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Report of the American Samoa Archipelago FEP Advisory Panel Meeting

Friday, October 18, 2019

Sadie's by the Sea Conference Room

Utulei, Tutuila, American Samoa

1. Welcome and Introductions

Will Sword, American Samoa Advisory Panel (AP) Vice Chair, opened the meeting. AP members in attendance included: Nonu Tuisamoa, Krista Corry

Other AP members in attendance included Gil Kualii (Hawaii AP Vice Chair), Ken Borja (Guam AP Vice Chair), and Clay Tam (AP Chair).

Also in attendance was: Joshua DeMello, Nate Ilaoa, Sylvia Spalding and Marlowe Sabater (Council Staff); Evan Howell (NMFS PIFSC); Michael Duenas, John Gourley, Ed Watamura, Brian Peck (Council Members)

Public in attendance included Dean Sensui, Kurt Kawamoto, Eddie Ebisui, Leia DeMello, Tony Langkilde and Peter Lamy

2. Review of the last AP meeting and recommendations

The Vice Chair reviewed the last AP meeting report and recommendations. At the last AP meeting the AP reviewed the Bigeye Tuna limit and allocation, recommending the Council allow for a transfer of up to 2,000 mt for allocation with a 3-year limit for allocation. The Council recommended a 1,000 mt limit. The AP also recommended the Council work with DMWR, bottomfish fishermen and NMFS to explore alternative data collection. The Council will be meeting with bottomfish fishermen on Monday to discuss bottomfish, including data collection.

3. 180th Council Meeting Action Items and Issues

A. Territorial Bottomfish Stock Assessment

Council staff presented a summary of the Territory Bottomfish Stock Assessment, providing the species, assessment method and results. He said that the stock assessment was published in 2019 and used creel survey data and commercial receipt book data, utilizing a JAMBA model. He noted that the results of the stock assessment indicate that the fishery may be experiencing overfishing and be overfished. What this means is that the Annual Catch Limit projection that was produced last year was 115,000 lbs. at 50 percent risk of overfishing, but the new stock assessment, at the same risk, would be 8,000 lbs. He said that the review of the stock assessment and the SSC agreed that this is Best Scientific Information Available. The result is that the Council will need to develop a rebuilding plan for the overfished fishery, with 15 months to initiate the process and have the plan done two years after that. A bigger impact is on projects that will be funded by the Federal government, as it will need to be considered in the environmental assessments.

An AP member asked if the data being collected isn't correct, how you assess that. NMFS PIFSC said that it is the next step in order to improve the data used for fishery management.

Council staff said that it is important to provide outreach to the community on the importance of data collection. An app is being developed to assist in this effort. He also said that there is a local requirement for a permit and to report for commercial fishing. The AP member said the integrity of the data is important. Council staff replied that without good data, the uncertainty around the data is a lot larger.

The AS Vice Chair asked if the stock assessment included all of the areas that were fished. NMFS PIFSC said that those types of questions need to be brought up with the assessment scientists and that type of insight to the fishery would be helpful. The Vice Chair said that the scary part is that having overfishing and overfished definitions contribute to larger management ideas like sanctuaries.

An AP member asked who does the rebuilding plan. Staff replied that the Council is required to do the plan and will have analytical support from NMFS. Many things are taken into consideration when developing the plan, including socio-economics. The form of the plan is unknown but there are requirements that staff are looking at. The AP member asked if the local government will be involved. Staff answered yes, there will be scoping with the local agencies and community to solicit information.

Another AP member asked if all of the data provided comes from the local agency. Staff replied both the local agency and the dealers.

The AP Chair noted that the question for the scientists is “what data is needed for the stock assessment?” He said that you can’t run a diesel engine with regular gasoline. He noted that this is the opportunity for the fishermen to ask these types of questions to the scientists at the bottomfish community meeting.

An AP member said that it was obvious that there was a huge discrepancy in the data that was provided to the AP on the fishery. He said that the numbers were so large, there was no way that it was reflective of the fishery. One problem with the data included the registration for the boats but he said that at an early AP meeting they saw this coming from the bad data.

The discussion by the AP centered on the data being collected for the fishery. They said that getting information from the village fishermen isn’t impossible but *there needs to be better outreach on getting good data. The AP agreed that they need to let the Council know that the data needs to be improved.*

B. Pacific Islands Fisheries Monitoring and Assessment Planning Summit

Council staff provided a review of the Pacific Islands Fisheries Monitoring and Assessment Planning Summit (PIFMAPS) held in August 2019. The PIFMAPS was held to review the status of the data collection from the US territories in the Pacific and provide recommendations for improving fisheries data. Staff noted the long-term goal of PIFMAS is to provide a long-term data collection program that is robust enough to support stock assessment and real-time fishery data reporting. The results of PIFMAPS included directing the inshore creel survey data collection to the right program (i.e. Marine Recreational Information Program); Mandatory

reporting for all fisheries, with a priority for bottomfish; and explore the use of electronic reporting, including self-reporting by fishermen in near real-time.

The AP asked what it would take to develop mandatory reporting. Staff reported that CNMI and Guam both looked at legislation, but for American Samoa, DMWR would need to do administrative regulations to implement any mandatory reporting. The AP noted that even if a mandatory reporting system is put in place, there will need to be a lot of outreach on why it is needed and how they would need to do it.

An AP member noted the need to make sure that fisher reports and dealer reports will need to be looked at to ensure that there is no double counting. Another AP member noted that there are many fishermen that fish in Federal waters so it is important to follow-up with DMWR on their plans to implement these recommendations.

Another AP member noted that the commercial receipt books are difficult to report on because while there are fields like price-per-pound that are required, businesses may not want to report that. As a business, they don't want to tell everyone how much they spend on fish or make on fish and that data should be confidential. These types of things would scare people away from making good data. One AP member agreed to help spearhead the change in the code for mandatory reporting.

4. American Samoa Reports

Council staff reported on Council activities and issues being worked on in American Samoa. With the Council Meeting being held in American Samoa, there was an effort to provide education and outreach to the community for the meeting. He said that the Council supported the 2nd Annual Pago Pago Open Fishing Tournament as well as a poster contest on Palolo for the Fishers Forum. He invited the AP to participate in the events and the Council Meeting.

5. AP Exchange

The Guam Vice Chair provided information about the bottomfish stock assessment in Guam, they saw that the problem was the change in the model that changed everything because the data was the same. He added that there may be other problems adding to the stock status as well. He also stressed the problem with the stock complex including both shallow and deep species and said that the stock assessment should have waited until that was fixed in the FEP before assessing the bottomfish stocks.

The AP Chair provided background on the Hawaii bottomfish fishery and the data collection involved in the Hawaii bottomfish stock assessment. He noted that different reporting systems, including a commercial marine license, dealer report, and bottomfish vessel registry. The effort took a few years, but the true stakeholders are the fishermen as they are on the water every day. He said that at the end of the day, it's about having a sustainable fishery and while fishermen fought it in the beginning, the experience has been rewarding.

The Vice Chairs offered their assistance in any of the issues, particularly bottomfish issues.

6. Island Fishery Issues & Activities

Council staff noted the US Coast Guard (USCG) rotation issue where USCG staff are stationed in American Samoa. He said that the concerns are that personnel stationed in American Samoa all come in at the same time for a one year deployment. This affects the local agency people and fishermen as by the time the personnel is acclimated to the community, they are transferred elsewhere. Staff explained that the USCG is working on addressing this issue through community meetings that week and will present its results at the Council Meeting.

The Vice Chair said that this was brought up by the AP early this year and that he was glad to see movement on the AP's recommendation. He also noted that the Admiral is coming over at the end of the month. It was noted that there were certain requirements for USCG personnel stationed in American Samoa, which is why the length of stay is difficult to increase. There was also a need to look at where that detailing would need to be changed. The AP suggested that a staggered rotation of USCG personnel may suffice.

Council staff reviewed that the projects that the AP recommended under the Sustainable Fisheries Fund and said that funding was approved by DMWR and NMFS. He said that the longline fresh fish project, bottomfish training project, and American Samoa education and outreach project, are being looked at with DMWR on how these projects will be carried out. Qualifications for participating in these projects are being developed and staff requested participation by the AP in the project development.

AP members heard that there may be waning interest in the projects but the DMWR should put out the solicitation notices for the projects to be certain. An AP member said that the longline fishing this year has been tough and the ability to change over from frozen to fresh is not easy and would be a gamble. The longliners are provided support from the cannery in the tough times so it would be difficult for some fishermen to make that commitment. Another AP member noted that market requires good looking fish that are not damaged, not spoiled/burned so the project to train fishermen will be helpful. AP members agreed to work with Council staff to engage DMWR on providing information to the projects.

7. Public Comments

Ed Watamura commented that the Hawaii bottomfish stock assessment working group was a success because NMFS didn't have an idea of how the fishermen fished and what caused all the changes in the data. He said that the importance of reporting should also include HOW to report, noting that CPUE should be correct to when the lines are in the water and not when they left port and returned. Reporting correctly is just as important.

Michael Duenas commented that it shouldn't be on the fishermen to push the governments to improve the data. The data streams are funded by the government, so there is a way for the Federal government to do it.

Peter Lamy noted that he is working on fresh fish exports from American Samoa and said that Hawaiian Airlines has made an investment but there has been zero return as of now. He was unsure how much longer he is willing to stick it out but would like to get the support and participation from the American Samoa fishermen. He said that bottomfish might not be viable

but there is an opportunity for pelagics and to provide more for fishermen while being a model for sustainable fisheries.

8. Discussion and Recommendations

The American Samoa Advisory Panel made the following recommendations:

- **The AS AP recommended the Council assist DMWR with improving the fishery data collection in American Samoa. Further, the AP recommended the Council assist with providing outreach to the American Samoa fishing community on the importance of collecting correct data.**
- **The AS AP recommended the Council request DMWR to provide a plan on following-up with recommendations to improve fishery data that resulted from PIFMAPS.**
- **The AS AP recommended the Council request DMWR to expedite the SFF projects to improve fisheries in American Samoa.**

9. Other Business

There was no other business.