

## **Puerto Rico District Advisory Panel Report for the 182<sup>nd</sup> CFMC Regular Meeting**

**On July 18, 2023 at our Advisory Panel Meeting, we talked about several topics such as:**

- How to Improve Data Collection
- The Implementation Plan of EEJ
- Status of Marine Reserve Areas in PR

**These were the most relevant comments and recommendations:**

- It is necessary to create a mechanism for the fishing community to provide reliable data that is considered when evaluating a fishery.
- We all know that the results we currently have are not in tune with the reality of our fisheries.
- The distrust that exists in the fishing sector with the scientific community is not a secret and it is necessary to increase the participation of fishermen when evaluating the fisheries and there must be feedback with the results of these collaborations.
- Most of the time, the fishermen do not find out the results of these investigations and this contributes to mistrust.
- You need to do something different to get different results.
- The Caribbean Branch should be the leader in facilitating new data collection participatory forms and to be fair to the science and the fishing community, we ask to the Science Center for a balance to place numerical data on facts that could increase the opportunity to fish, in the same way that the collection of data that potentially closes a fishery is facilitated.
- Although outreach is very important, there is a structural problem and for some time there has been a claim to do things in a new way including the industry.
- To get the messages and priorities of the fisheries sector with numbers, the DAP should have an active participation deciding one or two scientific research priorities for each budget cycle.
- It is necessary to develop workshops with the DNER, the PR Fisheries Research Lab, the Science Center and the CFMC on how to improve data collection, including the fishing sector.

- You must have information on hand such as flyers explaining more about the data collection process.
- We ask this Council and NOAA Fisheries to evaluate when it's necessary the possibility of expanding the 3 years before establishing a regulation.
- It is necessary to expand the collection of data with dealers, restaurants, etc. to include an assessment of the resource.
- When evaluating a fishery, it is necessary to consider the contamination of habitats and ecosystems, coastal erosion, when the numbers in the fishing reports drop and it's because the fishers move towards another that give them more profit and it's not because that fishery is in danger due to overfishing, among other factors.
- To evaluate alternatives for data collection, we suggest the creation of a committee that includes members of the DAP, Science Center, PR DNER Lab, and the team of scientists from this Council. We should meet after this meeting.

**Regarding the subject of EEJ, we agree on the following:**

- It is necessary to develop a research scheme that responds to the needs of the fishing sector.
- Each study that is carried out must have the experience of the fishers from the beginning and it is necessary to train the fishers to create a scientific bank of fishers.
- It is necessary that the fishers have a fair compensation when working in the studies. At present, this payment does not compensate for the time that the fishers dedicate to participate in them and for this reason they do not show much interest.
- It is very important to reach out to fishing communities to strengthen their resilience and open communication with the agencies in charge of distributing funds. It is needed to have effective contact with the industry.
- The use of community leaders and entities that bring information to all sectors to achieve an impact on all fishing communities would be very effective.

- It would be helpful to have some liaison staff that could provide guidance in the process of writing proposals so that fishing communities can participate.

**Regarding the topic of marine protected areas, we discussed the following:**

- The community in general only knows that these areas are protected but they have no idea what status they are in.
- We suggest evaluating these marine protected areas with the most effective frequency possible and bringing these results to all fishing sectors.
- Regarding the Tourmaline Bank, there is great concern if aggregations of Red Hind are currently occurring. - Our concern is based on data included in an article published by Dr. Rowell (2012) where Dr. Schärer and Dr. Appeldoorn, among others, appear as co-authors, he says that in data from visual censuses of groupers in Abrir la Sierra, the density values for February / March are reported between 0.5 to 3.3 individuals per 100 square meters vs. in a study carried out by Dr. Reni García (2020) at the Tourmaline Bank, they found a density of 0.073 to 0.074 individuals per 100 square meters. This reflects a 10 times higher density of Red Hind in Abrir la Sierra than in the Tourmaline Bank. Although Dr. Garcia's study does not suggest that Red Hind aggregations do not exist in the Tourmaline Bank, there may be a possibility that they are not occurring, which was the main reason for protecting this area.

**In Other Business:**

We briefly discussed the continued absences of our non-voting members. Also, we are very pleased to have DNER representation back and we would like to know if the U.S. Coast Guard is interested in maintaining their presence on our panel, which we feel is very important.

This concludes my report.

Thank you.