

Batabanó Port: a before and after the hurricane.



Language English

Since Hurricane Rafael hit the western part of the country on November 6, we have had a complex situation in the port of Batabanó, the main maritime access point for the transportation of passengers and cargo to and from the Isle of Youth. The accumulation of sediment in the port's access channel due to natural causes, accentuated by the extreme event, prevented the access of the ferry Perseverance and thus interrupted the only route for maritime transportation of passengers to the Isle of Youth.

Urgently, dredging began, which in its first stage and in record time, removed the sediment to recover the depth necessary for the access of the ferry with a draft of just under three meters. In order to learn about the current state of the port and its operations, as well as the conditions of the Perseverancia ferry and its services, a Desafío team recently visited these facilities and approached Arístides Feraudys Reinoso, director of the Basic Port Services Unit Southwest Batabanó, of the GEMAR Maritime Port Group.

"The main damages that still affect us today are in the infrastructure of the warehouses, where a large part of the three warehouses we have suffered damage to the tiles," he commented.

Despite the security measures implemented, the onslaught of the strong southern winds caused significant damage. However, he stressed that "immediately after the hurricane, we set about the task of recovery." The situation affected the ability to safeguard some merchandise, since "these warehouses are dedicated to safeguarding products that cannot remain outdoors."

To protect the merchandise, temporary measures were implemented, such as "covering it with blankets." Regarding the collaboration of other entities, the director mentioned that "the help we received was mainly from GEMAR, our superior body, which facilitated the acquisition of tiles and other necessary materials." However, he acknowledged that "there are still some resources missing to complete the repairs, such as welding rods and rebar."

Despite the difficulties, the director stated that "the institution has continued working." The level of operation has not been significantly affected, and recovery plans have been drawn up to maintain the image and conservation of the port. In addition, "we plan to improve, for example, the infrastructure that provides energy to refrigerated containers, which also suffered from the weather."

Regarding the Perseverancia ferry, the director explained that, since the start of its operations, "an operating protocol has been implemented that involves several companies, such as Viajero and Transcarga, to guarantee the safety and efficiency in the transfer of passengers and vehicles. We have all the resources and efforts available for the arrival and departure of the ferry.

Coordination with the agencies and port staff is key right now to avoid difficulties. However, as we well know, the impact of the sediment in the ferry access channel, another of the problems caused by Rafael in its passage, is being a challenge. "Currently, we are in the second phase of dredging, as planned, but in the event of any bad weather, such as the entry of cold fronts, we must stop. Quality dredging requires calm seas," he said.

However, the dredging work will not affect the dynamics of Perseverance arrivals. "I believe that now and in the future the ferry can operate without problems, as long as we evaluate the state of the access channel after hydrometeorological events."

It is important to mention that Feraudys Reinoso emphasizes the comments of the population regarding the state of Perseverance, plagued by the lack of comfort and the numerous difficulties of sanitary services, as well as the evident deterioration of the vessel. "I think it is time for the ferry to receive deep maintenance." In addition, he mentioned that, to the relief of the population, "we are working on the repair of the two catamarans and planning their start-up, although we still do not have a tentative date for the resumption of service, because it depends on the difficult situation of the country and the level of financing that we can obtain from GEMAR and the Ministry of Transport."

The return of these catamarans would allow for the necessary maintenance of the Perseverance ferry and a lower intensity of its operation, which would help to preserve it.

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