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My name is Suzana Blake, and I'm employed at the University of Miami, collaborating with the NOOA Center for Scientific Studies in Miami. We're working on a project to understand the stories of Puerto Rican fishermen, to understand history, how the marine environment has changed, how the work of Puerto Rican fishermen has changed, and what the thoughts are about the future of fishing in Puerto Rico. These are some of the topics we're going to explore with you today. I'm going to start by saying that today is February 12, 2025. We're in Puerto Real, at the marina, near the Puerto Real marina, and we're talking to people who...

-Con Interviewee Interviewee Interviewee.

-And what is your job?

-Fishing, a businessman. I'm retired from what I had, which was, I've been fishing all my life, but I had my seafood restaurant, the hurricane destroyed it, and since I was already retired, well, I stayed fishing and dealing with fishing, the same thing I did, but the business no longer exists, the restaurant.

-He's a fisherman, how old are you, he told me?

-I've been fishing with my dad since 1968.

-How old were you at that time?

-At that time, I was in High School, I was about 14 years old, more or less.

-And he started fishing with his father, who is also a fisherman by profession…

-Lifetime.

-How many years did you fish with your dad?

-We're still fishing.

-Still? How old is he?

-93 years old now.

-93, And he's still fishing?

-Look where it is there.

-OK. Nice to meet you.

-And are you always fishing for the same thing, or how did you start? What did you start with?

We started out fishing for everything: hook, trap, and silk snapper. The only thing we've never caught is nets, but we've caught traps and hooks.

-And when you started, what kind of boat did you have?

-When we started, when I started with my dad, my dad had one of those old boats, one of the wooden sailboats from those years.

-Like a yola.

-No, it was a boat similar to a sailboat, like those we have today, but it was made of wood, one of those old ones.

-But didn't it have an engine?

-When he started, it didn't have an engine. Later, they added an engine, but when I went there, it already had an engine. He added an engine because he, too, learned how to work mechanics.

-Back in '62, when you started, what was the fishing like back then? What was the quality of the fish like? Was it big, was it abundant? What do you remember?

There was an abundance of fish. There were a lot of fishermen, because here in the neighborhood there were an average of 50 boats, and everyone was fishing for something different; there were all kinds of fishermen.

-What fishermen were there?

There were snapper fishermen, there were trap fishermen, which were all kinds, spiny lobster (Panulirus argus), everything, which didn't exist, which was hardly ever caught in those years; it was very rare to catch queen conch (Strombus gigas). Queen conch (Strombus gigas) came later, with the use of diving, but in those years, queen conch (Strombus gigas) weren't seen. Spiny lobster (Panulirus argus) were thrown back into the sea because they weren't sold, trunkfish (Ostraciidae) weren't sold, they were thrown back into the sea. So, that's how it was.

[00:04:16]

-So, restaurants and shoppers don't...

-There weren't as many restaurants as there are now, like there are today, there wasn't the demand there is today, yes, everything was sold, everything that people don't look at today, that is there now, that is not touched, that was sold.

-Can you give me an example of what fish was sold at that time?

-The surgeonfish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) was sold, all species, the angelfish of different kinds were sold: black angelfish, line angelfish, brown, they were all sold. They sold what they call the pejepuerco (queen triggerfish), that was sold, which is the trigger fish. The sierra (zero) was sold, it has always been sold, the snappers (Lutjanidae\*) were sold (snappers), the lane snapper, all species. The parrotfishes were sold, all of that was sold. Nowadays, the only ones that sell of those species, of what I mentioned to you, are the sierra (zero), which continues to be sold, and the trigger fish. We don't look at the angelfish anymore, many fishermen don't look at that, that's from the trap, not anymore. That was when the buses sold fish all over the island in Puerto Rico, but that's practically unheard of anymore. Parrotfish, well, those who fish with seine nets will still catch fish today, but those used in pots, if we catch them in the pots, we release them, so they go. The same goes for what we called porkfish, which we also have, a yellow fish with black lines, goatfish (Mullidae), all of that. Nowadays, you can't catch mullet because the mesh is too large; you don't catch them; they go through the mesh. And we don't sell porkfish anymore. A large silver fish, like that, which we called margate, is like a gray silver fish. All of that used to be sold before, but we don't even look at that anymore. There are many species that we don't look at, we have names for them that aren't scientific, there's one that we called "hide", the meat is completely white too, of different species: grey, there are some that have spots, we don't look at that anymore, we don't look at the suns (African pompano) anymore.

-I mean, at that time, everything…

-All of that was sold.

-Everything caught in the sea was sold.

-Everything was for sale.

-The barracuda, nowadays that almost bothers us now.

-When we fished there, there was no hawksbill ban in those years; we fished hawksbills. It's because I had a seine net for hawksbills, with my uncle, my grandparents, but we don't see that anymore. Now we see them and we laugh. They sold sharks (Requiem sharks, \*Carcharhinidae\*), even those that are out there, they sold tarpon, they don't sell that anymore. Now we entertain ourselves.

-Why do you think your tastes changed or what happened, in your opinion?

-The consumer, in those years, didn't have a lot of money. It was a cheap fish, but times change, costs change, and the consumer became a little more strict about what they preferred. Most of that kind of consumer has died; they're no longer around today. Now people prefer snapper, sierra (zero) of the country and the spiny lobster (Panulirus argus) and the queen conch (Strombus gigas) (queen conch), the chapín (Trunkfish, Lactophrys trigonus XLVII) (trunkfish) if any are caught then they are sold, because the supply of that will never end, but outside of that what people want is: grouper (sea bass), sierra (zero), red grouper of the 5 species, groupers (Sea basses, Serranidae) guasa (Misty grouper, Epinephelus mystacinus) (red grouper), which live with the red groupers in the depths, and the spiny lobster (Panulirus argus) and the queen conch (Strombus gigas) that is what the consumer gives you Look for it today, exclusive. The rest, some other comes around and the arrayado (Lane snapper, \*Lutjanus synagris XXVII\*) (lane snapper), which although it is a fish that does not grow very large, it grows like that, but it sells because it is a good fish and a pretty fish, similar to the snapper, what differentiates it is the depth where it lives and the yellow lines it has.

[00:08:41]

-Back in the '60s and '70s, when you started and people were buying all kinds of fish, were there any important culinary traditions? Were there any kind of celebrations where people would say, "I want this kind of fish?" or "Let's cook it, is there a special one like that?"

-If only you knew. I'm going to talk to you about the neighborhood. I can't talk about other areas because...

-When you say neighborhood, is it Puerto Real?

-Yes, from the number of fishermen who have always been here. The fish that were preferred to eat here in those years: sierra (cero), mullet (goatfish), chopa (bluegill, \*Lepomis macrochirus\*) (sea chops), cachicata (white grunt), chillo (silk snapper), and arrayado (lane snapper, \*Lutjanus synagris XXVII\*) (lane snapper), and which can't be sold today: barracuda, which was a favorite, which people asked for, because of the best fish to eat today, forget about snapper, forget about carita, or sierra, it was barracuda; the fear because you could get poisoned by one, well, they took it off the market, but that was a better fish to eat. The captain (hogfish, \*Lachnolaimus maximus XXXIV\*) (hogfish)...

Did people at that time know how to eat barracuda without getting poisoned?

-Yes, it was always eaten here and we dedicated ourselves to fishing for it, and it would arrive and people would take it, and the captain (Hogfish, \*Lachnolaimus maximus XXXIV\*) (hogfish), but as I also tell you one thing I'll tell you another. Captain (Hogfish, \*Lachnolaimus maximus XXXIV\*) (hogfish) has always been on sale. Don't eat captain (Hogfish, \*Lachnolaimus maximus XXXIV\*) from Guánica onwards; you can get poisoned. Here it may fall if anything, but here with the captain (Hogfish, \*Lachnolaimus maximus XXXIV\*) in the area there have been no problems, I mean in the area where we are the ciguatera is minimal. I would tell you if there is ever a case like this, it could take years, but it's not common.

-And why do you think that's up north?

-In the south.

-In the south?

-It seems there are some places where ciguatera was so widespread that during the years of the red snapper fishing boom, which was in the 1970s. Because the fishing fleet was modernized, we had better fishing equipment and there was a boom, the boats from here, there was a kind of agreement that you could go fishing on the islands and you wouldn't have a problem or the Coast Guard wouldn't have a problem.

-To the islands, it refers to…

-To St. Thomas, St. Croix, St. Barthélemy, Saba, all the islands. Fishing was done closer to Santo Domingo (Blackline tilefish, \*Caulolatilus cyanops\*). They even went fishing near Venezuela, near Colombia, to the Bahamas, but many prisoners were arrested in the Bahamas. Back then, the fish there was very abundant, both sea bass and ciguatera-caused silk snappers, so much so that I believe they have areas there where fishing is not allowed because of ciguatera. And here, when that tilefish was brought in, which was brought in by the ton, there was a lot of ciguatera-caused poisoning in those years, I remember.

[00:12:14]

-What was happening to the people?

-They were poisoned by the fish.

-What are the symptoms?

-A poisoning from diarrhea, vomiting, you could even die, it can kill you, because it is such a bad poisoning.

-And there's no way to know if he has...

"There's no way. I'm telling you this because back then I had a girlfriend. I was young, and I used to bring her fish from the ones I caught. And a guy was fishing up there, toward the islands I mentioned, and he gave her a beautiful snapper, weighing 10 to 12 pounds. They ate it and were poisoned. And I saw the snapper, and she asked me about it first. I told her, 'I don't see anything out of the ordinary about this one, the one we fish with here.' There was nothing to differentiate it, the ciguatera, and some of them were poisoned on other occasions with sea bass, from there too. There's no way."

-There's no way of knowing.

-There's no way of knowing.

-The one here was always clean.

-Yes, the one from here has always been in this area, from here in Cabo Engaño, to next to Santo Domingo (Blackline tilefish, \*Caulolatilus cyanops\*) and this time around ciguatera, as far as I know, in recent years there have been cases of poisoning in restaurants.

-(indeterminate) It hit me.

-You got it, right, but you know what I'm going to tell you? They brought hogfish (blackline tilefish, Caulolatilus cyanops) from Santo Domingo here, they brought them there, and they poisoned half the world and the hogfish (blackline tilefish, Caulolatilus cyanops) weren't from here, they brought them from Santo Domingo, all hogfish (blackline tilefish, Caulolatilus cyanops) on duty. Because we sell hogfish (blackline tilefish, Caulolatilus cyanops) here and, thank God, never, and for a cousin of mine who I sold to my whole life, there was never a ciguatera problem with hogfish (blackline tilefish, Caulolatilus cyanops). But from up there and from Santo Domingo (blackline tilefish, Caulolatilus cyanops) where they brought them, many people fell here.

-Well, let's talk a little more about your knowledge of your work with your dad, what was a work day like for you and your dad?

If we were going snapper fishing, we'd get up at 3 in the morning. We'd go out in the little boat to get there at dawn, which took three hours or so, because the boats were slow, with the sail and the little motor. Sometimes, we'd arrive at dawn and start fishing. If it was snapper fishing, well, it's a game of luck. There can be as many fish as there are, and on the day the fish don't want to eat, you're there all day, and if you catch three or four fish, it's a lot. Because it happened to us, and it wasn't because there weren't any fish. Sometimes we'd arrive at the spot in the morning, and we'd cast at 700, 800, 1,000 feet, 1,200, 1,300 feet. We'd hear the bait hit, and we'd leave. We'd say, 'Let's go somewhere else, they're there, but they won't be fishing now.' We would move and walk 1, 2, 3 miles to another place, and we would arrive there, throw food, and there they were. When evening came, we would return to where we had been in the morning, and they wouldn't eat, and there they were.

[00:16:04]

-I mean, sometimes I would spend a whole day…

-This is a riddle, yes, it depends. When fishing for snapper, with a hook and line, it depends on the currents, the weather. I mean, right now, with the wind blowing for fishing, if the currents are bad, fishing becomes extremely difficult. When the weather is good, the fish want to eat and the current is good. That's why it's all a game of luck, cat and mouse, and that's when you catch fish. The difference in cost, when I went fishing with my dad, silk snapper for the first time, when he started fishing, snapper cost 6 cents a pound, and sea bass cost 3. When I started fishing with him, I started at 75 cents a pound, and we got 50 cents for black bass. Those are the differences in the stages of the years. And that's how it was.

-Growing up as a child in a family with a fisherman father, what kind of life did you have?

-My life?

-Yes, how was life, financially comfortable? How would you describe it?

"We didn't grow up in abundance, as the saying goes, but we never lacked food, because the poor came down from there, from their plots of land, and brought food. And when the fishermen came here, who came to fish traps, I saw this, they would ask them: 'Can you give me some fish?' And they would say: 'Find something to fall back on, I'll give you some fish.' It wasn't as expensive as it is today, but practically no one had it so bad because there was at least enough to eat, and we gave them fish, and when they came the next time, they would bring us yuca, food, and they would bring us something in gratitude, and that's how it was.

-It was a change sometimes.

-Yes. And I'm not complaining because my dad worked hard to fish, to raise us, and I grew up in that house over there.

-This one?

-I fell asleep to the waves of the sea.

-Yes, we are, the one who is there all of us... Can you give me a minute?

(...)

-He was telling me about his life growing up with his fisherman dad…

-I could, at least I earned enough money to buy notebooks, pencils, and go to school, and for my sister too, but we learned to work since we were young because you had to survive, they didn't give you things, you had to work.

-What was the mother doing?

-My mother was a housewife all her life. She didn't work.

-Do you still have the house here?

-That house is no longer there, it belonged to my aunt, and after that we moved here.

-He told me that in the 70s he changed the boat, it was a little better.

-In the 70s, they started putting motors on boats. Then, my father built a boat here in the 80s. We built it here, and we put a better motor on the boat, a diesel engine, and we were more comfortable for fishing. And we fished on it for many years.

-How has fishing changed for you?

"It was more comfortable because we weren't out in the open, with the sun and the water, standing on the deck. We were protected under the hood of the boat, and well, it was more comfortable, you didn't get as wet. A little more comfortable."

-And did the time spent at sea change? Was it less, or how did it change?

-No, the weather has always been the same, because those of us who have been around—I don't know if today's youth realize that, because most of them don't dive much. Many fish for snapper, but many dive. But those of us who started fishing in those years—the changes in the sea, well, you compare them year after year and you see that there are changes in things you used to see, that you don't see today. But since this is something that is sometimes cyclical; a few years go by and it comes back and repeats itself, well, you realize it, you say: look, this lasted this period, this year is like this. And you start noticing the changes that there are.

[00:20:41]

-Can you tell me a little about cyclical changes?

-Look, back then, when we went, how can I tell you now that we went fishing in La Mona?

(...)

-He was telling me about cyclical changes.

-Yes, you notice the cyclical changes because, nowadays, in places where there was a lot of herring, food, which is what fish go after, well, when someone took me in the boats, we would go out and there was a lot of food, a lot of herring.

-Herring? What is herring?

-The herring (Thread herring, \*Opisthonema oglinum XIII\*) (herring), the one they sell, the one that comes smoked, that was that big, that was seen. And it is there, but not at the daytime levels that we saw before. We don't see the same number of birds as before. The pollution on the banks is a little more, because in the sardine species, (Sardines, Herrings, \*Clupeidae\*) there were machuelo (Redear sardine, \*Harengula humeralis\*) (redear sardine), boqui-snake (striped anchovy), and cascarúa (False pilchard, \*Harengula clupeola\*) (scaled sardine), they are three species of sardines (Sardines, Herrings, \*Clupeidae\*) that are caught. And the snake-mouth... the bay, after the pandemic, which never since I was a child, had the bottom been visible, the water was so clear, you could see everything out there. It became crystal clear that I marveled at it, I felt happy.

-During Covid?

-After Covid.

-Did the water clear up?

-Mainly, last year and the year before, all that stuff out there, very, very clearly, places that weren't visible, and you looked like that and you saw them. What other changes have there been? I don't know if it was because of overfishing by the seine nets on the banks or in the bays, I've noticed it here, species that were there, that we're not seeing: the cassava (Bumper, \*Chloroscombrus chrysurus\*) (bumper), the Atlantic moonfish (Vomer setapinnis\*) (Atlantic moonfish), the Mongolian drummer (Cynoscion jamaicensis XXXI\*) (Mongolar drummer), the barbu (Barbu, \*Polydactylus virginicus XXXVIII\*) (barbu) and here it was a bay with a lot of small fish, but not the barracuda, the other one that is white, another species, because there are a few species, that one that we caught to eat, not to sell. And lately, we haven't seen it, we don't know what happened, and it's not because there is no food because there is food, there are sardines. What happened? We don't know, there aren't any. The fish they call machete (cutlassfishes), there are none, they have not been seen, what has happened?

-When did he disappear for the first time?

[00:23:42]

-As for the white picudilla (maybe: guaguanche or southern sennet), I'd say it disappeared here about two years ago. The cutlassfish haven't been in for more than two years, much longer. It seems like they've finished off the chinchorros or something happened, but the casabes (bumper) are the same, the corcobados (Atlantic moonfish), the same, because they're silvery bay fish, because fish from the bay have a different flavor than fish from outside. You taste it and you notice it. The snappers (Lutjanidae) don't, the snappers (Lutjanidae) are out there, you see all of that out there. This place is full of snappers, everywhere, this is a snapper farm (Lutjanidae) of different species, of other species, and you see them there because I see them in the morning. The other little fish, which is the one that grows big, I'm telling you, the barracuda, you go and fish for them here and they pull you in, we don't eat them, but we eat them like this, good for eating. But the cyclical changes, the same as when you went to La Mona, you saw a lot of flocks of birds, the last few years that I've gone to La Mona and I tell my father, I say to him, I don't see the flocks of birds that were behind the tuna, (Mackerels and Tunas, \*Scombridae\*) of the bonitos, of the dorados, (Dolphins, \*Coryphaenidae\*) you do see, but not like we saw in those years, when you saw flocks of birds, you were in La Mona and you saw the flocks of tuna, (Mackerels and Tunas, \*Scombridae\*) wherever you looked, you can see them but not... the only thing that increased in these last few years were, I would tell you, mainly 3 things, although a study that I was in a meeting once said this and I said: look: increase in the queen conch (Strombus gigas\*) (queen conch), because There has been an increase in conch (Queen conch, \*Strombus gigas\*), mainly last year, in the fishing for silk snapper and queen snapper. The fishing was good, I would say about normal, there was a good amount and the spiny lobster (Panulirus argus\*) (spiny lobster) was out of the question, to such an extent that we ourselves have had to put it as if it were a closed season, ourselves, fish less and look for someone to sell to, because if not, by the pound, because there was lobster…

-Lot…

-Lots, this year, last year, and the year before, lots of spiny lobster. (Spiny lobster, \*Panulirus argus\*)

-All that grew in abundance…

-Galore.

-But, there are things that have become less abundant…

[00:26:34]

-It may be that there is, the lane snapper (Lutjanus synagris XXVII\*), I would tell you, it is a fish that those who fish it mainly fish at night, because they tend to fish it more at night, but their season, which tends to be more abundant in federal waters, perhaps, the months are, from now on, until the month of May. It is caught a lot, but the lane snapper (Lutjanus synagris XXVII\*) is a fish that spawns, it has to spawn, since it is that big. That there is no problem with that, not because of the size, because since it is small, like that, you catch it and it reproduces. The other varieties, since the mesh of the trap is 2 inches, and a lot of variety, it goes away, well we no longer have proof because we do not know if there are many. But I'll tell you: conch (Queen conch, \*Strombus gigas\*) (queen conch), spiny lobster (Panulirus argus\*) (spiny lobster), silk snapper, these last 3 or 4 years, mainly last year and the year before that for silk snapper. And when the Christmas period comes, because the silk snapper fishing closes, the only things that remain are the queen snapper and the yellowfin mojarra (mojarra). When January comes, when you go, well, there are some, but it's a time when they don't sell. At Christmas, seafood sales stop by almost 50% on the island. Because there is abundance, but consumption—people consume pork—is what they consume at that time.

-Is it culture?

-Culture. That's what happens. There may be some, but they'd tell you at the fishmonger: Look, right now it's the sierra season (zero), and there are places that start buying and then they'll say: 'Don't bring me anything else,' because they fill up, as long as you can handle it, from now on they sell out. Right now, my dad and I go sierra fishing (zero), because we fish sierra, but with a hook, by hand. And people know we're fishermen for that too, and at that time they come looking, looking, and sometimes there isn't enough room for so many people.

-But he started telling me that he noticed that species are no longer around here, he tells me a little about when he first noticed those species disappearing.

-The white sennet (maybe: guaguanche or Southern sennet) here in the bay, we haven't seen it in about 2 years. Just like we don't see bumpers, we don't see barbu (Polydactylus virginicus XXXVIII\*), we don't see Mongolian drummer (Cynoscion jamaicensis XXXI\*), we don't see Atlantic moonfish (Vomer setapinnis\*). They might catch some in other places, but they have to have seine nets too, because seine nets used to be caught a lot with seine nets, and they don't use them here anymore. For a while, there was one who fished with seine nets, but he's not using them here. There aren't any.

[00:29:50]

-Has that happened before, with those species disappearing for a while from the bay?

-As far as I can remember, there were a few years, in the 1950s and something, and in the 1960s, almost reaching the 1970s, there was a quarry here, where you see that hill over there, and they used to plant explosives. And when the explosives went off there, the bay shook, because you could feel it here. There was a time when the cutlassfish disappeared, and species disappeared. But then, when that ended, when it was closed, years went by, it came back. Now we don't know why, because of pollution? Well, look, I'm telling you, the water became clearer than ever, cleaner, after those hurricanes passed. I don't know if it was because they cleaned it up and the mangroves were renewed, because the old mangroves died. Most of the mangroves you see now are a new strain of mangrove that has grown up. But out there, I talk to the guys who dive, and I ask them if they see goatfish, and they say yes, you can see all that on the bottom, but they don't kill them because they don't sell, the consumer doesn't...

-He doesn't want it.

-No. They don't ask for it anymore.

-So, why do you think the water cleared up after Covid?

I don't know if it was because of the length of time, because during that time, we licensed fishermen were allowed to go out, but no one could go out in boats. I couldn't say if that was the reason because, really, I don't see the logic in the boats' idea of ​​the water becoming crystal clear. I don't see it.

-Do you remember the last time, before this time, that the water was so crystal clear?

-Since I was a kid. I'd say around the '60s, around '50. Until it came back... And then the bottom, now, grew a kind of algae, a grass, which isn't like the underwater meadows that the Hawksbill eats, it's another kind of algae that we see on the bottom, different, smaller, but the area was covered by it. And apparently that affected the water, something else that came back, which you can see, look, they're not there now, but... they were pulled out. They came back, the oysters (mangrove clams), the oysters had disappeared, which are a filter, well, the oysters came back.

-Is it a type of fish?

-No, that's what sticks to the oyster (mangrove clam).

-¿Barnacles?

[00:33:11]

-That grew, and apparently, that's one of the things that filters the water a lot. When that came back, it filtered. And many people have become a little more aware, because what happens is that when you're young, back then, there wasn't much awareness about many things. Now, you limit yourself to doing things that shouldn't be done, for the good of the environment and fishing.

-Like what?

-Well, before, everyone threw everything into the sea and didn't care, and if there were oils and things, boom! For the sea, it didn't matter, there was no conscience. I'm telling you this for us. That's stopped quite a bit now; we haven't reached what I would like to reach; it's very different, but, in the long run, humanity has to become aware, because that's how it is. What else, that affects us here too, that perhaps is one of the reasons why we don't see as much of the dorados (Dolphins, \*Coryphaenidae\*) (dolphin), as of the tunas (Mackerels and Tunas, \*Scombridae\*) (mackerels and tunas), the species, the blue marlin (Makaira nigricans XLII\*), swordfish, marlin: the invasive fishermen, who invade our waters and sneak in to fish with liners. And that harms us.

-Can you tell me a little more about that? Who are they?

"They're boats, they could be from China, and they're entering our territorial waters. We've seen them and have been called to intervene. Whether they have, we don't know, but we've seen them fishing in waters that belong to us, those lines."

-How far from the shore, more or less?

-From here, about 20 miles. And the times they come in and we can't see them, because we're not in the water, out there, far away fishing. They come and go as they please, and there they kill sharks (Requiem sharks, \*Carcharhinidae\*) there they kill every species there is. Because that's how it is.

-When was the last time you saw a ship like this?

-The last time I saw them, we were coming from La Mona, about two years ago. Yes, they've been here before, because after that, I heard comments that they'd been seen here, in the southern area of ​​La Mona. And they're from the online, and they're not from here, they're from other countries. The trap, in those years—to change the subject a little so you know where the background comes from—the trap in those years, I'd tell you that in the area here, there were about 10,000 traps. And they were fishing day and night, and I'd say much more than 10,000.

-10,000 at this time that started or when?

-When I started fishing, in the 70s, there were more than 10,000 traps.

-10,000 traps? That came out of Puerto Real?

-Not from Puerto Real, from the different neighborhoods of Cabo Rojo.

-Cabo Rojo in general.

-This is one sector, but there's Joyuda, Punta Arenas, Boquerón, Guaniquilla, Combate, and so on. And there were more than 10,000 traps. Nowadays, one of the things that's improved is that there are traps, but they never reach the quantity they once had. The mesh is larger, and so the small fish are lost, and since the sale of that other fish that was sold is practically nonexistent today, very little of it is consumed, well, that helped the population of those species. I think it should have stabilized and be better.

[00:37:33]

-So, the law they put in place with NASA helped, do you think, with abundance?

-The mesh is 2 inches, fish that measure a certain size will go there, that's why we don't fish for goatfish, because we can't catch it, and the red mullet is not a fish that grows big, because the largest the red mullet grows is 8 inches, maybe 9, but since the mesh is two inches and the thickness of the fish is only 1.5 inches, it will go, and that's how it is.

-10,000 boats fishing with the trap?

-Not 10,000 boats, there were boats, let's say there were 100 boats, but there were 10,000 traps, because there were boats that had 200 and there were 200 and 200, and so on.

-And how many people were working on a boat with so many traps?

-2 or 3.

-Just 2 or 3? And where did they sell the fish?

-It was sold, there was a fish market for sale. This fish market here was the one that received the most. There were fish markets in Joyuda, there were 5 here, and today we have 5 here.

-The same number?

-The same number, more or less.

-And from here they took him all over the island?

-The whole island.

-Was anyone coming to buy the one from here?

-People used to shop here and came here to shop.

-Did they come with trucks?

-This fish market, which was the largest, had a large truck and when it arrived, it would take, back then there were many small buses, small pickup trucks, that were dedicated to distributing the fish that isn't sold today, they distributed it around the island, to the mountain areas and everything up there, where fish wasn't brought in, it was sold and sold.

-I mean, there was pretty good money to be made back then.

-At that time, those people made their money. Today, the advantage we have is the value of fish.

-You can say you catch less fish, but it's more valuable; back then, you caught more fish, but you sold it for less.

-Cheaper. The fuel cost was lower, the ice cost was lower, the bait cost was lower—the costs were much lower. Now, the cost—I'll give you a very simple example: I get on that boat to go fishing there for just one day, to fish for snapper, just one day. And the expenses for going there for just one day already reach practically $200: fuel, bait, ice, and whatever you eat, not including what you invest in the equipment, which is separate. If a shark comes and attacks you and takes your equipment, a team that takes you can easily cost you a hundred or so dollars. And you have to work hard, because the boats…

[00:41:18]

-About how much, what percentage of the investment is left over from a trip?

-For example, if we catch it ourselves, if we go, I'll give you an example, just for 100 pounds, let's say we spend $200, and we sell those 100 pounds for $1,250, leaving us with $1,000 left over. Basically, we can divide it between the two of us who go, or the three of us, for the day.

-I understand. We talked a little about the changes, for example, we talked a little about natural disasters like hurricanes, COVID. You told me a little about that. What can you tell me? What happens when there's a hurricane here? How does it affect your work? How does it change your work?

It changes us, because the first thing is: there's no power. If there's no power, it's not worth going fishing, because you run the risk, even if you have a plant, that people won't buy from you, because everyone has extra expenses, and that kind of economy comes to a standstill. Restaurants, many of them, will be able to open, but the seafood trade is very slow. So, if you go fishing, you're going fishing at the risk of 'who am I selling to?' You don't know who you're going to sell to, who's going to buy from you. And last time, during Hurricane Maria, we were without power here for 57 days. We went fishing, but instead of going for four or five days, we could go one day, maybe, a week, if they were going to accept us. Let's stop for a minute, okay?

"We were just talking, I forgot. He was telling me about the damage, like how much it costs, roughly."

-The damage? It paralyzes us for months. Then, another thing that comes in a chain is that hurricane season is almost upon us right around Christmas. So after the hurricane and everything else is over, there's good fishing, but Christmas comes and selling is bad. We're in a bad spot there.

-It's like a double whammy.

-A double blow, because you have to find someone to sell to, you have to see if they'll accept you. And that's the problem we have, because the seafood economy moves mainly from February to August, and from then on, the difficulty begins to deteriorate.

-And what do you do, if you can do anything, which is sometimes not possible, to prepare for the hurricane season?

-What we do is we have to buy excess fuel, you have to have excess fuel because, if you want to maintain what's there, you have to keep the plant running.

[00:45:11]

-I mean, the fridge.

-The refrigerator. Expenses here, expenses around the house, and expenses from my house there. You have three extra expenses.

-Who do you support, excuse me?

-No, we live in the house, my wife, and my son lives in the other house downstairs; it's two stories. And then my dad's house, where we put the little plant up there and the one down here. So those are expenses you have to spend on food and water. And when do you recover that? Because you have to wait for the hurricane to pass, for the situation to normalize, and months go by before you have to start all over again. So when the months come, Christmas comes, like I told you, and people say my menu: rice with pigeon peas, suckling pig, and cakes, because the menu changes. Three months go by from November to December and January, practically already in October. October is a horrible month. It's the month when the lobsters start arriving in droves and droves, and you can't find anything to do. Stop fishing. If they give you 50 pounds, you have to find the 50 pounds they give you, a quota. We have to set the quota ourselves. We say, "I'm not going to fish tomorrow because who am I going to sell it to?" And it happened this year, and it happened last year, and it happened the year before. Who are you going to sell it to? Not because there's a shortage; it's a practically fictitious shortage, because in those months when we couldn't go out every day as we should have, well, there's a recovery. It's a balance, which I don't criticize. It's good on one hand, too, but everyone has to find a way to sustain themselves and live, because that's how it is.

Was the impact Hurricane Maria had on your business different from other hurricanes in the past?

"When George came, I had the business. We were without power for about 60 days, but we managed to get through it. But when Maria came, she put an end to the business, which is a different story. I already had my pension and my wife, and we're still doing the same thing because we'll die doing it. My dad says we'll die at sea, because we were born at sea and we'll die doing this. But we don't have to be so suffocated anymore, because at least we have something. But those who have nothing have to struggle."

-Did you pay into your pension what you earned?

-I paid Social Security, and now I receive it.

-And your wife didn't work?

-My wife, no, she retired, she was a doctor.

-I mean, he always had another kind of cattle in the house.

"She did. She worked for the government, at the University of Puerto Rico, at school. But I depended on this, because you have to earn your keep. And we lived and we had two kids that we had to support, in school, at university, we had to work hard. I started my little business because of that, because I said, I worked for three companies and I said, 'They closed and left,' and I fished. The slightest day off I had, I fished. And I was like, 'Tomorrow I'm free, let's go fishing.' And I opened my business and said, 'No, now I'm going to work for myself, not for anyone else,' which is what my son did. My son, who I've taken fishing with since he was a kid, and he's crazy about fishing, is in bed right now, he hasn't come here. He has this now because I let him. He was a manager at Pep Boys for 15 years, a service worker. They sold it because they went bankrupt, and they left everyone stranded. I told him, because he owed a bus, a boat, and I said, 'Don't worry, forget about it.' I had freezers full of fish and I had clients. I told him, 'Now you keep this. You keep working, I don't have to work anymore.' I keep fishing, and he fishes too. I take my dad with me, and we live peacefully and happily. We don't work for anyone, just for ourselves.

[00:50:08]

-You started working with your dad in the 60s and 70s. You were already independent in a way, but then…

"My dad used to sell to this fishmonger at the time, and then we sold to another one there. When I started working, fishing with everything, one day when he built the boat we told him about, when he finished it, I told my dad: 'We're not going to fish for anyone else.'"

-When was this?

That was back in 1980. I told him, 'We're not going to fish for anyone else.' I bought a freezer, that's how we started, and I worked. I came, fished, and sold the catch. I worked right there. The people who worked with me would order fish from me, and I'd sell to them, and then I'd sell to restaurants, and so on. To this day, thank God.

-Did you already have another job in the 80s?

-Yes, I had a job, a factory, and when I went out, on weekends I would fish, on days I was free or on vacation, every vacation I would fish with my dad and so on.

-And why did you take another job too?

-Because, questions... Parents don't want you to do what they did. Oh, you're not going to fish, oh, yes. Look, if you're born on the seashore, no one can take that away from you. If you're born a farmer, maybe you won't work on the farm, but you'll become the owner of the farm, and you'll hire employees, but you won't abandon it. And that's what happened, and I said, well, when I worked there, the slightest bit of free time, boom, I'd go fishing and fishing and fishing, and I'd sell the catch right there, so I had a good market. And so it was.

-So, his dad told him: 'No, you're not going to be a fisherman, you're going to go to school and you're going to work.'

-No, I didn't want him to fish, and when I went to college...

-What did you study, excuse me?

"I started studying, but I didn't finish, because I was stupid, because now I regret it. I was 15 credits short of studying Economics. I went to study. With the same money I earned fishing, I bought the books, I did the things, but even so, the experience was good and I learned a lot of things. I learned how to get around, how to talk about anything, anywhere, and there's no problem with that. And when I graduated from university, things got really tough for a year, I went to work: 'Hey, no, we need to work because things aren't very good,' and that's when I went to work."

-What happened? Why were things not good?

-Fishing didn't get very good in those years.

-What time was it?

-It was a year, I'd say around the 1980s, and there were fish, but I'll give you more background on that. At that time, maybe I was a baby, fishermen from here had to go fishing in Patillas, a town in southeast Puerto Rico. Because there was a year, I think it was in the 1940s, when the fish here in the area sort of disappeared. My grandfather told me about it, and my grandfather was a fisherman and he was a captain (Hogfish, \*Lachnolaimus maximus XXXIV\*), and the one who raised him was also a captain (Hogfish, \*Lachnolaimus maximus XXXIV\*) of boats that sailed to the islands to deliver. They say that at a given moment, the fish sort of disappeared, for a few months. What happened? I couldn't tell you, I'm telling you from what they told me. Many fishermen from here went to the southeast of the island to fish up there in boats. They stayed there for a while until the situation returned to normal. Until it did. What happened? I can't tell you. We don't know exactly what happened, because maybe they weren't keeping track, like today when I start to think about it, I say: I've noticed this change, I've noticed it in this at sea, or this has improved, or this isn't very good, because one is an observer, and I, at least, have been an observer there.

[00:55:05]

-But did that happen again when you were already working, when you told me you had a bad year?

-No, it wasn't a very good year due to various circumstances. But not because of what happened back then; it was a completely different story, because my dad always fished since he was young. They would go sailing to La Mona. One day they'd catch 700 or 800 pounds of fish, then turn around the next day and come back, and they'd sell it. What happened that year? I couldn't tell you, because if it was in the 1940s, I wasn't registered here yet.

-No, but he told me that, suddenly, one year the fishing was bad and he had to go to work...

-I went to work, yes, because it was an unusual thing, I don't know, but things weren't very good, both there and many things that happened. And so, I said: 'I'm going to work,' and I went to work, but even so, I fished.

-When I was free I fished…

On weekends, I used to fish. My dad and I would go fishing for tilefish. Saturday and Sunday, there were no days off. I used to fish. I worked there five days a week. If one day they said there was no work tomorrow, I would talk to my dad: 'Well, let's go fishing,' we would go fishing. He would go with others if I wasn't there and so on. He taught a lot of people to fish like that, because he taught many, many who came here. He taught them and then they made a living from fishing. They would come here to the neighborhood and stay, because in those years, what we had here in Puerto Rico, if you didn't have a little bit of school, there was nothing to work in the government. There was sugarcane farming, with agriculture, or there was fishing. Whoever came here to the neighborhood would say: 'Here, people make their money fishing.' And then there were a lot of fishermen who said: look, they got seasick because they didn't know anything about the sea, but they said: 'No, I'll go with you and accompany you, because I want to learn,' and so they went, until they got used to it and so many came.

-What year, 80, did you say?

That was in the 60s, 70s, and 80s. There were fishermen who came here, who became fishermen here. Today, there's a boat captain (Hogfish, \*Lachnolaimus maximus XXXIV\*) who says, 'I'm grateful to have come to Puerto Real.' He sold encyclopedias, and he came here for the first time selling encyclopedias, and he sold some, and he started seeing the fishermen, and they said to him, 'Do you want to get on a boat to go fishing?' And he managed them all, every single one. When he started to see and see what he could earn, he stayed.

-And they came from all over Puerto Rico?

"Many of those who came here to the neighborhood in those years—I tell you this because of what my father, grandfather, uncle, and mother told me—many came here in circuses to put on shows and do many things. And they came to the neighborhood and stayed. Others came from other towns and liked it, and they saw that there's always been activity here. Where the fishing villages are, you see that there's always activity, because the fishermen are always up and down, there was always activity, there was a lot of business. And this was like the bars in those old towns in the United States, just like that, there was activity, just like in the ports there, where you see the fishermen's conversations, the same thing happened here. And people stayed, they liked it."

[00:59:03]

-When you say there was movement, what do you mean?

-Because it was always here, a little or a lot, but there was money to be made. There was something to make money doing, because if there wasn't any in agriculture, when the sugarcane harvest stopped, because of what they called the winter harvest, when you have to wait for the sugarcane to grow to harvest it in January, then they would go fishing and always have a balance sheet. I'm talking about the area here, about what my grandparents told me.

-Did your grandfather always work with fish or did he also work with sugarcane?

-No, my grandfather was a fisherman and he was a sailor on boats that sailed to the islands, to Curaçao and those islands over there, they traveled.

-Fishing, or something else?

-Traveling to deliver merchandise, in commerce. The person who raised my dad traveled. Because my dad was raised by an aunt, not his mom and dad, because my dad's mom died at the age of 20, when tuberculosis was the norm. And they raised him, and he sailed. He had four of those old-fashioned sailing boats, ones with two masts, those big old ones, that's what he sailed on, to Santo Domingo…

-Do you have pictures of that?

-I don't have any photos. One was called La Pensilvania, the other was El Astra. He knows all four names because he drove it and showed it around. That was back when the port of Mayagüez existed as such, which wasn't the port of San Juan or Ponce. It was back when ships docked in Mayagüez, with the piers to store cargo.

-So, at that time Mayagüez was…

-That was the port.

-And this place in Puerto Real, has it always been, more or less, a fishing spot?

-Lifetime.

-Did most people work in fishing?

-In fishing. Well, there are still a lot of young fishermen, because now we're... I'm 70, my father is 93, my son, well, he's stuck with that now, he's fishing, he has this now, my son is 38, my daughter, well, my daughter works for the Federal Government, she's in Maryland.

-Is he in Maryland?

-He works for the Department of Defense. And, well, at least we were able to get them up and moving forward.

-He had a good life supporting his family and sending his children to school…

-Yes, but my mom was worse than a sergeant (Sergeant major, \*Abudefduf saxatilis\*) in the army, she was very strict, and my dad, and my grandfather.

-In that way?

-They were very strict, they were very careful that no one…

-Were they strict about making them work?

-No, that they didn't do bad things, that they were honest people, and that's how we were raised.

-Well, we talked a little bit about, I want to better understand, a little bit, the evolution of your life as a fisherman as a job, I mean, in the 70s, independent, but in the 80s, you had a job too, a job outside of fishing…

-But we had boats, anyway.

How many boats does your family have?

-We always had the boat or the dinghy to fish.

-When did you start the business of selling fish again?

-When I worked there, I still sold fish, but when I decided to open the little restaurant, it was around 1981.

-Quite a while. Is it a restaurant or do you just sell fish?

[01:03:04]

-No, now they only sell fish. Before, it was a restaurant and they sold fish.

-How long did you have the restaurant?

-I was working here for 30 years.

-30 years and why did you close it?

-The hurricane.

-Maria?

-Maria. He destroyed all of this, so I was collecting my pension, and my wife and my children told me: 'Don't work anymore,' but we stayed fishing anyway, and that's what we did. I stayed selling fish, anyway, but not like it is now, a little less, because I said, well, this is an extra income I have, and as for the pension, well, I'll leave it alone. Anyway, we have to help them, even if they're older, we have to help them. We helped my daughter a lot, and him, in the past. My daughter bought a house there in Maryland. I came back from Maryland on Sunday (Blackline tilefish, \*Caulolatilus cyanops\*). I spent two weeks there watching her, with my wife. And then we helped my son, and we've helped him. And I'll have to keep helping because, anyway, he's getting by, and he worked so hard, and he has his issues. But you never stop helping your children, no matter what problem arises. That's how it is.

-So, Maria gave him the push to work a little less, maybe, but he keeps fishing and keeps selling fish.

"This is my life and my hobby at the same time. And what we like. Well, if we go to La Mona, we're preparing another boat over there, the blue one you can see over there, far away on the other side. We're going to buy two motors now, because we have that big one, but it doesn't work for us. I told him, 'Let's sell it,' because we like to go to La Mona to hunt, too. We fish in La Mona; we like to go fishing, but he hunts; he likes hunting pigs and goats. But now we need a boat like that. We'll say this Friday: let's go to La Mona to fish, and we go and fish. We leave at 5 in the morning and be there by 7. If we have a good catch that day, let's say at 5 in the afternoon or 6 in the evening, we'll leave and be here by 8 at night." If not, well, we stay and sleep there and the next day we fish for the day, and when it's 4:00 or 5:00 in the afternoon, we come back. But it's fast, it crosses a rapid, which is far, which is what it needs. That's been the dynamic; nowadays the fishing boat is small but fast, because we get there quickly. And if we go, for example, to La Mona, which is 39 miles from here to there, and we want to go to Cabo Engaño, a little further, we're on the border between Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo (Blackline tilefish, \*Caulolatilus cyanops\*), well, you say, it takes us two and a half, three hours, but we're there quickly, and the same when he comes.

-What technology do you use today to find fish?

-Well, the nautical charts are fine, you can see the depth here,

-It goes through the depths…

-Because before, one went for the cards.

-When you started, did you also use a nautical chart to fish with your dad?

[01:06:45]

"It was used to go to those faraway places, like when traveling to the islands there, there was no GPS. Today, if you take away the GPS from 90% of fishermen, what's up, they don't get to the places to fish, they don't know. So you had to take this, figure out a course, with the compass, the compass, and go there, to see what appears. Here are the seabeds, here is La Mona, here are the buoys, here is the Eastern Crown, the Desecheo, the Southern Desecheo, or we're going to such and such a place. Well, before, if you had seen that you could see the land by sight, we had the marks and we arrived at the place. Today, if you take away the GPS from the kids and they go to these places now, and you tell them tomorrow: 'Take me to the place where we were yesterday,' they don't go."

-What is the most important thing you learned from your father as a fisherman?

-He taught me everything. We often fished during the moon, during the months when, more or less, we know there's more movement of fish, of lobster. (Spiny lobster, \*Panulirus argus\*) I learned a lot from him.

-Is there anything you still use that's very important, that GPS can't give you?

-That the marks of land we see here, even when I go, I take my son and he takes the GPS and I tell him to mark your GPS so you know this, because if you don't mark it there, you'll never get there. And when my dad goes, he no longer has the vision he had, neither do I, but I tell him: 'here we are in such a place,' 'and here there is a rock,' and when I say to him: 'go this way,' 'here at the bottom there are no rocks, here there is grass,' or I say to him: 'here is sand.' We learned everything.

-I mean, he knows the background very well.

-We know the seabed, what it's like, where we're fishing.

-Tell me a little about the seabed. Have you seen any changes in your career as a seabed fisherman?

-As for the seabed, I can't really tell you what the seabed is like, except for what we see from above. I haven't seen any changes, but I don't think so, except for the area we had here, between buoys 6 and 8, which were here, where the ships would come and anchor and destroy the reefs on the seabed. They destroyed the seabed, because they would anchor, and as the ships moved with the winds and currents, that chain dragging along the seabed would destroy everything. Sometimes you can still see a ship anchored there.

-Are there any ships anchored?

-They're there sometimes for a month. For what?

-What ships, modern ones?

-Cargo ships. What kind of ship…

-When did this happen?

-That happened a lot in those years.

-What years?

[01:10:06]

-In the 70s and 80s, when the tuna farms were in Mayagüez, the tuna factories, that happened a lot, because the boats would anchor to wait their turn to come in and disembark, to unload, and that's what happened. And the divers who threw themselves in there told me, 'If you look at the bottom where the chain passes, it destroys everything.'

-The corals that were there…

-The corals, yes.

-In the 70s there were many corals, but they were destroyed.

-What we call where the buoys are, which are marked on this chart you have here.

-Show me with a pencil, please. Where were the corals?

The corals were here at the very edges you see here, depths of 30, 40, 50 fathoms, that whole area over there, all of that over there was destroyed by ships, mainly between buoys 6 and 8. Nowadays, sometimes you see a ship, sometimes they're deeper, but it's no problem. But when they're anchored at 40, 50 fathoms, holy crap, everything there, it's sad, it destroys it.

-And did you see changes in the fish because the coral disappeared?

-No, because in that area, there was a lot of fishing with traps. And the trap always catches fish, because you leave it for a couple of days, two or three days, and it catches fish, but you're destroying its habitat. And those were the boats, not us because we can't anchor to fish in the shallows. We used a small anchor, like this, and we anchored in a pool, pulled out the anchor, went forward, and pulled it out, but we couldn't drag the anchor along the... but a chain that weighs tons dragging along the bottom, as the boat shifts due to the currents, and that's what happened.

-I'm going to ask if you know about the yellow snapper (schoolmaster snapper), yellowtail, blue marlin (Makaira nigricans XLII\*), redtail parrotfish, blue marlin (Makaira nigricans XLII\*), stoplight parrotfish, true tulip (Fasciolaria tulipa\*), spiny lobster (Panulirus argus\*), this type of fish that is now very important commercially in Puerto Rico, have you seen any changes in that fish in the last 10 or 20 years?

-Of the parrots, the one you say is like roses, there are still parrots like that. If we go to see the trap and there are some of them in the trap, we release them because we're not going to sell them, because there's no market, and they're great for eating, but the market for them is limited, maybe one person in a month or less, maybe no one. The snappers (Lutjanidae) of the species, the mulatto (cubera), which is the darkest, those snappers (Lutjanidae) weigh 80, 100 pounds and more, they hardly ever look at them. The last one we caught, we caught it last year when we went sierra fishing (zero) and it caught us fishing, it weighed 48 pounds. We sold it to a restaurant because they used it for fillets. And the divers see them, but they hardly ever kill them, because sales are slow. In this area. My friends in this area say they see those monster snappers up there and don't even look at them. And it's the same here. They used to sell, but now they don't. The one we call dog snapper, which is like the yellow one, is fat. You have to know how to handle it, because if you fry it, it curls up. You have to get the fillets clean and remove the skin; you eat it. It sells well. The red snapper (Caribbean red snapper) sells well. It's good to eat. Of the three species of snapper we have here, these are the red snapper (Caribbean red snapper), the dog snapper, and the cubera.

[01:14:33]

-So, it's in the sea, but the consumer doesn't buy it, doesn't want it.

-We have some small ones here that are sold, like this, or like this, big ones, or the ones that are brought, that come, that are like this, they are sold, but those snappers (Snappers, \*Lutjanidae\*) that are there already, that one looks at, they weigh 50, 60, 70, 80, 100 pounds that are there…

-His big…

-Too big to sell.

-Were those sold before or not?

-They used to be sold.

-When did you notice that people didn't like you anymore?

-Starting in the 80s. My dad, there was a time, when I was young, when they used to fish for those snappers (Lutjanidae) off La Parguera, because there's a spot there where they go. Although they're everywhere, but they would go there at night and catch 400, 500 pounds, but they would catch 6 or 7 snappers (Lutjanidae), but they weighed 70, 80, 100. And then there was a man who dedicated himself to them, until he couldn't fish anymore, he died. And he would go there and I would see him, he would come back with 2 of them, or 3, but the 3 snappers (Lutjanidae) he brought in weighed almost 300 pounds. And those snappers (Snappers, \*Lutjanidae\*) are there because there's no one to catch them anymore, and the diver who goes down there if he sees him, that snapper is very clever and if he lives on the edge, when he goes down there like that, who's going to follow him? You shoot him with the harpoon and he'll take you, you won't be able to hold on, he'll take you... You don't look at him.

-Is it difficult to hunt because it is heavy?

-It is a strong fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*).

-It's strong too.

-Yes, strong. The horse mackerel (Jacks, \*Carangidae\*) (jacks), the mackerel (Crevalle jack, \*Caranx hippos\*) lost sales value in this area, both the horse-eye jack and the yellowtail (crevalle jack), those two horse mackerels, (Jacks, \*Carangidae\*) here we catch some, sometimes if we catch one, we catch it here, we remove the fillets, we bread it and we eat it ourselves. But not for sale as such. And that's it, that's not considered here. In the Aguadilla area it sells a lot, the meat is very dark from the blood, like tuna, it doesn't sell here. Pompano (Permit, \*Trachinotus falcatus XXV\*) (permit), which is another silver species like the horse mackerel (Crevalle jack, \*Caranx hippos\*) but it is wider, which they call permit, which you should have seen in photos. There are two species, one that is more rounded and another wider, more elongated with a long tail on top like that, those, I received two this past year, that were brought to me, one weighed 47 pounds and the other weighed 30 and something pounds. They are good for eating. They are not for sale. There are many species that people no longer, people, I'll repeat, for the record, seafood sales today: queen conch (Strombus gigas), spiny lobster (Panulirus argus), silk snapper, and octopus (Octopus spp.), but look, the octopus this year was not like other years. The octopus season is around Christmas, there wasn't much octopus this year. At other Christmases, sometimes there were 400, 500, 600 pounds of octopus in the fish markets.

[01:18:17]

-Didn't you find it?

-The same amount of octopus (Octopus, \*Octopus spp.\*) (octopus) didn't come. What happened? Because the same thing happens because this is like, but it's by season, the same thing that happens with the red sea crab, the sleeping crab, as we call it, when the months of June and July come now, which are the months of thunder, and so on, they are more abundant there and more are caught. During this time, you see very little.

-Is this the first time this year that you noticed there was no…?

-What about the octopuses? I noticed it this year, there weren't as many octopuses as in other years. What was the factor? I don't know if it was because, remember, this year there was La Niña, last year there was El Niño, the differences, and the sea was too warm this year, too much, because the water temperature was too warm.

-Too much…

-Too warm. And I remind myself that when Christmas comes around, it's the best time to fish because the water is colder. Colder water, more fish spawning. Unlike all the queen conch (Strombus gigas), which spawn more. The warmer the water, the more they spawn. Maybe that's why there have been more queen conch in such warm waters.

-It happened in years of The girl who saw that there is less octopus (Octopus, \*Octopus spp.\*) (octopus), I mean, do you think there are cyclical things or that this year was really strange, with all the history that you know?

-It was strange for me this year, because other years at Christmas there is a lot of octopus (Octopus, \*Octopus spp.\*) (octopus), this year there wasn't.

-Is this the first time in your history?

-From what I can tell, it's not like other years. The squids…

-Tell me a little about the community…

-The squids (Order Teuthida\*) (squids) at night there in the, fishing with light the saw (zero) at night in the water there is a time when squids come, (Squids, \*Order Teuthida\*) this year I don't know how it was. And the same with the herring, because you don't see the herring during the day, but at night, you put a light in the water and millions appear. That they changed from the places where they were previously parked, I don't know, because they were parked in a place, that you see that there is a reef, that you see that there is sea grass, here where these bottoms are here. When you leave here from the bay to outside, after you are a mile out, to get back to the reef you have to walk 5 miles, in that space there, what there is is mud.

-Mud?

-It's mud. Lane snapper bottom (Lutjanus synagris XXVII\*) and marine crab bottom, which we call marine crab bottom (Callinectes spp.\*), which is a beautiful crab bottom, those are the bottoms of those. At night, there's a lot of herring, you turn on lights to attract the herring, to fish for herring, and you catch mackerel with that, too much, a lot at night. That they've changed, because before I saw them during the day, and you see some, nowadays, you see some spots, but not the way I saw them when I was a kid, during the day, when I was young. Not at night. That the cycles have changed, we don't know, because changes happen that one doesn't...

[01:22:08]

-When did you first notice the change?

-I've noticed the herring issue during the day. I've noticed it for a few years now. And it's not because they fish for it, because herring isn't caught, it's not because of that. Albacore (Albacore, \*Thunnus alalunga\*), which is a type of tuna, is worth tons of it in the summer months. When winter comes, you see, it's less so. But nobody fishes for albacore (Albacore, \*Thunnus alalunga\*) here. We catch some because we catch them when we fish for mackerel. We catch about 2 or 3, but not because, but it's abundant. Sometimes I say, wow, if only there were a boat with nets to catch them, but the problem is: that's not for sale here. It's a type of tuna, albacore (Albacore, \*Thunnus alalunga\*), but it's not for sale. You can sell it to snapper fishermen, because it's used for bait. But you can catch tons of it, because when you see a school like that, when you're sailing and it's bigger than the distance from here to those boats there, you see all that stuff out there, from them.

-And was it always like this?

-It's been like this all my life.

-So with albacore tuna? (Albacore, \*Thunnus alalunga\*)

-That albacore (Albacore, \*Thunnus alalunga\*) (albacore) as far back as I can remember, ever since I was a kid, I've always seen the same thing. The only thing I don't see is the same number of birds, which is what I'm telling you, not the number of gulls there were, nor the number of barnacles, nor the number of great white-throated gulls. I don't see the number of great white-throated gulls there were back then. In La Mona, the same tropicbirds, you see them but you don't see...

-When was the first time you noticed that, wow, there seems to be a lot less of it?

-Years ago.

-More or less, 10 years, 15?

-About La Mona, about the tropic birds, about those birds?

-Of the birds.

-I would say about 10 years ago.

-Have you noticed about 10 years ago that there are much fewer of them?

-What I've noticed, maybe others have their opinion, let them see, but from what I've seen, from the time I grew up, from what I went to with my dad until now. Because one tends to see it... Whether they remember it or not is another thing. But for us, we're observant and we see things. Of the parrots, those little pink parrots and all that, a lot of that.

-Tell me a little about the Puerto Real community. Initially, for quite some time, Puerto Real was primarily a fishing community. Is this still the case, or has it changed now?

-Our distinctive feature is that: Cabo Rojo leads all coastal municipalities with the largest number of fishermen in Puerto Rico. Of the 44 coastal municipalities, Cabo Rojo has the most fishermen, and we are the neighborhood with the most fishermen within Cabo Rojo.

-Puerto Real. Tell me now, how many fishermen are there here, approximately?

-Here we have, I would say, like 150.

-And is the fish you make independent, family-run, an independent business, or are you working for a larger company?

[01:25:54]

-Here we don't work by company; we sell to the highest bidder. Well, that was one of the things that happened now, because there was so much spiny lobster (Panulirus argus) and so much queen conch (Strombus gigas) that the price of spiny lobster (Panulirus argus) and queen conch (Strombus gigas) went down. We used to sell spiny lobster for 12.50, and retail for 12.50 if you come to buy one or two. But the restaurants don't pay 12. The spiny lobster (Panulirus argus) that we used to sell for $12.50, we sell for 10, and the queen conch (Strombus gigas) used to sell for 11.50, we're already at 11, and if the quantity continues like this... by next year I think it's going to go down. And if the quantity of the queen conch (Strombus gigas) continues like I've seen, I think it's going to go down and I think raising prices isn't going to be easy. They went up because of inflation, because everything was fair, gasoline went up, fuel went up, everything went up, even the hooks went up, the lights for fishing for red snapper went up; a light cost 7 dollars and there are lights that cost 35, to fish for red snapper, down there. So everything went up. Squids, (Order Teuthida), when I started fishing with my dad, each box of squid cost $1. In the past, a 5-pound box cost $20, or something like $20. We have mackerel there, and we sell and catch it too, and whoever comes and brings it to us, we'll buy some. We used to sell mackerel for $2, but now mackerel is $5.

-Because there's too much of it.

"This is the season for it, because there's a species you catch at night here year-round, but the mackerel comes by in passing. You catch the mackerel starting in October; it passes through Puerto Rico, it seems like it's heading south. Because in a study I read many years ago, it said they came down from the coasts of South Carolina, down to Florida, down from the Gulf of Mexico, down to the Bahamas, and were caught here. Because when March passes now and April arrives, they disappear from this area. And that's how it is."

Tell me a little about the fisherman's lifestyle. Now, I understand you're retired, but from what you know, you told me that prices have gone up quite a bit these days, across the board. The most popular type of fish is cheaper because there's a lot of it. But in general, if you're a fisherman, for 10 years or so, with a little experience, can you make a good living in Puerto Real with this job, just being a fisherman?

[01:29:08]

-If you dedicate yourself to fishing. (Jaimito isn't here, Interviewee, come right now, yes, forgive me...) This is a mountain fisherman (zero) too. So, if you dedicate yourself to fishing and don't go overboard with expenses, if you want to live like a rich man around here, you live comfortably, peacefully. Because you dive, and I don't know whether to say this or not, because it could be that you interview other people and then they hear the interview you did with me and it causes conflicts and all that. But the fisherman, the one who dives, earns a few cents a week, enough to live peacefully, with the aid the government gives you. Well, because you have to be fair too, there are times when you can't go there for a week, and that week, well, you don't earn anything. Everything is subject, as happened to us during the pandemic, to atmospheric events; it's subject to many situations that are beyond our control, which we can't control. You can have a good time if you save something for when the bad times come, then you have something. If not… it's like everything else.

-I mean, you have to know how to manage money a little bit...

-Yes, because the only one who spends to see if they're going to make a profit is the fisherman, because we have to buy $100 or $200 worth of expenses first, to go out on an adventure, to see if we catch a fish, because if we don't catch a fish, we're left with the expenses out of our pockets without taking them out. And when we go, we have to come back again. That's how it is. The only worker who has to invest to make a profit is the fisherman, because you have a job at a company, you put gas in your car and went to work, other than the expenses you had, if you take food from home, you have nothing else. But not us, we have to bring food. The diver has to buy gas, the tanks, and risk catching a bubble, and if he catches a bubble, he can't fish for five or six months, or it could cost him his life. Because that same guy on this boat, right now, hasn't been able to go fishing for about two weeks and he's not well. The bubbles he took years ago are having an effect on him now and he's not doing very well, and he's a young man.

-What's the most important thing, when you're a fisherman, what do you think is the most important thing that makes you a resilient fisherman, meaning you can handle various things?

"I always say one thing: if you're going fishing, don't stick to just one type of fishing, because the day you can't go fishing for that fish, if you haven't learned to do another type of fishing, you're in trouble. We learned to make the traps for pot fishing. If we couldn't go to the small towns, the traps were fishing there, and we go see the traps, and we go hook fishing the next day, and so on, we take turns. Because that's how it is, because you can't go see the traps every day, because you can't cast them and have them catch the next day. No, you have to give it time, but in that time that you have the traps there, go hook fishing, and that's how you survive. You have to learn different things." If you have a seine, you know that you went fishing today at this port, tomorrow you're not going to go fishing again there, if you want to go fishing the next day you have to find another place to go, because you have to let that place rest and that's how it is.

[01:33:12]

-What is the future of Puerto Real, in your opinion?

"Look, I'll be honest with you, our future depends on people wanting to come from outside and buy from us, and on us leaving. They come offering money, and then the ones who come are wealthy people, and so, they don't come to fish, they come to have their luxury house, with their luxury boat, and you? How many times have they offered us this? Here they've left letters in the mailbox twice, lawyers and people, that we should call them, that we should ask. The first law my father made, and that my sister and I follow, and then my children and my nephews, is: this is not for sale." Because when we—I had a motto, when no one wanted this, because they said the mosquitoes bothered people and the stench of shellfish bothered those who came with money—we lived here and grew up here. Ever since insecticides and window screens were invented, mosquitoes didn't bother you. Now they want to have that, and they want to have this. And take it away from us, and that's not how it is.

-Do you think that's what's going to happen?

I don't think the youth, many of the youth, some of whom I know own property here, are friends with others, but I don't think they'll give up fishing, because the youth want to work little and earn money. The youth here go and fish in the morning, and many are here by noon. I'm not saying... because there are youth who are fishing for snapper and arrive at night, and they work hard, because I know them, they're hard workers. But many of those who fish, like the divers, leave at dawn and are here by 11 in the morning, and they earn a few bucks and rest the rest of the days. It's fine. I can't criticize them, because it's a risky fishing and they need to rest, because they're decompressing from the depths they were at. Everyone has their own catch, and I think they'll survive and keep this going here. I think Puerto Real will survive thanks to the divers. The hook and line fishermen who remain here, there are some young people who are rising up, maybe some will continue, not as many as we had before, but I don't think they'll eliminate us here so easily.

-Are there people who sold properties on the coast in Puerto Real? Are these people fishermen or did they do something else?

"The neighbor was a fisherman for many years. He lives there with his son. They were both fishermen. They sold this house, and a millionaire bought it. This marina, which was the largest fish market in Puerto Rico, and I believe in the Caribbean, was converted into a marina and sold. Now it has another owner. Down there, I'd tell you, if there are any houses left from the neighborhood, we can count here and there could be, I think, 10 or 15 houses, the rest are outside."

[01:37:12]

-I mean, there are people who do sell, what happens to those people, where do they go afterward?

-They leave and buy another house on a plot, somewhere else.

-But those people are fishermen, aren't they fishermen?

-Some were children of fishermen, some weren't fishermen, and so on. It's a mix, but most of us who lived here were fishermen.

-What do people in Puerto Real do for work if they're not fishermen?

-Many work in commerce and others work in factories.

-What factory?

There are factories in Cabo Rojo, Mayagüez, or Hormigueros. Others are in the teaching profession, others like my wife, who grew up here, became a doctor, and worked at the university, and so on. And others are electricians, others are in construction, and so on.

-There's everything here.

-There's everything.

-I mean, and how important is it...? I'm trying to understand the importance of the fishing economy in Puerto Real. It's still very important, I understand that, but...

-Look, Cabo Rojo's economy is driven by Puerto Real. Commerce, seafood, because we—let's say we do—in a year, I'll give you a basic statistic, here in the fishermen's operating expenses, say it reaches a million dollars, in fuel costs for the year. These are expenses that contribute to Cabo Rojo's economy through commerce. And what we consume is something else: the bait. And then, when the merchandise is delivered to the restaurant, how many restaurants does Cabo Rojo have? When you come looking, if we generate, an example that I'm going to give you, basic, simple, if we generate 3.5 or 4 million dollars, what we fish here in the year, for the restaurants, multiply that by the restaurants and you'll see that when you add up, you have, I think, that we are in commerce here in Cabo Rojo alone, but we sell, because we sell as far as Salinas, but in Cabo Rojo at least, I believe that after what happens with commerce, I think that no less than 20 million dollars have to be generated, for the economy.

-And here is this marina that they bought, that was, now I see that those are charter boats.

-That's for rent, yes.

-And before you only sold fish here, when did that change?

-That used to be a fish market with a dock. They had boats, and there were fishing boats that used to stay there too and fish for them. Over the years, they sold it, around 1984 or 1985. Those who bought it kept it as a fish market for a while, and then transformed it into a marina. A fish market remained there, bearing the name of what was once famous, but it's never, ever what it once was.

-And the people who come to rent here, are they tourists or where do they come from?

-Whoever comes here is a tourist or they come from the island, but they come tourists.

[01:41:06]

What do you know about the recreational charter industry? How important is it here in Puerto Real?

There were two charter boats here, and they have two others there, which were also used to take people to the beach or on charters. Sometimes someone shows up and talks to us and wants us to take them fishing, and we take them. But if they show up, we take them, but it's not the custom. Sometimes they show up and want us to take them to La Mona. We're very careful because the first warning we give them is: get the permits. If they get the permits, when they have all the permits, then we'll talk. But we don't lend ourselves to illegal matters at all. And people have shown up saying, 'Look, I need to travel, take me to...' No, not us. Let the charters take them if they want, and whatever charters they want, but not us.

-What do you want to do?

-It seems like they want to be taken to places, things that aren't right, and we're not going with that.

-To catch some kind of fish or for something else?

-Or fish for shamelessness. Bad things. No. And here it lends itself to them coming, because you know the area, you know everything, and you don't. We live comfortably with this, we live comfortably, we don't need to be involved in anything illegal, we don't like that, we've never been like that. We've never been involved in that. Whatever we earn, we earn by working. And that's it.

-Well, thank you very much for telling me so much. We're almost two hours away now. Is there anything you'd like to tell me about fishing in Puerto Real or Puerto Rico? Is there anything you think is important for some changes? Is there anything you think I might not have asked you about? Is there anything you'd like to tell me that's important about the future of this place, of the fishermen here?

-Look, there's always been something, and I'm not afraid to say this, that's happening to us right now: the aid they sent us for Hurricane Maria hasn't reached us. And that's always been the case. We're, the saying goes about sailors, treated like the last mackerel in the barrel. And it's always been that way.

-Why do you think?

-Because all the help for everyone else appears, for us the impossible, it's endless, it's a reality. We have that problem right now, the money there is stagnant, and there was until today, because if not, NOAA will collect the money, they haven't given us the money. And what else are they waiting for? How many years has it been, 8 years? And that's how it is.

-What do you think is happening? Why?

[01:44:42]

-In this case, from what I see, something very simple was happening: a government agency wanted them for themselves. And of the millions they allocated for us, they wanted to give us $400,000. To give us how much: $200? We're going to buy an engine for a boat, and it costs $10,000. And if we buy an engine for that one, a diesel engine, it costs $25,000. If we need a good new boat, how much does a boat cost? That blue boat over there, if we were to buy it for fishing right now, the one with the flag there, that boat costs 150,000 pesos. Of course, it's impossible for us. I filed for Re-grow, during the hurricane. I filed all the paperwork, I called, I have the paperwork, no, look, that went to such and such agency now. Well, I called that agency: no, we haven't received that yet, call them in a month. I called in a month, no, it still hasn't arrived. Well, I threw it in the trash. And the money was there. More and more and more setbacks. On one occasion, I told the Agriculture department, I said: 'Look, if you don't want to give the money, I don't care about the money, let Agriculture buy the materials for us with that money and give them to us,' because with the materials, we can work. If you're afraid of what I'll do with the money, don't give me the money. I need this, this, and this, and that's it.

-What do you think would have to happen for this to change, for it not to happen like this?

-Here we have to make changes in two agencies that are our responsibility: Agriculture and Resources. Because Resources is crazy about reporting, the Coast Guard comes and intervenes with us, the Coast Guard doesn't come with a book to give you a ticket. The Coast Guard comes and says: Captain, (Hogfish, \*Lachnolaimus maximus XXXIV\*) permission to board, no problem, Captain, (Hogfish, \*Lachnolaimus maximus XXXIV\*) come, board, Captain, (Hogfish, \*Lachnolaimus maximus XXXIV\*) the equipment, here's the equipment, here's this and this, Captain, (Hogfish, \*Lachnolaimus maximus XXXIV\*) this is expired, I'm going to give you this little piece of paper so that if they board you, you know that it's already been given to you, so that next time, if we come back, you have it available. They don't come with a ticket to give us, they don't. They can give you a $500 ticket, they give it to you there, that's a party for them, they don't know what you're going there for.

-If you could be in charge of that money, let's say, what would you do differently?

-The first thing is that I, here, have a person who comes to the neighborhoods and knows who the fishermen are, collects statistics, knows the fishermen, knows the new ones, knows those who want to come in, too, because we have to give them space to enter, because there's room for everyone here. What I don't agree with is that you go off in a boat worth millions of dollars, which is what happens, and they give you a commercial fishing tag, and they come and bring you the catch and then sell it, because they don't make a living from that. That's shameless to us, I'm not afraid to tell them that, to anyone. You have a license, like I have one here. If you have a license, give it to me. How did you get this license if you have millions of dollars? Unless you have a fishing company, well, I don't understand why you have to have a license. But that doesn't exist here. So you're going to tell me that you go on one of those boats that costs millions of dollars, and you go and do some fishing and catch 50 dorados (Dolphins, \*Coryphaenidae\*) and there are 3 people on the boat, you don't eat 50 dorados (Dolphins, \*Coryphaenidae\*), you catch 3 dorados (Dolphins, \*Coryphaenidae\*) or 6 dorados (Dolphins, \*Coryphaenidae\*) for yourselves and sell the rest, unfair competition and it's a pigsty.

[01:49:02]

-And how does this affect you?

-If you told me that they came and caught those dorados (Dolphins, \*Coryphaenidae\*) and went to a nursing home, where they provide services to the community, to give food to the poor, and 'we're going to donate this so you can make a meal for these people,' I would congratulate them, why? Because they used it in an appropriate way, but not in that other way.

-Where do you think they sell it?

-They sell it right there, the fishing tournaments, when those fishing tournaments come, they sell it right there.

-Agent?

-To the shops too. That's obvious.

-What happens to you on those days, do you sell less?

-It's not that we sell less, because if dorados (Dolphins, \*Coryphaenidae\*) appear next to us, we fish for them. We don't dedicate ourselves to fishing for dorado. (Dolphin, \*Coryphaena hippurus\*) If we see a swordfish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) and it pulls us in, we catch it, but not because we're going to chase it. But not them. They fish every weekend and in tournaments when they come. They have a marlin tournament and release the marlin, which is great, but it's not that. But then those I mentioned just now, the longliners, come and catch them and take them away. In other words, we raise the fish so they can take them abroad. And it doesn't enter the country's economy. I would tell you, we need to make a lot of changes there. We're at war with the Ministry of Resources over the regulations. I agree that laws need to be made, but don't try to throw them at me. Little by little, we're going to improve this, we're going to do this, but don't come to me with a regulation and next year, five or six years from now, say, 'Look, we're going to change the law, we're going to do this.' And I, well, I had a lot of arguments, you can tell me that, which is why I had arguments with some of the people who came for interviews here, so I completely withdrew. But come here, six months ago there was a vote and now you're coming at me with that nonsense again, after we reached an agreement. Because I agree, that's their job. They have to defend themselves with that, but this is my job too, and I have to defend myself with this. We're not going to cross lines. Don't try to give me more force than I can, and I won't cross them, because if you hit me on one side, don't complain later when I explode on the other side. Don't tell me, if you ban me from fishing for spiny lobster (Panulirus argus), you're closing it down, and I'm going to go fish for another endangered species, because I have to make a living. If you corner me with one species, who suffers? The other species. We're going to control them one way or another, as long as we can survive and don't have problems, and that way none of the species will be overfished. Because when you overfish one and they close you down, what are you going to do? You're going to move to another, and what will happen to that one?

-Can you give me an example of something like that that happened?

[01:52:49]

-I'll give you an example: if you completely close the silk snapper fishery to me, but you completely close it to me, you can't fish for queen snapper or yellowfin mojarra. Because right now there are three species that can't be fished, but you can fish for two. If you close the five to me, in that time, and I'm a fisherman for that, you're forcing me to, that after 9 miles, I can't fish for lobster because I'm in federal waters, right? What am I going to do? I'm going to go fish for it. Why? I have to live. Because if I overfish here and can't catch that one, well, I have to move over there, because I'll get it over there. And this is a game of cat and mouse, it's a reality. You can't completely close one thing, because the other species will suffer, because you're going to move. It was something I told you just now, I mentioned to you, that there are fishermen of all kinds here, but when it comes down to it, you have to learn to fish for different species and in different ways. Why? Because if something happens at one point, you move to the next. Because if we move, then when we bring people fishing, the government is the first to control you and tell you: 'You need to get a permit,' 'You need a Coast Guard permit,' 'You need a public service license,' 'You need to pay this insurance,' 'You need to pay that,' 'We need to inspect the boat.'

-Is it a lot of pressure, in general?

-Yeah.

-When did you start feeling these cumulative pressures—not just that it's difficult to fish, but that there are other things that come to hinder you? Can you give me an example of what things make it very difficult to be a fisherman?

"Look, sometimes you get detained three times a day, out there, and you get upset and have run-ins, and the threats come. I'm telling you, threats to such an extent that there's a friend of mine who died, may he rest in peace. He was a fisherman from La Parguera, and there was a Human Resources officer who had him crazy and would stop him for any little thing. There came a time when the man lost his mind, punched him, took his revolver and threw it into the water, spent thousands of pesos, for what? There was a policeman here who's no longer with us, who stopped me and we had run-ins, my son had run-ins with him, what he was experiencing was abuse. He would stop you for any stupid thing to report you, one of the ones who was here right now had to go and chase him, and then he couldn't get near him. Because he came to stop you, but it was to find a way to report you." One of the threats he made to my son was that a cousin from Florida came and there were some boat races outside the bay, and he anchored in a meadow, so there was enough water, so he could see it from afar, and the same man I mentioned, the policeman, came to intervene. They tried to hide the name from me, but I told him they were going to hide it from me, I'm going to find out in the long run, and when I find out, it's going to be worse. And that's how it happened. And then he called him, asked for his fishing gear, and the first comment he made, unnecessary, he said, when my son was in college, was, 'You make me look like a criminal.' A woman and two police officers were there, and my son said to him: 'Look, sir, I'm not a criminal, what are you going to do?' The other police officers backed down. He said: 'No, you look like you want to sleep in the spoons, in jail, at night.' My son came to him at one point and said, 'I'm going to sleep at my house today, and whatever you're going to do, do it now. Besides, look, I'm a criminal.' He took out his license and said, 'Is this a gun license they give to criminals?' 'Are you threatening me?' 'I'm not threatening you, I'm warning you.'

-Why do you think this happens?

[01:57:33]

"His power went up to... when I met with some commanders, and I did the story and gave them the name, a week later they fired him. I told him, 'This is happening,' and that's happening, and by the way, that time, the governor did too. There was another problem somewhere else, and the governor at the time came that week, and I told him, 'Look, I met with the commander, Furcio.' I told him, 'This is happening,' and that, and his name is so-and-so. He said, 'Write it down for me,' he said to the secretary. And a week later they fired him. 'You're a servant, you're there to help or guide me, you're not here to make my life impossible, difficult, and marginalize or belittle me. Because, as my wife says, my degree says I studied four more years, not that I'm better than anyone else. That's a piece of paper they gave me because I studied four more years, not because I'm better. My wife grew up very poor, so much so that when she graduated, I was fishing when I was young; I gave her the money to buy shoes for her senior year graduation, my dad bought her the ring, and my aunt gave her the suit; look how poor she was. But we got by. There are civil servants who are good, and I do a great job with them, because I don't disrespect anyone. I don't expect them to disrespect me, but if they come to disrespect me, to belittle me, and to do me wrong, that's the end of the mix. I'm honest. You can't look for me anywhere to say that I'm in... nor my son or my daughter, because if not, my daughter wouldn't be in the Federal Government, because they investigated us from top to bottom for her to get in there, the Department of Defense, on that side of us, they don't have to look for us anywhere.

-Can you show me on the map—this is the last question I'm going to ask you—which are the economically and culturally important places for fishing in this area? Can you show me what you think are very important for the fishermen of Puerto Real?

-Look, here, this is one, here, no way...

-Can you show me the whole area or is it just this…

-All of this. There are some here that are small, that don't appear as such, but we look for them when we have the snapper fishing machine set up, and they are places that are isolated and sometimes don't appear here. It appears here, it appears. It's up to buoy 2. The buoys aren't clearly visible, it doesn't appear here, the buoy appears... this is the Tourmaline buoy, here is the... this whole area, this whole area here, look, I'm going to mark it with these little dots like this, this whole area around here, all the edges, here, up to the Crown and up to Mona Island, all of these are our values.

[02:01:08]

-Corona, he said?

-That's the Crown, we call it, yes. There's Bajo de Sico…

-But I could say how, like this, like this, like this…

-Yes, what happens is that it doesn't appear here, there is the Corona, because there is also the Bajo de Sico, which is closed, you can't fish in that one.

-Is it like conservation or something?

-The Bajo de Sico is a conservation area. You can fish live, pelagic, but not bottom. The Bajo de Sico used to be right here. This is the Corona, you can fish the Corona, everything, all of this here that appears from 90 fathoms to 110, all of this is silk snapper farms, and we catch big snapper there. Since it's deeper here, it tends to be deeper, so we fish for queen snapper here.

-Where do you fish for queen snapper?

-In this entire area from here. From here to La Mona, the depths, after 140 fathoms onward, everything, after that, if it doesn't go over 250 fathoms onward, that's where we fish.

-What did you tell me you fish here, queen conch (\*Strombus gigas\*) (queen conch)?

-No, there is no queen conch (\*Strombus gigas\*) there.

-Queen conch (Strombus gigas) are in this area, look, inward from the buoys. Do you see the buoys marking here? This is number 6, this is number 8, this whole area around here, everything, they fish for queen conch (Strombus gigas), all of this. Yes, those who fish for queen conch (Strombus gigas), up there, all along the coast, up there.

-And you come from Puerto Real?

-The only place that is worse for fishing for queen conch (Strombus gigas) is here, because there in the northern zone you have 6 months to fish and 6 months that you cannot fish.

-I heard that before too.

-Because the platform is tiny, and so during these times the wind and sea are rough, from the cold fronts. When this time passes, now that summer comes, then it's good there, you can fish, but the rest of the year, you fish for dorado (dolphins, \*Coryphaenidae\*) (dolphin) and when the weather's good.

-Well, thank you very much, I'll stop now, I kept it up quite a bit.

-OK.