Key Informant Interview 16

Date: 8/3/16

Stakeholder Group: Commercial Fisher

Years of Experience in Occupation/Field:

Community/Area/Location: Fajardo

Speaker 1. Describe your involvement with Puerto Rican fisheries.

Speaker 2. The informant said he has been fishing all his life. [...]

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

Speaker 2. Informant didn’t answer this specifically but said that they used to depend more.

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

Speaker 2. Informant said that there used to be a lot more fishers in PR [they mentioned the number dropped from 7 thousand to about 700 in only a few years]. Informant said that many fishermen retired from fishing and went into other occupations because of the fishing regulations and because according to him the government wants to get rid of the fishers because they prefer the fishery from “outside.” Informant mentioned that some fishers depend entirely on fishing but many are recreational fishers and said that the recreational fishers are providing the government with higher statistics [“fake statistics”] and that this is having an impact on the decisions that the government makes.

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 mentioned that the most important fish they catch are reef species and that many of the coral reefs are damaged because of pollution. Informant mentioned the pollution that comes from the nearby resort (El Conquistador) that goes into the water directly and that it affects and kills the corals. Informant said there are many beautiful reefs but many of them are in bad shape.

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. The government and the fishing regulations they make. Informant said the most important problem is that the government does not help the fishers. They say they don’t have the money to help them but they have money for other things. Informant said the government blames the fishers for everything. Informant said before the DNER and NOAA the fishers were happy and they were not bothered. Informant said that the problem with the government is that they are given too much power and they abuse of this power. Informant said the fishers respect the rules and the stocks they fish but that many of the rules are too complicated. Informant also said that some rules are absurd and ridiculous such as the rules that make the fishers throw dead fish overboard because they cannot land certain species.

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. Yes. Informant mentioned that there are more storms and hurricanes and that the weather has been different in certain times of the year than they used to be. Informant mentioned that these changes are an impediment for the fishers. Informant said that El niños are affecting the fishery as well. Informant said the weather has been changing a lot and that the summer months when the weather used to be beautiful most of the time and now it is stormier.

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

Speaker 2. Yes. They are worried about these changes.

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

Speaker 2. Informant said they are only worried about climate change when there are hurricanes.

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

Speaker 2. Yes.

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

Speaker 2. Yes. The cooperative fishers work together to create proposals to help better develop the fishery but the government does not listen to them.

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

Speaker 2. The cooperative created a proposal to implement a fishing platform that would be out in the water with fishing equipment and that fishers could go out there and fish. The platform would come back to shore if the weather was bad and stay out in good weather. Informant said this would improve the conditions of the fishermen but they did not have the support to implement this idea.

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

Speaker 2. Informant said it depends on the government. Informant said the government is always against the fishers. Informant said they could work together if the government is willing to reach an agreement with the fishers.

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

1. Informant said there are no good examples, they talked a lot about a lost battle over the land historically used by the fishers that they want to

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. Informant said they are not fair because the fishermen are not involved in the decisions. Informant said the rules are made for the government and not to help the fishermen.

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

Speaker 2. Yes. They go to many meetings.

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

Speaker 2. Not easy. Informant said they blame the fishers for everything but thinks the cause of the bad relationship is the government. Informant called the government enforcers (personas vigilantes) “bad apples” and said that they steal the fishers’ catch if they don’t have a license and they take the fish to their families.

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

1. Informant said they should be resolved by going to meetings and talking about the causes for conflict.