



WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

Report of the American Samoa Archipelago Fishery Ecosystem Plan Advisory Panel

March 5, 2011

Sadie's by the Sea

Utulei, American Samoa

1. Welcome and Introductions

Chairperson Judy McCoy opened the meeting at 9:30 a.m. and provided the welcome and introductions.

2. Status of 2010 recommendations

Fini Aitoto, Council Island Coordinator, provided the status of the 2010 Advisory Panel (AP) recommendations.

3. Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning

Roy Morioka, Council contractor, provided a presentation describing what Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning (CMSP) is, what it involves, and how the AP members can contribute. He noted that the closing date for comments on NOAA's CMSP Plans is April 29, 2011.

AP Members discussed the CMSP plan and agreed that **the Council should request NOAA to translate the associated Federal Register Notice into Samoan for publication in the local newspaper.**

4. Ecosystem Monitoring and Community Issues

a. Report on Council-funded Coral Reef Projects

Joshua DeMello, Council Staff, provided an overview of the Council's Coral Reef Conservation Grant from NOAA and explained that the projects that are being presented were funded from this grant.

Marlowe Sabater, Council staff, provided a presentation on a project conducted by the American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR) through funding by the Council and its Coral Reef Conservation Grant, on the habitat characterization of the Humphead Humphead Wrasse. He provided a background on the project, including the methods used for surveying and models used in the analysis. The project concluded that the juvenile humphead wrasse are confined to very specific habitat features and these areas are very limited around Tutuila. The project has implications in how monitoring is performed because a low count of fish does not necessarily mean low abundance, and the results of the project can be integrated into fishery regulations and marine spatial planning exercises.

There was some confusion amongst meeting participants between the humphead wrasse and the bumphead parrotfish that is being considered for Endangered Species Act listing. Sabater said that a bumphead parrotfish also needs to be done, but since American Samoa is outside of the known “hotspot” range for bumphead parrotfish, they are very rare and it would be hard to come up with credible numbers. **The AP agreed that it is important to solicit the public’s viewpoints during any management process, particularly if this research is going to be used by fishery managers.**

b. Larval Pathways around American Samoa

DeMello provided a report on the larval pathway project and explained that the project was done by DMWR and the American Samoa EPA (ASEPA). Researchers used an Acoustic Doppler Current Profiler (ADCP) to measure currents and tides to determine the extent to which larvae and eggs may disperse around Tutuila. The results of the project were maps of the currents at certain sites around Tutuila that can be used to feed into a larval dispersal model. Results could be used in developing effective Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), as well as determining life history characteristics and stock assessments.

The AP was concerned about data being used to develop more, or expand existing, MPAs. They were particularly concerned about the proposed sites for the expansion of the Fagatele Bay National Marine Sanctuary. The AP had previously requested the process used for site selection at its 2010 meeting and pointed out that outreach was needed for all communities impacted by a sanctuary expansion. **The AP agreed that it was appropriate to request the National Marine Sanctuary program to provide a report to the Council on the site selection process.**

Additional discussion by the AP included the potential for an expanded bottomfish fishery with the development of the TriMarine operations as well as interest by Luen Thai.

c. Biosampling Program in American Samoa

DeMello also presented on the NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center’s (PIFSC) developing program for collecting life history information from fish around American Samoa. He noted that PIFSC is working with DMWR to collect length and weight from the local catch as well as otoliths and gonads for aging and fecundity studies and DNA samples for the “Barcode of Life.” He explained that this program is in its infancy and PIFSC should be able to report on preliminary results at future meetings.

5. American Samoa Fishery Development

a. Update on Fishery Development Projects

Ueta Faasili, Council contractor, provided the AP with an update of fishery development projects in American Samoa. He noted that the Council is currently working on four projects: Boat ramps in Tutuila; ice making facilities in Manu‘a; fuel storage facilities in Manu‘a; and fish market/fishermen’s cooperative in Pago Pago.

The AP asked if an environmental review was done for the boat ramps and had concerns that the boat ramp being developed for Lion’s Park may be ill advised. There were some members that felt that the boat ramps being built were sacrificing long term resources for short term gain. Issues with the Lion’s Park boat ramp included:

- Tidal movements in the channel are strong and small boats in these tides could create a dangerous situation;
- Dredging a channel will require continued maintenance;
- Lion's park is one of Tutuila's few recreational areas;
- The area is near a wetland and one of the last estuary systems left in American Samoa;
- Oil/fuel spills are unavoidable at boat ramps and can create serious issues in the area;

The AP agreed that due to these reasons, the Council should halt the development of the Lion's Park boat ramp until an assessment can be made to address these issues.

The AP also had a comprehensive discussion on the fish market. Their main concerns were with fishermen selling fish on the side of the road on the west side of Tutuila and that the fishermen didn't want to have to drive in to Pago Pago to sell their fish. They agreed that **the Council should look into developing an outlet to the proposed fish market on the west side of Tutuila.**

b. American Samoa Marine Conservation Plan

DeMello presented on the American Samoa Marine Conservation Plan (MCP) and noted that it is a spending plan for the American Samoa government in the event that fines from foreign fishing incursions are collected by the US government. He also noted that the MCP will expire next year and the Council is collecting projects and assisting DMWR with revising it for renewal. DeMello also explained that the current fishery development projects are a part of the MCP.

There was some concern by the AP that some of the projects propose to develop government-run facilities/businesses that provide services to fishermen for free will be in direct competition with local businesses. They also agreed that the government doesn't have the ability to develop and maintain these facilities/services and that it is okay to develop these projects on the outer islands like Manu'a since there are no competing businesses. **The AP recommended that the Council work with DMWR to remove these projects that will be in direct competition with local businesses from the MCP.**

6. Pelagic Action Items

a. Potential Modifications to the Large Vessel Area Closure Around American Samoa

Paul Dalzell, Council staff described the various options that the Council may consider for modifying the large vessel area closures around American Samoa. These options are being considered by the Council to make the vessel area closures congruent with the Rose Atoll Marine National Monument as well as provide for increased participation by local fishermen.

The AP discussed the various options presented and agreed that Swains and agreed that **the Council should choose alternative 2C, making the vessel area closure congruent with the Rose Atoll MNM as its preferred alternative.**

Regarding the options for reducing the area closure around Swains Island, the AP agreed that it was not needed at this time. Instead, the AP discussed the possibility of developing the fishery by allowing vessels to fish in the closed areas compensation provided to the community in return (i.e. percentage of the catch) utilizing the Council's Community Development Plans. **They recommended that the Council explore interest in this.**

The AP was also concerned that fishery development is slow in American Samoa due to the lack of fishing captains and the ability to provide training to the local community to build capacity. Council staff noted that the Council is providing a training opportunity this summer in American Samoa, but agreed that maritime education and training programs were needed to provide opportunities to the local community. **The AP recommended the Council provide funding for maritime and seafood handling training to build local capacity and expand the pool of available fishing crew and captains.**

b. American Samoa Longline Limited Entry Program Modifications

Dalzell also provided a presentation on options for modifying the American Samoa longline limited entry program, including permit classes, landing requirements, and transferability of the permits.

The AP discussed the permitted size classes and the options for combining size classes. There was a lot of discussion regarding the transferability of permits and the options of removing the catch history requirement. The AP was unclear of which option would be the best as many of the options were viable, providing that the option still provides for entrance into the fishery for local American Samoan fishermen. They noted the importance for keeping the program flexible enough for local fishermen to both enter the fishery and expand and upgrade their vessels. **The AP recommended that if any changes to the longline limited entry program are made, a priority should be made for American Samoans to obtain permits.**

7. Other Business

There was no other business.

8. Public Comment

Peter Crispin, Pago Pago Game Fish Association, provided the AP with a report on the activities of American Samoa's only sportsfishing group. He noted the schedule for fishing tournaments and suggested that the AP consider developing sportsfishing as an industry in American Samoa. He said that fishing tourism would provide an additional revenue stream because the resources are not overfished and charter fishing customers will pay for the opportunity to fish. He also was against the expansion of any closed areas around American Samoa.

9. Discussion and Recommendations

1) Regarding the Lion's Park Fishery Development Project:

The AP recommended the Council and DMWR halt development of the Lion's Park boat ramp and reassess using alternate boat ramps such as Leone, Asili, or Fagaalu.

Tidal movements in the channel creates dangerous situations for small boats; dredging because it's too shallow otherwise for use at low tide will create issues due to the need for continuous dredging; Lion's Park is one of the few recreational areas available, fronts a wetland, and is one of the few remaining estuaries on the island; and oil and fuel spills increases the probability for environmental impact on the ecology of the area, as well as potential siltation of the area from boat propellers.

- 2) *Regarding the National Marine Sanctuary proposal for additional sites:*
- a) **The AP recommended the Council request that the National Marine Sanctuary Program translate the upcoming Federal Register Notice to be published this spring 2011 into Samoan, and translate the Sanctuary Program management plan proposal into Samoan as well. The AP further recommended the Council request the National Marine Sanctuary Program submit an article in Samoan to the local newspaper to inform all communities about their upcoming actions and proposed sites, and hold meeting in communities other than those with MPAs proposed directly off their coastline.**
 - b) **The AP reiterated its request made in April 2010 to the Council to request the Sanctuary Program provide clarification about its selection process for the selected sites (what was the science and rationale?)**
- 3) *Regarding Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning:*
- The AP recommended the Council work with partners to submit an article in Samoan and English to the local newspaper describing the Federal Register notice (76 FR 4139) published January 24, 2011, particularly noting the comment period closure of April 29, 2011.**
- 4) *Regarding the proposed large pelagic vessel area closure:*
- a) **The AP recommended the Council's preferred alternative 2C.**
 - b) **The AP further recommended the Council explore interest in a community development program that would permit access to the current closed areas for large pelagic fishing vessels that would benefit the indigenous fishing communities through revenues generated from the large-longline vessel (>50 ft) catch.**
- 5) *Regarding fishery development in American Samoa:*
- The AP recommended continued work with respective agencies to:**
- a) **Identify a place on the west coast of Tutuila that could be used as a fish market; and**
 - b) **Identify other ways to export fresh fish out of American Samoa, including liaising with airlines.**
- 6) *Regarding the MCP in American Samoa:*
- The AP reiterated its recommendation that the Council help enhance small local businesses through direct support of companies or by subsidizing costs incurred by fishermen (e.g. ice making companies, project #) instead of creating public entities that directly compete with private sector businesses in American Samoa.**
- 7) *Regarding marine education and training:*
- The AP recommended the Council consider funding maritime training programs, including appropriate fish handling techniques, in American Samoa utilizing the MCP, MET, or other funds to expand the local pool of qualified mariners.**

8) *Regarding the longline limited entry program modifications:*

The AP reiterated its recommendation that the Council consider longline limited entry program modifications that provide the American Samoa community the priority to obtain permits.