

American Samoa Archipelago

Motu Lipoti

AS Pacific Island Forum Associate Membership Update

Key Developments:

Micronesian Islands Forum Endorsement

On July 3, 2024, the Micronesian Islands Forum (MIF) formally endorsed American Samoa's application for Associate Membership in the PIF. During the MIF meeting held from June 3-5, 2024, in Guam, a resolution was adopted supporting the applications of American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and Guam. This endorsement is a pivotal moment in the application process, as it demonstrates strong regional backing from governments in the northern Pacific.

Governor's Outreach to Pacific Leaders

Governor Lemanu Peleti Mauga has actively sought support from key Pacific Island leaders to ensure American Samoa's application remains on the PIF agenda. On July 10, 2024, Governor Lemanu sent a letter to Solomon Islands Prime Minister Jeremiah Manele, seeking his government's advocacy for the inclusion of American Samoa's application in the PIF Leaders Meeting scheduled for August 2024 in Tonga. This outreach is part of ongoing diplomatic efforts to secure broad-based support from PIF member states.

Fono Endorses PIF Application

The American Samoa Legislature, comprising both the House and Senate, passed a resolution on August 20, 2024, supporting the territory's application for Associate Membership in the PIF. The resolution highlights American Samoa's historical and cultural ties to the Pacific region and emphasizes the importance of elevating the territory's status from observer to associate member. This legislative endorsement reflects a unified stance between the American Samoa Government and the Fono in pursuing PIF membership.

Pacific Islands Forum Officials Committee (FOC) and Forum Ministers Meeting (FMM) Participation

Lt. Governor La'apui Talauega Ale represented American Samoa at the Pacific Islands Forum Officials Committee (FOC) Meeting and the Forum Ministers Meeting (FMM) held in Suva, Fiji, in August 2024. During these meetings, Lt. Governor Ale actively advocated for American Samoa's inclusion as an associate member, emphasizing the territory's commitment to regional

collaboration and sustainable development. His participation in these high-level discussions was a critical step leading up to the Forum Leaders Meeting in Tonga. Accompanying him was Director Taotasi Archie Soliai, whose extensive knowledge and contacts played a significant role in our delegation's efforts.

As the PIF Leaders Meeting approaches, final preparations have been made to ensure that American Samoa's application is on the agenda. The PIF delegation, led by Fiji's Roving Ambassador to the Pacific, Ratu William Toganivalu, visited American Samoa in June 2024 to assess its alignment with PIF membership criteria. Their report, which will be presented to the PIF Board of Directors, is expected to play a significant role in the discussions at the upcoming Leaders Meeting.

PIF Leaders Meeting in Tonga: Final Approval and High-Level Discussions (August 29-30, 2024)

At the 53rd Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting in Nuku'alofa, Tonga, American Samoa's application for associate membership was officially approved. Governor Lemanu expressed his gratitude to the PIF leaders and members who supported the application, noting that this achievement marked the culmination of over a decade of efforts to transition from observer status to having a seat at the table alongside other Pacific nations.

During the PIF meeting, Governor Lemanu also met with Fijian Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka to discuss potential areas of collaboration. Prime Minister Rabuka affirmed Fiji's readiness to work closely with American Samoa and other non-self-governing Pacific Island Countries and Territories on issues of mutual interest. He emphasized the importance of joint efforts in addressing shared environmental and social challenges, particularly as both nations navigate the broader Pacific context. Additionally, Rabuka discussed the ongoing review of the PIF's Regional Architecture, expressing hope for its completion before the next PIF Leaders' meeting in 2025.

Governor Lemanu acknowledged the invaluable leadership of Lt. Governor La'apui Talauega Ale, who played a critical role in navigating the application process, alongside Director Taotasi Archie Soliai, whose extensive knowledge and regional contacts were instrumental in securing this milestone.





Decline in Life Expectancy in American Samoa

The Department of Commerce (DOC) in American Samoa has reported a drop in life expectancy. According to the new American Samoa Lifestable, newborn boys are expected to live an average of 69.70 years, which is 1.4 years less than before. Newborn girls are expected to live an average of 74.47 years, a decrease of 3.3 years.

This drop in life expectancy is concerning for several reasons. Economically, it could mean fewer people in the workforce and more strain on systems that support retirees. Health-wise, it could lead to more age-related health problems and higher medical costs. Socially, it could put more pressure on resources that support the community.

The DOC stresses the need to investigate why life expectancy is falling and to address the health issues causing it. Improving family and individual health through better policies and resources will be important to reversing this trend and improving the overall quality of life in American Samoa.

Aspect	Current Life Expectancy	Change
Newborn Males	89.70 Years	-1.4 Years
Newborn Females	74.47 Years	-3.3 Years

Starkist Samoa's Housing Project for Guest Workers

StarKist Samoa has decided not to use government land for building housing for guest workers from Samoa. Instead, they plan to use land leased from the Catholic Church, located at the old Marist Brothers High School in Atu'u, across from the Samoa Tuna Processors plant. Senior StarKist official Tufuga Faafoi Palepua said they are still working out the details with the Diocese of Samoa-Pago Pago but hope to start construction by the end of the year. This housing project was requested by the Samoa Government during talks in 2022 to improve living conditions for these workers. Unlike most workers, these guest workers don't go through the usual immigration process and can only work at the cannery. Their stay under this program does not count toward residency. Samoa wants the housing conditions for these workers to be similar to those in seasonal work programs in New Zealand and Australia, where workers live in more community-like settings.



Update on Deep-sea Mining

In July 2024, Governor Lemanu Peleti Mauga issued an executive order placing a moratorium on seabed mining in American Samoa's waters. This decision was made in response to significant concerns about the potential environmental damage caused by deep-sea mining. The moratorium prohibits the mining, extracting, or removal of minerals from the ocean floor due to risks such as habitat destruction, pollution, and disruptions to important ecological processes that support marine life and local communities. The Governor emphasized that while this moratorium is in effect, scientific research related to marine environments is still permitted under local laws and regulations. Greenpeace USA and other environmental groups have praised this move, calling it an example of necessary leadership to protect oceans and urging broader support for similar measures globally. This decision aligns American Samoa with other regions like Hawaii and California, which have also imposed restrictions on seabed mining to safeguard their marine ecosystems.

Update on Aunu'u Wharf Reconstruction

The Aunu'u Wharf Reconstruction project has recently received some important updates. In early 2023, the project was awarded a \$2.1 million grant from the Maritime Administration Ports Infrastructure Development Program (MADRAD) to cover the design and construction phases. However, the grant funds couldn't be used until the project completed the National

Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, which required that at least 30-60% of the design be finished first.

To help with this delay, the Governor's Office secured an additional \$500,000 from the Department of Interior's CIP program to cover the costs of completing the design and NEPA requirements. The US Army Corps of Engineers has been hired to handle these tasks, with the design work starting this year and expected to be finished next year. Construction is planned to begin towards the end of 2025, pending necessary permits.

Meanwhile, repairs to the existing Aunu'u Wharf are underway to keep it safe and usable. Paramount Builders has been hired to carry out these repairs, using their Talitiga vessel, and they are expected to complete the work in the next few weeks.

While there have been some hurdles, the project is moving forward with steps being taken to ensure the wharf remains operational until the full reconstruction can begin.

Naumati Forest Proposal

In July 2024, the American Samoa Government (ASG) proposed purchasing 27 acres of the Naumati Forest to ensure its preservation. This land includes 20 acres owned by the Haleck family and 5 acres owned by the Congregational Christian Church of American Samoa (CCCAS). The ASG aimed to acquire the land to safeguard it from development and maintain its ecological and cultural value. The proposed purchase was valued at \$2,167,000, based on a valuation of \$425,000 per acre, with funding sought through the US Forest Legacy Program.

The ASG's initiative included a public awareness campaign launched on July 23, 2024, to emphasize the forest's importance and encourage community support. This campaign featured educational resources, outreach programs, and a video highlighting the forest's ecological and cultural significance. Key benefits of the Naumati Forest include its role in supporting biodiversity, recharging groundwater, mitigating flood risks, and providing educational opportunities.

Despite these efforts, on July 26, 2024, the CCCAS voted against selling its 5 acres of the forest. During the CCCAS's 35th General Assembly, ASG's Director of Marine and Wildlife Resources, Taotasi Archie Soliai, presented the case for the sale, emphasizing the forest's critical functions and the benefits of its preservation. However, the CCCAS decided to retain its land, citing their own considerations.

The Haleck family has agreed to sell their 20 acres, but the decision by the CCCAS has impacted the ASG's plans. Director Soliai remains hopeful that the church may reconsider its decision in the future, stressing the forest's importance for environmental conservation and cultural heritage.

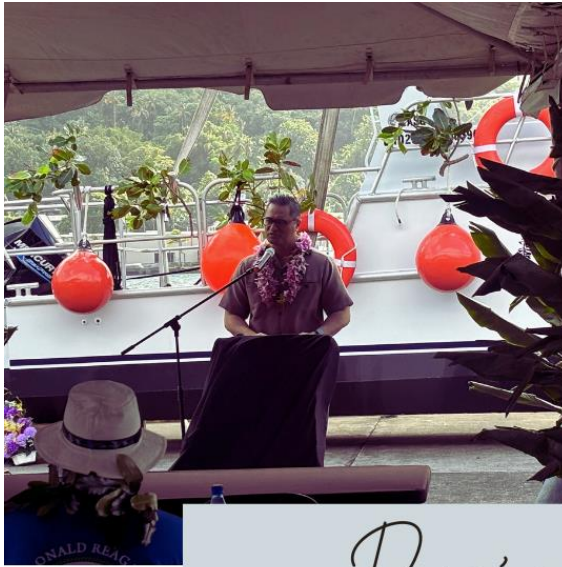
In an August letter received from the CCCAS Church, they confirmed that although the decision was made not to sell their property the Church is still very interested in preserving it for the purposes proposed by ASG. Currently, ASG is reviewing options to meet their mutual goals.

Tautai Mua and Puna'oaolevasa Dedication

On June 5, 2024, the American Samoa Department of Commerce (DOC) celebrated a significant milestone in the development of the local fishing industry with the launch of the first Alia Telē (Super Alia) at the Malaloa Marina Dock. The Tautai Mua, translating to "first fisherman" or "first sailor," reflects the leadership and pioneering spirit embodied in the new alia vessel's name. This larger and more advanced fishing boat was developed in response to local fishermen's needs for safer and longer fishing trips. Funded by a \$4.3 million grant from the Economic Development Administration, the project also includes training programs to build a skilled workforce across the islands.



The research vessel R/V *Puna'oaolevasa* was dedicated on July 2, 2024, marking a significant milestone in advancing marine research and conservation efforts in American Samoa. Built locally, this research vessel will be instrumental in conducting marine surveys, maintaining Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs), and improving wildlife studies. The vessel's launch was part of broader efforts to conserve American Samoa's natural resources.



Puna'oaolevasa V A S A

