



## **182<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council**

**June 23-25, 2020**

Via WebEx Conferencing and  
Department of Port Administration Airport Conference Room  
Tafuna Village, American Samoa

### **D. Community Activities and Issues Report**

#### **1. Catch-It-Log-It Self Reporting App**

In October the Council heard from fishermen at the 180<sup>th</sup> Council meeting in American Samoa and at a public meeting who strongly voiced their disagreement with the determination that the American Samoa bottomfish fishery is overfished and experiencing overfishing. That stock assessment also provided highlighted some of the limitations of current data collection in the territory. In response to those statements and to address the region's data-poor areas, the Council has developed an app that will allow fishermen in American Samoa and the other US Pacific Island areas to report their catch in near real time. The app will assist the Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR) and other island government fishery management agencies to address concerns of the fishermen that current fishery data does not adequately capture the fisheries.

The app is not new to some of our local fishermen. During that October meeting, the app was first tested by four volunteer boat captains who used the app during the Council's 2<sup>nd</sup> Pago Pago Open Fishing Tournament during the 180<sup>th</sup> Council Meeting in American Samoa. The staff has worked with a development contractor to iron out issues that those initial beta tests identified and now has a working app to roll out in the region. There are many benefits to the implementation of this self-reporting app.

Fishermen can now self-report catch and trip data and not have to wait to be interviewed. The app will also help to reduce the sources of errors, improving the accuracy of reporting. The Council also designed the app to create an information loop – and the information provided by fishermen can be given back to them. There is also no need for physical servers as the app is cloud-based. This also assists the agencies that may have capacity limitations. During the PIFMAPS summit last August a recommendation was made to utilize self-reporting combined with mandatory license and reporting regulations, while also identifying other technology to shore up data collection.

#### **2. Bottomfish Data Workshop for American Samoa Fishermen**

To assist DMWR with the development of their bottomfish rebuilding plan, the Council will launch a massive outreach campaign. This campaign will include workshops for the fishermen of American Samoa to become proficient in using the Catch-It-Log-It app and a media blitz to get the word out about the need to improve data collection and promote self-reporting of trip and

catch data via the app. The workshop will also provide an opportunity for local fishermen to provide direct input to DMWR, the Council and the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) to assist in the rebuilding plan for the bottomfish complex that is now categorized as overfished and experiencing over-fishing. This determination comes as a result of the most recent bottomfish assessment for the territory which PIFSC conducted in 2019.

Radio ads, video PSAs and infographics are all being produced and will be presented in both English and Samoan language to get the word out to the communities and address the issue of making data collection more robust for the local fisheries. The plan is for the outreach campaign to kickoff in American Samoa in July with Guam and the CNMI being next in the month of August. Travel restrictions have been a challenge for these plans due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the local Advisory Panel recently recommended at their May meeting that they could assist with the process.

### **3. AS Longline Diversification Project**

In May, the Tautai-O-Samoa Longline and Fishing Association of American Samoa submitted a proposal to diversify vessels of their fleet. The association is made up of US vessels with American Samoa Longline Limited Entry Permits, the majority are owned by local residents of American Samoa. The fleet delivers tuna to StarKist Samoa's cannery and the fish they caught is delivered completely to local markets.

The fleet is seeking to diversify in response to the decline in catch for the albacore they target recent years. Additionally, operating costs have increased and market prices have decreased, exacerbating the fleet's dire situation. COVID-19 and a measles outbreak have only worsened the association's situation and travel restrictions have made things very difficult for the vessel owners.

With these challenges affecting the fleet, the owners have chosen to diversify their operations, and will outfit certain vessels of the fleet with the gear to do pelagic trolling for albacore. Recent trends in the albacore jig fishery in southern waters have been positive and may provide a lifeline to the fleet which is doing its part to deliver US caught tuna to fulfill federal requirements for the US military and school lunch programs. The fleet will look to begin jig fishing later this year. The recent jig season where they will be fishing has been mid-November through the spring. This outfitting of the vessels will allow them to jig during those months and still longline in the other months (April through November).

### **4. Flake Ice for Pago Pago Harbor Coming Soon**

Advisors and fishermen have expressed the need for flaked ice to improve the quality of fish caught by the boats based in Pago Pago Harbor. Currently fishermen primarily utilize cubed ice (party ice) which melts quickly and doesn't allow fishermen to pack catch in ice completely. When Samoa Tuna Processors (STP) suspended their tuna canning operations in American Samoa, a local company was able to purchase a large ice flaker from the company. The unit is able to produce up to 5 tons per day and would produce enough ice to supply the alia and recreational fishing boats based in Pago Pago Harbor.

Being able to pack the fish well in flaked ice would allow for longer fishing trips and most importantly, improve the quality of fish for local markets. The company also has procured multiple refrigerated storage containers which will be used with the ice flaker to store ice for fishermen to buy at their convenience.

Currently there is only one ice flaker in operation which is owned by the Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources. This machine produces a small amount of ice per day and the department and the company that houses the equipment do not have the ability to provide ice to fishermen at the hours they are needed, i.e., early morning and late night fishing trips.

## **5. ASG Development Projects**

### **a. Malaloa Marina Dock Extension Groundbreaking & Construction**

In 2014 the Council responded to a request from the American Samoa Government's Department of Port Administration's (DPA) to address the issue of a severe lack of docking space in Pago Pago Harbor. The issue had most affected the American Samoa longline fleet which was forced to shuffle their vessels between the Port main dock, the Malaloa Marina dock and the StarKist cannery dock whenever larger vessels such as fuel or containers ships or cruise liners entered port. Additionally, the Malaloa Marina Dock was constructed with sport fish restoration funds which prevented commercial vessels from utilizing the dock. The Council supported DPA's plan to construct an extension to that existing Malaloa Marina Dock with Sustainable Fisheries Funds (SFF) to conduct a feasibility study of a dock extension, conduct a benthic survey of the area, and hire a contractor to develop the design plans to extend the dock.

The local longline fleet had also requested relief from the lack of dock space which put a strain on them to continually shuffle their vessels. Additionally, the American Samoa Advisory Panel had recommended that the local government make the longline dock project a priority and have it included in its most recent CIP projects list to alleviate the pressure on both the American Samoa Port Administration and Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources.

DPA worked with a pair of contractors to complete the design phase with the SFF funds provided by the Council. The design phase was completed and a 450 ft long and 40 ft wide extension will be constructed creating a t-shaped dock. The building phase will see the construction of a steel sheet pile bulkhead jetty and the dredging of the landward basin area. The estimated cost of construction of the dock is \$3 million and the Silva Group has been identified as the contractor to carry out the work. According to the Port Administration, the construction will take between 8 months and a year to complete. The government has identified that Capital Improvement Funds will be utilized to carry out the construction of the dock extension. On May 7, 2020 DPA hosted a groundbreaking ceremony at the Malaloa Marina dock to mark the beginning of the construction phase and completion of the project's design phase. The Port Administration hosted the event and invited Governor Lolo Moliga, Council Chairman Archie Soliai and representatives of the Tautai-O-Samoa Longline and Fishing Association among others to take part in the ceremonial first shoveling during the groundbreaking.

**b. Alia Tele Training and Incubator Program**

The Alia Tele development project is a Council-initiated project done in partnership with ASG. The Council previously contracted a Fisheries Development Officer in American Samoa who created the framework for a new alia vessel design, a fishermen lending scheme and a training program. The project was then handed over to the local government. The government has since developed a new vessel design to replace the aging alia fleet with Armstrong Brothers Ship Builders in Washington State to create a design for a new *alia tele* (large alia). The new vessel will allow longer trips and allow fishermen to cover much larger distances, while also allowing them to catch more fish in the process.

ASDOC has submitted a revised proposal to the Economic Development Administration (EDA) to fund the project. The department had initially proposed for a single vessel to be constructed to use as a training platform. However after roundtable meetings with representatives from EDA, the proposal was re-submitted for the construction of 3 to 4 alia tele. One of the vessels would still be utilized by ASDOC to create a training program aimed at captains and crew members. Those who successfully completed training would then be able to be part of an incubator program to assist with the development of a commercial fishing operation.