



## **187<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council**

### **AMERICAN SAMOA MOTU LIPOTI (ISLAND REPORT)**

#### **1. Tuna Industry**

StarKist Samoa has brought over 150 workers since the Governor of American Samoa (AS), Lolo Moliga, approved the hiring of guest workers from Samoa in June. StarKist Samoa has experienced workforce shortages in the last quarter since the release of Economic Impact Payments earlier in the year. The company is aiming to bring in more than 200 workers to fill labor shortages at the tuna processing plant. Due to the scheduled commercial flights between Pago Pago and Honolulu, and a recent positive COVID-19 case in September, flights between Western Samoa and AS have been suspended. Starkist Samoa is working closely with the American Samoa Government to bring over the remaining workers needed to fill vacancies.

Lady Naomi finished shipyard repairs at the Ronald Reagan Shipyard in Tutuila, and will facilitate travel for cannery workers. Governor's travelers' screening contractor will facilitate purse seine crew replacements from USA once boats decide to come back to Am Samoa. Concern is that the US boats may decide to stay in IATTC waters due to price of fish (better than SK) and the SK convenience fee of 150\$/ton.

#### **2. Island Fisheries Update**

Two Tutuila alia who have been fishing in July and August have reported catching albacore, yellowfin, and skipjack, although sparse. Also small vessel fishermen have reported that there are no catches of masimasi, wahoo, and rainbow runners.

Since April 2021, the lone Pago Pago-based commercial bottom-fishing alia is down due to engine issues, leaving just two alia active in commercial fishing at this time - one trolling and one long-lining. Long-line catches net about 400lbs a week on average. All other local fishing activity involves bottom-fishing and trolling trips for personal and/or cultural reasons. About 4 Pago Pago-based small-boats engage in trolling, with occasional bottom-fishing, inside territorial waters. Only about 3 Manu'a-based alia (2 from Ofu and 1 from Ta'u) are currently active, at least once a week, in bottom-fishing exclusively. Gas and fishing gear shortagse is an ongoing problem for fishermen in Manua. Twelve fishermen in Manua were trained on using the *Catchit*, *Logit* app, however, poor internet connection may inhibit their ability to report data electronically. The owners continue to provide DMWR with their catch data.

Several Pago Pago-based alia remain idle due to technical or structural problems awaiting relief. Five alia owners are seeking compensation from the local government-run Shipyard Authority for its role in causing damage to many alia during dry-dock work performed in 2017. A class-action lawsuit is being heard in the High Court of American Samoa at this time.

Some fresh reef fish is supplied to a few local stores or sold by the roadside to the public on Saturdays by under a dozen spear-fishermen.

Boat ramp repairs continue to be a priority for local fishermen. Most boat ramps need major repairs or modifications to enable safe deployment of vessels during low tide. The new boat ramp in Pago Pago has been completed but is unusable during low tide. The Malaloa sports fishing boat moorings need repairs as not much was done after the 2009 tsunami. The pilings need more work as the floating docks are unstable and unsafe.

Also, unfavorable weather conditions, like wind and rain, have persisted over the months, cutting down calendar opportunities for trips outside of local waters. And despite tough conditions, some local fishermen have done well. As an example, avid angler Chris King went out on the 14th of August aboard the "Double Hooked" in rough seas. He returned with a 163.8 lbs marlin, seven 15 to 20 lbs. yellowfin tunas. The largest Yellowfin tuna landed was just the head. The crew had some great fish-head soup, while a very large shark had sashimi that day...

On August 21st, angler Taulapapa Will Sword, AS AP member Jerome Jerome, and angler Sam Chung landed a 455 lb. marlin and a 70-lb sailfish in 10 to 12 ft swells.

The local community is still awaiting word on the status of the CARES Act for fisheries. The application deadline was last December and no one has received any funds as yet.