Key Informant Interview 1

Date: 7/25/2016

Stakeholder Group: Academia/Research

Years of Experience in Occupation/Field: 2.5 years

Community/Area/Location: Mayagüez, Puerto Rico (west coast)

Speaker 1. Describe your involvement with Puerto Rican fisheries.

Speaker 2. [...] we talk to local fishermen about the importance of sea turtles in the coral reef habitats and how to protect these habitats. Also creating a [...] facility in Mayaguez, PR to study and promote the importance of coral reefs.

Speaker 1. In general, how would you rate Puerto Rico coastal communities’ dependency on fisheries for their livelihood?

Speaker 2. Somewhat Dependent

Speaker 1. Describe (e.g. In what ways? Why do you think that is?).

Speaker 2. Most coastal communities in Puerto Rico still depend on the fisheries industry, for self-sustenance or market to local restaurants or shops. Some continuing family traditions, others with no work opportunities or experience.

Speaker 1. In general, how would you rate Puerto Rico coastal communities’ dependency on coral reefs for their livelihood?

Speaker 2. Very Dependent

Speaker 1. Describe (e.g. In what ways? Why do you think that is?).

Speaker 2. Coral reef habitats are critical spots and habitats for most game fish caught by fishermen in these communities, and they also serve as barriers to protect the coastal communities from storm surges and waves. The coral reefs serve as home, protection for juvenile fish, feeding spots, and critical areas for reproduction gatherings.

Speaker 1. What would you say is(are) the major problem(s) facing fishing communities in Puerto Rico? (If more than one please rank them in order of importance).

Speaker 2. Overfishing, Pollution, Climate Change / Global Warming

Speaker 1. Have you observed any changes to the fishery, environment, or other natural resources in Puerto Rico that you think can be attributed to climate change? Describe.

Speaker 2. Fish stocks are declining not only because of overfishing, but habitat loss. Climate change is greatly affecting local coral reef communities; with various species of coral are dying (bleaching). Whereas a decline in juvenile fish communities have been observed and more algae blooms and green algae growth observed close to these areas.

Speaker 1. In your opinion, are Puerto Rican fishers concerned about climate change? Why or why not?

Speaker 2. Yes and no. You will always find fishers who are greatly concerned about their future in the fishing industry, and will admit to changes in the weather but most are oblivious of what is happening directly to their fishing spots under the surface of the seSpeaker 2.

Speaker 1. In your opinion, are Puerto Rico fishery manager/decision-makers/researchers concerned about climate change? Why or why not?

Speaker 2. Yes. Climate change is no joke to most fishery managers and researchers in Puerto Rico. They are many studies being conducted between DNER, NOAA, Sea Grant and the University of Puerto Rico trying to find any possible solutions to help the fishery and coral reef communities in the coastal waters of Puerto Rico against climate change.

Speaker 1. Do you think people in this community can work together to solve community problems? Why or why not?

Speaker 2. Again yes and no. Community problems yes, fisheries problems no. The fishing community in Mayaguez is called El Seco. Most fishermen in this community are continuously accused of illegal fishing practices and admit that while they are still living they will continue with these practices.

Speaker 1. Do you think fishers could work together to solve problems in the fishery? Why or why not?

Speaker 2. In some places yes but mostly no. Fishers are independent from one another and are not happy sharing fishing spots with others, even within their own community. Solutions could be created to help out many of the fishing villages for example creating maps that can rotate between fishers and changing their catch to other edible species like the invasive Lionfish.

Speaker 1. Can you think of any examples of this kind of community action occurring now in Puerto Rican fisheries? Describe.

Speaker 2. Negative : A fisher in Mayaguez discovered someone setting lobster traps close to his. The next day holes were found drilled into the other fisher’s boat. Positive: A community in Mexico saw a dramatic change in economic growth once they started working together and agreed to only fish Lionfish to help save their local reef and also increase tourism.

Speaker 1. Do you think the government and fishers could work together to solve problems in the fishery? Why or why not?

Speaker 2. Yes. Even though many fishers are against the government setting policies and laws against fishing certain species during different periods, these limitations are helping in the return of more possible catch to areas where certain decline was observed.

Speaker 1. Can you think of any examples of this kind of participatory action occurring now in Puerto Rican fisheries? Describe.

Speaker 2. In the early 2000’s a great decline of 2 species of grouper could no longer be found in Cabo Rojo’s local reefs. Proper enforcement and protection laws were placed to protect this species and you can now see an incline of these species, also allowing the catch of it during certain months of the year.

Speaker 1. Do you feel that fishery management in Puerto Rico is fair in the decisions they make? Why or why not? Be specific.

Speaker 2. Yes, I greatly agree with most of the decisions they make even though at times I wished to see a better degree of enforcing these policies. Many of the policies are placed but no one is at the fishing villages or ports to enforce the laws placed, making the illegal catch of the species protected still possible.

Speaker 1. Do you think most fishers understand how managers make decisions? Why or why not?

Speaker 2. No, as I have spoken to many fishers in the west coast of Puerto Rico. Many of the fishermen still believe that the oceans bounty is unlimited and they can take it all if they wished to. Even though they see changes in the numbers of catch every year, they believe the fish will not disappear.

Speaker 1. In general how would you describe the relationship between fishers and fishery managers/decision-makers?

Speaker 2. Untrustworthy and unreliable. The fishery managers/decision-makers do not trust that all fishers will follow the policies of guidelines made for fishers, and the fishers believe the fishery managers are unreliable and are doing the policies to mess with the fishers.

Speaker 1. If they exist, how are conflicts between fishers and between fishers and managers/decision-makers resolved?

Speaker 2. When the fishers know the fishery managers directly and can discuss reasons why the policies or decisions are made is when I see less conflicts and disputes with these two groups. Creating bi-monthly meetings, presentations and community outreach to demonstrate the cause and effect if the policies are not placed and enforced.