



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

Tuesday, May 27, 2025; 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. (SST)

Virtual Meeting via Webex:

<https://wprfmc.webex.com/wprfmc/j.php?MTID=m5dffba2633a6c16c39596c13913a48c9>

*Event number (if prompted): 2862 514 0731*

*Event password (if prompted): ASAP0527mtg (27270528 from phones)*

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

Nathan Ilaoa, American Samoa Advisory Panel (AP) vice chair, opened the meeting at 6:01 p.m. SST Members in attendance included Gene Pan, Nonu Tuisamoa, Jerome Ierome, and Edgar Feliciano. Joe Hamby was excused. AP members Dustin Snow, Ray Tulafono, and Keith Ah Soon were absent.

Others in attendance included Felix Penalosa, Zach Yamada, Asuka Ishizaki, Joshua DeMello, Mark Fitchett, Mark Mitsuyasu, Alex Min, Tony Langkilde (DOC), and Tamiano Gurr.

### **2. Review of the Last AP Recommendation and Meeting**

Felix Penalosa, Council staff, provided a review of the last AP recommendations from the meeting held on March 18, 2025.

### **3. Council Fisheries Issues**

#### **a. 2024 American Samoa SAFE Report**

Council staff provided an overview of the 2024 American Samoa stock assessment and fishery evaluation (SAFE) report. In 2024, there is a notable increase in bottomfish catch, though still below the ACL, with commercial sales primarily roadside. Pelagic fisheries saw increases in both tuna and non-tuna catches, with the longline catch vastly exceeding troll catch and a slight increase in albacore CPUE. Fishermen have reported significant challenges like strong weather, deeper tuna, increased seaweed, lack of central markets and predictable prices, high fuel prices but decreased longline landings and revenue. Future work aims to revamp SAFE report structure, investigate potential impacts on bottomfish demand, explore climate impacts on mahi, and revise the bottomfish management unit species list.

An AP member said that the bottomfish fishery had a notable year for 2024 with 11,000 lb of bottomfish caught and asked what the fishery performance for 2023 was.

Council staff said for 2023, the bottomfish fishery caught an estimate of 4,689 lb.

An AP member said the AP made a recommendation to include data from the American Samoa TULA station for atmospheric information and asked what was the status.

Council staff said that TULA station collects the same information similar to the Mauna Loa station and the plan team agreed to continue to use the Mauna Loa information for the whole western Pacific region.

**b. Implementation of Electronic Monitoring in Hawaii and American Samoa Longline Fisheries**

Mark Fitchett, Council staff, provided an overview on the implementation of electronic monitoring (EM) in the Hawaii and American Samoa longline fisheries. To date, EM in the Western Pacific Region has been a voluntary program in the longline fisheries dedicated to research and development. To implement EM as a tool for monitoring, the Council would need to authorize the use of EM. At its 199th and 200th meetings, the Council directed staff to work with NMFS PIRO and advisory bodies to explore regulation considerations to utilize EM for management to supplement and/or fulfill data collection requirements as implemented through the federal observer program. At its 201st meeting, the Council took initial action to develop a proposal for the Pelagic FEP to authorize the use of EM in pelagic longline fisheries with the objective to monitor and provide reliable estimates of protected species interactions and phase in the use of an NMFS-approved EM systems over a three year period (2025-2027) with NMFS funding as an optional program to supplement the human observer program until permanent resources are available to fully implement a mandatory program. Given the decline in human observers in 2025, 2026 and with an uncertain future beyond due to the NMFS budgetary limitations, there is a need to implement the existing EM program from an experimental and research tool to a cost-effective monitoring program that can address monitoring requirements in the Hawaii and American Samoa longline fisheries.

First, the Council may decide to implement EM, as either a mandatory program with implementation sub-alternatives or as an optional program. Second, the Council may decide how EM will be financially supported, if it decides to take action to authorize EM. The Council and its advisory bodies longstanding position has been that NMFS should assume costs for monitoring for the purpose of protected species monitoring. The Council will consider the following alternatives. Alternative 1, no action, by authoring the use of EM for fishery monitoring and operating under the status quo monitoring regime; or Alternative 2, implement a mandatory EM program under the following sub-alternatives to phase-in annually from 2025-2027. Sub-alternative 2a would use random selection of all longline vessels for implements; sub-alternative 2b would prioritize shallow-set vessels and random selection of the remaining longline vessels; or sub-alternative 2c would go based on a voluntary program followed by random selection of the remaining vessels. Alternative 3 would implement EM as an optional program with EM authorized as a monitoring mechanism on participating vessels.

If the Council selects alternative 2 or 3, the Council will consider the following alternatives on how an EM program will be financially supported beyond 2027. Alternative A, implement EM with public Federal (NMFS) funding; Alternative B, implement EM with public-private cost-

sharing of sampling costs, with industry funding hardware replacement; or Alternative C, implement EM with sampling costs funded by industry.

An AP member asked for clarification on what was meant by “biased representation of fleets.”

Council Staff said that different implementation approaches, such as prioritizing voluntary participation or targeting specific segments of the fleet, may result in incomplete or unrepresentative data across the fleet. While random selection provides broader coverage, it can be perceived negatively as a top-down approach and may discourage those who are willing to participate early.

An AP member raised concerns about the cost of EM systems, noting that each unit is estimated to cost around \$10,000 and must be replaced every three years. If the industry is expected to cover these expenses, it would impose a significant financial burden on local vessels, especially given that the fleet has already declined in size this year.

AP members expressed concern that the removal of the human observer program, without sufficient support for EM, could negatively impact fishery operations.

Another AP member voiced continued support for a phased-in mandatory EM requirement, with strong preference for full funding by the federal agency. They emphasized that existing costs for gear and compliance are already at the edge, and additional financial pressure could force more vessels out of the fishery. Several members supported the alternative that would have NMFS fully cover both sampling and equipment costs, emphasizing the importance of protecting the viability of the American Samoa longline fleet.

#### **c. Hawaii and American Samoa Longline Fisheries Crew Training Requirement**

Asuka Ishizaki, Council staff, presented on the Hawaii and American Samoa longline fishery crew training requirement, which the Council will consider as final action at the upcoming June meeting. The Council at the 201st meeting took initial action on the regulatory amendment to implement a crew training requirement and scheduled final action for the June 2025 meeting. The Council at the March meeting received an update on the refinement of the regulatory approach, status of the pilot training program, and the revised draft Reasonable and Prudent Measure (RPM) Terms and Conditions (T&C).

For final action, the Council will consider two alternatives: Alternative 1, which is the alternative action to revise the longline fishery protected species workshop requirement to include crew training; and Alternative 2, which is the no-action alternative. Specifically, the action alternative would amend the regulations under the Pelagic FEP to implement crew training through both a crew certificate requirement and a person-on-deck requirement. Under Alternative 1, the Council will consider sub-alternatives for crew training recertification frequency, with the sub-alternatives being a 1- or 2-year certification duration or no expiration

for the certificate. The action is anticipated to reduce post-release mortality of protected species and improve outcomes of protected species interactions, and is not expected to affect fishing effort, operations, areas fished, species targeted, or other fishery resources.

An AP member asked whether the longline crew training would be conducted locally or if trainers would be brought in from outside.

Council Staff responded that the training in American Samoa is currently being conducted by Steve Kolstenik, and that vessel owners and operators are already participating.

An AP member inquired whether the self-guided online training option would still be available.

Council Staff clarified that for vessel owners and operators, online training will continue. Those who complete the in-person training can later renew online for a few years. However, for crew members, it is uncertain whether online options will be made available. Originally, the training was intended to be in-person to ensure more hands-on experience, but resource limitations have necessitated adjustments. These details will not be codified in regulation and can be revised as needed.

Another AP member asked whether there would be any remedial training required if a violation occurred, suggesting that training usually exists to satisfy specific compliance needs.

Council Staff explained that the certificate simply confirms completion of training, as is the case in Hawaii. Whether retraining is required depends on enforcement proceedings handled by the Office of Law Enforcement (OLE). The regulation being considered does not change existing enforcement rules, but the frequency of training is part of the current policy discussion. If patterns of untrained crew are observed, that would be addressed through enforcement.

An AP member asked who would be monitoring crew compliance.

Council Staff responded that the Electronic Monitoring (EM) program could be used to observe how protected species are handled. Over time, data will be used to evaluate whether the current training needs improvements, such as reduced trailing gear upon release. The goal is not to police behavior, but to provide the tools and information necessary for captains and crew to respond appropriately under difficult at-sea conditions.

Another AP member noted that this sounds like informational training. Ishizaki agreed, adding that the focus is on providing correct and necessary information, particularly for vessels already required to meet protected species handling standards.

One AP member raised the issue of international parity, noting that while U.S. vessels may implement these measures, foreign longline vessels, like Asia, may not be held to the same standards.

Council Staff acknowledged this concern and pointed out that while the Hawaii and American Samoa longline fisheries will be among the first to implement such measures, international fleets fall under the purview of organizations like the IATTC and WCPFC. U.S. implementation does not guarantee others will follow.

Another AP member noted the importance of engaging with the U.S. delegation to the tuna commissions, including working with whoever will represent American Samoa, to address this imbalance.

An AP member asked whether a certified crew member could train others during fishing operations and if that would be recognized by NOAA. The member also expressed support for annual refresher training.

Council Staff responded that peer training during operations would not currently qualify as certified training.

An AP member stated that 51 crew members in American Samoa have already been trained and asked if their certifications would remain valid through 2027 or if retraining would be required.

Council Staff explained that the regulation is anticipated to be finalized by late this year or next year, and implementation would begin as soon as possible. Current training would remain valid until the new rule takes effect. The final rule would likely include a grace period and account for retraining needs. The Council will consider sub-alternatives for certification duration of annually or every two years.

One AP member emphasized the importance of clearly recommending a sub-alternative that supports boat owners and captains by ensuring certifications are maintained and remain valid.

Another AP member said that neither the one-year nor the two-year certification options seemed unreasonable and noted that many crew members are on two-year contracts. Therefore, a two-year certification would be ideal.

An AP member voiced support for the two-year certification option, recognizing the earlier speaker as a representative of the longline fishery.

#### **4. Council Inflation Reduction Act Project Update**

##### **a. Scenario Planning**

Mark Fitchett reported that Kimberly Gordon and John Kaneko have been identified as contractors, they plan scenario planning workshops in Hawaii over fall and before new years. In American Samoa, in the first and second quarter of 2026. He said that more information will be available in September once the steering committee has been convened.

##### **b. Regulatory Review**

Joshua DeMello provided an update on the Council's IRA projects on scenario planning and regulatory review. The contractor should be starting next month, will be looking at FEP and local regulations. They will look at climate ready fisheries. The AP should be thinking about regulations that should be removed, determining what is good, bad, needs work. What one regulation should we remove, we will have community meetings after the desktop review of regulations.

##### **c. Community Consultation**

Alex Min and Nate Ilaoa, Pacific Islands Fisheries Group, provided an update on the IRA community consultation project that includes planned community meetings and the vocational fisheries course.

An AP member expressed anticipation for the upcoming IRA community meetings and acknowledged the preparatory work done by Alex Min, Clay Tam, and the Council. The member noted the importance of hearing directly from fishermen and highlighted the value of holding meetings in the Manu'a Islands, where such engagements are rare. The member also pointed out that early feedback from these meetings aligns with on-the-ground concerns in American Samoa, particularly regarding the perception that regulations are not equitable—citing the proposed expansion of national monuments and the national marine sanctuary as examples. The project is seen as a step toward addressing longstanding capacity issues in the region.

Alex Min emphasized the importance of Advisory Panel participation in the upcoming community meetings. He encouraged AP members to attend and engage, noting that their presence makes a meaningful impact and helps introduce the role and work of the AP to the wider community. He shared that there has been clear value when AP members are visible and involved in these discussions.

#### **5. AP Strategic Planning for 2025**

Nate Ilaoa, AP vice Chair, provided an overview of the status of the AP action plan and priorities.

## 6. Public Comment

Tony Langkilde provided an update on the Super Alia project. He reported that the first vessel has arrived on island and is currently being assembled, including the installation of equipment and necessary modifications. The vessel arrived incomplete, prompting the team to identify additional needs, particularly regarding electronics, which were missing essential software that must now be installed and tested. Langkilde explained that preparations are underway to outfit the vessel with bottom fish fishing gear. The boat has 12 longline drums, and securing funding to fully support its fishing operations remains a priority. The vessel is directly linked to the broader training initiative housed at the marketplace training center. A captain and deckhands have already been hired and are currently undergoing training. The captain brings experience from working aboard other local vessels, and the team also brought in a master fisherman from Fiji, an FAO consultant, who is now developing the training curriculum. In addition to technical skills, the training also includes instruction on how to operate a fishing business. Langkilde noted that plans are underway to acquire additional vessels (boats 2, 3, and 4), and efforts are being made to secure funding for further vessel modifications. He emphasized the importance of continued collaboration and partnership to develop American Samoa's fresh fish fishery. While data exists for bottom fish, the local fishery has struggled with a consistent supply. The Super Alia project aims to address this gap. The vessel has been licensed, assigned a call sign, and equipped with EPIRBs, as the team continues to build and expand the program.

Tamiano Gurr, shared remarks as a member of the American Samoa Fish Flow Project team. He is currently working part-time for Lynker, under contract with NOAA's Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, and has been serving as local field support for the project since late 2023. Gurr began by offering apologies on behalf of Mia Iwane, Fishery Management Specialist at NOAA Fisheries, who was unable to attend the meeting due to scheduling conflicts. He noted that she is available via email for follow-up and that he is also willing to help coordinate further conversations or provide information. In his role with the Fish Flow Project, Gurr is conducting in-depth interviews with alia fishers, seafood vendors, longline operators, and other local stakeholders throughout Tutuila and the Manu'a Islands. These interviews focus on how seafood moves through American Samoa, both through formal markets and informal networks of sharing. As of the meeting date, 18 interviews have been completed, with data collection expected to continue through September 2025. He emphasized that beyond generating data, the project seeks to amplify community voices, honor *Fa'asamoa*, and ensure that federal policies and scientific understanding are informed by real-life experiences in the territory. The project will culminate in a report expected in 2026 and aims to bridge the gap between science and tradition, as well as policy and people. Gurr welcomed any input, suggestions, or opportunities for collaboration from meeting participants and encouraged anyone interested to reach out to him or Mia Iwane directly.

## **7. Discussion and Recommendations**

***Regarding the Hawaii and American Samoa Longline Fisheries Crew Training Requirement,*** the American Samoa AP recommends Alternative 1, Sub-alternative 1b (implement crew training requirement with a 2-year certification duration), noting that some foreign crew members in the American Samoa longline fleet are typically on 2-year contracts.

***Regarding Electronic Monitoring,*** the American Samoa AP recommends Alternative 2a to implement a mandatory EM program in the Hawaii and American Samoa Longline fishery with a random selection of all longline vessels for implementation. Further regarding cost allocation, the American Samoa AP recommends Alternative A, to implement EM with public Federal (NMFS) funding noting that shared cost allocation would create unnecessary pressure on the fleet as it continues to face economic hardship while the agency has cost savings transitioning from human observers to EM as primary monitoring.

## **8. Other Business**

There was no other business.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:47pm SST