



Frustrations Voiced Over Impacts of US Fishing Quotas in the Western and Central Pacific

UTULEI, AMERICAN SAMOA (22 October 2015) Members of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, meeting yesterday in Utulei, American Samoa, questioned the high road the United States has taken in international Pacific tuna management and the unfair consequences to fisheries in Hawaii and American Samoa.

“When international regulations cause a fishery to close, I don’t see how we can convince other nations to abide by our standards,” Council Member Michael Goto said. “Fishermen are talking about quitting.”

The Council noted that, when US fisheries are restricted, domestic demand is satisfied by foreign fleets that fall far short of the rigorous standards applied to the US fleets.

Council members addressed the recent two-month closure of the US longline fishery targeting bigeye tuna in the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) convention area and the ongoing closure of the US purse seine fishery on the high seas and in US exclusive economic zone (EEZ) waters in the WCPFC convention area. Both closures were the result of the fisheries reaching US quotas developed by the WCPFC and implemented through federal regulation by NOAA. The Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) convention area in the Eastern Pacific Ocean remains closed to US longline vessels 24 meters and larger harvesting bigeye tuna. The United States has arguably the lowest quotas in both convention areas and is the only nation to have reached its quotas and restricted its fisheries.

The Council questioned the allocations developed by the WCPFC and recommended that the United States at the 12th regular meeting of the WCPFC invoke Article 10 paragraph 3 of the WCPFC Convention, which was established in 2000 in Honolulu, and work to restore the bigeye catch limit applicable to the Hawaii longline fishery and high seas effort limit for the US purse seine fishery. Current quotas for both US fisheries are below their historic catch levels, and the quota for the US longline fishery for bigeye tuna is scheduled to be further reduced in 2017.

Article 10 paragraph 3 stipulates that, in developing criteria for allocation of the total allowable catch or the total level of fishing effort, the WCPFC shall take into account not only the status of the stocks, the existing level of fishing effort in the fishery, the historic catch in the area and the respective interests, past and present fishing patterns and fishing practices of participants in the fishery but also other criteria. Among these are the extent of the catch being utilized for domestic consumption; the respective contributions of participants to conservation and management of the stocks, including the provision by them of accurate data and their contribution to the conduct of scientific research in the convention area; the special circumstances of a State which is surrounded by the EEZ of other States and has a limited exclusive economic zone of its own; the needs of small island developing States (SIDS), territories and possessions in the Convention Area whose economies, food supplies and livelihoods are overwhelmingly dependent on the exploitation of marine living resources; the needs of coastal communities which are dependent mainly on fishing for the stocks; the fishing interests and aspirations of coastal States, particularly small island developing States, and territories and possessions, in whose areas of national jurisdiction the stocks also occur; and the record of compliance by the participants with conservation and management measures.

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Hawaii and the US Territory of American Samoa, a WCPFC Participating Territory, have felt the brunt of the recent closures due to the US quotas developed by the WCPFC. Ninety-seven percent of the Hawaii longline bigeye tuna catch is consumed domestically, according to the United Fishing Agency, Honolulu's iconic fish auction. The Hawaii longline fishery operates in a region of the Pacific with the lowest impact to the bigeye stock.

The Territory of American Samoa is surrounded on all sides by the EEZ of other nations. In addition, 25 percent of the US EEZ surrounding American Samoa is currently closed to US purse seine and longline vessels due to the Rose Atoll Marine National Monument, created by Presidential executive order, and the Large Vessel Prohibited Area for pelagic fishing vessels over 50 feet in length established by the Council.

A detailed analysis of the dependence of American Samoa on US purse seine vessels delivering to Pago Pago canneries is forthcoming from NMFS. The US government recently denied a petition by Tri Marine Management Company requesting that it open the high seas and US EEZ to US purse seiners delivering at least half of their catch to tuna processing facilities in American Samoa. NMFS said it needed the economic analysis of the impact of the closure and issued an advance notice of proposed rulemaking with the petition denial.

Congresswoman Aumua Amata of American Samoa expressed her disappointment in the decision by NMFS. Addressing the Council yesterday, she said that American Samoa is in dire straits. "It goes back to US government making decisions that are detrimental to American Samoa. We've had enough of it. It has got to stop. We don't have IBM, Coca Cola or Silicon Valley for job creation. We just have the fisheries."

Va'amua Henry Seseparasara, coordinator of the American Samoa Fishery Task Force, said that the petition Tri Marine filed with NMFS was made as a member of the Task Force. The Task Force was set up earlier this year by Gov. Lolo Matalasi Moliga to protect and sustain the competitive advantage of the Territory's two canneries. The Task Force includes representation of both StarKist Samoa and Samoa Tuna Processors, a wholly owned subsidiary of Tri Marine.

Lt. Gov. Lemanu P. Mauga in his remarks to the Council yesterday said "StarKist and Tri Marine are our government's life support in terms of our economy and jobs and our people's social growth. A good number of American Samoa's population works at StarKist and Tri Marine." He asked the Council to imagine what would happen if these two canneries ceased operating because of the federal mandate to raise the minimum wage, the decision to restrict US-based purse-seine vessels on the high seas and exclusive economic zone or American Samoa not being afforded the same opportunity as other SIDS.

The Council recommended that the US government ensure that the US Participating Territories to WCPFC are linked with SIDS in terms of WCPFC conservation and management measures and are afforded the same recognition and opportunities as other SIDS in the region.

Christinna Lutu-Sanchez of the Tautai Longline Association voiced support for all of American Samoa fisheries. "It is about access to fishing grounds. Yes, we are great citizens of the world. But we don't want to sacrifice our US fleet for the whole entire world." She noted that tuna is a global commodity and American Samoa fisheries impact a small portion of it.

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As attested to by the recent area closures of the Hawaii longline fishery for bigeye tuna and the US purse seine fishery on the high seas and in the US EEZ, US monitoring and compliance with WCPFC conservation and management measures is unsparing if not exemplary. The US longline vessels in Hawaii targeting tuna are required to have 20 percent observer coverage and those targeting swordfish are required to have 100 percent observer coverage. On the other hand, the WCPFC requires a minimum of 5 percent observer coverage, and there is no mechanism in the WCPFC to sanction non-compliance. Council members voiced their frustration with the lack of compliance and monitoring in the fisheries of other nations.

After much deliberation, the Council took action on 20 items related to pelagic and international fisheries, the majority related to the WCPFC.

Other highlights yesterday included Council recommendations regarding redevelopment of the small-scale alia fishery in American Samoa, which was destroyed by a tsunami in 2009; the presentation of a \$50,000 check from the Council to the American Samoa Port Administration as the first installment to develop a longline dock at Malaloa; the swearing in of Michael Duenas and Michael Goto as reappointed Council members fulfilling the obligatory seats of Guam and Hawaii, respectively; and recognition of Lauvao Stephen Haleck as this year's Richard Shiroma Award recipient for his outstanding contributions to the Council. High Talking Chief Lauvao (from Aunu'u) was a former Council member and an active member of the Council's Advisory Panel when he passed away last month. His wife, Melesete Grohse-Haleck, accepted the award on his behalf.

The Council meeting continues today at the Lee Auditorium in Utulei and is being streamed live at <https://wprfmc.webex.com/join/info.wpcouncilnoaa.gov>. For more on the meeting, go to www.wpcouncil.org, email info@wpcouncil.org or phone (808) 522-8220. The Council was established by Congress under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act in 1976 to manage domestic fisheries operating seaward of State waters around Hawai'i, American Samoa, Guam, the CNMI and the US Pacific Island Remote Island Areas. Recommendations by the Council are transmitted to the Secretary of Commerce for final approval.

Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council: Appointees by the Secretary of Commerce from nominees selected by American Samoa, CNMI, Guam and Hawai'i governors: Michael Duenas, Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association (vice chair); Edwin Ebisui (Hawai'i) (chair); Michael Goto, United Fishing Agency Ltd. (Hawai'i); John Gourley, Micronesian Environmental Services (CNMI) (vice chair); Julie Leialoha, biologist (Hawai'i); Dr. Claire Tuia Pomele, Port Administration (American Samoa); McGrew Rice, commercial and charter fisherman (Hawai'i) (vice chair); and William Sword, recreational fisherman (American Samoa) (vice chair). Designated state officials: Suzanne Case, Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources; Dr. Ruth Matagi-Tofiga, American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources; Richard Seman, CNMI Department of Lands and Natural Resources; and Matt Sablan, Guam Department of Agriculture. Designated federal officials: Matthew Brown, USFWS Pacific Islands Refuges and Monuments Office; William Gibbons-Fly, US Department of State; RADM Vincent B. Atkins, US Coast Guard 14th District; and Michael Tosatto, NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office.