Key Informant Interview 10

Date: 8/9/2016

Occupation/Affiliation: Government

Years of Experience in Occupation/Field: 15 yrs

Community/Area/Location: Live in mainland US

Speaker 1. Describe your involvement with Puerto Rican fisheries.

Speaker 2. [...] I was contracted [...] to provide support to evaluate the socioeconomic effects of regulatory changes proposed by Council members as well as other issues that arose. Since then, I have assessed the socioeconomic effects of several proposed and implemented amendments to the regulations governing the U.S. Caribbean EEZ.[...] I’ve also been involved in interviewing fishermen at the multiple Puerto Rican fish houses regarding seasonal fishing schedules and cultural impacts of changes in seasonal closures and building a [...] model that examines the quantitative and qualitative social, economic, and cultural impacts of changes in the Accountability Measures based seasonal closures for individual species/species groups. [...]

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. Dependency varies by region and by community and is highly influenced by seasonal weather conditions. Areas on the southwest (lobster, some snapper species), Rincon (deepwater snapper and grouper), east coast appear highly dependent on fisheries while the north coast is less dependent. This could be largely due to the harsher weather conditions in the north coupled with the need to fish out further than lobster fisheries in the southwest region require. Dependence seems to also vary depending on the state of the economy and availability of other work opportunities. Puerto Rico is less dependent on fish than the USVI where providing fish for tourism and cultural events is more pronounced. For example, seafood is cultural the main dish for Christmas in the USVI whereas in the Puerto Rico, the main dish at Christmas is pork (except in Rincon perhaps). Both islands/island groups require seafood to satisfy demand during Holy week and Lent.

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

Speaker 2. Somewhat Dependent

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

Speaker 2. Based on anecdotal information, it appears that the fishing communities are somewhat dependent on coral reefs for their livelihoods. One indicator of this was when the Council considered streamlining the seasonal closures for the three coral habitat areas (Bajo de Sico, Abrir, Tourmaline) to the northwest of PR in federal waters. The process was considered over several years and near finalization of the amendment that made changes to the seasonal closures, there was a public outcry from west coast communities. The negative response resulted in the amendment being dropped. I am less aware of the coral reefs closer to shore in state waters.

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 economy and lack of job opportunities as well as rising costs for water and electricity seem to be the major problems facing Puerto Rican communities. With regard to fishing communities specifically, full-time fishermen often complain that they have to compete with recreational fishermen for fish. It is believed that some recreational fishermen have commercial permits but don’t rely on the stocks for a living.

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. I have not personally observed changes resulting from climate change but fishermen have mentioned the fear that climate change will result in a greater number of hurricanes and that this will result in toxins in places where they have not been previously known that could result in catching poisonous fish.

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

Speaker 2. Some fishermen are concerned about climate change but the form it will take is unknown.

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

Speaker 2. See above.

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

Speaker 2. The fishing community in some areas seems to be a cohesive group that work together and have strong social connections. For this reason, I think they may be able to work together to solve community problems if they experience a negative result from inaction.

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

Speaker 2. Some fishermen have mentioned that it is very hard to get more than a handful of fishermen together to talk about and address a problem. I believe that core groups of fishermen an work together and if given representation for others, they could solve problems in the fishery. However, many fishermen are uninformed about management changes and about the management process in general.

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

Speaker 2. One example of community action is with converting lobster traps to a similar type of trap to the one used in the Florida Keys.

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

Speaker 2. This is possible but would be very difficult. The language barrier between English and Spanish speakers can be a problem. While meetings are conducted in English on the federal level, most fishermen in Puerto Rico only speak Spanish. Also, the complexity at which the Council members and government staff interact at public meetings makes it difficult for members of the public to understand.

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?

Speaker 2. I am not informed enough about state fisheries management to establish an opinion.

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

Speaker 2. No, I do not think most fishers understand how managers make decisions. To understand, they would have to attend meetings and/or read meeting minutes and not many fishers have time to do that.

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

Speaker 2. It is a strained relationship.

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

Speaker 2. It appears that conflicts are resolved at informational meetings set up for communicating about specific topics.