Key Informant Interview 3 USVI

Date:

Stakeholder Group: Government/Fishing Community

Years of Experience in Occupation/Field:

Community/Area/Location:

Speaker 1. Okay. So, could you describe a little bit about your involvement with USVI Fisheries, to start?

Speaker 2. Okay, so my husband is the commercial fisherman, so my involvement is, I'm the one that do sell the fish. So, providing to the locals, selling on the side of the road, and stuff like that, and to the restaurants.

[...]

Speaker 1. Okay, yep. And would you say, Interviewee, in your opinion, that USVI coastal communities are highly dependent on fisheries?

Speaker 2. Yeah, yeah. Most of even like, the people that we supply fish to, they prefer local fish than anything. People that doesn't need them to eat. The majority of the residents here from St. Croix, are from all the islands. We know they are raised eating fish and knowing about fish, so here in St. Croix we have, like I showed you last weekend, where we have the [inaudible 00:02:21]. People have like, 140 registered fishermen. That doesn't mean that, I think maybe 40 of them go out fishing, but all the fish that are caught here, 90% stays here. Everybody eats fish, yeah. It's very important.

Speaker 1. Would you say that USVI fishermen are highly dependent on fisheries for their livelihoods? Speaker 2. Yes, the majority, that's all they know. They didn't finish school. So you know they depend on the fish, yeah.

Speaker 1. Okay, and would you say that USVI coastal communities are highly dependent on coral reefs?

Speaker 2. What is that? Oh, coral reefs. Yeah, sorry. Yeah, coral reefs. Yeah, because it's a handful of fishers that will do deep water fishing. The majority are divers, so yeah. It's definitely yes.

Speaker 1. Okay, and what would you say in your opinion, are the major problems facing fisheries in the USVI?

Speaker 2. I think education wise, to be able to educate the fishers. Because usually, when it comes to the fishing itself, like it's showing the difference. Like, for instance, 10 years ago you got to catch an amount. You don't catch it now. You know? Like, different current, different sales, but you still making money. You still you know, it's not that it's still getting hard, but in the fisher's life, it's getting more the fish and how to let them know what's going on [inaudible 00:04:38]. But like now for instance, [...]. I'm more involved when it comes to the rules and regulations. So, before I never pay attention to who makes the rules, who doesn't make it. I just try to abide by it. So, that's usually the type of things that I would say, for me.

Speaker 1. Okay. And so, between the two problems that you mentioned. You said, you know, keeping the fishermen informed, but also the complaints you get about regulations. Which one would you say is the most important one in your opinion? The biggest problem?

Speaker 2. I think keeping them informed. I think that's the biggest problem. They just know to go out and fish, but that's it. They don't know, you know? So I feel that if they really are well informed and the information that they're getting is for us working, you know? They will have, it will not be a problem.

Speaker 1. Okay, and what would you say are the most significant changes that have occurred in USVI fisheries in the last couple of decades or few years?

Speaker 2. The only, and it doesn't affect us directly. It has been closing areas that fishers cannot go and fish in there. That has been closed for a lot of years. Like, they say, okay, they're going to put this for a month or years, but they over pass those years. And that causes some fishers to go still fish, you know? Knowing that they're not supposed to. So, I think that's the only change. Because usually, the same thing, they haven't made new regulations or nothing like that. But that's the only change and this complaint that I would hear at the moment from the fishers. Like, "Hey, you guys say to close those areas. They said they were going to open them back. They haven't. What's going on? Like, we're going to get other, better places." You know?

And environmental one is, really, here in St. Croix we don't have pollution. I don't know about the south side, but in our area, the only problem that has been affecting mainly is the sea grass. So, yeah. That's what you call it, right? The seaweed. The sargassum, yes. It has been a problem. It has been, like, I haven't seen it for a good while, but it was covering except the west side. But all around the island and once that gets stuck on a beach, that's it. The smell. I hearing the fishermen saying, you know, "We got to turn back home because we don't want that in our engines." You know? Or even like, the other fishermen say, "Hey, we can't troll like it's supposed to." But I even haven't heard my husband saying anything about that he's seen any. He's not fishing like before, but that's the only, if that's an environmental problem.

Speaker 1. And have you observed any changes in the fisheries, and/or the environment, that you think can be attributed to changes in the local climate?

Speaker 2. I believe that the past hurricane definitely 2017 and 2018, I think affected the current. Yeah, like fish are not... Like, for instance, dolphins supposed to be passing through here at specific time of the year. Now they're passing in a later time of the year. So I mean, you know, here in St. Croix you don't get that hot or cold weather. I don't know how the water is, if the water get hot or cold, but I see some are starting to be really [inaudible 00:10:57]. You know? That I don't, you see here in St. Croix, we don't get that cold or hot weather. So, for me, one environmental is I seen in the hurricane, a big category hurricane in the Atlantic Ocean, I think affect it. Before that, now that I remember, my husband was saying that even I think a couple questions before about the [inaudible 00:10:57] fishing, some of his favorite long liners, they don't come through United States waters. But they would be right there on the edge, in international waters. But he feels that they're catching the fish before it passes through here, so it's affecting that. Yeah. Like, in the international waters, it'll have long liners. Yeah. They don't come, he said he never seen them in the American waters, but you can see them. He keeps saying in all those places like, that's got to affect you know? You know, when they throw the nets or anything that gets hooked, they catch. But with the climate, I think for me and here my husband says the hurricanes, so much hurricanes in the Atlantic. Big, category hurricanes.

Speaker 1. Okay, yeah. And in your opinion, Interviewee, are USVI fishers concerned about climate change?

Speaker 2. No, not to tell you the truth. Maybe because we're not educated on that. Maybe because we don't know a lot of it. Because when I was asking the questions to the fishers, they keep saying, "No, we don't think so," you know? I think maybe because we have limited information about it. And like I said, I think here we're not cold or hot. You know? It's a steady climate for the whole year, so maybe that's why things don't seem to be affecting us.

Speaker 1. Maybe, yeah. And in your opinion, are USVI fishery managers, researchers and decision makers, concerned about climate change?

Speaker 2. I don't know. I haven't been able to talk to any, you know?

Speaker 1. Okay, yep. I just have a couple of questions that have to do with relationships between different people related to the fisheries. How would you describe the relationship between fishers in the USVI? So, among themselves.

Speaker 2. Very cocky and very... Everybody trying to be the best. I don't think they have a real good relationship. Well, that's when they're inland. Anything that happens out there, they're willing to help. You know, they can call anybody and they'll go and help them. You know? They don't come to agree, you know? They will agree to disagree. That's the kind of relationship they have. But when it comes to like, a boat flipped or somebody run out of gas, then it will have somebody there to help. It's a weird relationship.

Speaker 1. Right. Can you think of any examples of fishers getting together to address an issue with the fisheries? Speaker 2. No, huh uh (negative). I've never seen them come to... Hold on, let me pay for something.

Speaker 1. So I was just asking you about relationships. My next question is, do fishers in your community there in St. Croix, do they get together socially?

Speaker 2. No. They will only do that when a meeting is called, and it depends what kind of meeting. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 1. And how would you describe the relationship between the fishers and the fishery managers?

Speaker 2. I think since in the past, they feel betrayed, no? With different information that they have gathered and they have closed areas. I think they're trying to build a relationship now, that they lost in the past.

Speaker 1. Okay. And is there a difference in relationship between you know, fishers and the local government, versus fishermen and the federal government?

Speaker 2. No, it's not. Because I don't think they know the difference.

Speaker 1. Okay, and can you think of any examples of the fishers and the fishery managers getting together to address an issue in the fishery?

Speaker 2. That's just when they call a meeting, but most of the time it's only once a year. And that's when it's time to register boats and stuff like that. They don't do stuff for them, you know?

Speaker 1. Right, okay. And do you feel that fishery management... So, this is in your opinion. Do you feel that fishery management in the USVI is fair in the decisions they make?

Speaker 2. I think so.

Speaker 1. And is there again, a distinction between the local and the federal government in the way that you perceive fairness?

Speaker 2. No, it's the same.

Speaker 1. Same? Okay. And what makes you say that it is fair?

Speaker 2. I think like, especially with the local, some of the things they have to abide by the federal. So, the new regulation, they've been trying different things to be able to help more, you know? They haven't had any changes with this.

Speaker 1. I see. And do you think most fishers in the USVI understand how fishery managers make decisions?

Speaker 2. No. They haven't been educated on it.

Speaker 1. Okay. And just my last question, if they exist, how are conflicts between fishers and other fishers resolved? Speaker 2. They're not. No, they're not. That isn't. I haven't, I've seen more not talking for years.

Speaker 1. Okay, and what about any conflicts if they exist, between the fishers and the fishery managers? How are they resolved?

Speaker 2. Usually, it's not resolved, but they help with each other. Like, you know? I don't know if you understand what I'm saying. Like, they haven't get what they want. [crosstalk 00:20:38] They haven't get what they feel they want, so they just live with it. Some, like before, I feel like I... Sorry, my Bluetooth is falling. In the past, they used to do different meetings, but I feel that [foreign language 00:21:23]... They used to do different meetings, but they never used to announce it. So it's like, five people would show up or 10 people would show up. Like I said, it's just education wise. Yeah, some of them don't have the patience. Some of them don't understand nothing. They don't like things to be talked. Ignorance, you know? Sometimes it's just when I see that a lot of people. When you're not educated to an extent, and they're talking in a way that the person don't understand because of the level of education, they might get frustrated. Yeah, and they don't know how to express themselves.

Speaker 2. So you know, all of that. The main thing is if they put stuff in a wording that we will understand, I think it will have better communication. Like, you cannot come here and give us scientific names. You know?