Key Informant Interview 13 USVI

Date:

Stakeholder Group: Government/Fishing community

Years of Experience in Occupation/Field:

Community/Area/Location: St Thomas

Speaker 2: I do, however, my husband was a commercial fisherman and I went out and I helped haul traps with him during my days off. And then I'm also a recreational fisher simply because I prefer to get my seafood from a trusted source, which is my own ocean instead of having it loaded.

Speaker 1: Nice. So actually it's great that you started talking about that, because our first question for you would be to describe a little bit your involvement with U.S. Virgin Islands Fisheries?

Speaker 2: [...]. As far as the fisheries go, it's now become my task to try to communicate to both commercial and recreational fishers. The importance of conserving the resources that we have here on Saint Thomas, the fishery is a lot different than on the island of Saint Croix. Due to where our reefs are placed and the surrounding waters, and also the species of fish that we target as consumable versus what's over on Saint Croix. So my involvement is pretty deep because not only am I fully invested in trying to save the resources that we have, but I also utilize them.

Right. Well, here's something interesting about the commercial angle. The reason why my husband decided to seek another avenue of employment is because we both noticed that the traps were not coming up as full as they used to. And he had to start putting out more fish traps to get the same amount of fish. So with me always being a bit of a conservationist, I pointed this out to him and I suggested strongly that he might want to look for another avenue to get employment. Because this... he was just working too hard to pay out the bills. And it was really becoming strenuous, yeah.

Speaker 1: Right. And just curious in what part of the island did he use to fish?

Speaker 2: On the South, and the South Eastern side of the island. So yeah, that would... and most of the fishermen here, the areas that they fish in are pretty demographic. So the fishermen that fish from the Frenchtown Port, they're the ones that fish the Southwest and the South Eastern side of the island. The fishermen that are based on the North side of the island, they fish mostly in the Northeast and the West. And the local fishermen on the Eastern side of the island fish strictly within a mile and a half area of there, on the side of the island. So it's very easy to map out what's happening. The quantity of fishermen are smaller on the Eastern side than on the South or the North.

Speaker 1: Okay, great. And so would you say based on your experience, would you say that on the U.S. Virgin Island, coastal communities are highly dependent on fisheries?

Speaker 2: That's a tough one. Now the coastal communities are not so much dependent on the fisheries. Because we're only three miles wide. So that's a bit of a difficult question. Now I know that the fishers, the commercial fishers, they are very dependent on the fisheries simply because that's their only job. That's what they do. But as far as the people, those of us that live on the coastal areas, like I live on the shores of the North side. I don't know how often you've been over to Saint Thomas, but I'm only five minutes away from three of the beaches. I'm pretty much on the coast. And I don't depend on the fisheries personally for my livelihood.

Speaker 1: Interesting. You said that because my next question would be, would you say that U.S. Virgin Islands, fishermen are highly dependent on fisheries for their livelihood?

Speaker 2: Yes. They are. And in my 23 years of being involved in the fisheries from the fisher side, I'm really surprised that they didn't try to take better care of our resources.

It's definitely going to be tourism. Everything here in the Virgin islands that is a privately run business and that is not government run, is strictly based on tourism unfortunately for the majority of their livelihoods.

Speaker 1: Okay. And would you say that these communities are highly dependent upon coral reefs?

Speaker 2: Some of them are. Yes. Mostly over on the island of Saint John. And that is because the health of the coral reefs, directly affects how many visitors we have wanting to go on excursions on these reefs. And how many visitors we have returning to these coral reefs. So if the reef is dead or dying, or there's not as many different species of fish on the reef,

no one wants to go there. And what ends up happening is that the dive companies and the tour boats for the snorkeling and the dive companies will all congregate on the reefs that currently, are sustaining a healthy ocean ecology and that have a different variety of fish. So it's a good and a bad thing.

Speaker 3: So Interviewee, I wanted to ask you a little bit more about some of the problems that the fisheries are facing in the U.S. Virgin Islands. So what would you say are the major problems facing the fisheries in the U.S. Virgin islands?

Speaker 2: Right now, after speaking with several of the fishermen at a meeting that we had a couple of weeks ago, it's trying to recover from the hurricanes of 2017. That is foremost in everyone's mind right now. And that's the main struggle. Even two years later, for a lot of these fishermen. The pelagic commercial fishermen or the charter boat captains, they don't have it as difficult as the local commercial fishermen do. So the trap fishermen and the fishermen that do the handlining to help supplement their income. They're the ones that are in a lot of trouble right now. Just because of their losses after the hurricanes and, because of the fact that a lot of the reefs haven't fully recovered. A lot of the fish are not where they're supposed to be. So that's a big issue right now for the trap fishermen and the line fishermen is, that they are really struggling with getting the quantity or the necessary amount of fish they need for a good paycheck.

Speaker 3: So I was going to ask you to rank these issues in order, but do you feel like that is one big issue that the hurricanes are the reason that the fishermen are struggling with getting big amounts of fish?

Speaker 2: This is going to be a little bit controversial just because, this is where I have to really watch myself especially when I'm sitting amongst my husband's friends. The hurricane just added in my opinion, because I'm also a diver. In my opinion, the hurricane added to the problem of the fishermen not being able to catch as many fish right now as they did, let's say 10 years before. However, I do feel strongly that we have a decrease in the amount of specific species of fish that we used to catch over. I can only speak for Saint Thomas and Saint John, I don't know about Saint Croix. But I do know that it's a lot more difficult to catch the quantity of certain species of fish. But that started before the hurricanes, the hurricanes just made it more difficult.

Speaker 3: Okay. So would you rank the quantity as being... which would you then rank as being the most significant problem?

Speaker 2: I would do the decline in the amount of preferred species number one, and then the hurricane as number two.

Speaker 1: Just curious, I'm sorry, just following up on that. When you say there's a decline in the quantity, are you saying that this is due to over exploitation or are there any other causes that you attribute to that?

Speaker 2: One of the causes that we all talk about, especially when were down in our little gathering place called Hull Bay, which is on the North side of the island where I live. We have a group of immigrants that have now arrived onto the island, and they are just not very good with respecting the laws of fish take and fish sizes. And I think that has a big problem to do with it. But also the increase in the amount of fishing traps that are in the waters right now in certain places. That's difficult. Going out with my dive boat buddies and then seeing the amount of fishing buoys in places that five, six years ago, were nowhere near the number that they're in now. It's crazy. So I want to say that my husband if he can hear me right now he'd probably smack me in the head. I feel like we have so many more traps in the water now than we did 10 years ago. And I'm not sure I haven't done fish size study, I haven't done anything with counting or any of that sort. But I think that one of the things that could be helpful is if we limit the amount of traps allowed in specific areas. Also if there was some way to police the illegal fishers that we have in our waters.

Speaker 3: Right. Okay. And I know that you have talked about an increase in the number of traps over the past five years. But adding on to that thought my next question was, what would you say are the most significant changes that have occurred in the U.S. Virgin Islands Fisheries in the last couple of decades?

Speaker 2: One of the really big changes that I think helped save us a lot, is the decrease in mesh size. Now that came over pretty difficult for a lot of the trout fishermen. They did not like the fact that the mesh size had decreased, which they fought them on it. But they managed to get that done really well. And then also the type of wire or mesh that was allowed to be used, that was another thing. Before they used to use this metal chicken wire. And then they started using coated gauge wire, which was very good. Another thing, another change that was for the better, was the allowing of catch or weight limitation on certain species. That was really good. An introduction that I think was like, okay, well, we're going to take this way but we're going to give you this, was the removal of how many people you can have sharing your license on board the boat. So every fishermen can have a helper and the helper, if the helper is on the fisherman's license, they can also have traps of their own which is, that's not a bad thing. I mean, it's just double the amount on the boat. So that's fine. But the biggest things that I think that helped save us was that change in the size of the mesh, and the weight limitations and the size limitations. That was a really big, good thing.

Speaker 3: Okay. And then what would you say are the most significant environmental changes that have occurred in the U.S. Virgin Islands in the last couple of decades?

Speaker 2: Oh my gosh. The dying of our coral reefs for one, the increase in that damn lionfish that was a really big problem. It still is, but we're not seeing as much lionfish in areas that we used to because now people are actually catching them and eating them, which is good. But just the decline of the health of our coral reefs, that was a big deal. The lionfish was another big thing that was bad. And then the last blow I would honestly say it came from the storms in 2017. Simply because it showed how much that we didn't protect the ocean from the island itself. The amount of debris and just silt and dirt and pollutants that ended up in the ocean after the storms, was absolutely horrible.

Speaker 1: Just a quick follow up question Interviewee, when you talk about the mortality of corals, is there any specific cause that you're seeing that is more significant or could you talk a little bit more about that?

Speaker 2: There's this really weird algae that we have now, especially for the inshore reefs that's taking over and I know that a lot of it has to do with the ocean temperature, staying a little bit warmer, a little longer than usual. Because algae and photosynthesis they just love that, those two go very well together, that has a lot to do with it. But because of that, the fish, like maybe the parrotfish, a lot of the fish that the locals prefer like the angelfish, different species that we have here, those fish don't stick around in certain areas like they did before. And then there's also the unfortunates of, ciguatera that is showing up in places that we didn't have to worry about before as well. So you can still catch the fish, but if one or two people end up getting sick from the fish that you catch, then less people are going to purchase that fish from you. Yeah.

Speaker 3: So have you observed any changes in the U.S. Virgin Islands Fisheries and or the environment that you think could be contributed to changes in the local climate?

Speaker 2: Yes. Besides the... well, first of all, we have an increase in yellowtail snapper. That's not a bad thing. That's one of the fish that the fishermen target locally to sell to the restaurants. And the things that the snapper, that the yellowtails feed on, that's directly related to the fact that we've got waters a little bit warmer. There's a little bit more spawning of different species that are going on. The mysid shrimp population has exploded in certain areas. And that's beautiful to see, because everything loves eating a mouth full of mysids from my experience. But then we've got things like the parrotfish that are not so readily consumed over here. That's something that Crucians like to eat more than people from Saint Thomas and Saint John like to eat. Their population is starting to increase in certain areas, but then because the parrotfish are algae eaters and they're crunching on things, they're also going to put a dent in some of the struggling coral population. So as far as the climate goes it's... I'm not going to say that the rising temperatures of the water has anything to do with any significant change in our fishing population. But you can tell that it is doing an injustice to some of the local corals that we have. And I'm not talking about the branching corals, because the Boulder corals are pretty important to us here too. Like even this year, off of the underwater observation tower where I work, we do temperature readings every now and then just because if the people that are getting in the water are complaining that it's still cold, we're in wetsuits. We'll just jump in and take a reading ourselves. It took a bit longer for the water temperature to warm up this year, than it has in the past couple of years. So these are things that we're paying attention to and that we're looking at. But us being in that part of the marine industry, we don't want to figure out, well, why is this happening? Where did it come from? Why did it take so long for our waters to warm up? We just know, well, it's not supposed to be this cold at this time of year. And that's just it. We're not scientists as far as that part of the marine ecology is concerned, but we do recognize that different things are happening. We just don't want to speculate why, we'd like to let the scientists tell us why?

Speaker 3: Right. So Interviewee in your opinion, do you think the U.S. Virgin Islands fishers are concerned about climate change?

Speaker 2: Some of them are, the younger ones are. The older ones, now this is where you need to understand the culture of the Caribbean people especially those that are 45 or 50 and up. As far as they're concerned, that climate change doesn't exist. There's no such thing as the warming of the earth's temperature. That's not something that happens. That's not real. So the younger fishermen, they are the ones that are very concerned about what's happened to the environment. They know how much fish their fathers and their grandfathers were catching. They're upset because they're not catching the same amount of fish and they have to put out so much more traps to do so. And they have to work a bit more harder and longer, to get the amount of fish that their fathers were bringing in. So they see that there's something wrong, but they don't attribute it so much to climate change. As a due to the fact that there's something not right with the ocean right now, or with the corals. Not many of us here really look into the effects of the whole changing of the climate and the warming and the cooling of different parts of the world, unless we're directly involved in the environmental sciences like myself and a lot of my colleagues.

Speaker 3: Right. So in thinking of your colleagues, do you think the U.S. Virgin Islands fishery managers and researchers and decision makers are concerned about climate change?

Speaker 2: Yes, definitely. Especially with the effects on the ocean. Yeah. So here, because we have the unique opportunity of having the coral reefs within easy reach, and we also have a large community of people that have been diving or fishing on and around these reefs for centuries. Not only that, but we also have the University of the Virgin Islands. And before them, we had the U.S. Military that utilized the fishermen here to help them find places, to help them map out different areas. And this is all before GPS systems came into play. We've always been involved in communicating or collaborating with the local fishermen about giving us facts and ideas. So one of the things that we do is there are certain reefs and certain patches of broken reef that were not known up until a few years ago. Because someone from the Department of Fish and Wildlife, or maybe someone from NOAA spoke to the right fishermen who was willing to help. And they let them know, "Hey, I've been catching this species of fish here on this reef. So I catch lots of them, hundreds every year. So you can't say that this species is going extinct or it's suffering. Because it's just not where you've been fishing or diving, it's over here." So these are the things that help us get a little bit of a litmus test on what's happening in our own waters. And then the easy ability to just go out to certain places and take a look at what's happening and because the island is so small, being able to tell, okay, well, when it rains really hard, the water comes from here. This is what the place looks like after a huge rainstorm. We can go out the next day and we can take a sample of the coral and see what the sediment looks like. So it's easy for us to get into the water and to make these assessments just like it is for people from other agencies to do the same thing. But we wouldn't have been able to do it as effectively, if we didn't have the trust of certain fishermen. It's easier for us because of where we live right now.

Speaker 1: So I'm glad that you were talking a little bit about these relationships, because my next set of questions are about relationships between fishers and fishers and managers. Could you describe a little bit the relationship between fishers in the U.S. Virgin Islands? So between fishers and fishers within fishing communities, how are these relationships?

Speaker 2: So everyone is... when I lived with my husband in the fishing community of Frenchtown, which is on the South side of the island, we are very tight knit. We also communicate with specific fishing families or fishing groups on the Northern side of the island, like something happens and we need to go get our traps. And we know they fish on the Western side of the island. Would you mind helping me get my traps on the Southwestern side? So there's a collaboration every now and then, between fishermen and the communities to help one another with continuing to make money. So amongst ourselves we were okay, but then there's always one, two or four that nobody trusts. We understand that, okay, you're a fisher. You need to do your business but, we don't like how you do your business. So we're going to try to stay away from you. If you want help with something like you need to find your traps and we see them, we'll take a mark and tell you, "Hey, go find them there," but that's that's about it. But each community is pretty tight knit with their own group of fishers or fishermen. Now we have what's called infiltrators, where we'll allow fishermen from other parts of the island to come and either sell their catch. Where we sell our catch or maybe to utilize our area. If yours isn't working out for you right now, which is what we did a lot after the storms. But before 2017, there wasn't that much of a tight knit community when it came to the fishers, not like there is now. But as far as trusting and having faith in fish and wildlife, the NOAA, things like the Caribbean Fishery Management. Those are people... people like me, we're supposed to be very wary of. Because the consensus still is, that there's not an understanding of why the fishermen live the way they do and why they catch the way they do. Honestly, it's because no one has taken the chance to help educate them in a way that they can understand that, preserving and trying to extend the resources that we need right now for our life is very important.

Speaker 1: Right. So I have a question about relationships between fishers and managers. And so I'm glad that you started talking a little bit about that, but I just wanted to go back to talking about the relationship between the fishers for one second. Can you think, or do you have any examples of the fishers getting together to address a specific issue in fisheries?

Speaker 2: Oh yeah. One of the things that we all banded together on was the introduction of a no-take bill on one of the specific species of fish that we had here. And it came down pretty suddenly. We didn't know that they were going to do such a huge limitation on specific species of fish and we love redfish here. So whether it's the rock hinds or the coneys, do you all... you do fish in the scientific terms, right? Yeah, it's okay. Any of the group or family at all, they are very desirable for us. And it doesn't matter whether it's the [tigres 00:43:27] or whether it is the coneys, that's just our... that's our fish. So there was a strict limitation and almost to the point of where there was going to be a no-take on the full of a species. And there was an uproar because that's where most of the money came from. So they banded together and it was a serious discussion back and forth between the Department of Fish and Wildlife here and I think it was the Nature Conservancy. I'm not sure that had suggested it, and then another entity. And the fishermen actually were able to get a compromise, which is okay, well, we're going to limit the amount that you can take this. And we're also going to have a season open for this particular species of fish. And me coming from both sides, I figured and I told my husband I'm like, this is what happens. So they'll say, they're going to take it. And then you all are going to be up in arms, and then they're going to do a compromise. And it's going to be either you agree to the compromise or it's the government. If they say, "Well, we're just going to take this away," then they're going to take it away. So it's either this or that. So you either have a limitation and we save the species, we give it a chance to rebound itself, or you don't get to have it again at all. So we do band together when it comes to things like that. So if it's going to affect not only our livelihood, but everybody else's livelihood and we don't like the government telling us what they want us to do. We don't like that feeling at all in the fishing community. So if we have one common thing to fight against, then we're all going to fight against it. If it's something that some fishermen are for they really don't care, because it doesn't affect them very much. Then it's a lot difficult to have unity on whatever bill they're trying to pass or whatever closure or adjustment that the fishery management is trying to make. Does that help?

Speaker 1: And just one more question regarding relationships between fishers. Do they get together socially or are there examples of social gathering? And are there specific examples of these types of social gatherings? Or are there any festivals events or anything like that?

Speaker 2: All the festivals. So we do several different fishing tournaments here on this little island. And the only one where there's not a large amount, maybe two or three commercial, local fishermen will partake in, are the offshore grand slams. So if you're going out hunting for wahoo or tuna or maki, there's a few fishermen that'll take part in that. But when it comes to all the other stuff, like the Father's Day Tournaments, the Mother's Day Tournaments, the Best Deal Day Tournaments we have two on the small island, they'll all get together for that. There are three different bars on this island, that the local fishermen are guaranteed to be there. On the weekend, they all get together for that. And it's the fishermen and their wives and their kids. So yeah, there's definitely gathering of fishermen in the fishing communities. And here's another thing too, that I learned the hard way. If you are a person that is of, and within the fishing management side of it, you are very hard pressed to be accepted. So I'm coming from the reverse, I'm coming from the fishing community to fisheries management. So as far as they're concerned, oh my God, Interviewee has just been jaded, this poor woman. But she's going to find her way back, you're going to be okay. And that's just them, but I'm still me. And I've never hidden the fact that I want to try to protect our resources they know that, and they accept me for it. Because first, I was fishing. So they know that I've been out there and I've hauled traps. And they've heard stories of my husband yelling at me, even still as we're mooring the boat about making him throw different species back in or, about making him move his pots. Otherwise they wouldn't get off the winch rope if he didn't put his trap someplace else. So these are the things that happened. But then if you go into a place like Hull Bay, and you go in there on a Saturday night and you're wearing a Caribbean Fishery Management Council shirt or uniform. Or you walk in there and you're a new fish and wildlife management officer that hasn't been introduced to the fishers yet, nobody is going to talk to you. Nobody is going to buy you a drink. You need to first of all, show them that I have my job but I also want to get to know you guys better and they're going to make you work for it to get into, to their little clique or their little group. So it's difficult, but then once you have gained their trust and they actually trust you, the slightest thing you do that they feel was a betrayal, you're gone.

Speaker 1: All right. That's interesting. So going off of that, could you talk and I know you talked a little bit about this. But could you talk a little bit more about relationships between the fishers and the fishery managers? How would you characterize that? And are there any examples of conflict or on the other side, any examples of fishers and managers working together to address an issue?

Speaker 2: Certain officers, we're more comfortable with talking to certain officers. We feel are more understanding to what we're saying. And then we have certain people where if you come in to try to do a port sampling, we're not going to give you a break at all. About getting... well, we're going to give you what we give you and don't ask for anything else. This is a port sample, take it, utilize it and then just get the heck out of myself. So it really depends on who you are. Like over here, we have two biologists and one of them is a bit more favorable than the other, definitely. So if anything needs to be done, we'll go through the one biologist or, we have two locals that are environmental specialists. And any questions or concerns that the fishermen have, will go straight to the local environmental specialist first. Because they're local people straight from the fishing community that just happens to work for fish and wildlife. But they still fish, which isn't bad. So we know that, okay, well, we can trust them. There was a meeting that was held between the Department of Fish and Wildlife and the commissioner of DPNR recently, last month. And there is one person selected to represent the voice of all the fishers. And the person that has been chosen has probably the strongest personality out of all the fishermen from one specific reason. But he's also worked very hard to put himself in the position that he's in right now. And if you wanted a more in depth view, or if you wanted a more in depth, look at the relationship between the fishers and the fishery management. I don't know if anyone's told you about [Julian Cattell 00:52:23], but he is the one that has a pretty good handle on the voices of the majority of fishermen. And a lot of us don't really trust him very much, but he does things more on a state side scale of commercial fishing. So one of the things that Julianne was talking about, and it's done over on Saint Croix, but we know that it's not going to fly so much over here. He wanted to try to at one point when I was still fishing with my husband, to form a co-op or a collaboration. Where the fishermen will bring their fish in to him and he would distribute the fish, therein cornering whatever market and also doing a price control. If we only have one person, collaborating or collecting the majority of the fish. And because the different fishermen here are very self contained. Like they're, if it's my fish, I'm going to sell it to who I want to sell it to. And if I need help then thanks I'll come and I'll ask you if you need my fish. But I'm not just going to give it to you to turn it in. He is probably the center of a lot of the information that goes out to the majority of the fishing community. That sometimes that's unfortunate, but he's very good at what he does Julian is. So that's all I have to say about him. But there are certain fishers that a lot of the fishermen are skeptical about. We know because of the fact that they can talk really well. They're... I don't want to say ruthless, but they're very determined in what they do. Those are the ones that are chosen to be the forefront or to be the speakers for the rest of us.

Speaker 1: Okay. And is there a distinction between relationships between fishers in the local government versus fishers in the federal government? Is it different in any way?

Speaker 2: Yes. We would much rather prefer to speak with the people that are here with us than to talk to the people on a federal branch. Like with our commissioner that we have here, he's very down to earth. He's someone that you can just approach and talk to and it's going to be okay. But then you've got someone like Miguel Rolón, for the Caribbean Fishery Management Council who... if he's in a room with Commissioner Oriel, they're not going to go to Mr. Rolón. They're going to go straight to Commissioner Oriel. And they're going to talk to him about something, even though you've got the head of the fishery management right there. So they just feel more connected to the local branch than they do to the federal brands, because we see them every time, with the exception of [Dr. Anjuli 00:56:24]. I don't know why there's a discord between her and the local fishers, but that's the only exception there is to the rule.

Speaker 1: And I know you touched upon a couple of examples, but are there any specific examples that you can think of fishers and fishery managers getting together to address a management issue successfully?

Speaker 2: But it's in the works. So we have a issue with port sampling right now, which is really necessary for studies that are being done. And apparently there was an issue with ice, which is ridiculous. Because one of the local fishers has his own ice company. And there, there was an issue about not having ice. So they couldn't do the port sampling and the fishermen are required to do a specific amount of port sampling in a certain amount of time. When they're filing for their new license and things like that. And they weren't able to get the amount of port samples done. And the year is almost over June is coming up fast. So there was a meeting to discuss that with the fisheries management, and it was getting a little tense for a bit there. But they were told that that's going to be rectified very soon. So hopefully that's going to be done because if it's not followed through on, then the fishery management is going to lose a little bit more trust from the fishers. And that's one thing. Another thing is there was an issue with the fishing sheds, that the fishermen housed their coolers in, and there was also something with the boat ramp. That was the responsibility of the Department of Fish and Wildlife, DPNR. And that took a while to get up and running. So the local government has to depend on federal funding for a lot of these things and the fishers cannot understand, or it's difficult for them to grasp how much it takes to get that money released, to do the things that they need to be done. So that's another thing that has to be understood. So the local fishery management section gets a lot of heat from that, because the federal side of it, they can't manage funding well enough, I don't know. Or they just have trouble for getting the resources or the monies available to do certain things. So with the fishing sheds and the storage rooms for their coolers and things like that, that was rectified pretty quickly. So that was pacified. And they were okay with that, that worked out really well. But then this issue that is recent with the port sampling, that's still a bit of a fester. So hopefully they'll rectify that soon. But because of the fact that, the fishers can talk directly with the local fishery management. They don't let them slack off on what's needed, especially if it's going to affect them getting their fishing license or getting their permits renewed.

Speaker 3: So Interviewee, I wanted to just continue on this discussion of the relationship between fishery managers and fishers. And do you feel that fishery management in the U.S. Virgin Islands is fair in the decisions they make?

Speaker 2: If you'd asked me that question five years ago, I would have said no. They're not. And that is from a fisher's viewpoint. Now that I'm on the other side of it, I would say, yes. Now I would say yes, simply because I know that from what I've seen so far I haven't gone too far into it, but apparently it seems to me like everything is a bit of a contingency plan. So things will be presented to the fishers to let us know that this is happening, and these are the steps that we're going to need to take to make sure that this doesn't get any worse. The disconnect happens when you don't have someone telling them the reason why, it's going to happen this way and not having a discussion beforehand with the fishers to let them know why certain actions are taking place. So the new thing that I'm getting a lot of flag for right now, because I was introduced by fire in the fishing community [inaudible 01:02:39], last month. Instead of being gently introduced or having me tell people myself, hey guys, I'm working for the fishery management now and the Department of Fish and Wildlife as a liaison, I was just thrown out there, spotlighted in a meeting that we had. Which caused the room to go quiet for a couple of seconds, but that was okay. But if they had an explanation or if there was a discussion before things happen to let the fishers understand, why we're going to start requiring recreational license for everybody that's fishing. Why we need to do things like starting to make sure that you list all of your catches and we're going to try to find a way to keep you honest, with what you're listing on your catch reports. Things like why we are struggling right now to get the Hurricane Recovery Act for the fishers together. Things that we discussed at a meeting that we had last month about, no one really bothering to ask the fishermen how hard it was for you to get online, to sign up for a DUNS number. So that you can be listed and eligible for a part of this funding. These are things that people didn't think about on the fishery management side. Because everyone just assumes that, well, if they know this is what's going on and this is what's happening, then surely the fishermen are able to do it too, but that's not true. A lot of the fishermen, even though they might play Call of Duty online or Monster Hunter or things like that. They're not that computer savvy to go in and punch through a government website and do things like, understand the jargon that's being used to help them get their funding number. Or they don't know where to go to look for certain information on studies that back up, what the fishery management is telling them. Like I had to explain to people just two days ago, why the whole recreational fishing license is important and how it can be good. As opposed to why they think, well, I've been fishing here off of this shoreline for the past 30, 40 years. How come all of a sudden now that I'm 45, I'm going to have to get a fishing license. That makes no sense. Yeah. So these kinds of things, if they were brought to the fishers, like in a little bit of a different manner, maybe they would be more accepting to change. So that's why I understand now, but being on the other side of that five years ago, it didn't seem like it was fair. It really didn't. It didn't seem like the fishers, the local fishers were being considered with this. The charter fishermen, had a whole other different story. Those men are bringing in bigger bucks, but the fish that they're catching and selling have no effects on the Caribbean reefs as far as the fishermen are concerned. Like you're out there catching dolphin and wahoo and yellowfin, that has nothing to do with the parrots and the group of family and the angels that we catch here.

Speaker 3: So I think that you're saying that in the past five years, you understand it now because of your position where you are now compared to where you were five years ago on the other side of the fence as a fisher. But do you think that that relationship is getting better in the sense of communication between the fishers and the fishery managers? Or is that what your role is now really to try to work on that relationship?

Speaker 2: That's what my role has been described to me as now to try to work on that relationship. But the relationship between the fishers and the fishery management is definitely getting better, it was a lot more volatile five, 10 years ago. Most definitely.

Speaker 3: Okay. And do you think that there is a distinction between the U.S. Virgin Island fishers thinking that the decisions that are made are fair? Is there a distinction between the local versus the federal government in decisions that are made?

Speaker 2: I don't know about the government, but I do know that as far as the local fishers are concerned, that decisions they're not fair as far as they're concerned. It's not a fair take and it doesn't matter whether we're talking about fish or conch or lobsters. As far as they're concerned, a lot of the decisions are not fair. We as fishers do not get to know much about the federal laws or the federal side of things until they're right on us.

Speaker 3: So do you think... and I feel like you answered this. But I'm going to just ask it and see if there's anything else that you could add. So do you think that most fishers in the U.S. Virgin Islands understand, how the fishery managers make their decisions?

Speaker 2: No. They are clueless to how these things come down and how they start and why they're necessary. A lot of the fishermen refuse to speak to any scientists at all, or to have anything to do with the biologists. Especially it was a fight to get them to cooperate with the port sampling because, anything that has to do with the science or anything that has to do with the federal government asking the local government to do something. Means that the fishermen are going to lose. So yeah, they don't understand the process at all. There's that huge disconnect of why things are being done the way that they're being done and how these decisions are made.

Speaker 3: It's okay. And then if they exist, how are conflicts between fishers and other fishers resolved?

Speaker 2: One out of two ways. We're very good at that whole do on to others thing. But on the bad side. So if I suspect you of screwing with my traps, then you might find two strings of yours missing, or they might all of a sudden have a new address. That's one way that we solve things is on our own. That whole,Q an eye for an eye. Or the other way that conflict is handled is depending on who the fishermen are, it's going to be a really heated, big argument, like very loud and very out in public. Everybody's going to know what happened or what you did. And that it's going to take a while to just smooth over. So it's either, there's a huge, very public, very well known not confrontation but definitely a publicly known conflict that's happening. And you know why it's happening because they're both talking about it right to your face. Or there's the whole subtle, I know that you did this, so I'm going to do this back to you and then that's done. So we don't involve the local government very much unless it's to benefit us. So we have fishers here that, if you are fishing too close to a restricted area, and they're upset with you for some reason. Then [inaudible 01:10:57] might get a phone call saying, "Hey, you might want to go check these traps out here in this quadrant or in this area." Just to see, I think they're in the no fishing zone and that's going to cause a problem. Because usually they go out very rarely when we have an officer that's on a boat, and they'll go out when the fishermen is hauling their traps. So sometimes the traps might be in the authorized zone and then the vessel is going to be in the restricted zone. But that's okay because, unless you get your traps on the boat in the restricted zone then you're in trouble but you take the boat to the traps, not vice versa.

Speaker 3: Okay. And then I also wanted to ask is if you think that there are conflicts that exists between fishers and fishery managers, how are those resolved?

Speaker 2: Very vocally and usually at public hearings or public meetings. And then at that point it's the fishery management having to explain to the selected fishermen who feels that they were slighted or if they were targeted. Or the group deciding if like, oh, this is bad for us. Then the person for the fishery management has to come to terms with it. So it's either do it very publicly at these meetings, or these forums or they will probably like, well, one fishermen in particular loves to write emails. So he would probably send an email and CC the commissioner in on it about something that he doesn't like. And then will use the names of other fishermen who he spoken to that will now also say, "Oh, well, yeah, you're right. That's not right." But usually it's done publicly at the meetings or the gatherings where there's more than one fishermen there, and the fishery management personnel or department is there also. Very rarely do they ever do a one-on-one confrontation.

Speaker 1: Is there anything that we didn't talk about that you would like to add at this point?

Speaker 2: One of the things that I noticed that... so all of the questions is pretty much based on social interaction and general attitude and feeling between the fishermen and themselves and the fishermen and fishery management, either on a federal or a local level. But something that I don't think was taken into account was, the equipment that the fishermen use or that they're allowed to use for these things. Because a lot of the conflict between the fishers and fishery management, whether it is local or federal has to do with how the fishermen obtained their fish. So there are different rules and stuff that are coming down as far as, if you can use a rod and reel, handline the type of traps that you use, things like that. And all of those things are also what the fishers are concerned about.