

Hope for Fishing Villages on the Island

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FEMA approves \$1.8 million for repairs to the villages in Guayama, Maunabo, Mayagüez and San Juan

GUAYNABO, Puerto Rico — At about 4 a.m. Christopher McGrath, a commercial fisherman from San Juan, begins to prepare his boat to go out to sea to find fresh fish. That hard work goes on for long hours until the sun goes down, where he then distributes the day's catch to restaurants and to the public.

Like him, nearly a thousand fishermen live this daily scenario on the coasts of Puerto Rico. For many, the work is more difficult and demanding after Hurricane María destroyed many of their boats, work equipment and even the wharfs where they docked. This is why a \$1.8 million allocation from FEMA to the Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture represents a boost for the island's fishermen, since it will improve the safety and environment of their places of work.

“Our goal with these obligations is to help the sector recover, allowing it to continue to support the communities and their families. Fishing is a vital link in the food supply chain on the island and the improvements that will be made will provide an opportunity to take advantage of the resources of our coasts”, said Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator for Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, José Baquero Tirado.

Four fishing villages where 96 fishermen work will be repaired and rebuilt thanks to these federal funds: La Coal Fishing Village in Old San Juan, with an obligation of about \$696,000; Maunabo Fishing Village, located near the historic Punta Tuna lighthouse, with about \$347,000; El Maní Fishing Village in Mayagüez, with about \$393,000; and Guayama Fishing Village with about \$383,000. Of those funds, about \$174,000 will go towards the strengthening of the facilities in order to reduce damage to the structures in the event of future disasters.

According to data from the Puerto Rico Planning Board, in 2018 local fisheries contributed about \$300,000 to the island's economy. In terms of local fish production, in 2017 a little over 15,700 quintals of fish and about 8,600 quintals of



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seafood were reported. National statistics show that commercial activities that depend on the ocean, such as fishing, finance 7 percent of total employment in Puerto Rico, three times as much as the 2 percent average for the continental United States.

“With this obligation from FEMA, aimed for the recovery and reactivation of the fishing villages, we will mitigate one of the sectors that was most affected by past atmospheric events,” said the designated Secretary of the Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture, Ramón González Beiró. “Through these grants the fishing villages facilities will improve, which is an essential tool for the operation and marketing of the products from our fishermen.”

For George Thomas, tugboat captain and vice president of La Coal Fishing Village in Old San Juan established 45 years ago, everything seemed like a war zone after the hurricane. The experience was similar in the Guayama Fishing Village. As shared by Miguel Ortiz, president of this village established in 2001 and also president of the Commercial Fishermen Federation of Puerto Rico, they lost all kinds of equipment and gave away 1,200 pounds of fish to the community so it would not go to waste due to lack of power. “It has been quite an uphill battle to get back to normal. Right now, we are operating at 35 or 40 percent capacity,” added Ortiz.

Ortiz also indicated that before Maria there were some 44 fishing villages, of which today there are approximately 20 operating at a full or part time capacity. He explained that prior to the hurricane the kiosk in the Guayama Fishing Village could generate about \$70,000 a year, while it is currently generating a little over half that amount. The expectation is that these funds will help increase the fishing activity in order to generate capital once again.

“This federal obligation represents an important support for the fishing sector of the island, which has great development potential, not only in financial growth but also on the sustainable food industry,” said executive director of COR3, engineer Manuel Laboy Rivera. “This sector has a great impact on local businesses and restaurants, as well as in the tourism industry and our communities. We thank FEMA for their constant assistance in the process of the reconstruction of Puerto Rico.”



For more information on Puerto Rico's recovery from Hurricane María, visit fema.gov/disaster/4339 and recuperacion.pr. Follow us on our social networks at Facebook.com/FEMAPuertoRico, Facebook.com/COR3pr and [Twitter @COR3pr](https://Twitter.com/COR3pr).



SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (January 5, 2021) -- FEMA approves \$1.8 million for repairs to the fishing villages in Guayama, Maunabo, Mayagüez and San Juan. Of those funds, about \$174,000 will go towards the strengthening of the facilities in order to reduce damage to the structures in the event of future disasters.



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GUAYAMA, Puerto Rico (January 6, 2021) -- Four fishing villages will be repaired and rebuilt thanks to these federal funds, including Guayama Fishing Village with about \$383,000. This allocation from FEMA to the Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture represents a boost for the island's fishermen, since it will improve the safety and environment of their places of work.

