Key Informant Interview 15 USVI

Date:

Stakeholder Group: Government

Years of Experience in Occupation/Field:

Community/Area/Location: St Thomas

Speaker 1: All right. So could you start by describing a little bit about your involvement in US Virgin Islands Fisheries?

Speaker 2: Sure. I started in... Well, first of all, I'm a very recreational fishermen. Mostly shoreline, but I do a lot of fishing some in boats, but mostly shoreline fishing. And [...] I applied to work for, at that time it was called Conservation on Coastal Affairs, which is now reorganized and called DPNR, kind of natural repurpose. And the [inaudible 00:04:10] with the department. And that's where it all started. And because of our responsibility, we're funded by coastguard to enforce safe boating, and then we were funded by Coastal Guard Management to enforce the development of a shoreline, any development of a shoreline. And then as the department grew, then we were responsible for the enforcement of about nine or 11 division within the department. And one of them was fisheries, but fisheries were not funded at the time. It's only until National Fisheries came up with this law enforcement officer funding for a system, and enforcing laws outside the three mile limit. We were deputized to do that anyways, but they finally got some funding to help us with it. But we were always doing fisheries, because that's part of our... that's in the VI code for the department, which is Title 12 is really what was the whole [inaudible 00:05:22]- ... of the VI code. So that's how I got involved in fisheries. [...]

Speaker 1: In your opinion, would you say that US Virgin Islands coastal communities, are highly dependent on fisheries?

Speaker 2: I would say that the local population for the Virgin Islands, and I've got to include St. Thomas, St. Johns, St. Florida- But I don't want to [inaudible 00:07:26] St. Croix. But I read in a document where, and this is years ago that I read this document, there is said that Puerto Rico consumes seven pounds of fish per year, per person per year, but the Virgin Islands consumes 26 pounds per person per year. So I would say, yes, pretty much into eating seafood.

Speaker 1: Right. And would you say that USVI fishermen are highly dependent on fisheries for their livelihood?

Speaker 2: I would say that there are a... How should I put this? They're dependent on fishing, but the real full-time, hardcore fishermen they're not that many. Those that do that specifically for a living, if there are 20 of them out of the 109 licenses out there, it's a lot. But there are... Most of those guys are part-timers where they have a full-time job, but they go out on weekends, or in the evening, or some [inaudible 00:08:51], and they hold licenses. And there's a lot of history of how that happened that we have so many licensed fishermen. We had a Commissioner named Dean Plaskett, he placed a moratorium on... No, he placed a limit on the amount of recreational harvest of conch [inaudible 00:09:17] at six per person. But he gave a grace period for the fishermen to be aware of what's going to be coming down. When that happened, that grace period, a lot of people applied for a license just to be able to harvest more than six conch. Because if you had a commercial license you were... They really were not full-time so much a fisherman, but with that license they can harvest more than six, and that's what really chewed that number way up in the air. I think it was 2000 or 2001. 2001 I believe, yeah. And that's what created this [inaudible 00:10:04]. Actually, in 2012, there was 220 licensed fishermen. Yeah, it just dwindled away from people leaving the island, or people dying off, or people just not interested in that anymore, or they forgot all about this limit on conch and they just didn't bother reapplying. If there is a big move toward that fishing license, then we've got to close up. Somehow. If you don't prove that you're fishing, I don't think that you should be allowed to renew your license just to submit a catch report that says how many fish for the year. I don't think... If you haven't for a year, it's time to give up that license, that's my opinion though. And you if you want to go back in, I think the department... The division of fishing wildlife, needs to find a way or the department needs to find a way to stop reissuing the licenses that have been dormant, but not issuing new license. I don't know if you catch what I'm saying? Yeah. So what I'm trying to do is, although we have a moratorium that was put in place, for the issuing of new license, those that are existent should be reissued to people that are interested in getting into the fisheries, or actually it will eventually die off. Because when these old men retire, what's going to happen to the fisheries, and they need to find a way to get these youth... the younger generation involved. And that's not happening.

Speaker 1: And do you have any of your own opinions as to why this younger generation is not interested, or not getting into the fisheries?

Speaker 2: I believe the younger generation, they way they were brought up by their parents, there was only a handful that really took up their parent's interest in fishing, like the father. Because hardly have any female commercial fishermen, we've only got like two or three, compared to Puerto Rico that has more. Puerto Rico's [inaudible 00:12:48] is way higher than ours. And also, they don't want to work as hard now. This new generation doesn't want to work all that hard. And also, it's more, and I'm going to use a fishermen I spoke to yesterday, Tom Bailey, I don't know if you're going to interview him one day here, he made a good point where he says, "The less fortunate, are the ones that get into fishing," which is the guys that are high school dropouts, the one that didn't bother learning to read and write, or that are very impoverished, low income. Those are the ones that get into the fisheries, because really, that's all that is out there, other than kind of working as bag boy in a grocery store, or a car wash or something. So they get into fishing, and they work hard. So I think that some of the less fortunate people is where the fishing industry is right now. Except when it comes to charter-for-hire fishing, commercial fishing. Some of those guys have commercial fishing licenses, and they're more educated. They're more up to date with things. But I don't know I agree with them having a commercial license, but there was a loophole. They made their money before they leave the dock, so why are you now coming around selling the catch and undercutting the troll-kind fishermen. You have 60 [inaudible 00:14:38] and sell it for a couple of bucks a pound, where the other guy who does it for a living has to sell it at the regular $7.00 or $8.00 a pound.

Speaker 1: Right, that's true. Yeah. So would you say that US Virgin Islands coastal communities are highly dependent on coral reefs?

Speaker 2: Well, the coastal communities, I think that they... I want to use sea community instead of coastal community, because the coastal community is kind of diverse. So let me put it this way, the Americans that live here from the mainland, they are more protective of the natural resources, the corals and stuff, then the local guys that live here, because all they know is fish. They're really... A lot of them know that you've got to protect the coral because the fish use it as habitat, stuff like that. But I don't know how much they're interested or concerned about the coral reefs, but they know it's important for the livelihood of their fishing. Because without the reefs, you don't have the fish. But they try to blame overfishing for a lot of things, when it's really not overfishing. You know, in the 1960s, late '60s, they didn't have Coastal [inaudible 00:16:10] Management, they didn't have no mitigation measures for runoffs that develop in their areas, clearing land. After 1974 where [inaudible 00:16:21] came into play, then things started to change. But back then, a lot of [inaudible 00:16:27] got the shore. So a lot of the reef that you see here that is covered with algae, or dying off, is really not from overfishing, but it's mostly from other types of pollution. And it's been in documents showing where fishing... overfishing is like number six on the list of impacts to the reefs. [inaudible 00:16:56]. But yeah. You know, we've been there we've made it, and I don't know what the [inaudible 00:17:05] value that is, then the Virgin Islands has [inaudible 00:17:08] because they made the fishing community a whole shabang, not just the little areas. Because we don't have other places, we don't have communities that live on the shoreline and use it as their base to fish. They live in the middle of the island, but the shorelines are so close, the beaches are so close that it's easy for them to get to. So [inaudible 00:17:34] the whole place is a fishing community. Yeah. So yeah, I would say that... [inaudible 00:17:44] that the people realize that without coral reefs we don't have any fishing. So I imagine it's important for the dive-charter people. So without fish you won't have tourists looking at reefs. And they like reefs you know.

Speaker 3: So Interviewee, this is Interviewer2, and I was just going to ask you a few other questions, and this sort of relates to what you had just begun to talk about, about some of the problems that have been occurring over the past few decades. So my question is, what would you say are the major problems that are facing fisheries in the US Virgin Islands?

Speaker 2: The major problems facing fisheries? Well, one of them is, the fishing license availability. I think if they don't do something about that here in the next 10 years, it's going to be a problem. Every year there's less, and less, and less people applying for renewing their licenses, so if they don't find a way to start reissuing what's existing, it's going to hurt us in the long run, or hurt the fishing community in the long run. A lot of these guys are over 50 that are really out there fishing full time. And then another thing would be, I don't know want to say the rules and regulations, but some of those rules and regulations are a little heavy for the fishing communities. And of course, they believe... And I think that they need to be more involved. We hold workshops, we hold meetings, and you're going to see that when you come to do your interviews, and especially that workshop that you want to develop with NOLTA, our fishermen don't go to workshops. They believe that the FEDS or the mainland US people are coming to stop them from fishing. That's their opinion, which is wrong, but it's still hard to get them away from thinking about that. But they think they're just coming to be heavy-handed, and whatever. No matter what they say, or no matter how much they work with the FEDS, they believe the FEDS are coming to strong-arm them. That's changed a lot compared to years ago, because now they're... I guess, the council has realized that fishermen input is very important, and they've changed their way of doing things. Now they get the fishermen involved. They're working from the bottom up, instead of top down, ... that's what I'm saying. But I think that... Let me say, when you have so many men in that [inaudible 00:20:55] it gets.... And then another thing that we've got to do is, we've got to have a compatible regulation somewhere, that you can do something within the three mile limit, and then something different outside the three mile limit. So how do you enforce that? And talking about enforcement, that's another problem we have. We don't have enough officers out there working, it's hard to manage that.

Speaker 3: So of the three that you mentioned Interviewee, fishing licenses, rules and regulations and then enforcement, how would you rank them?

Speaker 2: I would rank enforcement number one, because there really is... St. Coix has four officers for the whole island, land and sea, and they have nine divisions in DPR that they have to enforce rules for. And the majority of the funding comes from the Coast Guard at CVM, so they have to prioritize those things. So I would rank enforcement number one. And number two would be... This fishing license thing I believe would be number two, because some... And there's just a gut feeling I have, that I believe that if they don't do something about it, fishing is going to die off here in the Virgin Islands.

Speaker 3: Okay. Okay, thank you. So what would you say are the most significant changes that have occurred in the US Virgin Islands fisheries in the last couple of decades?

Speaker 2: I really don't feel that there's been much, because the fishermen are saying that fishing is good. So I don't think there's much. A lot of the changes have been shoreline, there's not as many. In the 50s and 60s, we were able to walk on the beach and kick conch with our feet, just walking on the... swimming on the beach. Now you don't find none of that. Most of that has gone out to deeper waters. And also the fish, the fish have moved away, because if you keep dumping pollution and everything on top of me, of course I'm going to move away. [inaudible 00:23:33]. So I believe that the changes really have occurred to the shoreline. But other changes, I think the fishing is still pretty good.

Speaker 3: Okay. So you've begun to talk a little bit about some of the changes, environmental changes, and I think that would lead into my next question, which is, what would you say are the most significant environmental changes that have occurred in the US Virgin Islands in the last couple of decades?

Speaker 2: Environmental changes, I would go to OneUp. OneUp has caused a lot of public reefs with silt, and it doesn't look like it if you walk a lot on this island because the waters are so crystal clear, but in time it has created a big change in the longterm, I think. Other than that, a lot of people blamed the refinery for a lot of what happened there, but I can see that, because in 1960, that whole refinery was a mango lagoon. It was one of the biggest mango lagoons in the Caribbean, and it was totally wiped out by the refinery. And the water clarity is not all that great up that side of the island also. I'm trying to send Howard a message there, because he keeps calling me, but-

Speaker 3: Okay. So have you observed any changes in the US Virgin Islands fisheries, or the environment that you could attribute to changes in the local climate?

Speaker 2: I don't really know how to answer that, because I don't think that climate change has really affected us here yet. Well, I shouldn't say that, because the reefs are changing, and that would be attributed to climate. And then of course you've heard about this whole issue die-out that's going on in St. Thomas and so. I haven't [inaudible 00:26:13] coral yet, but you never know. But it's not like... I went to a meeting for the South Atlantic Council I believe with another man, over fish up in Mulan, because it's moving to cooler water because of the climate change, but I don't think that has happened here. As yet.

Speaker 3: Do you think that US Virgin Islands fishers are concerned about climate change?

Speaker 2: A few of them are, but not much. And we have a large majority, in the '80s and '90s, early '90s Fish Trap was the biggest fishery here, and now it's starting to die because of what happened with Hurricane Hugo where everybody lost all their gear, and all the fish up here were wiped out with Hurricane Hugo. So they reinvested into diving, because it was so costly to buy all the... They spent $10,000.00 just to build 40 traps, or 50 fish traps. So instead of doing that, they went into diving, which you target the fish, and I guess it turned out to be better for them- ... in one way, but not in the other way with the bends and all that stuff. So I think that they've seen a lot of changes, but most of them have attributed that change, when I speak to them, when it comes to Hurricanes that have passed by here- ... and what it has done to the habitat. Because we've been impacted by eight hurricanes. Not maybe directly hit, but impacted by eight hurricanes. So that destroys reefs, trapping areas, it moves sand across areas. Where they used to see caves for diving for lobsters, it's completely covered with sand, so there's no more caves there anymore. Changes like that, not really related to climate. Well, in a way it is, I guess. Climates are sending all these hurricanes here. Because before Hugo, we didn't get hit with a hurricane in like 30 years, so I don't know what happened.

Speaker 3: So do you think in your opinion, that US Virgin Islands fishery managers, and researchers and decision makers are concerned about climate change?

Speaker 2: Yes, I think that they are. They're concerned... For here they're concerned about what is happening everywhere else. You know this thing with the ice melting in the Arctic, all this stuff it will eventually trickle down to us. So they're really concerned about what is happening and what can be done. And who knows what can be done, because really, we're not causing half the pollution that some of the countries are causing. And if you don't... I was looking at this Coronavirus stuff with what happened when China all of a sudden shut down a whole bunch of stuff, and the way the pollution cleared up a lot. I saw that on CNN the other day. So, if they don't stop it, or if other overpopulated countries don't stop that pollution, then what would it do to us? You know, we can stop fossil fuels here, but if it's still continuing somewhere else, it's still going to impact us.

Speaker 1: Based on your experience, how would you describe the relationship between fishers in the US Virgin Islands, amongst themselves?

Speaker 2: I'm not sure how to answer that. I don't think it has really changed. I do think that when it comes to the fishers and when it comes to the charter people, there is a little feud going on there, especially the dive charters. Those people that take tourists out to the reefs, there's a feud because a fisherman can go in their area and they can be spear fishing, and then if you have divers out there looking at reefs, you don't want them to see you shooting the fish that they're looking at. That has caused a little problem here. And when it comes to the charter guys, the recreational angler charters, the feud there between them and our commercial fishermen, is that they're allowed to sell... or they're selling their catch. Not that they're allowed to, but they're selling their catch. A lot of them don't have a license, but they're still sell their catch. And again, that's where our... But amongst themselves, I don't think that there's much of a problem, because they all work together, they all keep their prices the same, nobody tries to undercharge somebody else, things like that. And they're not really... Well, recently I would say, for some reason they've increased their price way more than I thought they would, because fish was $5.00 a pound, and now it's $8.00 a pound. So I don't know what caused that. I guess the fish here is sold so easily, that they feel, "Well, let's increase our prices." But everybody does it at the same time. It's not like, "I'm going to keep my fish at five bucks a pound and take all your customers away," or something. Although that has happened [inaudible 00:32:54], and so there's not really [inaudible 00:32:54] that I would say it's caused a feud between each other.

Speaker 1: Okay. And can you think of any examples of the fishers getting together to address an issue in fisheries?

Speaker 2: That's our biggest problem right there, the fishermen are not united. They don't have an identity. They need to form a strong fishermen's association, that would represent them in front of legislature, in front of the department. They don't have that. They don't have that unity. And I don't know how to change that. St. Thomas is a lot better off than we are with that, because they have their core group, I would say, that's formed their association, and it's not all of them either. They have their problems also, but on St. Croix for some reason, there's always this in-fighting about whose in charge, and who wants to be better than who, and stuff like that. I would say that's one of the feuds that they're having here. You know, when I say that I'm going to form up a meeting here, and you're going to pay 50 bucks a year or whatever for membership, then it's, "Oh, what are you doing with the money, and whose going to handle the money," and that sort of feud starts. And what are you going to do for us? They need that, because with an association, they can actually purchase at a lower cost their gear and their supplies, and all this stuff. If they can take over a market, and especially that fish market in Lorraine, the association should be the people that are managing that place. And for some reason it's beyond me, why the fishermen have to work all morning from 5:30 in the morning until 11:00 when he comes in for ship here, and try and sell his fish, when you can sell it to the association at 50 cents a pound cheaper, and you can go home and relax. They don't do that. They spend more time trying to sell their catch then they do fishing. I don't know what it is. I don't know if it's because they just don't want to sell it for 50 cents a pound cheaper, or $1.00 a pound cheaper. I don't know what it is. But maybe when you speak to Gershon, or Daly or whatever, they'll maybe help you with the answer to that question, but- Yeah, I don't know why. I would. We tell them, "You can come in, sell to your association, you can go back out and fish if you want or go home." Go home and relax, you've been diving all day.

Speaker 1: Right. Now, Interviewee, how would you describe the relationship between the fishermen and the fishery managers in the USVI?

Speaker 2: Well, it's better now, it wasn't like that before. They didn't want nothing to do with the managers. They always felt the managers were there to stop them from fishing, but I think we realized that when we get them more involved in developing your own management, you tell us how you want to manage something. That's the way we're going to deal with everything. If you tell us how you want to manage something, I think it works out better for everybody, and they feel more involved, like their work means something now. You know? I think that has changed a lot. Our Fish Trap [inaudible 00:36:38] some time was developed by fishermen. Our spinulops and merriment that we're working on, is being developed by fishermen. I think that's important.

Speaker 1: Yeah, right. And is there a difference in the relationship between fishermen and the local government versus the Federal government?

Speaker 2: Yes. Well, you know I think some people, especially on the legislature, they're a little confused about what the Federal government does compared to the local government. We, or shall I say and the Federal government along with the council now, but we cannot tell the local government what to do and what laws to put in place. And the fishermen tell the government what it was that they can do from the shoreline out, and it's really not true. The local government is always questioning why... These are the comments that I've been hearing from Senators, they are making our fishermen go further and further out to fish, and that's not true, because we're managing outside the three miles. So it would behoove the fishermen to fish in local waters more often, because it's efficient. So I think that the legislature is confused on that. And I've heard that on testimonies and stuff when they share it on TV, and I'm screaming at the TV saying, "That's not right." But they don't call me to talk. But I tried to talk to legislature, I try to tell the Senators things. I don't know, I have my opinion about those guys back, their ways. Don't put that on the record.

Speaker 1: Oh no. And do the fishermen themselves perceive the local government and the Federal government differently when it comes to the decisions that they make?

Speaker 2: Yeah, I would think so, because when we start legislature for example, we want to implement a recreational fishing license program, which the VI doesn't have in local waters anyways. Because they believe with the tradition and the culture, we don't ever need it, and I don't agree with that. But when they hear that the Federal government is saying, "Well, we're going to implement a recreational license program in federal waters," then the run to the Senate because they know it's coming to local. Because if you don't do it in the local, it doesn't make sense doing it in Federal, because it's not going to work. So they run to the Senators, then they complain that the Feds are doing this, the Feds are doing that, and then the Senators jump all over that. So boats really, that's all. That's my opinion about that. "I'm fighting for my constituents." No, you're not, you're...

Speaker 1: Right, right, right. And I know you mentioned a couple of examples before, but can you think of any other examples, or would you like to elaborate in any of the examples that you mentioned, of fishers and fishery managers getting together to address an issue?

Speaker 2: Yeah, I would say that's really the most important ones are, whenever the Federal government decides that they want to manage something in Federal waters include the local fishermen. ... and get them involved in the development of that. The development of any management planned for fisheries, must include the commercial fishermen's input, it must, that's a priority. Without that, they're going to feel like you're running them away. You're ruining their livelihood. But if you get them involved, and then say, "Okay, you're the one that's going to develop this plan. We'll help you, we'll give you advice on what we know and stuff like that, but that's your plan." And like I said, it's not like you're going get everything you want, but we can work together and see what changes can happen and what can't. And that happened real... They're pretty with this Trap we built. I mean, in St. Croix there never really was too much traps, I think St. Croix maximum traps since 1974 to now, was 1000 traps in the water. In St. Thomas was 4000. And they've reduced that to where they have a cap now in St. Thomas of 250 per guy, where he used to have 406 of them. But St. Croix wasn't all that bad. And we don't have that shelf that St. Thomas has, they have a big shelf north of St. Thomas to fish, we don't. They've got 20 miles and they have a 110 feet of water. We can't do that.

Speaker 1: Right. And you mentioned some examples of the Federal government involving the fishermen in the decisions that they make, what about the local government, do they involve the fishermen?

Speaker 2: I don't think so. I don't think so. I think fishermen wildlife needs to... But then again, I'm not really sure what they have changed... They haven't changed much in our rules and regulations in local waters, other than the queen conch stuff. The trap reduction had to have involved the local government, because the locals had to have agreed to that trap reduction in order for it to be implemented in Federal waters, because you've got to go through the local waters to get out there. So they collaborated with them there, but it's not like they... I don't think that there have really been more traps for fishermen to develop rules for local waters. I think everything has been implemented through the department. But it's going to happen, because right now I want to implement recreational bag limits, and that's going to involve local. That's what our [inaudible 00:44:07] does, we... I don't think all of them want to, but I want to implement a recreational bag limit. I don't think our recreational fishers should be able to harvest 100 lobsters,- ... that's a commercial activity. And fish traps. Recreational fisherman in our territory waters, cannot have fish traps, that's a commercial method. While in the Federal waters, it's allowed. So we want to close that. We're working with the council right now to do that.

Speaker 3: Okay. So Interviewee, do you feel that fishery management in the US Virgin Islands, is fair in the decisions that they make?

Speaker 2: Yeah, I think so. Yeah. Well, I think now... Well, since I've been on the council, I think that we have a regional administrator, Roy Crafty, who has really worked out very well. He has allowed for a lot of the fishermen's input to be a major decision making process for the Feds over here. So I think it's pretty... I think that is fair. And the local part, because we have our fishery advisory committee, I mean, we write a lot of letters to the Commissioner, and I'm not even touching the one we have now, Jean-Pierre Oriol, because he's new. But in the past, they don't even answer our letters. At least now we have this guy, JP, whose very involved whenever we ask for a conference call with him and our fisheries committee. He's always there, he calls in, he Skypes, he gets involved compared to past times. So I don't think it's been fair to the fishermen when it comes to the local government, listening to the fishery advisory committee's input. That's what we're there for, we're the buffer between the commercial fishermen and the local government, and we try to work with both of them. All our members are stakeholders in everything, chartered fishing, chartered dives, commercial fishing, commercial diving, and recreational. We have members from every aspect in there. Whereas in St. Thomas it's a little different, they're top-heavy in the commercial fishermen membership. I don't know why, but they... I don't know if you know the history, but we don't communicate much with St. Thomas. We have our feuds. I mean, the same thing you're going to get from over there, they're going to say, "Let St. Croix do what they want, St. Thomas is going to do what they want." And that's why we went to island-based management plan. I don't know.

Speaker 3: So Interviewee, I know you mentioned this briefly already, but I wanted to just ask that, do you think most fishers in the US Virgin Islands understand how the fishery managers make decisions?

Speaker 2: I kind of want to say no, ... and it's mostly because they don't want to be involved. Our core people that gets involved in fishery management for the local fishermen portion, is a handful of guys. It's not the whole... It represents the whole because we have members from every aspect of fishing, but it doesn't represent everybody's opinion... especially the western part. Those guys don't really want to hear from the local government, or the Federal government. They always believe that we want to stop them from fishing, which is not true. We need them out there, because we want... the economy depends a lot on fish. Or the people, I would say. And agriculture. You know, agriculture there are supposed to be farmers and fishermen represented, and agriculture does not represent fishermen at all. And they need to. So I understand now we have a new Commissioner of Agriculture, and he wants to take over the fishermen's whatever they're doing, I'm not sure. They want to treat them like farmers, whatever farmers do fishermen would do, whatever. But you know what is a big problem here, is taxes, there are very, very, very few people that are in the commercial fishing business that file taxes, and that's a big problem. It hurts them, and they just don't understand it. They only... And we repeatedly, or I repeatedly tell them, "If you file your taxes, you're already 90% exempt from taxes, so why not file because it's a benefit?" And that was written into the law, fishermen are 90% exempt. But if you file, you get below income loans, you can buy engines at a lower cost, you can do a whole bunch of stuff. But they're all scared about this costing, and they don't file. There's very few, I would say I think if there are 10 fishermen who file taxes, it's a lot. And then forget the helpers, they don't file at all, and that's going to turn around and bite them really bad right now with this disaster... fishermen's disaster funding that's coming out, these grants. There'll be a requirement from the Feds, "Show me that you're filing your taxes." "Show me that you don't owe any Federal debt." They're going to scream, because I was speaking with Tom Daly yesterday when he went to get [inaudible 00:51:44] Dunn's number, and I don't even know why they dug that up. But the helpers don't file, but this guy does, Tom Daly files his taxes, so if he's going to get grant funding for all his losses in here, but his helper doesn't qualify because he didn't file his taxes, then the feud starts between him and his helper, "You got funding but I didn't, what are you going to do? Take care of me, help me out, blah, blah, blah." I can't demonstrate, it's going to create a big problem here. And I don't know how they're going to solve that. And the Commissioner, he already says, "Well, if they don't file, they're in trouble." What they're going to do, I'm not sure. And look, even the bureaucracy and the red tape involved in this, has been... 2017 was the hurricane, now we're in 2020 and no money has been disbursed to fishermen. And Puerto Rico is even worse off than we are- ... when it comes to that funding. I'm not sure what to do about it. If they don't smarten up and start filing their taxes... I mean, you can get tax refunds if you do it right. As a helper you're not making over $9,000.00 a year, so... And it's a cash business, so they hide a lot of stuff. All your restaurants pay in checks, so...

Speaker 3: Yeah, right. So Interviewee, I just have one more question for you. So if they exist, how are conflicts between fishers and fishers resolved?

Speaker 2: They all stay away from each other, that's why if you go around St. Croix at different selling spots, they're there for a reason. They're there because they don't want to go to the fish market and listen to all that rowdy noise over there with the arguments about blah. Like, Bobby Thomas, you're going to speak to him about that, that's going to be a good question for him to tell you, he sells right there by the District Court, and he will not ever go to the fish market. Yeah, he won't. I don't care what facility you build for it, they can be state of the art, he's not going to go around those guys because there's... And it's really not the commercial fishermen per se, it's all their friends and the hangouts, and the people that come there to cause trouble, and make noise, and... You know. You know guys, young kids that are using [inaudible 00:54:50] language around older people, [inaudible 00:54:53] is one of the [inaudible 00:54:54] where the older community don't even go to that market anymore, because of the younger guys abusive language that they use up there. So it becomes a problem. It becomes a big problem. So that's why they stay away from each other and that, and I think that's why the association is not together, it's because of that little feud that they're having amongst each other.

Speaker 3: Right. How about, if they exist, conflicts between fishers and fishery managers, how are they resolved?

Speaker 2: I don't know really what to say about that one. We try to work with them, and they can yell and scream at me all they want, but I just take it in stride and say, "Yeah but, we're trying to do this." And eventually they come around. I think it's... First of all, you have to talk to them very respectfully,- ... don't think that they're just illiterate. You can't treat them that way, because they're professionals at what they do. So I think the way you approach them, this is where that conflict resolution comes in. I talk my head off to these fishermen. And even when I was in law enforcement, I'd go to the market, I can already look at their eyes and see the attitudes of some of them. And then I'd go and say, "Hey guys, what's up?" And those that don't answer me, I already know they're mad at me, or they don't like me, or whatever the case, and just sit there and talk and talk with those that are talking to me, and then eventually they open up and they start to throw their comments. But, I think it's all about the approach. You don't go heavy-handed, except when you're in law enforcement. Even to that, I tell those officers that Howard has in there now, "It's all about how you approach these guys. Don't go in there, "I'm the law and I'm going to tell you what to do," don't do that. Go and listen to them. Listen to their gripes, listen to their complaints, and then if you get to resolve some of them, you back and tell them, "Listen, I was able... What we talked about, I was able to do this." You can say that. Sorry, I'm a little different, I like negotiating. I like negotiating. But don't mistake me for Trump now. But yeah, I think it's all about how you approach these guys. They're very sensitive when it comes to the fisheries.