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COUNCIL

DRAFT Report of American Samoa Archipelago FEP Advisory Panel Meeting Report

Tuesday, June 7, 2022
6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. (SST)
Virtual Meeting via Webex

1. Welcome and Introductions

Nate Ilaoa, American Samoa Advisory Panel (AP) vice-Chair opened the meeting at 6:06 p.m. AP members in attendance included Joseph Faaita, Samuel Meleisea, Dustin Snow, Brian Thompson, Nonu Tuisamoa, Frank Barron. Advisory Panel Chair Clay Tam was also in attendance. Jerome Jerome and Pafuti Ana Tupua were absent

Also in attendance was Kitty Simonds (Council Executive Director); Will Sword, Archie Soliai, Brian Peck (Council Members); Zach Yamada, Mark Mitsuyasu, Mark Fitchett, Asuka Ishizaki, Maria Carnevale, Matt Seeley, Joshua DeMello, Felix Reyes, and Floyd Masga (Council staff); Domingo Ochavillo (DMWR); Joseph O'Malley, Marlowe Sabater, Justin Hospital, Beth Lumsden, Crystal Dombrow, Danika Kleiber (PIFSC); Thomas Remington (Lynker); Richard Farrell (CNMI AP).

2. Review of Last AP Meeting and Recommendations

Council staff reviewed the report and recommendations from the last AS AP meeting held on March 10, 2022. He reviewed the recommendations made at that meeting and provided an update on the status of those recommendations

3. AS Fishery Issues and Activities

A. 2023 US Territorial Bigeye Tuna Catch/Effort Limit and Allocation Specifications

Council staff presented the 2023 US Territorial Bigeye Tuna specification. Three options were presented: 1) no action, 2) total catch and effort attributions consistent with status quo (3000 metric ton[mt] total attributions), and 3) a combination of attribution possibilities that may exceed 3000 mt. The AP should consider possible tradeoffs under each option and sub-alternatives. Tradeoffs may include departing from the status quo arrangement of allowing any territory to allocate up to 1500 mt with total allocations not exceeding 3000 mt. Only CNMI and American Samoa have engaged in territorial agreements with the Hawaii Longline Association for the last several years.

An AP member said that the current quota transfer limit worked well for developing fishery development funds for the territories and asked if there were any roadblocks if the AP recommended option 3. Council staff said option three would prolong the administrative process with a new environmental assessment (EA) and analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act. In addition, it would delay the impending American Samoa longline biological opinion (BiOp) on a new EA.

An AP member asked who would audit the US fishery if they violated their quota.

Council staff said that the US was not in violation of compliance. The US reported 192 mt above their 2021, which was deducted from the 2022 quota.

The AP agreed that Option 2 was the best option and recommended to re-specify their previous action.

B. Review of Draft Bottomfish Biological Opinion

Council staff provided an overview of the draft bottomfish fishery Biological Opinion (BiOp), which covers the bottomfish fisheries under the American Samoa, Marina and Hawaii Fishery Ecosystem Plans (FEPs). The consultation was triggered by the 2018 listing of the oceanic whitetip shark (OWT) under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), as well as the listing of giant manta ray and chambered nautilus, and the designation of the main Hawaiian Island (MHI) insular false killer whale critical habitat. The draft BiOp concluded that effects of the American Samoa bottomfish fishery were discountable due to no known interactions with the species. For the Hawaii, Guam and CNMI bottomfish fisheries, the draft BiOp concluded that these fisheries are likely to adversely affect, but not likely to jeopardize OWTs. The draft BiOp includes an incidental take statement with a reasonable and prudent measure that requires NMFS to monitor the take of OWT in Guam, CNMI and MHI bottomfish fisheries, but this RMP excludes American Samoa due to the lack of known impacts. The Conservation Recommendations are discretionary and includes American Samoa, and includes actions for NMFS to work with fishers and local agencies to disseminate species identification materials, and support consistent reporting of OWT bycatch in the bottomfish fisheries.

The AP discussed the draft BiOp conclusions and whether the conservation recommendation is reasonable and practical for the fishery.

The AP agreed that the impacts from the AS bottomfish fishery is minimal, and that the conservation recommendation regarding reporting should look at ways to incentivize reporting.

C. 2021 Annual Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation Reports

Thomas Remington, Lynker, provided a report on the updates to the 2021 annual SAFE reports. Fishery performance for the American Samoa bottomfish fishery continued to decline in 2021, with a total estimated catch of just 2,215 lb, a large reduction in effort (i.e., fishing trips and gear hours), and a slight reduction in catch per unit effort (CPUE). Pelagic fisheries in American Samoa landed more catch in 2021 (~2.3 million lb) than in 2020 (~2.0 million lb) with slightly increased effort. However, this increase was driven by larger catches of albacore and yellowfin tuna as catch for non-tuna pelagic management unite species decreased. Socioeconomic data included in the reports were presented, including fuel price, pounds sold, fishery revenues, and trip costs. Revenues for the American Samoa bottomfish and trolling fisheries were non-disclosed due to data confidentiality rules, but revenue for the longline fishery slightly increased from its decadal low in 2020. Regarding ecosystem monitoring, parameters including sea surface temperature, coral thermal stress exposure, and ocean color were presented. Remington noted that data for many additional indicators are available in the full reports published by June 30, 2022. Last, Remington encouraged AP members to use the Council's online portal (wpcouncildata.org) for the annual SAFE reports to more easily navigate and visualize data presented in the reports.

The vice-Chair said fishery data collection continues to be a challenge in American Samoa. For the last two years, the Council developed the Catchit Logit (CILI) app and trained fishermen and vendors to report their catch and sales through the app. He asked if CILI data was being used by the fishermen and what would it take for a mandatory licensing and reporting management agency to utilize the data. Another member said the vendors continue to report through the commercial receipt program.

An AP member asked if the trip decline corresponded with the bottomfish catch decrease and asked how this would affect catch estimates. Remington said there was a decline of around 80-90% of trips for the 10 to 20-year average. Fewer trips mean less catch. The CPUE helped to standardize the data and was used to derive abundance values of fish in the ocean. He said it is mandatory to report their sales through commercial receipt books, but vendors do not always report at the species level. Current vendors will just report bottomfish.

A member asked who is charged with handling CILI and if there are agencies that do not want the platform. Remington said that we charged the American Samoa Department of Marine Wildlife and Resources (DMWR) with handling CILI. An AP member asked about the usability and issues with CILI with regards to the connectivity of tables and apps. The vice-Chair said that the Council did hire a contractor to train fishers on the app and other issues; however, he is no longer working with the Council.

D. Review of 2021 BMUS Catch

Council staff, presented on American Samoa 2021 fishery performance with a highlight on the decrease in BMUS (Bottomfish Management Unit Species) catch. The presentation and review of 2021 BMUS catch was initiated as a recommendation from the Archipelagic Plan Team (APT) due to the anomalously low landings. From 2019 to 2021, landings decreased from 7,751 to 1,739 pounds. Also presented and discussed were values associated with sample/interview days, number of unique vessels/trips, pounds sold/revenue, and general fisher observations.

AP members indicated there was less effort in 2021 due to fish availability, access to the resources (i.e., increased costs associated with fuel prices), and overall lower effort. In addition, AP members said that fishery data was not collected for the last three months.

E. CARES Act Update

Domingo Ochavillo, DMWR, presented an update on the CARES Act funding distribution in American Samoa. Relief assistance for approved subsistence fishermen were mailed and received in late March 2022. Of the 334 subsistence applications submitted, they approved 225.

The relief assistance payments were distributed in the PO Boxes provided in their applications. The Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC) and NOAA have reviewed and approved 21 commercial applicants for the first round of CARES Act relief assistance. The PSMFC confirmed that the relief payment checks for the eligible and approved they have mailed commercial applicants out last week. They anticipate that these will arrive by the end of June 2022.

The spend plan for CARES Act 2 funding is being finalized, and they anticipate that to be completed by July 2022. Once NOAA approves the spend plan, the application process will

begin. An AP member said that he experienced issues with the length of operation, which hindered his business from qualifying for CARES act relief assistance. Another member asked if the spending plan for CARES ACT 2 included the longline and small-boat fishermen. Ochavillo said he did not have further information on the spending plan and offered to provide an update at the next American Samoa AP meeting.

4. EEJ

A. Report on Council EEJ and Fisheries Management

Council Staff presented on the CCC EEJ WG Report, Next Steps and the recent WP EEJ Workshop. Members are encouraged to provide additional insights for WP EEJ Planning.

B. NOAA Fisheries Draft Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy

Beth Lumsden, NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, reported the NOAA Fisheries Draft EEJ strategy. NMFS is soliciting comments until August 31. She reviewed the barriers to EEJ and how NMFS plans to address EEJ in the underserved community. The draft EEJ strategy seeks to remove barriers to EEJ and promote equity in their work. This will lead to step-down implementation plans at the regional level to create a framework to incorporate EEJ into their daily activities.

An AP member asked if the indigenous fishing community will participate in the policy reform process and how staff EEJ training will benefit the underserved communities. Another AP member said that the Chinese Foraging minister met with 20 delegation members and 10 Pacific island government officials to sign fishing agreements. As there is an increase in fishing from the Chinese fleet, there is a need for more monitoring of the US EEZ surrounding American Samoa. He said American Samoa depended on the longline fleet and tuna stock to supply their cannery and only export. There is a need for more US Coast Guard monitoring since there is a possibility that they are fishing in the Swain Islands. He said that American Samoa is the only territory south of the equator, and there is a need to safeguard their fishing stock from the American Samoa fleet.

An AP member said there is a need to provide locally caught fish for the school lunch programs. This would be beneficial to the community to serve fresh local fish.

5. 2022 Advisory Panel Activities Plan

A. SFF Projects

Council staff provided an update on the Sustainable Fishery Fund projects. He reported that the gear diversification project was still in development. SFF12 supported the albacore study contract, alia vessel upgrades, training for educators and the Manu'a student fishing tournament. The products and materials for the tournament were purchased, and the contractor is waiting to confirm a date.

B. Catch it Log It Update

Council staff provided an update on Catchit Logit, noting that the Sellit Logit portion of the app is being transferred to NMFS PIFSC. The transition will allow PIFSC to work with DMWR to provide an electronic version of capturing the receipt book data from the vendors. There has been declining use for the voluntary fisher reporting portion of the application, and without a mandatory component, it has been challenging to participate. Council staff and NMFS PIFSC staff is working with the agencies to assist any efforts in mandatory data collection for

fishermen, and Catchit Logit will be a part of that effort. There have been 138 registered participants, with only four fishermen reporting monthly on average (with none reporting currently).

An AP said that fishermen had issues technical issues with the app. Council staff said that they did the last optimization in September, so there may have been technical issues since then, and encouraged the AP members to report any bugs or glitches as soon as possible to address the situation.

C. Education and Outreach

The Chair provided an update on the AP's Education and outreach initiative, including the development of the 2023 American Samoa lunar calendar. The calendar focuses on key species and seasonal correlations such as recruitment and currently putting that information together.

6. 2021 American Samoa Small Boat Survey

Justin Hospital, NMFS PIFSC, presented the preliminary results of the 2021 American Samoa small boat fishing survey, which covered 2020 fishing experiences, market participation, vessel information, average trip costs, 2020 annual fishing expenditures and fisher expectations. They received 33 completed surveys that showed the top primary motivation for fishing was subsistence, and 84% of fishers sold their fish. The median trip costs for trolling, deep bottomfish and shallow bottomfish ranged from \$140 to \$375. They will have a draft final report by August 2022 and present additional results to the AS AP at its September meeting.

A member asked if they could use CILI as a tool to supplement this type of survey. Hospital said they could look at how much participants are using CILI and compare their reported catch to the estimated catch derived from the creel surveys. They could further look at how they fit together to support data collection.

An AP member asked why they did not survey any fishers in the 25 and under age group. He said they are the next generation of fishermen and could monitor fishing effort in real-time rather than relying on surveys. Hospital said they did not receive surveys from fishers in that age group and identified it as a gap in the survey. Most of their participants are in their middle age, and PIFSC will plan for more on-island surveys to address that gap.

7. 2022 Marine Fishery Advisory Committee Report

Clay Tam provided a report on the outcomes of the 2022 May Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee (MAFAC) meeting held in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Tam was appointed as a member of the MAFAC in April 2022. The MAFAC was established in 1970 to advise the Department of Commerce on living resources. Items included aquaculture, seafood resilience, recreational summit, and budgets.

An AP member thanked Clay for his report and said that American Samoa has an interest in aquaculture development.

8. American Samoa Biosampling Program Update

Dr. Joe O'Malley presented on the AS Life History Research and Biosampling History and Shore-based Research Efforts. He reported that their primary planned objectives were to 1) develop relationships between NOAA researchers and local fishermen, 2) sample fishermen's catch to collect biological samples; 3) identify a potential avenue for a long-term program that

collects biological information from fishermen or markets; and 4) visit schools and villages to talk to young students about careers in science.

An AP member said that a good relationship with local fishermen is the key to build trust between researchers and fishermen. O'Malley agreed and said there is no known date when they will come to AS, but can provide updates on their plans at the next American Samoa AP meeting.

9. Feedback from the Fleet

A. AS Fishermen Observations

With the additional lockdown and mandates, member observed a decreased of fishing boats or other methods. Another member reported that the community members from Manu'a and the American Samoa Longline fleet reported that fishing was good in the second quarter of 2022.

B. Advisory Panel Issues

A member reported that there was a low supply of local fish on the western side of American Samoa.

10. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

11. Discussion and Recommendations

Regarding the 2023 US Territorial Bigeye Tuna Catch/Effort Limit and Allocation Specifications:

- The American Samoa AP recommends the Council select Option 2, allowing transfers of up to 1,500 mt from any territory to US-flagged longline vessels with total transfers not to exceed 3,000 mt. This is consistent with specifications from 2020-2022.

Regarding American Samoa Fishery Issues:

- The American Samoa AP recommends the Council request relevant federal agencies, including NMFS and the USCG, to work towards reducing burdens from economic uncertainty posed by increasing Chinese influence in the region around American Samoa, reduce potential incursions of distant water fishing vessels within the American Samoa US EEZ, and increase USCG presence to ensure safety at sea. These issues are directly related to National Standards 6 and 10.

Regarding the Bottomfish Biological Opinion:

- The American Samoa AP concurs with the draft BiOp finding that the impacts from AS BF are likely to be minimal and recommends the Council request NMFS, in implementing the conservation recommendations, work with fishermen on ways to incentivize, rather than penalize, reporting of OWT.

12. Other Business

The Chair noted that the Council's SSC meeting will be next week and the Council meeting the following week and encouraged AP members to attend virtually and participate.

Council staff announced that the Pacific Remote Island Coalition has circulated a proposal to expand the Pacific Remote Island Areas from 50 nm to 200 nm. The proposal was supported by eight members of the US Congress.

The next AS AP Informal Meeting: Tuesday, July 12, 2022, 5 p.m. SST.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:27 p.m (SST).