



Report of the American Samoa Archipelago FEP Advisory Panel Meeting

Wednesday, June 12, 2019

5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

NASAC Conference Room

Pavaiai Village, American Samoa

1. Welcome and Introductions

Will Sword, American Samoa Advisory Panel (AP) Vice Chair opened the meeting. In attendance were members Brian Thompson, Dustin Snow, Sam Meleisea, and Joseph Faaita. Excused members included Krista Corry, Carlos Sanchez and alternate member Nonu Tuisamoa.

Also in attendance was Christinna Lutu-Sanchez (Council Vice Chair) and Nate Iloa (Council Staff).

2. Review of the last AP meeting and recommendations

Council staff provided an update on the Council action items from the 176th meeting in Honolulu noting there was only one recommendation that dealt with American Samoa fishery issues:

Regarding the assignment duration for the USCG head of the Marine Safety Detachment in American Samoa, the Council directed staff to communicate with USCG 14th District requesting their assistance in finding a solution, or innovative methodology, to address continuity concerns caused by a one year rotation of the active duty member service for the Marine Safety Detachment in American Samoa.

Council staff informed the AP members that a letter was sent to RADM of the District 14 office in March, and that Council staff had reached out to USCG staff in Honolulu to get an update. The staff member acknowledged receipt of the letter and would look to get a reply to the recommendation.

3. 178th Council Meeting Action Items and Issues

a. US Territory Longline Bigeye Catch/Allocation Limits

Council Staff presented on the territorial bigeye tuna catch and allocation limits, noting three options that the Council would consider at its June meeting. In the discussion, there were questions about how the quota transfer is carried out, which was explained as an agreement between the territorial governments and the fishing industry. There was also a question of the conservation impact of not having a limit, and the Vice Chair explained that the transferrable limit is 2,000 mt and that historically, the territories have not exceeded the current limits which would keep the total under the limit. There was also a question about the health of the BET stock. Council staff replied that the Pacific bigeye tuna stock is not overfished nor experiencing overfishing.

After discussion, AP members decided that option 3 – no limit for US Pacific Island Territories and up to 2,000 mt for allocation would be the best option for American Samoa. They

discussed the fact that this would keep the total limit within the current amount but allow the territories more flexibility to transfer quota which is mutually beneficial to both the boats in Hawaii and for the continued fisheries development in American Samoa. In discussion members also discussed a multi-year limit being a good idea, especially since the Council would continue to do an annual review based on best available science. *AP members agreed that a three-year limit for the BET limit/allocation.*

b. Annual SAFE Report Updates

Council staff reported that the Annual SAFE Report was currently being drafted and is due at the end of the month. The report will be provided electronically to the members of the AP when it is completed.

4. American Samoa Reports

a. Community Activities and Issues Report

Council staff reported on the main items included in the Community Activities and Issues report. He noted that Island Fisheries Inc.'s opening success with their Friday fish markets have attracted large crowds and is routinely selling out their entire stock of fish and value-added products by noon. An AP member added that Island Fisheries Inc. has just sent its first shipment of fish to the US – to a destination on the west coast. The shipment was approximately 2,500 pounds of pelagic fish which was provided by F/V Sea Hawk which was in port to fulfill its obligation to land fish in AS and pick up crew. This marked the first time the airport cold storage unit was used, and AP members noted that Hawaiian Airlines had built that unit for the purpose of fish export. The AP member also said that all of the fish sold has been from longline boats and the company was looking forward to working with DMWR's director to attract alia fishermen to sell fish to the company as well. He also mentioned that Island Fisheries Inc. was in the process of working with the American Samoa Nutrition Assistance Program to get approval for his company to receive food stamps for their fish from local residents.

The Vice Chair reported on the 20th Steinlager I'a Lapo'a Game Fish Tournament which was May 6 – 10, 2019. It marked the first time boats from the Kingdom of Tonga participated. He also mentioned that the total of 2,500 pounds of fish was a huge improvement from the Samoa International Game Fishing Association's tournament the week before in neighboring Independent Samoa in which only 400 pounds of fish was landed in the same number of days. There was also some concern that only one of five fads was in place, but fish was still caught.

Council staff mentioned the April crew awareness training for AS longline crews. The four day training focused on navigation, emergency drills and environmental protection simulations. The event was organized by USCG with help from NOAA OLE, and the local Department of Public Safety Marine Patrol Division.

Council staff reported on the Department of Commerce's plans to seek funding for the initial build of an *alia tele* (super alia) which they plan to use as a training vessel for alia fishermen who are interested in applying for a loan for the alia tele. He mentioned the criticism of certain Fono members during a Senate hearing which called into question the viability of the project due to the large price tag associated with the purchase of the alia tele. Those present discussed the price of the project being too much for local fishermen to afford and noted that no one had applied in over a year since the funding for loans has been available.

b. Education Report

i. HS Summer Course

Council staff reported that an instructor for this year's summer high school course was selected and he is working with her to finalize the schedule for the three-week class and coordinate with the usual summer guest hosts and teachers. The class will run from July 1 – 19, 2019 and Council staff requested the AP's assistance in the solicitation for participants and noted that limited spaces are available.

ii. US Pacific Territories Capacity-building Scholarship Program

Council staff informed the AP that this was the first year that two students from American Samoa have been selected for the Council's US Pacific Territories Capacity-Building Scholarship in the same year. The students selected are both graduates of the American Samoa Community College. The two students are currently at UH Manoa completing an internship at before they head to Hilo in August for the fall semester to work toward their degrees in marine science. The AP also discussed including capacity building for vocational subjects in fishing – mechanics, refrigeration, and engine maintenance as being part of this scholarship in the future.

c. Island Report

Council staff presented that DMWR was still in the process of drafting the Island Report and will be presented to the Council detailing the fishery-related activities of the department since the last Council Meeting.

The Vice Chair noted that DMWR needs to improve its Fish Aggregating Device (FAD) deployment for fishermen, especially for the major fishing tournaments. He told those present that there was only a single FAD deployed during the 20th Steinlager I'a Lapo'a Tournament in May – the one on the north shore. There was a question about the status of the biodegradable FAD that DMWR was working on with the purse seine owners to deploy as they had reported at the 176th Council Meeting. The Vice Chair said they hadn't finished a design yet, but the plan is to deploy them at the usual FAD locations. *The AP discussed the need for DMWR to address the missing FADs and have them deployed as soon as possible.*

d. Legislative Report

Council staff reported that the Senate had held a hearing of its economic development committee and criticized the Department of Commerce for its plans for the alia tele. The criticism was mainly due to the cost of the new vessel which some senators said made the project unaffordable. One senator called the project "a dream".

5. Report on American Samoa FEP Advisory Panel Plan

a. Pelagic Longline Fresh Fish Demonstration Project

Council staff reported that the Pelagic Longline Fresh Fish Demonstration Project is being developed to help American Samoa longline vessels explore the viability of providing fresh fish for local markets.

There were concerns that this project may not be possible because it is not listed in the American Samoa Marine Conservation Plan (MCP). Council staff pointed out that the priority projects listed would likely fit into one of the six identified priority objectives. The MCP does include projects for identification and development of markets for fishery resources, development of fishing technologies, boat design and construction, and training for fishermen – all of which this demonstration project would apply.

b. Bottomfish Fresh Fish Demonstration Project

Council staff also reported that the Bottomfish Fresh Fish Demonstration Project is being reviewed and the plan is for an expert bottomfish fisherman to travel to American Samoa and

work with local fishermen to demonstrate techniques, gear and technology that would increase their knowledge of bottomfishing.

There were some concerns about the project being carried out in this way as the project would be using a charter vessel and not alia boats, which is concerning as the alia fishermen would be the main participants. The Vice Chair reported that he brought this up and there would be a possibility for some trips on alia boats after they had been on the larger boat to learn from the fisherman. Another concern was that gear would not be provided under the project and that it would be showing alia fishermen things they don't have. Council staff said there was a possibility that some gear may be available but it is not the focus of the project to hand out gear, but to teach fishermen about new techniques and gear. There was also a concern raised that expensive gear and technology would be wasted on the alia boats. There was a suggestion that a boat and crew be brought down from Hawaii for the project, but Council staff said the cost of shipping a boat to American Samoa and back to Hawaii would be very expensive and the logistics of doing so would also be prohibitive under the time and resources from the grant. He also said most of the successful bottomfish fishermen in Hawaii had only one or two crew members and it wasn't a large crew, so it could easily be duplicated with one fisherman and participants from American Samoa on a charter boat. The Vice Chair said the focus would be on how to use improved gear and fish finding technology, which would benefit the fishermen who participate.

c. Education and Outreach Projects

Council Staff reminded the AP members that they had previously decided to work on two education projects. The first project was a second version of the Know Your Fisheries brochure with more socio-economic data, including job opportunities connected to the fisheries and also salary ranges to attract more students to pursue careers in fisheries or related fields. He noted that the AP needed to decide on the final information they wanted to include and referenced the list of data that was pooled for the brochure previously. The AP members also need to get quotes from local printers and provide them to staff. The second project that the AP agreed to work on was an integration of the fisheries into DOE curriculum. He said that the Council's Education Committee is currently working on a plan for Hawaii State and the territories. The AP could use that plan to move forward with getting more fishery-related curriculum content locally.

An AP member reported to the AP that he recently traveled to Hawaii to participate in a workshop with John Kaneko of the Hawaii Seafood Council, an educator from the community college, and a fisheries division staffer from DMWR. He said they were trained in fish handling and also visited the auction at Pier 38. He added that there are plans for an educational project in American Samoa from that training and it would likely be done around one of the major fishing tournaments. Council staff noted the next big tournament is November when the National Marine Sanctuary holds its annual fishing tournament.

The Vice Chair reminded the AP of the recommendation previously made to build capacity in the territories as there is a big need for mechanics and welders as there is no one there to service marine engines.

6. Island Fishery Issues & Activities

AP members discussed a potential revision to the shark law which has been pending for nearly three years. Council staff reported that it was completed but the filing of paperwork was still pending. AP members also discussed other statutory revisions that DMWR was working on amending and Council staff informed them that the department was seeking a legal review of

the amendment package they are working on which would strengthen outdated laws regarding data collection and enforcement capabilities.

AP members brought up the bottomfish assessment which may have negative results for the American Samoa bottomfish fishery. During discussion, AP members noted the poor data that they were shown during a February workshop at the Council office and how data for catch and effort appeared drastically inflated and largely inaccurate given the small number of alia boats fishing regularly. AP members discussed worried about potential closures for the fishery. *AP members said there is a need to get DMWR to address its data deficiency and suggested that the number of fishermen in the fishery be corrected immediately.*

7. Public Comments

Lutu-Sanchez told the AP members that the data will reflect what a devastating situation the American Samoa longline fleet is facing.

8. Discussion and Recommendations

The American Samoa AP made the following recommendations to the Council:

Regarding the BET limit and allocation:

- **The American Samoa Advisory Panel recommended the Council select option 3 – no limit for the territories and up to 2,000 mt for allocation. The American Samoa Advisory Panel further recommends the Council adopt a 3-year limit for the BET limit/allocation.**

Regarding the American Samoa fisheries:

- **The American Samoa Advisory Panel recommended the Council work with DMWR, bottomfish fishermen and NMFS to explore alternative data collection methods that would more accurately capture information to reflect the bottomfish fishery. The American Samoa Advisory Panel further recommended the Council request PIFSC Stock Assessment Program staff to conduct a series of community meetings in American Samoa explaining the results of the most recent bottomfish assessment for American Samoa. Those community meetings should be held on Tutuila as well as in the Manu'a Islands.**

9. Other Business

AP members discussed meeting informally to be regularly be appraised of fishery issues and to work on the AP plan. AP members decided that the informal gatherings would be held on the second Wednesday of every month at the NASAC building in Pava'ia'i village to provide updates and keep in touch with AP members and the fishing community.