many wealthy people who gave aid, they filled them out there and we were able to leave.

-Were there fishermen who had to work in something else?

-Yes, chopping sticks, cleaning yards…

-And did the city pay you for that?

-Many people paid for it, and many people sometimes did it out of favor. And sometimes, when they're wealthy, they'll give something to someone. The ones who get away with it are the ones who make the contracts...

-But, in general, it was difficult for the fishermen, because there was no work after the hurricane…

-So look at the problem we have: they allocate some aid, and even now there's aid from years ago that hasn't arrived. So one wonders, look here, if that money is already allocated for the fishermen, why would another agency, which isn't that agency, take it? To do something else and buy that. When that money already had a purpose, and this is how it is. So, in many of the nearby towns, the mayors gave aid to the fishermen.

-Was it local? Isn't that the aid they received from the Federal Government?

-I don't know, but they gave it to Aguadilla, they gave it to Añasco, they gave it to Cabo Rojo, they gave it to Mayagüez, they gave it to Arecibo.

-Not here? And you don't know why?

-I don't know. And that's the way it is. I believe that bread should be shared among everyone; there are interests.

Tell me a little about the quality of life. How do you enjoy life in Rincón now compared to when you started? Do you feel the quality of your life and the life of the town has improved?

[00:47:59]

The town of Rincón has improved, but these are things that happen in a town. I don't like to talk much about the people, but everyone from here has left because most of the Americans have taken over everything to make Airbnbs. They've bought up the beaches, doing business. So, your house that's worth 100,000 or 150,000, they'll give you 400,000 or 500,000, and you sell. Some Americans came to my mother's house, so you couldn't turn on the engine or turn on the equipment in your house because it bothered them. It's changed. There are people who are good neighbors, but sometimes they can't stand you, but you have to put up with it. Since you're not used to it, you stay quiet. But it's changed. Rincón has been everything. Rincón has the same thing that other small nations have had that have taken over all the beaches.

-When did this start?

-This happened about 12 years ago, it's a shame to talk about it, but you're asking me and I'm answering you.

-So the locals are faced with the option of staying or selling their house for a lot of money... And where do they go?

"They're moving up. This place is already overcrowded. Rincón has little water infrastructure; we don't have any. So they never fix the water supply."

"Now I understand. Since the seashore used to be free, anyone would go fishing. Now it's…"

-There are places now where if you go through the designated space, which is an entrance to a public beach, you go in and start casting a line in front of it, and the guy who bought there comes out to eat. You can't stay there because his house is right across the street. We've experienced that.

How many places are there where the boat can go out to fish at depth?

[00:50:58]

-Here, just one.

-Just one, how many were there before?

-There used to be two ramps in that same location, both of which could be used, but there's only one now. There used to be three because there was the one for the charter, the public one, and another one on this side. When the government changed, one of the mayors—because I didn't build it—ordered it to be removed.

-So it's an aspect of fishermen's lives that has become quite difficult. In the past, when you started, could you say that there was a fishing community in Rincón?

-Right now, I'd say Rincón is overpopulated with fishermen, because there are so many Americans fishing. There are more fishermen now, because everyone has a boat. Before, they were rowboats.

-When it started there were 10, 15 fishermen

-Few.

-And they used to take the fish only for the town of Rincón. But now there are more fishermen, but more recreational than you're telling me.

There are many. The problem is that no one has done a study. Natural Resources or Fisheries Statistics in Mayagüez are supposed to have control. They should know how many fishermen there are in the Rincón area, simply by the license number and where you're from. But I don't know what happened because they don't have that information. Or they have it and don't want to give it away. Because the Fisheries Laboratory has your ID, where you go out, where you register to fish, where you land, because you fill out the Fisheries Statistics: where you went out, what time you went out, what you caught...

-Is that just for the commercial?

-For the commercial, but there are many people who are commercial but go out recreational.

-Are you familiar with this type of letter?

-Of course. All I ever learned was how to read, that's all.

-If you could show me, what are the most important fishing areas around…?

[00:54:05]

-Uh-oh.

-It's not here

-I didn't even notice. Well, whatever.

-We are on the North side.

-Well, anyway, you can make it here, let's think that here is the slope, here is Rincón and if you can show me more or less the fishing areas.

-The fishing areas… right now I don't have a nautical chart… We fish a lot. Let's assume this is the Desecheíto here. There's a crown here, and this is a shallow area in Rincón that reaches about this far. This is here… this is the Bajo de Sico.

-This is the lighthouse, Rincón, Corona del Desecheo, and this is Desecheo Island. There are many more shallow ones around there, so you'd be right here... Are you sure you don't have it on your computer?

-Unsure.

-See if you can get it so you can explain it better.

-I'll see if I can look it up on the internet.

-Look, we fish here, in this area. This is the Bajo de Sico. They closed it. They open it for three months, so you can fish, and the rest of the year it's closed. Sometimes you can catch everything above it; everything that's running, you fish above it. This is where you catch a lot more queen snapper, which are deep-water snappers (Snappers, \*Lutjanidae\*). This other one here is where you catch silk snapper and deep-water snapper. And around Desecheo Island, you catch deep-water snapper. It continues there, because this shallow area continues to another shallow area. And all those shallow areas have a lot of fishing, but right here, right next to the coast, that's where we fish. Around here, Córcega, which is right next to the shore, we're right across from it. Let's see... it's much easier there...

[00:57:13]

-And I wanted to ask you, have you been fishing in more or less the same areas since the 70s?

-Yes, but most of them, remember, are for months. We fish, there's another shallow area around here. That's in front of Aguadilla, which is the two seedbeds, and we fish for tuna (mackerels and tunas, \*Scombridae\*) on that shallow.

-What I want to ask you is, what changes in the maritime environment have you noticed the most? And most importantly, I understand there's more sargassum?

-There's been a lot of sargassum coming in lately, which we've been catching while fishing for silk snapper: it's a wine-colored sargassum, I'd say.

-Red?

-Yes. It sometimes comes out in the subtleties and in the plumb lines. Not the yellow one, the one that goes on top, because that one always, every year, comes in. But lately, that one has been getting picked.

-So what happens? How does that affect the fish?

-I don't know, because that wasn't seen before, that type of algae, which is coming out now and where that algae arrives, I don't know, it kills or removes the shrimp or the squid and they leave, so you fish in places where there were fish, (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) and when that algae arrives, there is nothing, there is no fishing. Because remember that all these fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) are migratory: the silk snapper migrates, the queen snapper migrates. The only one that doesn't migrate is the blackfin snapper, which is a deep-water snapper, and that one is from the site, it walks at night, it goes out to look for food, but that one is from a cave, that snapper.

-When did you notice that?

-We have noticed that for the past 3 years.

-Three years? And where do you see it?

-We found it south of this rock, here. From Bajo de Sico.

-Red algae, right?

[01:00:01]

-Red algae. In the Lower Sico.

-And is it big?

-No, it's a fine, thin seaweed. I'd say it's not as big as the one above, because the yellow one is the one above; that's the one that fills in the spaces; that's a different type of seaweed.

-No, but is the place where it infests large?

-It has to be big, because sometimes you cast a line here and the line catches you, say, 100 meters or 50 meters, and it comes out. And sometimes you go to turn further forward and it comes out.

-And when there are fish in that place…

-There are no fish in that place

-But do you feel anything? The smell?

-The different smell of sargassum.

-Does the smell bother you?

-I don't know if that's chemical or what, because I don't know where that last sargassum came from, but a lot of it has been caught, in waters of 130 fathoms.

-When does it come out? During which months?

-It came out three years ago after the silk snapper came out

-And always in the same place?

-Right now he wasn't in the same place, but he was dating for about 2 years.

-But 2 years from January to December?

-No, because sometimes we don't fish every day. Sometimes we go once a month. Or sometimes if the fishing is good, we go for two, three, or four days so the fish keep coming. To clear the spot. Because if you take everything out of your bag, there's nothing when you go looking. But we've found that. So we throw a kind of weight down, and when you catch it, sometimes—we call it the plumb line—it doesn't come out like it did in the past. A while back, it comes out a little colder. Sometimes when you catch the plumb line, it's a little warmer; the system has changed a lot. I don't know what it is, if there's something down there that's warming it up.

-But it's hotter.

-Yeah.

Have you seen fish that died from that sargassum, that red algae?

-For this area, no.

-And sargassum, when did you notice it was more powerful?

-That's been going on for 7 or 8 years now. I don't know where all that sargassum came from.

[01:03:00]

-And how does sargassum fishing affect you?

-We catch dorado (dolphin, \*Coryphaena hippurus\*) there, and we catch a lot of dorado (dolphin, \*Coryphaena hippurus\*) there because they seek shade. We catch wahoo (Acanthocybium solanderi\*). It's good fishing when it comes in, but sometimes when it reaches the shore.

-If it's outside it's fine…

-When he went to the beach… there were days there, weeks, without being able to launch a boat, because he went right into the whole field and there was no such thing… and it smelled awful.

-And that didn't happen before, 8 years ago?

-No.

-And does sargassum come for a few months or when is it most powerful?

-He's supposed to be around these past few months. He's been around for two months now, and he hasn't been seen much this year.

-But the one from 3 years ago…

-There were places where if you got into the boat you wouldn't get out, it stayed there on top.

-I think we've covered everything. One final question: What do you think the future of the Rincón community holds, the future of commercial fishermen in Rincón?

-Now some fishing associations have been formed, after they've always been tried, but sometimes there's no support. If you don't have support from the local government, well, no. Remember, most fishermen aren't wealthy. If someone wanted to promote this, they could do so, but that's like everything else; everything has its price: buying a place. There are fishmongers right now; I admire the Arecibo Fishmongers. They buy all their own fish and sell it because they have the facilities. They arrive there by boat, park, unload the fish, and distribute and sell it themselves, but nothing like that has arrived in Rincón.

-Have you never had a Rincón fish shop?

"He had one there in Barrero. The songs are still there, but it's not the same. I used to sell to the boy when I had it, I sold him a lot of fish. But there aren't the facilities. So, when it's an association there, the government takes care of helping them much more quickly. Sometimes they have proposals and the government, since it's an association, helps them, the Federal Government, because here you go to the local government and you already know how it is."

[01:06:05]

-No, I don't know.

-I don't even want to tell you, you find out.

-But what is the biggest barrier for someone to form a fishing association?

-The biggest barrier, I think we'll see how this plays out, because if there were a place like a fishmonger, even if it wasn't on the beach, a place where you could come and sell all the fish. And another thing is getting paid a fair price; you know that the buyer has to make a profit, you know that if it's an association, you should give it to them a little cheaper, and that the same association, with what they sell you at that price, should keep it for you and give it to you annually, like a bonus. What they make from the profit. And if there's a profit, it's divided and paid out and shared among everyone, but there's no such vision. We don't have a place where we can say, "I can bring 500 pounds of fish today and 500 tomorrow, and they'll take it."

-But what I'm saying is, why can't the commercial fishermen of Rincón organize themselves? Why do you think?

-We're getting organized. We're starting an association right now. By the way, I'm one of the members, and we're working on it.

What is the biggest barrier to achieving what the fishermen's association wants to achieve?

-The thing is, it's about the aid, because right now we have Jeffrey, who's the daycare center manager. That boy makes a living from his daycare, and that boy is helping us set up a non-profit organization. But we have to knock on doors to see who will open, who will help, because politicians, when they want to climb the ladder, offer you villas and castles, and by the time they're up there, they're worthless.

-Well Jannette, do you have a question to end the interview?

-(Jannette) When you talked about sargassum you said that where the purple sargassum arrives everything disappears, but when the yellow sargassum arrives, is there any difference?

[01:09:08]

-No, because most of the yellow sargassum is always on top.

-But the yellow sargassum is going down.

- It's quite rare that we've caught it at depth. I don't know what it is. The deepest we've caught is that type of sargassum.

-And the purple sargassum…

-It sticks, like chewing gum.

-And does it affect you in any way?

-Where we fish, when it's there, there aren't many fish. (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*)

-And when you take the boat out, the sargassum that reaches the shore...

-It affects us when we disembark. And sometimes we can't leave. I said in the interview that sometimes we've gone 6, 7, or 8 days without being able to leave, because no, it's not possible.

-And when the sargassum reaches the coast, you see that tourists don't want to come...

-It doesn't want to arrive, you know that yellow sargassum gives rise to bacteria.

-Does it give a bacteria?

"It stings and little creatures crawl under your skin. Look up information about that yellow sargassum when it's decomposing... a fisherman here almost died cleaning the ramps. Cleaning it because it was so full, to clean it, it was already so rotten it stank. He's got an allergy that the guy was on treatment for, to the yellow one, which is the most common."

-And you're sure that what you're seeing, the purple stuff, is sargassum too.

-It's a type of sargassum. We've been seeing it in that area for about three years.

-And the yellow one, how long have you been seeing it?

-13 years ago, a lot, but we saw it the most about six or seven years ago. That's when it was most prevalent.

-And what do you connect the arrival of that sargassum with?

"I don't even know what it is, nor can I tell you where it comes from, because they tell me it comes from here in the south. But where it comes from, I don't know, but it kills the fish, it kills them, because you can't get out. And there are places you can't fish because it's there."

-And you said the water is very hot…

-Yes, that's right.

-Do you think that affects fishing?

-Of course, because the fish, (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) the deepwater snapper, is from cold water. That's why that fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) is now being caught at depths of up to 300 fathoms. Deeper than before.

-Thank you very much, is there anything else you'd like to tell us at the end?

[01:11:57]

-What can I say? They haven't done anything with the maritime land zone, where the swell reaches and continues to be stored. The government here has ignored that. You know, we've already seen the political interests; they continue to allow construction in the water, and that's not good. I've left Puerto Rico a lot; you go to the United States, I went to North Carolina, and it's beautiful because it has beaches for people to enjoy, and you build from one place to another. But not here; here they build from one place to another. You want to see the place, but you can't even enjoy it. Right now, here, you can't go swimming right there on the shore. All those structures are in the water, so you go to one place and swim in front of someone else's house, and they even get upset. They haven't done anything with that.

How long do you have to travel to get to a public beach?

-About 3 to 5 minutes. The only public beach there is the Balneario Público (Public Spa). And there's the Almendros (Almond Trees), which was there until the war the other day.

-By car for 3 minutes or on foot?

-Like 3 minutes in the car.

-But before, people only got off here.

-Here. This was a tremendous beach. Now, back in the 70s and 80s, there was no control over the sand on the beaches here. There were certain institutions that came here, and I don't know how they managed, they would take hundreds of pieces from the shore. They took them here, in Los Almendros, at the mouth of the ravine, in the Pinito canal, in the Doña Roba canal, they took them in La Fuente, they took them in front of the park, in front of where they call La Playa de Lala, which was the boundary marker, that was a burning ground; that's where all the garbage was dumped in the town of Rincón. There were pieces and pieces, hundreds of pieces, they excavated the shore of the beach.

[01:14:55]

We're blaming erosion, but of course we are, because it was washed away, and the sea has to take it if there's no sand. And this is, unfortunately, what we're experiencing.

-Thank you so much.

-Look over there and you'll see with your own eyes what I'm telling you.