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[00:00:20]

-Well, if you please tell me your name.

And today is February 13, 2025.We're in the Puerto Real Fishing Village, speaking with the president of the Puerto Real Fishing Village. Can you tell me a little about the history?

-From the Villa?

-Well, about the Villa, but let's start a little with your personal history. How did you get started in fishing? How did you become president of the Villa?

I was born and raised here in Puerto Real, in the neighborhood here in Puerto Real, and as a young boy, I always liked fishing, and I was interested in it, but I decided to study. I went and worked for the Government with Natural Resources, I was a guard for the Department of Natural Resources, and a few years ago I joined the army. I was a soldier, I made my career in the military, I was there for eight years, I had several situations, and I'm retired. I studied, after that I stayed in Orlando studying, I studied boat mechanics, I returned to Puerto Rico and to my neighborhood, and yes, I became interested in fishing and decided to get my license. After fishing for several years, the young people approached me to be president of the Fishing Village, and since then, for the past three years, I have been president of the Fishing Village. And my intention is to continue the tradition and take this to the top, because it's a way of life for people; this is how many fishermen in this area make a living. This is the first Fishing Village in Cabo Rojo. It's been around 40 years since it was founded, the Fishing Village. This was done with federal funds from Jimmy Carter when he was president, and then it was passed on to different agencies, like the Ministry of Resources, and now more recently it belongs to the CODREMAR structure. I think it was the Ministry of Resources, and now more recently it belongs to Agriculture. And we have a strong association. We have a president, a vice president, and there will be 5 or 6 members. And we have around 37 to 40 active members, and other members come and go, but it has remained strong and is one of the strongest fishing villages in Puerto Rico right now.

[00:03:13]

-Why do you think it's a stronger Fishing Village? What does that mean?

-Strong in the sense that it's structurally well-organized and hasn't had any problems, unlike other towns that have had problems where people have tried to take them away and transfer them to the municipalities. And this one is one of the most solid in the sense that it's well-structured, and financially, we haven't depended on any aid, so far.

-What makes it so well structured?

-Sales, fish sales, lobster (Spiny lobster, \*Panulirus argus\*) (spiny lobster), conch (Queen conch, \*Strombus gigas\*) (queen conch), arrayado (Lane snapper, \*Lutjanus synagris XXVII\*) (lane snapper), colirubia (yellowtail snapper), chillo (silk snapper), and dorado (Dolphin, \*Coryphaena hippurus\*) (dolphin) and other species that fishermen generally extract every day and since we are non-profit, we buy them from them. We try to give the greatest benefit to the fisherman and that the Villa can survive, because employees are paid and water costs, the operational expenses as one calls. And well, we try to always keep the fisherman with their greatest benefit so we can survive.

-Where do you sell the fish and how did you…?

-We have several clients, we depend a lot on restaurants, on hoarders who come and buy from us to resell, we also have several restaurants and the local community that helps us, buys fish from us all year round, and that's how we try to survive, there are some months, like everything, like everywhere, like all work, like agriculture, there are months that are slow, months that are bad for us, because of the bad weather, and months when the economy is declining in terms of, at least we have 3 or 4 months after August, September, October onwards; November, December and January, in which we have to at least have a balance so that it is not so bad, because those are the months when fishing does not sell much.

-He told me that the Fishing Village is one of the oldest, that it dates back to President Jimmy Carter, and that it has always been so well organized?

[00:05:54]

-It's always been organized. There were a few years when there were some problems, but it got back on track. Before, the advantage was that silk snapper was caught much more than now. Now, silk snapper fishing has decreased, because there used to be other competitions, but now we depend more on diving than on line fishing; we depend more on that type of fishing. That's why there are about 16 to 20 divers there, I have about 16 to 20 divers who go out every day, at least 5 days a week they go out, and we depend on the sale of queen conch (Strombus gigas), spiny lobster (Panulirus argus), trunkfish (Lactophrys trigonus XLVII), queen triggerfish, hogfish and other varieties of fish that they bring us daily.

-Why did the type of fishing change? He told me that before there was more line fishing, now there's more diving.

-What happens is that before, you'd go out after 12 miles, and you could catch queen snapper and yellow snapper. I don't know what's happened, if it's changed because of the... climate or the weather or other things have changed, or if there are more fishermen, who then have to go further out to catch silk snapper, deeper. Because on our coasts there are snapper, but I understand that there are a lot of small snapper, and if we don't let them grow, they won't continue to reproduce. And I understand, before there were around 20 or 30 large boats that were fishing for 3, 4, 5 days. Now the fisherman goes out to fish for silk snapper, stays for 1, 2, or 3 days, no more than that, and returns. Not just one return, maybe with 2 or 3 quintals, but others go out daily and catch 40, 50 pounds, because there aren't that many like before. And there is a lot of demand but there is not the quantity.

-So, there were bigger boats, and they stopped leaving because the silk snapper is farther away? I don't understand.

-There used to be a company here, a huge fish market dedicated to what was known as Pescadería Rosa, in Cabo Rojo, Puerto Real. Everyone knew it. They had more than 10 or 12 large boats that would go out and fish for months at a time, bringing back huge quantities of silk snapper. And we understand that fishing has declined because they used to go, even to some islands, near other islands to fish for them, and there are no longer those types of large boats to fish for them there either. And since the permitting has changed, well...

-When did those boats exist?

[00:09:00]

-Those boats, I'm talking about, I would say about 20 years ago.

-Yeah. Quite a while.

-Yes, quite a long time.

-I mean, he doesn't know exactly what happened, but 20 years ago there were those boats and the first fish they went after was silk snapper.

-They brought in silk snapper, red snapper, and misty grouper (Epinephelus mystacinus), which were groupers (Sea basses, Serranidae) weighing 80, 90, 100 pounds or more. And all that…

-I mean, if I know correctly, they can't catch the silk snapper now.

-No, the ban has passed, you can catch it, yes.

-Is it the Nassau grouper?

-Yes, yes.

-Now you can take it…

-You can capture it, yes.

-But it's recent…

-Yes, recently, because they had a closed season, the silk snapper had a closed season, they could go and catch queen snapper, but that's at greater depths. And the problem is that you throw out the bait to catch queen snapper, but they bring back the other one, because you can't tell them not to. But they have to release it, there's a law that says they have to release it.

-So, is it possible that the boats, the business with the large boats, stopped because of the law?

-No, not by law. They sold the business, and as the silk snapper catch was declining, they relied on snapper fishing. They would go out and stay for two or three weeks and bring back 6, 7, or 8 quintals at the time, which was $2 or $3. Comparatively, snapper now costs $10. That is, it's bought for $10 and sold for $11.50 or $12. So they've opted to bring it in from Miami. There's a company that's bringing it in foam coolers with fresh ice, which arrives fresh, but the cost right now—I pay $10, and that company that's bringing it in from the United States is selling it to us at $11.50 a pound. You know, there's no profit margin. We, as Villa Pesquera, can't afford those expenses and pass them on to the consumer; the consumer is looking for cheaper options. Well, if you put a snapper on a plate and you put a mutton snapper (Lutjanus analis) on a plate and when they see the price they say: ‘Give me the mutton snapper’, which is worth much less than the snapper and is the same quality of fish.

-And the silk snapper that comes from the United States…

-It's very good.

-Do they sell it to restaurants themselves?

-No, the company is selling it to restaurants. But the restaurant doesn't buy the other silk snapper; it sells it to them. Although it's a little expensive, it's more expensive now, but they have it all the time, so right now they... Before, the plate, if you go to the restaurants, the restaurant plates have changed size. Before, for them, a serving snapper was a plate that measured less than 12 inches, but now they've changed the plates and the plate measures 15 or 16 inches. Well, they want a plate-sized snapper that covers the plate, and that's also difficult for us, because if there isn't one, there isn't one.

[00:12:09]

-Do you think the size of the fish has changed?

-Yes, it has changed.

-Tell me a little about this, what have you seen?

-I've seen that they're bringing in a lot of small fish.

-Since when?

-I've been here for 3 years, from 3 to 4 years it's changed and they've brought in a lot of fish... There are times when they bring in big ones, but the one who fishes closer is bringing in a lot of small fish.

-And what kind of fish are we talking about?

-We are talking about the same silk snapper.

-From the same chillo (silk snapper).

-Of the same quality, yes. I worked with the government and know the laws, and I like what I consume to be of high quality, and what I try to sell, I try to pass that quality on to people. I wouldn't like it to end, because there will come a time when all the fishing and people pulling from the sea and pulling, and nothing will come in. We don't let them develop. And that's what happens.

-Why do you think the silk snapper and fish in general are smaller?

-Fish, well, because I understand that it's overfished, that's the reality, the reality we live in, perhaps the fisherman. Remember, I fish and I make a living too, you know, I like fishing. I have my entry fee because I'm a veteran, but I like it, and you always look for something extra. But overfishing is leading us to the end of things.

-Since when do you think that…?

-We've been doing this for a few, several years now.

-Of overfishing?

-Yes, from overfishing.

-Are there many more fishermen now?

There are many more fishermen now than before. If you look closely and take a census of the age of fishermen, they did a study, Agriculture, and the Agriculture Department itself told us some comments: for every land-based farmer who retires, one joins. For every fisherman who retires, two or three join. And they've done studies and researched, and it's true. There are a lot of young people. If they research and take a census of the fishermen and their ages, they'll realize it.

-And why do you think there are so many young people wanting to be fishermen?

[00:14:44]

"Because it's a way of making a living, and it's a way of generating money, and when they fill out their statistics, they fill out their forms, they don't reflect the reality of what they earn daily. And unfortunately, I say this as a fisherman too, you know, I'm a fisherman, I've seen it, I notice it. You know, I worked with the government and I like fishing, so you see so many fishermen leaving the same areas and going to the same places, and there's always fishing, because the sea is large. But it's going to come, I think one day, there's going to be a decline, and we ourselves are the ones responsible, it's not... The climate system has changed, but I think it's the fishermen."

-Let's talk about the climate system, but before that, I want to understand: When do you think this shift toward more young fishermen occurred?

-I would say that I was away for several years, like more than 10 years ago.

-More than 10 years ago?

-About 10 years ago.

-But what happened? I wonder why fishing always brought in money, right?

Fishing brings in money, fishing continues to bring in money. The thing is, before there were more fishermen who threw traps, and it was only what they brought in the traps, in the pots, which we call traps but are pots. And what the line fisherman brought in, and different fishing gear. Now the diver goes and goes there, goes underwater seeing what's there, looking for more, things, you know what I mean. You throw out a net or a cast net or a seine, for example, and you wait for what happens there. If nothing happened there, that fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) passed by over there, it survived, and you caught whatever you could. And we survived on that, but today divers go anywhere to dive, you know, here, there, I dive here, I go out, I dive further. And I understand that's what's happened, the number of divers there.

-I mean, it's more specific, the fish they catch is very specific.

-More specifically, because they chase spiny lobsters (Panulirus argus), queen conch (Strombus gigas)…

-The divers I was talking to told me that most of them catch the queen conch (Strombus gigas), the spiny lobster (Panulirus argus) and I think some of them catch the mutton snapper (Lutjanus analis), I don't remember.

-Yes, yes, exactly.

-But they only catch three or four types of fish. So, have you seen any changes in this specific area?

[00:17:40]

-There are always fish, there always are, what happens is that if we don't let them develop, even if there is a closed season, and just like the spiny lobster (Panulirus argus). The spiny lobster (Panulirus argus) doesn't have a closed season, but at least the queen conch (Strombus gigas) (queen conch) does have a closed season. But what happens, if I go fishing during the time when there is no closed season, because during the time outside the closed season, I go fishing for queen conch (Strombus gigas) and I catch the small queen conch (Strombus gigas) which is the one that has always fought and said: we are not going to let them develop, we are not going to let them reach adulthood, and be able to procreate. And I've said this, and I tell them, my boys. They get upset with me because I tell them the truth. I dive, but I free dive. I go up top, like freediving, and when I see something, I go down to catch it and then I leave. I don't go down there to get something small, or something that's not going to give me anything, it's not going to leave me anything; I go out to catch. Unlike the diver, he goes around here, and I see this, I catch it, I see that, I catch it, I catch it. The same thing happens with lobsters. I don't know what's happening; the climate has changed so much that lobsters are caught. Sometimes they bring me 70, 80 pounds of spiny lobster (Panulirus argus) a day, from just one fisherman, and I don't have it, I can't have it all. I have my clients, but if the client doesn't order from me, I can't sell it. And we understand, and it's understandable that the fisherman catches it, I can't catch it because I don't have the space, and they go and sell it cheaper elsewhere, damaging the market themselves. That's what's happening. There are many things; this is like dominoes, which have different stages and different things that happen, and if we don't manage to stop this, this may last. I may be wrong and it may last for many years, but if not, I don't think it will last for many years.

-Do you think the spiny lobster (Panulirus argus) fishery will be affected?

-The time will come when there will be no lobster (Spiny lobster, \*Panulirus argus\*) (spiny lobster) or they will be small, because we have an advantage in the western area, they come from the north and we have a run for these months of November, December, which are the northern swells, and we have a run that comes from Aguadilla to Rincón, there is a pass, where hundreds of lobsters come. There are people in Rincón, the department has given permission to some people who have mallorquines and they catch 100, 200 pounds of small lobsters there, whatever, and sell them for 5 dollars a pound, when we buy them for 8 and sell them for 8.5. You know, you have to see, I would say, the closed seasons are tough, because they're always going to catch it, but there will always be, but you have to find options for the fisherman, because many of those fishermen, who I've had problems telling them, that if they had studied they would have two jobs, they would work on land for a while and go and fish in their free time, but they say no, I say, I don't know.

[00:21:00]

-What do they say?

-That's wrong, I had the opportunity to study, and I say, well, if they didn't study and don't have two jobs, this is going to end any day. And what are they going to do? The day they start saying they want to get queen conch (Strombus gigas), close down the queen conch (Strombus gigas) completely. How are they going to live, just spiny lobster (Panulirus argus)? They're always going to catch. I go to the Bajo myself; during the month the queen conch (Strombus gigas) is closed, I didn't go fishing because I depend more on the conch. (Queen conch, \*Strombus gigas\*) I catch other things, lobsters if I see them, I kill chapines (Trunkfishes, \*Ostraciidae\*) (trunkfish), sama (Mutton snapper, \*Lutjanus analis\*) (mutton snapper), capitans (Wrasses, \*Labridae\*) (hogfish), but I don't go specifically looking for it, because if I don't get it, I have to catch what I see, that's what happens. That's what's happening, there have to be closed seasons and... I'm not against closed seasons, what I am against is that we have to educate these fishermen so that they can do another type of job, so that they can survive those months, because like everything, they have their families and they want to bring food home. They depend on fishing.

-What other profession do you think young people have the opportunity to pursue?

-The opportunity, well, they have to study because they don't want to work on land, they don't want to be carpenters, they don't want to be... I don't really know. I was fortunate, well, I worked for the government. I was a security guard, first. Before that, I worked in the manufacturing industry. I was a sewing machine operator, because I wanted to. You know, you're not born with skills, but I worked making military clothing, but there were factories; there aren't even those here anymore. I worked in a factory, then I switched jobs and worked in a glove factory. I went to that factory and trained, and I worked for a telephone company installing cables. From there, I switched jobs. I worked in green areas, maintenance at the beach resort, with the government. From there, I had the opportunity; they offered me a job in Natural Resources. I started as a security guard, I was there for 10 years, I went to an academy, I was there for 10 years. When the Iraq war broke out, I said, "I'm going to serve in the United States Army." They told me, "You're crazy." "It's not crazy, I just want to go!" I went. I served in the Army for eight years, had several surgeries, and all that. Due to medical conditions, they kicked me out. I stayed in Orlando studying boat mechanics. From there, I decided that Customs needed a mechanic, so I said, "I'm going to Puerto Rico to see if they'll hire me." When I arrived in Puerto Rico, they already hired someone. They told me, "We'll send you to Laredo or Miami." I said, "No, I'm already in Puerto Rico." I stayed here, worked as a boat mechanic, fixing engines, but in my free time, I went scuba diving and got my license for the pandemic. And then I went more often, more often, and I stayed on the water fishing.

[00:24:09]

-During the pandemic, was it like a push for you to get out…?

-Yes, because there were options, but I always had my boat and did it for sport. But when the pandemic hit, I saw an opportunity and said, 'Let me get a license,' and so I continued more quickly. Since I'm here as president, sometimes it's impossible for me to go every day, but I go three or four days a week, depending on how things are here. So I go and do my fishing and I'm preparing my boat to try to catch silk snapper or giant squid.

Many of the fishermen I've spoken to this week seem quite optimistic, in my opinion. They seem optimistic, in the sense that they say, 'There are fish, the people of Puerto Rico want to eat these fish, and we'll continue; it's a good life.' What I hear from you, too, is that there is this opinion, of course, because there are many young people who want to work in this, but do you think it's sustainable?

-Fishing?

-Fishing, the way it's going now.

-Yes, how are things right now? Yes, if I tell you I'm not lying, there are statistics, and I'll tell you more, I'll go further: the thing is that there's no law, although the law exists and they don't enforce it, they don't enforce it, that every fisherman has to land their catch in fishmongers. There's another fishmonger nearby, there are several fishmongers around, but there are a lot of hoarders who go and buy directly from the fisherman, who isn't going through a, not a control, I would say a... where they are actually selling, what they sell is not really known.

-So, there's a lot of fish that aren't marked in the statistics...

[00:26:44]

Statistics are about quantity, because the fish are always the same species, the quantity. If you want to do a study, go to the villages and look for them. It's written down. What's bought is on receipts and invoices, versus what they fill out in the statistics. Because if the fisherman put what he caught in the statistics and filled out the forms, they'd have to pay taxes to the government, I'm very sincere. You know, I'm not exactly attacking the fisherman, but that's the reality of things. Sometimes we think fishing is sustainable, but I understand there's overfishing. Because I go every day, if I go, I can earn $50 or $60, four or five hours, you're not going to make that much anywhere else. So I go five or six hours and earn $100, $200. What does that mean? Fishing is sustainable. Now, give yourself a salary for when the bad times come, you have your savings. That's the reality. Everyone can jump on me and say, 'This is how it is,' but that's the reality of things.

-I mean, there are very few fishermen who know how to manage finances, it's something that...

-Few fishermen, that's right. Because if I go and earn, I'll tell you, when I arrived from out there, I went and fished every day, I didn't put less than $200 in my pocket a day, and I went for five days, what's $200 in my pocket, net, taking out gas and the expenses of my boat, and I went with two other people and each person earned $200. If I were to fill those statistics with the reality that I fish, you'd think there would have been closed seasons, there would have been many more things, you know. The fisherman, as they call me, I'm a veteran, I receive my pension, but I have this, as they say, as a sport, as entertainment. Yes, I do it and I do it conscientiously, and yes, I look for it, not that I don't look for it, but I go and earn $40 or $50 in four or five hours, that's enough for me. Look it up, and I can show you the receipts. Look it up, and I can show you the receipts. Look for the fisherman who goes out there for $40 or $50. The line fisherman, who is an older fisherman who goes out every morning, gets up, goes out, catches his bait, and goes fishing. Those people earn that every day. But the scuba diver…

-How much fish is produced in a month or so?

-Right now I don't have…

-More or less…

[00:30:00]

-For sale, I would say, it's bad now, but around $20,000 or $30,000 worth of fish has been sold here.

-In a month?

-The month. Depending, yes. Right now, I can verify this later with the same accountant if you'd like, because the accountant tells me: look, 50 or 60,000 pesos were bought this month, but that's like telling them it was bought, but the profit goes to the fisherman. The village buys and sells it, and always, well, as we say, to earn 10 dollars you have to sell something. Right now, I catch spiny lobster (Panulirus argus) for $8, and I sometimes sell it for up to 8.25. A peseta of profit. In reality, the profit goes to the fisherman, at $8 a pound. And I have fishermen who sometimes bring me 70 pounds of spiny lobster (Panulirus argus) in a day. That's why I'm telling you.

-And this is where you keep the money for the Villa's expenses, your salary, and what else?

-Okay, here, the operating expenses, above all, the employee, we have another employee who fills the diving tanks, charges a couple of hours, bags, water, electricity, telephone, we have around $5,000 to $6,000 monthly operating expenses and that's enough for us and it keeps going, because we have the dry dock, which sometimes has boats to repair, sometimes not. But yes, that's part of what we achieve here. As president, I don't charge a cent. That's part of my job for the Fishing Village itself, to maintain the association and to maintain the culture, as one says, because I grew up here and I came here to this area because I'm from nearby, when this was just being built.

-Why do you think the culture of the Fishing Village is important?

-Because this, believe it or not, has a history, and the community, like everyone else, comes here to shop. Everyone talks about the Fishing Village, the fish markets, but always the Fishing Village, and it's already part of our daily lives. If there isn't a Fishing Village, the benefits the fishermen get, and this being what it is, being one of the largest villages. Right now, when I tell you that this is one of the strongest in the area, you have to see it. Everything is in the statistics, and we fill out forms. We're a non-profit, we've been established since 1980 or something.

[00:33:05]

We're here, everything's up to date, all the documents, we're certified and registered with the Department of State, we have everything. What we do sometimes do is try to seek aid to continue, aid to expand, to continue providing more service to the same fishermen, and if the Department of Agriculture closes its doors to us, well, I've already explained, we've been here for 40 years, and I've asked fishermen here. That young man who's employed here has been here for about 30 years, and Agriculture has never been here, never the agencies that have been involved, that have been involved in this, have never given anything. This has been for us, and help from some representatives, the mayor of Cabo Rojo has helped us. Right now, there's a project: with federal funds, they provide the motor for the boat, they give you some funds, you have to meet the requirements, and Agriculture has some funds that you have to meet certain requirements, and they also provide assistance. And if that's not the case, well, the fisherman supposedly can't buy a motor, but we'll see.

-Can you tell me a little about how you were during Hurricane Maria, or other hurricanes?

-During Hurricane Maria, I wasn't president, but it was bad around here; it devastated us. But because we were there, they realized we were part of the food chain. That's when the Ministry of Agriculture came and said, 'We have to give the fishermen permission to go fishing,' because, since there's no food around, fishing is sustainable in that sense. Just like during the pandemic, everything was closed, but we went out, and here a group was dedicated to bringing the catch to people's homes. They sorted and the fish was brought to them or they came to collect it.

-So, he sold it?

-It sold, yes. Not in the volume one might expect, but the fishermen always survived because it made them money, but the community survived.

-If a hurricane like Maria comes, do you think you're a little more prepared?

-Yes, we do. We have a solar panel system for the freezers and everything related to fishing. What's more, we have a generator that, as long as they supply us with diesel, we can continue working 24/7.

[00:36:00]

-When did you buy the generator?

-We've had the generator for several years, so that's no problem.

-After Maria or before?

-We had it before Maria and this, the solar panels, was after Maria.

-So, he could use the generator, OK.

-Yes, we were able to use the generator, but it involved an expense, I'd say weekly or a little less, of $200 in diesel and fuel. Now, on the contrary, with solar panels, we can maintain the fishing storage equipment and that with the panels, and use the generator as a backup, just in case. So, we supplied the nearest neighbors, we supplied them with energy, and here we had a collection center, where they gave us things for the community, and we delivered them to the people in the community.

-So, the Fishing Village seems to serve a community role, in addition to fishing.

-Community, yes. In addition to fishing, yes, that's correct.

-Was it always like this?

-It's always been like this, it's always been like this.

-Why do you think?

-Because, since the other presidents previously liked to help the community, there have even been times when we have too much fishing stock, and we, the older people, sometimes, in meetings with the board, we meet and talk, and so that the fishing doesn't continue to deteriorate or get lost, we put it on the list of losses, but we prepare it and we do it in coordination with neighborhood leaders. We deliver the fishing to them, or they come and collect it, and we give it to people we really know who are older and don't have access to buy fishing, and we give it away. So that helps us, because when they want it, they will come and buy it.

-Is there another organization like this that does things like this?

-Yes, there are different organizations here in Cabo Rojo, which have nothing to do with fishing, but there's always communication, and if they need any help we can give them, we help them. Even these large federations that give money to agencies have given us money, but with the intention that we distribute it to the community. We help the fishermen; people have come here who have needed to build a ramp so they can, who have been fishermen, and their wives, well, they don't have any, and their wives need a ramp to get there, because they're disabled. We've given them the materials, to the extent they can, to the extent they've reached them, we've given them materials and help so they can be comfortable.

-You told me that this fishing association is one of the largest in southern Puerto Rico.

[00:39:03]

-Yes, we would say that in terms of facilities, and that they have been maintained since it began, because here you see the stranding machine, this is not the only place where they gave that, they gave it in Fajardo and Culebra, and if you visit those facilities, it is no longer in operation.

-And why do you think they are not working there?

-Because we've heard that they're not in use, they're falling into disuse, they don't have the... I don't know if it's because they don't have the money or something else that's going on that makes them unable to continue operating it. Because we know from other people, other partners, and other fishing villages, that they're falling into disuse, that they're not being used. And there have been fishing villages that have been handed over to the municipalities because there's disorganization within the Fishing Village. This one was saved because there were some administrative problems three or four years ago, and with the young man who was talking to me, Daniel, he rescued it. And then, well, every two years there are elections here and it changes, depending on whether the person wants to continue as president or not, and so they decided to elect me, but I've always tried to maintain a balance, even me, because we're non-profit, we can't have more than $100,000 in a bank account, because otherwise we'd have to pay taxes to the government. We try to have a balance, we make investments, like the chairs, the tables were given to us with federal funds from the municipality, but the freezers are purchased. If we have to maintain some things, then we have to buy them. We give it at the end of, let's say around September of this year, we've been doing it for at least 3 years, and since I've been here, what we do is if we see that we're above and doing well, we take out every member who is up to date and every member of the Fishing Village, we give them an incentive to improve their fishing gear, whatever they use the money for, we give it to them to improve or repair their boat and we've been doing it for about 2 years now, because this is my third one, we've been giving them that little incentive of 300 dollars for 2 years now, and for them, they see it as help, that we're not just here, this is a non-profit, but we try to help the fisherman.

-Are there any other types of events that you organize throughout the year?

[00:41:50]

-During the year, no, not really, well, they celebrate, we have parties for Christmas, for Thanksgiving, we do activities, we prepare food for the family, anyone who wants to bring their family can come and share, the community, because it's open to the community to come, and they always come because the fishing community, we can't accommodate them all because we don't have the space, because if we had the space, a bigger dock and more facilities we could accommodate them, then it would be solid, one. But since there are more private fish markets, we don't do it, because we can't. I don't have the facility to provide a dock for every fisherman. But the fishing community is invited and they come, they show up there.

-Are there many private facilities here?

-Here, right now, of the many that used to exist, there's one, as far as I can remember. I'll tell you, I'd say 1, 2, 3, 4, and there were many more than that. I'm talking about the fact that there were fishmongers here, quite a few.

-And what happened, do you think?

"Well, they're closing because people, as I would say, have privatized the permits, they've sold them, and everything has become private. That's why I say there are fewer fishmongers, but there are hoarders who sell fish; they have a business, but they don't have a dock or facilities; they come and buy directly from the fisherman. That's what happens too, there are several hoarders out there. Here comes, right now, I have a hoarder, a person from... Ave Maria, from up there in the south, past Juana Díaz, he comes and looks for fish here. I have a gentleman who's a businessman from the Dorado (Dolphin, \*Coryphaena hippurus\*) area who comes and looks for fish. But there's another guy who dedicates himself to buying and reselling, who comes and looks for it, when I can't buy from him, because there's a regulation; We have a regulation that if the freezers are full, we can't afford to buy from them. They have the option of selling to them outside, and there's someone who comes and buys directly from them. Those are the ones we call hoarders. They are dealers and they sell, but they don't keep an inventory. The inventory is for their own use and statistics for their own use. They may be merchants, or perhaps they're not registered as merchants, or that's what's happening in this case.

-You mentioned climate change. What can you tell me about that? Have you noticed any changes in the maritime environment, with the funds?

-Yes, after Maria everything changed. Look, I was fishing for the Combate area long before that.

-Where is that?

[00:45:00]

-We are… Boquerón, Boquerón, Mayagüez, Cabo Rojo, this way, Puerto Real, OK, Combate is this way.

-Is that Combat here?

-Yes, this is El Faro, Combate. I used to catch a lot of queen conch (Strombus gigas) in this area. After Maria, you go there and you don't get as much queen conch as you used to.

-Let me write this down. Queen conch change. (Queen conch, \*Strombus gigas\*)

-Yes, there was fishing.

-I mean, there isn't that much.

There aren't that many, or almost. People don't go there because they can't get as many anymore. Now, however, in this area of ​​El Negro, Guanajibo, Las Coronas, here, now in this area here, where you can move around, there's a lot of life for conch (\*Strombus gigas\*).

-After Maria?

-After Maria. But there were a lot of queen conch (Strombus gigas), a lot, like juveniles. And here... Those are my fishing areas.

-No, I'm not going to say.

-No, no. So, Bajo, Corona. I fish around here, the fishing isn't as big here anymore, there isn't much here anymore.

-Afterwards too?

-Yes, after that, there's little fishing, yes. After Maria. And then there's El Negro around here, I don't see El Ron around here.

-What is here?

-Yes, put it in that area. Fishing has also destroyed marine habitats after Maria.

-And when you say it's destroyed, what exactly does that mean?

-How do I tell you, the habitat, the reefs, the plants, you see that they are dead, you see, life is less, before where you went and caught, you caught octopus (Octopus, \*Octopus spp.\*) (octopus), they are no longer caught like before.

-The octopus (Octopus, \*Octopus spp.\*) (octopus) has generally declined, do you think?

-In the area here, yes, in our area.

-Also after Maria.

-After Maria. Now, supposedly, the people from Aguadilla tell me they're catching a lot of octopus (Octopus, \*Octopus spp.\*) for the area there and the southern area. And in our area, there isn't as much octopus (Octopus, \*Octopus spp.\*) as before. Before, I would go out and catch half a bucket of octopus (Octopus, \*Octopus spp.\*). Now, I go and catch two or three.

-Where did you tell me that there is octopus (Octopus, \*Octopus spp.\*) (octopus), more?

[00:48:02]

-I caught octopus (Octopus, \*Octopus spp.\*) (octopus) in this area a few days ago. But up here it's very little and before. Now for Aguadilla, they say that up north, up here, they're catching more octopus. (Octopus, \*Octopus spp.\*) And for the southern area, for Guánica, Parguera, this area down here, they're catching octopus, (Octopus, \*Octopus spp.\*) but they sell them for uuuh... very expensive.

-And have you noticed any other changes?

"No, look, that's all I've seen from there, the reef and all that, which suffered a lot of damage. And where you sometimes went and there was a meadow, that is, a lot of bushes, what we call plants and all that, it caught them, and there are areas where I see them sometimes, not so much anymore because they've started to disappear, decomposing, I found them in piles, as the waves caught them and destroyed them, I found them in piles."

-And what can you tell me about sargassum bloom, or any other type of algae?

-The sargassum is visible, look, this year it's been seen much less than last year, but it's always visible. What does happen is that we have a problem: there's a river mouth, here in this area, there's a river mouth that when it rains a lot, the water gets really dirty. This is... a river, no, this is from Añasco. This Añasco River, all of this reaches here yellow, the water turns yellow when it rains, a lot of rain, from the Añasco River and the Guanajibo River, which I don't see. Guanajibo River, what does it say here? This one. Guanajibo, does it say here? River, this river too.

-Guanajibo River?

-Guanajibo, yes. I fish in that whole area. This river, when it flows, when there's flooding and it rains, all of this, all of this here makes it impossible for us, sometimes, to fish because the water turns muddy and yellow. And other problems like here, for example, in our bay, where there was so much life—there's marine life, right? But there was so much marine life; the sewage system.

-What is this?

-The water used.

-Sewage.

-Yes, all that water, sometimes the pumps are damaged and all that goes into the sea. And that happens in Boquerón itself, all that, the pollution, as one says.

-But Boquerón is a tourist area, and is there a lot of pollution there?

[00:51:00]

-Oh, yes. This is Boquerón Bay, right? Yes. I worked there; my offices were there. Boquerón, that bay, I dive out here and out here, which is where I mentioned. There's so much pollution there that you don't want to see, and all that pollution comes out here, because there are 1, 2, 3, 4, 5; that bay has around 5 or 6 treatment plants, and the wastewater goes into the sea. The plants treat it and dump it into the sea, and there are plants like that, which I can take right now; of those plants there, there are 3 that don't work. And all that water goes, as it comes in dirty, directly into the sea. That pollution comes here out of the sea, believe it or not. And that's a reason they don't see. Right now, they're trying to do more development and more development. I know development is good, and sometimes changes are positive, but it affects the fishing community indirectly. The same battle happened when Maria destroyed part of here—because this is part of it, some salt flats. Salt was manufactured here, and what happens? It's broken, the storm surges broke this part, and damaged that whole area there. It's important to note that before, fishing was good in those areas, but now it's very little. Everything has changed.

-Yes, I went over there with Jannette.

-Yeah, by the salt flats? And around here by Los Pozos, didn't you go to Los Pozos?

-(Jannette) We haven't gone…

[00:53:00]

-The storm surge hasn't just affected the fishing community, it's affected a lot of fish. What's happening is that this area of ​​the salt flats and that was affected, and where you used to go and see land, as I say, where you could see the seashore, it all went inward. Maria destroyed it. And that area of ​​El Combate, well, now the fishermen have to go out to the buoys, well outside the buoys to fish, to the buoys... there's buoy 2 over here, but here you have to go out to fish inside, because there isn't as much fishing around here anymore, there isn't any.

-So, did the fishermen come out here more?

-Yes, they came out through here, I came to fish many times around here, but it would be deeper with a tank, they come to this area, they fish out here.

-OK. Could you say that fishing moved from here to here, something like that, after Maria?

-After Maria, yes.

-Let's see how I sign up. A lot... My notes, but oh well. It went further, practically.

-Yes, the fishing is gone…

-And why exactly did that change the marine habit?

-The marine habitat has also changed, and I don't know if it's in use or disuse. Here, after, this is El Faro, OK, this area here they call 'water up to the neck' there was a complex, a hotel there, that had a treatment plant and that treatment plant was more than damaged, and the contaminated waters went to the sea and kill, and it makes it... change, everything changes. I tell you sincerely, sometimes I wish, there are times when they come and investigate, but I wish they went to the areas, that one could take them: 'Come, so you can see, we're not lying to you, nor are we telling you things that aren't true.' When the river mouths dump garbage, they dump bamboo, that goes down that river, everything. There are the problems that the municipalities have, the lack of communication and permits, because that has to be through the Corps of Engineers, what happens, they don't allow the permits, nor the dredging, the cleaning of the river mouths. And you have to see, when the rains and currents come that bring all that bamboo, the fisherman has to go further out if he's going to fish, because the yellow water reaches quite far, about 2 or 3 miles out to sea.

-If you could do something, what would you do to change, if you had the power?

[00:56:05]

-If I had the power, I don't know. I'd be more aware of natural resources, and I don't know, some would like to do so many things, but having more control over natural resources and permits, making them more accessible and treating everyone equally, not just the big interests, giving them a permit to do something because there are many people who would like to help and do things, but I don't know, but I would say being more lenient with natural resources.

-When you worked for Natural Resources, you were at sea monitoring, what problems did you encounter most?

-The safety equipment, the closed seasons, the fishing, the size, the size of the lobster, (Spiny lobster, \*Panulirus argus\*) lobster eggs, catches of hawksbills, which are hardly ever seen anymore because, well, I don't know, I don't work there anymore, but I used to go out all the time. I used to go to La Mona a lot and with the fishermen, I used to work with the fishermen and mostly fishing during closed seasons, because if they close us down, for example, in some areas we have to find a living, as they say, but we always work.

-Was it a job you liked?

-Yeah.

-Because?

-Because I really liked preserving. That's why I tell them about things as they are, because I want this to last a lifetime, so that in 20 or 30 years they won't say, "Look, fishing's over, we can't go fishing anymore," and see people sitting on the shore, looking for something to do, because there's nothing to do if they can't go fishing and make a living from it.

What is your current vision for the Fishing Village?

[00:58:47]

-For the Fishing Village, to continue growing, to be able to have, to have more sales, to be able to market directly with other people, with a supplier, with a supermarket, to look, you know, for the fisherman to have more benefits, so that the fisherman can come and leave me his harvested fruit here and not have to go sell it somewhere else. So that I can make what serves as a tool for them to be able to continue selling their catch.

-What do you think...?, and you've already told me about this, excuse me for asking again, in a way, but what do you think is the value of the Fishing Village and the fishermen for the community of Puerto Real and for the community of Puerto Rico?

-For the Puerto Rican community, I'm going along these lines; today there are huge interests because we have to face the reality: the fishing community has been marginalized, and if we don't have places like this, fishing villages, that can accommodate all those fishermen, we'll be left with nothing. Because the big interests come and open a business today, and if they don't do well, they close. Who's going to continue the tradition or who's going to continue offering those services? For example, there's a marina near us that someone bought a few years ago, several years, quite a few years ago, but the intention was, they gave him the permit and told him he had to have a fishing pier. There's no fishing pier there; The fisherman has to pay to be there, otherwise they can't be there, and there's still a fish market there, because the agreement was that they had to have a fish market so the fisherman could bring their produce, that is, whatever they caught, to be able to sell it, because that was, if you look at the history, Puerto Real had its Fishing Village and it had the Pescadería Rosa, which was one of the largest fish markets there was here in Cabo Rojo. And when it sold, closed, the owners died, and the family sold, but in this case, if the Fishing Village closes, if it's privatized, the fisherman will lose part of their history and part of their culture, as one says. Because despite everything, they come here, wherever they sell, they will always arrive at the Fishing Village, they ask for the Fishing Village. There are private fish markets, but it's not the same. At the fish market, you have to leave your boat at the private fish market, but you have to pay. Here you are provided with water, electricity, a dock, a locker, and you can buy your fish. Fishing villages will always exist, they will always exist, I don't think they will end.

[01:02:07]

-Well, is there something else you'd like to tell me, something you'd like the people listening to this interview to know?

-Well, when you visit Puerto Rico, come visit the western area. And come visit the Fishing Village of Puerto Real, which, a little bit of history, just to give you a glimpse: Cabo Rojo has a lot of history, and it was one of the most important ports for Spain. The thing is, it's all gone to the San Juan area, but Puerto Real was one of the main ports, and Puerto Real was where trading took place. What happened is that it moved to Mayagüez, or San Juan, but when you come to Cabo Rojo, ask about the history, and you'll see that Cabo Rojo has a lot of history.

-Thank you very much, it's a pleasure talking to you.

-And I'll tell you more, at the other end, which is La Mela, there was a fort. This is history, there are people's discoveries there, because it's like a cemetery. And there was a cannon and everything in Puerto Real, and what happened is that I was with a historian and he told me the history of Puerto Real. 'You see Puerto Real,' he told me, 'and Puerto Real has history,' Cabo Rojo, as such. You know, it's one of the most important ports for Spain, and I said, listening to the story: 'Wow, and we don't know how to exploit those parts.'

-Doesn't anyone teach this story in school?

"There isn't any anymore. I even found out from that person, who was in tourism, and when they won, the administration that's now here in Cabo Rojo, they closed the tourism department. They tried to recover the lighthouse and were on the verge of giving it to a non-profit agency, and the current governor said no. She made arrangements, made arrangements, and asked the municipality for it. They haven't done anything; it just stayed there. There are some of the largest archaeological finds of Native Americans here, right there, right here in Puerto Real. That's near here. There were Native American settlements here and everything, because it's proven, but history isn't; it's part of history."

-Are you proud of your…?

[01:04:53]

"I'm proud, I've been all my life. My family arrived through Ponce, from the south. I'm of Italian descent. My grandfather was Italian. My grandfather arrived through Ponce, and the family split up. I knew my grandfather and everything, but I never asked him about his history. And after finding out, and yes, we do, they say that's why we're white. I'm not white, but we are. Sometimes a lot of people have asked me. I was in the army: 'But you're Puerto Rican, but you have light eyes.' And I told him: 'My ancestry comes from Europe.' And there are a lot of people here, they're European, we're not. The true Puerto Rican is the Indian, and the Indian still exists in the mountains, you know, that culture of true Puerto Ricans exists. And as I kept finding out, I met this historian, and he talked to me about history like that, and I said: wow." But I am proud. I was born here, studied here, left Puerto Rico, moved to the United States, and then came back, and I've lived here my whole life. Don't doubt that one day I'll be somewhere else, but as long as I can, I'll live here. Yes, I'm proud of my roots.

-Are there any Indians fishing? On the hill?

-At least, no descendants, but there are descendants of the first settlers here who were pirates, descended from pirates: Balber, and those Balbers, the surname Barber, Barber, are European and were among the first settlers, yes, there are fishermen, and there is one that you look at and he is an Indian, it may be that his descendants are from people from before, but there are people of descendants of, who were the ones who came to settle here, but there are few Indians like that now, there are none. There are none left anymore, if there are any descendants of them, they are not around. But yes, there are quite a few of those settlers who came from Europe there.

-Thank you very much. I'm going to stop now.