



**Western  
Pacific  
Regional  
Fishery  
Management  
Council**

October 22, 2021

Mr. Dave Hogan  
Office of Marine Conservation  
Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental & Scientific Affairs  
US Department of State  
2201 C Street NW, Room 2665  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear David,

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (Council), at its 187th Meeting held virtually on September 21-23, 2021, discussed important issues pertaining to tuna fisheries within the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) and funding opportunities for US Territories. The US currently disburses an average of \$1.4 billion in aid per year to members and cooperating non-members of the WCPFC, including those who are beneficiaries of the Compact of Free Association. Yet, many of these fishing nations remain adversarial towards US fisheries. The Council agreed upon recommendations to improve the US position within the WCPFC and explore avenues for funding fishery development in US Pacific Territories.

*Regarding Conservation and Management Measure for Tropical Tunas, the Council urges the Department of State and the Department of Commerce to enhance cooperation with particular WCPFC members with the goals to increase the US longline bigeye catch limit and recognize American Samoa purse seine vessels within the WCPFC.* The Permanent Advisory Committee (PAC), which advises US Commissioners to the WCPFC, echoed Council recommendations on the matter at its meeting held October 12-15, 2021.

The Hawaii-based longline fishery that targets bigeye tuna does not transship, has the highest compliance record, and highest observer coverage – yet the US currently has the lowest WCPFC specified bigeye tuna catch limit among ‘distant water’ longline fisheries. The situation places a disproportional burden on the Hawaii fishery, which is a gold standard for the WCPFC in terms of overall management. The US having the lowest catch limit for bigeye tuna further proves that ‘playing by the rules’ is not rewarded. At the WCPFC annual meeting in December, it is critical for the US to have its WCPFC longline catch limit increased by at least 3,000 mt. For the sake of US interests and for food self-sufficiency for Hawaii and the US Pacific Territories, the US must work with WCPFC members right now.

American Samoa-based purse seine vessels are treated as a distant water fleet by the WCPFC. This situation has deprived ‘American Samoa purse seine vessels’ the benefits under Article 30 for special exemptions from strict conservation and management measures intended for distant water fleets. It creates a situation where US-flagged American Samoa purse seiners are not motivated to offload a higher proportion of their catch in American Samoa to sustain the local StarKist cannery. A report from the US Government Accountability Office in 2018 found

that the GDP of American Samoa declined by one-fifth in the decade following closure of a former cannery. Optimizing production of the StarKist cannery is critical for other American Samoa fisheries, such as the local longline fishery that supplies albacore.

*Regarding Reduction in the US Purse Seine fleet operating under the South Pacific Tuna Treaty, the Council requested the Department of State to consider reallocating \$3 million of the \$21 million in funding previously intended for the South Pacific Tuna Treaty to the US Participating Territories for the purpose of fishery development.*

While viability of American Samoa-based purse seine vessels is critical to maintaining American Samoa's largest source of private employment, other vessels previously flagged under the US have recently reflagged under other competing Pacific Island nations. Since 2018, the US-flagged purse seine fleet under the South Pacific Tuna Treaty has declined from 34 to 14 active vessels. The US government provides \$21 million a year for fishing access in waters of 16 Pacific Island nations. Due to the decline in US-flagged vessels participating in the Treaty, the Council requests that \$3 million of funding intended for purse seine fishing access under the Treaty (or from other sources) be made available so that US Pacific Territories enjoy the same financial safeguards provided by their federal government. This funding will be intended for fishery development to cover the costs of infrastructure, improve monitoring, and optimize equitable access to fishery resources for Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa.

Please make these recommendations your highest priority as we approach the December 2021 Regular Session of the WPCFC. Do not hesitate to reach out to my office if you have any other concerns on the matter by email [kitty.simonds@noaa.gov](mailto:kitty.simonds@noaa.gov) or by telephone at +1 (808) 522-8220.

Sincerely,



Kitty M. Simonds  
Executive Director

CC: Keone Nakoa, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Insular and International Affairs  
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