

# American Samoa Archipelago

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## *203<sup>rd</sup> Council Meeting Motu Lipoti*

This report provides an update on current issues and events related to fisheries in American Samoa.

### **FLAG DAY CELEBRATION: 125 YEARS OF THE U.S. TERRITORY**

American Samoa recently celebrated its 125th Flag Day. This year's celebration held special significance as it marked 125 years of American Samoa's official relationship with the United States, beginning with the raising of the U.S. flag on Tutuila Island in 1900. Manu'a joined the U.S. in 1904. Flag Day is described as a tradition unique to American Samoa, celebrating in the Samoan way while honoring the deep patriotic ties to the United States.

Key events included the **125th Flag Day Fautasi Regatta**, which was initially delayed due to bad weather but ran on April 16th, 2025. The race format included two elimination heats and a final race, covering approximately 2 miles. Pago Pago's Aeto fautasi won the final race, followed by Aua's Paepaeulupoo in second place and Nu'uuli's Manulele Tausala-Low Rider in third. The Final Race was noted as being well-run by the Flag Day Committee.

Additionally, American Samoa hosted **Navy Week for the first time**, coinciding with the Flag Day celebration from April 14-17, 2025. This event was part of a global outreach effort connecting Sailors with the community through performances, educational events, and service projects. Rear Adm. Richard Meyer attended Navy Week, further solidifying the Navy's connection with American Samoa. As part of Navy Week, the **first U.S. Navy Recruiting Station on the island was officially opened** at the Mosooi Building. This station is intended to provide career opportunities, mentorship, and a stronger connection between the Navy and the region.

StarKist Samoa provided support for the 125th Flag Day celebration with a donation of \$10,000 and 300 cases of tuna and wahoo. April 16th and 17th were government holidays for Flag Day celebrations.



## **FISHERIES: ACCESS RESTORED TO HISTORIC FISHING GROUNDS**

A significant development for the territory is President Donald J. Trump's Executive Order amending the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument (PRIMNM), which allows commercial fishing between 50 and 200 nautical miles. This decision, signed on April 17, 2025, coinciding with American Samoa's 125th Flag Day, restores access to historic U.S. fishing grounds in the central Pacific that are considered critical to the American Samoa-based U.S.-flagged purse seine fleet and vital to the Territory's economic security.

Governor Pulaalii Nikolao Pula issued a statement of strong support and appreciation for this decision. He stated that the previous restrictions, established in 2009 and expanded in 2014, disproportionately harmed American Samoa's tuna fleet and threatened the local tuna industry, which employs thousands and sustains families, businesses, and government services. Governor Pula believes the Executive Order reopens grounds responsibly used for decades, restores balance and fairness in ocean policy, strengthens food security, and helps keep the cannery operational and competitive. He thanked President Trump for listening to the Territory's concerns and taking action to correct a policy viewed as economically harmful and environmentally unnecessary. Governor Pula also thanked Congresswoman Uifaatali, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (WPRFMC), and local stakeholders for their advocacy. Congresswoman Uifa'atali Amata requested this action and was present at the White House signing. She called it a "monumental win" and "absolutely great news" for fishermen and the cannery.

The Council clarified that the change primarily focuses on three islands: Wake, Johnston, and Jarvis, allowing commercial fishing in the 50-200 nautical mile zone around them. Commercial fishing remains prohibited within 0-50 nautical miles of all seven islands and atolls within the PRIMNM, which include sensitive coral reef ecosystems and essential habitat for protected species like sea turtles and seabirds. The reopened offshore waters are deep open-ocean environments, where fishing gear targeting migratory tunas operates near the surface and does not contact the seafloor or sensitive habitats.

Chairman Taulapapa William Sword and Vice Chair Taotasi Archie Soliai, emphasized the economic importance of the move, noting that over 70% of tuna processed in Pago Pago's cannery comes from U.S.-flagged vessels. They also stated it supports jobs, food security, and provides a level playing field against foreign fleets operating under weaker regulations outside U.S. waters. Congresswoman Amata and others argue that putting more U.S. vessels in these waters helps combat Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing and counters malign activities by foreign fleets, particularly from China.

However, not all views are in agreement. Some locals questioned whether it was a "monumental win" or "short sighted," suggesting it benefits foreign companies while local people receive low wages. Another raised concerns about potential overfishing and harm to future generations.



There is also a call for local monitoring programs with federal funding to ensure the balance between sustainable fisheries and ocean protection can be verified with local data.



### III. IUU FISHING AND COAST GUARD SUPPORT

Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, particularly by foreign fleets, is a significant concern. The recent decision to reopen fishing grounds in the PRIMNM is seen, in part, as a way to combat this by increasing U.S. fishing presence and supporting the regulated U.S. fleet, which is considered preferable to relying on other nations' supply and illegal practices.

In related news, the U.S. Senate Commerce Committee advanced the **'FISH' Act** (Fighting Foreign Illegal Seafood Harvests Act) aimed at combating IUU fishing. This bipartisan bill would blacklist IUU fishing vessels, raise costs for their owners (mostly Chinese), and support increased Coast Guard enforcement. The bill also encourages international cooperation to combat these practices. Senator Dan Sullivan described these foreign operations as a "cancer on global fishing" and specifically targeted Russian and Chinese fleets. Increased Coast Guard enforcement is seen as a key argument for basing a cutter in Pago Pago Harbor. The Coast Guard Cutter *Midgett* recently completed a deployment in Oceania in support of Operation Blue Pacific, focusing on enhancing maritime domain awareness, combating IUU fishing, and building interoperability with partners like Tuvalu, New Zealand, Australia, and Papua New Guinea.

Broader U.S. efforts in the region are also underway, as highlighted by the introduction of the **Pacific Partnership Act** in the U.S. Congress. This bipartisan, bicameral bill aims to strengthen U.S. strategic partnerships with Pacific Island nations and establish a clear strategy for diplomatic, security, and economic relationships in the Indo-Pacific region. This is intended to keep China's influence in check and strengthen mutual development opportunities. American Samoa's Congresswoman Uifaatali Amata is a co-sponsor of this bill.

Another economic concern linked to geopolitics is a Trump Administration **port fee on China-built ships**. American Samoa is seeking a full exemption from this fee, which could significantly impact the local economy and the tuna cannery by making shipping costs prohibitive. A revised plan has capped the fee but has not granted a full exemption, and Congresswoman Amata continues to work on the issue.

#### IV. EMERGING ISSUE: DEEP SEA MINING NEAR AMERICAN SAMOA

Plans are unfolding to explore and potentially mine deep waters off the coast of American Samoa for critical minerals. John Wasko, executive director of the American Samoa Economic Development Council (ASEDC), sees American Samoa as poised to play a role in the U.S. strategic push for domestic access to critical minerals, which he learned about from a U.S. Geological Survey publication in 2020. ASEDC is a nonprofit aiming to create a new industrial economy in American Samoa and believes this offers a practical solution to U.S. reliance on foreign minerals.

Impossible Metals, a U.S.-based deep-sea mining company, has become the first to request a lease to explore and potentially mine these minerals near American Samoa. Their application was filed under the authority of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), part of the U.S. Department of the Interior. The Secretary of Interior Doug Burgum announced that they are initiating the process to evaluate a potential mineral lease sale in the waters offshore American Samoa.

The first formal step will be the publication of a request for information and Interest in the *Federal Register*. This notice will seek input from the Indigenous Island community, ocean users, industry stakeholders, government agencies and the public. Feedback will help inform BOEM's assessment of geologic conditions, potential environmental and cultural impacts and the multiple uses of the area, such as navigation and fishing.

John Wasko stated that American Samoa welcomes the start of a deep-sea minerals industry, believing it will bring significant economic growth, support national security, and create jobs. He also mentioned that American Samoa is positioned to be a receiving and refining hub for the Asia Pacific. Supporters argue that deep-sea mining could lessen the need for land-based mining.

However, deep-sea mining is a highly contentious issue with significant opposition. Environmentalists and some Pacific island nations fear irreversible damage to marine ecosystems and question the long-term effects of disturbing the ocean floor. Concerns include potential damage to deep-sea ecosystems, sediment plumes, noise pollution, and disturbance of marine life. Opposition movements recall a history of colonial resource extraction with little benefit to locals.

The nonprofit organization Finafinau is circulating a petition opposing Impossible Metals' application. They stand with former Governor Lemanu Peleti Mauga, who placed a moratorium on deep-sea mining activities in the territory last July. Finafinau stated the community previously expressed clear opposition to Impossible Metals' unsolicited request and views the current request as an attempt to exploit resources without consent. Finafinau and others are deeply alarmed by the potential for deep-sea mining to create geopolitical vulnerabilities, allowing foreign powers access to ocean resources and critical maritime data, particularly mentioning China. They urge federal agencies to reject Impossible Metals' request and respect the decisions of the American Samoa government and people.

Former Governor Lolo Matalasi Moliga also opposes seabed mining within American Samoa's Exclusive Economic Zone. He expressed concern about the lack of scientific information to gauge potential damage to ocean quality and biological resources. He implored the government to proceed cautiously and methodically, ensuring scientific reports clearly delineate benefits and costs before considering any proposal. Commenters in the sources also express strong opposition and skepticism about potential "shared benefits," fearing locals would primarily fill low-wage jobs. Despite American Samoa's current ban, the President has taken executive actions to allow undersea mining to counter China's dominance in critical mineral supply chains. NOAA is also reportedly committed to an expeditious review of exploration licenses and commercial recovery permits, viewing it as "The next gold rush". The licensing process is intended to include public comment.



## V. COMMUNITY MARINE EDUCATION AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

The **Tafuna High School Science Club** led an outreach campaign during a recent First Friday event, focusing on ocean health awareness. The students educated the community about two critical issues: **ciguatera fish poisoning** and **marine debris, specifically microplastics**.

Ciguatera poisoning is caused by toxins from a marine organism that build up in certain fish, leading to illness in humans who consume them. Microplastics are tiny plastic particles found in the environment and even in human bodies, potentially causing health problems from chemicals like phthalates. The students encouraged practical solutions like using metal straws and glass containers. This initiative involved partnerships with NOAA Ocean Guardian Ambassadors, Sea Grant, and the Talofa PEA Project.

## VI. ECONOMIC SNAPSHOT

Inflation rose slightly to 1.3% in Q1 2025. Food and transport costs climbed, including sharp price increases in staples like eggs and salted beef. Conversely, medical care and housing costs saw declines. Airfare to Honolulu dropped, but flights to Manu'a and Apia became more expensive.

Additionally, while the Trump administration capped new port fees on China-built vessels, American Samoa has not yet been granted a full exemption, a matter Congresswoman Amata continues to address due to potential impacts on cannery operations and freight costs.

## VII. REGIONAL CONNECTIONS THROUGH FISHING TOURNAMENTS

The 22nd Steinlager I'a Lapo'a Fishing Tournament brought together teams from American Samoa, New Zealand, and Samoa, strengthening Pacific ties through sport fishing and cultural exchange.

The **Top 5 Boat Standings** are listed, with **YELLOWFIN** captained by **ROY LEE** finishing in **1st place** with **1233.20 points**. The other boats in the top 5 were **BRAVE HART** (Clyde Fraser, 900.00 points), **FU'A II** (Vaughan Simpson, 856.80 points), **GRANDEE** (Mike Randrup, 821.40 points), and **DOUBLE TROUBLE** (Chris Banse, 543.40 points).

The **Top 5 Ranking Anglers** are also provided. **RYAN SIMPSON\*** from the boat **FU'A II** is listed as the **1st ranking angler** with **856.80 points**. The other anglers in the top 5 were Telesia Mavaega (**YELLOWFIN**, 815.40 points), Deb Anderson (**BRAVE HART**, 600.00 points), Craig Townsend (**YELLOWFIN**, 417.80 points), and Mike Broadley (**GRANDEE**, 400.00 points).

Additionally, there are **Species Totals - final** listed, detailing catches such as Skipjack, Dogtooth Tuna, Giant Trevally, Masimasi, Wahoo, Yellowfin, and Marlin, along with their weight, the angler, captain, and boat. For example, a **1st place Marlin** weighing **222.60 lbs** was caught by **SIMON PARKER** on the boat **DA ROTTIE II**, captained by Jon Bain.

| 22 <sup>nd</sup> Annual Steinlager I'a Lapo'a Fishing Tournament |            |        |
|--|------------|--------|
| TOP 5 RANKING ANGLERS - final                                    |            |        |
| ANGLER   | TEAM       | POINTS |
| RYAN SIMPSON*  | FU'A II    | 856.80 |
| TELESIA MAVAEGA  | YELLOWFIN  | 815.40 |
| DEB ANDERSON   | BRAVE HART | 600.00 |
| CRAIG TOWNSEND   | YELLOWFIN  | 417.80 |
| MIKE BROADLEY  | GRANDEE    | 400.00 |



**22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Steinlager I'a Lapo'a  
Fishing Tournament**

**TOP 5 BOAT STANDINGS - final**

| ANGLER           | CAPTAIN         | POINTS         |
|------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| <b>YELLOWFIN</b> | <b>ROY LEE</b>  | <b>1233.20</b> |
| BRAVE HART       | CLYDE FRASER    | 900.00         |
| FU'A II          | VAUGHAN SIMPSON | 856.80         |
| GRANDEE          | MIKE RANDRUP    | 821.40         |
| DOUBLE TROUBLE   | CHRIS BANSE     | 543.40         |

**22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Steinlager I'a Lapo'a Fishing Tournament**

**SPECIES TOTALS - final**

| PLACE | SPECIES         | WEIGHT (LBS) | ANGLER         | CAPTAIN           | BOAT            |
|-------|-----------------|--------------|----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1ST   | MISC (SKIPJACK) | 20.00        | TAI IAKOPO     | NATE SAGAPOLUTELE | AMANA           |
| 2ND   | MISC (SKIPJACK) | 19.60        | CRAIG TOWNSEND | ROY LEE           | YELLOWFIN       |
| 3RD   | MISC (SKIPJACK) | 19.40        | RYAN           | RANDY SIZEMORE    | PURE INDULGENCE |
| 1ST   | DOGTUOTH TUNA   | 31.00        | HUA MING WEI   | MANNY PU'E        | DEVORAH         |
| 2ND   | DOGTUOTH TUNA   | 21.00        | PAUL           | RANDY SIZEMORE    | PURE INDULGENCE |
| 3RD   | DOGTUOTH TUNA   | 20.80        | POTASI JR      | CALVIN            | AVAII           |
| 1ST   | GIANT TREVALLY  | 20.60        | HUA MING WEI   | MANNY PU'E        | DEVORAH         |
| 2ND   | GIANT TREVALLY  | 15.40        | DUSTIN SNOW    | BRIAN PECK        | TAVA'E ULA      |
| 1ST   | MASIMASI        | 40.60        | SAM FUAMATU    | ANDY WEARING      | DOUBLE HOOKED   |
| 2ND   | MASIMASI        | 40.40        | RYAN SIMPSON   | VAUGHAN SIMPSON   | FU'A II         |
| 3RD   | MASIMASI        | 33.60        | JEROME IEROME  | TAULAPAPA SWORD   | MUMUA           |
| 1ST   | WAHOO           | 57.40        | COOKIE COOK    | CHRIS BANSE       | DOUBLE TROUBLE  |
| 2ND   | WAHOO           | 31.40        | Stewart        | ROB JOBLIN        | ON THE JOB      |
| 3RD   | WAHOO           | 28.60        | SAM FUAMATU    | ANDY WEARING      | DOUBLE HOOKED   |
| 1ST   | YELLOWFIN       | 84.20        | COOKIE COOK    | CHRIS BANSE       | DOUBLE TROUBLE  |
| 2ND   | YELLOWFIN       | 51.40        | ROPATE DELANA  | NATE SAGAPOLUTELE | AMANA           |
| 3RD   | YELLOWFIN       | 31.60        | RYAN SIMPSON   | VAUGHAN SIMPSON   | FU'A II         |
| 1ST   | MARLIN          | 222.60       | SIMON PARKER   | JON BAIN          | DA ROTTIE II    |

## Infrastructure Updates

Plans are underway for a new Port Administration Building and a Loose Cargo Processing Warehouse at the Port of Pago Pago. These projects are funded by \$17 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds and must be completed by December of 2026. Bids for the construction are being advertised.

Requests for proposal have also been advertised for a Floating Docks Design for the Malaloa and Fagatogo docks.

## Governor Meets with the Tuna Industry

The Governor of American Samoa met with Edward Min, CEO of StarKist Co., and Joe Hamby, CEO of Cape Fisheries, to discuss economic development, the future of the tuna industry in the Territory, and opportunities for collaboration. Governor Lemanu emphasized that one of his administration's top priorities is to increase private sector employment and create sustainable economic opportunities for the people of American Samoa. He acknowledged the critical role StarKist plays in the Territory's economy and expressed his continued support for their operations.

CEO Min thanked the Governor for his ongoing support and shared StarKist's plans to make new investments in American Samoa aimed at expanding its business. He noted that the current U.S. political climate is favorable for StarKist, citing Executive Orders issued under President Trump—one that opens U.S. marine monuments and sanctuaries to commercial fishing and another aimed at enhancing the competitiveness of U.S. seafood. Additionally, the higher tariffs placed on imported tuna loins further benefit StarKist's American Samoa-based operations. However, Min expressed concern over a 10% duty that the U.S. government is currently and incorrectly assessing on StarKist's shipments to the U.S. mainland. The Governor responded that Congresswoman Uifa'atali Amata Radewagen is actively working to resolve the issue and has confirmed that the duty is expected to be reset to zero.

Joe Hamby of Cape Fisheries encouraged the Governor to support StarKist's efforts to increase daily production, which would require more guest workers, greater investment in infrastructure, and an increased supply of tuna. He emphasized that expanded operations would necessitate a longer-term lease agreement to provide the stability needed for future capital investments. Hamby explained that there is currently a good balance between the number of purse seiner calls to Pago Pago and the plant's processing capacity, but any expansion will require more vessel calls. He stressed that each purse seiner call brings significant economic benefits to the Territory,

including purchases of fuel, supplies, stevedoring, logistics, and spending by vessel crews in the local economy.

The Governor was also briefed on the American Samoa WCPFC Small Island Developing States (SIDS) initiative, which aims to have the American Samoa-based purse seiner fleet regulated as a SIDS fleet by the United States. This designation would help mitigate the competitive disadvantages currently faced by local U.S.-flagged vessels when compared to foreign fleets. The meeting concluded with a shared commitment to support the growth of the tuna industry and the broader private sector economy in American Samoa.







