

American Samoa Island Report

204th Council Meeting

Fisheries and Marine Environment

Shark Presence in Pago Pago Harbor

Shark sightings inside Pago Pago Harbor have become more common. Divers and fishermen recently reported more than six bull sharks near the Utulei fuel dock. In



the past, sharks were mostly concentrated around the StarKist dock where fish waste is discharged, but with fewer vessels unloading, sharks are now roaming across the harbor.

Concerns have been raised that if nothing is done, American Samoa could face safety risks similar to shark incidents in other Pacific islands. Community meetings also confirmed that sharks are taking fish more often from fishing gear and are coming closer to shore in both Tutuila and Manu'a.

Cannery Update – StarKist Samoa



The cannery remains the backbone of our economy and jobs. In 2023, about one-quarter of the canned tuna eaten in the U.S. came from American Samoa. However, leaders continue to point out that trade rules make it hard for StarKist to compete. Foreign companies can import tuna loins with very low tariffs, while our canned tuna faces higher duties.

To help sustain operations, StarKist has announced plans to add a pet food production line at the Pago Pago plant. This is expected to increase output and provide more jobs for local workers.

Congressional Corner

Amata's Legislative Priorities

As Congress reconvenes, Congresswoman Uifa'atali Amata is focused on:



- Securing a \$900,000 increase for ASG operations funding.
- Restoring the 30a Economic Development tax credit, which is vital for the cannery.
- Passing the South Pacific Tuna Treaty Act.
- Advancing a study to homeport a Coast Guard cutter in Pago Pago Harbor.
- Continuing efforts to prevent seabed mining near American Samoa.

Federal Bills Benefiting American Samoa

- **Ocean Observing System Reauthorization:** Congresswoman Amata co-sponsored this bill, which continues funding for ocean monitoring important for safety, storm readiness, and fisheries planning. A buoy named for former Port Director Chris King contributes to this system.
- **Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Safety Act:** This bipartisan measure reauthorizes federal programs that support fisheries restoration, boating access, and aquatic education.

Maritime Safety and Infrastructure

Coast Guard Cutter Homeporting

The U.S. House has passed the Coast Guard Authorization Act, which includes a feasibility study on cutter homeporting. While it does not specifically name Pago Pago, it gives an opportunity for our harbor to be considered. Congresswoman Amata has stressed that Pago Pago Harbor is well suited, especially given concerns about illegal fishing in the Pacific.

In July, the Coast Guard Cutter *Harriet Lane* visited American Samoa. A reception was held with government officials and community members. Commander Tesoniero and Congresswoman Amata both spoke about the importance of a

stronger Coast Guard presence in the Pacific and the value of having vessels based in our harbor.

Stakeholder Meeting with U.S. Coast Guard Captain Nick and Longline Fleet

In August, American Samoa Council members and local longline operators met with U.S. Coast Guard Captain Nick to discuss concerns about safety, compliance, and operational challenges facing the fleet. The meeting was candid, with fishermen highlighting both regulatory burdens and practical barriers.

Key Discussion Points:

- **CPR and Emergency Preparedness:**
Fishermen noted that CPR certification and first aid training requirements are difficult to meet consistently in American Samoa due to limited training availability. They asked for more locally based classes and flexibility in certification renewal timelines.
- **Standards and Manning Requirements:**
The fleet raised concerns that USCG manning standards and safety equipment requirements do not align well with the small-scale nature of the American Samoa fleet. Many vessels cannot meet requirements designed for larger U.S. mainland operations.
- **Emergency Response Limitations:**
Fishermen expressed worry about the Coast Guard's limited ability to provide timely rescue services in remote areas such as Manu'a. Captain Nick acknowledged these limitations, citing distance and resource constraints, and discussed options to improve communication and safety protocols.
- **Master Certification and Training:**
Several longline captains raised the difficulty of obtaining or renewing U.S. Coast Guard master certifications, especially with limited local training providers. There was a call for regional training opportunities or remote/online coursework tailored for territorial fishermen.
- **Loss of Institutional Knowledge:**
Longliners stressed that as older captains retire, the territory is losing institutional knowledge of vessel operations. They urged support for training younger fishermen, so knowledge can be passed down before it is lost.

- **Naturalization and Crew Issues:**

Crewing continues to be a problem. Fishermen described difficulties in retaining crews, citing strict naturalization requirements and immigration barriers for foreign workers. This creates challenges for maintaining reliable crews on longliners.

Coast Guard Response:

Captain Nick acknowledged the challenges raised and emphasized the Coast Guard's commitment to working with the fishing community. He explained that while many regulations are federally mandated, the Coast Guard can improve communication and support local training opportunities. He also encouraged ongoing dialogue through Council channels to ensure territorial needs are heard at the federal level.

Ferry and Port Development

The Port Administration has received two federal grants totaling more than \$4.8 million. One will go towards ferry facilities, and the other will fund the design and construction of a new ferry for Manu'a. The new ferry is expected to be ready by 2027 and will replace the aging boats that currently serve the islands.

A groundbreaking ceremony was also held for the new Seaport Building. The \$28.57 million project will house Port Administration offices, a warehouse, and government agencies that process ships and cargo. The goal is to improve efficiency and competitiveness at Pago Pago Harbor.

Shipyard

Shipyard Taxation Issue

The ASG Shipyard has faced challenges after being denied a tax exemption certificate. Customs withheld equipment until excise taxes were paid, which caused delays in needed repairs. The Shipyard CEO has said this change in policy creates serious financial strain and makes it harder to maintain services and payroll. Discussions are ongoing with the Tax Exemption Board to consider relief on certain imports.



Deep-Sea Mining Developments

Federal Policy Shift

The U.S. Department of the Interior has announced new policies to streamline offshore mineral development, including extending prospecting permits and shortening environmental review steps. These changes are meant to fast-track companies interested in seabed mining, including Impossible Metals' lease request off American Samoa.

BOEM Process and Comment Period

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) published a Request for Information on Impossible Metals' proposal to explore and mine critical minerals near American Samoa. The original July 16 deadline for public comments was extended to August 15 at Governor Pula's request. More than 21,000 comments were filed nationally, many in opposition.

Government and Legislature Position

Governor Pula, Lt. Governor Ae Ae Jr., Congresswoman Amata, and Fono leaders have issued a united front opposing seabed mining in our EEZ. The Governor's executive order (006-24) established a moratorium on seabed mining, and the Legislature passed a House Concurrent Resolution linking opposition to the Deeds of Cession. These measures affirm that our ocean is not only a natural resource but a sacred inheritance tied to our identity and survival.

Public Forums and Town Halls

The ASG Deep Sea Mining Task Force hosted multiple forums at the Lee Auditorium in July and August. These meetings provided information booths, presentations, and opportunities for community voices.

At the July 2 town hall, about 100 people attended, and nearly all who spoke opposed seabed mining near our islands. Some called for more balanced discussions including industry experts, but most residents emphasized risks to the marine environment and cultural ties to the ocean.

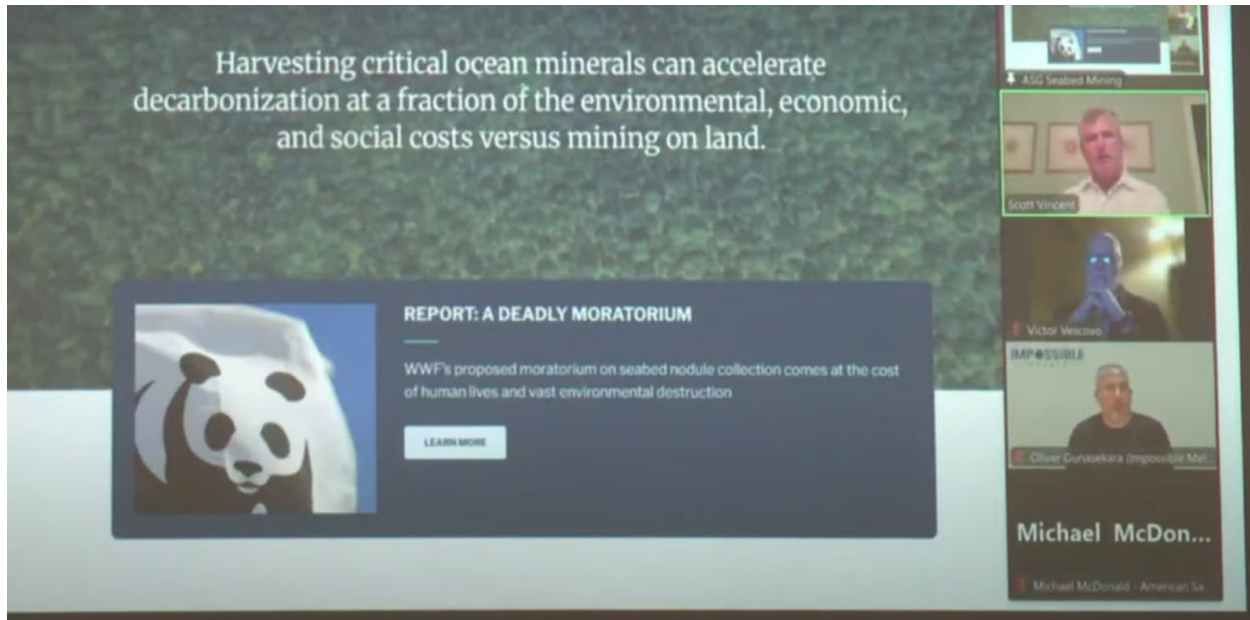
The August 6 forum, titled “*Exploring Risks, Rewards, and Realities*”, featured presentations from industry, scientists, and investors. Governor Pula stressed that the forums are important for ensuring informed dialogue. Speakers included Impossible Metals CEO Oliver Gunasekara, who argued the company could generate \$1 billion annually and committed 1% of profits to American Samoa, though this was widely criticized as insufficient.



Industry Proposals and Reactions

Impossible Metals claims its robots can collect nodules with minimal environmental impact, and that its profits could fund port upgrades and even a Coast Guard presence. However, community members, church leaders, and village chiefs have consistently voiced skepticism, noting that no testing has been done in local waters and that U.S. law does not guarantee revenue-sharing with the territory.

Religious groups, including the Congregational Christian Church of American Samoa, have publicly declared their opposition, calling the ocean “a sacred gift from our Creator” and warning of long-term harm to biodiversity.



Food Security and Cost of Living

The Department of Commerce reported that the Basic Food Index for July 2025 fell by 1.2%. Egg prices dropped sharply, while other items like rice and pork also decreased. However, prices for bananas, turkey tails, saimin, and some imported foods went up. Tuna prices also rose slightly, showing its continued importance as a staple for local families.

Community Meetings – IRA Consultations

The Council held a series of IRA meetings across Tutuila and Manu'a in June to hear directly from fishermen and community members.

- **Tutuila:** Fishermen reported fewer yellowfin, smaller palolo runs, and more shark interactions. They raised concerns about the condition of boat ramps and marinas, the cost of safety equipment, and federal regulations affecting fishing.
- **Ta'ū:** Participants observed changes in currents and coral, more shark sightings, and limited use of alia boats due to costs and maintenance. Residents asked for more support for young people to learn fishing and boating skills, including tournaments and training.

- **Ofu & Olosega:** Residents highlighted fuel shortages (gasoline limited to 10 gallons per week), lack of ice and gear shops, and algae growth damaging coral. They said fish are still abundant, with reports of plentiful aku, wahoo, octopus, and faisua.

Across all the meetings, people voiced opposition to seabed mining. Fishermen emphasized the need for safe and reliable boats, gear, and infrastructure, and for passing on knowledge to younger generations.



Report on the Current Status of American Samoa Longline Fisheries

Date: August 19, 2025

Summary

The American Samoa longline fishery continues to face significant operational and economic challenges in 2025, with reduced vessel activity and fluctuating catch rates. Despite a smaller fleet due to some vessels being up for sale or in the process of being sold, overall fishing effort remains low, exacerbated by supply chain issues. Only six longline vessels are actively fishing this year, with three more currently up for sale, reflecting the fragile state of the fleet. Some of the operational vessels often lose too much time tied up in port for lack of bait, and this situation has persisted through much of 2025.

Catches of albacore tuna have declined slightly compared to 2024, while yellowfin tuna catches have increased. Positive developments include rising albacore prices, efforts to secure additional bait supplies, renewed progress in building stronger partnerships between Starkist and the local fleet, and support from the local shipyard in sustaining operations. These factors provide cautious optimism for improving continuity and reducing vulnerabilities.

At the same time, assistance from outside entities has so far been minimal, leaving operators to shoulder the ongoing burden of expenses even when vessels cannot fish. Costs for crew wages, food and provisions, port fees, and maintenance continue to accumulate whether a vessel is actively fishing or waiting for bait.

Concerns remain regarding the economic viability of operations and the potential environmental impacts of proposed seabed mining activities offshore American Samoa. However, the fleet is adapting to these conditions, and new cooperation among stakeholders offers meaningful momentum toward long-term stability.

Positive Developments

Bait Supply Initiatives: Recent efforts by Starkist Co. and one longline fleet operator to source additional bait supplies may alleviate current shortages in the near term. However, until this supply arrives, there is no bait available on island, and the fleet remains constrained.

Starkist Commitment: Starkist announced that they have ordered a bait supply sufficient to keep most of the fleet operating for approximately three months, with arrival expected mid-to-late

October 2025. Importantly, Starkist has positioned this as a complementary supply, ensuring KS Shipping Agency — until now the sole supplier — is not cut off. This approach helps diversify supply while providing relief to vessel operators. Notably, the Starkist bait pricing is more favorable than that of KS Shipping Agency, potentially lowering operational costs for the fleet.

Renewed Industry Relationship: Starkist and the Tautai-O-Samoa Longline Fishing Association are making progress on a renewed relationship where all parties work together for the continuity of operations of the longline fleet and the supply of U.S.-flagged albacore to Starkist. There is mutual interest in establishing a stronger working relationship under certain conditions, with discussions ongoing.

Local Shipyard Support: Under the leadership of Mr. Carlos Sanchez, the local shipyard has been instrumental in finding avenues to assist the longline fleet. The shipyard is actively pursuing multiple forms of support, demonstrating its value as a critical partner in maintaining fleet viability.

Price Increases: Albacore prices have risen approximately 8% from December 2024 to August 2025, increasing from \$2,785 per metric ton (MT) to \$3,005/MT for Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certified gutted and gilled albacore over 10 kg. This aligns with market trends showing a rebound in North Pacific albacore harvests, though global supply remains tight.

Conclusion

The American Samoa longline fishery is navigating a challenging landscape in 2025, marked by economic strains, supply issues, and environmental uncertainties. While positive steps in bait procurement and price improvements offer some relief, the recent Starkist commitment to provide additional bait supply is a significant boost to fleet stability.

The reality, however, is that only six vessels are currently fishing — and even these are operating only occasionally, as they are often tied up awaiting bait. Even idle vessels continue to incur costs, and with minimal assistance provided so far, the pressure on operators remains severe. The bait situation, though showing some progress, is still unresolved and has left much of the fleet unable to operate for a large part of the year.

Even more importantly, the renewed discussions between Starkist and the Tautai-O-Samoa Longline Fishing Association demonstrate a shared commitment to strengthening industry cooperation and ensuring the continuity of U.S.-flagged albacore supplies to Starkist. At the same time, the leadership of Mr. Carlos Sanchez and the local shipyard highlights the importance of local infrastructure in supporting the fleet through difficult times.

Together, these developments represent meaningful momentum toward long-term sustainability. Yet, the fishery's immediate survival depends on stronger assistance and policy support to help offset ongoing losses and stabilize operations. The fleet's resilience will still depend on addressing core challenges and mitigating risks from emerging activities like seabed mining. However, with

improved cooperation among processors, operators, and local infrastructure, the path forward for the American Samoa longline fishery looks more stable than it did earlier in 2025. The Council is encouraged to continue considering supportive policies, including enhanced monitoring, research, and collaborative frameworks, to bolster the fishery's resilience.