



Public Hearing on America Samoa Large Vessel Prohibited Area to be Held on May 3

HONOLULU (23 April 2014) The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council will hold a public hearing on the Large Vessel Prohibited Area (LVPA) in waters surrounding American Samoa from 4 to 6 p.m. on May 3, 2014, at the Sadie's by the Sea conference room, in Pago Pago, American Samoa.

The LVPA was initially established to support small-boat fisheries, such as the *alia* fleet. These vessels are powered by outboard motors and longline using hand cranked reels. Once thriving, the *alia* fleet now includes one or two vessels operating out of Pago Pago and none from Swains Island.

The LVPA encompasses about 33,000 square nautical miles (nmi) of the 118,354 square nmi (about 28 percent) of the EEZ around American Samoa. It is closed to all pelagic fishing vessels larger than 50 feet in length overall (LOA). While the longline fishery harvests mostly albacore, the fishery also catches marlin, yellowfin, wahoo, mahimahi and other tuna important to the *alia* fishery and sports fishermen.

Currently, the American Samoa longline fleet is a part of a region-wide economic collapse of the South Pacific albacore fishery. Around 20 longline vessels that operate out of Pago Pago are tying up rather than fishing because catches are insufficient to cover expenses. The fishery, which reeled in more 300,000 fish or about 6,000 metric tons (mt) in 2002, had declined to a low of 117,000 fish or about 2,000 mt in 2013. Vessels returned from trips of greater than one-month duration with their fish holds only half full, according to fishermen.

At its March 2014 meeting, the Council directed its staff to draft a measure that would modify the LVPA to promote economic efficiency in the fleet. The preliminary preferred alternative would shrink the northern boundary around Tutuila, Manu`a and Rose to 25 nautical miles (nmi) and the LVPA around Swains to 12 nmi. The southern boundary would not be changed so the Southern Banks would be retained for *alia* and non-commercial troll fishermen.

This item will also be taken up by the American Samoa Regional Ecosystem Advisory Committee (REAC), scheduled to convene 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on May 5, at the Port Administration airport conference room in Tafuna, American Samoa.

The Council will consider the public testimonies and recommendations of the American Samoa REAC and its other advisory bodies and may take action on the draft measure at its 160th meeting to be held June 24 to 27, 2014, in Honolulu. For more information, visit the meetings section of the Council's website at www.wpcouncil.org or contact the Council at info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov or (808) 522-8220. In American Samoa, contact the Council's Island Coordinator, Nate Iloa, at nate@lava.net or (684) 252-3175.

Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council: Appointees by the Secretary of Commerce from nominees selected by American Samoa, CNMI, Guam and Hawaii governors: Michael Duenas, Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association (Guam) (Vice Chair) ; Edwin Ebisui (Hawaii) (Vice Chair); Richard Seman, education and outreach specialist (CNMI); ; William Sword, recreational fisherman (American Samoa) (Vice Chair); Michael Goto, United Fishing Agency Ltd. (Hawaii); Julie Leialoha, biologist (Hawaii); Dr. Claire Tuia Poumele, Port Administration (American Samoa); and McGrew Rice, commercial and charter fisherman (Hawaii). Designated state officials: Arnold Palacios, CNMI Department of Land & Natural Resources (chair); 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; Bill Gibbons-Fly, US Department of State; RADM Cari B. Thomas, US Coast Guard 14th District; and Susan White, Pacific Reefs National Wildlife Refuges Complex.