



183rd Meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council

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Via WebEx Conferencing

AMERICAN SAMOA MOTU RIPOTI

Longline Fleet Diversification Project

The American Samoa longline fleet has historically had its fishing season between the months of April/May to December. 2020 has been a difficult year for the fleet as a number of issues have affected the fleet's ability to go fishing. COVID-19 restrictions on flights to and from the territory have caused a major hurdle for the boats to fill crews for fishing trips. Additionally, a number of severe weather events has forced the fleet to either remain tied up or return to port for safety. When the boats have been out fishing they have not had much success landing albacore with low catch numbers reported.

The U.S. flagged longline fleet based in American Samoa has faced many challenges in the past decade. Steadily declining catch and increased operating costs have resulted in tough times for the vessel owners of the fishery. In an effort to assist the fleet in diversifying its fishing operations, the Council supported a project with Sustainable Fisheries Funds (SFF) to outfit a number of vessels in the fleet with pelagic trolling gear to conduct jigging in southern waters. Those fishing grounds will take the vessels out of the US/American Samoa Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and under the project, each vessel will make the requisite adjustments to make that extended fishing trip.

The fleet currently targets albacore tuna with deep-set longline gear. All of the albacore landed is delivered to StarKist Samoa cannery. Other pelagic species landed are sold to local businesses and given away to family and community members. The vessels are owned by American Samoa families and families with longstanding ties to the territory. Historically, the longline albacore season has been between the months of April and December. The jig season for albacore is typically from mid-November to early spring and the fleet's participating vessels will look to explore the viability of trolling after the longline season is complete to provide the tuna to StarKist from the fleet that it needs to fulfill US military and school lunch contracts.

In October, the owners of the five participating vessels submitted checklists outlining the needs of each boat to meet the requirements to begin jig fishing. All of those vessels are members of the Tautai O Samoa Longline and Fishing Association. The owners are currently working with

Council staff and the Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources to complete the prerequisite tasks to begin procurement of the gear and services for the boats. The fleet is hoping to join the jig season next fall.

Alia Fishing Update

Currently there are five alia owners awaiting a settlement for the repairs that caused hull damage due to improper paint used at the Shipyard Authority. The alia owners report that the case will most likely go to court and not be settled. There are five owners unable to make repairs on their own.

In the last two months, alia fishers have experienced large amounts of yellowfin and skipjack tuna. Since the previous Council Meeting in September, the weather has been cool and rainy and these conditions are historically connected to high catch rates of wahoo and yellowfin tuna. There are currently only four alia vessels trolling or bottomfish fishing on a regular basis, when the weather has permitted. A number of days with high winds have resulted in fewer fishing trips for the alia fishery during the months of October and November.

The American Samoa Alia Fishing Association (ASFA) is awaiting news on applications for CARES Act COVID-19 relief funds. DMWR has announced that their spending plan has been approved by the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission. They have begun accepting applications. The Council previously recommended that DMWR provide information for qualified applicants.

There was a small palolo spawn event after the full moon in early October. There were very small amounts around Tutuila Island with a larger spawn in the Manu'a Islands. A much larger spawning event took place after the full moon in early November. Palolo has been plentiful with local seafood vendors. The spawn occurs seven days after the full moons in October and November.

CatchIt LogIt & SellIt LogIt App

The Council staff has worked with the contractor who was hired to assist with registration of users, training and data management for the app to initiate the training process in American Samoa. Together with the DMWR staff, they planned and carried out training for administrators, training assistants (Advisory Panel and Council Members), and then fishermen. That initial training was conducted for both commercial and recreational bottomfish fishermen on October 6th. The Council has provided tablets for fishers who do not currently have devices to use the app, and the staff has worked with local agency DMWR to train fishers on the platform. The app will be used in a beta test phase until the end of the year, at which point the data will be counted. This beta period will allow both fishers, vendors and administrators to work out any issues with the process and identify any potential areas for improvement. DMWR is currently planning to

conduct additional training sessions for the app. A tournament for alia and recreational fishers in November will use the captain's briefing before the event to train the teams on how to use the app and that tournament will feature incentives for self-reporting catch data. There still remain a number of users to train on the app. One group is the fishing community based in the Manu'a Islands of Ofu, Olosega and Ta'u. The Council and DMWR staff will plan those remote trainings whether they will be done online or in-person. There are also recreational and boat-based spearfishermen that have yet to be trained. The largest group of users to train will be seafood vendors. The Seafood Vendor Commercial Receipt Book Program was initiated by DMWR with support from the Council and their hired contractor. There are currently over 50 businesses enrolled in the program that will need to be trained on the SellIt LogIt app that tracks seafood sales. DMWR has scheduled a Seafood Vendor Forum to conduct that training in November although a date has not yet been set.

November Fishing Tournament

The Council's CatchIt LogIt app will be featured in the upcoming November fishing tournament. The American Samoa Alia Fishing Association (ASAFA) and the Pago Pago Game Fishing Association (PPGFA) are hosting a joint fishing tournament the week before Thanksgiving in American Samoa. The tournament will be the first major boat-based tournament of 2020 and the vessels have agreed to utilize the new CatchIt LogIt self-reporting data app developed by the Council. There will be incentives for vessels to report catch from the tournament with the app and in addition, the captains' briefing before the tournament will be a training session for captains to learn about how to use the app.

Fono Resolution on Interim Measure for American Samoa Bottomfish

In October 2020, the American Samoa Fono passed a concurrent senate resolution which addressed the interim measure for the American Samoa bottomfish complex. The resolution supported a letter sent by DMWR to NMFS requesting a suspension of the interim measure's proposed limits for bottomfish caught in federal waters within the American Samoa EEZ. The resolution also supported the proposal from DMWR to develop a territorial bottomfish management plan to provide a revised stock assessment for American Samoa. Additionally, the Fono extended its support of the DMWR request to suspend or vacate the interim measure and come up with a new stock assessment tool.

The Council has made recommendations to assist DMWR with the bottomfish management plan and has developed the CatchIt LogIt and SellIt LogIt apps to assist the local government with shoring up data collection to address the territory's bottomfish status of overfished and experiencing overfishing. The Council has also worked with the DMWR staff on SEEM and P* analyses to better understand the current bottomfish situation.

AP Curriculum & Outreach Project

The American Samoa Advisory Panel and a video production contractor are continuing to work on a curriculum and outreach initiative, under the Sustainable Fisheries Fund XI grant. The contractor will create a series of 12 60-second PSAs to intermediate and high school aged students to the fisheries in American Samoa. Additionally, the Advisory Panel will work with the local Department of Education to provide these PSAs and other resource materials to the teachers of the territory. The plan is for a series of teacher workshops to be held for educators for grades 6 to 12th grades to introduce the videos and provide additional information that will allow the teachers to expand their lessons to include fisheries and marine resource management and ecological information. This component of the project addresses the Advisory Panel's recommendation from previous meetings to have more fisheries and marine science lesson material in local schools' curriculums.

In addition to the educational component, the AP's project also will target the community at specific events to increase awareness and education on fisheries and marine issues. The AP will use printed material, including a second version of their Know Your Fisheries brochure to provide to the public at various public events in the territory. The project will also provide a spin the wheel game board that will be used to test the public's knowledge of fish species identification, vessel and gear type, and other fisheries-related topics. Guests to the Council's booth will have a chance to win a prize by spinning the wheel and successfully answering a question. This will enhance the public's knowledge of the fisheries.

2021 American Samoa Lunar Tide Calendars

The American Samoa Lunar Tide Calendars for 2021 are complete and have been sent to American Samoa for distribution. This version of the calendar features prominent fishing locations and the gear types used and species caught at those locations. The calendars are a tool for fishermen and educators to time fishing trips, teach students about the moon and tide phases and various aspects of fishing in American Samoa. The latest edition of the Council's lunar tide calendar highlights these very important fishing grounds, shoreline and at-sea, with photos of the fishers who frequent them and the fish species they target there. The American Samoa Advisory Panel assisted the Council staff with selecting the sites, providing information on the gear and species and contributed photos to the project.

Palolo Harvest

The Palolo harvest in October was very small in American Samoa. There was some palolo harvested in Manu'a but around Tutuila, there was very little spawning palolo. Residents await a second chance to harvest palolo in the first week of November, seven days after the full moon which is on October 31, 2020. They are hopeful that there will be a larger harvest at that time. Many believe that palolo spawn follows patterns based on the time of the full moon. One commonly followed set of rules for the full moon date is as follows:

If the full moon occurs:

- From October 1 to 8, palolo will not appear until November.
- From October 8 to 18, palolo will not appear in October or the swarming will be weak followed by a stronger appearance in November.
- From October 19 to November 7, there will be a single, strong swarming centered on this date.

- From November 8 to 17, there will be a strong appearance on this date, possibly following a weaker swarming during the previous month

New Barge for Manu'a – Tutuila Cargo

The American Samoa Government is working on finalizing the purchase of the MV Pago Pago, a barge previously owned by local business Paramount Builders. The barge is a converted Navy retrieval vessel and will be purchased by ASG. The vessel can carry both cargo and passengers to and from the Manu'a Islands on a weekly basis. The vessel has a much larger load capacity than either the MV Sili or the MV Manu'a-tele vessels which currently serve as cargo carriers for the Manu'a Islands. A third vessel, the MV Segā'ula has been re-assigned from Port Administration to the Department of Public Safety to increase their Marine division's enforcement capacity.