



Press Release

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Plan Team Members Make Recommendations for American Samoa

UTULEI, AMERICAN SAMOA (8 March 2011) The American Samoa Fishery Ecosystem Plan Team meeting yesterday yielded recommendations for collecting environmental and fishery data and supporting local aquaculture development. The plan team consists of scientists, managers and industry representatives who make recommendations to the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (Council) based on their annual review of the region's bottomfish and seamount groundfish, coral reef ecosystem, crustaceans, pelagics and precious coral fisheries. Their recommendations will be considered by the Council from March 8 to 10, 2011, at the Gov. Lee Auditorium in Utulei.

The Plan Team was provided information on the status of fishery monitoring programs that included trends, catch and effort for coral reef and bottomfish fisheries as well as a description of coral reef habitat. The overall trend showed decreased participation in the coral reef fishery because people rely more heavily on processed and packaged foods instead of fishing for their protein. The bottomfish fishery now includes 16 boats, which is five fewer than 2009. Total landings were 15,923 lbs, which is 78% less than 2009 landings. The decrease in the bottomfish fishery in late 2009 may be attributed to natural disasters (tsunami, hurricane) but also to some fishers having sold their boats after seeking employment elsewhere. The coral reef habitat report with respect to coral cover indicated that Tutuila had an increase of 1% relative to a 3% decline across the Pacific Islands since 2006 and up to 9% decline in the Caribbean over the same period.

The Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) and Council members reported on a biological sampling program for reef fish in American Samoa. The sampling strategy differs by island jurisdiction. In Guam, the sampling is conducted at the Fisherman Cooperative, in Saipan it is conducted at several fish markets, and in American Samoa by contracting 10 fishermen to provide access to the catch and allow acquisition of some fish for life history studies. The goal of the biological sampling is to provide more information on reef fish life histories and better catch estimates.

Progress was reported on coral reef research projects on humphead wrasse and current mapping as it relates to the pathways marine larvae travel around Tutuila. A presentation was given concerning the characterization of humphead wrasse distribution and abundance in American Samoa around Tutuila. The researchers gathered information about sightings, lengths, visibility, time of sighting, bottom substrate. An overview was also provided about fish larval distribution and sea currents conducted by the American Samoa Environmental Protection Agency and DMWR. The coastal circulation around Tutuila is driven by the tide and wind depending on the location. Seven locations were selected based on the head land features, protected area status and water quality. The objective of this study is to help inform the design of a Marine Protected Area network in American Samoa.

The Coral Reef Advisory Group provided background on the Two-Samoa Initiative including an update on a series of meetings held in Apia and Pago Pago. This initiative is to improve collaboration for regional approaches to management on various issues affecting Samoa and American Samoa. Environmental management at this stage is focused mostly on coral reef conservation efforts.

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An update on aquaculture in American Samoa was provided which described the challenges this industry faces including market preferences and fish feed supply. There has been no significant progress in aquaculture over the last decade. Local inland tilapia farms produce an estimated 9000 pounds of fish per year. The main hindrances to the development of tilapia farms are the inconsistent supply of fish feed and the preference by the majority of the local people for reef fishes versus fish-farmed tilapia.

Other actions taken at the Plan Team included support for a survey of ciguatera fish poisoning in American Samoa. Ciguatera fish poisoning occurs in coral reef areas where reef fish accumulate the toxins secreted by micro-organisms which live on algae on the reef, and poison people who consume them.

As part of the Council meeting, a free Fishers Forum will be open to fishermen and the general public from 6 to 9 p.m. March 8, at the Governor Lee Auditorium. The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council was established by Congress to manage fisheries in offshore waters around Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and the US Pacific remote island areas. Regulatory recommendations from the Council are transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for final approval. For more information or the agendas, visit www.wpcouncil.org; email info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov; or phone (808) 522-8220.

Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council: Appointees by the Secretary of Commerce from nominees selected by Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa and CNMI governors: Stephen Haleck, business owner (American Samoa) (Vice Chair); William Sword, recreational fisherman (American Samoa); Manuel Duenas, Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association (Guam) (Chair) ; David Itano, researcher (Hawaii) (Vice Chair); Benigno Sablan, cultural practitioner (CNMI) (Vice Chair); Frederick Duerr, resort and hotel consultant (Hawaii); Julie Leialoha, environmentalist (Hawaii); and Sean Martin, Pacific Ocean Producers (Hawaii). Designated state officials: Ignacio Dela Cruz, CNMI Department of Land & Natural Resources; Mariquita Taitague, Guam Department of Agriculture; William Aila, Hawaii Department of Land & Natural Resources; and Ray Tulafono, American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources. Designated federal officials: Michael Tosatto, NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office; Don Palawski, U.S. Fish and Wildlife; RAdm Charles Ray, U.S. Coast Guard 14th District; and Bill Gibbons-Fly, U.S. Department of State.