



## **Report of the American Samoa Archipelago FEP Advisory Panel Meeting**

Tuesday, February 28, 2023

5:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. (SST)

### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

Nate Ilaoa, American Samoa Advisory Panel Vice Chair, opened the meeting at 605p. Members present include, Clay Tam (AP Chair), Nate Ilaoa, Ray Tulafono, Dustin Snow, Brian Thompson, Joe Hamby, Jerome Jerome, Joe Faaita and Nonu Tuisamoa.

Others in attendance include Zach Yamada, Matt Seeley, Asuka Ishizaki, Joshua DeMello, Mark Mitsuyasu (Council Staff), and Mia Iwane (PIFSC).

### **2. Report of the 2019-2022 American Samoa Plan**

Zach Yamada, Council staff, provided a report of the 2019-2022 AP Action Plan which included the status updates on recommendation and plans by the AP.

An AP member said they worked on a PSA on American Samoa fisheries that could be included in the school curriculum. The intention of the PSA was to plant the seed of fisheries since there is a strong reliance on the commercial fishery and discuss different pathways into the fishery. Another member said this course could be conducted like a career day where there would be representatives from different sectors of the fishery to provide exposure to young kids (e.g. cannery, mechanic, refrigeration, welding, etc.). An AP member said this was conducted when the high school summer course was funded pre-covid.

An AP member said that American Samoa is surrounded by a huge body of water and their economy relies heavily on fisheries. To help build capacity with local study, they asked if the Council could provide scholarships for their local community college students. Council staff said the Council does target community college students and it would be good to work people who want to work in the local community.

### **3. Feedback from the Fleet**

#### **a. AS Fishermen Observations**

Clay Tam, AP Chair, provided an overview of the Fishermen Observation initiative. This fishermen led initiative was to provide on-the-water observations and give context to fishery-dependent data found in the annual SAFE report. Following the first fisher observation summit in 2020, the Council's AP began reporting and gathering information from fishers on what they observed during that period of time. There have been cases where certain fish will experience large recruitments on a certain timeframe and this initiative allows scientist in the future to have that record to further analyze. They believe that fishers need to be a part of the solution to addressing data gaps in fishery data.

An AP member said the Pago Pago Game Fishing Association has tracked the movement of fish and would be a great resource for collecting fisher observation. Tam encouraged him to include that information in the Annual SAFE report and take a picture of interesting observations.

**b. Advisory Panel Issues**

The AP provided potential fishing issues in Hawaii that been reported by the fishing community.

An AP member provided an update on the super alia boat funded under EDA. He said the boat is currently being fabricated and hopes that it will be dressing with fishing instruments in the upcoming months.

An AP member provided an update on the longline dock. The ports engineer reported they are going through the US Army Corp of Engineer permitting process and hope that they will make more progress on this in 2023.

An AP member said the US purse seine fleet has declined to 12 boats. Over the years, some of those boats have gone bankrupt and never had the chance to profit. The purse seine fleet has been working with NMFS to manage the purse seine as a small island fishery fleet. Without some registry, they want to ensure they are provided the same fishing opportunities as these SIDS. They said NMFS may take action and there is a need to keep pushing it to supply the cannery.

*The AS AP supports the Council’s efforts to promote regulation by NMFS of the American Samoa based US flag purse seiners as a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) fleet with regard to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission.*

**4. AS Fishery Issues and Activities**

**a. Options for a Multi-Year Bigeye Tuna Catch and Allocation Limits**

Mark Fitchett, Council staff, presented options for setting a framework for a multi-year bigeye tuna catch and allocation limits applicable for American Samoa, Guam, and CNMI to U.S. flagged Hawaii longline vessels. Under Amendment 7 to the Pelagic FEP, the Council specified annual fishing agreements to support the territorial marine conservation plan and fishery development projects. This action could remove the requirement for annual catch limits and amend the Pacific Pelagic FEP to specify multi-year allocation limits from US Participating Territories to US longline vessels.

An AP member said that it would be advantageous to have AP recommended removing the single year allocation limit to the multi year with a catch limit of up to 2,000 mt allocation limits for 2024-2026.

*The AS AP recommended that the Council proceed with the multi-year territorial catch and effort allocation framework removing the requirement for annual catch limits for the US Participating Territories, and proceed with previously analyzed longline BET allocation option with a preliminary preferred alternative of up to 2,000 mt allocation limits for fishing years 2024-2026.*

**b. Review of Draft American Samoa Longline BiOp**

Asuka Ishizaki, Council staff, provided a brief background and update on the status of the American Samoa longline draft biological opinion (BiOp). The Council is expected to receive a draft BiOp for review prior to the SSC meeting (March 14-16). To provide opportunity for the American Samoa AP to weigh in on the draft BiOp review, the AP will reconvene jointly with

the Hawaii AP and the Fishing Industry Advisory Committee on Thursday, March 16 from 4-6pm (SST) virtually.

**c. Bottomfish Management Unit Species Revision Update**

Matt Seeley, Council staff, provided a status update on the territorial BMUS revision highlighting changes to the proposed timeline, which include amending only the American Samoa FEP given the timing of the stock assessment for American Samoa. The Action team will develop alternatives for the Council to consider to amend the American Samoa FEP at its upcoming 195<sup>th</sup> Council meeting.

An AP member said that the community would have appreciated if they were provided a warning that overfishing was occurring through a data work shop prior to the 2019 stock assessment. Council staff said this was a result of the data collected, but there have been strides to ensure that the stock assessment is representative of the state of the fishery.

An AP member acknowledged the fishermen who said that overfishing was not occurring and they are a key part to the betterment of the fishery and the stock assessments.

**d. Bottomfish Western Pacific Stock Assessment Review Outcomes**

Mark Fitchett, Council staff, provided an overview of the Bottomfish Western Pacific Stock Assessment (WPSAR) outcomes. In 2019, the American Samoa assessment concluded that the BMUS complex was both undergoing overfishing and was overfished. A new benchmark assessment for the American Samoa BMUS was conducted in 2022 and differs significantly from all previous efforts in terms of data inputs and model structure. The AS BMUS Stock Assessment was put under a Western Pacific Stock Assessment Review (WPSAR) to determine if the data were appropriate, the assessment model was applied properly, and if the final results are scientifically sound. The results of the review and the final model will not be available until that time. The AP will be provided with an update of both the stock assessment and the review for its consideration in preparation for the June meetings.

**e. Council Pelagic Fisheries Research Priorities**

Mark Fitchett provided a presentation on the Council Pelagic Fisheries Research Priorities (PFRP). Under section 302(h) in the MSA, each Council shall develop, in conjunction with the scientific and statistical committee, multi-year research priorities for fisheries, fishery interactions, habitats, and other areas of research that are necessary for management purposes. The Council has started to plan for the Pelagic Research Plan before March 2023.

An AP member said it would be good to understand the economics of the fishery on how are they benefitting and what are the needs. The Council's PFRP could include a study to focus on what is needed to support and sustain the fishery.

***Regarding the Council's Pelagic Fisheries Research Priorities, the AS AP recommends the Council request PIFSC conduct an economic study to estimate what is needed for the commercial fisheries in American to grow***

**5. Setting the Direction for the American Samoa AP**

Clay Tam, AP Chair, provided an overview of the AP training workshop and the 2023-2026 AP term expectations. This includes developing the plan and providing updates at formal

and informal meetings. In addition, Tam encouraged the members to observe the other AP and advisory body meetings in the case there could be a joint meeting during their tenure.

An AP member said it was imperative of the informal meetings to work on the different plans. An AP member said they would like to provide assistance with the Super Alia project and invite the director of DMWR to provide an update on the project.

*The AS AP recommended that the AS Secretary of Commerce provide a presentation on the Super Alia project at its upcoming meeting.*

## **6. Public Comment**

There were no request for public comment.

## **7. Discussion and Recommendations**

*The AS AP supports the Council's efforts to promote regulation by NMFS of the American Samoa based US flag purse seiners as a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) fleet with regard to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission.*

*The AS AP recommended that the Council proceed with the multi-year territorial catch and effort allocation framework removing the requirement for annual catch limits for the US Participating Territories, and proceed with previously analyzed longline Bigeye tuna allocation option with a preliminary preferred alternative of up to 2,000 mt allocation limits for fishing years 2024-2026.*

*The AS AP recommends the Council consider including the following in the Pelagic Fisheries Research Plan:*

- *Shark depredation research in American Samoa*
- *Study on the economic impact of the American Samoa fisheries in terms of their benefits and needs to support and sustain the local fishing communities especially the longline fishery which provides food security for American Samoa*

## **8. Other Business**

Council staff provided an overview of the National Seafood Strategy and the National EEJ Strategic Plan.