



## **Report of the Meeting of the American Samoa Council Family Advisors**

Saturday, June 28, 2025

2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. (SST)

Flying Fox Gastropub, Pavaia'i

Pago Pago, American Samoa

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

Nate Ilaoa, Advisory Panel Vice Chair for American Samoa, opened the meeting at 2:26 p.m. Council family advisors in attendance included: Nonu Tuisamoa (American Samoa Advisory Panel), LCDR Matthew Guanci (US Coast Guard), Martina Sagapolu (NOAA Office of Law Enforcement), Domingo Ochavillo (Scientific and Statistical Advisory Committee, Archipelagic Plan Team), Clay Tam (AP Chair) and Natasha Bartley (Acting DMWR Director)

Others in attendance included: Felix Penalosa and Joshua DeMello (Council staff); Alex Min (PIFG); and Rudy Bartley (Public).

### **2. Overview of the Community Consultation Effort**

DeMello and Penalosa provided a background on the IRA Consultation efforts in the territories and some of the key points heard in the American Samoa meetings. These included changing the name of Rose Atoll Marine National Monument to “Muliava” the traditional name of the island; There has been a lack of yellowfin tuna and mahimahi in the Manu’a islands; There have been changes to the traditional palolo, akule, and oama fisheries; and the effects of climate change have yet to be seen (warming waters, etc) but people acknowledge the impacts of weather, coral bleaching, etc.

The Chair added that the people of Manu’a expressed interest in opening the monuments. He clarified that purse seine vessels operate on the high seas and not inside monument waters.

A member raised the issue of VHF radio problems in Manu’a and the need for safety equipment such as flares.

Another member emphasized that fishing participation in Manu’a is much higher than in Tutuila, and that opportunities such as knot tying workshops and access to better quality fishing gear are needed. He suggested that the DOC Super Alia program could recruit crews from Manu’a, since many start fishing at a young age.

A member cautioned against repeating failed projects in Manu’a, noting that too much money has been spent on projects that failed. He said projects should be piloted in Tutuila before being brought to Manu’a.

Another member pointed out that fuel costs in Manu’a are high, forcing people to choose between fueling cars or boats. He also noted that the majority of Manu’a residents now live on Tutuila and that

infrastructure in the outer islands is weak. He stressed that projects must include plans for long-term maintenance.

A member said that the lack of consistent government support for fisheries is a common issue across the Pacific. He pointed to Lahaina as an example where fishers became the primary source of food and water after the fire, long before government assistance arrived. He stressed that American Samoa needs a better plan to keep fishers on the water, particularly small-boat fishers who are often grouped unfairly with longliners under regulations.

Another member raised the issue of subsidies and asked why American Samoa could not provide assistance when the longline fleet had been requesting it for years. He stressed that once the fleet disappears, it will not come back.

A member referred to the Cares Act, which provided critical support during the pandemic, keeping fishers and businesses afloat. He noted that landings decreased in the past three years, and explained that while Covid relief money temporarily boosted boat purchases, landings are directly proportional to the availability of funds.

Another member asked whether ARPA funding could be used for fuel vouchers.

Council staff said this might require higher-level approval but noted that the Advisory Panel could recommend it.

A member stressed that the alia fleet should be treated separately from the longline fleet and that more support is needed for the alia.

Another member reflected on Hawaii, where fisheries are often ignored and vocational training was eliminated, forcing students to go to the mainland. He suggested that American Samoa should consider regional student exchanges or pooled resources to build training opportunities.

A member reminded the group that the Governor had previously signed an Executive Order establishing a Fisheries Task Force. Although the EO has not been repealed, the task force is not active and should be reconstituted.

Another member emphasized collaboration with the Community College to develop training and certifications in areas such as Mercury and Yamaha engine repair. He said many young people leave the island, but want to return with skills that allow them to work in local fisheries.

A member added that a boat handling program was being developed in collaboration with the Samoa Maritime School and SPC. He suggested that the Council's scholarship program could also be expanded to support vocational training.

Council staff noted that the fish market in Fagatogo remains underutilized and is not being used for its intended purpose. They explained that there is confusion about shark regulations. Federal law allows non-commercial shark take if landed whole with fins attached, but local law prohibits shark harvest altogether. They stressed that DMWR needs to reconcile these conflicting regulations.

### 3. Fishers Observations & Local Knowledge Overview

Clay Tam



### 4. American Samoa Conservation Issues

#### a. Deep Sea Mining

Council Staff

Council staff summarized presentations on deep sea mining and the ongoing community concerns.

A member asked who benefits from deep sea mining and whether American Samoa will receive a share. He recalled similar concerns raised about wind energy projects, where there was no compensation.

Another member raised the question of long-term impacts, stressing that resources removed from the seabed may never return.

A member asked about the impacts of electromagnetic energy from wind projects on marine life and seabirds, and who would clean up obsolete equipment.

Another member said the Advisory Panel should help the community generate questions for public meetings. He explained that people often do not ask questions without translation and clear information.

A member stressed that translations should be provided ahead of and during meetings.

Another member warned that cultural fishing near Rose Atoll could be affected, and that discharges from mining activities could impact fisheries. He said that much more information is needed before decisions are made.

Council staff added that the key questions being asked are what the community stands to lose, whether those resources will recover, and how fishing, culture, and ecosystems could be affected. They emphasized the need for information rather than speculation.

#### b. Shark Depredation

DMWR

DMWR reported that shark depredation continues to be a concern.

A member explained that conflicting federal and local rules on shark byproducts complicate management and that efforts to address this began in 2019 but stalled when the territorial bottom fish plan was not finalized.

#### c. Marine National Monuments

Council Staff

Council staff referred back to earlier discussions on monuments. They noted strong support for opening monuments to fishing and restoring the traditional name of Rose Atoll to Muliava.

d. Recent Executive Orders

Council Staff

Council staff explained that recent executive orders are intended to support U.S. seafood competitiveness and regulatory reform, aligning with calls from the community for greater access to fishing grounds

e. Roundtable Climate Change Impacts in American Samoa

Council Family

Council staff and members acknowledged climate impacts such as warming waters, coral bleaching, and stock shifts as issues to monitor closely.

5. Public Comment

- There was no public comment

6. Discussion and Recommendations

The Council Family Advisors made the following recommendations:

The Council should request that ASG reconstitute the Fisheries Task Force to address ongoing issues.

The Council should expand its scholarship program to include vocational training opportunities.

The Council should request that monuments be opened to fishing and that the name of Rose Atoll be officially changed to Muliava.

Council staff should work with the Advisory Panel to develop talking points and questions for deep sea mining.

The Council should recommend that BOEM provide translation support ahead of and during public meetings.

6. Other Business

A member raised concerns about foreign vessels offloading at local docks, including from Samoa, and asked whether Customs was properly taxing them.

Another member asked whether the cannery could process loins so that bycatch from foreign vessels could be used more effectively.

Discussion followed on the broader impacts of cannery operations on local fisheries and markets.

Meeting Adjourned: 4:00 PM