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**Advancing Equity and Environmental Justice in the  
Southeast Region through the Conservation and  
Management of Living Human and Marine Resources:**

***Examination of Barriers and Development of Actionable  
Solutions Derived from the 6 Focus Groups in the US Caribbean  
(Puerto Rico and the USVI)***

***Prepared By:***

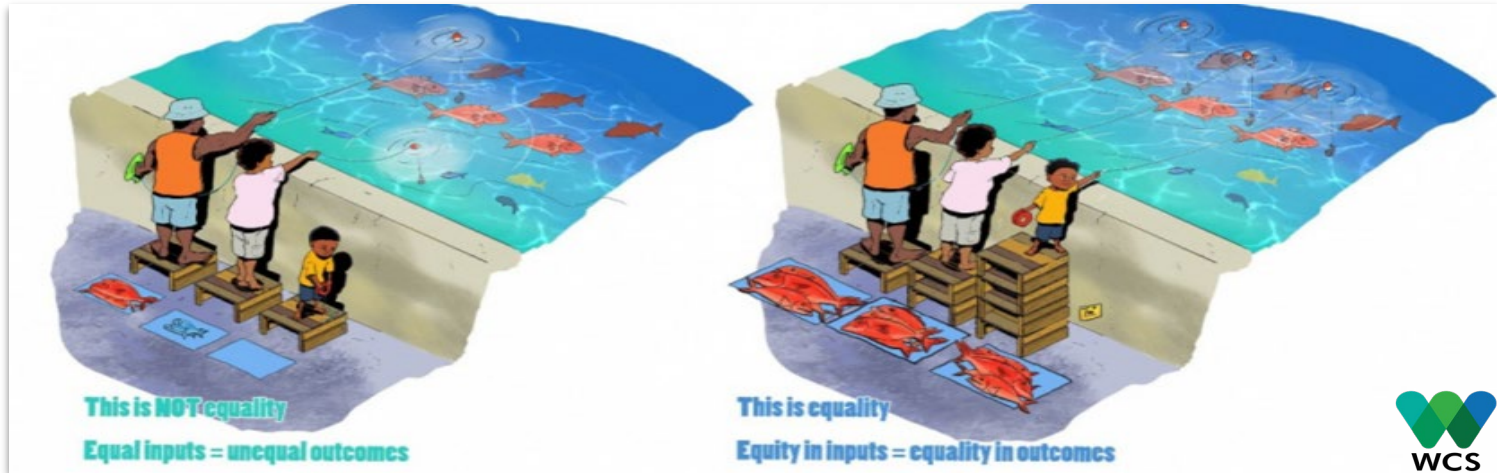
***Brent Stoffle, Maria López-Mercer and Sarah Stephenson***

***CFMC 183<sup>rd</sup> Meeting, St. Thomas, USVI***

***December 6, 2023***

# Key Terms: Equity

*Equity* means the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment.



Definition from Executive Order 13985.



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# Key Terms: Environmental Justice

*Environmental Justice* is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, color, gender, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies including but not limited to:

- Equitable protection from environmental and health hazards
- Equitable access to decision-making processes
- Equitable opportunity for disadvantaged communities that have been historically marginalized



Definition from the Environmental Protection Agency.



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# Key Terms: Underserved Communities

*Underserved communities* have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life.



These include geographic communities as well as populations sharing a particular characteristic such as: women and girls; Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons\*, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and other persons of color; persons facing discrimination or barriers related to gender identity; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

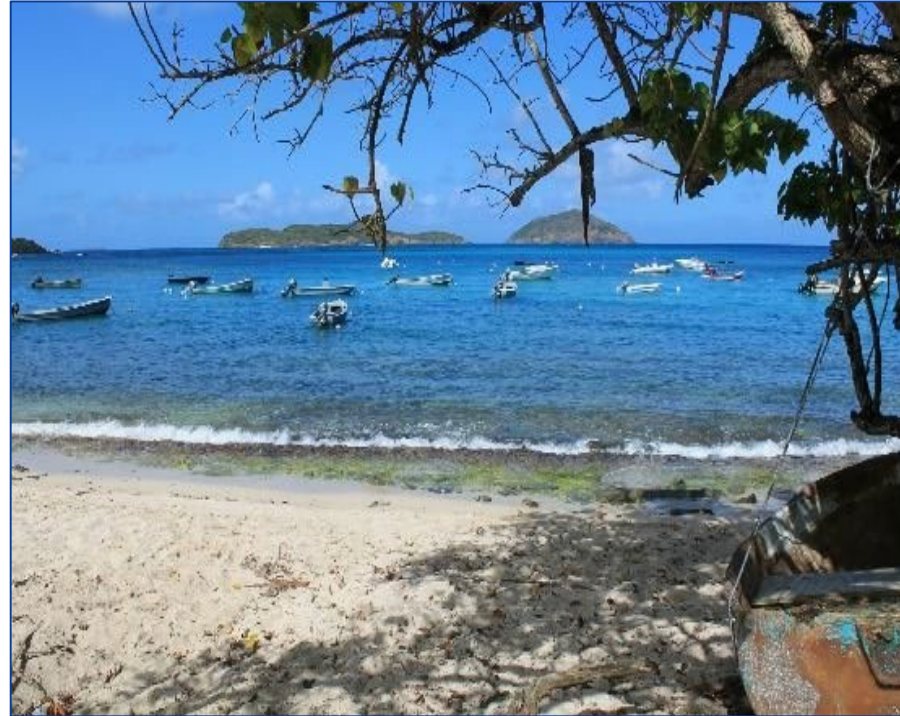
Definition based on Executive Order 13985

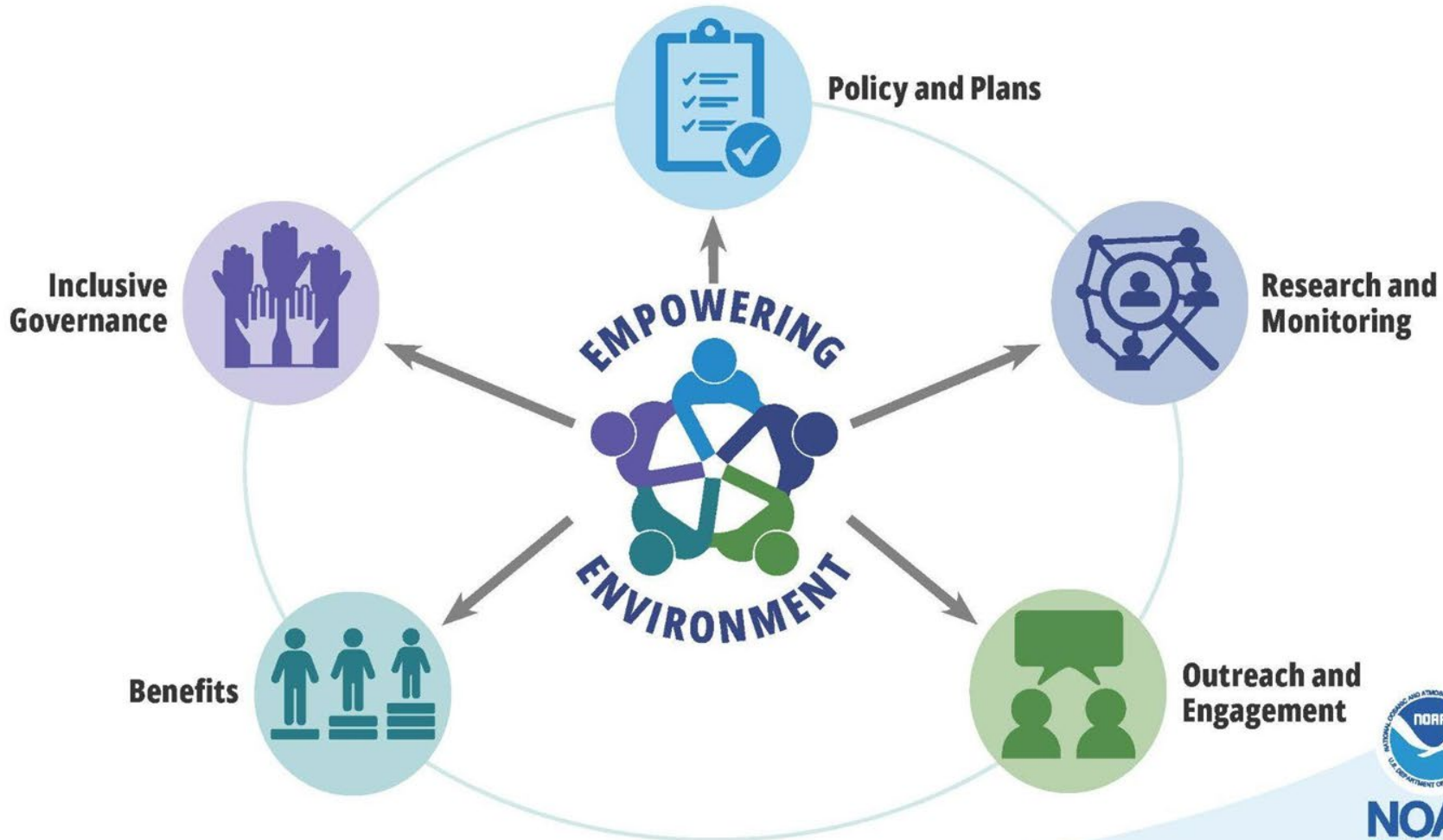


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# NOAA Fisheries' EEJ Strategy

- Framework to incorporate EEJ into our daily activities
- Requires step-down regional implementation plans
- Seeks to remove barriers to EEJ
- Seeks to promote equity in all we do





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# U.S. Caribbean Equity and Environmental Justice Engagement Strategies

- Six focus groups with underserved community members and liaisons  
In Puerto Rico and USVI
  - Dorado, PR
  - Cabo Rojo, PR
  - Ponce, PR
  - Fajardo, PR
  - St. Croix, USVI
  - St. Thomas/St. John, USVI
- Also attended FAC meetings in St. Croix and St. Thomas
- WEBINAR Session (multilingual) (conducted September 28, 2023)



# Who We've Engaged in the U.S. Caribbean



- Various Ethnicities, Genders, Education Levels, Ages, Employment Backgrounds
- Focus Groups, Scoping, Group Meetings, Informal Interviews, Key Informant Interviews

# Key Focus Group Takeaways

- Underserved communities feel that decision makers do not understand, consider, or represent their perspectives and viewpoints
- Underserved communities feel exploited by industry and federal projects (e.g. Offshore Wind)
- Underserved communities are depending on us to partner with local, state and federal agencies to find solutions for a variety of issues



# Key Focus Group Takeaways

- Develop a strategy to improve the way we communicate with underserved communities
  - Location
  - Timing: Hour/Date
  - Education – Training, Scholarship, Internships
  - Opportunities: Research/Management
  - Technological Capability: Internet/Cell Phone
  - Language: Translated into preferred language
  - Utilize Multiple Methods for getting the Word out (e.g. Radio)

# Key Focus Group Takeaways

- Increase presence in communities and leverage support of trusted and knowledgeable community liaisons (Sea Grant, port agents, community NGOs and Key Informants) where applicable
  - Recognize / acknowledge the value of community liaisons and Key Informants
  - Institutionalize communication mechanisms with community liaisons
- Understand cultural and historical context of fishing to the Islands

# Key Focus Group Takeaways: Puerto Rico

- Commonalities Across Puerto Rico and its Fisheries
  - Pollution is Key Issue on all sides of the Island
  - Greater Transparency with Government at ALL levels:
  - Desire to know what funds are for and how they are spent, especially Disaster Relief
    - Desire to Collaborate on the Development of Priorities for Funding
  - Improved Access to Opportunities
    - Infrastructure Maintenance and (re)development
    - Grants and Loans – Language and Navigating the Process
    - Research/Management – Language and Collaborative Effort
    - Vocational and Education System
  - Greater Presence of NOAA
  - Enforcement – Capacity and Training

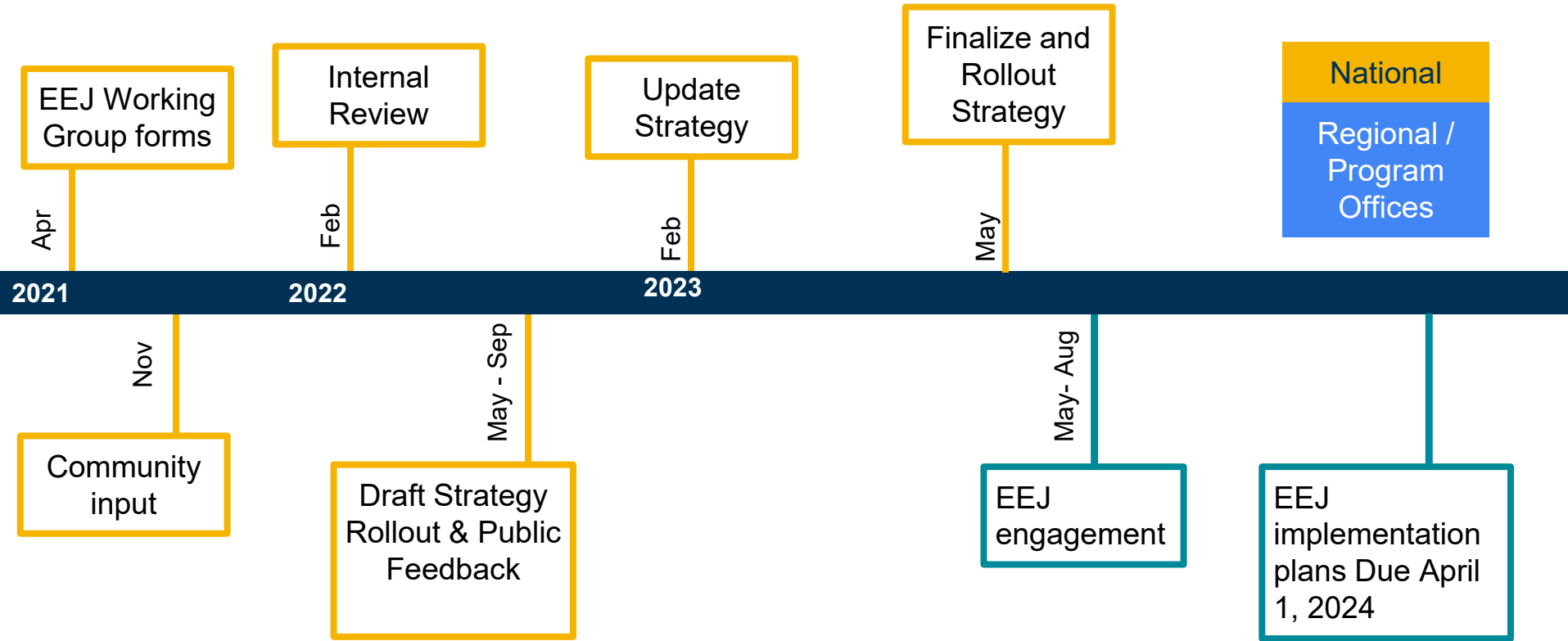


# Key Focus Group Takeaways: USVI – St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix

- Development and replacement of FADs to ease pressure off of inshore fisheries
- Enforcement – Not enough; better trained
- Safe Fishing Zone – Lang Bank
- Better Awareness of Opportunities to Collaborate on Research, find scholarships, take part in internships, other
- Improved Communication with Community Liaisons
  - If people are coming to the islands to conduct research first, advise local liaisons so they can make the fishermen aware, and second, try to engage the local fishermen in the process
- More Timely Assistance after Disasters



# Next Steps



**Final Thoughts  
and THANK YOU!**

**EXTRA SLIDES**