



Lt. Governor Asks Fisheries, Sanctuary and Coral Reef Efforts to Work Together; District Governors Call for Removal of Expanded Sanctuary

UTULEI, AMERICAN SAMOA (13 March 2013) The Western Pacific Fishery Management Council today concluded the second of its three-day meeting at the Governor H. Rex Lee Auditorium (Fale Laumei) in American Samoa. The meeting opened yesterday at the newly erected Fale Samoa with a traditional `ava ceremony, one of the most important customs of the Samoa Islands involving a solemn ritual where a ceremonial beverage is shared to mark important occasions in Samoan society.

“Fishing is the ocean and fishing is life to the Samoans and throughout the Pacific,” said Lt. Gov. Lemanu Peleti Mauga during the welcoming remarks. Lt. Gov. Mauga, whose term began in January of this year, noted that there is a clash between the Pacific Island culture and the Westerners and a clash among the efforts of agencies and organizations responsible for fisheries, sanctuaries and coral reefs. “Some trying to protect ... some trying to survive,” Lt. Gov. Mauga noted. “I hope today will be a new day ... new ways of going forward, new ways of thinking.”

During the next two days passionate public testimonies were heard regarding the recently expanded Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary, now known as the National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa. Originally established by NOAA in 1986, the Sanctuary included 0.25 square miles within Fagatele Bay. In 2012, NOAA expanded the sanctuary to include Fagalua/Fogama`a (the next bay east of Fagatele) on Tutuila Island; areas off the islands of Aunu`u, Ta`u (in the Manu`a Group) and Swains; and a marine protected area at Rose Atoll (which is known as Muliāva by the Manu`a residents) including nearby Vailulu`u seamount. The expanded Sanctuary covers 13,581 square miles of nearshore coral reef and offshore open ocean waters and includes a mixture of no-take fishing areas, areas where fishing is restricted to certain species and gear types by permit only, and open-fishing areas.

All of the testimonies except one were strongly opposed to the expanded Sanctuary. They included two of the Territory’s three District Governors, the Office of Samoan Affairs, a Fono (Legislature of American Samoa) Representative, a master fisherman (tau tai), representatives from the Pago Alia Fisherman Association and a private citizen. In favor of the expansion was the Representative from Swains Island to the Fono, who said the Sanctuary has provided recognition of the island but has not assisted in needed economic development.

Eastern District Gov. Alo Stevenson said that National Marine Fisheries Service data shows that the area between Manu`a islands and Rose Atoll has the potential fishing revenue of \$1.2 million per year. “That’s a lot to take away,” noted Stevenson, whose district includes five counties and 26 villages, the majority of which are on the ocean front. He stressed that the fairness of the Sanctuary process was not clear. The Fishery Management Council process includes scientific

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studies and studies on the social, economic and cultural benefits and impacts. “If this is true [for the Sanctuary], it has not been done,” he said. He said Samoans fish every day, and the Samoan proverbs tell people to proceed with caution. “Don’t worry about the fish. You can fish tomorrow. Worry about the net. If you cannot mend the net, you will not eat.” Stevenson said they were always told that they could fish in the Sanctuary, but he asked what is required, what are the regulations? “The picture is one sided and not clear. We are a fishing community. ... We have to eat and feed our family through commercial means and through bartering.”

Paramount Chief Misaalefua Hudson, District Governor from Manu`a, said that the Council meeting was the first time he was asked and able to speak about the Sanctuary expansion. Referring to Muliāva (Rose Atoll), he asked, “How would anyone feel, if something you owned for over 3,000 years and someone else tells you, you cannot go there anymore.” He explained that two years ago, when they heard about the Sanctuary expansion, all of the elders of Manu`a signed a petition and sent it to then Gov. Togiola Tulafono, who ignored it. “Our people are still sitting in the dark,” the Paramount Chief noted, adding that no one came to Manu`a. “Rose Atoll is part of our islands,” he concluded. “Muliāva is the name of the island ... we don’t need others to tell us not to go there.” He said the current restriction against subsistence fishing within 12 miles around Rose Atoll should be lifted.

Sagele Tuiteleleapaga, Executive Assistant at the Office of Samoan Affairs, explained that there are 56 villages in American Samoa and each one is independent from one another. “They are sacrosanct in their own make up. Each village has its own constitution. ... That is why federal regulations are almost inexplicable to American Samoans as we have independent units that do not obey or are aligned with these federal laws.” He noted that the Samoan people have inhabited American Samoa for 3,000 years “and all of a sudden someone writes legislation, President Bush signs and people were forbidden to go to Muliāva.” Tuiteleleapaga was referring to the establishment of the Rose Atoll Marine National Monument on Jan. 6, 2009, by executive order. Presidential Proclamation 8337 prohibited commercial fishing within the monument, whose boundaries extend 50 nautical miles from the mean low water line of Rose Atoll and encompasses approximately 13,451 square miles, and provided that the Secretary of Commerce initiate the process to add the marine areas of the monument to the Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary. Tuiteleleapaga noted that Manu`a includes six villages, which were not considered when the legislation was put into place. “The mentality of Samoans as regards the sea and land, your ownership goes as far as you can see inside of your house out into the ocean. No one has the right to say you cannot go there. ... Ownership is very different from Westerners, that is what we are saying. The salutations at the `ava ceremony were given to you because our forefathers gave it to us, that is what we gave to you when you visit our shores. ... Samoans are very structured ... Think of the peculiarities of each island. ... You want to talk sanctuaries, go to that village.” Tutieleleapaga concluded, “We have a Governor; that was what the colonial government gave to us.” He urged “to study the people and your problems would be easy to solve.”

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Va`amua Henry Sesepasara of the Pago Alia Fishing Association and a former director of the American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR) said in the 1980s he supported the establishment of the Fagatele Sanctuary for educational purposes. It was remote, small and not many people fished there. When the Sanctuary expansion came up, he was a member of the American Samoa Marine Sanctuary Advisory Board and the board voted against it. "Unfortunately, three days later, another special meeting was called," Sesepasara said, "because [then Gov. Tulafono] instructed the directors of DMWR and EPA [American Samoa Environmental Protection Agency] to change their vote and support the extension of the marine sanctuary. The governor's wish is not the people's wish. ... Fagatele extension is not the people's wish. It is the wish of one person." Sesepasara said Aunu`u island is part of the bottomfish area that is closed because of the expansion. He asked the Council to help the new Administration open the area up so the fishermen can fish. "I fish there as a sport fisherman almost every weekend," he said. "Sunday meal is very important; we bring our best food. Our best food is fresh fish."

The July 26, 2012, Federal Register notice on the "Expansion of Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary, Regulatory Changes, and Sanctuary Name Change; Final Rule" notes that "The Aunu`u Island unit will be divided into two zones: A Multiple Use Zone (Zone A), where fishing would be allowed [provided that vessel operators make their presence known to the sanctuary or its designate in the village of Aunu`u prior to entering the sanctuary to conduct extractive activities], and a Research Zone (Zone B), where all consumptive uses except trolling and surface fishing would be prohibited to provide a control area as a mechanism for research activities."

Talaimatai Su`a, the Fono Representative from Saole County, which includes Aunu`u island, said that his people were given wrong information about the Sanctuary. He said he strongly opposes the Sanctuary in Saole, including Aunu`u. "I am looking for people to have access to their front shore, whatever food they can access," he said. He said the village council signed a petition also, but [then Gov. Tulafono] ignored it.

Additional testimony against the expanded Sanctuary was provided by Distinguished Eo Mokoma, a 65-year master fisherman (tau tai) and member of the Pago Alia Fisherman Association and by Jerome Ierome from the Eastern District. Ierome asked that hearings be brought to the people. He urged, "Go village by village to solicit the views of the people who will be effected."

According Dr. Ruth S. Matagi-Tofiga, Council member and current DMWR director, Manu`a and Tutuila have a long history of sustainable use of marine resources. "We have also traditionally managed our coastal fisheries," she notes. "Local communities know who is doing what on the reefs, including fishermen who use destructive fishing methods. My people are definitely stewards of the ocean. This Sanctuary expansion has caused a lot of public outcry, and, as director of DMWR, I will do whatever I can to stop this expansion from going forth by providing the most accurate scientific evidence for our government to make decisions."

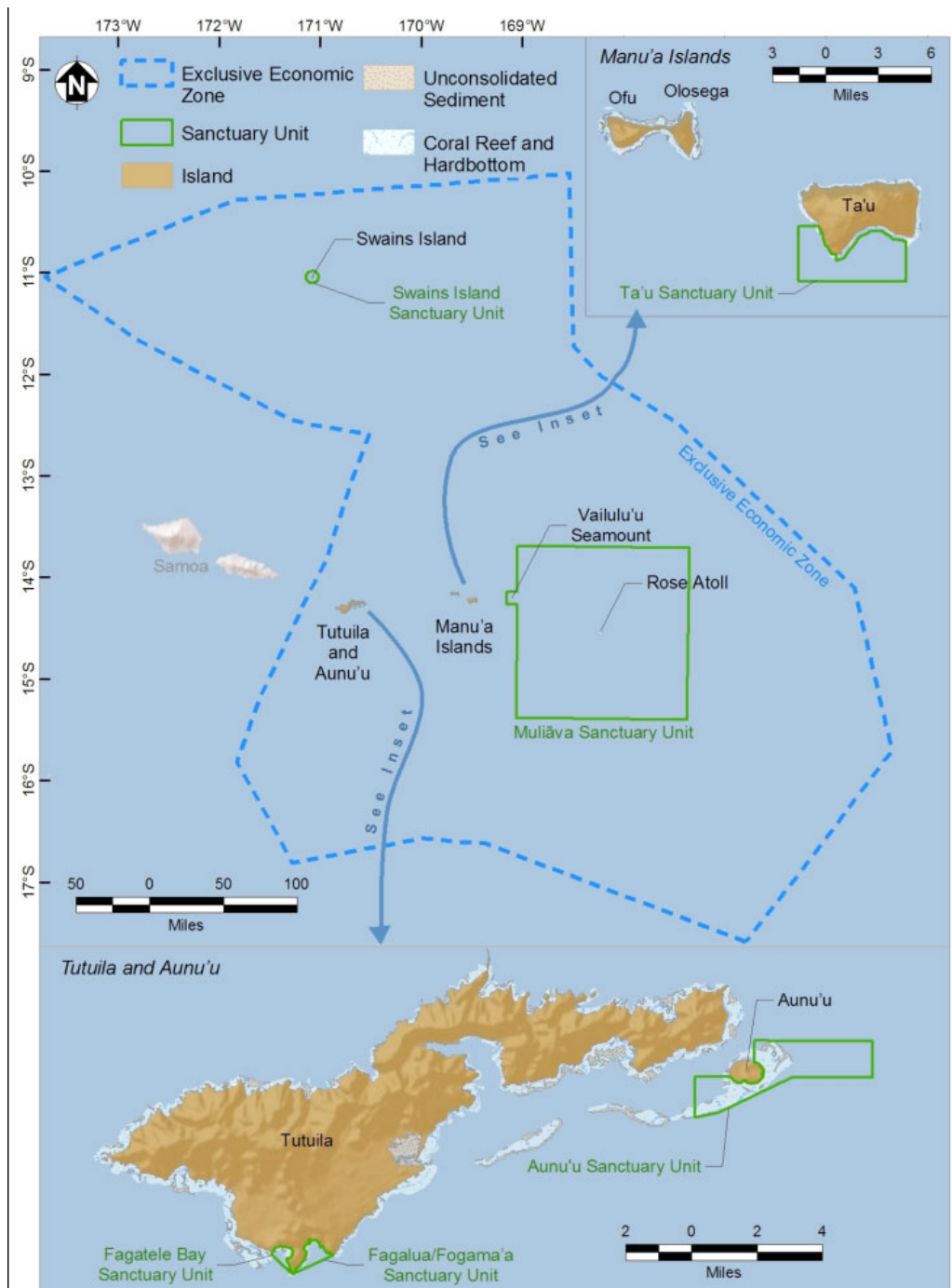
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Today, the Council also addressed protected species issues, including the National Marine Fisheries Service's proposed listing of 66 species of coral as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the listing of the main Hawaiian Islands insular false killer whale as endangered under the ESA, as well as management of fisheries in the Mariana Archipelago.

The Council is responsible for providing the US Secretary of Commerce with recommendations for federally managed fisheries in Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and the remote US Pacific Island areas. For a complete agenda, go to www.wpcouncil.org/meetings or email info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov; phone (808) 522-8220, or fax (808) 522-8226.

Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council: Appointees by the Secretary of Commerce from nominees selected by American Samoa, CNMI, Guam and Hawaii governors: William Sword (vice chair), recreational fisherman/civil engineer/manager (American Samoa); Michael Duenas (vice chair), Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association (Guam); Richard Seman (vice chair), education/outreach specialist (CNMI); Edwin Ebisui (vice chair), attorney (Hawaii); Michael Goto, United Fishing Agency (Hawaii); Julie Leialoha, environmentalist (Hawaii); and F. McGrew Rice, charter fisherman (Hawaii). Designated state officials: Arnold Palacios (chair), CNMI Department of Lands & Natural Resources; William Aila, Hawaii Department of Land & Natural Resources; Dr. Ruth Matagi-Tofiga, American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources; and Mariquita Taitague, Guam Department of Agriculture. Designated federal officials: Michael Tosatto, NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office; Susan White, U.S. Fish and Wildlife; RAdm Charles Ray, U.S. Coast Guard 14th District; and Bill Gibbons-Fly, US Department of State.

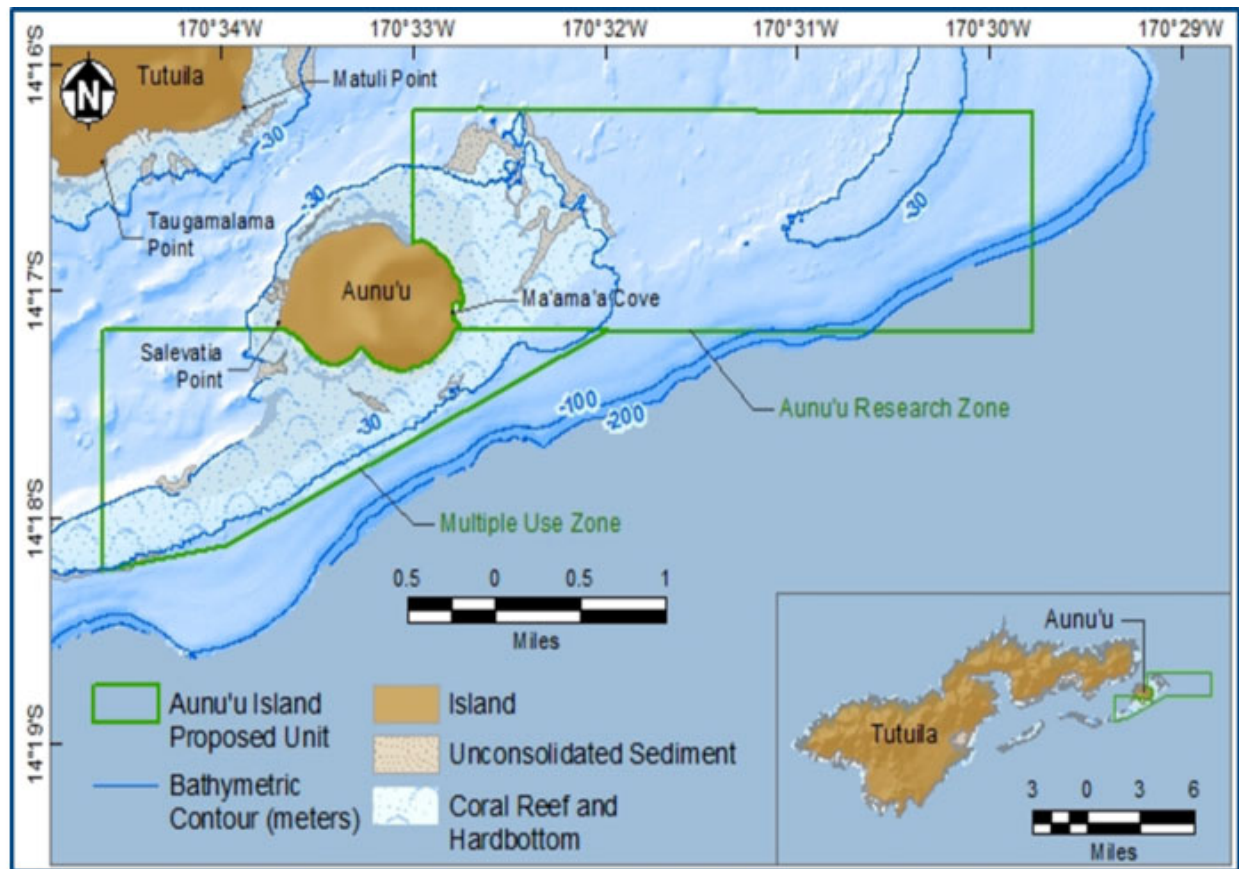
American Samoa Fisheries, Sanctuary 5-5-5-5



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Aunu'u Unit

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