



Report of the American Samoa Archipelago Advisory Panel Meeting

Tuesday, September 2, 2025

5 p.m. – 7 p.m. (SST); 6 p.m. – 8 p.m. (HST)

Hybrid Meeting via Webex:

<https://wprfmc.webex.com/wprfmc/j.php?MTID=m4f0685ec49268e509314f34c508b93a6>

Event number (if prompted): 2864 025 9551

Event password (if prompted): ASAP0902mtg (27270903from phones)

1. Welcome and Introductions

Jerome Ierome, American Samoa Advisory Panel vice chair, opened the meeting at 6:05 p.m. SST. Members in attendance included Clay Tam, Gene Pan, Nonu Tuisamoa, Joe Hamby, and Dustin Snow, and Keith Ah Soon.

Others in attendance included Felix Penalosa, Zach Yamada, Asuka Ishizaki, Joshua DeMello, Mark Fitchett, Mark Mitsuyasu, Alex Min, Adam Ayers, Keith Kamikawa, Tusi Avegalio Papalii, Mia Iwane, Oliver Gunaskera, Sabrina Suluai-Mahuka, Bronson Azama, Sierra Fata, Kiki Zumwatt, Ola Baccos, Nathan Ilaoa, Archie Soliai, Craig Severance

2. Review of the Last AP Recommendation and Meeting

Felix Penalosa, Council staff will provide a review of the last AP recommendations from the meeting held on May 27, 2025.

An AP Member asked about the costs of electronic monitoring and whether those costs would be absorbed by the longline fleet or by the agency.

Council Staff responded that the Council had already taken action for the costs to be covered by the agency.

3. Council Fisheries Issues

A. SEEM Process Review Report

Craig Severance provided an overview of options to review the SEEM process, which assists in specifying Annual Catch Limits (ACLs) for fisheries in the Western Pacific. Adam Ayers outlined the history of the SEEM process and its application in the American Samoa bottomfish assessment. The process begins with a stock assessment, which is reviewed by a committee, followed by the application of a buffer that serves as a safety net in setting ACLs. Ayers provided a summary of the American Samoa AP's feedback on improving the SEEM process from an earlier informal meeting. The feedback included questioning why SEEM scoring can only result in an ACL reduction, suggesting that the process would yield better results with stronger representation from fishermen, and recommending that the AP have the discretion to decide when to hold a SEEM, particularly if the panel identifies additional fishing community data or information that would be brought into the process. He also noted that SEEM is sometimes not needed.

The American Samoa AP did not have any further feedback on improving the process at this time.

4. Council IRA Project Discussions

A. Scenario Planning

Mark Fitchett provided the update on Scenario Planning. The project is preparing fisheries for future challenges by developing adaptive strategies. Two efforts are underway: one for the Hawai‘i and American Samoa longline fisheries, and another for small-boat fisheries across the region. Key themes shaping future scenarios include climate change, governance shifts, market forces, labor availability, infrastructure, and fishing supplies. Steering Committees are preparing materials for workshops planned for November 2025, with updates to follow as they progress.

An AP Member expressed concern about the viability of selling local longline products, noting that the fleet is small and three vessels are owned by a single family. If those vessels were to withdraw, it could severely impact the local food industry.

Council Staff responded that the planning effort is aimed at avoiding further vessel losses.

Another AP Member added that 30 years ago there were many more fishing vessels, which supported local suppliers, laborers, and related businesses. Those vessels are now gone, while countries like China have managed to keep their fleets active by subsidizing fuel. Without reducing costs, the local fleet cannot be competitive. He noted that in other parts of the world labor costs are a fraction of what they are in American Samoa, and stressed the need to identify federal assistance to help bring vessels back, which would benefit the entire island.

Another AP Member commented that IRA funds are designated for scenario planning, but questioned whether they could be redirected toward subsidizing fuel for the local longline fleet to help prevent the negative scenarios being considered.

Council Staff explained that under the Sustainable Fisheries Fund (SFF) 2025 proposal—representing the last round of SFF funding donated to the territories by the Hawaiian Longline Association—funds have been allocated specifically to provide fuel subsidies in support of the longline fleet in American Samoa. The proposal is pending approval.

An AP Member responded positively, emphasizing that the longline fleet is a highly regulated fishery while foreign countries often operate outside the rules.

Another AP Member expressed concern that one of the local boats may soon cease operations due to high costs, and noted the importance of helping the local longline fleet remain viable.

B. Regulatory Review

Joshua DeMello provided the update on the Regulatory Review Project. This effort is analyzing how well current fishery regulations respond to climate change. It looks for gaps, inefficiencies, and conflicts that could limit community adaptability during sudden ecosystem shifts (e.g., new species, warming waters, stock changes). Input from fishermen, agencies, and other ocean users will help align regulations with how fisheries actually operate. The goal is to ensure streamlined, flexible, and coordinated management under the Council's Fishery Ecosystem Plans (FEPs). A contractor launched the project in mid-2025 and is developing a draft action plan and methods to share with the Council.

C. Protected Species

Asuka Ishizaki provided the update on the Protected Species Project. This work is focused on anticipating how climate change may affect protected species interactions in fisheries, especially for the Hawai'i and American Samoa longline fleets. Two workshops are planned to explore possible climate-driven changes, discuss impacts to turtles, seabirds, marine mammals, sharks, and rays, and identify strategies for reducing risks. The first workshop is scheduled for October 2025, with the second in early 2026. Updates will be provided to the Council as plans progress.

An AP Member asked whether there were any new regulations being developed for marlin.

Council Staff explained that the Council had recently voted on a North Pacific striped marlin catch limit and noted that additional details could be provided by staff online. It was clarified that the measure does not apply to American Samoa, as it pertains to the North Pacific stock, and therefore American Samoa would not be subject to an Annual Catch Limit (ACL) for this species.

D. Community Consultation/Vocation Training

Zach Yamada provided the update on the Community Engagement and Capacity Building Project. This effort builds capacity in fishing communities by ensuring they have the tools, resources, and knowledge to participate in federal fisheries management. Engagement sessions help capture the real challenges communities face as ecosystems and climate change evolve. The first round of meetings took place between February and June 2025, and the second round began in August 2025. These efforts aim to strengthen community input and ensure federal management reflects local needs.

5. Deep Sea Mining in American Samoa

Oliver Gunaskera, of Impossible Metals gave a presentation on the potential benefits of deep-sea mining (DSM). He explained that the company has committed to donating a 1% profit share to American Samoa, in addition to any taxes owed to the territory. This would be a voluntary commitment, not deducted from royalties owed to the U.S. government. He noted that a bill is going before Congress to share revenue from renewable energy, and if critical minerals are included, congressional approval would be needed.

The presentation emphasized that DSM could bring upgrades to ports, expanded U.S. Coast Guard presence, possible new military infrastructure, and lower energy costs if operations were based in American Samoa. The industry could also generate new jobs and increase GDP. There is potential for on-island processing facilities, though these would need to be constructed and operated.

Gunaskera highlighted the strategic importance of critical minerals, explaining that China has spent the last 20 years securing vast mineral resources. U.S. military infrastructure, battery storage, and other critical systems could be at risk of shortages in the event of conflict. He described the growth of the global market for minerals as immense, citing applications in artificial intelligence and other advanced technologies. Without access to affordable minerals, he argued, climate change would worsen due to reliance on less efficient energy systems, with sea level rise threatening coastlines in places like American Samoa.

He provided a case study of Norway, which did not initially have offshore mineral and gas industries but has since grown its GDP eightfold outside of inflation, with a sovereign wealth fund valued at over \$1.74 trillion. He posed the question of whether American Samoa wanted to share in similar wealth, job creation, and economic opportunity.

On the environmental side, Gunaskera described Impossible Metals' technology as designed to minimize impacts. The company uses robotic systems that hover above the seafloor, equipped with cameras to identify marine life. If life is detected, the robots avoid disturbing it. He stated that their method avoids sediment plumes, reduces noise and light, and leaves 60% of nodules behind if removal is found to affect life. He stressed that fishing would not be impacted, as there are no fish stocks or plankton in the deep ocean where operations would occur. He further noted that all activities would be subject to environmental impact assessments before any commercial mining could take place.

Gunaskera described the company's Eureka 2 robot, which has been tested successfully at 6,000 feet, with larger versions in development. At full scale, he projected the use of 271 robots and \$10 billion in gross profits.

An AP Member asked whether the company was American.

Gunaskera replied that it is based in Delaware and has raised \$15 million in venture capital.

An AP Member asked whether operations would be delivered directly to American Samoa.

Gunaskera responded that the company intends to share profits locally and has secured substantial capital.

An AP member asked how much of each nodule can be used.

Gunaskera explained that 100% is usable, their economics rely on a parallel system, and the technology scales to reduce costs. He also noted that BOEM makes the final decision on whether to lease, and stipulations could be included in lease terms.

An AP member turned the discussion to the possibility of American Samoa becoming a local hub for DSM and asked whether U.S. government co-investment would be required.

Gunaskera responded that upgrades to ports and infrastructure would be helpful leverage but not a preferred or necessary route. Asked about the company's age and development stage, he stated that Impossible Metals is five years old, has raised venture capital, and is not yet large-scale, but aims to start small and grow into a major industry player. He added that the company has already testified before the U.S. Senate.

An AP member asked about a timeline for full operations.

Gunaskera explained that they plan to secure a location within the next few weeks, followed by an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and a leasing process, though he could not predict how long the approvals would take.

An AP Member welcomed the concept of profit-sharing, comparing it to the Norway case study and suggesting American Samoa could benefit similarly.

Gunaskera replied that the company volunteered a 1% profit share, but the larger opportunity is in coastal gas models where the share can be as high as 27%. He emphasized the need for congressional action to include minerals in revenue-sharing legislation.

An AP Member asked whether processing would occur locally or abroad.

Oliver stated that nodules must be processed on land using acids or furnaces, which is not ideal for American Samoa, but new technology might make local processing feasible near the port. At present, materials would be shipped to Asia, which already has the infrastructure, though there is also political momentum in the U.S. for domestic processing. He mentioned new innovations such as using bacteria, which may be more applicable to American Samoa.

An AP Member asked whether the company had any profit-sharing agreements with the Cook Islands.

Oliver replied that they did not, but noted that Cook Islands arrangements typically involve a 3% royalty, similar to U.S. terms.

Council Staff explained the BOEM process, noting that the public comment period on environmental considerations had just closed. The next steps include publication of a call-out area, refinement of that area, an environmental review, a lease sale, and then a permittee-led EIS to assess operational impacts.

Oliver closed by reiterating that DSM could benefit American Samoa with limited or no long-term impacts, and shared a blog post on offshore energy. He emphasized the strategic importance of these minerals and encouraged American Samoa to consider the potential opportunities.

An AP Member asked whether Impossible Metals was pursuing opportunities in other jurisdictions.

Gunaskera responded that they are interested in any areas with nodules, including partnerships in the Clarion Clipperton Zone (CCZ) and potential leases in the Cook Islands.

Finally, an AP Member asked about job opportunities if American Samoa were to become a hub even when mining occurs elsewhere.

Gunaskera explained that it would depend on the location, noting that mining in Japan would not make sense to connect to American Samoa, but operations in the Cook Islands could make it viable. Potential jobs could involve operating and managing vessels.

<https://impossiblemetals.com/blog/smart-stewardship-extending-state-territory-revenue-sharing-to-marine-minerals/>

6. Advisory Panel Strategic Planning for 2025

Felix Penalosa, Council staff, provided updates to the American Samoa Advisory Panel Action Plan which included a draft fisheries one-pager that was approved with no edits and placed in the AP Toolkit folder. Gene Pan was nominated to manage AP social media pages, with access pending from Nate. A meeting with BOEM is proposed for September 17, 2:00 PM. A list of watermen responders was provided for the community safety protocol. The video PSA content list has been sent to the videographer. Nonu will participate in the October Fisheries Educator Workshop.

An AP Member discussed developing a first responder list. He shared an example of stopping by a facility event and providing his contact information to staff, from leadership to janitors, so they could reach him in emergencies. He also recounted a recent incident where a paddling team's outrigger broke and their boat did not return until sundown. He received a call and was able to assist, noting the positive outcome of saving lives. He emphasized that permission must be obtained from each person before adding them to the list.

Another AP Member suggested building on this project by coordinating with the DMWR Director, who had expressed support. Some of the needed information could be gathered through him, and the effort could eventually be shared with the public. The discussion concluded with the idea of organizing the list by island region so responders can be quickly located.

7. Other Business

An AP Member raised the need for floating docks to support local fishing clubs.

Council Staff noted that DMWR is currently preparing an RFP for dock design in partnership with a New Zealand company and deferred to the Director for additional details.

The Director explained that the project is in the design phase, which includes adding new berths. While these would not be intended for overnight use, funding is being sought through CIP or EDA to expedite the process.

An AP Member observed that small craft advisories had been issued, and fishers should already be aware not to go out in such conditions. He suggested that some form of legislative

action or accountability mechanism might be needed, as the situation could have been avoided had advisories been followed.

Another AP Member stressed that while safety advisories are important, the focus of the earlier discussion was on emergency response and the need to prioritize saving lives.

Other AP Members expressed appreciation, noting the role of community service and positive influence.

8. Public Comment

Council staff read aloud a comment submitted by Dr. Papali'i Avegalio in the Webex chat. Dr. Avegalio stated that, according to World Wide Fund for Nature reports, scientists estimate that there is as little as 1.1 percent of the knowledge required to make science-based decisions on whether deep seabed mining can proceed. He noted that the stand of American Samoa to support the moratorium is imminently wise compared to rushing in, driven by profit, with claims of technological abilities that have not yet been tested in the deep of the Moana. He suggested that traditional leaders be included among the stakeholders so that the Moana and traditional wisdom have a voice and a place at the table. He concluded by quoting the adage: if you are not at the table, you are on the menu. Bronson Azama stated that healthy fisheries are a major concern, and it is disheartening to see a company that earns billions unable to take back feedback from those who understand the potential impacts. He noted that western perspectives often approach life differently, and questioned whether we are in a place to discern the impacts of deep-sea mining with such limited understanding of the ecosystem. He explained that practices on the continental shelf may be very different from those in deep-sea island ecosystems, and asked how often the technologies have been tested in this region to fully understand how they operate. He also raised concerns about the economic benefits being proposed. Each time questions were asked about job creation, the answer was that it depends on federal decisions. He questioned whether every option has been explored to ensure there is a direct benefit to the communities. Azama pointed out that while the company mentioned a voluntary 1% profit share, federal regulations for the Gulf provide 37.5%, leaving a 36.5% gap. He asked how much the company truly cares about the communities that may be impacted. He emphasized that decisions are often made based on accounting and profit, but his elders taught him a different understanding of accountability. He suggested that if there are opportunities for industries that are not extractive and that do not damage ecosystems, those should be pursued instead. Finally, he urged that the environmental impact assessment include cultural engagement and consideration of cultural impacts, along with a broader evaluation of cumulative impacts. He stressed the importance of considering not only one practice in isolation, but also the combined impacts of various industries and natural hazards. He concluded by encouraging the Council to take these factors into account for the communities it represents.

Nate Ilaoa thanked the panel for the opportunity to comment and stated that the issue of subsidies is deeply unfair. In 2024, \$9 billion were provided to farmers for commodity crop subsidies, yet whenever fisheries subsidies are discussed, it is treated as taboo. He noted that local fisheries are struggling and vitally important, and emphasized that he has raised this concern many times at Advisory Panel and Council meetings. He urged consideration of why the territories cannot receive some form of federal subsidies for fisheries. He explained that

there is a pressing need for fishery development funds. Since the U.S. Pacific territories lost the ability to transfer bigeye tuna quota to the Hawaii longline fleet in exchange for Sustainable Fisheries Fund (SFF) development money, they have received nothing. He pointed out that while \$60 million is currently paid for the tuna treaty, the territories see little benefit. He suggested that if the amount were adjusted to \$57 million, with \$1 million each allocated to the three Pacific territories, it could directly support fisheries development. Nate recalled that at the March Council meeting, Regional Administrator Sarah Malloy had stated she would redouble efforts to find funds for the territories. However, he noted that no progress has been made, and the territories still lack fishery development money. He indicated that this is an issue he plans to raise again at the next Council meeting. Finally, he addressed misinformation regarding the monuments, particularly Rose Atoll. At the IRA meetings in June, he and Council staff were present, and fishermen were not prompted about Rose Atoll. When asked, they responded strongly that they wanted the federal restrictions lifted. Nate emphasized that opening Rose Atoll Monument to commercial fishing seaward of 12 nautical miles would not compromise protections for coral reefs, seabirds, or turtle nesting sites, but would instead give the struggling longline fleet more space to fish and reduce fuel costs. He urged Advisory Panel members not to let fear-mongering on social media influence them, reminding them that the longline fishery is compliant with national standards. He encouraged members to speak up and address misinformation when they encounter it.

Sierra Fata introduced herself as a youth representative from American Samoa and shared comments on deep-sea mining. She stated that as a 23-year-old who has spent most of her life in the territory, she is very proud of the culture, livelihood, and way of life. She expressed concern that deep-sea mining is frightening for the upcoming generation of leaders. She noted that during the presentation, the question was raised about whether people in American Samoa want to share in wealth like Norway. She emphasized that she has never aspired for American Samoa to be like another country, but instead appreciates the simplicity of its livelihood and culture. Sierra explained that speaking as a youth representative in the meeting was intimidating but important. She attended the forums at the Lee Auditorium and stressed that young leaders must think about the future. She stated that these foreign ideas are not indigenous to American Samoa's waters and reminded participants that the people inherit the land and ocean and must take care of them. She expressed skepticism that deep-sea mining would have zero impacts, citing a Samoan proverb: *"What is felt in the water is felt on the land."* She explained that ancestors considered future generations when laying the foundation of American Samoa, and urged careful thought before supporting extractive industries. She concluded by noting that there is still much to learn about the ocean, which is a key part of Samoan identity. She recommended further research not only on potential benefits but also on the risks of deep-sea mining.

9. Discussion and Recommendations

There were no recommendations

Meeting Adjourned at 8:25 p.m. SST