Key Informant Interview 5

Date: 8/12/2016

Occupation/Affiliation: Other

Years of Experience in Occupation/Field: 6 months

Community/Area/Location: Vieques Island

Speaker 1. Describe your involvement with Puerto Rican fisheries.

Speaker 2. One of the ways [they] will be involved with the fisheries in Vieques is with regard to conservation and protection of marine resources: “Vieques is unique, everything in the water is food but people do not conserve.” Informant said they were diving in Vieques 10 years ago and it is a drastic change compared to now: “now coral life is almost gone.” They said this has to do with education. They want to establish a program: “we will have an activity center and we will work with the fishers.” One challenge in their opinion is that “fishers don’t talk too much. They [think they] know everything, you can’t teach them anything.” In the education program they intend to involve the fishers directly and they are also particularly concerned about fishers’ health issues: “we have people with the bends every day and no doctors here who can deal with that.” They said the local mayor supports them and the local government will help to make it free: “that’s the only way we can get fishers involved.” The mayor believes all divers should have a license to dive in Vieques. They mentioned that the worst diving practices are from the tourists and not the fishers. Informant said the tourists throw trash in the water and they hurt the corals with bad diving practices. It is hard to tell people they need to protect.

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. Said in Vieques they sell what they catch. They don’t care, they are not dependent.

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

Speaker 2. Not Dependent

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

Speaker 2. Informant said nobody cares, “it’s an education problem.” 15 years ago people would do clean ups but now they said “we don’t create awareness. It’s cultural, they don’t care.” They said that there are no programs in schools to educate children about not impacting and how to maintain and protect the natural resources. They said that 15 years ago they tried to grow corals for free but had no support from the PR government to do so.

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. Decompression sickness, “more than anything else.” Several people in Vieques who were affected can’t walk. We have at least 1 or 2 cases weekly and there are no doctors. They have to fly the patients to the main island, which is the worst thing you can do, and the hospital where they take them is in altitude, not sea level. Ceiba used to have a hospital, which was closer and at sea level but that is gone (since the navy left). “Our air ambulance is currently not working.” They said in Vieques kids go fishing before they go to school and there is no program for them. They mentioned that the local macho culture also makes things more difficult with regard to addressing decompression sickness: “they brag about being in deep water.”

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. Not in Vieques. They said in Parguera there used to be black corals but they don’t exist anymore. They mentioned more storms and water surges and said that people are destroying the coastal natural defenses by anchoring on corals and breaking them. Informant did say corals are bleaching and dying everywhere. They mentioned the public pier by the Vieques airport which is a good spot to dive but said everything is white and there is nothing growing there any more. They said there used to be sharks and sea turtles about 10 years ago and now you don’t see them anymore. They said people are affecting the resources through pollution in the water, and no awareness: “they don’t try to hurt, they just don’t know any better.”

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

Speaker 2. Yes.

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

Speaker 2. They are but not as much as they should. It is political “let me sound like I care but I don’t.” And that’s everywhere: Venezuela, Costa Rica, Panama. “Everything is dead.”

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

Speaker 2. No. “Everybody wants to be in charge, not take charge.”

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

Speaker 2. No. They are in the same boat, they try but it is cultural. They are divided into different groups. They separate, they take things from each other and they are all related! Informant said: “people are really nice here though. But many Puerto Ricans don’t know Vieques is part of PR, which creates conflicts. The government doesn’t take care of Vieques. The Americans who live here are more concerned about the island than Viequenses. The government has no resources, no money for here.”

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

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

Speaker 2. “They could but they won’t.” It is the same thing in Culebra. Informant said Culebra has more support than Vieques and that is because of foreign investments. They said foreign investments help the PR economy but not the local people. “The people from Culebra are leaving the island.”

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. They are not doing what they are supposed to do. There is no coast guard, no police. We have laws but nobody cares for them. Informant said he personally called the coast guard once (for illegal fishing activity) and nothing happened. They said there is a lot of illegal fishing not only from Vieques but from many places like Culebra, US Virgin Islands.

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

Speaker 2. No. “The government says something and they do another. They say one thing today and tomorrow is something else.”

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

Speaker 2. Not bad. They don’t give fishers a hard time. They have rules but they don’t comply.

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

Speaker 2. They have meetings, they come up with an agreement. They say that in 6 months the fishers won’t be able to do it again but they do it again and nothing happens.