



WESTERN
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COUNCIL

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176th Meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council

Laniakea YWCA, Fuller Hall
1040 Richards St.
Honolulu, HI 96813

11.D(1) AMERICAN SAMOA COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES REPORT

1. REPORT ON TUNA CANNERIES

A. NOAA's Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Fisheries Visits StarKist

StarKist Samoa received a visit from Drew Lawler during the last week of February. Lawler is the Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Fisheries and his visit to the cannery allowed the company to shine a light on the tuna industry's importance to the territory of American Samoa and share some of the issues that the industry faces operating in Pago Pago Harbor. After meeting with the company's management team, Lawler had the opportunity to get an up-close look at the fishing vessels that provide the supply of tuna to the cannery. A guided tour by boat owners and members of their crews were provided to Lawler by the purse seine fishing vessels that provide fish to the company. He was also given a guided vessel tour aboard a longline vessel by members of the Tautai O Samoa Longline and Fishing Association. The association's members operate the only US longline albacore fleet. While in American Samoa, Mr. Lawler also met with officials from the American Samoa Government, including Solip Hong, the Chairman of Governor Lolo Moliga's Fisheries Task Force and other members of the group.

B. American Samoa Government Reinstates Guest Worker Permit Program

In January this year, the Governor of American Samoa, Lolo Moliga, approved the reinstatement of a program in move provide to assistance to StarKist Samoa with its labor force shortage issues. The Guest Worker Permit Program's reactivation will allow the company to recruit 200 qualified laborers from neighboring Independent Samoa. The program allows the company to bolster its workforce with select individuals from Samoa while speeding up the Immigration approval process. StarKist Samoa requested assistance with the reinstatement of this program from the local government to address high turnover and absenteeism issues which have affected the company.

Under the program, eligible guest workers must be between 19 and 45 years of age, have verified health and police clearances, and possess a valid passport that has at least one year before expiration. They must also have a local host to qualify for employment at StarKist and the host must meet the requirements of being 21 years of age or older and provide living arrangements for the guest workers during their stay in American Samoa. StarKist capped the number of applications it would accept at 300, and from that pool they will select the most qualified 200 workers. The company plans to conduct interviews with those applicants in Apia, Samoa before selecting the final pool of workers to hire.

C. StarKist Relocation of California Operations to American Samoa Plans

StarKist Samoa's expansion of its Pago Pago operations has been delayed while the company deals with the uncertainty of the future status of its federal 30A tax credit extension, workforce shortages, supply issues and federal regulatory challenges. StarKist had planned to transition its California production operations to American Samoa but has had to delay that move while the company addresses the aforementioned issues.

The American Samoa Government estimates that StarKist's planned expansion would create up to 300 new jobs in the territory and provide a boon to the local economy. Approval of USEPA National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits stands in the way of the company's ability to transition its California operations to American Samoa and the local government has acknowledged the permit issues facing StarKist and the Governor of American Samoa, Lolo Moliga has publicly stated his displeasure with the federal policy issues hindering StarKist's expansion. At the Governor's direction, the local government has even taken steps to assist StarKist in clearing those NPDES permit hurdles, mainly in the formation of a group of local agency and industry members to draft a proposal to USEPA to assist the permit process. In addition, the territory's Congresswoman, Aumua Amata Radewagen, has also indicated that she will address the company's issue of its tax credit in Congress. The Congresswoman and Governor's proactive support of the company's expansion highlights the territory's commitment to keeping the company and the tuna industry viable in American Samoa.

2. ASG FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

A. First Manu'a Alia Fishing Tournament

The Fale Lua Nu'u Fishermen's Cooperative Association, whose members own and operate alia fishing boats based on the islands of Ofu and Olosega, held its inaugural Tautai O Manu'a Fishing tournament on December 20 – 21, 2018. The Manu'a fishermen would like the tournament to become an annual event and hoped that the inaugural tournament would generate excitement amongst alia fishermen in Manu'a which would lead to an increase fishing effort. With the support of DMWR Director Henry Sesepasara and his staff, the association was able to successfully host the very first fishing tournament in the Manu'a Islands. Director Sesepasara also invited Dustin Snow to accompany the DMWR staff to oversee the tournament. Snow oversees operations for Island Fisheries, a newly established business based in Pago Pago Harbor that will buy locally-caught fresh fish for export to off-island markets. During the tournament he spoke with fishermen about handling and shipping methods to improve the quality of the fish and inform them of the opportunity to sell fish caught in Manu'a to Island Fisheries.

Despite issues with the MV Sili vessel which delayed the arrival of supplies and prizes for the tournament, including fuel for the boats, the tournament was a resounding success according to both the participating fishermen and DMWR. DMWR shipped fuel drums, insulated fish coolers, large igloo coolers, and ice for the tournament from Tutuila. The

Council assisted DMWR and the cooperative in holding this fishing tournament as well, donating the fuel used by the eight participating alia boats during the tournament.



Figure 1 DMWR Director Sesepasara with the alia tournament participants

The tournament fishing time was approximately one and a half days, with both trolling and bottomfishing allowed with boats having the decision of which method to utilize. Target pelagic species included billfish, yellowfin tuna, mahi mahi, wahoo, and miscellaneous fish (including, but not limited to dogtooth, skipjack tuna, trevally, rainbow runner, and barracuda). Bottomfish target species included snappers, groupers, emperors, jacks and jobfish. DMWR staff members handled weighing duties for the two days of the tournament. Over 700 pounds of fish was weighed for the two fishing days of the tournament.

Prizes were awarded for both trolling and bottomfish catch, with a grand prize of a fuel drum for the boat with the most combined catch weight from both bottomfishing and trolling. Scoring was based on the heaviest weights of eligible fish species for trolling and bottomfish catch. Cash prizes were awarded for the heaviest catch weight for each of the species categories in trolling, and for total weight for bottomfish. Pita Ili's *alia* took home the grand prize of a fuel drum for having the highest combined weight of both bottomfish and trolling catch.

B. DMWR FAD Program Updates

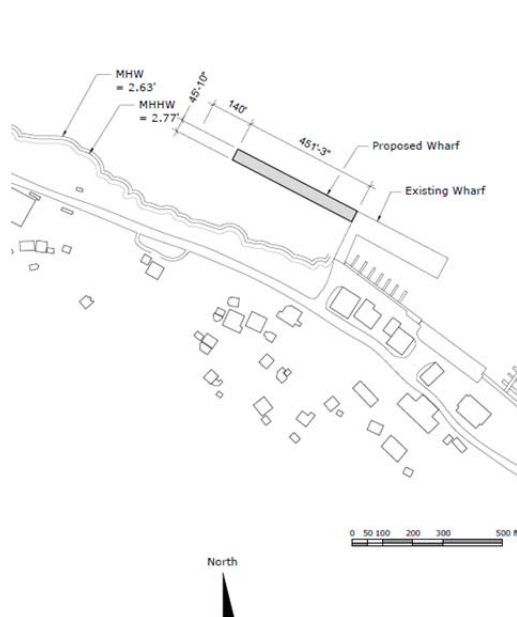
Tri Marine International is working with the Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR) to develop a new prototype biodegradable fish aggregating device (FAD) for the fishing boats to utilize, and to meet the requirements developed by members of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) last year.

Tri Marine representative Frank Baron has worked on developing that new FAD design and DMWR will assist him the deployment and monitoring of the first four FADs to be tested around the island of Tutuila. The goal is to make a biodegradable FAD that is not only effective in aggregating fish species but also can be decomposed naturally at sea, eliminating marine debris. The hope is that this new FAD design will also be durable enough to be useful over an extended period of time despite the fact that it will be biodegradable.

Advisory Panel member William Sword has also been assisting with the new FAD project. The initial four FADs will be deployed at locations offshore from Amanave Village near the western tip of the island, Vaitogi Village in the central area of the south shore, and at the designated A and B FAD locations on the eastern side of Tutuila Island. DMWR's role in the project will be to assist Tri Marine with monitoring of the FADs with regularly scheduled trips to the FAD locations to check rate of decomposition and record the number of fish observed around the FAD over a one year period.

C. Longline Dock Extension for Malaloa Marina Project Update

The Department of Port Administration (DPA) met with a representative of the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE) to discuss the pending permit application for the proposed project to extend the Malaloa Marina dock for the US longline vessels based in Pago Pago Harbor. According to USACOE's Susan Gayagas during her recent visit to American Samoa, the permit application is still incomplete due to critical information missing from the biological report submitted by the Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR) for the project. DMWR's Chief Fisheries Biologist, Dr. Domingo Ochavillo was contacted and provided the requested information to the report to satisfy the USACOE's concerns. The additional information requested by USACOE includes clarification of some of the report's content, further information on the project's impacts to live coral, and a spatial map showing the anticipated disturbance footprint from the dock extension's construction.



The image shown illustrates the proposed project's site and dimensions. Funds were provided by the Council to ASG for a feasibility study and the design of plans for the dock extension to provide relief to both ASG and the American Samoa longline fleet. DPA contracted Tinai, Gordon & Associates INC to draft the design plans which were finalized and submitted with a final report in the fall of 2018. The design is for a 450' x 40' extension to the existing Malaloa Marina dock.

The Council provided the funds to ASG for the design of the dock extension with the agreement that the local government would identify a funding source for the construction of the

Figure 2 Malaloa Marina Dock Extension Design

longline dock. Up to this point, those construction funds have not yet been identified. Last summer, the Governor of American Samoa, Lolo Moliga, proposed a supplemental budget which included \$1.5 million to be allocated for the construction of the dock. The steel sheet pile bulkhead jetty extension designed by designer Tinai, Gordon & Associates INC will cost over \$3.3 million. The designer has also recommended the landward basin area of the project be dredged at an estimated \$341,000 cost to the overall construction cost. The \$1.5 million in Governor Lolo's supplemental budget was part of the \$2.6 million settlement payment from StarKist Inc. It is unclear where the additional 60% of funds required to complete the construction phase of the project will be obtained from. Uncertain that funds will be identified for the project construction, members of the Tautai O Samoa Longline and Fishing Association have asked the Council to consider utilizing funds that were to be used for the project in other ways to assist the fleet directly.