



**Western
Pacific
Regional
Fishery
Management
Council**

December 13, 2023

John Armor
Director
Office of National Marine Sanctuaries
National Ocean Service
1305 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear John,

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (Council), at its 197th meeting on December 12-13, 2023, discussed the need for fishing regulations in the proposed national marine sanctuary for the Pacific Remote Islands (PRI). The Council reiterated its previous findings that the Council's existing regulations have established comprehensive protection since the 1980s and continues to provide for long-lasting conservation and management for the PRI fishery ecosystem and resources. The Council also stressed the importance of the current pelagic fisheries in the Pacific Remote Islands (PRI) to the economy and culture of American Samoa and recognized that impacts to those fisheries would be devastating to Fa'a Samoa. The fisheries provide for millions of dollars and thousands of jobs through direct and indirect contributions.

Therefore, the Council determined that the existing fishing regulations under the current structure already meet the goals and objectives of the proposed sanctuary and recommends to ONMS that additional fishing regulations are not necessary to meet the proposed PRI National Marine Sanctuary goals and objectives.

The current pelagic fisheries in the PRI are conserved and managed pursuant to an adaptive, ecosystem-based approach both domestically and internationally and are neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing. Pelagic fishing occurs at or near the open ocean's surface and does not interact with benthic communities, so these activities do not jeopardize the benthic ecosystem or biodiversity. Should fishing for bottomfish, crustacean, precious coral or a coral reef ecosystem species be conducted in the PRI, Council regulations implementing the Pacific Remote Islands Fishery Ecosystem Plan would apply and continue to comprehensively conserve and manage these fisheries, the marine biodiversity, and ecosystem services they provide. This management plan has been in place for over 13 years to prevent negative impacts to fish stocks, habitat, bycatch, and protected species.

The Council plans on providing ONMS with the final document with the analysis, rationale and justification for the Council's determination to the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries by January 19, 2024. We look forward to continued participation in the development. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Executive Director Kitty Simonds at the Council Office at (808) 522-8220.

Sincerely,


Taulapapa Will Sword
Council Chair


Kitty Simonds
Executive Director