

Bridging the Gap Between Local Fishery Culture and Management Strategies in Puerto Rico

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Puerto Rico's commercial fisheries are considered small-scale and artisanal in which its practices have been part of their culture for centuries. Although fishing has been a time long practice in Puerto Rico, aspects of this activity that have been accepted culturally do not always coincide with the strategies that are implemented to manage it. One issue faced in their fisheries is the licensing process. One can apply for a fulltime, part-time, or an apprentice commercial license. Within Puerto Rico's current management strategies, there is no license present for recreational fishermen. A problem that stems from this is that culturally one may be accepted as "commercial" fisherman who provides and sells their catch to the local communities, but legally are not labeled as such. Because of the lack of recreational licenses, there is no way to document how many recreational fishermen are out there and what is being caught. This has also opened doors for illegal selling of recreational landings. Due to this and poor or lacking commercial landings recorded, Puerto Rico's landings data and fish stock assessments become skewed (Matos-Caraballo 2001-2004). This research looked into how the actions of recreational fishermen have affected commercial fishermen and how cultural perceptions of commercial fishermen vary from what management has defined it to be and how they regulate it. This research was implemented by the collection of qualitative data conducted through various interviews and focus groups of commercial fishermen, recreational fishermen, and a policy maker. The interviews took place at various locations around Puerto Rico including various *villas pesqueras* (fishing associations, in Spanish) on the north, south, east, and west coasts, using semi-structured interview method. The questions asked to the fishermen pertained to the interactions that occur between recreational and commercial fishermen, whether they were negative or not, and how they perceive one another, as well as demographic questions. The questions that the policy maker was asked pertained to the different laws and regulations implemented on fisheries licensing, levels of compliance with these regulations, how they interact with the fishermen, and demographics. The data was analyzed qualitatively using Atlas.ti. Results suggest that the management strategies implemented do not coincide with the fishery culture of Puerto Rico. It was found that there the commercial fishermen have negative perception towards the policy makers as well as the government. It was also concluded that there is a problem with recreational fishermen illegally selling their catch at a lower price than commercial fishermen, therefore affecting the market. Through this research, it is apparent that the policy makers and commercial fishermen do not see eye to eye on management strategies. A suggestion to change this include providing a new license for those who do not meet the requirements of the current definition of a commercial fisherman so that there is a way for them to sell their catch and no longer be considered legally a recreational fisherman. In time and with more studies on Puerto Rico's fishery culture, maybe one day the gap between the management and the culture will lessen and fishers and management authorities will find a way to better work together.

Work Cited

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Student Bio

I am a current undergraduate senior working toward a B.A. in Marine Affairs with a minor in Legal Studies. Growing up on the coast of Massachusetts, being by the ocean has always impacted my life. Now that I am older, I wish to protect the place that has given me such fond memories as a child. Once I have graduated, I wish to pursue a career in fisheries management and public outreach. Completing SURF has given me a greater understanding of what my career goals are and lifelong skills needed to chase these goals.

