Let's talk about fishing in Rincón and its surroundings. How old are you, Interviewee?

-I'm 57 years old.

-And since when did you start fishing? How many years ago?

-Basically since I have knowledge, but I started fishing commercially since I was 12 years old.

-And who did you start fishing with?

"I started fishing with a fisherman who fished with chinchorros, or landing nets. His name was Pedro Muñiz, known as Pedrosa, and that's basically where I got started in commercial fishing. Later, with him, we started developing trap fishing, since he had a trap. He started introducing me to deep-water snapper fishing, and that's basically where I got hooked on commercial fishing. Because I see this more than a job, it's a passion."

-But I was still like a child when it started.

-Yes, at 12, we basically started during school holidays, if not when we got out of school, then we went to the beach to fish with the seine. Because we fished with the seine in the mornings and in the afternoons. So, basically, I spent half my life at school, and the other half at the beach. The same day. If we had interlocking, at a given time, we studied in the afternoon, then in the morning we were at the beach. If not, then vice versa. We were always at the beach, and if we had to miss school to go fishing, we did that too.

-And you were always fishing around Rincón?

-Basically, I've been fishing in the northwest part of the island. I started my first few years in Rincón all the time, and then as time went on, I moved out to other towns, but mainly in the western, northwest area.

[00:03:12]

-And he told me that he learned to fish on the shore, but then he taught him how to fish in the deep.

-Exact.

-How many years did you fish with your teacher, so to speak, or your mentor?

-Well, basically, I fished with him until I entered college. Basically, I fished with him mainly, but if not, I fished with other people. But with him, I was the main one until I entered college. By the time I entered college, it was already taking up a lot of my time, and I couldn't really focus on fishing. By then, I already had my boat, and whenever I had days off from college, I would go fishing on my own. But unfortunately, I dropped out of high school just before finishing both because my passion for fishing was stronger than my studies.

-What high schools did you attend?

-In Mathematics and Sociology Education.

-And you didn't finish because you wanted to catch more fish?

-My passion for fishing, I've lived it since I was little. I even worked for the government for 10 years and then resigned from the government to dedicate myself to fishing full-time.

-What work did you do with the government?

-In the government, I was in charge of the Billing Department in the emergency room. I was the one who billed the medical plans (Doctorfish, \*Acanthuridae\*) of patients who came in through the emergency room. And also in emergencies, I served as support, because I have a course in emergency medical technicians. Also, if an emergency arose and they needed help, I helped them too.

-And when did you leave that job and dedicate yourself completely to fishing?

-Wow, that was over 20 years ago.

-What happened that made you say: No, not anymore, I just want to fish?

Yes, I remember clearly. First, what I earned, the salary I earned at the job I had was so little compared to what I earned fishing. And I also didn't feel comfortable; honestly, I didn't feel comfortable at work. I missed a lot of work to go fishing. I think I had a record of absences at my job because if they didn't want to give me the day off, I would get a medical certificate, because all the doctors (Doctorfish, \*Acanthuridae\*) were my friends, and they would give me the certificate, and I would go fishing. Then I would give them a fish as a bribe, paying the bribe. But really, my passion for fishing, and thank God, I've always made good money from commercial fishing, and honestly, I don't regret the step I took. And if I had to do exactly the same thing again, I would do it again.

[00:06:48]

-There was the passion and also the fact that you could have earned much more…

-Yes, the economic factor, definitely.

-And is that still the case? Can you still make a good living off of fish now?

-I understand so. We older fishermen don't go out every day, because we fish intelligently; we use the phase of the moon and the weather, the weather conditions, to know which areas to go to. On the other hand, you see new fishermen who go out every day, they catch their catches, but they're not as big as those of the older fishermen. We know what time it is, where to go, and we can have good catches without having to go out every day.

-Tell me a little more about that: what are the things that give you information about when is the best time to go out and when is not the time to go out.

-First, the weather conditions, because you don't fight with nature. Weather conditions are the most important thing. Then you have to know the current conditions. You have to monitor the currents, either by talking to friends from other towns. 'Did you go fishing?' Ask about the current conditions, if they're good, because if the currents are strong, you're not going to go because the expense you have each time you go out isn't worth it; you're not going to take that risk. You take controlled risks and obviously the phases of the moon. The phases of the moon tell you which areas to go to, because contrary to what many people think, and the fishing I do, which is deep-sea fishing, we depend heavily on the phases of the moon to know which areas the fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) want to bite. Because if you go during the opposite phase, you can catch some fish, but if you let yourself be guided by the phases of the moon, you maximize that day's fishing if you go to the most favorable areas, with the phases of the moon.

[00:09:26]

-Well, I don't know if this is like economic details. As someone who never goes fishing, I'd like to understand exactly what you pay attention to, such as the current, what it needs to be like to catch what kind of fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*), or the phase of the moon. For example, today you decided not to go fishing. Why?

-Yes. If you can see it today, look at the weather conditions: the weather is windy. Right now out there, the wind is around 20 knots, 30 knots, which is easily close to 40 miles per hour. You know, on the boats we have, which are boats that range from 21 feet to 25 feet, more or less, that's not safe conditions. For you to go fishing, you also have to watch the weather conditions, because you have to have a safety code at sea. Because I can go out, I can try to fish in bad weather, but I already have something against me. It's a factor against me, which is going to limit me, how I'm going to fish. And you weigh those things and decide whether to go out or not. For example, the phases of the moon: you have Point A, Point B, and Point C. Perhaps during the full moon phase, you can go to Point A and it's favorable for you. Perhaps when it reaches the waning moon phase, you go to Point B, and so on, with each phase of the moon. You have your fishing areas, because years of experience tell you where you have to go, with which lunar phase, to maximize your catches. Obviously, because you can go to another place that isn't favorable with that moon and you'll catch, but not the quantities you perhaps need to have a good day of fishing. And those are the factors we basically consider, all three: currents, weather conditions, and the phases of the moon. At least for me, those are the three factors I let myself take into account before going fishing.

[00:11:56]

-And that's something you learned from your teacher from the beginning?

Yes, I had several teachers. For example, the one I mentioned, Pedro Muñiz, known as "Pedrosa," taught me more about seine fishing and pot fishing. Then I have another one, or I fished with another man named Pablo Santos, who was known as "Palín." We called him "the master." Back then, he was a man of strong character, but he taught you how to fish for deep-water snappers (Lutjanidae) like no one else. I say that if he hadn't taught me how to fish for deep-water snappers (Lutjanidae), I wouldn't have been as successful as I am now in that fishery. The truth is, he was a very brilliant man. He was a very brilliant man because he's since passed away, and not just me; many of the fishermen who are here today, he taught us how to fish. That's why everyone knew him as "the master."

-Is there anyone similar today who teaches young people?

Yes, there are several people. Modesty aside, I try to teach the fishermen who approach me the correct way to fish, and I'll give you an example: there's a young man from Aguada who approached me and asked me the basics of this fishing, because he fished, but didn't produce large quantities. And I asked him: 'Do you really want to fish? Do you want to dedicate yourself to this fishery?' And he said yes, and I saw him. He was the father of a baby at the time. Today he has two babies. But I started teaching him. I didn't go with him, but I told him: you have to go to these spots, observe the currents. I taught him the factors, I told him how to do things, how to develop a fishing area. And today, that young man was able to build a house without taking out a loan. And he has two children. And he recently came to me and said: 'Interviewee, thank you, because thanks to you, I was able to build my house without having to take out loans.' Because he trusts me a lot, he said to me: 'Interviewee, I'm going to get a loan to build a house.' And I told him: 'Of course not, you're not going to get a loan.' I told him: 'You're young, don't go into debt. If you're going to go into debt, it's for something bigger.' He said: 'But a house is something bigger.' And I said: 'Yes, but with what you're earning these days from fishing, you can build your house without needing a loan. You fish for one or two weeks, you hold on to the money, and since his father is a carpenter, he helped him build the house. He did that; he fished for one or two weeks with the money he earned from fishing, so he bought the materials and worked for one or two weeks. Then he fished for one or two weeks. It took him a year to build the house, a modest house; three-bedroom with a small bathroom, a small house, but it has a little cement house. A safe house for her children, she didn't have to go into debt. And those are things that satisfy you. You say, "Cons," at least I taught someone who learned a trade and at least they're making a profit, and that makes me very happy.

[00:16:08]

-And tell me a little about your life. What was it like when you decided to dedicate yourself

100% fishing and no longer working for the government, but he made a good living from fishing? How was he able to support his family?

Ironically, when I worked for the government, I worked seven days a week, just to make ends meet, as they say. I worked five days for the government and had to work two days fishing to generate enough income to support my home and family. And I got tired. At that time, and now, the salary of a government employee is a pittance. Because ironically, what I earned in two days was sometimes a month's salary. And I said, 'No, I can't continue with this. I'm tired.' I quit, and people told me, 'You're crazy,' and I said, 'No, that's why I'm going to quit because I'm not crazy. I'm not going to stay here, in prison for 30 years to collect a pension, a pittance. No, I'm going fishing.' That's why I put the money in an IRA. Or I set aside some money for my retirement, but I'm not going to stay here. So, thank God, I found people who were flexible and didn't penalize me as much for my absences. But I didn't like it; I felt like a prisoner, and I was always, how do you say, broken, or deflated. Ever since I started fishing, because before I worked for the government, I already had my boat, I was already fishing. I said, 'No, I'm going fishing.' And ever since I started fishing, my life changed; I mean, I started making a lot of money. And I can't complain, really. To this day, I can't complain about fishing.

[00:18:36]

-One of the things people say is that it's good to have a government job or something similar. The good thing is that you do get a pension at the end of it and that there's health insurance. I don't know, things like that. How do fishermen manage without these things? How do they get the things they need to go to the doctor or retire?

-Right now, at least I'll tell you about my case. The government provides a pretty good health plan. I can't complain. That's the one I use, and it's good.

-Is that the Federal plan…?

-That's "the reform," it's called health reform. I'm not complaining. My wife has been hospitalized, I had eye surgery, I had hand surgery, and I've been fine. At least I don't have any health insurance expenses. I do have retirement expenses, if the fisherman doesn't make his adjustments, because obviously, like when you're self-employed, because being a fisherman you're self-employed, you have to make your own plans, because you're not going to be fishing forever. Fishing is a high-risk art; one jump, you can break a leg, you can go without fishing for a long time, so you have to have your financial reserves and obviously establish a retirement plan. Many fishermen, out of ignorance, don't pay federal taxes, which is what we call Social Security. Well, I pay them too. If I have an injury or something, I can claim Social Security and have something to live on, too. At least in that sense, well, I've guided myself. And I can't complain, I know I'm fine.

[00:20:43]

-And what do you think, is it the same with other fishermen here in Rincón, do they do the same as you, or what is it like?

-Ever since the government—I think it was during Pedro Rosselló's time—required fishermen to fill out tax forms. Accountants gave many fishermen the option of filing federal tax returns. Well, many, I'd say it's about 50/50. 50% do it, 50% don't, but even before they were required to file a tax return, I was already paying Social Security and filing my tax returns because I know that in an eventuality, you have to have, as they say, a plan B. And in that case, I've protected myself a lot.

-Let's talk a little about the changes you've observed in the maritime environment, in fishing, in the marine environment. If you've noticed any changes since you started fishing until now, could you tell me a little about that?

The first change I can tell you has occurred is coastal erosion: excessive construction on the coast has caused us to have less beach today. These excessive constructions that cause coastal erosion, the elimination of wetlands and mangroves, have caused marine habitats to decline. And that is a serious change today. I think it's something that needs to be taken into consideration. And it's very frustrating when you see that all governments, not any specific one, look the other way and turn a blind eye when they have to address such important issues. As for fishing, I tell you that this is a very important factor, because wetlands and mangroves are the breeding grounds, the nurseries, where small fish are raised that later sink to the bottom, small lobsters are raised, many snappers (Lutjanidae) are raised there, sardines thrive there. And it's sad to see how that's gradually being lost, and I think it's time for governments to decide to do something, to address this issue seriously.

After Hurricane Maria, there was a huge change here: the seabed changed. I didn't say anything about it, because I stopped diving a while ago. I used to dive. But divers have told me that places where there were rocks now have sand, and places where there was sand now have rocks. So that has changed a bit the way many fishermen develop their fishing areas; they've had to relearn. Because, for example, you used to go to a place and you already knew you could fish there. Well, now you went and you didn't catch anything. It's not that the fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) disappeared, it's that they moved, and you had to relearn, to see where they were located. Rediscover the areas where they were aggregating. And that, well, every time an atmospheric event of this magnitude occurs, it always happens.

For us, when fishing for deep-water snapper, I remember that many of the areas we fished stopped being productive. However, others were super productive. You know, there's always a lag when those movements occur. I say it's like a blender in the water, changing everything and coming out, it was here, but it moved it over here.

And you have to learn to adapt and start looking again, in which you adapt and come back, and as they say, come back and start again.

[00:25:29]

-Tell me a little about how fishing changed, exactly, for you, after Hurricane Maria.

After Hurricane Maria, I remember that the first trips I made weren't productive for that very reason. So, unfortunately, we were without electricity for several months. In other words, we were out of business because the restaurants didn't have power. You had no way to store your produce. When you went fishing, if the catch was good, you had to stop fishing and bring in what you knew you could sell. Not only was there no electricity, but there was a shortage of ice. So you had no way to preserve that catch. Thank God, I was one of the privileged few who had an ice factory next to my house, and obviously, because I was a neighbor, we had certain benefits that the local population didn't have, and we could get ice to store some of our catch. Because they couldn't afford the amount of ice I needed, but it at least gave me enough to work. But many people had a very difficult time marketing their produce. I remember that electricity came back to our homes in December. I remember it was the day of a Fisheries Council meeting, and I was arriving at the hotel when my wife called me and said, "The electricity just came on, right now." I said, "Wow." Because I went to work because, obviously, I'm the chair of the Fisheries Council's advisory panel and had to attend the meetings. I couldn't miss it. And I know a lot of people had a tough time, they had a really tough time, and we got electricity after about four months. What month was that, Maria?

-September.

-We had electricity after about three months, but there were people who didn't. And the restaurants didn't have electricity, sometimes until January or February. How did you market that product? It was impossible; the island was in chaos. But everyone learned to be prepared and more resilient, because it hit us so hard. You know, there's a saying here that goes: hard knocks teach. Well, people prepared themselves. Now, I understand that today people are more prepared, ready to face disasters of this nature.

[00:28:36]

-How do you think you are more prepared?

Fishermen have strengthened their approach to fishing. They have more powerful electric generators, because what I had was a small gasoline generator. Back then, I had a generator that you had to use for four or five hours and then you had to turn it off. So I used it for four or five hours for the house and four or five hours for the freezer for my bait. Because I had to save my bait. And now, fishermen have more diesel generators or solar systems. The few who have solar panels and they have more freezers, they have their own ice machines, some of them, those who can afford them. You know, and they're better prepared to face any eventuality that arises. Everyone learned; we learned a lot.

-Let's go back a little to Maria, she told me that the first 3 to 5 months she couldn't catch much fish because there was nowhere to sell it, but she also told me that the fishing spots were changed, how long did it take her to understand: So they were changed and so we can do efficient fishing and that she could use it again?

-I was there for about 6 months, because when I say 6 months, it's on the platform, inside, the first few miles of the coast, because offshore it didn't have as much impact on the fishing spots, obviously because of how deep it is.

But in the shallower areas, I had about six months to get acclimated again and understand the dynamics of the bottom and how things were going. So, thanks to the divers, when they went in, they would tell me: "Look, Interviewee, there are rocks here now, there's sand here," because we also cast nets to catch bait, and if there are rocks, if there's an area with rocks, you can't cast the net because it'll break. It took us about six months to once again understand the dynamics of the bottom, the structure of the bottom, in order to be more efficient.

[00:31:23]

-Can you say that after 6 months you were able to work more or less the same as before Maria?

-Yes, at least I do.

-And the other fisherman from Rincón?

-Which one, the one you were interviewing?

-No, in general.

There are other fishermen who, unfortunately, suffered more losses than I did. Of course, they took their time. Trees fell on their boats, breaking them, and there were no materials to repair them because everything was closed. It was chaos. Many lost their boats. Many fishermen had to leave the island. If we're going to talk about the situation with other fishermen, because they truly lost everything. I remember that at that time, all I had were 50 traps; they were lost. But, little by little, I was able to make traps again and throw them out again. And we continued working. Because, unfortunately, the government's response was late, very late. The government took a long time to provide aid to the fishermen, and basically what they provided was crumbs. So, because unfortunately, the fishing sector—I say that fishing in Puerto Rico is the child that no one wants. For some things, we belong to the Department of Natural Resources; for others, we belong to the Department of Agriculture. And when there's an issue, both remain silent and do nothing. That's why we say we're the children no one wants because they ignore the problems. Right now, I don't know if you've heard the problem with the Fisheries Disaster Relief Funds. NOAA sent 11.4 million, I think it was, and the DNER still hasn't disbursed the funds. And if NOAA doesn't send a letter requesting the disposition of the funds by the 16th of this month, the funds must be returned. Since Hurricane Maria, they've allocated funds, but I don't blame NOAA; I blame the Department of Natural Resources' negligence in being skillful in resolving these issues.

[00:34:20]

Because they used part of the funds quite easily. The Department of Natural Resources used the funds, part of the funds, for what they needed, but the part of the funds that are for the fishermen—7.6 million—since it's not for them, they're not interested in resolving the issue. That's why there's neglect. But if the 7.6 million were for the Department, I guarantee you that they would have already purchased everything they needed for the Department and would have used the funds before they were lost. And that's very sad and very disappointing, and it's the neglect of all government administrations, because it's truly pitiful to see how the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Natural Resources work with commercial fishermen; it really leaves much to be said.

[00:35:23]

-I understand. How do you think that money could be used for the Rincón community? What good would it do to make them more resilient to another hurricane that might hit?

-The remaining funds are for direct assistance to fishermen. This money is supposed to be divided equally among fishermen who, at the time, had an active commercial fishing license and met all the requirements, which is around 600 to 700 fishermen, perhaps a few more.

-In all of Puerto Rico?

-Yes, from all of Puerto Rico... doing the math, that's like $9,000 or $10,000 for each fisherman. Many fishermen need that money today, because many may have had a boat, but the engine they have isn't working or the repair costs on the engine they have today are so high that they need to change that engine, and that money can help them perhaps get a better engine. There are many fishermen who are still using fishing gear, basically obsolete, who could upgrade to better technologies: like GPS, Fish Finder. Perhaps buy the safety equipment the boat needs, because maybe they have a boat and don't even have an EPIRB, the safety system, and it's sad that they continue using that, that they continue falling asleep, sleeping, and don't want to take a step forward to resolve this issue. The fishermen had to protest last Wednesday at the DRNA on that matter, and now, as the news has come out, they're perhaps making a bit of a move, but honestly, if you ask me, I highly doubt they'll give that money. I don't trust the Department.

[00:37:41]

-Is this the first time you've felt so disappointed?

-Always. The Department of Natural Resources is a department that, unfortunately, is highly politicized. And that's something that truly speaks volumes, because on the one hand, the DNER doesn't address fishermen's issues properly. I'm part of the Fisheries Board of the Department of Natural Resources, and we—I don't remember the last time the Fisheries Board met to advise the Department of Natural Resources on fisheries matters. But I'll go further… in the history of the Fisheries Board of the Department of Natural Resources, no secretary has ever positively accepted the recommendations made by the Fisheries Board. And I can say this without fear of being wrong. And you can ask anyone who belongs to the Fisheries Board, they have never taken the advice given by the DNER Fisheries Board. As one person—whose words I'll never forget—someone who works at the Department of Natural Resources said: 'You make recommendations, but we're the ones who make the decisions.' We know that, but what did he mean? No matter what recommendations you make, we're going to decide what we want. That's what he meant. You know, we're perhaps just an ornament, perhaps a protocol, to say they're doing things right, but they've never accepted a recommendation from the Fisheries Board. And that's very sad. On the contrary, I'm part of the advisory board of the Caribbean Fisheries Council, and within the Caribbean Fisheries Council, all the recommendations issued by the District Advisory Panel are discussed, and the vast majority are accepted and actions are taken based on those recommendations, because they take the fishermen's recommendations very seriously.

[00:40:25]

-Both together are…

-They are separate

-Fishermen?

-Yes, they're made up of fishermen. From the industry, recreational fishermen, charter fishermen, commercial fishermen, the restaurant industry, there's a scientific industry, it's the entire community issuing recommendations.

-I want to ask you more. You told me that after Hurricane Maria, many fishermen had to leave…

-Yeah.

-Outside of Puerto Rico?

-They left Puerto Rico to look for work, perhaps in construction, perhaps in agriculture in the fields of the United States, because they knew what, they had no way to live. There are fishermen who left and made a life out there; they now have a new life totally different from fishing. Because the truth is, that hurricane, I've been through a few hurricanes, but none like that one, you know, and it had a strong impact on the fishing industry on the island.

-Tell me a little bit, roughly how many fishermen were there in Rincón before the hurricane and roughly how many there are now, commercial fishermen?

I don't remember the exact number, but in Rincón there could have been... maybe 15 or 20 commercial fishermen. Now there are many more because these are one of the few towns I've seen where there are young fishermen wanting to get into fishing. And that makes me happy, because commercial fishing is a sector that unfortunately has little recruitment. People aren't interested in making a living from fishing, because they know that even though it's a burdensome job, because it generates a good income, you have to work it, if not, well, you do. And many people right now prefer the easier things. But at least I'm happy that in Rincón I've seen, after Maria, in recent years, an increase in fishermen. I'd say there are about 30 fishermen in Rincón right now.

-And many are young… after Maria.

-Yes, young people, there are many young fishermen.

[00:43:02]

-Let's talk a little bit about... We talked about disasters and resilience... Tell me a little bit more about the fish you catch now, if it's different from what you caught before, you asked me about the type of fish, if the type of fish has changed in your career...

-No, the fish are basically the same. I'm currently a deepwater lobster and snapper fisherman. It's basically the same for deepwater snappers. The only difference I've seen now in the deepwater snapper fishery is that, given the local government's irresponsibility in opening that fishery—because that fishery was like a limited entry—it opened the fishery to more fishermen a few years ago. When you went fishing, for example, in an area, you could see 5 or 6 fishermen fishing that area, to give you an example. I recently went to a sector and there were about 20 fishermen in that area. The fishing is still good, but I'm deeply concerned, and this is an issue I'll soon bring to the Fisheries Council, that the fisheries will be impacted. And that wonderful resource we have on the island is going to start to dwindle. And that seriously worries me. Right now there's no problem; fishing is still extraordinary everywhere, right, obviously, depending on the weather conditions, because there are good days and bad days. It all depends on the conditions. But, unfortunately, if more people continue to enter that fishery, there could come a time when it could be in danger. And as a responsible fisherman and as president of the advisory panel, I'm going to bring this to the Fisheries Council for an eventual evaluation, based on the fishing reports and catch reports. We'll see if it stays as it is or if controls begin to be implemented, closing that window for bringing in so many fishermen. I think it should be closed for the time being and we'll see how the resource responds. Because I wouldn't want a fishery that is so fruitful to fall into danger. So, before, there was enough for everyone, but in the future, there may not be enough for anyone. You know, and I would like to protect it in time. That's the only thing, but the truth is, so far the fisheries are good, the fishing continues to be good.

[00:46:22]

This has even been going on for a few years: in Puerto Rico, a closure was implemented on fishing for Unit 1 snapper, which are the chillos, the silk snapper and various deep-water snappers (Snappers, \*Lutjanidae\*).

-(Jannette) Can you say the names?

-Silk snapper, vermilion snapper, blackfin snapper—basically those three. Of the yellow snappers, the snapper. And the catches have been excellent. I remember when I started fishing—I'll give you an example—I caught snapper of 14 or 15 pounds. At one point, that size started to decline, and catching an 8-pound snapper was a real treat. A few years ago, maybe five years, all those snappers came back. So the closure was good; it had an effect.

-When was the closing?

-The closure has been going on for a few years now. I don't remember the exact date, but it's been going on for a few years.

-But specifically is it the closing of the chillo?

-For the snappers (Lutjanidae) in Unit 1. The deepwater snappers (Lutjanidae) have Unit 1, which is the silk snapper, vermilion snapper, blackfin snapper, bluegill (Lepomis macrochirus) (black snapper)… I think it's those four species, I don't remember exactly. And in Unit 2 they have the queen snapper and the cardinal snapper, those two units. In the future, I think it will be necessary to implement a seasonal closure for Unit 2 as well, but more as a preventative closure. But you have to evaluate the possibilities, because you can't just close just for the sake of it; you have to study it, see if it's necessary to close, see if it warrants closing or not, that has to be studied. Consider the socioeconomic factor, too, which is very important, and all of that needs to be brought to the table to determine whether or not it warrants a closure, but I understand that it should be done.

[00:49:28]

-I wanted to ask you a little about the quality of life in Rincón. Since you grew up here, many years ago, could Rincón be called a fishing community, since the economic profile was more oriented toward fishermen?

Rincón has always depended heavily on tourism, but there used to be a large fishing community in Rincón. I'm talking about net fishermen, divers; unfortunately, there aren't many divers now. And right now, there's a large fishing industry in Rincón. To give you an idea, I don't know if you saw the ramp. More than 80% of the deep-water snappers (Lutjanidae) that were sold and consumed on the island came in from that ramp, according to the Fisheries Research Laboratory. Having problems with the ramp, the fishermen obviously have better boats, and they sort of displaced themselves. Many went south, to the communities of Añasco, Mayagüez, and Cabo Rojo, others went to Aguada. But Rincón has always had that unique quality: it always attracts fishermen from all over the island. This ramp, to give you an idea, is still used by fishermen from as far away as Arecibo and Cabo Rojo. Sometimes they come here to develop deep-sea fishing. Why? Because if you look at the map, Rincón is a peninsula, and being a peninsula, it's the area furthest into the sea. What does that mean? That the fishing spots are closer than anywhere else. If you're going to summarize the attraction, it's the economy for the fishermen; the ease of getting to the fishing spots faster and having better catches, because it's not the same as leaving Cabo Rojo to fish, perhaps, for example, in the Bajo del Medio, where you can spend perhaps up to an hour longer, than leaving from Rincón. And Rincón has always had that appeal. You come to see the good fishing days, you come here in the afternoon, and you can see lots of fishermen, because Rincón's strength is actually deep-sea snapper fishing. In addition to charter boat fishing. Those are the two most important fishing-related industries in Rincón.

[00:52:31]

-And two things, but I'll start with: not only the fishermen from Rincón who can sell their fish here but fishermen who come from all over the island, embark here and sell their fish here?

-There are both. We have fishermen who sell to resellers based in Rincón, but there are also fishermen who take it and market it themselves, and that's good.

-Here in Rincón?

They sell in Rincón, but most of our product ends up in the metropolitan area. That's the biggest source. But many fishermen market their product themselves, which is the beauty of it. They already have their own established businesses.

-But why are they stopping here, if they come from somewhere else?

-No, because they go fishing from here.

-They're leaving here.

-And they come here and then they come back.

-I get it now. It makes sense because, as you told me, it's closer.

-Yes, the fishing spots.

-If you show me in the letter, because I have this question too, like the

The most important fishing areas for this place, if you could show them to me. Let's see if the chart will work here. I don't know if you can see the map well enough.

-Yeah.

-But, supposedly, let's see if it works. Yes. Could you use this pencil to mark the areas you think are of cultural and economic importance to the fishermen of Rincón?

-We left… I just don’t see…

-It's a little difficult…

-What buoy is this? 6?

-Let's see, where?

-That's the 6.

(…)

[00:55:40]

-Well, the fishing areas of Rincón, including the western area, are all these areas, basically. From here, like this, like this, I can't see the depths. More or less? Wait, how deep is this nautical chart?

-I don't know.

-Anyway, basically, that's it, it's more or less, I'll tell you now when I see the banana. Where the banana is here, the banana, I think this is in meters. It tells you here, down here... Yes, more or less... Ah, fathoms, it's in fathoms, I'm fine. Because here we use fathoms.

-Nautical, right?

-Yes, basically, this is more or less… Because obviously around La Mona, because ever since the Okeanos Explorer came here, which is a NOAA research vessel, fishermen used to fish, although I already knew, they fished in all these areas. Fishermen fish all this, and the vast majority come out of Rincón, but the areas they fish the most are here. But they fish all this. Well, I've come down here… I don't see… but, basically, one way or another, fishermen fish this whole area, the fishermen from the west, basically, around here are Los Rabos, look Los Rabos are here. If I go with it, it's down here, like this, because these are Los Rabos, this is an area where fishermen catch bait. They come out from here, they fish this area to catch bait.

[00:59:55]

-You can write to me there, 'bait'...

-Bait. No, and tuna (Mackerels and Tuna, \*Scombridae\*) too. Pelagic, you could put pelagic here. And DWS; deepwater snapper. Because this whole area here is used to fish for deepwater snappers (Lutjanidae), including this whole area. Since the fishermen saw that I was part of the Okeanos Explorer working group, they saw on the boat's live recordings that Queen snappers were found at depths of almost 2,000 feet, well, everything changed, because before, fishermen fished up to 1,200 to 1,300 feet, more or less, that was what the deepwater fishermen fished. Since they saw what the Okeanos Explorer published, most fishermen, when they don't get snappers (Snappers, \*Lutjanidae\*) in those depths, go looking for depths of 300 fathoms, which is 1800 feet, up to 350 fathoms, which is already 2200 feet, around there, more or less, you know that the whole panorama changed.

-When did that happen?

-That was a while ago, let me see, if I remember the date, I think it was more than 5 years ago.

[01:02:03]

-And if you look at this place, it's practically the entire area...

-Yeah.

-But if you look at this place, are there areas that are protected here, where you can't fish?

There are seasonally protected areas. Just wait, I hope the Corona doesn't come up and it's going to be Bajo de Sico. This is Bajo de Sico, this is a protected area. This is Bajo del Tourmaline and Abierto La Sierra, this area is a protected area that's closed seasonally. I mean, it's not closed all the time; it's closed seasonally, but they allow you... in some of those areas, even though they're closed, they allow you to fish in the water column. You know, you can troll, but you can't bottom fish when they close it. And in others, like Tourmaline, when they close it, you can't fish.

-And do you think it's okay like this or do you think there should be more areas that are closed or more areas that are open?

The closure of those areas, not including Bajo de Sico, was to protect the spawning of the red hind, the red sea bass. And I believe that this should be revisited, because I understand that the areas currently closed, except for Abierto La Sierra—I'm talking about Bajo del Tourmaline—are not ideal for the spawning of the red sea bass. I've spoken with scientists, who've told me they've been there during the closure seasons and haven't seen any aggregations of red sea bass. In other words, it should be revisited. Perhaps it was a change, perhaps due to atmospheric events, who knows, perhaps the aggregations shifted. Because unfortunately, since those closures were made, they haven't even released studies that tell you: look, the population is fine. We know it's doing well because large individuals are being caught in abundance, because the red hind is not like that, but I classify it as a seasonal fish that is only caught. The vast majority of red hind are caught only around Easter. Then the catches drop because that's when there's the most demand. They continue to be caught year-round, but not in such large quantities as during Easter. For me, they need to revisit that at some point and determine what's happening in those areas. And see, because you can't just close them down, because those are areas of great economic importance for fishing. And when wahoo season comes, they are exceptional spots for wahoo fishing. And not just wahoo for commercial fishing, but for charter boats. I know that clients come, because Rincón currently has, I think it has more than five or six charter boat operators, in this small town. And people come for wahoo season, to fish for wahoo. Big wahoo are caught here. And many customers come who just want to go wahoo fishing or tuna fishing. (Mackerels and Tuna, \*Scombridae\*)

And that's a business because if you go out fishing and don't catch anything, your customers won't come back. And these are areas that should be considered, at least opening up the water column while the condition of these aggregations is investigated.

[01:06:27]

-At one point in the interview, you told me about the communication between commercial fishermen on the internet. I mean, there are people who live far away, because you can tell them they're diving...

-Yes, we fishermen are like a family. Everyone has their own group. And right now I can call a fisherman from Cabo Rojo who I know is fishing and ask him: how did it go, how were the currents? Just like I can call someone from Aguada, I can call someone from Arecibo, who I know came out through Rincón, and that's how I'll make my fishing plans. So they call me when they come to fish because this ramp has a lot of problems with the sand. They call me and say: Interviewee, how's the ramp? What condition is it in? I tell them: dude, go to Mayagüez, don't come here, or come, it's clean. We're all, the vast majority of us, buddies. You know, we don't tell each other we're fishing when we're fishing. When we're out there fishing, the fishing is always bad, and when you get here, you say: Hey, it was bad, you caught a lot. You know? Because you're not going to take them to your fishing spots either, but apart from that, since everyone does it, you're obviously defending your interests. Aside from that, we all have a good relationship and get along.

-Can you say that the relationship between commercial and charter fishermen is the same?

-Yes, at least in Rincón. I'm talking about Rincón. The charter boats themselves sometimes sell us bait and say, "Look, I'll tell you, get me some bait, I don't have any." And a fisherman who doesn't fish deep water tells me, "I saved some bait for you, I have it at home, go and get it, you know." And when they need it, sometimes they give it to you, because sometimes bait is really expensive, and sometimes when they ask me for a fish, I give it to them or sell it to them cheap. We make exchanges like that, because we have good relationships with the vast majority of charter boats here. I think it's true for everyone, because there are a lot of commercial fishermen who work part-time on charter boats when they're not fishing. Not all of them, but there are a few, more or less, who are just starting out in fishing, and that's good because they're diversifying their fishing capacity. They can fish for deep-water snappers, they can fish for pelagic fish, they can dive, and that's good because they improve their skills, and that's good, and when I see it, I'm very happy because they're really diversifying. And that, at least, lets you know that in the future they're going to be fine, because they have ways to make money, to fish, and to generate an income.

[01:10:01]

-How do you see the future of fishing in Rincón?

-I see the future of Rincón's fishing as positive. What I do believe is that it's necessary to increase or create facilities for fishermen. Because, unfortunately, that piece of land there, that parking lot, was created based on proposals from the fishermen. Because the fishermen wanted to be displaced from here, but that's a whole other story. They wanted to be displaced, and based on the protests the fishermen made, that space was made available for parking. In such a short time—it didn't take five months—they pulled the lines and regulated parking, because that was a free-for-all there. And right now, cars aren't supposed to be parked there. A $200 fine for every car parked there, but the police don't come.

-Is it a tourist car?

-Yes, for visitors. They have a parking area, but they can't park in the boat area. Sometimes FURA comes and gives them a ticket, but sometimes they don't.

-Is that the only place there is for fishermen, for boats in Rincón?

-Yes. Right now, yes.

-How many were there before?

-We used to have the Fishing Village, we have the Fishing Village, because I'm the president of the Rincón Fishing Village. But after Hurricane Maria, it's destroyed there. With our own money, we rebuilt the part of the booths and the building we have upstairs, but FEMA hasn't given us a cent. It was all our own money. We don't have electricity right now; we had a generator, and it was stolen there. Because having a generator for when we went to hold meetings, and if night fell, we could turn on the lights, and have a refrigerator to put cold water or beer for the kids to drink during the meeting. And now, you know, if we're going to hold a meeting, it has to be during the day; when it gets dark, we have to leave. And it's regrettable. I think that in the future, we should consider moving the Fishing Village from where it is. Because that Fishing Village has essentially lost its purpose. And I'll explain why: this Fishing Village dates back to the 1970s, when most fishermen had wooden boats, what are known as Yolas. You know what a Yola is. The fishermen would arrive there in their boats and leave them there, on the shore, and leave their catch at the Fishing Village. Now, the vast majority of fishermen—95%, if not 100%—have boats with trailers and keep them at home. The vast majority of fishermen keep their boats at home. So, the reality, the reason for the existence of the Fishing Village, is no longer there. We continue trying to keep it alive, but in my opinion, it would be good to expropriate a piece of land next to the ramp. It doesn't have to be right here, but nearby, where the fishermen can park when they arrive, leave their catch, if they wish to do so, because it's not mandatory either, if they wish to do so, and establish another type of economic activity. That's why now the fishermen, one of whom works with us at the Fishing Village, instead of waiting for the fishermen at the village, have to come here, weigh the fish here on the beach, and distribute it to the restaurants.

[01:14:37]

-I mean, if I understand correctly, the old fishing village, which is still alive now, is far from the only place where fishermen can go out...

-Exactly.

-But why was there a place there before, but now it's private?

-No, porque antes los botes eran de madera, las yola, los wooden boats, small wooden boats, that we used to ramp in the sand, because we don’t have big boats like 20 footeers, fiber glass boats, no, we only had small boats with 30 or 40 horsepower. That’s it. So, there are small boats that you can ramp there, leave your boat there, but now they have the boat on a trailer; fiberglass with big motors, GPS, sounders, they have so expensive tools, so they take their boats to the houses and use the ramp, because this is the only ramp that you can use from here to Mayagüez. Because in Añasco we have a boat ramp, but most of the time is unusable, because is totally covered from sand.

-I understand, but in the Fishing Village, do they hold council meetings there during the day?

-Meetings, yes.

-Meetings, but more than that, is fish sold there?

-No, because we don't have electricity.

The fish market area of ​​the Fishing Village is on the sand, like this. She'll take you there now so you can see it. We lost our beach, so we had to fix it. We brought trucks without anyone's permission, we put dirt in front of the shacks, and then we brought sand. And we rebuilt the beach, but there was no beach there; the beach was lost.

-Why do you think the beach was lost?

-Because of Hurricane Maria.

-Because of the hurricane.

-It was all because of Hurricane Maria.

-Well, I think I've asked all the questions I wanted. I have one more thing: to ask you about what you noticed with sargassum? When did you first notice it was problematic?

[01:17:18]

-Well, sargassum has always been a problem, seasonally. But I don't know why, in recent years—it could be global warming, who knows—the quantities of sargassum that are reaching the coasts of Rincón, and Rincón is in the western area, which are some of the least impacted towns. But Rincón, being a peninsula… let's look at the map here. Being a peninsula, the sargassum rests in Rincón. We are here. So, generally, the sargassum comes like this and stays here. Generally, after here, the sargassum continues like this, like this, like this, like this, and almost never reaches the beach. But Rincón is one of the last towns, where the sargassum hits the hardest with the southern winds. All the points, here in Cabo Rojo, the sargassum also hits. And here when the sargassum hits, it covers the entire beach. When it hits the beach, the sargassum decomposes, and what happens when it decomposes? Everything that lives beneath that sargassum: the corals, the nurseries, everything on the beach will die because the oxygen runs out. There's no oxygenation; it all ends. The life that sargassum itself brings also dies, because when the sargassum decomposes, the life of the ecosystem that sargassum itself supported ends.

-(Jannette) What does sargassum bring when it arrives, when you say life?

-Sargassum has an ecosystem: it has little crabs, it has little fish, it has a lot of life, the ecosystem that is created, the life that is created beneath the sargassum. There's also the problem that sargassum has when it arrives, when it decomposes; I've seen tourists who get allergic reactions. That, well, is dangerous. The boats often can't leave, because of the amount of sargassum that reaches the ramp. There's no way out, because you launch the boat and you can't turn it on, because it doesn't turn on. The propeller gets tangled. My traps, which I keep a short distance from the coast, I keep them closer than where that boat is from the coast; I have them about half a mile from the coast. And when the sargassum starts to break loose, the traps fill with sargassum. What happens? I can't fish. Once, my hauler burned out while I was moving a trap that was full of sargassum. So, when I don't fish, I lose money because of the fishing effort, the work you put into lifting those sargassum-filled pots, because you have to pull them out, clean them, throw them back in, and cross your fingers. Often, the fish in the pot dies when you lift it, because when all that sargassum gets in, the fish dies, so you have to throw it away.

[01:20:44]

-He told me that the first time sargassum was problematic was when?

-Sargassum has always been a problem, but in recent years, it's been around for about five years, or so, when the problem started to get worse, but sargassum has always been a problem.

-But when you say it started to get worse, is it more frequent, is it bigger?

-More. When we cast the seine, and that sargassum on the bottom, when we get to shore we can't pull it out; it all stays behind, and you lose your catch because you have to lift the net and everything inside goes away; you've lost your day's fishing. You know, sargassum is a big problem when it arrives.

-Is there a season that is more…?

-Sargassum is like summer or after summer. I don't remember the exact date, but it always arrives with the southerly winds. Now, when Lent begins, which is when summer begins, that's when the sargassum generally arrives.

-And is there a type of fish that is more affected by sargassum than another?

-As I was telling Brent just now, sargassum has two faces: when it's offshore, sargassum is good for us because it has an ecosystem. You can catch wahoo, you can catch dorado (dolphin, \*Coryphaena hippurus\*), you can catch rainbow runners. You can catch a variety of fish when it's offshore. But when it arrives, for example, here, when the sargassum arrives, you see that it's full of rocks, there's life there. When that sargassum arrives there and has nowhere to go, it dies. And all that life, all those corals, all those little fish that get trapped in the sargassum are going to die. Because there's no more oxygen. When it decomposes, there's no oxygenation. And when it decomposes, obviously everything dies. And that's what happens with the fishing habitats on the shore, the nurseries, the ecosystems all die. You know everything that's lost, after causing the navigation problem, it causes problems for tourism. Rincón is a town that depends heavily on tourism. Tourists leave here when the sargassum arrives, they go to other towns. So the money they're going to spend in Rincón, what are they going to do, they spend it in other towns. The economy shrinks when the sargassum season arrives. As a tourist, if you go to a beach and there's sargassum, are you going to go swimming? No, you go. That happens. Supermarkets lose business, gas stations, restaurants, everything.

[01:24:04]

I understand now, and is there anything I can say: Ah, the sargassum is coming, there are signs in the water?

You know because you see it. You see it offshore when it comes, and then you say: I hope, at least in Rincón, that the wind doesn't come from the south. Because if the wind comes from the south, it's like that. And it almost always pushes the sargassum inward. If the wind is from the east, you say: thank God, because the sargassum is going outward. Because the sargassum is drifting. The sargassum travels with the current and with the winds.

-I mean, but he told me that before, it was always a problem, but for the last 5 years it's become more frequent, it's bigger...

"The quantities are larger, I don't know why. I think it could be global warming, because more sargassum is coming off than usual. But the truth is, sometimes it gets here and you can't even go fishing. I come in my boat, and the whole place is covered in sargassum. I'm not going to launch my boat because when I turn on the engine, it'll shut off, it'll clog up, and it could get damaged."

-And before when you came, because it wasn't that big, could you go around the sargassum?

-Yes, you could work. You know, you could work, but right now… Sometimes the ramp is completely filled with sargassum too. You say: wow, it looks like they were cutting the grass with a lawn mower because you see the huge mountain of sargassum. And it's necessary, I don't know why that has to be very expensive, but systems should be developed to keep that sargassum out. I don't know if by implementing buoys or perhaps doing something that could change the trajectory of that sargassum, so that it has less impact on the hotels. There are many coastal hotels here that fill with sargassum and it's very sad. They make a great effort cleaning the beaches to keep tourists, you know, but it's very sad.

-Well, I'm done with my questions, I don't know if Jannette has any more...

-(Jannette) I have a couple of questions. One is about the warm water: Have you noticed anything different in the water over the past few years? Does the warm water affect your fishing, not just the marine life, but your fishing days?

-Yes. Those are one of the changes I may not have mentioned to you. Before, especially during the summer, I've found that the waters are warmer. And the type of fishing we do depends on cold waters. So, I've realized that if I don't make some strategic changes, I won't have good catches. These strategic changes could be a secret, but I only tell all the fishermen. What I do is: if I used to arrive at a fishing area, say at 7 in the morning, I try to get there earlier, before the nighttime cold sets in... before the sun starts to warm up. So, during the early morning, we make good catches. Then, we have to wait until 4 p.m. passes, sometimes catching a small fish, two small fish, and when the afternoon begins, at 4 p.m., 5 p.m., when the day is already getting cold, then you return to the fishing areas where you know the fish are there and go back and make another good catch and that completes the day.

[01:28:36]

Could you tell me that it's like an hour earlier and an hour later, that the change is about an hour?

-No, basically, I arrive at the fishing area at least an hour, an hour and a half early, but I almost always get about three hours of good, acceptable fishing in the morning, and in the afternoon I get two more hours, or an hour and a half. And then you caught a good amount of fish, which, you say, was worth the day's fishing.

-If you compare it to a few years ago, when the water temperature didn't change as much, can you say that you were fishing the same number of hours, more or less, or is it longer now?

-Before, the vast majority of fishermen would return to land at 3 or 4 in the afternoon. Now we sometimes return at 6, 7, or 8 at night.

-So, fishing time is longer? It starts earlier, ends later...

-The fishing time is basically the same, but the day is longer.

-I understand. And that's something you did strategically, but you see that other fishermen...

-Yes, we learned everything, basically. I wasn't the only one, but I learned that if I arrived early enough, because many fishermen waited until the afternoon. And I said: if I leave early, then I can maximize the trip. And it worked for me, and I told the fishermen. Many fishermen also discovered it on their own. And it's worth it.

-The black (Nassau grouper, \*Epinephelus striatus\*) (Nassau grouper), where is it?

-¿Nassau?

-A lot?

-No, look at the traps…

-Have they fallen?

-I do from time to time…

-Do you report them?

-Sometimes, when I remember, to be honest. But yes, not always, but every now and then we see one or two. When we talk to the divers, they tell me they see a lot.

[01:31:13]

-Do they see them together or separately? Have they not told you?

-I haven't asked him that, but they say they've seen a lot of small ones.

-OK.

-Nothing else! That's it?! Enough already...

-Thank you. Is there anything else you'd like to add to the interview, anything you'd like anyone listening to this interview to know?

-Well, look, I think commercial fishing in Puerto Rico should be given the importance it deserves. Many people view commercial fishing in Puerto Rico as artisanal fishing; others say it isn't. I don't know what the criteria are for establishing a fishery as artisanal fishing or, perhaps, industrial fishing, but the truth is that it contributes greatly to the island's economy. And we fishermen have always been marginalized, in every possible way, over time. I think it would be necessary to go back and establish a Department of Fisheries on the island. So that it would be someone who truly takes us seriously, so that we aren't second-class to the government, because we actually contribute millions of dollars to tourism and the local economy with the [unintelligible] value. We contribute millions of dollars to the state's economy, and it's sad that they treat us the way they do.

What do you think is the biggest barrier to this issue being given the importance you believe it deserves?

I understand why we don't have an agency dedicated to serving fishermen as such. As I told you at one point: we're the children no one wants. For some matters, we belong to the Department of Agriculture, but for other matters, we belong to the DRNA, the Department of Natural Resources. But when it comes to important matters, both of them turn a blind eye. They don't take fishing matters seriously. That's why I say the Department of Fisheries should be created in Puerto Rico, to address not only commercial fishing matters, but also recreational fishing, charter fishing, and everything related to fishing itself. So that the value of this industry, which contributes so much to the island, is fully realized. Because I'm sure that everyone who works and everyone in charge of ensuring the well-being of the fishery in Puerto Rico loves fish, but they don't understand the enormous amount of work required to produce that fish. After that, whenever you need something, they ignore you, they elbow you, and you almost have to beg to submit an incentive. To give you an example, the Federal Government, through the CDBG program, implemented the Agroenergy program that provided solar panels for Bona Fide Farmers. In the Department of Agriculture, we are classified as Bona Fide Farmers. I applied for the incentive, but they denied it. And the reason they gave me was that I was a commercial fisherman. In other words, they discriminated against me for being a fisherman.

[01:35:19]

-Although it is classified…

-As a Bona Fide Farmer. I mean, there's already discrimination within the agency itself, or perhaps discrimination within the person, within the case evaluator, and that shouldn't be the case. Because we're farmers, we farm the sea to produce a type of meat, which is fish, which is served in the island's restaurants, just like beef (Butter hamlet, \*Hypoplectrus unicolor\*). When you sell beef, pork to restaurants, when you sell vegetables to restaurants, it's the same. And simply because I'm a fisherman, they discriminated against me. That's why it's necessary to have a Department of Agriculture that looks after the interests of fishing in Puerto Rico. I think that would be... I would like, at least before I die, to see that established and, at least, given importance, because in many countries it exists, it really exists, and you see the importance they give to this huge industry. We may not catch enough fish to export, but we do catch enough to supply the island. Much, much of the fresh produce consumed on the island comes from local fisheries, even though fishing reports say otherwise. That's a different story. There are many reasons why what's actually caught isn't reported. You know. It's time to do something.

-Well, I'd like to find out more about why they're not reporting...

-Well, look, many fishermen don't make the most of what they catch. First, I'll go with the commercial fishermen because there are several factors. Many commercial fishermen don't report their catches for fear of losing government aid. Because there are many fishermen who don't work hard enough to perhaps afford health insurance, perhaps have the food assistance program, which is known here as "stamping," you know, which gives you money every month to buy food. And they don't make the most because of that. Other fishermen don't make the most simply because they're afraid that if they make too much, the fishery will be shut down. If I report everything I catch, unfortunately, when measures were taken to manage a fishery before, they weren't well-targeted for the fishing community. And they say: if I report everything I catch, they'll shut down my fishery, well, I'm not going to report everything I catch. On the other hand, in Puerto Rico we have a large number of illegal fishermen, poachers, who fish commercially and sell their catch to restaurants. But since there's no control here, there are no measures for you to audit those catches, so no one knows what you have. That's why they say fishing in Puerto Rico only supplies, I think, 5 or 10% of the island's catch. I say no, I say it's much more, I say it's over 25 or 30%, and be careful, because the vast majority of catches here aren't reported. Very few of us fishermen report the reality of our catches. Perhaps some will tell you they do, but since we don't have any, we go back to the DRNA. We're the children no one wants, since we don't have enough fisheries agents to evaluate those catches at the fishing centers. How are you going to have the necessary information to be able to estimate, using an archaic correction factor, which they say is quite accurate? I have many reservations about the correction factor. And we really, really, really have to find a way to ensure that everything caught is reported. Because I know that if we get even close to reporting more than half of what is caught in Puerto Rico, the story will be different.

[01:40:15]

-One more question, are there fishermen, at least in Vieques and Culebras, I heard that, that there is competition with the fish that comes from outside?

-Everywhere

-But you say that, anyway, most of the fish is local?

-No, not the majority. But a larger percentage than the government says. The government says 5 or 10%, no, it's much more.

-Is it much more?

-A lot more, but they don't have the tools to verify that. But I'm telling you this because I see it every day. I know fishermen all over the island. Jannette can tell you that too; she sees it, and it's sad.

-And is it true what they say? That if you report it, they'll...

-No, but education hasn't reached the areas it needs to. So remember, this is an example: when your dad tells you something, you believe it, then you tell it to your son, and your son believes it. When your son grows up, he'll tell his son, and all of this happens over generations.

–(Jannette) Can I add something?

-Of course.

-(Jannette) But at the same time, also from experience, were you the one who talked about the medical plan just now?

-Yeah.

-(Jannette) From the reform? Okay. In Puerto Rico, public hospitals were closed. Now, practically all services are private. There are very few places that have a health center, which is where you used to go to receive free services. Now, everything is private. The government gave you a card called the health reform, it's called Pedro Rosselló's card, the governor who implemented it. So, at first, they gave it to everyone, but imagine the expense that arose; it wasn't sustainable to have that health plan. And so they're using private companies like Blue Shield, First Medical...

-Triple S…

-(Jannette) You name it. All the private companies, it's not sustainable, it's totally unsustainable. So, they started taking away the cards from many people, and you have fishermen who are good fishermen, who have structured themselves enough so that their finances are better. However, they're not good enough to be able to afford a private plan, but they're not bad enough to be given the government card. And what happens to those fishermen? They're left without health services. So that's one of the main reasons why fishermen don't want to report. And the same thing happens with the coupons.

[01:43:08]

-(Interviewee) I know fishermen here, who will never tell you, but there are fishermen here who generate over $120,000 in fishing a year. There are. I would like to be one; I used to be, but not anymore. But fishing in Puerto Rico provides a living. What we need to do is guide the community and tell them those stories along the way. For example, if you ask me why I'm a Bona Fide Fisherman, the only reason I'm a Bona Fide Fisherman is because I'm 90% exempt from reporting my income. That is, if I report $100,000, what I'm going to pay is $10,000. And that's why the few fishermen who know how to take advantage of the Bona Fide Farmer status do so, in addition to other incentives they give you in the Agriculture Department, but that's minimal. And as I told you, it's necessary to reach out to the communities, establish an education plan, and have a voice in the government. You can't rely on two departments that want to do a lot, but do nothing, to represent you. If I weren't on the Fisheries Council, many fishermen would have been trampled right now. And I dare say that without fear of being wrong. Because I'm a commercial fisherman, but I defend the interests of commercial fishermen, recreational fishermen, and charter fishermen. I don't care what area it is, if their interests need to be defended, I'm going to defend them. And I always have. And I do it because I'm passionate about it, and it's sad, it's really sad.

[01:45:23]

-Well, what I've heard is that we need more education, more understanding, more voice in the government, and perhaps a united voice. Did the money that came to the Council or the DRNA?

- Al DRNA.

-I'm going to turn it off for now. Thank you so much for your time and everything you've…

—-----Audio # 2: (00:02:17)

-We continue with Interviewee.

-In Puerto Rico, we have a big problem. They're selling you imported species and selling them to you as another species. I'll give you an example: basa, swai fish, they're selling it to you as if it were sea bass. As if you order a fish fillet and they don't have anything else, they ask you, "Doloro fillet?" (Dolphin, \*Coryphaena hippurus\*). Well, they're selling you basa. "Swordfish fillet" (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*)? Yes, they're selling you basa. For those who don't know about fish, what they're selling, among other species, is basa. And a big problem we have in Puerto Rico is that, although this is a problem that has to do with the Department of Commerce, they should, when a fishery in Puerto Rico closes, prohibit the importation or at least the sale of that product during that closure, regardless of where it comes from. Because what people do is prohibit fishermen from fishing, but they continue selling the product. And what happens is that this encourages illegal fishermen, poachers, to continue fishing and bringing it to restaurants. And when you ask the restaurant, they tell you: no, look at the boxes I bought, I have boxes of spiny lobster (Panulirus argus), or boxes of conch, or whatever species it is, I have it there bought from abroad. You can't compete; if you're going to prohibit a species, you're going to close a fishery, you should prohibit the importation of that product to the island. I understand that would be a fair way, not only for commercial fishermen, but for the fishing resource, the species, for it to recover, because it discourages illegal fishermen.

-And they sell it to tourists?

-To everyone. They don't sell it to me, because I know how to tell the difference between fish.