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COUNCIL

Report of the American Samoa Archipelago FEP Advisory Panel Meeting

Saturday, May 30, 2020

10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

1. Welcome and Introductions

American Samoa Advisory Panel (AP) Vice Chair Will Sword welcomed all the members and attendees to the meeting. He gave an overview of the Webex meeting protocol and introduced the members of the Advisory Panel (AP) present – Joseph Fa’aita, Samuel Meleisea, Nonu Tuisamoa and Brian Thompson.

Also in attendance was Council staff Nate Ilaoa, Joshua DeMello, Mark Mitsuyasu, Asuka Ishizaki, and Marlowe Sabater, as well as Council Contractor Thomas Remington.

Members of the public included Stuart Chikami and Joe O’Malley.

2. Review of Last AP Meeting and Recommendations

Council staff provided a summary of the Council issues and recommendations from the last American Samoa Advisory Panel meeting held this past February. Staff also summarized the recommendations that were made at that meeting and provided an update on the status. He noted that the Council took up many of their recommendations including the recommendations on the territory bigeye catch limit specification and AP membership. The Council was continuing to work with the fishing community on improving the bottomfish fishery data collection.

3. Council Issues

A. Specifying Annual Catch Limits for American Samoa Bottomfish

Council staff provided a presentation on the specification of annual catch limits for American Samoa’s bottomfish fishery. He talked about the process for specifying catch limits and went over ACL alternatives for the American Samoa BMUS. He informed the AP members that the allowable biological catch (ABC) for American Samoa would be 2,000 pounds per year, a sharp decline from previous years. Sabater also stated that it would take at least a year of improved data collection to make a difference and discussed Council plans to conduct training with fishermen in the territory on use of the Catchit Logit self-reporting app to do so. To do this as quickly as possible, fishermen in American Samoa should be trained on the app and submitting data before the end of the year.

In the discussion, it was suggested that DMWR needed to be a more active participant in the Council and PIFSC data improvement process. A member referenced the AP’s previous suggestion for a letter to be drafted by members of the American Samoa Task Force to the Chair, Solip Hong informing him of the issues with the grim outlook for the bottomfish fishery and data collection and requesting a strategy to address them. It was also suggested that the AP should step in and assist the Council staff with training for the self-reporting app considering the continued flight suspension and possibility that it extends past the scheduled July dates. Council staff explained that the staff is looking at the best options for carrying out the training in

American Samoa with the suspension of flights. Flights have been suspended at least until July 1, 2020 and there is no guarantee that they will begin after that date.

B. Pacific Remote Island Area Marine Conservation Plan

Council staff presented on the PRIA Marine Conservation Plan (MCP) noting that the Council will be looking to approve the MCP at its 182nd meeting in June. The staff provided a background on the MCP and its process and noted the additions made by USFWS and the State of Hawaii. He reviewed the projects and asked for comments from the AP.

C. Mandatory Electronic Reporting

Council staff provided a presentation on mandatory longline electronic reporting for the American Samoa longline fishery. This included a description of the issue of deciding when to implement a mandatory reporting system for the American Samoa longline fishery and also when that system should be mandatory. The staff member also explained the ELog-it system and how vessel crews would capture and submit data, and detailed possible timelines for optional electronic reporting, phasing in E-Logs and full implementation.

During the discussion, the question was raised as to whether electronic reporting would be a requirement for permit renewal for longline vessels. Council staff member said he would find out and let the AP know. The members were also curious if the requirement would apply to the class A smaller alia longline boats as well (these are the American Samoa Longline Limited Entry permitted vessels that are 40 feet in length or less).

One of the AP members inquired about whether American Samoa and the longline vessels had a system in place already that would be able to adequately transmit the information required, or if there would have to be work done to get the boats' connectivity to a sufficient level to electronically report data. Council staff replied that the electronic reporting method will run on the current Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) which is satellite-based. He added that being able to report electronically would help managers to track the quota of a fishery in real-time, and that was a benefit because the Hawaii longline fishery lost nearly 90 metric tons using the paper system.

Regarding a question about the status of the waiver for vessels to have observers, Council staff member said that the current waiver would expire on the 31st of May and would be re-evaluated. It would likely be extended for the American Samoa vessels.

The Chair recognized an American Samoa longline owner who asked whether the fleet would still be required to continue paper logbooks when electronic reporting becomes mandatory. The staff was unsure but said that the question would be raised the implementation team and it was likely that keeping paper logbooks would still be needed as this would be the only backup system for tracking catch data.

The members discussed when the best time for electronic reporting implementation for longline vessels might be. One of the members asked whether the implementation team had made a recommendation for that implementation. Another member recommended that the AP should also make a recommendation. After a discussion, members agreed that the longline owners

should be given a say in the decision of a timeline. The Chair asked one of the members of the public who was a longline owner for his thoughts on implementation. That owner said that electronic reporting was already being done on the purse seine vessels and it was beneficial. He said that implementation for the longline fleet would depend on how quickly training could be conducted. He added that there will be mistakes and they will be resolved as it's used, but it was important to train the crews on any electronic reporting as soon as possible.

D. 2019 Annual SAFE Reports

A Council contractor provided an overview of the American Samoa pelagic and bottomfish fishery of the AS SAFE report. The report detailed the fishery performance for pelagic and bottomfish catch, looking at effort and participation. 2019 was a record low for albacore catch, however there was an increase in revenue per sets. For the bottomfish fishery, there were increases in pounds sold and revenue with a slight decline in fish price. AP members were also given a summary of some ocean and ecosystem variables that affect the fisheries – CO₂, pH, El Nino, Hurricanes, surface temperature, coral thermal stress, chlorophyll-a, rainfall, and sea level.

One of the AP members asked about the declining albacore catch numbers and whether it was known where the albacore is going. The contractor said there was not spatial catch information included but it would be possible to ask about south pacific albacore ecosystem indicators. A staff member added that it might be a good idea to inquire of the Pelagic Plan Team about those indicators.

E. Update on Data Reporting App and Launch Plans

Council staff provided a presentation on the Council's Catch It Log It App suite which will allow fishermen to submit their own catch and trip data electronically. There are issues facing fisheries in American Samoa and concerns that the current data collection system does not accurately capture the fishery. The presentation explained the user interface as well as how the backend works. A walkthrough was provided for the app process from the users' end and highlighted the main benefits of the app – reporting in real-time, increased reporting accuracy, direct feedback loop with fishermen, and not requiring physical servers with its cloud-based database.

One AP member said the app was a good measure and would improve the information on the economic side of the fisheries. Another AP member agreed and asked about the compatibility of the app – whether it was for IOS or Android operating systems. The staff member explained that the app would not be available in the Apple App Store or Google Play Store. Users would be provided a link to register and install the app online, and once installed, the app would run on both IOS and Android operating systems. An AP member asked how the app would transfer data if the fishing boats were out of range of the two internet service providers in American Samoa. Staff replied that the information would be queued and automatically transmitted when the device was connected to the internet. Another AP member stressed that the AP should begin assisting the Council immediately in getting local fishermen registered for the app and install it on devices.

F. Considerations for Developing Reasonable and Prudent Measures and/or Reasonable and Prudent Alternatives for the American Samoa Longline Fishery

Council staff provided a report on the considerations for developing Reasonable and Prudent Measures (RPM) or Reasonable and Prudent Alternatives (RPA) for the American Samoa longline fishery. The focus will be on giant manta rays, oceanic whitetip sharks and leatherback turtles. The presentation also shared the Pelagic Plan Team's discussion on improving handling practices to reduce post-hooking mortality, difficulties with identification, exploring impacts from closed areas on fishery performance, and recommending working groups to generate a roadmap for analyses and potential measures under the MSA and ESA.

The question was asked if there were any changes regarding the MSA that would potentially impact American Samoa. The Council staff member explained that with the oceanic whitetip sharks, it will be driven by international impacts and work would be done to develop measures through the MSA. The staffer then added that the AP had the option of prioritizing a focus on the MSA.

4. American Samoa Reports

Council staff gave a summary of the American Samoa reports for the 182nd Council Meeting in June. On the legislative section, the reports would detail the CARES Act funding relief for the commercial fisheries and the American Samoa Congresswoman's request to the Department of Interior for aid to the fisheries. There will also be a cannery update providing details on the tuna industry impacts from COVID-19.

The Community Activities report details ASG development projects, including the Malaloa Marina Dock Extension project which broke ground in May and the government's Alia Tele project proposed to SBA for funding. Also included in that report will be outreach and education items – the AP's Curriculum and Community Outreach project in collaboration with the Department of Education and DMWR, the US Pacific Territories Capacity-Building Scholarship Program, and the upcoming Summer High School Fisheries and Marine Resource Management course.

Members discussed the Malaloa Marina project timeline. Ilaoa said the Port Administration, which will be in charge of construction oversight, had provided an 8 to 12-month project timeframe estimate. One member felt that this was optimistic and would likely be closer to a year and a half.

5. Report on American Samoa Archipelago FEP AP Plan Activities

The Vice Chair reported on the Advisory Panel's Curriculum and Community Outreach Project. Under the project, 12-episode short PSAs would be produced. The short episodes will be focused on the fisheries of American Samoa. The project will also include teacher workshops with local Coral Reef Advisory Group agencies and the Department of Education to introduce the PSAs and provide educational resources for teachers to introduce fisheries lessons into their classroom plans. The project will include an outreach strategy that will allow the AP members to conduct focused outreach at events such as fishing tournaments and outreach festivals.

The Vice Chair also discussed a Manu'a High School Fishing Tournament and acknowledged the AP member who had developed the proposal. He said the proposal was part of the

Sustainable Fishing Fund XII application and if approved, would be a K-12th grade fishing tournament held in Manu'a.

6. Island Fishery Issues and Activities

One of the AP members asked about the possibility of obtaining regional catch data to compare American Samoa's catch to their neighbors. A member of the Council staff said countries will likely not be willing to share catch data.

An AP member suggested that the AP needed to do a better job of communication with the longline owners on a regular basis since they were not on the AP anymore. Another member agreed and said that should include Class A longline permit holders as well (alia longline owners).

The members also discussed the Executive Order from Trump requesting the nation's Fishery Management Councils submit prioritized lists of recommended actions to reduce burdens on domestic fisheries. One member suggested that the removal of fishing prohibitions in the Marine National Monuments was the most important and the AP should make this a recommendation. The members in attendance agreed.

7. Public Comment

Joseph O'Malley of the NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center introduced himself and informed the AP that he was coming to American Samoa to conduct a life history project. He would provide further details as they were made available.

8. Discussion and Recommendations

The American Samoa Advisory Panel made the following recommendations:

- **AS Advisory Panel recommended the Council request DMWR work with the American Samoa Fisheries Task Force to address issues with data collection that have led to the current BMUS status of overfished and experiencing overfishing, and coordinate with the Council and PIFSC to develop a strategy to address those issues.**
- **AS Advisory Panel recommended the Council work with the AP to identify ways the members can assist with training fishermen in AS on using the Catchit Logit self-reporting data app in the event of extended suspension of flights into AS.**
- **AS Advisory Panel recommended the Council request the Pelagic PT look at South Pacific albacore indicators, provide more information on spatial catches within the region including American Samoa, and investigate ecosystem drivers for inclusion in the SAFE Report.**
- **AS Advisory Panel recommended the Council request NMFS PIFSC work with staff to convene a meeting with AS longline owners to discuss inclusion of American Samoa in the electronic reporting implementation plan and to include an American Samoa representative in its Electronic Technologies Steering Committee.**
- **The AS Advisory Panel recommended the Council request NMFS to work with the American Samoa longline fishery to begin implementation of electronic reporting as soon as possible and set a target date of October 1, 2021 for mandatory electronic reporting.**

- **AS Advisory Panel recommended the removal of fishing prohibitions of the Marine National Monuments in the Pacific as the highest priority to address President Trump’s EO on Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth.**

9. Other Business

Council staff provided an update on 2021 BET specifications and options that the Council may look at for next year. He noted that the BET is not overfished nor experiencing overfishing. The AP was concerned that Guam was not participating in the territorial quota. AP members said that the Council Members from Guam needs to continue pushing the Governor to participate in the quota because Guam is losing out on the funding.