Key Informant Interview 15

Date: 8/15/2016

Stakeholder Group: Supporting business

Years of Experience in Occupation/Field: 7 years

Community/Area/Location: Vieques Island

Speaker 1. Describe your involvement with Puerto Rican fisheries.

Speaker 2. [...] Informant said he buys all the fish and shellfish that the fishermen bring daily. There are no fishing associations in Vieques and said: “the fishermen are not united. Maybe years ago but not now. They fish and sell their catch on their own account. They get no help.” Informant said some fishermen would like to have an association or villa but others don’t. Informant said that the ones who don’t are not interested and also said they are afraid that there will be corruption.

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

Speaker 2. Very Dependent

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

Speaker 2. Informant said that there are not too many options for employment on the island and therefore they depend on the fishery to make a living. Informant said they go out everyday fishing.

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. Informant said lobster is the number one species that they sell in Vieques (conch is also important) and that the lobster live in the reefs.

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. Informant said the biggest challenge is the closed seasons, the bans (*vedas*), and the regulations. Informant understand that the rules are important but they said that the decisions are made by government officials in their offices and that they are not always well informed and in tune with reality. Informant said they are talking about closed seasons for lobster. Informant said the conch needs a rest but the lobster no, they are in good condition. Informant also said that a lobster closure would create a problem for the fishers because the traps that they use to attract and trap the lobsters stay in the water and that it would be difficult and costly to bring them to shore in order to comply with a ban.

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. No.

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

Speaker 2. Yes. They are worried. The fishers see the changes. We don’t because we don’t go into the water. They talk about changes like the presence of more algae or ones that didn’t exist here before.

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

Speaker 2. The government has abandoned us here in Vieques. They do not come here to give orientation. “They do not worry about the fishery here.”

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

Speaker 2. Yes. People here unite and help each other when there are storms and hurricanes. The fishers help each other getting boats out of the water when there is a storm. But only when there is a disaster, really.

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

Speaker 2. Not really. They are united when there is a problem.

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

Speaker 2. The few times where there is a meeting about regulations or licensing problems, they unite. Informant mentioned about the challenges for some of the fishermen to comply with all the licensing regulations because they have to fill out a ticket and they need to send them in the mail (something that it is not normally a part of a fisher routine). Informant said that because of these challenges 50-60% of the fishermen in Vieques fish without a license. Informant said that fishers who have been in the water for many years find this challenging. They also said that DNER does not give anything back to the fishers.

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

Speaker 2. No.

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

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. No. Informat said they make decisions sitting on chairs in the air-conditioned offices. They don’t know about the problems. They don’t talk to the fishers. When they do, the rules are already made.

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

Speaker 2. Yes they do but they do not accept it.

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

Speaker 2. Informant thinks it is not very good. They always put rules in place that affect the fishers and make things more difficult for them every time. For example, Vieques does not have an office where the fishers can renew their licenses, they have to go to PR to solve any fishery related issues, with licenses and boats. Informant said Vieques is where there is more fishing in PR and that it makes no sense that there is no office to address these issues. Informant said there used to be one in Ceiba but not anymore (since the navy left).

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

Speaker 2. They all have problems.. They resolve them by talking to each other, arguing a little. With government only when there are meetings but the government decides anyway. “They talk and they argue but in the end the government makes the decisions they want.”